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Islamic Perspective on Social Media Technology, Addiction, and Human Values

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Abstract

Our paper discusses the design features deliberately used in social media technologies to cause behavioral addiction, while outlining how this addiction leads to altering, reshaping and redefining of basic human values such as contemplation, well-being, mindfulness and connectedness that bring about social, psychological, cultural and ethical changes in human existence. The paper sheds light on how the altering of the human value system goes against the values and principles of Islamic law by citing Qur'ānic verses, prophetic traditions and teachings of Islamic scholars. Currently, there are no frameworks, laws and/or strategies that view social media addiction from a metaphysical perspective and in terms of human worldview and existence. Hence, as a solution, our paper introduces an ethical framework for designing social media technologies using the objectives of Islamic law that discourage a social media design with indefinite ends and encourage a design methodology with well-defined objectives and consequences.

Keywords: Social Media Technology, Behavioral Addiction, Human Values, Ethics, Islamic Objectives Framework

Introduction

In the previous research, there have been various studies highlighting the pros and cons of the technology that make the case that social media is a value-neutral technology (which can be used for both good and evil). However, this paper, will not merely be evaluating social media platforms in isolation, but would place those concerns within the broader metaphysical questions of human nature, the nature of human relationships, the kind of individuals and societies that are being created due to a specific value orientation scripted in these social media technologies. We will be focusing not just on the ontic dimension but rather on the ontological dimension of social media — where the difference between the ontic and the ontological, put simply, is essentially the difference drawn up between ‘tools’ and ‘technologies.’¹ The former are tangible, disposable things that are separate from our existence, while the latter refers to the larger socio-economic, cultural, and psychological nexuses that connect our existence to those of other people in specific ways. Thus, when

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¹Peter D Hershock, M. T. Stepaniants, and Roger T. Ames, *Technology and Cultural Values* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).



referring to social media technologies, we do not mean to refer just individual social media websites or the phones that enable easy access to them, or even the equipment that provides internet access in the first place, but rather the influence they have on human existence and the ways these shape human existence, meaning and purpose. To evaluate social networking technologies in such a concatenated manner, we will use the Islamic metaphysics to understand the human nature, its need for social interaction and the weaknesses of human psychology and how that can be understood from within the framework of the Islamic values and objectives. In such a holistic analysis we will discover that the kind of purposelessness and chaos signified by the social media networking is representative of the absence of a higher metaphysical understanding of human nature and purpose. The postmodern loss of truth and higher values is the new informing paradigm behind both the creation and use of social media. Fake news, deep fake videos and infodemic are only some reflections of the deeper problem where there is no absolute standard to separate the means from ends and steer the means toward well-defined individual and societal ends and objectives.² The lack of self-discipline and self-control in social media usage is representative of the general absence of self-discipline we see in over-consumption of goods and services such as food, clothing, recreation etc. In the absence of absolute ethical standards, the technological means have acquired the status of ends. The various objectionable consequences of social media addiction and other associated psychological and social disorders that are now raising concerns are the result of this metaphysical shift. We argue that these instances are not the unintended consequences of social networks gone wrong but are the very predictable chaotic consequences of the creation and use of technology that has no definite end or objective. This has been alluded to in the Islamic scriptures that in the absence of a metaphysical compass, humanity loses all sense of direction.

“And be not as those who forgot Allah, wherefore He caused them to forget their own souls. Those! they are the transgressors.”³

The directionless technology allows for any number of short-term goals to emerge since there is no final end in sight. The fact that the inner weaknesses of lower human self (*nafs ammara*) is taken advantage of and manipulated for profit motives by the social media corporates is not the cause but the effect of technological design that is not inherently guided by a fixed set of values and objectives. The design unguided by an underlying philosophy of meaning renders it vulnerable for all sorts of manipulation for profit mongering at the cost of psycho-spiritual, emotional and physical health of its users.

This paper aims to share an in-depth analysis of social media technologies and their business model in Section two and highlights some of the manipulative design features with undefined end goal used in the technologies in Section three. Section four of the paper

²John Zarocostas, “How to Fight an Infodemic,” *The Lancet* 395, no. 10225 (2020): 676, doi:10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30461-x.

³Al-Qur’ān: Al-Hashr 59:19.

focuses on the alterations that the technology introduces in human value system that deviate Muslims from adhering to the values prescribed by the Islamic law. In Section five, we refer to the deeper, metaphysical and existential challenges concerned with the social media technology that require more than just a few ‘addiction-controlling’ applications. Section six presents the Islamic ethical framework for designing social media platforms using the Objectives approach. The paper concludes in Section seven.

2. Background

Facebook, a multi-billion-dollar industry that also has an ownership over WhatsApp and Instagram, provides free of cost access to the platforms universally. While the company does not ask users for money, it multiplies profits on their attention. The more time a user spends using, consuming and interacting with the platform, the more appealing it becomes to advertisers; and hence, the more revenue for the platform. The social media has a specific business model that banks on users’ attention. Hence, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube and other such networking websites need people to be constantly using their site to succeed as a business.

However, what’s really surprising here is that the designers and engineers behind the platforms have put restrictions on their and their family’s smartphone usage?⁴ If more users mean more revenue, then why are the inventors keeping their loved ones away from the very products they are promoting? What is it that the inventors know, and the users don’t? Perhaps, statements of top executives of these companies can help answer this question. Former vice-president for user growth at Facebook, Chamath Palihapitiya admitted at a conference that he does not use Facebook and does not allow his children to use it either. He further criticized the platform saying that it is ‘destroying how society works. No civil discourse, no cooperation; misinformation, and mistruth.’⁵ One of Instagram’s founding engineer, Greg Hochmuth, revealed in an interview that he has deactivated his Facebook account and does not have any social media app installed on his phone.⁶ Similarly, Facebook’s former president, Sean Parker, admits that they [investors] were consciously aware of making an addictive product that exploited a vulnerability in human psychology, but they did it anyway. ‘God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains’, he further expresses concern.⁷ The creators of such networks in a conscious bid to acquire maximum

⁴Alex Hern, “‘Never Get High On Your Own Supply’ – Why Social Media Bosses Don’t Use Social Media,” *The Guardian*, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/jan/23/never-get-high-on-your-own-supply-why-social-media-bosses-dont-use-social-media>.

⁵Julia Carrie Wong, “Former Facebook Executive: Social Media Is Ripping Society Apart,” *The Guardian* 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/dec/11/facebook-former-executive-ripping-society-apart>.

