



مصیبات لک کنلہمیہ

POSITION PAPER # 25

Muslim Behavior and Conduct on Social Media

September 2023

ABOUT THE MAJLIS UL ULAMAA (MAJLISTT)

The Majlis ul Ulamaa is a forum to facilitate the collaboration of Islamic Scholars resident and active within Trinidad and Tobago. It seeks to define the authentic Islamic position as it relates to Islam and the Muslim community of the country, considering the various scholastic positions and schools of law. To this end, it deliberates on issues of importance, and defines the Islamic position. The due process is meticulous, spanning the issuing of a draft position paper, inviting stakeholders and public comment and consultations before a final position is issued.

SHARI‘AH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

Maulana Dr. Waffie Mohammed

SHARI‘AH COUNCIL MEMBERS*

Mufti Asrar ul Haque

Mufti Azhar Ahamad Ali

Maulana Atif Majeed

Maulana Junaid Ahmad

Maulana Kavir Mohammed

Sheikh Munaf Mohammed

Dr. Musa Mohamed

Maulana Siddiq Ahmad Nasir**

**(in alphabetical order of first name)*

***participating non-member*

Bismillaahir Rahmaanir Raheem
Allahumma salli alaa sayyidinaa Muhammadin wa baarik wa sallim

MUSLIM BEHAVIOR AND CONDUCT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Contents

1: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEXT	4
1.1 WHO USES IT?	4
1.2 HOW PEOPLE CONNECT & USE SOCIAL MEDIA?.....	5
1.3 GENERAL ISSUES IN USE	5
1.3.1 Opportunities – social media can be beneficial.....	5
1.3.2 Risks – what can go wrong using social media?.....	6
2: SOCIAL MEDIA, ISLAM & MUSLIMS	8
2.1 HOW SHOULD SOCIAL MEDIA BE USED BY MUSLIMS	8
2.1.1. Things To Do	8
2.1.2. Things To Avoid.....	11
2.1.3. Things To Remember.....	14
2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA USE & ACCEPTABILITY.....	15
2.1.1. Is It Permissible to Use Social Media?	15
2.1.2. Is It Permissible to Have Your Photo on Your Profile of Your Social Media Account, Or to Share Photos Of Self, Family Etc.?.....	15
2.1.3. What To Do If We Are Exposed To Content of A Haram Nature?	16
2.1.5. What To Do If We Discover Our Spouses Or Family Are Misusing Social Media?.....	16
2.1.6. How To React If Others Are Misusing Social Media / Misrepresenting Islam / Maligning Muslims?.....	17
2.1.7. How To React When Followers Of Other Muslim Ideologies Begin To Criticize, Berate, Accuse, Condemn, Or Castigate Our Content	18
2.1.8. How To Respond (Or Not) On Religious Content of Other Religions.	19
2.1.9. In what context can interaction with non-mahram persons be Permissible?	20
2.1.10. Can women produce (halaal) content for display and distribution on social media – e.g. speeches, qira-ah, etc.	21
3. CONCLUDING REMINDERS & REMARKS.....	22

1: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEXT

Media refers to mass communication using platforms for broadcasting messages and publishing content. Platforms include radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the internet, which reach or influence people widely. [1]

Social media refers to the set of interactive internet applications that facilitate individual and collaborative creation, curation, and sharing of content – especially user-generated content. [2]

Social media can be categorized into different types:

- Sites that primarily facilitate the sharing of content - social network sites
- Sites that primarily facilitate the connection and interaction of persons – social networking sites
- Sites that primarily facilitate the broadcast of messages to audiences – which include media and microblogging
- Sites that primarily facilitate the codification, consolidation, consensus and critique of information on specific or general topics – wikis

1.1 WHO USES IT?

Social media penetration stands presently at 4.8 billion users worldwide as at April 2023, (~60% of the world population, growing at 3.2% per annum). [3]

Of the platforms, the following are the audiences by platform:

- Facebook has 2.963 billion monthly active users
- YouTube’s potential advertising reach is 2.527 billion
- WhatsApp has at least 2 billion monthly active users
- Instagram has 2 billion monthly active users
- WeChat (inc. Weixin 微信) has 1.313 billion monthly active users
- TikTok ads can potentially reach 1.092 billion adults over the age of 18 each month

Usage varies by specific demographics across age, income, gender, education backgrounds... demonstrate usage across the board – it is not relegated to only youths, or only female, etc. Some platforms feature usage by different demographics (such as TikTok by age and Pinterest by gender).

