

Islamic Ethics & Social Media Use: A Study in Theory & Practice

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Abstract

Islamic ethics are always considered an important factor that can affect the perceptions of users or consumers. These ethics are studied in detail in the context of traditional media but their implications are ignored in social media. Therefore, this research aimed to identify the main Islamic virtues, discuss them in relation to current universal media ethics, and bring the issue of Islamic ethics and social media into the realm and academic discussion through conducting interviews with selected Arab & Muslim scholars who have conducted extensive research on the subject. Moreover, it analyzed social media users' behaviors attempting to understand and explain the phenomenon of using Instagram and social media by a sample of users in the Arab Muslim context. The study adopted a mixed-method approach by focusing on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The data for qualitative methods was collected through semi-structured interviews with six specialists to study their perceptions and analyze their answers to find out how Islamic ethics relate to other ethical systems and how Islamic ethics relate to media ethics. The data for the quantitative method relied on a questionnaire designed for a sample of social media end users. The results highlighted that Islamic ethics do converge with universal media ethical values yet differ from other ethical systems in the principle of "monotheism," having a unity of divine reference and relating to media ethics when it comes to virtues of accountability, honesty, and truthfulness. Furthermore, the study revealed that social media users in the Arab Muslim context are not necessarily guided by an Islamic ethical perspective even when the content of social media does violate such ethics, a fact which indicates that ethics in such context and the pervasive nature of social media environment have little if any impact on users' behavior even when they are claimed theoretically.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics, Media Ethics, Universal Ethics, Social Media, Accountability.

1. Introduction

The endless disputes about right and wrong have been a language of debate amongst philosophers and theologians throughout history. From a religious perspective, the teachings of many faiths have indicated one message where everything exists by the will of God. In the Quran, "Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is, over all things, Disposer of affairs." [39:62]. Showing agreement, the Bible verse says "you [God] created all things, and by your will [God] they existed and were created" [4:11].

Kant, the moral philosopher of the 18th-century defined an ethical virtue as a moral

strength in humans to fulfill their duties. He does not attempt to define a good character based on their actions as Aristotle's virtue ethics theory claims. Kant's moral philosophy does not subscribe to the idea that right and actions serve goodness or badness (Johnson & Cureton, 2019, p.37). Whereas, Aristotle believes that human excellence comes from a good character who has taken the right choices. He sees that the right decisions are correct only if a proper balance is achieved by practical wisdom "phronesis." Once practical wisdom is achieved, intellectual and moral virtues are granted (Tom, 2012, p. 169).

While major ethical theories as Aristotle's virtue ethics and Kant's duty ethics stress

character and obligation, other theories rely on relativism and egoism. Many also believe that moral-ethical relativism or realism is the right approach and where morality depends on the norms of culture. In other words, ethics are decided by humans according to their own judgments (Meyer, 1992, p.01).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, European orientalist have raised the issue of the non-existence of “Islamic Philosophy” as Muslims have considered the Quran as an ethical text per excellence. It was because European orientalist have dealt with Arabic-Islamic through “Greek Lenses” or through modern European views.

Mohammed Abdullah Draz, a modern ethical scholar, asserted in his comparative analysis of Kant and the Quran, that the ethical and practical contents of the Quran had come to blame Muslim and non-Muslim scholars for leaving many gaps by not studying the holy book from an ethical perspective. Draz argued that the scholars have not focused on the concepts of obligation and responsibility in the Quran, as well as the ethics of family and society (Hashas & al-Khatib, 2020, p. 02).

In the modern context, social media content is one of the controversial topics representing such debates. With social media going viral over the internet, the heavy flow of online audience are daily publishing discussions, posts, and interactions creating dilemmas for ethics and morality. The ethical dilemmas are growing through misinformation, disinformation, fake news, rumors, propaganda, privacy violation, cyberbullying, public bashing, and dishonesty (Koustav, 2015, p.05).

