# AL-MUSTAFA

## In Contemporary Islamic Thought

**Religion and religiosity in virtual space**

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# THE EDITORIAL

## An Introduction to the Interaction of Religion and Virtual Space

■ Seyyed Rasul Alavi[1]

The modern era is characterized by a plethora of mass media and virtual spaces, each with unique capabilities and features. Communication in today's globalized world has made it common and easily accessible to exchange opinions, spread negative culture, and propagate false and biased information about various factions, groups, personalities, and especially religions. Throughout history, the culture and fundamental religious texts and divine beliefs have been subjected to attacks, including in the form of anti-religious propaganda in cyberspace.

The rise of new mysticism, the emergence of terrorist groups, and the proliferation of pseudo-religious networks and organizations have distorted the true image of religion and presented it in a different light, particularly to the younger generation. In particular, Islam has been the prime target of such attacks. Amidst such circumstances, it is crucial for virtual space to facilitate the promotion of Islamic culture by establishing accurate networks, groups, and links that can correctly present Quranic interpretations and sources, while simultaneously combating anti-religious propaganda.

Today, virtual space presents both opportunities and threats to humanity. While the threats have caused concern among

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Muslims, the conditions for harnessing their opportunities are extremely favorable. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has also emphasized the importance of utilizing the opportunities presented by virtual space, as he states:

Virtual space has now expanded to many times the size of our physical world, with some individuals living and breathing solely within its confines. For such individuals, their entire existence revolves around virtual space. Young people, in particular, engage in various activities within virtual space, such as utilizing its scientific programs, browsing the internet, and using social networks. Some individuals have created a channel, which has come to be known as virtual space or the cyber world. Use it, but use it properly. (Supreme Leader, meeting with teachers and educators, May 13, 2015)

In the era of information and communication, the ubiquitous presence of virtual space in various aspects of human life has created new demands on the primary institutions, structures, and organizations of every society.

Virtual space is a novel form of social space that, despite its relatively short history, has firmly established itself in people's lives. It has enabled individuals from diverse social backgrounds and of all ages to come together and communicate with each other, regardless of the physical distance between them in the real world. In contemporary times, the Muslim family is confronted with a diverse cultural landscape that includes satellite networks, virtual spaces, and modern media, each of which seeks to exert its influence on different facets of family life.

Certain satellite networks, virtual groups, and channels have increasingly focused on the family, promoting disorderly and unbridled family structures while normalizing spousal infidelity, premarital sexual relations between individuals, and cohabitation instead of marriage. The impact of satellite network programs on Muslim audiences has raised concerns among the scholarly community due to its potential consequences.

Religion, as one of the longstanding institutions of human life, is not immune to the impact of contemporary cultural trends. Therefore, it is necessary for religion to adapt and

redefine its form and means of interacting with its audience and society of believers in light of the new conditions of the world.

Religion can utilize virtual space to showcase and introduce itself, as well as the society associated with it, thereby creating opportunities for recognition and differentiation from other religions. The utilization of virtual space has enabled less hierarchical and rigid forms of communication with the audience, creating a platform for members of the religious community to address their doubts and confusions with less fear and anxiety. This allows them to seek answers that bring peace to those who seek the truth.

Nevertheless, taking advantage of these benefits while also avoiding the associated risks requires careful preparation. It is essential to provide the necessary training through supportive institutions, such as families, media, and educational institutions, to increase media literacy and skills among people, particularly the younger generation. This would help to reduce errors in selecting appropriate networks or channels, and provide guidance on how to interact with the content of virtual social networks. By doing so, the potential for harm can be minimized.

Conducting a thorough needs assessment and increasing awareness about the audience and their preferences, particularly within the context of the younger generation, are other crucial factors that can enhance the effectiveness of religious content in virtual networks and cyberspace. By doing so, religious decision-makers can optimize their approach to these spaces and increase their ability to meet their objectives.

Instead of relying on defensive and security-based approaches, adopting a creative approach that integrates foresight and innovation can facilitate the creation of up-to-date, engaging, and attractive religious content that is likely to attract a larger audience and enable the dissemination of religious teachings. On the other hand, coercive and defensive measures can hinder the positive impact of virtual space in the realm of religion and limit its potential benefits.

The decision to enter virtual space and use it for religious purposes should be an intelligent move that takes into account the needs of religion, the religious community, and the diverse

interests and tendencies of audiences who have different dispositions and attitudes, and may be inclined towards negative and irrational reactions. Given the diversity of religious teachings and propaganda in virtual spaces, adhering to the above-mentioned points can help establish a stable and positive interaction between religion and the virtual world, ultimately benefiting religion.

In the present issue of the *Al-Mustafa Journal*, various authors have explored different aspects of the interaction between religion and virtual space. We look forward to continuing this discussion in future issues of the journal.

# Quranic Requirements for Communicating Messages in Cyberspace

■ Seyyed Isa Mostarhami[1]

■ Hamideh Hadibeh[2]

**Abstract**

Cyberspace refers to a virtual realm where communication occurs primarily through the World Wide Web. This realm encompasses a wide range of online platforms, including popular social networks like Facebook, WeChat, Telegram, WhatsApp, Eitaa, Viber, and many others. The innate human desire to connect and communicate with others is one of the primary reasons for using cyberspace. The proliferation of fast and seamless interactions and exchanges in cyberspace has effectively shattered temporal and spatial barriers, enabling individuals to effortlessly connect and exchange ideas and perspectives with others. The extensive use of this virtual space has had a profound impact on both individual and social life, sometimes surpassing that of physical space. Adequate knowledge and awareness among the public have paved the way for responsible utilization of cyberspace. By adhering to the rules and guidelines governing communication in this realm, the potential threats posed by this space can be transformed into opportunities, while mitigating any associated destructive impact. Successful communication and mutual understanding necessitate adherence to established rules and regulations. The process of communication

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comprises three essential components: the message, the sender, and the receiver. A descriptive and analytical study of the illuminating verses of the Holy Quran reveals that this divine guidebook has established specific criteria for each of these fundamental components. The Holy Quran, which upholds the principles of knowledge, honesty, piety, etiquette, and eloquence, is regarded as one of the prerequisites pertaining to the message that the sender must adhere to.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, social networks, virtual messaging, Quran, criteria of dialogue.

**Quranic Requirements for Communicating Messages in Cyberspace**
■ Seyyed Isa Mostarhami and Hamideh Hadibeh

# Introduction

One of the advantages of cyberspace is the ability to communicate and converse with individuals from all around the world. Despite physical distance separating individuals in the real world, cyberspace effectively erases this distance, allowing people to interact, engage in conversations, and negotiate with each other while seeing and hearing each other. This new means of communication provides numerous possibilities, including conducting virtual scientific and administrative meetings, engaging in scholarly debates, hosting online classes, and facilitating friendly discussions.

It is worth noting that friendly conversation is among the attributes of the dwellers of Paradise, as described in the Quran: "Reclining on them, face to face…" (Quran 56:16). The residents of Paradise recline on their thrones, engage in friendly conversations, and enjoy face-to-face interactions with one another (Makārim Shīrāzī 1374 Sh, 23: 211). Moreover, relevant hadiths in the Islamic tradition contain the following narrations: "Conversation is the comfort of the soul" (Ibn Bābawayh 1413 AH, 4: 402). Therefore, speaking provides solace to the soul, and conversing with others, especially in person, can bring comfort to an individual.

