Islamic Perspectives on Digital Literacy and Online Ethics

Dr. Syed Hamid Farooq Bukhari
Head of Department
Department of Islamic Studies, University of Gujrat
Email: hamid.farooq@uog.edu.pk

Dr. Shoaib Arif
Lecturer
Department of Islamic Studies, University of Gujrat
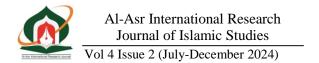**Email:** shoaib.arif@uog.edu.pk

Abstract

The digital revolution has transformed the way individuals interact, learn, and conduct daily activities, presenting both unprecedented opportunities and profound ethical challenges. In this context, the integration of Islamic perspectives into digital literacy is essential for guiding behavior in online environments. This article explores the foundational principles of Islamic ethics—such as truthfulness, accountability, modesty, and respect for privacy as they relate to the use of digital technologies. It examines how the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah can inform ethical conduct in social media engagement, content sharing, cyber communication, and the consumption of digital information.

Particular attention is given to the Islamic condemnation of slander, backbiting, and spreading false information, which are common in the online space. The paper highlights the importance of digital responsibility, advocating for a value-based approach that encourages critical thinking, fact-checking, and purposeful usage of digital tools. It also underscores the obligation of educators, religious leaders, and policymakers in Pakistan to promote digital ethics through curriculum reforms and community programs.

Furthermore, the article addresses the role of Islamic teachings in protecting users from the harms of cyberbullying, online addiction, and identity theft, proposing faith-informed strategies for safe and meaningful digital engagement. In conclusion, this study presents a comprehensive framework that blends modern digital literacy with classical Islamic ethics, aiming to nurture a morally upright digital citizenry capable of navigating the digital world with integrity, wisdom, and social responsibility in the Pakistani context.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics, Digital Literacy, Online Behavior, Cyber Morality, Social Media Conduct

Introduction

The term ***digital literacy*** refers to the ability to effectively and ethically use digital tools and platforms to access, manage, evaluate, create, and communicate information. In an Islamic context, this skill must be informed by **ethical consciousness (taqwā)**, **truthfulness (ṣidq)**, **accountability (mas'ūliyyah)**, and **modesty (ḥayā')**. The need for a religiously informed framework for digital conduct has become more critical due to the rise of cyberbullying, misinformation, digital addiction, and the erosion of privacy and family values.

The Concept of Knowledge and Communication in Islam

In Islam, **knowledge (ʿilm)** is a foundational value and a divine gift. The very first revelation—*"Iqra'" (Read)*—emphasizes the significance of learning and literacy[1]

Seeking knowledge is not only encouraged but considered an obligation upon every Muslim, male and female. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

"Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim.[2]"

However, Islamic knowledge is never pursued in isolation from **ethics and responsibility**. It must lead to truth, justice, and moral refinement. Islam also stresses **communication** as a trust (amānah), where speech, writing, and now digital expressions must reflect **truthfulness (ṣidq)** and **wisdom (ḥikmah)**.
The Qur'an commands believers:

"Speak to people good words"[3]

And warns against speaking without knowledge:

"Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge…" [4]

This establishes a clear principle: **every form of communication, whether verbal or digital, must be rooted in verified knowledge, sincerity, and good intention**.

Thus, in Islam, knowledge is sacred, and communication is a moral act. Both must align with the values of **truth, respect, and accountability**, especially in the digital era.

Key Islamic Ethical Principles for Digital Engagement

In the digital age, Muslims are required to uphold the same ethical standards online as they are offline. The Qur'an and Sunnah provide timeless principles that guide behavior in all spheres of life, including digital communication. Below are the core Islamic ethical principles relevant to online conduct:

Truthfulness (Ṣidq) and Verification (Tabayyun)
Islam emphasizes honesty in all forms of communication.

"O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with news, verify it..." [5]

Sharing unverified information, fake news, or rumors on social media is a violation of Islamic ethics.