1.2 HOW PEOPLE CONNECT & USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Devices: Persons connect through home and work computers, smart phones and tablets, and other smart devices.

Identities & Participation: Social media use is nonymous – it can be traced to a bodied being who establishes an online identity and presence on a platform in order to participate.

Although researchers vary in their interpretation of how identities are established and used, and how they integrate with the physical reality, users establish identities and use these to participate on platforms – simultaneously producing and consuming content – to interact, to learn, teach, identify with and agitate for causes and interest.

Interaction: persons can communicate synchronous or asynchronous, 1-to-1 or 1-to-many, situational or programmed, and with different groups across family ties, social circles and friends, workplace colleagues, members of the community and others, across different locations, time zones, countries and even languages.

Usage: Persons spend an average of 2.5 hours per day on social media, across an average of 6 platforms. [3]

Social media has changed the landscape of individual functioning & interpersonal interaction:

- broaden network reach
- strengthen existing ties
- stretching ties thin
- changing the form, function and frequency of communication
- methods of entertainment, education and participation
- commerce and access to goods and services, and drivers of purchase decisions

1.3 GENERAL ISSUES IN USE

MajlisTT recognizes there are certain benefits that can be accrued from using social media, be it for personal development or business purposes. At the same time, there are some risks that one is exposed to in using social media.

1.3.1 Opportunities – social media can be beneficial

- Social media affords persons the opportunity to learn new skills, perspectives and gain knowledge
- It enables persons to meet people, expand their networks and share perspectives
- It gives persons the ability to help others and mobilise support, in different ways, directly and indirectly

- It allows persons the ability to earn halaal income
- Persons have the opportunity to compile, create, curate and communicate content of interest
- It gives persons access to research and information on topics of interest (acknowledged with caution)
- It helps persons to crowdsource information / insight
- It can prove a relaxing and enjoyable form of leisure and interaction

1.3.2 Risks – what can go wrong using social media?

MajlisTT acknowledges that the use of technology, and social media in particular, exposes persons to some measure of risk of threatening, unpleasant or compromising actions perpetrated by others, or through the vulnerabilities and failure of devices and their misuse. We recognize the following, which we expound on thereafter:

- Technical risks
- Interaction and interpersonal risks
- Risks to the individual

Technical Issues

- **Cyber Security:** accounts can be hacked, communication can be intercepted, for e.g. in transit, content can be consolidated and used to inflict harm for e.g. identity theft, devices can be stolen and hidden, data can be lost.
- **Social Media Literacy:** as an emerging technology, it creates the need for certain literacies, competencies and understanding in order to function responsibly and effectively. These literacies may be unattainable to some, at the risk of their marginalization [4]
 - Content-related knowledge and skills
 - Medium / Platform related knowledge and skills
 - Attitudes, Paradigms and Conduct
 - Self-efficacy
- **Digital Divide:** some have access and others don't.

Interaction Issues

- **Verifying Data & Authentication:** user-generated content means persons can say what they want, without verification process – misinformation, disinformation, biased representation; photoshop / deep fake

- **Trolling & Bullying:** for e.g. anti-Islamic activists, now with widespread instantaneous reach; castigation of persons with Muslim names / photos, or on an individual-level, persons being mean and nasty to others. [5]
- **Social Influence:** for e.g. haram content; constant exposure to values that are inconsistent with Islam – hypersexualized, materialistic, individualistic world is different from Islamic values.
- **Relationships:** attraction to others, spouse’s attraction to others, promulgation of Islamically illegitimate relations
- **Predatory actions:** men on women, adults on kids, spam and phishing, ID theft, etc.

Individual Issues

- **Individual Psychology:** ability to communicate effectively with others; blurred boundaries of real and virtual; can result in incidents of low self-esteem, low self worth, negative body images, etc.
- **Addiction:** frequency and duration of use at the expense of meaningful interaction, salaah [5]
- **Dissatisfaction with life:** through carefully curated social media presences and profiles
- **Technology Distrust and Avoidance:** some persons distrust technology and its use, or are averse to change; others see these ‘new’ platforms as Biddah (harmful innovations) or unIslamic.