Amanullah has discussed the disadvantages of using social media, more specifically Facebook from an Islamic perspective. He believes that the objectives of Islamic jurisprudence can be disrupted if Muslims do not follow Islamic Ethics. He states Islamic guidelines as; (1) A Muslim should define his purpose and intention of using social media such as “Facebook” within the boundaries of Islamic teachings; (2) A Muslim should be more considerate when communicating with the opposite gender; (3) A Muslim should not hack or create fake accounts and lie in the process; (4) A Muslim should not spread fake

news and false information; (5) A Muslim should maintain honesty and truthfulness in their posts; (6) A Muslim should honor the copyright of other posts; and much more. (Amanullah, 2015, p. 25). Shehu has proved that social media has tied up the minds and time of adults and children. The author reports that a great deal of time is spent over social media as people chat, post, follow, and like content which threatens the socio-religious, cultural, and communal interests of many societies. (Shehu, 2017, p.75). From the Islamic perspective, a study authored by a group of scholars from Malaysia, (Norwawi *et al.*, 2014) revealed that when using Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it should be inspired by the spirit of the sacred texts as the authoritative sources of guidance. Muslims shall follow careful steps to protect themselves from harming themselves and others when using technology and social media such as respecting privacy and not sharing personal photos and private information.

2. Theoretical Background

The review of literature involves a comparative analysis of Islamic ethics and other ethical frameworks of different origins and argumentations.

The Divine Command Theory considers all actions from a religious perspective. It identifies religion as the main standard of ethics. The commands of God are classified as right and good actions. The actions which go against the commands of God are considered ethically wrong. Similarly, Islamic ethics are derived from the Quran and “Sunnah” (sayings of the prophet) where good actions are called “salihat”, and the bad ones are known as “sayyi’at”. These actions should be determined and judged based on many terms such as virtue “ma’ruf”, goodness “khayr”, the truth “haqq”, righteousness “birr”, equity “qist”, justice “’adl”, and piety “taqwa” (Al-Aidaros, Shamsudin, & Idris, 2013, p. 2).

In deontology, the outcomes of good actions are not completely accepted. Even though there are good moral consequences, ethics are objective principles. In other words, the right is prioritized over the good according to the conformity of a moral norm in a specific

environment (Alexander, Larry, Moore, Michael, 2016).

The theory does not look at the actions in terms of its consequences and sees that universal ethical actions must be followed. Islamic ethical system is skeptical about this theory as it does not specify the source of “ethical universalism” (Al-Aidaros, Shamsudin, & Idris, 2013, p08) .

The utilitarian theory provides two theoretical rules where the utilitarian act presumes that individual moral action is considered right if the act has utility regardless of breaking any rules. The second rule sees the value of an action is in its consequences. This perspective can discipline individuals where it allows one to think before acting if whether performing any action is right or wrong, and does it harm anyone if acted upon (Rodgers & Dietz, 2014, p.04). Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics Theory concentrates on what makes an individual good and not the origins of good action. Aristotle proposes several traits that every good person must have such as courage, justice, honesty, and loyalty.

Islamic ethics are inspired by the sacred text. In the Quran, God says: “Just as We have sent among you a messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our verses and purifying you and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know]” .[2:151 Islam beliefs contain five essential principles where one must believe in God’s Unity, dispatches God’s Justice, believes in paradise and hell, have an intermediary position, and command the right and forbid the wrong (Booth, 2016, p.25). Al- Ghazali, a major classical Muslim philosopher, considers ethics as good principles that are associated with the ninety-nine attributes (virtues) of God. However, he does not completely deny independent moral reasoning (Parrott, 2017, p. 3). Al Khateeb has given his review in terms of the main principles that should be considered in Islamic ethics in media. He states that any media content should be inspired by the sacred text. He also maintains that media should be a force for the good. He also indicates that media content should be carried within ethical boundaries. He adds that media content should be ethically bound and should not bend with any unethical content published in media no

matter how popular the unethical content may get. (Al-Khateeb, 1991, p. 221). According to Malik and Normazman, Islamic media ethics are based on main foundations that highlights the values and morals of Islam. The main foundations are (1) Honesty, (2) Commitment, (3) Forbidding false content and fake information, (4) Accurate understanding of published information, (5) Avoid tricking followers, (6) Openness and clarity of purpose, (7) Courage in showing opinion, and (8) Wisdom. (Malik & Normazman, 2016, p. 327)

3. Definition of Terms

This study selects three main principles among many others for the purpose of analysis and given the limitation of this study. The three principles are; honesty, truthfulness, and accountability.

