



Importance of Managing Social Media to Preserve the Intellect: An Islamic Ethical Perspective

**Siti 'Aisyah binti Jamaluddin, Muhammad Fauzee bin Kamarudin, Masyitah
Husna binti Ammer, Akram M Zeki**

Kulliyyah of ICT, International Islamic University Malaysia
akramzeki@iium.edu.my

Abstract

In the digital age, technology has a profound impact on cognitive health, knowledge dissemination, and mental well-being. While social media offers significant benefits, it also introduces challenges, such as reduced critical thinking and exposure to misinformation. Social media and influences shape human behaviour in both positive and negative ways, making it increasingly difficult to maintain intellectual sharpness. This study examines how ethical frameworks, particularly Islamic principles like hifz al-aql (preservation of intellect) and Maqasid al-Shariah, can guide responsible social media use. This study also explores various attributes of the mind, such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and creativity, to understand how they interact with the challenges of social media. Through comparative analysis with Western views, this study aims to provide practical insights for responsible social media use that align with Islamic values.

Keywords: Maqasid Shariah, Hifz- Al-Aql, Intellectual Integrity, Technology, Digital Age, Islamic Ethics, Information

1. Introduction

The literal meaning of intellect refers to the power of knowing, distinguishing it from the ability to feel and will, thus defining it as the capacity for knowledge. Intellect or 'aql has been given by Allah, the Creator for us to administer the world, it makes us different from other creation. They were given the brain but do not have the ability to think like humans do. The path to knowledge is often considered to involve three primary sources: hawas (sensory perception), 'aql (intellect or reasoning), and wahyu (revelation). Al-Ghazali's quote, "Every human being has their own sensory, imagination, and intellect judge, but the leader of that judge is the intellect." [1] It highlights the hierarchy within human cognitive faculties. According to Al-Ghazali, each person possesses senses (hawas) for perceiving the physical world, imagination for interpreting and creating mental images, and intellect ('aql) for logical reasoning.

Due to the immense value of the intellect, Islam adopts a dual approach in protecting human intellect which are.

i. **Muhafazah min Jaanibil Wujud (Preservation from the Aspect of Existence)**

This refers to safeguarding the intellect to ensure its proper functioning. One way to care for it is through learning, which is a command from Allah for all human beings, regardless of gender, status, or wealth. Several verses emphasize the importance of knowledge. Social media, often considered a learning platform, offers vast amounts of knowledge accessible online. To

preserve the intellect, users should seek beneficial content that promotes critical thinking, cultural awareness, and spiritual growth. Selective content consumption helps in filtering out distractions that can cloud judgement and weaken intellectual focus.

ii. Muhafazah min Jaanibil Adam (Preservation from the Aspect of Non-Existence):

This refers to protecting essential values from harm or destruction, such as prohibiting activities that damage the intellect (e.g., substance abuse) or promoting rules that safeguard life and well-being. Fakhrur Razi stated in his Tafsir: “The intellect of a human being is one of his noblest traits, and alcohol is the enemy of the intellect. Everything that is an enemy to nobility is considered vile. Therefore, drinking alcohol is a reprehensible act[1]”. The variety and abundance of substances on social media can lead to addiction if not used appropriately. By analogy (qiyyas), social media addiction is similar to alcohol consumption, as both are detrimental to the intellect. Such behaviour may be subject to prohibition as it leads to the same harmful impacts on mental faculties and social interactions.

Social media platforms promote quick and global communication and are easy to use and learn [2]. Social media, broadly defined, includes any digital platform that enables social interactions, such as emails, texts, blogs, message boards, dating apps, gaming sites, and social networking platforms. This interconnected digital world presents both challenges and opportunities.

Managing social media platforms well is key to preventing mental overload and reduced critical thinking that comes from too much content consumption. Current studies show that the fast spread of information can make people dependent on false information, which endangers smart choices and ethical actions [3]. This situation highlights the need to connect social media habits with the idea of *hifz al-aql*, or protecting the mind, as taught in Islamic teachings. By encouraging moderation, purposefulness, and checking information, we can change social media into a tool that improves thoughtful engagement instead of harming it [4]. In the end, promoting responsible online conduct based on Islamic principles not only protects individual intellect but also helps create a society that is more informed and ethically strong.