⁶Haley Weiss, “In Conversation with Gregor Hochmuth - Newest York,” *Newest York*, accessed 15 June 2020, <http://www.newestyork.co/15-in-conversation-with-gregor-hochmuth>.

⁷Rob Price, “Facebook’s Ex-President Admits He Helped Build a Monster: ‘God Only Knows What It’s Doing to Our Children’s Brains,’” *Insider*, 2017, <https://www.insider.com/ex-facebook-president-sean-parker-social-network-human-vulnerability-2017-11>.

user attention are ‘deliberately’ designing features that come at the expense of their well-being. We will be discussing these features in the next section.

3. Design and Human Psychology

In his book, *Irresistible*, Alter discusses addictive technologies and behavioral addiction, identifying the ingredients of behavioral addiction, which include: 1. Compelling goals beyond one’s reach, 2. Irresistible and unpredictable positive feedback and 3. Strong social connections.⁸ These three ingredients can evidently be found in social media platforms. The number of likes, comments, shares, retweets, follower counts, etc., are some of the quantitative goals that a user sets for themselves and constantly keeps checking or stays online to know if the goals have been reached. Likes, favorites and reacts are forms of feedback (mostly positive) that convince a user to keep sharing more content to acquire more positive feedback. Thirdly, the networks, being an open and free space where everyone is entitled to share their opinion, act as a hub of social validation and approval. The value here is not the collective acquisition of truth but popularity, validation and aggrandizement.

Moreover, Tristan Harris, a former Google employee, discusses how social media features exploit human psychology and work on the principle of variable reward system (also called ‘The Hook Model’), where the chances of getting a reward are uncertain.⁹ It is the same principle that works behind the slot machines; sometimes there is a reward, sometimes, there isn’t. This unpredictability and randomness is what makes users keep coming for the reward. Social networks provide numerous examples of variable social rewards. The pull-to-refresh mechanism, that he considers the most addictive feature, allows users to effortlessly pull the screen down to refresh the site and the new content appears within a second, without the page reloading.¹⁰ It is the anticipation of what users will find each time they refresh that creates the intrigue needed to frequently pull the screen. While variable content gets users to keep searching for interesting tidbits in their News Feeds, getting a new comment or like is a means self-validation that acts as a variable reward.¹¹ Justin Rosenstein, a Facebook engineer who introduced the ‘Like’ Button, admits that the feature is too addictive, describing it as ‘bright dings of pseudo-pleasure’ that can be as hollow as they are seductive. The reason behind the success of this feature, he claims, is that it gave people a short-term boost of happiness through social affirmation and

⁸Adam Alter, *Irresistible - The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

⁹Anderson Cooper, “What Is “Brain Hacking”? Tech Insiders on Why You Should Care,” *Cbsnews.com*, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/brain-hacking-tech-insiders-60-minutes/>.

¹⁰Paul Lewis, “‘Our Minds Can be Hijacked’: The Tech Insiders Who Fear a Smartphone Dystopia,” *The Guardian*, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-dystopia>

¹¹Nir Eyal and Ryan Hoover, *Hooked* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2019).

acceptance, while the company sold the data about user preferences to advertisers.¹² According to Susan Whitbourne, a psychology professor, a ‘like’ on a post results in an emotional high, which is why users keep going after it but are never fulfilled because they want more likes.¹³ These rewards instill particular behaviors in users, reinforcing them to stay active on the network, keep scrolling through the newsfeed, frequently refresh for new content and keep posting.

Dopamine is one of the chemicals in the brain that nudges us towards behaviors that we want to engage in by rewarding for beneficial behaviors and motivating us to repeat them. The dopamine system is also involved in social media usage. Every time a user finds something exciting in their newsfeed, receives a new notification, gets a friend request, etc., dopamine is released that triggers them to check their phones.¹⁴ Co-founder of Dopamine Labs, Ramsay Brown, who has previously studied neuroscience, is now working as a computer programmer who understands how a brain works and writes codes that can get the brain to do certain things, he calls the process ‘Brain Hacking.’¹⁵ The code he creates can find the best moments to give the reward to an individual, which will trigger the brain to make them want more. He shares an example of how Instagram sometimes withholds notifications of ‘likes’ and delivers them in large bursts at some other moment, which is predicted using the algorithm. Haynes takes a different approach to explain the reason behind the delay in notifications.¹⁶ Receiving no ‘likes’ in the beginning disappoints the user, so when notifications appear in bulk later, the user responds robustly to the sudden influx of social praise after a negative outcome. This takes advantage of the dopamine-driven desire for social validation and ‘optimizes the balance of negative and positive feedback signals until we’ve become habitual users.’

Snapchat has a ‘Streaks’ feature that keeps a count of the number of consecutive days two people have sent and received snaps. While the feature may seem harmless, it actually coerces users to use the app at least once a day, instilling in them the fear of loss if the streak is broken. In an interview with the CBS News, Harris revealed that when kids go on a vacation, they are so stressed about maintaining the streak that they would share their

¹²Lewis, “Smartphone Dystopia.”

¹³Edward Muldrew, “The Secret Design Tools Which Social Media Apps are Using to Create Addiction,” *Medium*, 2019, <https://medium.com/swlh/the-secret-design-tools-which-social-media-apps-are-using-to-create-addiction-e6a502ccb79f>.

¹⁴Trevor Haynes, “Dopamine, Smartphones and You: A Battle for Your Time - Science in the News,” *Science in the News*, 2018, <http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time>.

¹⁵Anderson Cooper, “What is “Brain Hacking”? Tech Insiders on Why You Should Care,” *Cbsnews.com*, 2017.

¹⁶Trevor Haynes, “Dopamine, Smartphones and You: A Battle for Your Time - Science in the News,” *Science in the News*, 2018.

password and ask others to maintain the streaks on their behalf.¹⁷ Moreover, Snapchat was the first platform to introduce limited-time content, naming them ‘Stories,’ where users share images and videos that disappear after twenty-four hours. Later, Facebook and Instagram added the feature as well. This limited-time content creates a sense of urgency in users and a fear of missing out (FOMO), forcing them to view the content before it disappears, which means being online at least once in twenty-four hours.

