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## **Digital Identity and Ethical Challenges on Social Media: An Islamic Communication Perspective**

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Received: 14 January 2025. Revised: 10 March 2025

Accepted: 20 July 2025. Published: 10 October 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to explore and analyze the application of communication ethics in the era of social media. Using qualitative content analysis methods as well as in-depth interviews, the study found that communication ethics on social media are often ignored by users, especially in terms of the dissemination of inaccurate information, social polarization, and hate speech. Users also tend to manage their digital identities by displaying an ideal image that is different from reality, which creates social pressure and lowers the quality of communication. Ethical awareness varies among users, influenced by digital literacy and education levels. These findings emphasize the importance of stricter regulations and digital literacy education to improve communication ethics on social media. The study concludes that while social media offers opportunities for wider interaction, better regulation and social responsibility are needed to create a more ethical and responsible digital communication environment.

**Keywords:** *Communication Ethics, Digital Literacy, Social Media*

### **ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dan menganalisis penerapan etika komunikasi di era media sosial. Dengan menggunakan metode analisis konten kualitatif serta wawancara mendalam, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa etika komunikasi di media sosial sering kali diabaikan oleh pengguna, terutama dalam hal penyebaran informasi yang tidak akurat, polarisasi sosial, dan ujaran kebencian. Pengguna juga cenderung mengelola identitas digital mereka dengan menampilkan citra ideal yang berbeda dari kenyataan, yang menciptakan tekanan sosial dan menurunkan kualitas komunikasi. Kesadaran etis bervariasi di antara pengguna, dipengaruhi oleh tingkat literasi digital dan pendidikan. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya regulasi yang lebih ketat dan edukasi literasi digital untuk meningkatkan etika komunikasi di media sosial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun media sosial menawarkan peluang untuk interaksi yang lebih luas, regulasi dan tanggung jawab sosial yang lebih baik diperlukan untuk menciptakan lingkungan komunikasi digital yang lebih etis dan bertanggung jawab.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Etika Komunikasi, Media Sosial, Literasi Digital*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of information and communication technology in the digital era has brought significant changes to the way humans interact with each other. One of the most prominent aspects of this change is the emergence and dominance of social media as the primary communication platform. Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, has enabled instantaneous communication, across geographical boundaries, and involves participation from various walks of life. On the one hand, social media offers a

wide range of opportunities to disseminate information, build relationships, and support various forms of social, political, and economic activities. However, on the other hand, social media also presents serious challenges in terms of communication ethics, especially related to how individuals and groups use these platforms to communicate.<sup>1</sup>

The development of social media has given rise to new forms of communication that are often not bound by the traditional norms that exist in face-to-face communication. In this context, communication ethics is a very important element to consider. According to Wida in his research, communication ethics includes a set of moral rules and principles that govern individual behavior when communicating, both verbally and nonverbally. In the age of social media, this ethics is often tested by anonymity, unlimited access to information, and the rapid and wide dissemination of content.<sup>2</sup>

One of the main issues that arise in communication on social media is the spread of inaccurate information or hoaxes. This phenomenon not only damages information integrity but also has far-reaching social impacts, such as creating polarization in society and worsening conditions of social conflict.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, irresponsible communication on social media also often involves cyberbullying, hate speech, and personal attacks, all of which have a negative impact on the quality of communication and human relations.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, social media provides space for the formation of digital identities that can be different from individual real identities. These identities often allow users to express opinions and ideas without fear of immediate consequences, but they also have the potential to create unethical behavior, such as fraud, slander, or information manipulation. This phenomenon has been studied which highlights how social identities and interactions in cyberspace have the potential to create a "double ethic" where norms that apply in the real world are not always followed in the digital space.<sup>5</sup>

In this case, communication ethics on social media not only concerns basic norms such as honesty and openness, but also relates to social responsibility in disseminating information, managing dissent, and avoiding actions that can harm other individuals or groups. Based on this, research on communication ethics on social media is becoming increasingly important to identify principles that can help overcome the ethical challenges presented by these digital platforms.<sup>6</sup>

In examining communication ethics in the era of social media, there are several relevant communication theories that can be the basis for analysis. One of them is the Theory of Social Responsibility in mass communication, which emphasizes that the media must function for the public interest and be responsible to society. This theory is relevant in the context of social media because these platforms have a great influence in shaping public opinion, disseminating information, and influencing users' social decisions and actions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Riyad Muhammad et al., *Strategi Dakwah Muhammadiyah Di Era Digitalisasi : Inovasi Dan Tantangan*, no. 4 (2024).