3.1. Honesty:

Al- Ghazali’s defines as a virtue in a person who says the truth to be called an honest person “Sadiq”, yet not at the best level of truthfulness (Mubarak, 2012). In a modern media ethics text, Clifford defines honesty as a virtue that comes as a center of human affairs that should go along with the teachings of sacred texts (Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 2017, p. 29). For this study, the operational definition of Honesty is being truthful to oneself when communicating and using social media platforms by not writing or posting what is known to the person as false or misleading.

3.2. Truthfulness:

Aysh & Hydar defines truthfulness as the inner intention “Niya” to follow what Allah commands and adhere by His teachings based on principles of honesty, truthfulness, trust, equality, and forgiveness (Christians & Traber, 1997, p. 109). Al- Ghazali’s regards truthfulness as a virtue that relates to the virtue of honesty where one can be called “Sideeq” (Truthful) once reaching the ultimate level of truthfulness and honesty (Mubarak, 2012, p. 214). The operational definition of truthfulness in this study is truthfulness is a virtue of telling the truth to the best of one’s ability and a virtue that relates to the virtue of honesty and can be achieved when one is completely truthful to oneself and to others by using social media for

providing true information without promoting lies or posting misleading content to conceal the truth.

3.3. Accountability:

Accountability is a virtue derived from monotheism “Tawhid”, that can lead people to believe and follow one God and therefore are held accountable and responsible to adhere to divine commandments (Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 2017, p. 27). Al- Ghazali’s defines it as a virtue associated with the virtue of “silence” where one must be held accountable of their own words and behavior by encouraging positive actions and repelling the negative in line with the virtues of divine commandments (Mubarak, 2012, p. 286). The operational definition of accountability in this study is that accountability is a virtue where one is put under the responsibility for the content posted or shared over social media and where one must be held accountable for any negative actions over the social media platforms in line with the virtue of divine commandments as promoting the good and reducing harm. This study focuses on the virtues of accountability, honesty, and truthfulness, providing the contribution of classical and contemporary scholars on Islamic ethics enlightens the subject matter from such a perspective.

Al- Ghazali’s interpretation of virtues and ethics were derived from the Quran. To Al- Ghazali, the most elevated virtue generating other values is wisdom, the highest of morals (Draz, 1996, p. 167). He regards truthfulness and honesty as highly important, if one adheres

to them, one is called “Sideeq” (very truthful) derived from the word honest and truthful, meaning that one has reached the ultimate level of truthfulness and honesty. However, if this can be achieved only partially, one can only be called “Sadiq” (truthful), an honest person yet not at the best level of truthfulness (Mubarak, 2012, p. 214). Al- Ghazali identifies the virtue of accountability as part of responsibility where one must be responsible and held accountable for their own actions and words. He includes the virtue of silence as part of accountability where one must remain silent to avoid mistakes. He adds that the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice is part of accountability where one must encourage positive actions and repel the negative (Mubarak, 2012, p. 286).

Draz regards honesty and truthfulness as the most important virtues. He uses many Quran verses to refer to the importance of Honesty as a virtue and a commandment from Allah (Draz, 1996, p.236). He also uses Quran verses to interpret accountability which is in his view somewhat like responsibility. The virtue of accountability is seen as obligatory where every human is held accountable to their actions and intentions (Draz, 1996, p. 37). Siddiqi states that Muslim IT experts should concentrate on what changes an instructional objective can bring to the learner’s psycho-ethical fabric and how important is Islamic education and training. He states that Islam has a broader view when it comes to IT and media education through a sequence he has developed himself. The figure 1 shows how Siddiqi’s sequence is related to the virtues chosen for this study (Siddiqi, 1993, p. 315).