Montag et al. discuss a few addictive features of social media in their paper.¹⁸ One of techniques discussed that is used to prolong user’s time on the platform is the bottomless feeds and endless streaming without any stopping cues that keep the content flowing smoothly without coming to a natural stop; thus, making the user get more and more immersed. This feature can be found on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram where an individual is trapped in a spiral of infinite scrolling. Also, YouTube has an auto-play feature, where videos from recommendations or related to the previously watched videos keep playing one after the other without any human intervention. In addition to this, over the years, Facebook’s newsfeed algorithm has become quite efficient in predicting the type of content a user is more likely to want to see after having studied their behaviors. Through this, users are made to stay longer by showing them the content they ‘want’ to see. Roger McNamee, once a mentor to Mark Zuckerberg, writes in his book that when users are posting, liking and commenting on the content on their newsfeeds, they are ‘playing multidimensional chess against massive artificial intelligences’ and this AI presents with the content that can keep each individual highly engaged and monetizable.¹⁹

These features provide enough evidence to conclude that the designers and engineers behind these apps, in their full consciousness, created and integrated the addictive features that exploit human psychology by offering them with instant and intense, yet short-term, gratification and a regular dosage of dopamine to acquire their maximum attention. Author of the book, *World without Mind*, Franklin Foer describes social media users as the ‘dogs in a Pavlovian experiment’ run by these platforms through which they determine the ways to make users addicted because that is what their fortunes depend on.²⁰

¹⁷Anderson Cooper, “What Is “Brain Hacking”?” Tech Insiders on Why You Should Care,” *Cbsnews.com*, 2017.

¹⁸Christian Montag et al., “Addictive Features of Social Media/Messenger Platforms and Freemium Games against the Background of Psychological and Economic Theories,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 14 (2019): 2612, doi: 10.3390/ijerph16142612.

¹⁹Roger McNamee, *Zucked - Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe* (London: Harpercollins Publishers, 2019).

²⁰Franklin Foer, “Franklin Foer: World without Mind,” video, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tccLAPt67c>.

4. Human Values

In this section, we will be discussing the various ways in which social media has altered and re-shaped different human values, while outlining how this re-shaping contradicts with the Islamic teachings.

4.1. Values of Health and Well-being

Psychologist Dr. Paul Marsden summarizes the Nottingham Trent University research commenting that anxiety, depression, stress, hostility, distraction, procrastination, obesity, diabetes, sleep disorders and poor dietary habits during adolescence have been likened to excessive and problematic social media use.²¹ Another study from John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health claims that students who spend more than three hours a day on social media are more likely to display high levels of internalizing behaviors, which include withdrawal and difficulty in coping with anxiety and depression.²² Lin et al. studied the association between depression and social media use and concluded that there is a strong and significant positive correlation between the two in U.S. young adults.²³

Blease claims that individuals are more likely to suffer from ‘Facebook Depression’ (affective result of spending too much time on Facebook) when they have more online friends, spend more time reading updates from online friends and when these updates are of bragging nature.²⁴ This should not come off as a surprise because social media is an open and unrestricted space where users represent the best version of themselves; they share the parts of their lives that want to be known for, typically this includes their achievements, successes, and pleasant moments. Scrolling through the newsfeed and figuring out how every other person on the network is a successful person and has something to be happy about leads to feelings of jealousy and envy and feeling bad about one’s own life. On the other hand, Hunt et al. conclude that limiting social media usage can improve well-being over time, specifically reducing feelings of loneliness and depression.²⁵

²¹Paul Marsden, “Social Media and Digital Wellbeing – Summary of the Latest Evidence – Digitalwellbeing.Org,” *Digitalwellbeing.Org*, 2018, <https://digitalwellbeing.org/social-media-and-digital-wellbeing-summary-of-the-latest-evidence>.

²²Kira E. Riehm et al., “Associations between Time Spent Using Social Media and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems among US Youth,” *JAMA Psychiatry* 76, no. 12 (2019): 1-9, doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.2325.

²³Liu yi Lin et al., “Association between Social Media Use and Depression among U.S. Young Adults,” *Depression and Anxiety* 33, no. 4 (2016): 323-331, doi:10.1002/da.22466.

²⁴C. R. Blease, “Too Many ‘Friends,’ Too Few ‘Likes’? Evolutionary Psychology and ‘Facebook Depression,’” *Review of General Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 1-13, doi:10.1037/gpr0000030.

²⁵Melissa G. Hunt et al., “No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 37, no. 10 (2018): 751-768, doi:10.1521/jscp.2018.37.10.751.

In addition to this, social media addiction and excessive usage also affects the quality of sleep. Psychiatrist Dr. Victoria L. Dunckley explains how social media use disrupts the balance of human well-being.²⁶ The light from the devices suppresses and delays the release of sleep-inducing hormone, melatonin, which desynchronizes the body's biological clock, resulting in hormone imbalance and brain inflammation. English neuroscientist Baroness Greenfield predicts that with social media and video games usage, individuals are going to be emotional and risk-taking with poor social skills, weak self-identity, and reduced attention spans, just 'like 3-year-olds.'²⁷

It is important to note that despite sufficient evidence of negative impact on health, social media continues to be praised for its responsiveness, interactive nature, making communication easier, quicker and more accessible and for providing global 'connectivity.' In the social media realm, the values of ease, convenience, faster response and connectedness are considered as the primary values, where little or no regards is given to more humanistic values of peace, health and mental wellbeing, thereby equating convenience and ease as the necessary values. This analysis allows us to establish that social media technology not only reshapes the existing human values, but also, produces and imposes its own set of values.

Islam puts a lot of emphasis on protecting oneself from any harm and on taking care of one's physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being. The Muslims believe that health is one of the blessings of Allah Almighty that they need to be grateful for; as reported by Ibn-e-Abbas (RA): '*Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) said, "There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) Health and free time for doing good."*'²⁸ The hadith indicates that many individuals do not value health as a blessing and often get involved in activities that harm their well-being, like we have seen excessive use of social media has negative effect on mental health. Social media usage wastes precious time that could be used for community building activities. Moreover, we can also find relevant sayings of Holy Prophet (SAW) concerning the social media posts that only highlight one's achievements and successes and sow seeds of envy and jealousy. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "*Look to one who is lower than you, and do not look to one who is above you. For indeed that is more worthy (so that you will) not belittle Allah's favors upon you.*"²⁹ In another saying, it is narrated by Abu Hurayrah: "*The Prophet (SAW) said: Avoid envy, for envy devours good deeds just as fire devours fuel or*

²⁶Victoria L. Dunckley, "Screen time is Making Kids Moody, Crazy, And Lazy," *Psychology Today*, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/201508/screentime-is-making-kids-moody-crazy-and-lazy>.

²⁷Charles Hymas, "Social Media is Making Children Regress to Mentality of Three-Year-Olds, Says Top Brain Scientist," *The Telegraph*, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/social-media-regressing-children-mentality-three-year-olds-says/>

²⁸Muhammad b Ismail Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 76, Hadith 421.