Human beings are constantly inundated with a multitude of thoughts, emotions, and beliefs that they have internalized. Speaking serves as a bridge between an individual's innermost thoughts and the external world, providing a means by which the hidden nature of man is revealed. In this light, Imam ʿAlī (a) has been cited as stating: "The nature of man is concealed beneath his tongue" (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, 148).

Conversation is essentially a shared endeavor in which individuals engage in the exchange of thoughts, emotions, and ideas by conveying messages that hold mutual significance to them.

Communication can take on various forms. One is verbal communication, which is characterized by the conveyance of information and ideas through spoken or written language, whether through voice chat or written messages. Another form of communication is nonverbal communication, which involves the conveyance of ideas and concepts without the use of spoken or

written language. This can include communication through visual mediums such as photos, films, or even through the use of special profile pictures.

In essence, all forms of communication comprise three fundamental elements: First, a message that conveys certain contents and serves as the impetus for communication; second, the sender of the message who seeks to communicate with others for a specific purpose; and third, the recipient of the message, for whom the message is intended. The purpose of this paper is to outline the significant Quranic guidelines for transmitting messages in cyberspace.

## Research Background

Numerous works have already been published on the principles and etiquettes of face-to-face communication based on the Quran and hadiths in the Islamic tradition. These include *Etiquettes of conversation and debate from the viewpoint of the Quran and hadiths* by ʿAlī Aṣghar Riḍwānī ; *Conversation etiquettes from the viewpoint of the Quran and hadiths* by Jawād Īrawānī, and *Quran-approved etiquettes for dialogue* by Sayyid Asad Allāh Yāwarī.

Numerous works have been written on cyberspace and its disadvantages, including *Cyberspace* by Sayyid Mohsen Paknahad; *The Muslim family and the cyberspace* by Sayyed Reza Ameli, and *Great potentials of cyberspace for the Muslim world* by Dr. Ali Morshedizadeh. However, there is a scarcity of literature on the etiquettes of dialogue in the context of communication in cyberspace.

Only a handful of papers have been published on this topic, including "Dialogue in cyberspace" by Ghaffar Parsa and "The Public sphere and dialogue in social networking applications and sites" by Bihjat Yazkhasti. Nevertheless, none of these papers have examined this topic through the lens of the teachings of the Quran and hadiths.

It is worth mentioning that various Quranic exegeses, such as *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, *Tafsīr Nemūneh*, Tafsīr Tasnīm, and *Tafsīr Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, contain valuable discussions on the subject of dialogue and communication. Their interpretations of the relevant Quranic verses can be applied to dialogue in cyberspace as well.

## A. Conceptual Framework

### 1. Message

According to Dehkhoda (1377 Sh, 4: 5129), a message is defined as a piece of information or news that is transmitted through oral or written discourse. Zowragh (1388 Sh, 122) defines a message as a collection of words, expressions, utterances, gestures, sounds, and shapes that the sender uses to convey their intended meaning.

Messages can be either verbal or non-verbal. Verbal messages can be conveyed in either oral or written form, while non-verbal messages can be communicated through gestures, signs, or pictures. An example of non-verbal communication is the hospital silence sign, which often features a picture of a nurse placing a finger over their mouth.

When communicating through a message, there are three fundamental factors to consider:

a. The code of the message: This refers to a system of symbols that are arranged in a meaningful way to convey a message to the intended audience;

b. The content: This refers to the main message that the sender intends to convey to the recipient in order to achieve a specific goal;

c. The manner of presenting the message: This encompasses the decisions made by the sender regarding the selection and arrangement of codes and content in the message (Eskandari 1391 Sh, 1-24)

At its core, a message serves as a connecting link between the sender and the receiver. A message is deemed useful when it is truthful, appropriate to the current situation, and conveyed with goodwill and benevolence towards the intended recipient. To establish effective communication, all parties involved need to be aware of and adhere to the criteria and rules for proper communication.

### 2. Cyberspace

The term "cyberspace" was first introduced in a science-fiction story written by William Gibson in 1984. In the story, it referred to a fictional world where words, relationships, data, wealth, and

power were created through computer networks and digital communication (Mojtahedi Najafi 1395 Sh, 25).

In contemporary language, the prefix "cyber" often refers to anything related to modern information technologies, including lifestyles and thought patterns. The term "cyberspace" typically refers to the digital realm, which is a virtual geographic space created by computer networks (Mohseni 1380 Sh)

Although cyberspace is often referred to as a virtual space, this description can be misleading, as it is a real world that exists in the digital realm, rather than an unreal or virtual one. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli has aptly pointed out that what is commonly referred to as the "virtual space" is, in fact, a reality, as it cannot be eliminated like something unreal (Sayyah Taheri et al., n.d., 33). Thus, cyberspace is, in its essence, a reality.

## 3. The Internet

The Internet is a global computer network that facilitates the exchange of information across the world. It is a vast network of interconnected computers that use network protocols to facilitate communication and data exchange between them. In one sense, the Internet is a comprehensive network that comprises millions of private, public, scholarly, commercial, and state networks, ranging from local and small to global and immense in scale. These numerous networks are interconnected through a vast array of electronic devices. The Internet serves as the gateway to cyberspace, allowing users to enter and navigate the digital realm [https://fa.m.wikipedia.org].

## 4. Social Networking Applications

Social networks are made up of individuals or organizations that have formed connections based on specific affiliations, such as shared ideas, financial transactions, friendships, kinship ties, web links, and more. Currently, there are six main types of social networks in existence (Sayyah Taheri et al., n.d, 55-56):

1. Text-based social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
2. Video-based social networking sites (e.g. YouTube, TikTok)
3. Photo-based social networking sites/apps (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat)

4. Professional networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn)
5. Niche-based social networking sites (e.g. "ChildKafel" for children and "Empress" for women)
6. Service-based social networking sites (e.g. sites for bill payments or setting appointments with physicians).

## B. Quranic Requirements for Transmitting Messages in Cyberspace

Studies of the Quran have identified the following as some of the most important criteria for a message.

### 1. Being based on Knowledge

One of the crucial requirements for a message is that its contents should be based on true knowledge and wisdom. It is important to note that there is a mutual relationship between discourse and knowledge. One should not speak on a topic without possessing proper knowledge about it, and it is equally inappropriate to say something that contradicts one's knowledge. The Holy Quran has refers to knowledgeable people as "the seer" (Quran 35: 19) and "the living" (Quran 35: 22).

When a speaker possesses knowledge and expertise on a given topic, their audience is more likely to listen to what they have to say and take it seriously, as their scholarly qualifications lend credibility to their statements. Without the necessary knowledge, one may fail to effectively convey their point to others, leading to a misunderstanding or lack of understanding.

Allah has instructed human beings not to speak about that which they do not have knowledge of. Consider the following Quranic verse: "And do not follow [either in words or in practice] that of which you have no knowledge, for the hearing, the sight, and the heart are all accountable" (Quran 17: 36).