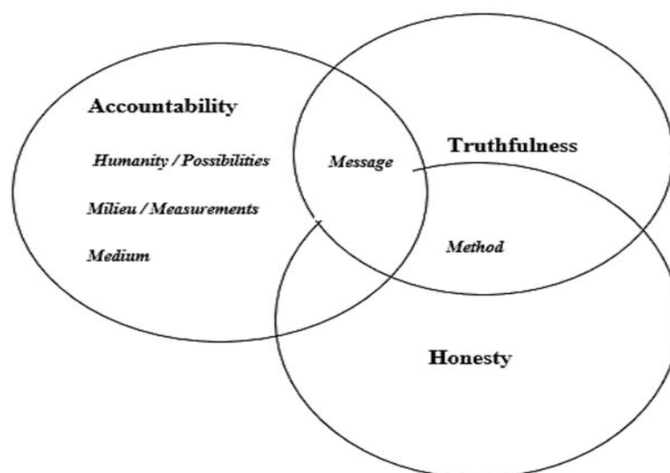


Figure 1: Siddiqi’s sequence relation to the virtues of this study (Siddiqi, 1993, p.315)

Siddiqi regards accountability as being composed of many factors:

- a. Humanity:* Humanity is a virtue that holds accountability for sins or any unethical action. His perspective sees that one is born innocent and free; therefore, accountability is held towards one's actions.
- b. Medium:* This means that media have been misused and many negative consequences have occurred where the public and specifically children in schools have been driven away from their core ethical principles.
- c. Milieu:* The milieu refers to the interaction between society's demands on media and what do media do to society is very important and therefore those who control media should be held accountable with regard to the media content.
- d. Measurement:* This is the notion that it is essential for those who are in control and are responsible to measure the effectiveness of the message to do that in line with virtues derived

4. Research Problem and Questions:

This study revolves around the following themes as objectives:

1. Identify the main Islamic virtues and discuss them in relation to current universal ethics.
2. Bring the issue of Islamic ethics and social media into the realm and academic discussion through conducting interviews with selected Arab & Muslim scholars who have conducted extensive research on the subject.
3. Examine selected social media users in the region on whether Islamic ethics is a factor in the use of social media.
4. Provide understanding and recommendations pertaining to using social media within the boundary of Islamic ethics.

Based on the above background, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. **RQ_{1A}:** What are Islamic ethics?
2. **RQ_{1B}:** How do selected Arab & Muslim scholars articulate Islamic ethics in media?
3. **RQ₂:** How do Islamic ethics converge or differ from other ethical systems?

4. **RQ₃:** How do Islamic ethics relate to media ethics?
5. **RQ₄:** Are social media users guided by an Islamic ethical perspective?

5. Methodology and Sample:

This study adopts a qualitative approach as the main research method, and a quantitative method is also used to analyze social media users' behaviors, attempting to understand and explain the phenomenon of using Instagram and social media in the Arab-Muslim context. The nature of the topic requires an in-depth analysis of Islamic virtues, interviews with relevant scholars, and a thorough examination of social media users' perceptions of the subject. The first part, interviewing Muslim scholars and professionals who made the contribution and showed interest in media ethics, involves several interview questions from the research inquiries including the three virtues selected for the study. The second part, a survey of selected social media users in the region, involved a questionnaire on the three main virtues selected for the study. The sample of the first part consists of six media scholars and media professionals (Table 1). In-depth interviews were conducted with the six participants on Islamic ethics in theory and practice.

Table 3. Scholars and journalists who were selected for interviews

Participant	Specialization
Katherine Bullock	PhD. Lecturer, Dept Political Science.
Amani Al Naqbi	Journalist and News Editor.
Al-Shafie Omar	Press editor.
Yazan Souliman	Digital and Social Media Expert.
Mariam al-Attar	PhD. Lecturer, Department of Arabic and Translation Studies.
Mohammad Ayish	PhD. Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication.