²⁹Muhammad b Isa Tirmizi, *Jami at-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 4, Book 11, Hadith 2513.

(he said) grass.”³⁰ Hence, in the light of Islamic traditions, the Muslims are directed to refrain spending time on social media platforms when they start causing feelings of depression, anxiety, despair, loneliness, jealousy, envy and other feelings that disturb their peace of mind and well-being.

4.2. Values of Connection and Enriching Relationships

In his talk, Tristan Harris points out that while using social media keeps us distracted, abandoning it creates a fear of missing out and being disconnected.³¹ Due to this fear, it is believed that an online presence is essential to stay connected with the world. However, our argument is that social media platforms have not only altered the human value of connectivity and friendships but have also made individuals more disconnected than ever before.

It is not uncommon to observe people at dinner tables, family gatherings, leisure activities or friends’ meet-ups, being so absorbed in their phones whether it is to share a new status update, upload a selfie or simply to ‘connect,’ while they are physically surrounded by a lot of people. It is as if they would do anything to avoid interaction with the person sitting right in front of them. Author of the book *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle points out that human relationships are messy and demanding, so we turn to social media that offers the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship.³² Kardaras comments that social media friendships may help temporarily relieve feelings of isolation and loneliness but cannot address the underlying human need for real and in-depth connections.³³

In his essay “Focal Things and Practices,” Borgman discusses how an activity needs to have enriching human ‘connections’ and interwoven-ness of experiences to be qualified as a focal practice, that could lead to a long-time attachment.³⁴ For instance, preparing a meal as a communal activity can only be a focal practice if it involves human interaction; that is individuals who perform tasks collectively - from gathering the ingredients to having the food -, share each other’s suffering, help one another, work towards the same goal and are fully present in the moment and deeply engaged in the activity. On the other hand, he talks about the ‘device-paradigm,’ where people are constantly distracted, unable to fully engage in any practice. Social media allows sharing moments with virtual friends; tagging

³⁰Abu Dawood Sulaiman b Ash’as, *Sunan Abi Dawood*, Book of General Behavior, Hadith 4885.

³¹Tristan Harris, “How Better Tech Could Protect Us from Distraction,” | *Tristan Harris*, video, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D55ctBYF3AY&t=328s>.

³²Sherry Turkle, “Connected, But Alone?,” video, 2012, https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_connected_but_alone?language=en

³³Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids - And How to Break the Trance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016).

³⁴Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

one another, posting on each other's profiles or sending a private message, but these things can never be equivalent to having a 'shared experience' or having done something together that could help deepen the social bonds. With these virtual networks, there are no longer deeper and meaningful attachments formed over-time with shared experiences and sufferings; all there is, is a strife towards a convenient lifestyle and an effortless life, be it lived in isolation. Can the meaningless and feeble social media connections that neither have any shared experiences, nor have experienced pain or pleasure together be equivalent to real-life connections that have been strengthened and nourished over time?

We reduce them [people] to some outlines—a Facebook “friend,” an Instagram photo, a text message—in a controlled and sequestered world that exists largely free of the sudden eruptions or encumbrances of actual human interaction. We become each other's “contacts,” efficient shadows of ourselves.³⁵

Moreover, the culture of online communications has also affected in-person interactions. A research concludes that the mere presence of smartphones, without active usage, causes distractions in face-to-face exchanges where individuals are likely to neglect facial expressions, subtle cues, changes in the tone of the speaker and have less eye contact, which prevents forming of sincere, heartfelt and intimate connections.³⁶ Chakrabarti discusses the way technology has redefined the values of hospitality.³⁷ There is no longer the same kindness and generosity towards guests. The act of welcoming, having meals and spending time with the guests is not as prevalent in the culture as it used to be. The distraction and absorption with social media create a false sense of companionship with the virtual ‘friends’ that there is little room left for an un-self-interested leisurely conversation with a visitor.

Since Islam provides guidance for all dimension of life, a large part of Islamic ethics is focused on the rights of fellow human beings, including one's family, neighbors, guests and relatives, as Allah mentions in the Qur'ān: “Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.”³⁸ Spending time with one's family, serving food to guests, assisting the neighbor are a few of the examples of how one should treat a fellow being from the exemplary life of prophet (SAW). When the wife of Prophet (SAW), Aisha (RA), was asked “What did the Prophet (SAW) use to do in his house?” She replied, “He used to keep himself busy serving

³⁵Andrew Sullivan, “Andrew Sullivan: My Distraction Sickness — And Yours,” *Intelligencer*, 2016, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/09/andrew-sullivan-my-distraction-sickness-and-yours.html>

³⁶Shalini Misra et al., “The iPhone Effect,” *Environment and Behavior* 48, no. 2 (2014): 275-298, doi: 10.1177/0013916514539755.

³⁷Arindam Chakrabarti, “Of Greed, Gadgets, and Guests: the Future of Human Dwellings,” *Technology and Cultural Values* (2017): 385-399, doi:10.1515/9780824844967-024.

³⁸Al-Qur'ān: An-Nisa 4:36.

his family and when it was the time for prayer, he would go for it."³⁹ In another hadith, it is narrated: "[...] *All idle pastimes that the Muslim man engages in are falsehood, except for his shooting of his bow, his training of his horse, and his playing with his wife, for they are from truth.*"⁴⁰ This highlights the significance of spending quality time with one's spouse, parents, children etc. that the techno-culture has replaced and continues to replace.

Moreover, in Islam, a lot of emphasis is put on being hospitable towards neighbors and guests as it deepens and strengthens the societal and communal bonds. The Prophet (SAW) said, "*Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should not hurt his neighbor and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should serve his guest generously and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should speak what is good or keep silent.*"⁴¹ Also, it was narrated from Anas bin Malik that the Messenger of Allah said (SAW): "*Goodness comes more quickly to a house where there are frequent guests than a knife to camel's hump.*"⁴² Abdullah bin Amr narrated that the Messenger of Allah said (SAW): "*The companion who is the best to Allah is the one who is best to his companion. And the neighbor that is the best to Allah is the one that is best to his neighbor.*"⁴³ However, it is important to note that a neighbor is not merely someone living next door, but rather it refers to the individuals residing within the community, as Al-Hasan was asked about the neighbor and said, "*The term 'neighbor' includes the forty houses in front a person, the forty houses behind him, the forty houses on his right and the forty houses on his left.*"⁴⁴

To conclude the argument, with social media platforms, the profound, meaningful connections and relationships have been replaced by shallow, virtual connections, where emotional bonds and sentiments have no place. A modern-day family gathering where individuals sitting across each other absorbed in their mobile phones, or individuals having countless interactions on Facebook every day while not having a single interaction with their neighbors or people in their communal circle says a lot about social media failing to connect people in proximity. Thus, while social media may make it appear that it has connected people it has not only made them lose deeper connections with people but has also diminished their ability to form new ones and have profound interactions with the existing ones.