This verse applies equally to any words, deeds, or decisions that are not based on knowledge. This verse can be interpreted as instructing human beings to speak only the truth, act only in accordance with what is right, and believe only in that which is correct (Ṭabarsī 1360 Sh, 14: 135).

Speaking based on knowledge is considered to be of great importance within the framework of the sacred Islamic law, to the extent that it has been counted as one of the duties that human beings owe to Allah. According to a narration by Zurāra, he once

asked Imam al-Bāqir (a) about the duty of the people towards Allah. The Imam replied, "Their duty is to speak of what they know and remain silent regarding what they do not know" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1: 43).

There are many hadiths narrated from Shiite Imams wherein individuals are strongly advised against speaking on topics they do not have proper knowledge of. For instance, Imam ʿAlī (a) has been quoted as saying: "Beware of speaking about that whose ways are not known to you and whose reality is not comprehended because what you say is an indication of the extent of your wisdom" (Tamīmī al-Āmidī 1410 AH, 174).

According to this insightful hadith, speaking without proper knowledge can cause one to be seen as unwise and foolish, as one's words reflect the extent of their wisdom and knowledge. Speaking without proper knowledge results in unfounded and unsound words, which is an indication of the speaker's lack of wisdom and intellect.

According to the Quran and the teachings of the Infallibles (the Prophet and his Household), the most crucial requirement and criterion for speaking is possessing proper knowledge of the relevant topic. Expressions that are founded on conjecture, doubts, heresy, or uninformed personal judgment are considered invalid and meaningless, and are also considered blameworthy and abominable by the Sacred Legislator.

Furthermore, there may be situations where it is prudent to refrain from speaking even on topics one *is* knowledgeable about, as doing so could lead sometimes to negative consequences in this world or the hereafter. Concerning this, Imam ʿAlī (a) has been narrated as having said: "Do not speak what you do not know. Do not [even] say everything that you know for Allah has charged all your limbs with certain obligations and He shall hold them accountable to their obligations on the Day of Resurrection" (Tamīmī al-Āmadī 1410 AH, 544).

Allah places great value on knowledge. Speaking on a topic without possessing the necessary knowledge in that field is considered one of the worst ways to show disrespect towards any field of knowledge. Knowledge is a guiding light that illuminates and informs. Disrespecting a scientific field by making inaccurate statements about it is akin to disregarding the importance and

value of knowledge itself. This issue is particularly important in the context of online interactions, as cyberspace is a platform for discussing diverse topics across various fields of knowledge.

One challenge of cyberspace is that individuals who lack expertise in a particular field may engage in discussions and debates on topics that require specialized knowledge. As a result, their contributions to these discussions may consist of worthless ideas that are rooted in ignorance and lack of knowledge, or they may be motivated by ulterior motives and seek to show off their supposed expertise. Regardless, individuals are responsible for ensuring the accuracy and truthfulness of ideas or news they share, particularly in the context of online interactions where misinformation can spread rapidly and widely. The Holy Qur'an addresses this issue as follows: "If a person given to transgressions brings you some news, verify it" (Quran 49: 6).

The influence of cyberspace has spread across the globe and encompasses all branches of knowledge, with its contents spanning a wide range of scientific fields. The essential prerequisite for engaging in discussions related to any of these scientific fields is possessing proper knowledge and expertise in that particular area. Given the importance of this issue, an example from the field of hadith studies can be helpful in illustrating this point.

In the field of hadith studies, familiarity with *fiqh al-ḥadīth* (i.e., in-depth understanding of hadiths) and their reliability has always been considered a necessary condition for the transmission of hadiths. Conversely, believers have always been encouraged to spread the instructive hadiths of the Infallibles (a). In this regard, the Prophet (s) has been reported to have said, "Spread my message even if it is just a single verse from the Quran" (Majlisī 1404 AH, 5:144). The Prophet (s) has also been quoted as saying, "Narrate hadiths from me, and there is no harm in doing so, but be cautious in spreading only that which is truthful and accurate" (Majlisī 1403 AH, 30:145). The Prophet (s) then added, "Whoever deliberately attributes falsehoods to me will have a place reserved for him in the Hellfire."

Undoubtedly, the dissemination of hadiths for the purpose of promoting Islam is a commendable act. However, it is crucial to ensure that the hadiths being spread are based on reliable sources,

contain truthful information, and have dependable contents. Disseminating hadiths that are adopted from or transmitted through unreliable sources is a blameworthy act and carries a significant legal responsibility.

In fact, the transmission of unreliable, fabricated, or undocumented hadiths can lead to a range of negative consequences, such as causing pessimism regarding the religion or promoting religious carelessness and indifference. Similarly, inaccurately segmenting the contents of hadiths, distorting their meaning, and transmitting hadiths that are not well-documented are among other hazards of transmitting hadiths. Thus, when transmitting hadiths, it is essential to mention their sources, and this practice should become a part of the culture of the Muslim community, observed by all individuals.

In the context of cyberspace, it is important to verify the accuracy and reliability of scholarly discussions presented by various individuals, ensuring that they are based on trustworthy and reliable sources. Even if sources are provided for the facts being discussed, it is important to consult those sources to confirm that the presented facts have not been altered and are entirely credible and scientifically sound.

Possession of media literacy and other forms of knowledge is a necessary requirement for using social networking sites and navigating cyberspace. Media literacy involves a set of skills that enable individuals to analyze, access, and create various types of messages across different media platforms. These skills are essential for making effective use of cyberspace and engaging with social networking sites [https://graphteam.ir].

## 2. Leniency and Gentleness

Another positive value in speech is the quality of being gentle and lenient in one's interactions with others. This approach fosters amity and kindness in relationships. Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi says:

The quality of gentleness and leniency in speech stands in contrast to intolerance and harshness. These opposing attributes have two aspects: a psychological aspect that concerns the underlying meaning of what is said, the types of sentences chosen to convey that meaning, and the way one treats one's audience. The second aspect concerns the physical characteristics of speech,

which include the tone of one's voice and the length of the speech (Mesbah Yazdi 1391 Sh, 3: 326).

When the Prophets Moses and Aaron were sent to invite the Pharaoh to submit to Allah's command, Allah instructed them to speak to the Pharaoh with gentleness and leniency if their words were to have any effect on the Pharaoh's hardened heart: "And speak to him leniently, so that he may take heed or fear [Allah's Retribution]" (Quran 20: 44).

Individuals on social networking sites are in constant communication and interaction with one another, making it natural for them to engage in discussions and exchange ideas. However, at times a challenging discussion can spark a huge discord in cyberspace that can quickly spiral out of control, leading to the spread of enmity and resentment among members of the community. Once this happens, it can be challenging to contain the fallout.

To prevent discussions and exchanges of ideas from turning into tension and discord, it is important to choose suitable contexts for each discussion. Additionally, maintaining a positive attitude and displaying considerate behavior can contribute to creating a favorable atmosphere where opposing views can be tolerated and an air of camaraderie can be fostered. This, in turn, can help to reduce tensions resulting from disagreements.

At times, one of the parties involved in an interaction may persistently attempt to impose their own views and beliefs on others. Such attitudes, which often stem from differences in ideas, beliefs, and preferences, can lead to prolonged debates and arguments. Islam advises individuals to refrain from engaging in useless arguments and attempting to impose their views and beliefs on others, even if they are convinced that their views are correct.