Accountability (Mas'ūliyyah)

Muslims believe they are accountable for every word they utter or type.

"Not a word does he utter, but there is a watcher by him ready to record it." [6]

This principle reminds users to think before posting, commenting, or sharing anything online.

3. Respect for Privacy (Sirrīyah)

Islam strictly prohibits spying and invading others' privacy.

"And do not spy on one another..." [7]

This includes avoiding hacking, forwarding private messages, or accessing others' content without consent.

Avoidance of Gheebah (Backbiting) and Namīmah (Slander)

Defaming or mocking others on digital platforms is strictly forbidden.

"Do not backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead?" [8]

Respect for others' honor and reputation is essential in online spaces.

Modesty (Ḥayā') and Decency

Muslims are required to maintain modesty in digital expressions—through images, videos, messages, and comments.

This applies to both genders and includes modest profile pictures, appropriate dress in online visuals, and respectful interactions.

Avoidance of Isrāf (Wastefulness)

Spending excessive time or resources online, especially in entertainment or idle talk, contradicts the principle of balance.

"Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils..."[9]

Muslims should use their time online purposefully and productively.

Promotion of Good (Amr bil Maʿrūf) and Prevention of Evil (Nahy ʿan al-Munkar)

The digital realm should be used to promote virtue, knowledge, and justice.

"Let there arise from you a group inviting to all that is good..." [10]

This includes educating others, standing against injustice, and sharing beneficial content.
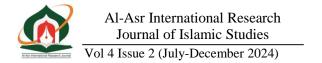
In summary, Islamic ethics call for a **balanced, responsible, and God-conscious approach** to digital engagement. A Muslim's online presence should reflect their faith, character, and commitment to truth and justice.

The Islamic Duty of Digital Da'wah

In the modern era, the digital world has become a powerful platform for communication and influence. For Muslims, this transformation presents not only

a challenge but also a profound opportunity: **the duty of Da'wah (inviting to Islam)** can now be fulfilled globally with unprecedented reach and impact through digital tools.

Da'wah as a Collective Obligation

Da'wah is one of the central responsibilities of the Muslim Ummah. Allah says:

> *"Let there arise from among you a group inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong..."* [11]

Digital platforms like websites, social media, blogs, podcasts, and videos serve as modern tools to fulfill this command. The responsibility now extends to not just scholars, but to every Muslim who has access to these platforms and the ability to share truth with wisdom.

The Sunnah of Conveying the Message

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

> *"Convey from me, even if it is one verse."* [12]

This Hadith encourages every believer to share Islamic knowledge, no matter how small, provided it is authentic. In the digital age, this can be done through posts, tweets, reels, educational videos, or articles—spreading the message of Islam to people who may never enter a mosque or Islamic center.
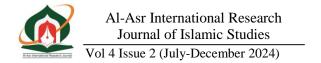
Digital Da'wah and the Global Audience

Digital media breaks geographical barriers, allowing Muslims to:

- Clarify misconceptions about Islam
- Respond to attacks against Islamic values
- Promote peace, justice, and moral teachings

- Provide authentic Islamic knowledge to seekers of truth

A short video, blog, or social media post can reach thousands or even millions in minutes. This magnifies the reward—and also the responsibility.

Conditions for Effective and Ethical Digital Da'wah

To fulfill the duty of digital Da'wah effectively and islamically, several principles must be upheld:

- **Authenticity:** Ensure the information shared is accurate and rooted in Qur'an and Sunnah.

- **Wisdom (Ḥikmah):** Present the message in a gentle, respectful, and contextually appropriate way.[13]

- **Respect for Diversity:** Engage with people of other faiths or opinions with adab (Islamic manners), avoiding hostility.

- **Consistency:** Be regular in efforts, and practice what is preached.