4.3 Values of Contemplation and Solitude

Technology has shaped the culture and practices so powerfully that it has even redefined the value of solitude and idleness. While idleness could have been an opportunity to contemplate and self-reflect, in the modern era, it is replaced with boredom, more precisely, an existential boredom, which is a state of meaninglessness and emptiness. It has

³⁹*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 73, Hadith 65.

⁴⁰*Jami at-Tirmidhi*, Book 20, Hadith 1637.

⁴¹*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 73, Hadith 158.

⁴²*Ibn-e-Majah, Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 29, Hadith 3356.

⁴³*Jami at-Tirmidhi* Vol. 4, Book 1, Hadith 1944.

⁴⁴Muhamamd b Ismail Bukhari, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, Book 6, Hadith 109.

become instinctive to human nature to occupy itself with novelty and discovery in an attempt to avoid feeling idle as though idleness is a disease one must overcome. This continuous need for newness, entertainment and fulfillment continues to keep people fascinated with the idea of progress and innovation. The assumption that it will keep providing with pathways towards satisfaction and fulfillment in life without realizing the neglect towards its consequences is having an impact on human nature and their perspective of the rest of the world. To escape the existential boredom, individuals are constantly in search of means to fill in the emptiness, and one of the means is social media.

We organize all available means for cloudseeding and storm dispersal in order to have calm in the face of the storm. But this calm is no tranquility. It is only anesthesia; more precisely, the narcotization of anxiety in the face of thinking. In other words, technological hyperactivity ensures that philosophic thought seldom surfaces, and that existential anxiety never gains sway. Vast in its reach and furious in its pace, modern technological activity proves the most effective means of dissipating the storm of Being. It also allows us to bear the burden of boredom in relative comfort, even with a heightened sense of excitement.⁴⁵

People keep browsing social media, one app after the other, to keep themselves distracted and occupied because they are too afraid to be with themselves and with their thoughts. They no longer crave for the solitudes or have the quest to contemplate upon their condition and existence. The colorful life of the social realm where everyone shares their happiest moments and appears to be high on ecstasy and euphoria paint a very sad and dull picture of the reality that people want to escape and alienate themselves from. Consider this example, where a person experiences feeling of worthlessness and purposelessness, instead of facing and combating their negative thoughts, they would capture a selfie, apply an Instagram filter to unnaturally beautify themselves and upload it. Their self-esteem and self-worth are restored when the picture gets likes and comments. In other words, as Thiele puts it, instead of confronting and over-coming deep boredom, modern technology encourages one to ignore, resent and suppress it.⁴⁶

Consulting the Islamic guidance, we find a number of places where Allah Almighty has commanded His servants to reflect, meditate, contemplate, and ponder. Abdul-Rahman points out the significance of contemplation in Islam by outlining the different words used in the Qur'ān to denote contemplation.⁴⁷ *Tafakkur* is a 'deliberate process by which an individual chooses to direct and focus his/her thoughts'; *tadhakkur* is the 'process by which the heart constantly re-evaluates knowledge it has obtained in the light of new experiences to deeper insight and firm grounding.' *I'tibār* is a 'constructive process whereby existing

⁴⁵Leslie Paul Thiele, "Postmodernity and The Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology," *Polity* 29, no. 4 (1997): 489-517, doi: 10.2307/3235265.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Zohair Abdul-Rahman, *Spiritual Psychology: The Lost Art of Contemplation*, ebook (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 2017), <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/zohair/the-lost-art-of-contemplation-spiritual-psychology-series/>.

thoughts are synthesized to produce more profound and sophisticated realizations.’ And *Tadabbur* is ‘to follow a thought to either its logical end or starting foundation.’ Parrot writes that Islamic meditation is using all four of these processes to remember Allah Almighty and being aware of His existence.⁴⁸ This awareness purifies the heart from evil feelings and mind from evil thoughts. He further comments that just as a balanced diet requires various food groups for nutrition, a balanced spiritual life requires different acts of worship and meditations for complete sustenance. Moreover, the significance of being alone with one’s thoughts can be inferred from the hadith where the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said: “*You must observe long periods of silence, for it will drive away Satan and help you in the matter of your religion.*”⁴⁹ Hence, this gives an idea of the significance of being thoughtful and valuing solitude and idleness as a means to contemplate. Building upon the analogy of Ibn Al-Qayyim, a well-known Muslim theologian, Abdul-Rahman further comments:

Shaytaan encounters the land of the heart as empty and barren, so he plants seeds that will lead to satanic thoughts giving rise to passions, forbidden urges and desires. This will then lead to (forbidden and destructive) actions. But if the land of the heart is busy with good and beneficial thoughts regarding one’s purpose in life, thinking about accountability and the next life, its eternal delights and painful punishments, then there will be no room for one’s desires.⁵⁰

4.4 Values of Presence and Mindfulness

In his book, *Moralizing Technology*, Verbeek introduces the concept of Technological Mediation, which is the idea that technologies alter the experiences and practices of their users.⁵¹ The concept can be applied to social media platforms that have redefined the value of being present in the moment and the value of experiencing. Being constantly connected to the world has changed the way individuals engage with their surroundings, especially when they are addicted to social media and have the urge to keep browsing apps repeatedly. It is not a rare sight to see people using their phones when eating, driving, before going to bed and immediately after waking up and even taking their phones to the bathroom. Users upload images of their fancy food platters with the hashtag Foodstagram, share statuses on Facebook when exercising at a gym, post updates on the places they are visiting and events they are attending, as if the whole point is to let the world know about the experience, rather than observing, fully engaging with and experiencing the moment itself. Hence, this practice of broadcasting every other moment on social media has affected the way people

⁴⁸Justin Parrot, *How to be a Mindful Muslim: An Exercise in Islamic Meditation*, ebook (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 2017), <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/justin-parrott/how-to-be-a-mindful-muslim-an-exercise-in-islamic-meditation/>.

⁴⁹*Shu’ab al-Imān* 4582

⁵⁰Zohair Abdul-Rahman, *Spiritual Psychology: The Lost Art of Contemplation*, ebook (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 2017),

⁵¹Peter-Paul Verbeek, *Moralizing Technology: Understanding and Designing the Morality of Things* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

experience things, making one more concerned about capturing the moment to share on social media, rather than being present in the moment. Social media apps keep people too busy and preoccupied to either observe closely or reflect on those observations.