The Prophet (s) emphasized that no good comes from arguments, even if one's stance is correct. He also stated that giving up such arguments is a sign of humility, stating that "The most God-wary among people is the one who avoids arguments, even if he is in the right" (Ibn Bābawayh 1376 Sh, 21).

## 4. Being Rational

Islam places great emphasis on rationality and wisdom as the

most important factors to be considered in both words and deeds. From the perspective of this monotheistic faith, human beings are not authorized to say or do anything that is considered inappropriate, worthless, or aberrant by reason.

The tongue is the voice of man's thoughts and emotions, and if left unchecked, it can reveal emotions such as anger, passion, and lust. However, when one's intellect is fully developed, it can exert control over all organs, including the tongue. Imam ʿAlī (a) has stated that "As the intellect grows, speaking diminishes" (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, 480).

To fully develop the intellect, it is important to consider all aspects of what one intends to say and then communicate in a logical and rational manner. Ignorant people often speak without forethought or consideration, which can lead to negative consequences resulting from their careless words.

In the Quran, Allah discusses the detriments of thoughtless speech when recounting the dialogue between the angels and the inmates of Hell in the following verse: "And they will say: 'Had we listened or cogitated, we would not be among the residents of the flaring Fire'" (Quran 67:10).

The powers of thought and speech are two blessings bestowed upon mankind by Allah, and they are what have granted mankind superiority over other creatures. As such, it is fitting for humans to exercise both of these powers concurrently, especially during times when they may be overwhelmed by emotions. For instance, during times when one experiences anger, it is important to control the tongue with the intellect to prevent speaking words that may later lead to regret. Otherwise, the tongue may become a ferocious beast, as Imam ʿAlī (a) has asserted: "The tongue is a [ferocious] beast; if it is given free rein, it will bite!" (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, 479, hadith no. 60)

The ability to communicate effectively through speech stems from correct thinking, and thus, good speech is the result of good thought. Therefore, one of the outcomes of good thinking is the ability to control one's tongue and prevent it from making mistakes or errors.

The unrestricted use of modern communication means, including cyberspace, can lead one into dangerous pitfalls. Today, cyberspace has led many of its users to neglect rational thinking,

to the point where they may even forget their Creator.

Therefore, the use of cyberspace must be subject to certain regulations and religious limitations, as Allah has instructed in the Quran: "and do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction" (Quran 2:195).

Individuals who use internet chat rooms or social networking sites/applications must be aware that even their slightest mistake or lapse in cyberspace can have major repercussions, often resulting in greater harm than mistakes made in the physical world.

Thus, individuals who send texts or messages in cyberspace without considering their contents, spread inappropriate or false information, or violate others' privacy by divulging their secrets are either ignorant or negligent regarding the damaging effects and serious consequences of their actions. Imam ʿAlī (a) says:

As long as you have not spoken, you are in control of your words; but once you have spoken, your words will be in control of you. Therefore, guard your tongue as you guard your gold and silver, for words can either attract blessings or incur a penalty. (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, 479, hadith no. 60)

Therefore, adhering to the principle of giving a message proper thought before sending it is essential for all social media users. Equally important is making rational and wise decisions regarding the content of messages that are exchanged, as this plays a critical role in preventing negative consequences resulting from sending messages through cyberspace.

## 5. Honesty

Human nature has been created with a disposition towards truthfulness, truth-seeking, and honesty. Honesty, in this context, refers to the act of telling the truth. The teachings of the Quran strongly emphasize the virtues of truthfulness and honesty. An example of this can be found in the following verse: "O' you who believe! Abstain from [defying the command of] Allah and be with the truthful" (Quran 9: 119).

The opposite of truthfulness, namely dishonesty and lying, is considered a blameworthy character trait in the Quran. Moreover, the Quran asserts that those who are dishonest will not be guided by Allah: "Allah does not guide him who is a liar and an ingrate" (Quran 39: 3).

According to the teachings of Islam, honesty and truthfulness are virtuous character traits that are fundamental to attaining eternal prosperity and felicity. Consider the following remarks by Imam ʿAlī (a): "The truthful are en route to salvation and honour, and liars are on the brink of ruin and ignominy" (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, 117, hadith no. 86).

Truthfulness and refraining from falsehood is, in fact, the most basic and well-known form of honesty. Islam has placed great emphasis on honesty in all aspects of one's life. In a related verse in the Quran, Allah stated the following regarding the Prophet (s): "And had he passed off any sayings under Our Name – We would surely have seized him by the right hand- and then ripped the aorta off of him" (Quran 69:44-46).

Arguably, the most significant danger facing people in cyberspace is the dissemination of falsehoods and lies. In Surah al-Ḥujurāt, Allah has emphasized the importance of verifying any news that one receives: "O' you who believe! If a person given to transgressions brings you some news, verify it, lest you should come at some people out of ignorance and then become remorseful over what you have done" (Quran 49:6).

Today, it is increasingly common to use applications like Photoshop to modify photos and alter texts, which can lead to the spread of false news and lies through cyberspace. However, a more concerning development in this regard, which we face in cyberspace, is the emergence of "deepfakes." Deepfake is an AI-based software technique that enables users to modify videos and alter them in any way they desire. Ultimately, the deepfake user can completely alter a video to their liking, creating a version that is entirely different from reality. The term "deepfake" is derived from the combination of "deep learning" and "fake," which accurately conveys the purpose of this technique (https://dataio.ir).

Deepfake is a relatively new technology that allows users to alter videos or images, modifying people's faces, gestures, or even their voices. With deepfake, fake sentences can be added to a speech, and the gestures and lip movements of the speaker can be modified to make it appear as though they said those sentences. However, the reality is that it is all fake and a lie.

Deepfake can even be used to change the face of a speaker in a

video, making it appear as though the words spoken belong to a different person altogether. This technology can even be used to transform a still image into a video in which the person depicted appears to be speaking. Deepfake can also be used to modify a video in such a way that certain remarks or actions are falsely attributed to a specific person. This technology is so advanced that even the AI used to create such fake videos is difficult to distinguish from real footage, presenting a significant challenge in the present era.

While graphics editor programs such as Adobe Photoshop have been used for years to manipulate images and create fake pictures, what we are witnessing today is a significantly more disturbing phenomenon. Deepfake is, in effect a new form of deception technique in the modern age and it is rapidly evolving alongside the expansion of global social media.

For cyberspace, particularly social media, to foster an atmosphere of trust, it is crucial to creating a culture of honesty and institutionalize this important principle. However, given the prevalence of fake identities that enable users to do and say as they please, creating such an atmosphere seems far from achievable. As a result, the only recourse for social media users is to ensure the veracity of exchanged messages.

## 6. Chastity and Decency

Chastity, in a literal sense, refers to purity, piety, and decency (Dehkhoda 1377 Sh, 10: 14089). It is regarded as one of the most significant moral values. According to experts in ethics, chastity is a spiritual attribute that allows the intellect to control one's carnal desires, limiting them within the boundaries set by the intellect (Narāqī 1967, 1: 108).