2: SOCIAL MEDIA, ISLAM & MUSLIMS

2.1 HOW SHOULD SOCIAL MEDIA BE USED BY MUSLIMS

Islam is a complete way of life for all peoples and all times. It guides us on our conduct and behavior as individuals, and in our interaction with others. Technology represents tools that can help us in our efforts, of which social media is one such tool that helps us to communicate with others. We are encouraged to use tools for good, and to use them responsibly to achieve our outcomes. To this end, we identify a number of guidelines in Islam that instruct us in our conduct and use of tools, including use of social media. We recognize these guidelines to cover:

- Things we should do
- Things to avoid
- Things to remember or keep in mind

2.1.1. Things To Do

A Way To Get Closer To Almighty Allah

Follow the Sunnah: You have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern of conduct for everyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day and who engages in the praise of Allah (Qur'an 33:21)

Seek forgiveness: "Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful." (Qur'an 39:53)

Be righteous and well-intentioned: "Your Lord is most knowing of what is within yourselves. If you should be righteous [in intention] - then indeed He is ever, to the often returning [to Him], Forgiving." (Qur'an 17.25)

Speak for the pleasure of Almighty Allah: Hadith: "The person who utters a word which meets with Allah's favour may think it has not been heard, yet for this Allah will raise him to a higher level of Paradise. Conversely, the person who utters a word that stirs Allah to anger may give no thought to what he said, only to have Allah cast him in Hell for seventy years." (Tirmidhi)

Do good: "Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer, and those whom your right hands possess..." (Qur'an 4:36)

Maintain justice: "O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be

just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.”
(Qur’an 5:8)

Educate people: “And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know.” (Qur’an 9.6)

An Example To Others

Lead by example: “And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth humbly, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace” (Qur’an 25:63)

Be sincere: Tamim bin Aus Ad-Darri (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: “The Prophet (peace be on him) said, ‘The religion is sincerity.’ We said ‘To whom?’ He said, ‘To Allah, His Book, and His Messenger and to Muslim Leaders and their common folk.” (Abu Dawud)

Be supportive: “The Believer to the Believer is like a building, one part supporting the other.” (Bukhari, Muslim)

Restrain anger and be forgiving: “And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous. Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good;” (Qur’an 3.133-134)

Be forgiving: “Hold on to forgiveness, command what is right and turn away from the ignorant.” (Qur’an 7:199)

Be lenient: Anas Ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated, “The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, ‘Show leniency; do not be hard; give solace and do not create aversion.’” (Muslim)

Be patient: “And whoever is patient and forgives – indeed that is of the matters [requiring] determination.” (Qur’an 42:43)

Good Speech

Invite others to goodness: “Let there be a group among you who call others to goodness, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil—it is they who will be successful.” (Qur’an 3:104)

“Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord, with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best, and most gracious,” (Qur’an 16:125)

Be tactful and inviting: Muslims are reminded that Islam directs us to “invite (all) to the way of thy Lord, with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best, and most gracious,” (Qur’an 16:125)

Speak good or remain silent: Hadith narrated by Abu Huraira: “Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, then let him speak good (khair) or remain silent.” (Bukhari, Muslim)

Restrain your speech: Hadith narrated by Mu'az ibn Jabal: ‘I was in company with the Prophet in a travel, and one day I was close to him while we were travelling. So I said: "O Messenger of Allah, tell me of an act which will take me into Paradise and will keep me away from Hell fire...shall I not tell you of the foundation of all of that?" I said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah," and he took hold of his tongue and said: "Restrain this." I said: "O Prophet of Allah, will what we say be held against us?" He said: "May your mother be bereaved of you, Mu'az! Is there anything that topples people on their faces - or he said on their noses into Hell-fire other than the harvest of their tongues?"’ (Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Nasa’i, Ibn Maajah)

Respond in kind: “Whoever does you a favour, respond in kind, and if you cannot find the means of doing so, then keep praying for him until you think that you have responded in kind.” (Abu Dawud)

Treat other religions with respect: Muslims are encouraged to be righteous with those of other beliefs, and treat everyone with respect.