Being mindful and present in the moment is one of the virtues of Islam. The Qur'an repeatedly directs individuals to be mindful of apparently regular occurrences, such as the sunrise and sunset that is day and night, the different kinds of plants, fruits and their ripening stages, variation in the seasons, breeze and rain and so on. To be fully engaged in the present moment and thoroughly experience and observe the surroundings is an oft repeated theme in the Qur'an.

The purpose of a Muslim's life is to remember Allah at all times and be conscious of His awareness when performing any deed, which is why being mindful in Islam is to be mindful of Allah in all acts, as when one is present with the creations of God, they are present with the God. Allah Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an: "*Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth...*"⁵² Also, there is a hadith narrated as: "*I advise you to be mindful of Allah Almighty, for it will beautify all of your affairs.*"⁵³

Keeping these teachings in mind, a Muslim is instructed to be aware of the presence of Allah, that is, to remember Him at all times and perform all actions for the sake of attaining Allah's pleasure and not having the intention to show off or post about it on social media. Regarding *Riyaa* (showing off), it was narrated from 'Amr bin Shu'aib, from his father, that his grandfather said: "*Eat, give charity and clothe yourselves, without being extravagant, and without showing off.*"⁵⁴ Qara'ati points out that if a man sets his intention, motive and direction to please Allah, even his mundane acts, like eating, dressing, traveling, studying, etc.,⁵⁵ become spiritual acts. For instance, while eating, one should be mindful of what they are eating and being grateful to Allah for providing them the ingredients, the resources, means to eat.

5. Solutions by Technologists and Technological Change

In this section, we will be discussing the initiatives and steps taken by technologists to help overcome social media addiction and later, the effectiveness of these initiatives. The solutions presented by the designers include apps that help restrict users' time on social media and allow them to monitor and take control of their social media activity. Software developer and designer, Kevin Holesh, created a smartphone app called 'Moment' that runs in the background, tracking the time spent on social media while also providing coaching

⁵²*The Holy Quran: Al-e-'Imrān* 3:191.

⁵³*Shu'ab al-Imān* 4582.

⁵⁴Imam Ahmad an Nasai, *Sunan an-Nasa'i*, Book 23, Hadith 2560.

⁵⁵Muhsin Qara'ati, *Radiance of the Secrets of Prayer* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

to reduce usage.⁵⁶ Surprisingly, Moment's CEO, Tim Kendall, was formerly Facebook's director of monetization, where he led the development of Facebook's advertising business. Apple introduced 'Screen Time' app for iPhone and iPad users that displays users' usage statistics and patterns in an interactive dashboard.⁵⁷ Similarly, Google has added three Digital Wellbeing apps to "shame" Android users into disciplining their phone usage.⁵⁸ Activity Bubble creates a new bubble every time a user unlocks their phone and the size of bubble keeps increasing with user's screen time. Screen Stopwatch displays the time spent on phone on the wallpaper in real time. Envelope is another app that transforms the smartphone into a basic phone with a very simple user interface that can only be used as a dialer or a camera.

However, the question we aim to address here is, "Are these apps enough to overcome or prevent the influence of problematic use of social media platforms?" According to Schwartz, values are 'desirable, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives.'⁵⁹ From this definition, it can be deduced that values influence one's thoughts, ideas, actions, practices and decision-making. Hence, shaping and shifting of values condition the social and moral life and bring about changes in human existence in terms of worldview, institutions and modes of living. Hoffman says: '*It is clear that technology changes us. It does not only change our environment and our actions and activities, but also our thoughts and ideas.*'⁶⁰ Also, at this stage, we would again like to refer to the ontic and ontological dimensions of technology discussed in Section 1, regarding which Hershock et al. comment that what makes tools (ontic) and technology (ontological) different is that the latter has the potential to condition the meaning of things.⁶¹ For instance, in her TED Talk, Allison Graham 2014 discusses how social media communication has introduced shortened vocabulary, where individuals use 'chat' abbreviations, slangs and emojis that have specific meaning in the online realm.⁶² The meanings of the words 'friend request,' 'like,' 'troll,' 'pinned,' 'tweet' etc. have been transformed, along with the introduction of some new words, such as 'selfie,' 'emoji,' 'lol.' In fact, the influence of social media is so powerful that even those who have completely

⁵⁶www.inthemoment.io

⁵⁷Olivia Solon, "Apple's New 'Digital Wellbeing' Tools Aim to Help Reduce Screen Time," *The Guardian*, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jun/04/apple-ios12-screen-time-apps-how-much-spent-phone-digital-wellbeing>.

⁵⁸David Matthews, "Google Introduces Three Digital Wellbeing Apps to Help Curb Your Smartphone Addiction," *Techspot*, 2020, <https://www.techspot.com/news/83649-google-introduces-three-digital-wellbeing-apps-help-curb.html>.

⁵⁹Shalom H. Schwartz, *Basic Human Values: An Overview*, ebook (Jerusalem, 2006), <https://www.yourmorals.org/schwartz.2006.basic%20human%20values.pdf>

⁶⁰Björn Hofmann, "When Means Become Ends: Technology Producing Values," *Seminar.Net* 2, no. 2 (2006).

⁶¹Hershock, Stepaniants, and Ames, *Technology and Cultural Values*.

⁶²Allison Graham, "How Social Media Makes Us Unsocial," *Allison Graham | Tedxsmu*, video, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5GecYjy9-Q>

alienated themselves from these platforms find their values being reshaped one way or the other. For instance, when social media addiction affects mental wellbeing of an individual, their relationships often suffer, thereby impacting the lives of their family and friends. Similarly, when children are too busy on their phones to spend time having conversation with their family, their parents are going to be affected.

The changes that the online world has introduced are irreversible, inevitable, drastic and profound, as Neil Postman says: “*technological change is not additive, but rather ecological*”; it does not add to the existing practices and experiences, but rather alters them entirely.⁶³ While the apps that restrict social media usage could be effective tools to overcome or reduce the addiction, but they certainly cannot undo or restore the deteriorating human values, and this is because the technologists do not consider the ontological dimension of social media. In this case, one needs to step away from the ‘device paradigm’ and consider solving the larger epistemological, social, economic, psychological, cultural and academic contexts birthed by social media technologies, an approach that we will be discussing in the next section.