- **Avoiding Sensationalism:** Refrain from using clickbait or emotionally manipulative content that distorts Islamic teachings.
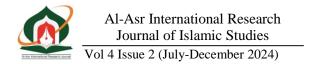
Role of Scholars and Youth

- **Scholars** must actively participate in online platforms to guide the Ummah and counter misguidance.

- **Youth** possess digital fluency and can use their skills in content creation, video editing, design, and social media to promote authentic Islam in creative and engaging ways.

Accountability in Da'wah

Just as Da'wah brings reward, misuse of digital platforms in the name of religion can bring sin. Misinterpretation, misinformation, or harsh rhetoric can

push people away from Islam rather than attract them. Hence, **digital Da'wah must be guided by sincerity (ikhlāṣ)**, knowledge, and a sense of accountability before Allah.

Digital Da'wah is a sacred responsibility and a historic opportunity. In a time when misinformation and moral confusion are rampant online, Muslims are called upon to **be ambassadors of truth, mercy, and guidance** in the digital space. By using technology wisely, ethically, and purposefully, the Ummah can fulfill the timeless command of inviting toward Allah—now with global reach and eternal impact.

Online Ethics and Accountability (Mas'ūliyyah)

In Islamic teachings, **accountability (Mas'ūliyyah)** is a central concept that governs all human actions, including those performed in the digital world. Islam teaches that every word, click, post, and interaction online is subject to divine observation and will be accounted for on the Day of Judgment.

"Not a word does he utter, but there is a watcher by him ready to record it."[14]

Consciousness of Divine Surveillance (Taqwā)

A true believer maintains a sense of **God-consciousness (taqwā)** even in the private and anonymous world of the internet. Just because an action is hidden from people does not make it hidden from Allah. This belief deters Muslims from engaging in unethical behaviour online, such as:

- Lying or spreading false information
- Viewing immoral content
- Engaging in abusive or indecent comments
- Violating others' privacy or dignity

Ethical Use of Technology as a Trust (Amānah)

Digital tools are blessings from Allah and should be used as a **trust (amānah)**. Misusing these tools for unlawful entertainment, slander, or time-wasting contradicts the Islamic understanding of responsibility.

> *"Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you is responsible for his flock..."[15]*

In the online context, this means being responsible for what you write, share, like, or promote.

Responsibility for Influence and Reach

A single social media post can influence thousands. Thus, users with large followings have **greater accountability**. Influencers, bloggers, and content creators must:

- Verify the authenticity of Islamic content before posting
- Avoid promoting unethical trends or behaviors
- Uphold Islamic values in both message and manner

Spreading misguidance knowingly is a grave sin, as the Prophet ﷺ warned that whoever starts a bad practice will bear the burden of those who follow it [16]
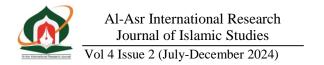
Time as a Valuable Asset

Time is among the most precious resources entrusted to humans. Digital addiction, endless scrolling, and time-wasting apps must be approached with caution. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> *"A servant's feet will not move on the Day of Judgment until he is asked about... his life and how he spent it.[17]*

Online ethics in Islam is rooted in the profound understanding that **every digital act is a moral choice** with consequences. Muslims must navigate the digital space with a sense of duty to Allah, ensuring that their online presence reflects sincerity, integrity, and justice. Accountability (Mas'ūliyyah) transforms online behavior from a casual activity into an act of worship or transgression—depending on the intention and conduct.

Challenges in Digital Ethics for Muslims

As Muslims engage with the digital world, they encounter numerous ethical challenges that test their values, beliefs, and religious responsibilities. While technology offers immense benefits, it also introduces moral and spiritual risks. Below are the key challenges in digital ethics that Muslims face today:

Spread of Misinformation and Fake News

Social media platforms are flooded with unverified claims, fabricated Hadiths, and manipulated religious content.

> *"O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with news, verify it..."* [18]

Muslims often forward such content without verification, violating the Islamic principle of *tabayyun* (careful scrutiny).