This paper aims to address this gap by exploring how Islamic teachings on *hifz al-‘aql* can inform individuals’ engagement with social media, examining the impacts of social media use on intellectual well-being, and proposing guidelines for responsible engagement rooted in Islamic ethical principles.

2. Islamic Teaching and Intellect Preservation

Rulli Nasrullah describes social media as an interactive and public communication platform. It serves as a medium for users to communicate across unlimited distances, times, and locations. Additionally, social media provides services that enable users to engage interactively with one another[5]. Social media serves not only as a tool for communication but also as an entryway to education, commerce, and services. While it offers significant benefits, it also poses risks to intellectual well-being, as unregulated use can lead to issues like information overload, addiction, and misinformation. Therefore, it is essential to establish boundaries and guidelines for social media use, aligning with the Islamic principle of *hifz al-aql* (preservation of the intellect). Such measures help protect the mind from harm, allowing individuals to engage with technology responsibly, maximize its benefits, and support the development of a healthy, informed society.

The use of social media as if it were a completely unrestricted, private space often leads to issues such as disrespectful discourse, loss of empathy, and the unchecked spread of misinformation, or hoaxes. Such misuse not only strains community trust but also creates widespread anxiety and scepticism. In Surah Al-Hujurat, Verse 6, Allah says:

"O you who believe! If a wicked person brings you some news, investigate it carefully, lest you harm people out of ignorance and become regretful for what you have done." (Quran, Surah Al-Hujurat 49:6).

This verse emphasizes the importance of verifying information before sharing it, a principle highly relevant in today's social media landscape. By ensuring accuracy, a Muslim can prevent harm caused by false information and uphold the values of truthfulness and respect. In the context of *maqasid al-shariah*, Islamic scholars like Al-Shatibi and Jasser Auda explain that the purpose of shariah includes promoting benefits and preventing harm (*maslahah*)[6]. Applying this to social media means using it in ways that preserve the intellect (*hifz al-aql*) and moral well-being, encouraging users to engage responsibly and consciously.

The use of social media should aim to achieve benefits (*maslahah*) for individuals and society. However, in Islam, preventing harm often takes precedence over seeking benefits—a principle encapsulated by the *fiqh maxim*, جلب المصالح على جنب المفاسد مقدم ("Preventing harm takes precedence over bringing benefits") [6]. This means that even if the content is true, sharing it publicly may not be necessary if it could lead to harm. This aligns with another principle in *fiqh*: (إذا اجتمع الضرار فعليكم بأخذهما) ("When two harms come together, choose the lesser of the two") [6]. Applying this concept, if sharing information on social media risks harming the intellect ('*aql*) or mental well-being of the public, it is wiser to refrain from spreading it.

In this digital age, freedom of expression is a norm, and you can share almost everything on social media, including explicit content like pornography. However, in Islam, we are taught to lower our gaze, as both men and women are equally responsible for maintaining modesty. In Surah An-Nur, verse 30 and 31, it states:

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which [ordinarily] appears thereof and to wrap a portion of their head covers over their chests..." (Quran, Surah An-Nur 24:30-31).

Pornographic materials shared on social media can weaken and damage the mind, thus undermining one of God's most valuable gifts: the intellect. Islam emphasizes the preservation of the intellect (*hifz al-aql*), and engaging with harmful content like pornography can impair mental clarity and spiritual well-being. Therefore, it is crucial for Muslims to safeguard their intellects by avoiding exposure to such content.

3. Impact of Social Media on Intellect

3.1 Positive Impacts on Intellectual Development

The first impact of social media is enhancing learning and critical thinking. Social media platforms support intellectual growth by enabling students to improve learning abilities and critical thinking skills. These platforms help student participation, communication, and the use of digital tools like online tests, which replace traditional paperwork [7]. Users can easily search for Quranic verses, translations, narrations, stories of the Prophet's companions and

wives, biographies of famous Islamic figures, scholars' interviews, and writings. Social media also provides the latest fatwas and *ijtihad* (Islamic legal opinions), making it an accessible resource for a wide range of professionals [8].