6. Means, Ends and Objectives

6.1 Existing Criterion for Social Media Evaluation

So far, we have understood that social media is not value neutral – it reshapes the existing human value system and imposes its own values over human values, bringing about changes in human existence in terms of worldview, practices, institutions and modes of living. This leads us to contend that social networking technology has not been designed with any definite ends and purpose. Had there been any predefined ends or objectives it would have been simply a means to fulfill those ends and values, and not something that would be tampering with the existing value system. For instance, Facebook (means) does not merely help people communicate more easily (end), but rather, produces the value that virtual communication, contact and friendship is better than in-person contact and communication. This value makes individuals more disconnected from real human beings in their surroundings and discourages making real friends. Another value is the speed of communication which Facebook, and other such apps, prize over the quality of communication. When it comes to age old values of generating wisdom and insight that requires sometimes reading and deliberating over and over again on something to develop a keen understanding, it is replaced by short, limited number of characters in tweets, the amount of material that one can gobble each day, no matter how fast and skimmed. Being “fast” is another value that comes atop other values. No matter we are able to read something or not, sharing is ‘the highest’ value, so much so that it has become the defining trait of human nature; I share therefore I am. Individuals think that in order to affirm their selfhood they must keep on sharing information. Social media is an apt example of means

⁶³Neil Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know about Technological Change*, ebook (Denver, 1998), <https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/postman.pdf>.

becoming ends. The end was human relationship and technological apps was to be the means. Now relationship has become a dispensable means and sophisticated, ever new, technologized ways of maintaining the contact has acquired the status of an end. These ways keep on multiplying ad infinitum.

To be able to evaluate the harm and benefit of technology and to assess its contribution towards a good life from a virtue-based or deontological framework requires a universal ethical standard that defines ‘harm’ and ‘benefit’ and dictate the values that contribute to a ‘good life.’ However, in the absence of such standard, we can only evaluate technology from a consequentialist perspective. Utilitarianism takes the consequent approach to label all actions and products that produce ‘happiness’ as ‘good’ and all that produce ‘pain’ as bad, regardless of the intentions behind the actions and creation of products. In the case of social media, referring to accessibility to more information, a positive image of global connectivity, efficiency of communication and increased productivity, it is easy to assume that social media platforms bring happiness and contribute towards human progress. Moreover, a recurring theme in modern technology is the absence of ‘objectives,’ where the technological invention is a product of mere experimentation and innovation, letting its consequences reveal themselves as the product gains more popularity in the masses. The same theme can be observed in social media technology where there is no defined plan, purpose or objective as the new design features are added and updated regularly to keep up with the market, whose consequences are then individually assessed as they unveil without taking into account the bigger picture – the technological shaping of the society. However, if viewed from a more holistic dimension, social media has resulted in more ethical dilemmas, loss of personal value systems, deterioration of mental well-being and lives filled with loneliness and meaninglessness (as we saw in Section 4). The assessment of the consequences of social media alone makes us wonder if it has actually contributed to human happiness and progress. Rivers states that ‘progress’ presupposes a gain in quantity and quality and any loss in the pursuit of this gain does not qualify as progress and is merely just change.⁶⁴ Hence, losing the ability to form profound relationships with the gain of hundreds of virtual friends does not qualify as progress, neither does the loss of propensity of appreciating solitudes with the gain of constant online interactions. Not to mention social media technology has also made ethical issues like spread of misinformation and disinformation, hate-speeches and cyberbullying more prevalent. Simply put, the modern methodology to evaluate technology takes a consequentialist approach, disregarding objectives and assessing the consequences as they occur in isolation, without questioning the overall impact of the existence of technology.

⁶⁴T. J. Rivers, “Progress And Technology: Their Interdependency,” *Technology in Society* 24, no. 4 (2002): 503-522, doi:10.1016/s0160-791x(02)00039-8.

6.2 Islamic Objectives Framework for Social Media Design

Raquib had pointed out these ethical hazards in 2015 when rampant uncritical usage of social media apps was taking place.⁶⁵ Only in a matter of five years there has been abundance of research that corroborates the philosophical analysis and forecasts made by the author in the earlier work. This shows the nature and extent of moral dilemmas that has instigated such heightened fears leading to so many studies and analysis discussed in the earlier sections of this paper. Raquib uses the *Maqāsid al-Shari'ah* (Islamic Objectives) approach to evaluate and assess technology. Since Islam is not merely a religion that enforces individual ritual acts, but a *deen* that provides guidelines for ethico-sociopolitical-economic spheres, the technological design that is inspired by the Islamic objectives will cover all areas of human life. The objectives approach divides the objectives of Islamic law into three levels as: 1. Necessities (*darūriyyāt*), 2. Needs (*ḥājīyyāt*) and 3. Luxuries (*taḥsīniyyāt*). The 'necessities' dictate the 'preservation and enhancement' of these objectives: 'Life', 'Intellect,' 'Wealth' and 'Offspring'; where the protection of these four objectives is a means to protecting the fifth, higher objective of 'Religion'. The 'needs' are less-essential objectives that 'aid' in fulfilling the objectives dictated by necessities, while 'luxuries' are '*beautifying purposes*' that 'improve' the necessities. All the objectives contribute to promoting human good and well-being (*maslaha*).

It is important to note that the well-being (*maslaha*) is not determined according to the human desires. We have highlighted in the earlier sections how social media websites and apps have become a platform for narcissistic and egotistical expression of human desires. Likewise, al-Ghazali explains human nature to be prone to fulfilling listless whims and the higher purpose of Sharia is to put that under restraint. Incessant human desire constitutes the death of the human heart (soul).⁶⁶ This is represented in the strong correlation that psychologists are finding between depression and the use of social media (highlighted in Section 4.1). Putting a check to human desire has not been mentioned as a distinct objective but if we look at the penalties imposed by the *Shari'ah* for protecting the five objectives, the rationale is to curb the unregulated human passions and desires which could lead to actions like murder, fornication and intoxication.

While social media distances people from attributes such as social responsibility, compassion and self-restraint, furthering aimless sharing of unverified information and mindlessness, objectives (*maqāsid*) of the *Shari'ah* are meant to allow individuals to live a humane life, to be contemplative and self-reflective which are essential characteristics for developing a religious consciousness (*taqwa*). The objectives' theory places emphasis on securing human good (*maslaha*), but not merely in a pragmatic or consequentialist spirit. The highest goal is the wholesome intellectual, spiritual and moral development of

⁶⁵Amana Raquib, *Islamic Ethics of Technology: An Objectives' (Maqāsid) Approach* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2015).