Cyberbullying and Character Assassination

Insults, trolling, public shaming, and harsh criticism are common online. Islam strictly forbids backbiting, slander, and humiliating others:

> *"Do not backbite one another..."* [19]

These actions, even behind a screen, are sins and can cause serious harm to individuals and communities.

Pornography and Immoral Content

Easy access to haram content is one of the most severe challenges for Muslims, especially the youth. Viewing such material erodes spirituality and contradicts the Islamic principle of modesty (*ḥayā'*).

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts..."[20]

Digital Addiction and Wastage of Time

Excessive use of smartphones, gaming, and endless scrolling leads to neglect of worship, family, and responsibilities.

"Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils..."[21]

Time is a trust (*amānah*) that will be questioned on the Day of Judgment.

Violation of Privacy and Digital Surveillance

Unauthorized access to personal data, spying on others, or recording without permission is growing concerns.
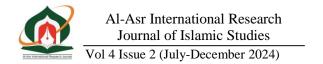
"Do not spy on one another..."[22]

Islam upholds the sanctity of private space and forbids all forms of unjust intrusion.

Erosion of Family and Social Values

Excessive screen time can weaken family bonds and Islamic etiquette in social relationships. Children and adults alike may adopt secular, materialistic, or

immoral worldviews through unfiltered online exposure.

Echo Chambers and Intellectual Laziness

Digital algorithms often reinforce one-sided opinions, discouraging critical thinking and reflection. Many Muslims consume short, oversimplified religious content instead of deep study, leading to confusion and sectarianism.

Misuse of Da'wah Platforms

While digital media allows for spreading Islam, some individuals misuse it for fame, divisive rhetoric, or promoting unauthentic teachings, causing harm to the image of Islam.

The digital age poses unique ethical challenges that require Muslims to be vigilant, knowledgeable, and spiritually grounded. Overcoming these issues demands a return to Islamic values, the promotion of digital literacy infused with *taqwā* (God-consciousness), and proactive involvement of scholars, parents, educators, and youth. Only then can the Ummah navigate the digital world with integrity and purpose.

Developing an Islamic Framework for Digital Literacy

In an increasingly digital world, Muslims must not only acquire technological skills but also engage with digital platforms through the lens of **Islamic ethics and values**. A comprehensive **Islamic framework for digital literacy** integrates both functional competencies and moral consciousness, ensuring that digital engagement becomes a means of personal development and spiritual accountability.

Integration of Islamic Values with Digital Competence

Digital literacy, from an Islamic perspective, is not limited to technical know-how. It must be guided by:

- **Taqwā (God-consciousness)**
- **Ṣidq (truthfulness)**
- **Mas'ūliyyah (accountability)**
- **ʿAdl (justice)**
- **Ḥayā' (modesty)**

Every click, post, or interaction online must align with these principles to ensure ethical use of technology.

Key Components of an Islamic Digital Literacy Framework

Curriculum Development

- Integrate digital literacy with Islamic Studies in schools, madāris, and Islamic universities.
- Design modules on:
  - Responsible use of social media
  - Online privacy and Islamic ethics
  - Cyberbullying and Islamic adab
  - The Islamic ruling on digital earnings, gaming, and NFTs

Authentic Islamic Content Creation

- Encourage production of Islamic videos, blogs, podcasts, and apps that are engaging, educational, and grounded in authentic sources.
- Train youth to use digital skills in **Da'wah**, **Tarbiyah**, and **defending Islam** against misinformation.

Parental and Community Guidance

- Offer workshops for parents to understand the digital challenges facing their children and guide them according to Islamic teachings.
- Promote community centers and masājid as hubs for **digital ethics awareness**.

Scholarly Involvement

- Ulama and Muftis should issue fatwas and guidelines on emerging technologies like:
  - AI-generated content
  - Virtual reality environments
  - Digital contracts and crypto-trading
- Scholars should maintain an active presence online to counter false ideologies and provide authentic guidance.