The sample of second part of the study consists of a purposive sample of forty (40) social media users selected randomly for the purpose of measuring the extent to which participants rely

on Islamic ethics in dealing with social media content. Table 2 shows the sample's social characteristics.

. Table 2. Participants' Demographic Characteristics by Respondents

Characteristics	Levels	All students (N = 40)	
		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	31	77.5%
	Male	9	22.5%
Age	18 to 24	17	42.5%
	25 to 34	18	45%
	34 and above	5	12.5%

6. Study Results & Discussion:

6.1. Part I: Qualitative Results

The interview used several semi-structured questions involving Islamic ethics in theory and practice. The data from the interviews of six scholars and professionals in the field were collected and synthesized. The qualitative data are classified into themes for the purpose of analysis and interpretation.

Question 1: Islamic Ethics as God's commandments:

The theme discusses the participants' definitions and understanding of Islamic ethics. The participants agree that Islamic ethics are originally derived from God's commandments. One participant maintains with confidence that the moral concepts put by the Quran can be considered as the essence of Islamic ethics. Another participant reinforces this assertion and agrees that Islamic ethics are informed by Islamic beliefs and teachings. The rest of the participants maintain that Islamic ethics is to live life by following God's commandments.

As for one different participant, she gives a different interpretation saying that she would not prefer to use Islamic ethics as such, but it would be considered as a moral philosophy which is universal in all religions and traditions. Despite the disagreement, most participants' feedback seems to be very similar when it comes to their understanding and definition of Islamic ethics.

The participants' answers are in line with what Al-Ghazali, a classical theologian, proposes when he put boundaries on morals and ethics. He discussed how ethics need to be

consistent with the Quran's ethical principles and the notion monotheism (Frank, 2016, p. 12). Draz, a contemporary scholar in Islamic ethics, reinforces the participants feedback where he sees a great loss to humanity has happened in Europe because they have been blinded from the ethical system which comes from religion (Draz, 1996, p. 1). Siddiqui, a scholar in communication ethics, has also developed a strategy that follows the concept of Quran which he believes that it contributes to upholding the most righteous actions and ethics (Siddiqui, 1987, p. 282).

While there is agreement among most participants as to what constitutes Islamic ethics as commandments, there is still some uncertainty about the way such ethics are different from cultural norms and whether they are followed in practice especially in using social media. One participant acknowledges that ethics are developed by the norms of culture, and it should not be called or only be considered as "Islamic." Another participant's feedback complies with Velleman's defense of moral relativism where different communities develop moral ethics based on one's culture and way of living (Velleman, 2015, p. 21). However, Immanuel Kant's deontological theory has tried to examine the blurring line between culture and religion. Kant disagreed with religious knowledge as the main source of ethics, yet he also stresses that the human mind should not be completely freed from any object, intuition, religious guidance, or anything else. Therefore, it could be a possibility that ethics may not be withdrawn from one's norms and culture only.

Question 2: Ethical Systems Convergence:

The second theme discusses the perspective of participants about whether media ethics converge with Islamic ethics or not. (Questions 2 and 6). Three participants have agreed that, and media ethics converge on many ethical principles. One participant agrees that the ethics touch on both culture and religion as what is good or evil for community is determined by ethical values of religions and those adopted by societies. Another participant agrees that media ethics and Islamic ethics converge. However, he sees that ethics can be considered as universal ethics that embrace Islamic and non-Islamic values. However, Islamic ethics and other systems of ethics may differ when it comes to the interpretations of certain morals. The notion of justice, for example, may vary from one legal system to another. One participant agrees that there are many convergences in both Islamic and media virtues, given that ethics are shared with other human beings with the same basic moral principles.