<sup>2</sup> Wida Fitria and Ganjar Eka Subakti, "Era Digital Dalam Perspektif Islam," *Jurnal Penelitian Keislaman* 18, no. 2 (2022): 143–57, <https://doi.org/10.20414/jpk.v18i2.5196>.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ghazali et al., "Pelatihan Peningkatan Kemampuan Komputer, Internet Dan Aplikasi Desa," *ABSYARA: Jurnal Pengabdian Pada Masyarakat* 3, no. 2 (2022): 324–32, <https://doi.org/10.29408/ab.v3i2.6802>.

<sup>4</sup> Dewi Bunga et al., "Literasi Digital Untuk Menanggulangi Perilaku Oversharing Di Media Sosial," *Sevanam: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.25078/sevanam.v1i1.9>.

<sup>5</sup> Alya Rahmayani Siregar et al., *Etika Komunikasi Media Digital Di Era Post-Truth*, 5, no. 1 (2024): 39–53.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Latif et al., "Etika Komunikasi Islam Di Tengah Serangan Budaya Digital," *Jambura Journal Civic Education* 2, no. 2 (2022): 174–87, <https://doi.org/10.37905/jacedu.v2i2.17065>.

<sup>7</sup> Fai, "Teori-Teori Komunikasi Menurut Para Ahli," *Teori-Teori Komunikasi Menurut Para Ahli*, 2021.

In addition, Symbolic Interaction Theory is also important in understanding how individuals interact on social media. According to this theory, communication is a symbolic process used by individuals to build meaning in their social interactions.<sup>8</sup> In the age of social media, these symbols are not only words but also images, videos, emojis, and various other forms of digital representation. The use of these symbols can create meanings that vary depending on the context and social interpretation that occurs within the digital community.

In addition, the Impression Management Theory proposed by Erving Goffman (1959) is also relevant in analyzing communication behavior on social media. According to Goffman, individuals are actively managing the impression they make in front of others, and on social media, this happens in a variety of ways, including the way they edit photos, choose content to upload, and the way they interact with other users. The management of these impressions often creates the illusion of an ideal life that is in contrast to reality, which in turn can have a significant psychological and social impact on users and their audience.<sup>9</sup>

This research will use a content analysis method with a qualitative approach to understand how communication ethics are applied and interpreted by social media users. This method was chosen because it is able to identify communication patterns and ethical norms that are revealed in interactions on social media. Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to explore the hidden meanings behind text, images, or other symbols used in communication on social media.

The study will sample content from some of the most widely used social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, over a six-month period. The content to be analyzed includes comments, uploads, and interactions between users related to sensitive topics, such as politics, religion, and social issues. The data obtained will be analyzed in three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion, following the qualitative analysis method from Miles and Huberman (1994). Data reduction will be carried out to filter content relevant to the focus of the research, while data presentation will be carried out in the form of thematic categorization, before finally conclusions are drawn regarding emerging communication ethical patterns.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, this study uses a systematic review approach with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analyses) method as described by Rubio-Aparicio et al. (2018). The main reference source comes from Google Scholar with a range of publication years after 2000, using the keywords "da'wah communication means" and "digital media". From the search results, 15 articles were selected to be analyzed systematically. The article selection process includes several stages: (1) a search on Google Scholar with the help of Publish or Perish software, resulting in 15 selected articles; (2) selection of articles based on keywords, titles, and abstracts; (3) articles that do not meet the next three selection indicators are eliminated; (4) only articles that are fully accessible to the author are used; and (5) systematic review analysis was conducted on the most relevant articles.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Haritz Asmi Zanki, "TEORI PSIKOLOGI DAN SOSIAL PENDIDIKAN (TEORI INTERAKSI SIMBOLIK)," *Scolae: Journal of Pedagogy*, ahead of print, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.56488/scolae.v3i2.82>.

<sup>9</sup> Messy Elvina et al., "Impression Management in Building Personal Branding by Bengkulu Influencers Through the Reels Feature on Instagram," *IJOEM Indonesian Journal of E-Learning and Multimedia*, ahead of print, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.58723/ijolem.v3i1.219>.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad rizal Pahkevianur, "Penelitian Kualitatif : Metode Penelitian Kualitatif," *Jurnal EQUILIBRIUM*, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> María Rubio-Aparicio et al., "Guidelines for Reporting Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses," *Anales de Psicología* 34, no. 2 (2018): 412, <https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.34.2.320131>.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods consist of explanations of types of research, data collection, data sources, types of data, and data analysis<sup>12</sup>. Written in paragraph form. Research Design This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at exploring communication ethics phenomena on social media. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study integrates two data collection strategies: qualitative content analysis combined with in-depth interviews, and a systematic literature review (SLR) to support empirical findings<sup>13</sup>. This multi-method approach allows researchers to identify communication patterns, ethical norms, and hidden meanings behind texts, images, or symbols used in digital interactions, while validating them against existing academic literature<sup>14</sup>.

