



Social Media Ethics (Ethical Study from Al-Ghazali's Perspective)

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Abstract. The use of social media in the 4.0 revolution era is a must for people who want to keep up with information. Along with intensive use without paying attention to good social media ethics, disputes occur in cyberspace which sometimes continue into the real world. Not infrequently such commotions occurred, even though the warring parties had never met before, and did not even know each other's names before. Thus, the research on ethics offered by Al-Ghazali can provide a solution to this dispute. The purpose of this study is to determine good communication ethics when using social media. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a descriptive method and literature review. The results of this study indicate that social media users should pay attention to the communication ethics outlined by Al-Ghazali. Social media users also need to be mindful of who they are communicating with on social media, as they may encounter three types of friends: accounts of unknown people, accounts of acquaintances, and accounts of close friends.

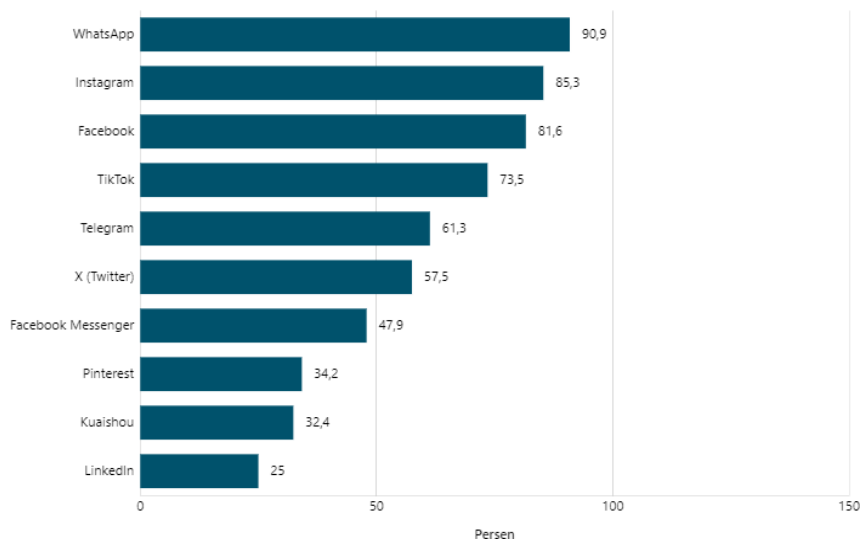
Keywords: Al-Ghazali Ethics, Social Media, Communication.

1 Introduction

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 created smartphones that make it easier for users to communicate through various social media platforms [1]. Social media has become a highly potential means of information and communication in Indonesia, marked by the increasing use of friend-based and information-based social networking applications. Overall, We Are Social [2] recorded 139 million social media user identities in Indonesia as of January 2024. This number is equivalent to 49.9% of the total national population. The usage of social media can be seen in the image.

Data from We Are Social indicates that social media users range from 16 to 64 years old every month. Meanwhile, according to Ihsan [3], social media users consist of children to adults. This indicates the ease of social media use across various age groups in society. Moreover, since the COVID-19 pandemic, school children have become accustomed to learning online using smartphones, which has further facilitated access to other applications beyond educational needs.

Picture 1. Indonesia Internet Users Data for January 2024



This convenience brings positive impacts along with negative consequences, such as rumors, weakening authority, and encouraging terrorist actions, which points to the need for applying social media ethics in crisis situations [4]. Additionally, this ease of access allows the general public to obtain various types of information without control, which, consciously or unconsciously, affects the ethical behavior of users [5]. The direction of this change is a shift towards less admirable ethics, particularly in communication ethics. Fauzan [6] mentions a crisis in social media ethics in Indonesia. Iswara [7] notes that Indonesian netizens are polite compared to other Southeast Asian countries. However, a Microsoft survey also indicates that netizens are becoming increasingly impolite [8].

The various phenomena of social media usage mentioned above indicate that the positive goals of social media have not yet been fully achieved. Therefore, it is essential to implement control or regulation to ensure that virtual piety and user behavior are upheld, while effectively providing entertainment and information. An effective alternative for managing communication ethics on social media is through a religious approach. As noted by Hastharita & Jasri [9], Islamic ethics highlights the importance of recognizing ethical boundaries within the digital context. Anisah et al. [10] emphasize that Islam advocates for compassion, justice, and empathy towards others, particularly in the realm of communication through social media.

One of the prominent figures in Islamic ethics is Al-Ghazali [11]. Al-Ghazali was a renowned scholar and philosopher from the 11th century who emphasized the importance of ethics in a Muslim's life [12]. His book, *Bidayatul Hidayah*, discusses the initial process of a servant receiving guidance from Allah SWT. It also addresses the ethics of striving to draw closer to the Creator, as well as proper conduct towards oneself and others. Al-Ghazali [13] offers practical guidance on how a Muslim can lead a life in accordance with Islamic teachings [14]. *Bidayatul Hidayah* provides highly relevant insights for addressing these challenges. By delving into Al-Ghazali's

teachings, we can find effective methods to integrate ethical education into daily life. These teachings not only help in shaping good character but also in creating a harmonious and ethical society.