⁶⁶Al-Ghazali, *On Disciplining The Soul and Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII And XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Islamic Texts Society, 1995).

individuals and communities. We have found the consequences of social media technologies to be antithetical to this *Shari'ah* objective. Social media technologies represent the lack of any deeper metaphysics that could generate a moral compass for the design and use of the social media apps. If speed and magnitude of communication with virtual strangers has replaced the value of meaningful kinship relations, the very benchmark of technological and human progress need be assessed when critically evaluating the social networking websites and applications. Listing down positive and negative consequences of social media, as is commonly done today, is not the right approach from the perspective of Islamic values and objectives. What is understood to be a positive or negative consequence is dependent on the underlying value framework. If the very technology to be under critical evaluation, that is social media, is to provide the benchmark values then there is no benefit in such evaluation. There is a connection between the intrinsic nature of a given technology; the motivation for developing a certain technology and, the social-ethical consequences that follow, which generally symbolize the worldview behind. There are deeper philosophical-cultural, intellectual and economic reasons behind technological design of social media, such as the technological means turning into ends in the postmodern culture of meaninglessness and nihilism. Although some of the consequences can be unintended or unforeseen, the predominant ones are a result of the very nature and design that is embedded within the technology (mentioned in Section 3) and the cultural-ethical scripts contained therein. These cultural-ethical scripts tend to influence the perception of the world and subsequently human behavior. In the Islamic objectives context, one needs to holistically evaluate the consequences and their impact.

The Islamic Objectives (*maqāṣid*) framework for technological ethics takes into consideration both, the objectives and the consequences. Raquib comments that while certain actions are made obligatory or recommended in the Islamic Law because they lead to desirable consequences, at the same time, a general rule states that '*actions are subservient to objectives*,' thus, to evaluate a technological innovation, the intention behind its invention as well as its outcomes are equally significant to consider.⁶⁷ Moreover, it is important to note that the *maqāṣidic* approach does not evaluate the specific artifacts in isolation, but rather uses a holistic view to assess the invention, ensuring its alignment with the five Islamic objectives and determining its relationship with the social, economic, psychological, political and religious worldview. For instance, from the perspective of the objective of 'preservation of Intellect', social media provides access to a variety of information and allow individuals the freedom of expression; however, the very same technology also diminishes individual's ability to contemplate and be mindful of God. Applying the Islamic objective-based ethics, the access to information and freedom of expression comes under complements that improve the intellect (*tahsīniyyāt*), whereas God consciousness is a necessity (*darūra*), that is essential for preserving of human intellect. Since, necessities have precedence over complements or enhancements, from an Islamic

⁶⁷Amana Raquib, *Islamic Ethics of Technology: An Objectives' (Maqasid) Approach*.

viewpoint, social media platforms should not be designed at the cost of objectives that are essential to preserve human intellect, religious uprightness and spiritual progression.

The objectives' (*maqāṣid*) techno-ethics will estimate innovativeness as one value for the fulfillment of the objectives of enriching human life and intellect. This is because being innovative and creative is part of the God-given human nature and part of the human intellectual ability. The ability to innovatively solve problems is integral to human thinking. It is necessary for the survival of human life, as it helps understand and use the earthly bounties in an optimum manner. However, innovativeness will not enjoy the status of the supreme value the way it is considered in contemporary knowledge-based capitalist economies. Instead, moral rectitude (*tahdhib*) of individuals will form the core value in an Islamic ethical framework of technology. Objectives' oriented ethics of technology will acknowledge the need for developing human creativity and innovative skills -- which are God-given abilities -- through innovative technological designs, but only if these can contribute toward a spiritually aware and religiously conscious life. A holistic idea of technological progress based on this comprehensive understanding should thus inform the technological paradigm and specific technologies.⁶⁸

7. Conclusion

Islam has absolute dimensions and well-defined end that is submission to the transcendental God, Allah. The problem with the Muslims today is they have become too distracted by the technology that they have forgotten their ends, the purpose of their existence. In his article, Moad narrates al-Ghazali in the following words:

In this manner, the vocations of the world multiplied and became interrelated. The people lost themselves among them and did not know that the root of all these was no more than three things: food, clothing, and shelter. All of this became necessary for (satisfying) these three needs, and these three are necessary for the body, and the body is necessary for the heart, to serve as its vehicle. The heart is necessary for God. But they forget themselves and they forget God, like the pilgrim who forgets himself, the Kaabah, and (the object of) his journey and spends all his time taking care of his camel.⁶⁹

He further uses the example of a tree; whose branches are the technology and fruits are the divine knowledge. The branches act as a means to achieve the end, fruits, and once the branches have become dead and useless, they need to be cut off. However, individuals have been so lost in the branches, while being oblivious of the fruits. Hence, the problem is losing focus on the ends. The *Maqasidic* approach acts as a guiding compass that assess the technology in terms of their consequences as well as objectives, presenting a framework with definite ends to preserve religion, life, intellect, wealth and lineage and family relationships.

Since modern technology falls under the rubric of instrumental good, its normative status depends on whether it helps in the realization of an Islamic way of life or leads to a life of

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Edward Moad, *The Technology of Happiness*, ebook (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 2019), <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/omar-edward-moad/the-technology-of-happiness>.

unheeded innovation and consumption per se. The most important factor in the design and development of objectives (*maqāṣid*) oriented technology should therefore be that the technologies are created with definite ends in mind and for fulfilling specific objectives and meeting well-articulated needs. Instead of modern technology acting as the self-fulfilling end toward which all values should converge, Islamic technological ethics should be about approaching technology or technologies as a means for fulfilling basic human necessities and needs that are essential to allow for a dignified life of contemplation, worship and virtue, and not as an avenue of incessant expression of human ingenuity and creativity.⁷⁰

The objectives approach for ethics of social media technology requires establishing a framework of values, where the fundamental or intrinsic values that are essential towards achieving Islamic objectives are prioritized over instrumental or secondary values that only aid towards fulfilling the objectives. For instance, developing features on social media that allow users to communicate with people living abroad in real-time promotes an instrumental value, where the intrinsic value is of having stronger and sincere bonds with each other. From the Islamic context, in the design of the social media technologies (means or instrumental value), healthy family relationships (ends or intrinsic value) should not suffer. Similarly, the values of efficiency, productivity, responsiveness and faster access in social media come secondary to the fundamental values of worship, contemplation, moral excellence, charity, compassion, brotherhood and so on. Hence, the key is to have a clear distinction between the two values and develop and design technology that promotes both of the values, with intrinsic values being a primary concern.

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