According to the teachings of the Quran, chastity manifests in various forms, including chastity regarding one's gaze (Quran 24:31), chastity regarding carnal desires (Quran 24: 33), and chastity of speech (Quran 33: 32).

One form of chastity is observing decency and modesty in conversations and interactions. Engaging in unnecessary conversation with non-Mahrams, insulting, abusing, lying, boasting, and divulging secrets are some of the actions that violate the principle of chastity of speech. Allah is Decent and Merciful, and in His speech, He refrains

from using offensive language. Instead, He often employs metaphors and allusions to refer to sensitive issues indirectly. The moral code of chastity of speech, as outlined in the Quran, is not limited to sexual matters alone. Even when referring to abominable issues such as urination and defecation, the Quran uses indirect expressions, as it is considered a more appropriate way of addressing such matters than direct references.

An example of Quranic reference to sexual issues is the verse: "Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you" (Quran 2: 223). The Arabic term "ḥarth" means "planting" or "sowing" and it used to illustrate the importance of women to society, much like farms are essential to farmers. Without women and their ability to bear children, humankind would face the threat of extinction (Tabātabāʾī 1374 Sh, 2: 212). As evident from this verse, sexual intercourse between a husband and his wife has been indirectly and respectfully referred to through the metaphor of "sowing."

Cyberspace has both physical and virtual aspects. While some aspects of cyberspace are tangible, there are also virtual elements, such as the fact that connections between people are not physical. The unique quality of cyberspace, where connections between people are not physical, can cause individuals to feel less constrained by the limitations they typically experience in the physical world. For example, many individuals find it easier and more comfortable to interact with non-Mahrams in cyberspace than in the physical world. Such permissive and irresponsible behavior can gradually extend to the physical world as well.

Regrettably, due to the unique characteristics of cyberspace, such as the anonymity it provides, individuals often engage in chatting with members of the opposite sex under the guise of getting to know each other for the purpose of marriage. However, such connections can quickly devolve into sexual chats solely for the purpose of seeking pleasure, turning the chat atmosphere into a harmful and hedonistic one, with the initial intentions of getting to know each other for marriage being completely abandoned. These connections can lead to moral corruption and result in various problems, including irreparable damage to families.

Due to these issues, religion warns against engaging in sexual dialogues under any circumstances, whether in the physical world or in cyberspace. For instance, Allah has instructed the Prophet's

wives in the Quran as follows: "O' wives of the Prophet! You are not like any [ordinary] women, that is, if you practice piety; so do not be over-soft in speech, lest those in whose heart is a disease should aspire, but speak reasonably" (Quran 33: 32).

While this verse may seem to specifically address the Prophet's wives, its message applies to all women at all times. This verse suggests that there is no problem with engaging in reasonable conversation with others for the purpose of getting to know them or attending to daily affairs. Conversely, what is considered blameworthy speech is any conversation of a sexual nature that may arouse others and lead those "in whose hearts is a disease" to engage in immoral behavior. This kind of speech can transform a reasonable and wholesome conversation into one of perversion and hedonism, thereby destroying the positive atmosphere of the conversation. Therefore, it is imperative to avoid such speech. Similar to conversations in the physical world, as long as dialogues in cyberspace remain reasonable and appropriate, there is no issue with them. However, if they turn into sexual or hedonistic conversations, they become blameworthy and impermissible.

The Infallibles (a) have cautioned against engaging in unnecessary conversations with non-mahrams, joking with them, and speaking in a soft or flirtatious tone with non-mahram men, as such behavior is considered indecent and inappropriate. For instance, the Prophet (s) has been quoted as saying: "Anyone who jokes or flirts with a non-mahram woman, Allah shall lock him up [in the Fire] for a thousand years for every single word exchanged" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 20: 198).

Moreover, the Holy Quran has referred to the temptations of Satan as "khuṭwāt" (footsteps): "and do not follow in the footsteps of Satan" (Quran 2: 208). The Arabic term "Khuṭwat" means "footstep" (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1374 Sh, 1: 615), and based on the meaning of this term, it can be inferred from this verse that Satan's temptations are gradual and occur in steps. The gradual and imperceptible nature of misguidance makes it extremely challenging to counter.

This is precisely why we observe cultural and religious norms gradually eroding over time as they are passed down through generations. The previous generations may not even be aware of the decline of these norms until later generations have completely deviated from them.

Today, it is increasingly common to observe offensive behavior such as joking with non-Mahrams in cyberspace and social media, with many individuals considering it a normal and acceptable practice. In fact, social media has created a platform where individuals can openly express their previously inhibited desires.

In the present era, users of cyberspace are exposed to various forms of corruption, including but not limited to pornographic content, sexual chats, sexual jokes, or sexual pictures. Some websites even feature obscene pictures on their homepage, so they are the first thing users see upon visiting the site. This can entice users to revisit the site solely to view such content again.

Even if individuals do not initially surrender to such inappropriate content, being exposed to it can have a negative impact on their chastity. This is especially true when individuals are repeatedly exposed to such content, as it can gradually erode their resistance and make them more susceptible to succumbing to such temptations involuntarily.

In recent years, the emergence of social networking applications such as Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, and others has made online interaction and connections much easier and more accessible. While these applications have many benefits, the ease of access they provide also brings with it various downsides. For instance, it can be easy to transform a formal mode of dialogue with the opposite sex into a friendly, and even intimate one. This has become so prevalent that sensitivity towards posting inappropriate and even pornographic content online has ceased. This, in turn, has paved the way for discarding the hijab and normalizing indecency and immorality.

This type of behavior is referred to as "tabarraj" in the Quran, and it was disapproved of as a practice of pre-Islamic pagan women who would appear in public heavily adorned with makeup and ornaments, showing themselves off to men (Ṭurayḥī 1375 Sh, 2: 277): "And stay in your houses and do not emerge ostentatiously [before the people] like the former times of ignorance" (Quran 33: 33).

Therefore, observing chastity and decency in cyberspace is not limited to the language used, but it encompasses all aspects of online interaction. It goes without saying that the most crucial factor in reinforcing chastity and decency is faith and a sense of God-wariness.

## 7. Being Well-founded

Another essential requirement for dialogue is that all parties involved must express their views in a well-documented well-founded manner. This principle has also been emphasized in the divine teachings of the Quran. For instance, the Quran has enjoined believers to speak with "well-founded words" twice, in addition to emphasizing piety: "O' you who believe! Abstain from [defying] Allah and speak words that are well-founded" (Quran 33: 70); "and let them abstain from [defying] Allah and speak well-founded words" (Quran 4: 9).

The Arabic term "sadīd" derives from the root word "sadda," which means "firm and well-founded." It refers to unimpeachable and truth-based facts (Ṭurayḥī 1375 Sh, 3: 66). Therefore, the expression "qawl sadīd", is a type of speech that preclude distortion and falsehood (Makārim Shīrāzī 1374 Sh, 17: 447).

The necessary requirement for faith, according to the Quran, is piety and God-wariness: "O' you who believe! Abstain from [defying] Allah" (Quran 33: 70). The essential requirement for piety and God-wariness is, in turn, "well-founded speech": "Abstain from [defying] Allah and speak words that are well-founded" (Quran 33: 70).