Moreover, social media promotes collaboration and engagement. Social media encourages collaboration rather than exclusion. Social media platforms promote quick and global communication and are easy to use and learn [9]. It can transform mobile devices from distractions into tools for responsible and active learning. Social media also connects people across the globe, helping users maintain ties with their home cultures while integrating into new ones. This fosters broader cultural understanding and knowledge [10].

Adolescents report that following Social Media Influencers (SMIs) helps expand their knowledge and cultural awareness. SMIs influence behaviour and opinions, contributing to intellectual growth in areas such as digital literacy and social education [11]. By promoting relevant and informative content, SMIs can positively impact young audiences, helping them access and share diverse knowledge while navigating the digital world responsibly.

3.2 Negative Impacts on Intellect

The first impact is cognitive and academic challenges. Teens' heavy reliance on smartphones and social media often leads to chronic sleep deprivation, which negatively affects cognitive function, academic performance, and socioemotional well-being [8]. The lack of sufficient sleep due to excessive social media use can impair memory, focus, and problem-solving abilities, all of which are essential for intellectual development.

Secondly, there are mental health risks affecting intellectual development. Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and empirical studies show that teenagers who frequently use smartphones and social media are more likely to experience mental distress, engage in self-harming behaviors, and consider suicide [8]. These mental health issues can disrupt teens' ability to focus, regulate emotions, and perform academically, thereby impacting their intellectual growth.

Thirdly, social media platforms often encourage an oversharing mentality, leading to privacy risks and potential cyberbullying [8]. The constant flow of personal updates and shared interests on social media encourages an oversharing mindset [8]. A researcher explains this issue by saying that people today are unable to control information and decisions once they enter electronic communication networks [12]. The constant flow of personal updates can make teens vulnerable to privacy violations, which can cause anxiety and stress, distracting them from intellectual pursuits and negatively impacting their mental well-being.

In addition, there is a negative impact of media on resilience and physical fitness. Social media can contribute to a decline in both mental resilience and physical fitness among young people, who may struggle to adapt to new situations and find it challenging to maintain physical health [13]. The findings showed that social media influencers had a large favourable impact on adolescents' intellectual development of teenagers in Middle Eastern nations [14]. This reduced resilience can lead to lower academic motivation and hinder intellectual engagement.

In conclusion, social media has a complex impact on teenagers' intellectual development. On one hand, it promotes learning, cultural awareness, and collaboration, with social media influencers (SMIs) providing valuable content that can expand teens' knowledge and critical thinking. However, social media also presents risks, such as privacy issues, cyberbullying, and mental health concerns like anxiety and depression. Overuse often leads to sleep deprivation,

which can harm cognitive function and academic performance. The overall impact depends on how social media is used, suggesting a need for balanced, mindful engagement to maximize benefits while minimising harm.

4. Ethical Guidelines for Responsible Social Media Use

4.1 Importance of Moderation (Wasatiyyah) in Social Media Consumption

Navigating social media responsibly needs understanding of ethical rules. Moderation, known as *wasatiyyah*, is a key principle that pushes people to balance their online activity with their mental and spiritual health. In a time where fast information sharing is the norm, the idea of *wasatiyyah*, meaning moderation, is very important for managing the complex world of social media use. This balanced way helps create a good relationship with online platforms, letting people take advantage of the vast information available while protecting them from mental overload and false information. Too much engagement can change how we see things, reduce our ability to think critically, and ultimately alter societal values. By practising moderation, users can find time for careful thought and judgement, maintaining their intellectual honesty according to the Islamic value of *hifz al-aql*. Additionally, *wasatiyyah* promotes purposeful engagement on social media, encouraging users to participate thoughtfully and responsibly instead of just passively consuming content [15]. Overall, moderation acts as a guard against negative impacts and a guiding concept for ethical online behaviour, helping to uphold Islamic moral values.