This research aims to explore the concept of communication ethics in *Bidayatul Hidayah*, examine the key principles proposed by Imam Ghazali, and analyze their relevance and application in the context of communication using social media. Thus, it is hoped that social media users will find inspiration and practical guidance in social media ethics.

2 Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a descriptive method and literature review. This method is employed to explore and analyze communication ethics from Al-Ghazali's perspective through his book, *Bidayatul Hidayah*. The method is chosen because it is analytical and more oriented towards understanding the concepts and thoughts present in the literature related to the research objectives.

3 Finding and Discussion

3.1 Ethics

The function of ethics often pertains to a very serious context, important, and even involves something fundamental [15]. Ethics comes from the ancient Greek words "etos" and "etha." "Ethos" is a singular term meaning human behavior habits, customs, morals, character, attitudes, and ways of thinking. Meanwhile, "etha" is the plural form referring to customs and habits. Thus, based on these root words, ethics is the study of customs and habits [16]. According to the etymology in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)* [17], ethics can be understood in three aspects, namely:

- a. The science of what is good and bad, as well as moral rights and duties.
- b. A collection of values or principles related to ethics.
- c. The values of right or wrong adopted by a particular group or society.

3.2 Social Media

Social media are dynamic and interactive computer-based communication tools with widespread use among the general population in high-income and middle-income countries [18]. Meike explains that the term social media denotes a convergence between personal communication, which involves sharing between individuals (one-to-one sharing), and public media, which involves sharing with a broader audience without individual specificity [19]. Andreas describes social media as a collection of internet-based applications founded on certain ideologies and technologies, which facilitate the creation and exchange of content generated by users [20]. Social media are online platforms that enable users to engage, share, and create content [21].

1. Nasrullah [22] highlights six distinct characteristics of social media that set it apart from other forms of media.
2. Network: A network is the infrastructure that links computers with other hardware.

This connection is essential because communication, including data transfer, can only take place if computers are interconnected.

3. **Information:** Information is a key element in social media because users create representations of their identities, generate content, and engage with others based on this information.
4. **Archive:** In social media, the archive refers to the feature that allows information to be stored and accessed at any time and from any device by users.
5. **Interactivity:** Social media creates networks among users that extend beyond merely increasing friendships or followers; these networks are developed through active interactions between users.
6. **Simulation of Society:** Social media acts as a platform for a virtual society, featuring distinct characteristics and patterns that often differ from and are not present in real-world societal structures.
7. **User-Generated Content:** On social media, content is entirely created and owned by users or account holders. User-generated content reflects a symbiotic relationship in the new media culture, providing users with the opportunity and freedom to participate actively.

3.3 Ethics of Interaction from Al-Ghazali's Perspective

Ethics of interaction from Al-Ghazali's perspective [13] is divided into three parts. First, ethics of interacting with unknown individuals. In dealing with unknown people, one should:

1. Not participate in conversations that are not beneficial.
2. Ignore the false statements of unknown individuals.
3. Avoid frequent encounters or expectations from unknown individuals.
4. Gently remind if an unknown person commits wrongdoing.

Second, ethics of interacting with close friends include:

1. Prioritizing the needs of close friends.
2. Being prompt in providing assistance to close friends.
3. Keeping the secrets of close friends.
4. Protecting the reputation of close friends.
5. Remaining silent when someone criticizes close friends.
6. Communicating all compliments received from others about close friends.
7. Listening attentively to what close friends say.
8. Avoiding arguments with close friends.
9. Addressing close friends by names or titles they prefer.

Third, ethics of interacting with acquaintances who are not close friends include:

1. Being cautious with acquaintances, as harm often comes from them. Unknown individuals will not disturb us if we do not interfere with them, and close friends will always offer help.
2. Avoiding criticism of acquaintances because we do not know much about them. Not being swayed by an acquaintance's wealth, as it may undermine one's own self-respect.
3. Not becoming angry if they criticize us.
4. Refraining from offering excessive advice unless we are sure it will be accepted.
5. Not retaliating if an acquaintance is hostile.

6. Listening to the truthful words of acquaintances and disregarding false statements.
5. Avoiding close association with acquaintances who are overly absorbed in legalistic discussions due to their preoccupation with debates and disagreements.

3.4 Discussion

Social media users will encounter a virtual society where they interact with other social media users. In this context, social media users will come across unknown individuals, acquaintances who are not close friends, and close friends. Therefore, a social media user can apply Al-Ghazali's ethics of interaction based on the type of relationship with other social media users in the virtual world.

When a social media user encounters an unknown account making rude comments, it is advisable for the user to simply observe without engaging, as one of Al-Ghazali's ethical guidelines for interacting with unknown individuals is to avoid participating in unproductive discussions. If the user is criticized by an acquaintance who is not very close, they should refrain from becoming angry or responding with advice through comments. This approach aligns with the ethics of interacting with acquaintances who are not close friends.

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, social media interactions and communication will proceed more smoothly, free from insults and misinformation. This practice will also help prevent conflicts in the virtual world, leading to a more pleasant experience on social media.

4 Conclusion

Social media users are encouraged to consider the ethical communication principles outlined by Al-Ghazali. Users should also be mindful of who they are communicating with on social media as interactions can involve three types of connections: unknown individuals, acquaintances who are familiar but not close, and close friends.

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