Several participants disagree with the idea of ethics convergence. One participant sees that there may be similarities in the ethical systems because the virtues such as honesty and respect are similar. However, in media ethics, honesty can be interpreted differently as some media institutions follow a certain policy and where institutions' interests are put above one's religion and the true meaning of the virtue itself. Another participant has also noted that ethics take different meanings where media systems adopt ethical trends that are different from Islamic values. Yes, another participant has also explained that Islam ethics are rooted in true ethical concepts, whereas media ethics are impacted by the source of their funds and derived benefits.

Siddiqi sees that popular culture and media are influenced by sociocultural movements with political campaigns that disregard ethical standards, and consequently he stresses that an Islamic point of view is important to inform media ethics (Siddiqi, 1996, p. 324). Therefore, it can be assumed that as much as ethics may seem universal because they are the same virtues, their manifestation differs and may not converge accordingly.

Regardless, almost all participants maintain that the main Islamic virtues that converge with media ethics are truthfulness and "Honesty." Mowlana, a contemporary communication scholar, discussed five cardinal

concepts of Islam that can function as the main principles of communication: monotheism, allowing virtues and forbidding vice, Unifying people, Piety, and Honesty (Mowlana, 2007, p.23). Piety and honesty are viewed as related virtues, one cannot be pious unless they are truthful and honest. This is relevant in the context of social media today where many unethical conducts and dilemmas are the main factors such as dishonesty, cyberbullying, and privacy invasion (Koustav, 2015, p. 25).

Question 3: Universal Ethics

The theme examines participants' understanding of universal ethics. (Questions 3) Four participants agree that ethics are universal focusing on the virtues "Truthfulness," and "Honesty." This is in line with Schwartz's assertion that the virtue of Honesty is considered one of the main universal morals in ethics according to Schwartz (Schwartz, 2005, p. 1). However, Mowlana highlighted that Muslim societies do not react positively when communication ethics come from foreign cultures and environments, which makes ethical values relative in terms of meaning and definition (Mowlana, 2007, p. 23).

Siddiqi views the virtue of accountability differs in Western and Islamic perspectives. He explains that the western perspective sees that one does not hold accountability for their sins or actions as it is a religious concept that man is born to sin which is different in the Islamic perspective, where it is seen that man is born innocent and free, therefore one must be held accountable of their own actions (Siddiqi, 1993, p. 315).

Al- Ghazali defines accountability as a part of responsibility where men must be held accountable for their own actions and words (Mubarak, 2012, p. 286). The participants' feedback seems to be in line with this interpretation even though Al-Ghazali and Siddiqi were explaining the virtue of accountability from only a strictly Islamic perspective without special focus on current universal ethics. Siddiqi uses accountability from an ethical media perspective and underlines the importance in having Muslim experts to be the "Gatekeepers" in order to be more accountable through following Islamic values and practices (Siddiqi, 1996, p. 315).

The results demonstrate that mainly there are different perspectives about whether

ethics are universal or not. The participants are split about whether virtues are defined from an Islamic perspective or that ethics are being universal. One participant maintains that media ethics are universal in the sense that they are based on certain principles like justice, truthfulness, and accountability.

Question 4: Ethical Guidance

The theme relates to question 4 on whether social media users are guided by Islamic ethics. The participants observe that ethics, in general, do not discipline social media users in the region; one participant has indicated that users do not take Islamic ethics seriously accept “unethical” content over social media. Another participant indicates that social media use is not restrained by Islamic ethics. He adds that there are concerns when it comes to social media as some imagery may be considered as an imitation of God’s creation which contradicts the spirit of Islamic ethics. The participants argue that the digital realm is causing an adverse effect on religious beliefs. Shehu in a similar context has detected many unethical chats, posts follows, and likes that go against socio-religious, cultural, and communal interests in many societies (Shehu, 2017, p 75). Another study recognized that respecting the privacy of others is part of Islam teachings and ethics, yet many Arab Muslims are violating Islamic ethics as they invade the security and privacy of online users as hackers specialized in spying (Khan, Zahid, Aalsalem, Zangoti, & Arshad, 2017, p. 4). Although there are guidelines within the Islamic ethical perspective when using social media such as abiding by the boundaries of Islamic teachings, not hacking or creating fake content, spreading false information, and respecting privacy (Amanullah, 2015, p. 23), studies and participants’ views converge on the notion that Islamic ethics are not contributing much when guiding social media users in the region.