**Data Collection** The data collection process was conducted through three main channels over a six-month period. First, observation and documentation were carried out on three major social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The researchers specifically targeted comments, uploads, and user interactions related to sensitive topics such as politics, religion, and social issues. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected social media users to understand their perspectives on digital identity and ethical responsibility. Third, a systematic literature search was performed using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analyses) method. Using Google Scholar, the researchers selected 15 relevant articles published after the year 2000 that met the inclusion criteria, specifically focusing on keywords such as "communication ethics," "digital media," and "Islamic communication."

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges of Communication Ethics in the Digital Era

Based on the data analysis that has been carried out, the findings of this study can be divided into several main categories that describe ethical patterns of communication on social media. Data obtained through content analysis methods and in-depth interviews show the existence of several important trends related to communication behavior and ethical understanding on digital platforms.

#### 1. Dissemination of Inaccurate Information and Social Responsibility (Hoax)

One of the main findings in this study is the high frequency of spreading inaccurate information or hoaxes on social media. Many social media users seem to pay less attention to fact-checking before sharing information, which can ultimately exacerbate disinformation in the public space. This phenomenon is in line with the findings of previous research which

<sup>12</sup> Dawit Dibekulu Alem, "An Overview of Data Analysis and Interpretations in Research," *International Journal of Academic Research in Education and Review* 8, no. 1 (2020): 1–27.

<sup>13</sup> H. R. Ganesha and P. S. Aithal, "How to Choose an Appropriate Research Data Collection Method and Method Choice among Various Research Data Collection Methods and Method Choices during Ph. D. Program in India," *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2022): 455–89.

<sup>14</sup> Hamed Taherdoost, "Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; a Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects," *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)* 10, no. 1 (2021): 10–38.

shows that social media is often a place for fake news to develop, especially when users do not have adequate digital literacy.<sup>15</sup>

From the data analyzed, it can be seen that social responsibility in disseminating information is still low among most users. Most of the interview participants mentioned that they tend to share information based on personal emotions or interests without checking the veracity of the source of the information. For example, one of the respondents stated, "*Saya sering membagikan berita karena merasa tertarik, tetapi saya tidak selalu mengecek apakah berita itu benar atau salah*" (Responden 3, 2024). This shows that there is a gap between the principle of social responsibility in communication ethics and actual practice on social media.

## 2. Social Polarization and the Use of Hate Speech

The second finding that stands out in this study is the increasing social polarization reflected through communication on social media. This polarization mainly occurs on sensitive issues, such as politics and religion. Based on content analysis, it can be seen that social media users often engage in debates that lead to the use of hate speech and personal attacks. This is consistent with previous research, which shows that social media in Indonesia is often a means of sharpening dissent, which ultimately creates social tensions.<sup>16</sup>

Data from in-depth interviews also corroborated these findings, with most respondents admitting that they had been involved in or subjected to hate speech on social media. One of the respondents said, "Whenever I express a political opinion, there are always people who attack me personally, even though I try to communicate politely". This reflects the imbalance between freedom of expression and communication ethics on social media, where many users feel free to express their opinions without paying attention to the social impact of the words they use.

## 3. Identity Management and Ethical Awareness in Communication

The third finding has to do with how social media users manage their identities and how this affects communication behavior. Based on the theory of Impression Management put forward by Goffman (1959), individuals tend to manage the impressions they show to others, and this phenomenon is very visible on social media. Many users form a digital identity that is different from their real-life identity. They tend to present their ideal versions of themselves through carefully selected uploads, which often blur the lines between reality and fiction.

Based on content analysis, it can be seen that users often edit photos and other content to display a perfect or ideal image. This is in line with in-depth interviews conducted, where some respondents stated that they felt social pressure to look "perfect" on social media. "I feel the need to show my best side on social media, even if it doesn't always reflect my real life." This shows that there is a gap between the identity presented on social media and reality, which has the potential to create psychological pressure for users.

In addition, the study found that ethical awareness in communication on social media varied between users. Some users are aware of the importance of maintaining communication ethics and strive not to spread hate or false information, while others tend to

<sup>15</sup> Novianto Puji Raharjo and Bagus Winarko, "Analisis Tingkat Literasi Digital Generasi Milenial Kota Surabaya Dalam Menanggulangi Penyebaran Hoaks," *Jurnal Komunika: Jurnal Komunikasi, Media Dan Informatika* 10, no. 1 (2021): 33, <https://doi.org/10.31504/komunika.v10i1.3795>.