“Indeed, those who have believed [in Prophet Muhammad] and those [before Him] who were Jews or Sabeans or Christians - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve. (Qur’an 5:69)

“They are not [all] the same; among the People of the Scripture is a community standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of Allah during periods of the night and prostrating [in prayer]. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and hasten to good deeds. And those are among the righteous. And whatever good they do - never will it be removed from them. And Allah is Knowing of the righteous.” (Qur’an 3:113-115)

“O you who believe! Let not some people among you deride another people; it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let some women deride other women; it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame one another (and provoke the same for yourselves in retaliation); nor insult one another with nicknames (that your brothers and sisters dislike). Evil is using names with vile meaning after (those so addressed have accepted) the faith (doing so is like replacing a mark of faith with a mark of transgression). Whoever (does that and then) does not turn to God in repentance (giving up doing so), those are indeed wrongdoers. (Qur’an 49:11)

Honorable Conduct

Maintain cordial relations: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.” (Qur’an 60:8)

Leave trouble-makers to their own devices: “For you is your way and for me is mine.” (Qur’an 109:6)

Honor agreements and maintain peaceful relations: “Excepted are those with whom you made a treaty among the polytheists and then they have not been deficient toward you in anything or supported anyone against you; so complete for them their treaty until their term [has ended]. Indeed, Allah loves the righteous [who fear Him].” (Qur’an 9:4)

Be charitable: Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) said, “*Your smile for your brother is a charity. Your removal of stones, thorns or bones from the paths of people is a charity. Your guidance of a person who is lost is a charity.*” (Bukhari)

In another hadith, we are told, “*A charity is due for every joint in each person on every day the sun comes up: to act justly between two people is a charity; to help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belongings onto it, is a charity; a good word is a charity; and removing a harmful thing from the road is a charity.*” (Bukhari, Muslim)

Uphold the ties of kinship: “The one who maintains a relationship with his relatives only because they maintain a relationship with him is not truly upholding the ties of kinship. The one who truly upholds those ties is the one who does so even if they break off the relationship.” (Bukhari)

Return what is better: “And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good].” (Qur’an 41:34-35)

2.1.2. Things To Avoid

Your Conduct

Don’t be boastful and extravagant: “...Verily, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.” (Qur’an 4:36)

“...and do not spend wastefully. Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful.” (Qur’an 17:26-27)

Don't envy, outbid, hate, turn away from or outsell each other: Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with Him) reported: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "Do not envy each other, do not outbid each other, do not hate each other, do not turn away from each other, and do not outsell each other. Rather, be servants of Allah as brothers. The Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. He does not wrong him, nor humiliate him, nor look down upon him. Righteousness is here," and he pointed to his chest three times.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "It is enough evil for a man to look down upon his Muslim brother. The entirety of the Muslim is sacred to another Muslim: his life, his wealth, and his reputation." (Muslim)

Don't dress immodestly and don't post content of immodesty and immorality: "O ye Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you ..." (Qur'an 7:26).

"O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess." (Qur'an 7:31)

Don't complain and lament trials and difficulties: "But as for a human, whenever his Sustainer tests him by His generosity and by letting him enjoy a life of ease, he says, "My Sustainer has been generous towards me"; whereas, whenever He tests him by tightening his means of livelihood, he says, "My Sustainer has disgraced me!" But nay." (Qur'an 89:15-17)

"Whoever Allah wants good for him, He puts them to the test. He puts them through difficulties; like a diamond or gold that has to be burnt after which anything bad from it is removed so that what you have is pure diamond or pure gold." (Bukhari, Muslim)

"...And to be firm and patient, in pain and adversity; And throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing." (Qur'an 2:177)

Don't put your trust in other than Almighty Allah: "And if any one puts his trust in Allah, sufficient is (Allah) for him. For Allah will surely accomplish his purpose. Verily, for all things has Allah appointed a due proportion" (Qur'an 65:3)

Your Interaction

Transgressing limits: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for Allah does not love transgressors." (Qur'an 2:190).

Don't make fun of, backbite or spy on others: "O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name [i.e., mention] of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the wrongdoers.

“O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it... But fear Allah: For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.” (Qur’an 49:11-12)

Don’t engage in offensive discourse or foul language: “And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversation. And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain after the reminder with the wrongdoing people.” (Qur’an 6:68)

In a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is reported to have said, “Be gentle and beware of violence and foul language” (Bukhari)

Don’t taunt or abuse others: Narrated by Abdullah Ibn Mas’ud, the Prophet (peace be on him) said, “A perfect Muslim is neither a taunter, curser nor an abuser nor one having a long tongue” (Trimidhi)

Don’t dissociate with or separate from other believers: Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) said, “Do not desert (stop talking to) one another, do not nurse hatred towards one another, do not be jealous of one another, and become as fellow brothers and slaves of Allah. It is not lawful for a Muslim to stop talking to his brother (Muslim) for more than three days.” (Bukhari, Muslim)