The results compiled can relatively confirm that ethics and social media will continue to be a difficult and complex challenge. The participants do not support the idea of controlling unethical content in social media as this may produce undesired consequences. The participants argue that state censorship or control can make users rebel more and look for more unethical ways and where freedom of speech may be seen and

restricted as a result. As much as Islam ethics sees freedom, dignity, and reputation as Islamic values, social media is negatively causing users to care less about Islamic ethics, and surveillance, on the other hand, is seen as unwarranted and even violates privacy (Malik, S. 2015, p. 264).

Question 5: The Islamic Virtues

The theme relates to question number 5. The theme sheds light on the main Islamic virtues. The participants maintain that the following should be considered the main Islamic virtues: Truthfulness, Honesty, Righteousness, Justice, and Monotheism.

Research findings do correspond highly to participants’ answers as many scholars have proved that such virtues are truly the main Islamic virtues. A participant emphasized the virtue of monotheism as he sees that believing in the unity of the universe is a central value that defines Islamic morality and can be the source of all other virtues. Mowlana, in this context, argued that Tawhida (monotheism), is the main principle of communication ethics which can also lead to “amr bi al-ma’ruf wa nahy’an al munkar” (allow virtues and forbid vices), “ummah” (unified people), “taqwa” (piety), and “amanat” (Honesty) (Mowlana, 2007, p. 23). Most importantly, Al-Ghazali sees that morals and ethics are derived from monotheism, (Frank, 2016, p. 12). Clifford, a contemporary Western media ethics scholar, has also connected the virtue of accountability to monotheism where people believe and follow one God and though it, people will follow all other virtues sent down by divine commandments (Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 2017, p. 29). While the virtue of honesty is widely discussed as being a universal virtue, it is also concluded that it is considered one of the main Islamic virtues in Islam. Radi discusses how an Islamic perspective is based on four main foundations righteousness, truthfulness, and honesty (Radi, 1996, p. 66). The participants have defined the virtues with personal inputs; defining truthfulness as “to remain honest and truthful”, and “to remain sincere, honest, and leave no room for dishonesty and lying”. The participants agree that truthfulness” is a virtue that is derived from Islamic teachings. However, one participant added that the value can also be considered

universal as it is a “a similar principle held by other cultures and other traditions”.

The interviews with participants show that truthfulness and honesty are connected, Al-Ghazali’s thoughts there was a very important slight difference in them despite the fact of both virtues are related. He explains that being truthful is being “Sideeq” (very truthful) where one reaches the ultimate level of truthfulness and honesty. However, if one does not reach that level, he can only be called “Sadiq” (only truthful), which is only being “honest” but not at the best level of truthfulness (Mubarak, 2012, p. 214). The participants also indicated that justice is an essential Islamic virtue. Booth suggested that one of the five essential principles in Islamic ethics is that one must believe in God’s Unity, and dispatch God’s “Justice” (Booth, 2016, p. 25). This is also in line with Al Nusri’s theory of God’s attributes that can establish a linguistic and semantic

connection between ethics and several God’s attributes. Azzi discussed many God attributes including the attribute The Fair or the “Just” - “Al Adel” as an inspiration for the need of social justice in media ethics and practices (Azzi, 2011, p. 757).

6.2. Part II: Quantitative Results:

The survey involved non-probability sampling; forty (40) respondents were selected to answer questions related to the presence of virtues in social media uses. The chosen sample was social media users in the United Arab Emirates. The survey was conducted to better understand the importance of three chosen virtues for this research in practical uses (Accountability, Truthfulness, and Honesty).