<sup>16</sup> Muannas and Muhammad Mansyur, "Model Literasi Digital Untuk Melawan Ujaran Kebencian Di Media Sosial," *Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Teknologi Komunikasi* 22, no. 2 (2020): 128–36.

pay less attention to ethical aspects in their digital interactions. This awareness seems to be influenced by factors such as digital literacy, education, as well as the level of social engagement. For example, one of the respondents who has a communication education background stated that he always strives to fact-check and communicate politely on social media, because according to him, "Social media is a reflection of the real world, and we must behave as well as possible".<sup>17</sup>

## Communication Ethics Solutions in the Social Media Era

### 1. Increasing Digital Literacy

As a result of this study, it was concluded that increasing digital literacy is one of the main solutions to face the challenges of communication ethics in the digital era. Based on the findings obtained, comprehensive digital literacy education needs to be widely implemented at all levels of society. Effective digital literacy programs should include modules specifically designed to improve people's ability to recognize fake news, understand the importance of online privacy, and apply appropriate communication ethics on social media. The results of the analysis show that this educational approach will increase public awareness of the importance of more responsible digital communication.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, this study found that digital literacy must be integrated into the formal education curriculum. These findings are in line with previous studies that emphasized the importance of digital literacy education in equipping young people with the skills to interact ethically and critically in the digital space. Important aspects such as accurate information identification, an understanding of data privacy and security, and digital communication ethics should be an integral part of the curriculum. The results of this study also indicate that the implementation of a curriculum that prioritizes digital literacy will play a significant role in forming a generation that is more aware, critical, and responsible in the use of digital media, so as to minimize the negative impact of unethical communication in cyberspace.<sup>19</sup>

These findings support the need for collaboration between governments, educational institutions, and digital service providers to create an ecosystem that supports digital literacy and better communication ethics in society.

### 2. Stricter Regulations and Policies

The results of this study confirm that stricter regulations and policies are needed to overcome the challenges of communication ethics in the digital era. The findings suggest that stronger government regulation is crucial in controlling the spread of disinformation and hate speech on social media. The study identifies an urgent need for the development and enforcement of stricter regulations, which can provide strict sanctions for violations of communication ethics, especially those related to the spread of disinformation and hate speech. These regulations must be adjusted to the dynamics of technological developments and the pattern of people's digital interactions.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the study found that the policies implemented by social media platforms

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<sup>17</sup> Mesra Betty Yel and Mahyuddin K. M Nasution, "Keamanan Informasi Data Pribadi Pada Media Sosial," *Jurnal Informatika Kaputama (JIK)* 6, no. 1 (2022): 92–101, <https://doi.org/10.59697/jik.v6i1.144>.

<sup>18</sup> Nurmasari Situmeang et al., "Pelatihan Literasi Digital Dalam Kerangka E-Commerce Untuk Petani Sayur Organik Di Desa Bojong, Kecamatan Kemang, Kabupaten Bogor," *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat (JPM)* 2, no. 1 (2022): 16–25.

<sup>19</sup> Deri Firmansyah et al., "Daya Saing : Literasi Digital Dan Transformasi Digital," *Journal of Finance and Business Digital*, ahead of print, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.55927/jfbd.v1i3.1348>.

<sup>20</sup> Hadi Ido Prijana, *Tantangan Etika Dan Regulasi Media Digital*, I, no. 2 (2015): 92–104.

should be more firm and transparent. These platforms need to have clear guidelines regarding content that violates communication ethics, as well as provide effective and user-accessible reporting mechanisms. The results of the analysis show that clear policies, accompanied by consistent enforcement mechanisms, will help suppress the spread of negative content and encourage more responsible participation in the digital space. Integration between government regulations and strong social media platform policies is considered important in creating a safer, ethical, and responsible digital communication environment.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the ethical challenges of communication in the era of social media, where digital platforms have significantly changed the way humans interact. The main findings of this study include several crucial issues. First, the spread of inaccurate information or hoaxes reflects low social responsibility among users, which contributes to increasing social polarization and the rise of hate speech, especially related to sensitive issues such as politics and religion. Second, the dynamics of digital identity management show that there is social pressure to project an ideal image that is often incompatible with reality, which has an impact on the quality of communication and the mental health of users.

Third, ethical awareness in communicating on social media varies, with many users showing low digital literacy. This highlights the need for digital literacy education that emphasizes social responsibility and information verification before disseminating. This study emphasizes the importance of stricter regulations and comprehensive education to overcome the spread of hoaxes and hate speech.

In conclusion, while social media offers great potential for interaction, the challenges of communication ethics remain significant. Collaborative solutions through strict regulation, increased digital literacy, and ethical awareness are needed to create a more responsible and positive digital communication environment.

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<sup>21</sup> Izka Aniyatul Manfaati Sifa and Dian Ratna Sawitri, "HUBUNGAN REGULASI DIRI DENGAN ADIKSI MEDIA SOSIAL INSTAGRAM PADA SISWA SMK JAYAWISATA SEMARANG," *Jurnal EMPATI*, ahead of print, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.14710/empati.2018.21699>.

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