Presenting sound arguments and evidence is a distinguishing characteristic of well-founded speech, which attracts truth-seekers. Despite being well-founded, stubborn individuals and disbelievers may refuse to use their intellects and accept this type of speech.

The most well-founded speech is that of Allah, who has based all of His words on sound evidence. Every major or minor issue mentioned in the Quran is backed by evidence. In fact, Allah has challenged anyone who denies Him to bring forth their evidence, if they have any: "bring forth your proof, should you speak the truth" (Quran 27: 64).

A quick glance at the life of the Infallible Imams (a) and their debates with various scholars, authorities of different non-monotheistic creeds, and dissidents reveals that they frequently employed logic, rational arguments, and reasoning. By using convincing logical arguments, the Imams were able to make the other party submit to the rightful teachings and convictions of Islam. Well-founded speech conforms fully to man's inner nature

and is consistent with his intellect and reason. Therefore, this type of speech is acceptable to everyone.

One of the downsides of cyberspace is that its users can be exposed to doubts and blasphemous content, either organized efforts or in the form of jokes. Providing sound and well-founded answers to these doubts or blasphemous remarks can sometimes require a significant amount of time to conduct the necessary research.

Since it is not possible for everyone to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to doubts and fallacies, the answers given to misleading remarks in cyberspace are often insufficient. As a result, these remarks often persist as doubts and continue to be circulated in cyberspace. This issue deals a severe blow to the religious convictions and faith of individuals in society, undermining their religious identity.

Under these circumstances, individuals can protect themselves against these dangers only if they have an adequate degree of media literacy and are motivated to seek the truth. This means not blindly accepting the content circulated on social media, but instead actively seeking credible and well-founded information with a truth-seeking attitude. Today, cyberspace has become a tool in the hands of the enemies of religion. They use it to spread doubts and fabricated interpretations of Islam that lack logic, or to promote excessive leniency and tolerance in order to undermine authentic Islamic convictions.

There are various accounts in the Quran of enemies using this strategy, which led to the demoralization of Muslims and even a shift in their convictions. Examples of these can be found in verse 83 of Surah al-Nisāʾ (Chapter 4) and verse 60 of Surah al-Aḥzāb (Chapter 33):

And when there comes to them disturbing or promising news, they broadcast it [without having ascertained its authenticity]. Yet, had they referred it to the Prophet or to those authorities among them, those who are of sound judgment would have gotten to the heart of the matter [and would then have notified them of the truth of the news]. And had it not been for Allah's Bounty and His Mercy upon you, you would, no doubt, have followed Satan [and gone astray], all except a few. (Quran 4: 83)

If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease and those who spread rumors in the City do not desist, We shall urge you

against them, then they will not be your neighbors therein except for a little while. (Quran 33: 60)

The reason why enemies use this strategy is to wage a type of soft war against the believing community. By creating and spreading doubts, they seek to undermine the faith of believers. Unfortunately, some naïve believers may also embrace these fabricated doubts and become accomplices of the enemy by spreading them further in cyberspace.

To thwart such enemy plots, people need to increase their knowledge of genuine Islamic principles and precepts, as well as strengthen their ability to engage in logical arguments and analyze content. Additionally, they can use the resources of websites and social media that are active in dispelling the doubts spread in cyberspace.

## 8. Beauty

The first step toward establishing effective communication is choosing the right words that are both appealing and effective in conveying the intended message. The concept of beauty mentioned here applies to both the outward structure of the speech and its contents.

In addition to its linguistic beauty and the literary figures used within it, beautiful speech can also evoke the beauty of the universe in the minds of its audience. Allah greatly values the beauty of speech and has enjoined people, rather affectionately and kindly, to use the best kind of discourse when speaking: "Tell My servants to speak that which is [the] best [of words]" (Quran 17: 53).

Religious leaders have consistently called upon people to speak beautifully, as reflected in the following statement by Imam ʿAlī (a): "Speak to others in a beautiful manner so that you may hear beautiful responses" (Tamīmī al-Āmidī 1410 AH, 158).

The collection of Imam ʿAlī's own words in Nahj al-Balāgha represents the epitome of beautiful speech and the pinnacle of eloquence. In one of his remarks, Imam ʿAlī (a) described his supreme command of the Arabic language and literature rather beautifully through the following simile: " We are indeed the masters of [eloquent] speech, as its roots run deep in our hearts and its branches extend over us like a shadow" (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, 354, hadith no. 233).

The beauty of speech derives from eloquence and the art of

rhetoric. Great literary figures and orators have regarded these two aspects of speech as important and necessary characteristics of both written and spoken language. Arabic rhetoricians have elaborated eloquence and rhetoric as follows: Eloquence, which can refer to both individual words and extended speech, is defined as the state in which speech is free from bombastic, grandiloquent, archaic, inharmonious, or cacophonous words or expressions. Additionally, for speech to be considered eloquent, it must also avoid offensive, petty, odious, raucous, incoherent, complicated, and ambiguous expressions. Rhetoric involves the use of language that is completely aligned with the purpose of the speech.

In other words, eloquence pertains to the quality of the language used in speech, while rhetoric pertains to the quality of the content and the meanings conveyed by that language. To put it differently, eloquence encompasses the physical appearance of speech, while rhetoric includes its semantic aspect (Makārim Shīrāzī 1386 Sh, 8: 114).

Even though the messages exchanged in cyberspace are often brief, they can have a profound impact on their audience. Examples of these include the aphorisms of important figures and great intellectuals, as well as the narratives and poems containing profound and influential content. Some sentences may convey facts, accounts of incidents, or sentiments that are difficult to express in words. These sentences are presented either alone or in combination with texts as "visual texts" in cyberspace.

Visual texts have become increasingly popular in social media, with users utilizing them as profile pictures or sharing them in the form of posts or stories. Using Quranic or religious visual texts as one's profile picture can be a positive step toward promoting Islam and raising awareness among those who have become too consumed by social media and may have lost sight of the purpose of life and how to communicate with others around them.

For instance, imagine a visual text containing the following Quranic verse: "Tell the believing men to cast down their eyes [and refrain from staring at stranger women]" (Quran 24: 30). A visual text of this nature could serve as a wake-up call for individuals who may be unaware that many of the things they encounter in cyberspace are, in fact, prohibited. By looking at obscene pictures or watching similar video clips, they may be unknowingly corrupting their souls.

## 9. Purposeful

According to the holy Quran, the universe and the world are purposeful (Quran 11: 7). As a result, everything in the world moves harmoniously and coherently toward a certain end, which is eternal peace and permanence. This state of eternal peace and permanence has been referred to in the Quran as the "permanent abode" (Quran 40: 39). As part of this world, humanity is not exempt from this principle, and thus our lives should be guided by a proper goal.

One of the most significant aspects of human life is our ability to communicate effectively and interact with our fellow human beings through the power of speech. Every human being possesses unique characteristics, meaning that individuals differ from one another in terms of their convictions, views, and ideas. Therefore, if they wish to converse with one another, they must first identify the purpose of their conversation, anticipate potential problems and obstacles that may arise during their interaction, and have logical solutions in mind for resolving issues and overcoming obstacles.