Building a Digitally Responsible Muslim Society
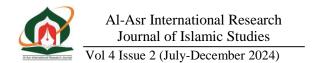
a. Promote Critical Thinking

- Teach Muslims to evaluate online content critically using **Islamic epistemology**.
- Encourage the practice of **tabayyun** (verification) before sharing any news or religious material.

Foster Digital Adab (Manners)

- Implement Islamic netiquette such as:
  - Respectful disagreements
  - Avoidance of vulgar language

- o Honoring elders and teachers online
- o Seeking permission before sharing images or conversations

Encourage Purposeful Engagement

- Time spent online should be intentional and beneficial. Muslims should prioritize:
  - o Gaining knowledge
  - o Serving others
  - o Improving skills
  - o Promoting Islamic values

Policy Recommendations

- **Educational institutions** should embed Islamic digital ethics into national ICT curriculums.
- **Islamic organizations and NGOs** can launch campaigns promoting safe and moral online behavior.
- **Governments** in Muslim-majority countries should collaborate with scholars to regulate unethical digital content in light of Islamic values.

Conclusion

Developing an Islamic framework for digital literacy is essential for preserving faith, values, and identity in the digital age. It combines **technological proficiency with moral responsibility**, aiming to produce Muslims who are not only skilled users of digital tools but also ambassadors of Islam in online spaces. By embedding Islamic teachings into every layer of digital education and practice, the Ummah can rise to meet modern challenges with wisdom, dignity, and purpose.

The digital age has revolutionized the way humans live, learn, and interact. For Muslims, this transformation brings both immense opportunities and serious ethical challenges. As followers of a faith that emphasizes **truth, justice, accountability, and modesty**, it is imperative that digital engagement aligns with the core values of Islam.

By integrating **Islamic ethics into digital literacy**, Muslims can navigate online platforms responsibly, protect themselves and others from harm, and use technology as a tool for **knowledge, Da'wah, and societal benefit**. Principles such as **truthfulness (ṣidq)**, **God-consciousness (taqwā)**, **verification (tabayyun)**, and **modesty (ḥayā')** provide a moral compass in an environment often marked by misinformation, immorality, and distraction.

Furthermore, developing an **Islamic framework for digital literacy**—through education, parental guidance, community initiatives, and scholarly involvement—can ensure that the Muslim Ummah not only survives but thrives in the digital world. Ultimately, every digital action is a spiritual decision, and the believer must strive to make each post, message, and interaction a reflection of their faith and a means of earning Allah's pleasure.

In this light, let our digital footprints be a legacy of goodness, wisdom, and sincere service to humanity and to Allah.

References

[1] . Qur'an 96:1

[2] . Tahir-ul-Qadri, Muhammad. "Islamic concept of knowledge." *Lahore: Minhajul Quran Publication* (2007).

[3] . Qur'an 2:83

[4] . Qur'an 17:36

[5] . Qur'an 49:6

[6] . Qur'an 50:18

[7] . Qur'an 49:12

[8] . Qur'an 49:12

[9] . Qur'an 17:27

[10] . Qur'an 3:104

[11] . Qur'an 3:104

[12] . Sahih Al-Bukhari/Ahadith of the Prophets 50 (3461) (Tahfat Al-Ashraf: 8967) (Sahih)

[13] . Qur'an 16:125

[14] . Qur'an 50:18

[15] . Sahih al-Bukhari - 2554

[16] . Abu-Shamsieh, Kamal. *End of Life Care and Islamic Practical Theology: A Case Study: The Dying Experience of Prophet Muhammad*. Graduate Theological Union, 2020.

[17] . At-Tirmidhi, Kitab Sifta al-Qiyamah...al-Kh, Chapter on the Day of Resurrection, 4/188, Hadith: 2424

[18] . Qur'an 49:6

[19] . Qur'an 49:12

[20] . Qur'an 24:30

[21] . Qur'an 17:27

[22] . Qur'an 49:12