Taking non-believers as allies over believers: “Let the believers not take the disbelievers into leaders, loyal friends, protectors by leaving believers. Whoever does so, surely he is free from the help of God, except because (tactics) maintain themselves from something they fear. And Allah warns you against Himself, and only to Allah will you return.” (Qur’an 3:28)

Follow disbelievers: “O ye who believe! take not others than your own people as intimate friends; they will not fail to corrupt you. They love to see you in trouble. Hatred has already shown itself through the utterances of their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater still.” (Qur’an 3:119)

Do be tempered in speaking to or about People of the Book: “And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him." (Qur’an 29:46)

Discourse About Leaders

Criticizing leaders in public: ‘Iyaad ibn Ghunum said, “The Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) said, ‘Whoever desires to advise the one with authority then he should not do so openly, rather he should take him by the hand and take him into seclusion (and then advise him). And if he accepts (the advice) from him then (he has achieved his objective) and if not, then he has fulfilled that which was a duty upon him.” (Ahmad)

Allah's Messenger (peace be on him) said, "He who sees from his ruler something he dislikes, let him be patient with him, for he who splits away from the Jamaa'ah by a handspan and then dies, dies a death of Jaahiliyyah" [al-Bukhari and Muslim] and in a narration, "then he has thrown off the yoke of Islam from his neck." (Tirmidhi, Ahmad)

Cursing leaders: Abu Umamah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace be on him) said: "Do not curse your leaders, and invoke Allah to make them righteous, for their righteousness brings about your well-being as well." (Abu Dawud)

2.1.3. Things To Remember

Freedom of religion: Islam recognizes the rights of persons to choose or reject religion and religious beliefs, be it of a specific religion or religion overall.

"There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256)

"If your Lord had so willed (and, denying them free will, compelled humankind to believe), all who are on the earth would surely have believed, all of them. Would you, then, force people until they become believers?" (Qur'an 10:99)

"Have not then those who believe yet known that had Allah willed, He could have guided all mankind?" Qur'an 13:31)

"And upon Allah is the direction of the [right] way, and among the various paths are those deviating. And if He willed, He could have guided you all." (Qur'an 16:9)

Like and hate mildly: Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is reported to have said, "Love who you love mildly, some day he may become disliked by you; Hate your enemy mildly; he may become beloved to you some day" (Al-Tirmidhi)

Do not get caught up in the allure of this world: "The life of this world is alluring to those who reject faith, and they scoff at those who believe. But the righteous will be above them on the Day of Resurrection..." (Qur'an 2:212)

Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) said that he feared for his followers the peril of the splendor of the life of this world and its (false) adornments which they will soon possess and with which they will be tested. (Sahih Muslim)

What you share should be consistent with Islamic values and regulations aforementioned – be careful of posting, sharing and promoting content that contravene the regulations and guidance that Islam offers to Muslims.

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA USE & ACCEPTABILITY

2.1.1. Is It Permissible to Use Social Media?

Social media is permissible to use if it is used responsibly. If not, one should refrain from using it. One can increase one's knowledge, or one can become misguided through it. It also has the potential to lead to solutions or problems in people's lives and relationships with others.

Social media has different forms, and as Muslims, we first of all need to identify who we are. As long as we know we are Muslims and abide by the principles of Islam (and therefore expected to behave in a certain manner), we would know what is permissible and impermissible.

One should be wary of how they use social media, one may go on social media with the best of intentions, and in the process of use are tempted (or even seduced) by others.

2.1.2. Is It Permissible to Have Your Photo on Your Profile of Your Social Media Account, Or to Share Photos Of Self, Family Etc.?

Permissibility of posting photos to profile pictures is contingent on the prevailing circumstances.

Pictures you put online should be in line with Shari'ah. All persons should preserve their aura when posting personal photos that may be open to or reach the public, in order to comply with Islamic injunctions. We are reminded in the Qur'an of the following guidelines that instruct us to guard our modesty.

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.”

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss.”
(Qur'an 24:30-31)

Also, women specifically are guided in the Qur'an: (Qur'an 33:59)

“O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

Persons are reminded that even in posting of photos, they should be wary of effects that can result from phenomena such as the evil eye, or malicious use and edits of photos by others.

All Muslims should bear this in mind as they would be personally responsible for what they post, and would be held accountable for it on the Day of Judgement. This would be applicable for both men and women who have accounts – personal or shared.