A rational speaker has logical and legitimate intentions behind their words, and avoiding meaningless and nonsensical speech is the result of this mindset. The significance of purposeful speech has been greatly emphasized in the hadiths of Shiite Imams. For instance, Imam ʿAlī (a) has been quoted as saying that "I am amazed at the one who speaks something that neither benefits him in this world nor does it bring him otherworldly reward" (Tamīmī al-Āmidī 1410 AH, 465, hadith no. 35).

This principle implies that communication in cyberspace should also be purposeful. At times, individuals use speech as a means of expressing their emotions, while at other times, it is used to obtain or convey information and knowledge. However, sometimes individuals may speak aimlessly, either to show off or simply because they are talkative. Engaging in such useless conversations not only results in a spiritual loss for individuals, but it also means that they are wasting their valuable time and energy on something that is completely worthless.

Messages are typically exchanged in cyberspace for one of the following purposes:

1. Instructive: This type of message is intended to provide the receiver with instructions on what to do or what to avoid doing.
2. Informative: These messages usually contain information, facts, or beliefs that are conveyed to the intended audience.
3. Persuasive: The purpose of these messages is to impress, persuade, or convince the audience so that they would do or embrace something.
4. Communicative: The primary purpose of these messages is to establish or maintain relationships among people in a community;

People produce content in cyberspace for specific purposes. By content, we mean a collection of ideas or notions that are conveyed to the audience through pictures, video clips, and voice or written messages.

One of the downsides of cyberspace is that adversaries may attempt to exploit its potential to advance their preconceived objectives. Creating anti-religious and anti-cultural content and disseminating it in cyberspace is one of the modern methods that adversaries use to weaken Islamic communities. Furthermore, promoting immoral behavior, celibacy, certain styles of dress that are not customary in various communities, and keeping animals as companions are some examples of how adversaries seek to spread Western lifestyles and values across the globe.

In addition, spreading religious and ideological skepticism, promoting blasphemy and sacrilege, disseminating false and aberrant creeds, and sowing division among Muslims are among the other tactics employed by adversaries, which have now taken the form of a "soft war."

However, no matter how hard adversaries attempt to undermine Islamic communities, Allah always has the upper hand, as He has also noted in the Quran: "and never has Allah granted the disbelievers a way to prevail over the believers" (Quran 4: 141).

The use of the indefinite Arabic term "sabīl" (way) in this verse, along with its universal negation, implies the negation of any possible "way." It then follows that not only will disbelievers be unable to have the upper hand over believers in logical arguments, but they will also be unable to do so militarily, politically,

culturally, or economically. In fact, this verse indicates that disbelievers will never be able to prevail over believers in any way (Makārim Shīrāzī 1374 Sh, 4: 175).

Therefore, it is essential for individuals to acquire a proper understanding of cyberspace and develop valuable content to disseminate through it. By doing so, they can turn these threats into opportunities and thwart adversaries' attempts to infiltrate Muslim communities and influence Muslims. Raising public awareness and providing a deeper understanding of this issue is crucial in achieving this goal.

Cyberspace and social media have become weapons in the hands of adversaries. One of the ways that adversaries utilize this new weapon to infiltrate and influence Muslim communities is by producing content based on falsehoods or by creating and disseminating doubts. Regrettably, due to the low level of awareness among many users of these new media and their failure to verify the content they are exposed to, such content often has harmful effects on these users.

## Conclusion

Quranic studies suggest that the Holy Quran, as a guide for mankind, contains comprehensive instructions for various aspects of human life, including indirect guidelines for their interaction with cyberspace. The Quranic teachings provide guidance for communication and interaction in the physical world, which can then be adapted to meet the requirements of cyberspace.

In summary, the Quran provides guidance on the following requirements for communication and exchanging messages in cyberspace:

1. The Holy Quran emphasizes the importance of beauty, gentleness, and leniency in speech. Believers are instructed to speak kindly and gently to others. According to the Quran, a message can only be effective if it is based on strong logic and if honesty is observed in its delivery.
2. The Quran emphasizes the importance of observing decency and chastity in social relationships. This principle applies to relationships in cyberspace as well.

The Quran teaches that adhering to this principle is crucial in protecting oneself against the potential harms of interactions and relationships, especially in cyberspace.

3. Messages sent and received through cyberspace should be well-founded and well-evidenced in a way that serves the most elevated human goals.

It is important to recognize that a significant portion of the harm caused by cyberspace today is due to a failure to comply with these requirements. If the teachings of the Quran are applied to this new aspect of human life, cyberspace can become a means of guiding human beings, which is the ultimate purpose of the Holy Quran and the reason why it was revealed to mankind.

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# A Model for Utilization of Cyberspace based on the Holy Quran and Hadiths

■ Mohammad Gholami[1]

## Abstract

In today's world, cyberspace has become an essential part of daily life. Its impact on the family environment can sometimes be greater than that of physical space. The damage caused by this uninvited guest cannot be denied, just as the current benefits of this platform cannot be ignored. Is it possible to create a safe and healthy path for utilizing this space by providing families with a suitable religious model? By developing an adequate answer to this question, we can take effective steps towards strengthening the foundations of family and ultimately, the cultural consolidation of society. However, if such a model is not presented to society, the destructive consequences of cyberspace may threaten the religious and cultural security of our society. The aim of this research is to answer the following question through an analytical-explanatory method, using the library research method: How can such a model be designed according to religious sources? According to the research findings, incorporating nine religious components into interactions with cyberspace can help in developing a successful model. These components are: cultural appropriateness, necessity, age, gender, time, specialized knowledge level, general knowledge level, family role, and societal role.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, Quran, hadiths, consumption model.

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## a. Media Literacy, Media Ethics, Media Behavior

Recently, the term "media literacy" has gained popularity in cultural circles. This phenomenon can be attributed to the increasing prevalence of media warfare by adversaries, and the need to develop a response to it. In recent years, the Western and Western-minded media have waged an open and unequal war on human and Islamic values. They are attempting to alter and reorganize the beliefs of their audiences. Equipping individuals with a comprehensive understanding of media culture, particularly media literacy, is one of the most effective ways to neutralize this cultural invasion. Media literacy is a multifaceted concept, and different perspectives exist regarding its definition. One possible definition is as follows: Media literacy involves the ability to access, categorize, deconstruct, analyze, and evaluate the media dimensions of a message and its values. It also involves cultural reprocessing and adaptation, as well as artistic objectification of meanings based on cultural principles, methods, and tools.

This definition comprises three critical dimensions. The first pertains to message analysis, which involves recognizing the sender, purpose, and production of the message. This dimension helps regulate our media consumption. The second dimension involves customizing messages for sharing with others. Finally, the third dimension relates to the creation of high quality and valuable media products.

Based on conventional definitions and the historical background of this term, media literacy is often viewed as a defensive and passive skill that only enables individuals to avoid harm from the media. However, some alternative definitions have moved beyond this passive view and expanded the concept of media literacy by including the aspect of production in the set of skills and competencies. Given the expanded definition of media literacy, which includes production skills, can we conclude that media literacy alone is sufficient to confront the media? Furthermore, is the mere production, distribution, and consumption of media sufficient?