The survey shows that most participants use Instagram (40%) and Snapchat (40%) followed by Tiktok and Twitter (Table 3)

Table 3. Respondents’ Frequent Use of Social Media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Instagram	16	40.0	40.0	40.0
Snapchat	16	40.0	40.0	87.5
Tiktok	4	10.0	10.0	97.5
Facebook	3	08.0	08.0	96.5
Other	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

With regards to the virtue of Honesty, the respondents were asked about the level of their honesty when using social media in terms of the content and posts they share over social media platforms. To measure the importance of the virtue of accountability, participants were asked if they feel responsible or find themselves held accountable for the social media content they share or post. As for the virtue of truthfulness, participants were asked whether

they make sure that they always confirm that whatever they share, or post is the truth and is not fake or false information. The results show that 60% say they are honest, 32.5 are sometimes honest and 7.5% are rarely honest. The respondents feel more responsible for using social media (90%) than not feeling responsible (10%). The respondents say they confirm the truth of their sharing and postings (75%) as against 25% who do not do so. (Table 4)

Table 4. Responses to Questions 2, 3 and 4

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
How Honest are you when using social media in terms of content and posts?				
Honest	24	60.0	60.0	60.0
Sometimes honest	13	32.5	32.5	92.5
Rarely honest	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Not honest at all	0	0	0	0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	
Do you Feel Responsible or Held Accountable for the Content you Share and Posts over Social Media?				
Yes	36	90.0	90.0	90.0

No	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	
Do you Make Sure you Always Share and Post the Truth over Social Media?				
I share or post without confirming	10	25.0	25.0	25.0
I confirm before sharing or posting	30	75.0	75.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Analyzing the results of the survey conducted on a sample of Arab social media users, the results seem very promising. The results prove that the selected sample has stressed being “honest” and is held “accountable” towards the social media content they share or post in addition to confirming information before sharing and posting. The results prove that the three chosen ethical virtues are important and are put into consideration by social media Arab users.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

This study has highlighted that virtue of accountability is a main Islamic virtue, linked or originated from being accountable to God before being accountable to self and others. The virtues of “truthfulness and honesty “overlap where one cannot be truthful without being honest in words and actions, and one cannot be honest without revealing the truth. Islamic virtues can stem from the idea of monotheism, the belief in the unity of God and divine commandments. This notion may not be universal, but it is part of the ethical plurality of belief systems.

The interview with six media scholars and media professionals in the region and the survey of a sample of social media users in the region show that:

1. *Islamic ethics are the core teachings of the Quran and the Sunna (saying of the prophet).*
2. *Islamic ethics do converge with the ethical values of other belief systems based on monotheism.*
3. *Islamic ethics are related to media ethics on virtues of accountability, honesty, and truthfulness.*
4. *Social media users maintain that social media platforms involve content that*

violates core principles of Islamic ethics.

5. *Social media users are not necessarily guided by Islamic ethics even when they claim the importance of such ethics in theory.*

It is hoped that this challenging issue of ethics and media ethics in different cultural environments adds value to the current discussion on ethics and social media through comparative analysis, discussion, and clarification in this wide landscape of plurality of belief systems and the new digital environment. While certain virtues may be conditioned by cultural considerations, most core values such as truthfulness, accountability, and honesty are mostly universal even when they are based in Islamic ethics on a monotheist belief system.

8. Implications and Limitations

This study has highlighted an important topic of Islamic ethics and revealed its importance in the context of social media. It has identified the main Islamic virtues and discussed them in detail in relation to current universal media ethics. Moreover, the research has analyzed the behaviors of social media users. Therefore, this study can be beneficial for academicians and also practitioners. The academicians can emphasize on the detailed literature shared by this study about virtues and ethics. Similarly, the practitioners can use this research as a guideline for developing effective strategies.

This research has used the mixed-method approach and future studies can adopt any single method. It's important to quantitatively examine the stance of this research with a bigger sample size to generalize the results. Secondly, this study has mainly highlighted the accountability of virtue, and studies in the future can rely on any other important virtue.

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