4.2 Role of Intentionality (Niyyah) In Online Interactions

Taking part in online activities needs a deep understanding of intentionality, or *niyyah*, which is key for ethical behaviour. This idea helps people look at their reasons for being active online, encouraging meaningful interactions that match Islamic values of honesty and respect. By reflecting on the motives behind their actions on social media, users can lessen the negative effects of too much information and false news. For example, having clear intentions promotes checking facts before sharing them, which greatly cuts down on spreading lies that can confuse understanding and judgement. Apart from that, ethical guidelines from *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* stress that users should focus on keeping their minds safe, highlighting the need for rules that match Islamic beliefs [16]. By holding to this principle, people develop careful online habits that promote critical thinking and better focus, as their interactions are more in line with real goals instead of just shallow interactions. In the end, embracing *niyyah* in online spaces protects intellectual honesty and helps build a community based on ethical communication and common values.

4.3 Strategies for Verifying Information to Combat Misinformation

Navigating the digital world needs people to use good methods to check information and reduce misinformation. A basic method is to focus on examining sources, where users look closely at how credible the information is. This matches Islamic values that stress honesty since bad sources can confuse understanding and harm *hifz al-aql*, which means preserving the mind. Additionally, checking information from several trustworthy sources helps create a full picture and lessens mental strain, which can happen due to too much quick information [17]. Using fact-checking tools and talking to experts also goes along with the advice from past scholars like *al-Ghazālī*, who highlighted the need for careful judgement in learning. These approaches not only develop critical thinking but also create a responsibility to keep the shared information accurate, leading to a more knowledgeable society and improving personal understanding in the digital age.

4.4 Establishing Content Filtering and Safe Browsing Practices

The online world brings special issues for thinking and ethical actions, making it important to have strong content filtering and safe browsing habits. Using good filters helps people manage the huge amount of information they face and choose content that promotes learning and fits with Islamic ethics, especially the idea of *hifz al-aql*, which focuses on protecting the mind. Research shows that interacting with peaceful and accepting discussions can greatly reduce negative cognitive upset and promote critical thinking and careful analysis [18]. Also, understanding that modern communication mixes different cultural stories helps Muslims develop a careful way to use social media [19]. In conclusion, using clear filtering methods improves intellectual honesty and supports the moral responsibilities of responsible online activity.

5. Comparison of Islamic and Western Views on Managing Social Media for Preserving Intellect

In a world that is becoming more digital, the strong impact of social media brings up serious questions about keeping intellect safe, leading to a need to look at different cultural views. From the Islamic viewpoint, which is based on the main ideas of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, the protection of intellect (*hifz al-aql*) is very important. It encourages a balanced and thoughtful approach to using technology [20][21]. On the other hand, the western perspective focuses on personal freedom and responsibility, trying to find a balance between personal choice and concerns about mental health and addiction risks [22]. Both views recognize the negative effects of social media on thinking and moral actions, with Islam highlighting virtues like *sidq* (truthfulness) and *amanah* (trustworthiness) [23], while western ethics promote freedom of speech, backed by responsible use and the prevention of false information [24]. The differences in views later will be compared to find effective ways to manage social media that help maintain intellect.

5.1 Significance of Social Media in Contemporary Society and its Impact on Intellect.

In today's society, social media is important for communication but can also be harmful for thinking. It greatly influences public opinion, helps people get information, and connects individuals; still, it brings big issues for focus and ethics. The constant presence of social media promotes quick replies and distractions, causing people to engage less deeply with ideas and weakening their critical thinking abilities. Additionally, these platforms can be addictive, harming personal well-being and leading to shorter attention spans. As people move through this online environment, being deliberate about how they use it is important, highlighting the need for strategies to protect mental sharpness. In the end, social media acts as a connector but can also hurt deep thinking, showing that careful use is essential in the digital world.