2.1.3. What To Do If We Are Exposed To Content of A Haram Nature?

We need to bear in mind some apps are given permissions to post to our profiles; others, based on the prevailing algorithm settings, display content without our choosing. In instances like this, we should delete the content and block the app, or instruct the algorithm (as proves possible) to prevent future instances.

Where haram content is shared from a person deliberately (for e.g. on a WhatsApp broadcast or message), it should be removed and the person notified and discouraged from sharing same. If they persist in sharing this type of content, they can be blocked from your contact list.

Parents should have parental settings on their children's devices to mitigate such instances, and **where there are transgressions not based on the intentional actions of the children, parents should show restraint in disciplining their children, and use these as learning opportunities.**

Where children are deliberately creating and posting haram content, parents should intervene with appropriate disciplinary measures to help the children be more responsible individuals.

All persons should be cautioned of the predatory nature of some people to others online, especially persons targeting children – and young girl children in particular. In instances of the increasing sexualization of societies, and the lucrative trade in human trafficking, parents and guardians should be especially careful of the attempts of predators to victimize children, and take proactive measures to prevent it happening to their own children or children around them.

2.1.5. What To Do If We Discover Our Spouses Or Family Are Misusing Social Media?

Misuse can be of different natures – those of a sexual or infidelitous nature, and other instances of misuse that may not be sexual at all (such as mocking persons, cyber bullying, ID Theft, or compromising security, creating misleading content, etc.).

In instances of suspicions of infidelity, there can be proactive and corrective measures the persons can pursue. Persons are encouraged to read the MajlisTT papers on Marriage in Islam and Divorce in Islam to consider possible measures that can help.

If people are concerned about keeping their relationship healthy, they should have their devices and social media accounts accessible to their partners, and ensure some level of transparency so

as to preserve the trust. One should not create a situation where the spouse has reason to suspect or distrust, or doubt their partners' fidelity or loyalty. In addition, persons should ensure that they work to build and maintain effective relationships with their spouses, so that persons are not inclined to respond to the advances of others online.

In situations where the suspicion manifests, persons run the risk of becoming overrun with emotion, and respond in ways that may prove neither constructive nor Islamic. Persons should address the issue directly with their spouse, without the interference of negative emotions. Where this is not possible, an arbitrator or a mediator should be appointed to help resolution or reconciliation.

In other instances of misuse, persons perpetrating the misuse should be cautioned, discouraged, reported or disciplined as applicable, based on the infraction in question.

In any attempt at problem solving, all Muslims are reminded that they should restrain their anger in situations as applicable, and not give in to doing anything that would compromise their Islam and Islamic conduct and values.

2.1.6. How To React If Others Are Misusing Social Media / Misrepresenting Islam / Maligning Muslims?

We recognize some situations are perpetuated innocently; others done with bias, malice or hate, yet others with hidden agendas; and some even done as calculated acts to evoke a response, provoke persons and groups in society; or create mischief.

Different situations demand different responses to effectively treat with the content, the perpetrator(s) and the effects of the actions on society. Some issues remain isolated in nature, while others can go viral online and be highlighted in the mainstream media. All situations have to be managed on a specific case basis – there is no single response that would apply across all situations.

If incidents are accidental or innocent mistakes, and are acknowledged as such, these persons should be forgiven, and the content corrected, deleted or otherwise managed based on the its nature.

If persons appear to be seeking attention in issuing provoking content, they should be ignored. We recognize the instance of rage-baiting, where persons engage in actions to evoke a specific intended reaction – typically to prove a point.

The general Muslim public is advised that not all matters should be individually dealt with, and some issues should be left to the Ulamaa to treat with and respond to.

Where issues affect the Muslim community or psyche, the issues should be addressed appropriately. This depends on the nature of the specific situation itself. Similarly, where issues manifest that seem to demand a response, persons should defer or escalate to someone whom

they believe has the capacity to respond appropriately and effectively. Otherwise, such issues should be ignored.

Where issues become a big issue or a trend, goes viral or is featured on the mainstream media (e.g. the incident of burning the Qur'an in Sweden), Muslims should use these opportunities to highlight Islam – the best solution to ignorance is education. Relatedly, Muslims are free to and encouraged to participate in peaceful rallies; raise slogans of Islam; and use platforms to highlight Islam.

Sometimes we may be tempted to take things into our own hands in attempting to handle a situation, and we might end up being pitted against someone with superior intellect or hidden agendas, leaving us looking like fools. Persons seeking to take the initiative to respond to a situation – online or off – should ensure that their responses are consistent with Islamic teachings and theology. Persons must be of a certain competence to act towards a solution, and if that competence is not there, they should seek guidance before any action is taken.

Inciting violence is never the solution in situations as these.

We remind Muslims that they should restrain their anger, propensities to violence or orchestrations in situations as applicable, and not give-in to doing anything that would compromise their Islam and Islamic conduct and values, or the standing of Islam and Muslims in society.

2.1.7. How To React When Followers Of Other Muslim Ideologies Begin To Criticize, Berate, Accuse, Condemn, Or Castigate Our Content

We remind all Muslims that in Islam, we are told the following:

“And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute (with one another) lest you lose courage and your strength departs, and be patient. Surely, Allah is with those who are As-Saabiroom (the patient)” (Qur’an 8:46)

“There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is not part of the Book; and they say, "That is from Allah," but it is not from Allah: It is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it!” (Qur’an 3:78)

In a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is reported to have said, “O people, beware of exaggeration in religious matters for those who came before you were doomed because of exaggeration in religious matters.” (Ibn Majah 3029; An-Nasa’i 3057)

“If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make you peace between them [...] with justice and be fair. For Allah loves those who are fair. The believers are but a single brotherhood; so make peace between your brothers...” (Qur’an 49:9-10)

“O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: That is best, and most suitable for final determination.” (Qur’an 4:59)

MajlisTT is of the view that any person versed in the laws of Islam according to Ahle Sunnah Wal Jama’ah would not condemn any major Islamic scholar of the past. Where persons are connected or loyal to a particular Islamic scholar, it is wrong for these persons to condemn other Islamic scholars or their followers, simply because their positions do not align with their own learnings or interpretations. All Muslims should demonstrate a basic level of respect for other Muslims on one level, and all Muslim scholars on another. We are told in the Qur’an,

“We raise to degrees (of wisdom) whom We please: but over all endued with knowledge is one, the All-Knowing.” (Qur’an 12:76)

Where there is deviance, it should be called out for what it is. It needs to be addressed. How it is addressed also matters. Muslims should be discouraged from vehement condemnation and castigation of other Muslims, and especially other Muslim scholars, without suitable justification.

Highlighting an issue or trying to correct a matter of theology is one thing, but being malicious or cynical in conduct is a transgression of acceptable Muslim behavior. It is the onus of the scholars whom these persons follow, to teach the persons responsible conduct on how to behave in their articulation of their convictions, and the *adaab* (etiquette) that is engrained within Islam in dealing with other Muslims and Muslim scholars.

2.1.8. How To Respond (Or Not) On Religious Content of Other Religions.

Where there are attacks against Islamic theology, response should be left to the scholars to be commented on and responded to, and should not be engaged by the general public.

In some situations where persons are attacking Islam, certain content should be simply ignored, and don’t justify a response. In some cases, the perpetrators may act in expectation of an emotional response. It is better to ignore them.

We should use these situations to reaffirm and strengthen our faith in Islam. Scholars, Imams and others of influence can use these opportunities to either highlight a positive message about Islam, and change the narrative, or use it to galvanize Muslim identity, unity and faith in Allah.

As Muslims, we have the opportunity to show higher standards in ways of thinking and ways of status in our responses, and present what is better. If people don’t accept it, it’s a reflection on them. We are told in the Qur’an:

“Good and evil will not mix.” (Qur’an 41:34)

“Truth stands out clearly from falsehood.” (Qur’an 2:256)

“Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.” (Qur’an 109:6)

Persons who want to respond should ensure that what they espouse is in conformity with Islamic teachings, so as not to misrepresent or misinterpret the message of Islam.

Where persons of other religions express their religious beliefs, we as Muslims are reminded that we should not berate the deities of other religions (Qur'an 6:108).

2.1.9. In what context can interaction with non-mahram persons be Permissible?

Non-Mahram refers to a male person for whom it is not haram for a woman to marry, with some exceptions as defined in Shari'ah (See MajlisTT paper Marriage in Islam). The restrictions of women's interaction with non-mahram relates to dress code – covering the 'awrah, and also behaviors – being modest and guarded. We are told in the Qur'an:

“O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech.” (Qur'an 33:32)

It is generally understood by scholars in Islam that a woman's speech is not considered part of the 'awrah.