5.2 Islamic Perspectives on Social Media Management

In dealing with social media, Islamic viewpoints stress the need for a careful approach that safeguards intellect, known as *hifz al-aql*, in line with the ideas of *Maqasid al-Shariah*. This idea encourages Muslims to use digital platforms in a way that balances self-expression with ethical issues, promoting moderation and mindfulness in online activities. The issue of social media addiction shows a departure from Islamic principles about self-control and awareness, as such reliance can weaken mental focus and moral values [27]. Additionally, ethical behaviour online, based on values like *sidq* (truthfulness) and *amanah* (trustworthiness), helps build a culture of respectful interaction and discourages harmful actions such as *ghibah* (backbiting) [25]. This mindful engagement strengthens the idea that all users share a responsibility to make sure their online presence aids in their intellectual and moral growth.

5.3 Guiding Principles: The Role of Maqasid al-Shariah in Protecting Intellect Through Moderation and Intentional Use

Maqasid al-Shariah offers a framework that focuses on the protection of intellect (*hifz al-aql*) through principles of moderation and intentionality, which are very important given the widespread influence of social media. The increasing addiction to social media platforms presents serious dangers to cognitive focus and moral integrity, opposing the Islamic values of self-control and mindfulness [23]. By promoting *wasatiyyah*, or moderation, and *niyyah*, or purposeful engagement, Islamic ethics suggest a balanced way of interacting digitally. This diverse approach seeks to create a healthy online space that encourages truthfulness (*sidq*) and trustworthiness (*amanah*) while also discouraging harmful behaviours like backbiting (*ghibah*) [25]. In conclusion, the main principles of *Maqasid al-Shariah* work to create an intellectual environment that focuses on individual well-being, ensuring that technology use follows ethical standards and supports, rather than harms, cognitive abilities.

5.4 Western Perspectives on Social Media Management

With social media becoming more important, views in the West on how to manage it focus on individual freedom and digital health. There is a clear emphasis on personal responsibility. Rules for ethical online behaviour suggest that people should use their free speech wisely while being aware of the risks of false information [24]. This shows a wider concern in society about the mental effects of too much social media use, which research connects to increased anxiety, shorter attention spans, and depression [26]. In reply, Western approaches stress the importance of digital literacy, pushing users to set limits on their usage and practice “mindful” engagement with online material [22]. Therefore, while there is a clear focus on protecting individual rights, there is also an acknowledgment of the need for steps to lessen the negative impacts of social media on mental health and cognitive skills, resulting in a more detailed method for managing online environments.

5.5 Guiding Principles: The Emphasis on Individual Freedom, Responsibility and Mental Health in The Context of Social Media Use

Handling social media has both problems and benefits for keeping individual intellect safe, especially when looking at ideas from Islamic and Western sides. From the Western viewpoint, there is a focus on personal freedom and mental health, which calls for people to take responsibility for how they use digital platforms. This idea highlights the need for self-control to prevent addiction and mental health problems, like anxiety and shorter attention spans, as noted by the American Psychological Association [26]. On the other hand, Islamic teachings emphasise the need to protect intellect (*hifz al-aql*) and ethical behaviour online by promoting honesty and moderation, encouraging thoughtful interaction to keep cognitive and moral health intact [27]. Both views understand that social media has a big effect on how individuals see things and how communities work, making it necessary to consume content mindfully to encourage a balanced and healthy online environment [28].

6. Conclusion

With the ongoing debate about how social media affects intellectual honesty, it is clear that careful use is very important. Viewing social media through an Islamic ethical perspective shows the value of *hifz al-aql*, which means protecting the mind. It also ties into the principles of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, which aim to protect essential human interests. Insights from various analyses reveal that while social media helps with sharing knowledge, it can also harm critical thinking and concentration, cause cognitive overload and spread misinformation, as recent studies have pointed out [29]. Therefore, guidelines based on Islamic principles promote balance, purpose, and fact-checking, helping users act ethically in online environments. In

summary, encouraging responsible social media behaviour not only shields personal intellect but also supports a more aware and ethically-minded community, thus connecting contemporary actions with enduring Islamic teachings [30].

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