The restrictions that apply to the non-mahram are applicable online as they are offline. (Qur'an 24:31)

Generally, interaction is not prohibited. But we should be cautious and careful of the intention for the communication. We are told in the Qur'an:

“...know that Allah Knoweth what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him; and know that Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing.” (Qur'an 2:235)

All Muslims are reminded of what we are told in the Qur'an:

“That Day shall We set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to us, and their feet bear witness, to all that they did.” (Qur'an 36:65)

“At length, when they reach the (Fire), their hearing, their sight, and their skins will bear witness against them, as to (all) their deeds.” (Qur'an 41:20)

Online interaction is permissible with non-mahram for specific purposes, as long as the behaviors and conduct are consistent with the stipulations defined in Shari'ah. There are numerous examples in ahadith where sahabiyyaat (female companions of the Prophet (peace be on him)) used to work and interact with the sahaba (male companions of the Prophet (peace be on him)).

It should be clear that interaction for leisurely purposes – including all online formats (such as social media, multiplayer online games, etc.) should be restricted and subject to certain conditions as outlined in Shari'ah. We remind Muslims that we will be held accountable based on the intentions that drive our conduct and behavior.

Sexting

One recurring concern is virtual interaction of a sexual nature. Albeit in an online or virtual context, this behavior is haram conduct and should not be practiced. In this regard, we are told in the Islam:

"And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way." (Qur'an 17: 32)

Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is reported to have said: "Allah has written the very portion of Zina (fornication or adultery) which a man will indulge in. There will be no escape from it. The Zina of the eye is the (lustful) look, the Zina of the ears is the listening (to voluptuous songs or talk), the zina of the tongue is (the licentious) speech, the zina of the hand is the (lustful) grip, the zina of the feet is the walking (to the place where he intends to commit zina), the heart yearns and desires and the private parts approve all that or disapprove it." (Bukhari and Muslim)

2.1.10. Can women produce (halaal) content for display and distribution on social media – e.g. speeches, qira-ah, etc.

The delivery of speeches by women in mixed gatherings is a practice that has been done in Islamic conferences, with the governing principle that women were properly attired in accordance with Shari'ah.

As it relates to qira-ah (recitation of Qur'an), qaseedas and songs, it is permissible in a female only gathering, but not in a mixed audience. On social media for public or mixed audiences, this type of content should not be produced nor shared since this is contrary to the principles relating to this as established in Shari'ah.

In the use of artificially-generated female-voiced content (such as generative artificial intelligence or AI content), nothing is wrong with its use. The underlying principle aforementioned is to safeguard the family unit. That family unit is not under threat with the use of artificially generated content in this case.

As it relates to artificially-generated and AI content generally, MajlisTT reserves its position on this topic, pending further considerations. A paper on this source and form of content will be treated with separately.

3. CONCLUDING REMINDERS & REMARKS

In conclusion, we remind all Muslims of the following:

People should examine and be aware of their intentions in what they are engaging in on social media, and why. They should ensure that whatever they are engaging or interacting with would bring them closer to Almighty Allah and preserve their conformity with instructions contained in Shari'ah.

Persons are reminded they should not excessively waste time in their social media pursuits, or allow themselves to be distracted by it. Social media is a tool that we should use responsibly & safely, and in using it we should not engage in acts to disunite or jeopardize the community or families, or blood ties, or the status of Islam.

May Almighty Allah allow us to always remember our duty to Him as His vicegerent on earth, and draw our example of behaviors and interaction from Sunnah.

REFERENCES

- [1] Hoechsmann, M., and Poyntz, S. R., (2012) *Media Literacies: A critical introduction*, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell
- [2] Davis, J.L., (2016) *Social Media*, International Encyclopedia of Political Communication, 1st Edition, Edited by Gianpietro Massoleni, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- [3] Data Reportal, accessed May 2023.
- [4] Vanwysberghe, H., Boudry, E. and Verdegem, P., (2012), *The development of a conceptual framework of social media literacy*, Research group for Media & ICT (IBBT-MICT), Ghent University, Interdisciplinary Institute for Broadband Technology (IBBT)
- [5] Stodt, B., Wegmann, E., and Brand, M., (2016) *Predicting Dysfunctional Internet Use: The Role of Age, Conscientiousness, and Internet Literacy in Internet Addiction and Cyberbullying*, Int. J. Cyber Behav. Psychol. Learn. 6, 28-43