It is important to note that media literacy is just one aspect of mastering media culture. Once one has gained an understanding of media literacy and acquired the necessary skills in media

production, distribution, and consumption, the next step is to implement these skills effectively. In fact, "media behavior" is even more important than media literacy. A user who has acquired media literacy, but does not adjust their behavior in using media based on this literacy, has gained an unproductive skill set.

To transform media literacy into media behavior, it is essential to have trust or belief in media information. Without trust in the information, an individual's behavior will not change accordingly. Therefore, it is only when media information becomes an integral part of an individual's beliefs that it can lead to appropriate behavior.

This is where the concept of "media ethics" comes into play. In essence, media ethics involves integrating media literacy into an individual's beliefs and values. When some Muslims claimed to have faith, the Holy Quran responded as follows: "The Bedouins say, 'We have faith.' Say, 'You do not have faith yet; rather, say, ''We have embraced Islam,'' for faith has not yet entered into your hearts" (Quran 49:14). Media literacy alone is not sufficient to correct media behavior. However, if media literacy is transformed into media ethics, it can guide behavior accordingly.

Media literacy serves as the initial step towards achieving a proper culture of media usage. The second step involves transforming this skill into capability and ethics. After acquiring the necessary capability, the desired media behavior will follow as the third step.

By outlining the essential components of correcting media behavior, this article aims to assist readers in designing a sensible model for utilizing all forms of media, including cyberspace.

## b. Practical Model of Utilizing Cyberspace

Imam ʿAlī (a) delivered an enlightening speech to Kumayl and stated, "O Kumayl! Your religion is like your brother, so be vigilant in safeguarding your religion as much as possible" (Mufīd 1413 AH, 283).

The potential risks associated with using cyberspace cannot be overlooked; thus, it is crucial to exercise caution and mindfulness when utilizing this space. By introducing a suitable religious model, the potential risks associated with using cyberspace can be significantly reduced or eliminated altogether. By examining religious sources, it becomes evident that adhering to the

following components can aid in designing an effective and desirable model. In a broader perspective, the following nine main components (which are not exhaustive and may be supplemented by others) can be introduced in this context.

## 1. Cultural Suitability

The first criterion for utilizing media and cyberspace is to ensure that media products are appropriate and culturally compatible. When there is such proportionality in various aspects, a common language can emerge.

## Religious Culture

The initial step in achieving cultural compatibility is to compare media products with Islamic law (Sharia) and its objectives. Therefore, it is necessary to learn the rules of media, particularly new media. Furthermore, conformity with ideological principles and moral propositions is one of the most crucial aspects of religious culture.

Upon careful examination of the evidence for the prohibition of most sins, it becomes clear that the criteria for many sins, such as lying, backbiting, spying, gazing upon the forbidden, neglecting the prohibition of evil, and casting doubt, are the same in both real life and cyberspace. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the manifestations of these sins in cyberspace.

Here are some examples. A lie is a piece of information that is not true and contradicts the external reality (Qummī 1387 AH, 410; Khomeini 1415 AH, 2: 48). When considering information as a lie, there is no difference between speaking, writing, or even nonverbal communication such as gestures made with hands, eyebrows, or head, as long as they do not reflect reality. Similarly, presenting a false sign is also considered a form of lying. Some Muslim jurists state:

It is evident that lying is not established merely by speaking and uttering words, in the sense of being a statement that comes from the mouth and contradicts reality ... Lying is typically a statement that contradicts reality and is not limited to verbal communication. It can also include written communication, gestures, and other forms of expression. This includes information found in newspapers, magazines, and diaries. (Khomeini 1415 AH, 2: 453)

A lie is not restricted to verbal communication but is customarily defined as a piece of information that contradicts reality. This includes written communication and nonverbal cues such as gestures. Therefore, lies can also be found in written form, such as in magazines and newspapers. Based on this definition, certain media actions, such as spreading rumors or misinformation, can be considered forms of lying.

To establish the criterion for considering backbiting a sin, we can refer to a hadith from the Prophet (s): "I asked the Messenger of Allah (s), 'What is backbiting?' He replied, 'To mention something about your brother that he would dislike.' I said, 'But what if what I say is true?' He replied, 'If what you say is true, then you have backbitten him, but if it is not true, then you have slandered him'" (Tūsī 1414 AH, 537). The narrator asked the Prophet (s) about the criterion for backbiting, and he (s) replied, "Mentioning something about your brother that he dislikes" (i.e., discussing the faults of your fellow believer that they do not wish to be made known).

Abd al-Rahmān Siyāba narrated an authentic hadith from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), in which he stated: "Backbiting is to mention the faults that Allah has concealed in your brother" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2: 358).

It is worth noting that some jurists believe that "defamation" must also be present for a statement to be considered backbiting (Shahīd al-Thānī, n.d., 284). In other words, if the intention behind mentioning someone's faults is to discredit and humiliate them, it is considered backbiting; otherwise, it is not. Backbiting is also prevalent in cyberspace. One of the most apparent examples of virtual backbiting is the publicizing of people's hidden sins without their consent, particularly when they do not wish for them to be made known. It is now common to see instances where a football player or an actor, for instance, commits an inappropriate action, which is rapidly shared in the form of a video or photograph on online platforms.

Another frequent transgression in cyberspace is spying, an act that is explicitly prohibited in the Holy Quran: "And do not spy on one another" (Quran 49: 12). In the context of the Quran, spying refers to the act of secretly investigating and gathering information about others without their knowledge or consent. Allamah Ṭabāṭabāʾī

further explains this term, stating that spying involves following and researching people's hidden affairs in order to obtain information about them (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1390 AH, 18: 323).

Capturing photos and videos of individuals' private lives and sharing them online can be considered a form of spying, as it involves intruding into their personal space and sharing information about them without their consent. It is worth noting that even events that occur in public cannot be filmed or photographed without the consent of those involved, and if someone captures a video or photo of them without their permission, it is considered a violation that can lead to legal action (Mansour 1395 Sh, 158).

Viewing inappropriate pictures and videos is another common transgression in cyberspace. However, many users may be unaware that this is a sinful act, particularly when such content is shared in the form of humorous clips and pictures. Hence, it is crucial to provide proper guidance on the prohibited acts and behaviors in order to address this pervasive problem. In Islam, it is permissible to look at the face and hands of a Muslim woman, specifically the roundness of her face and the area of her hands from the wrist to the fingers, on the condition that these areas are free from makeup and the act of looking is free from any lustful intentions or fear of committing sin. As for a non-Muslim woman, one may only look at the parts of her body that are typically exposed in public, provided that the two conditions mentioned earlier are met. Looking at any part of her body beyond this limit is considered impermissible. Likewise, there are also criteria for a woman to look at the body of a non-mahram man (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1419 AH, 5: 439; Khomeini 1366 Sh, 2: 243). It is important to note that these guidelines apply to any situation, whether humorous or serious, and to any form of media, including photos and videos.

Given that cyberspace can facilitate the occurrence of various sinful acts, forbidding evil takes on various forms in this context. Users may encounter sins such as the reception of prohibited images and videos, false information, insults and defamation (often in the form of backbiting and spying), gambling offers, and so on. The same principles and limitations of enjoining good and forbidding evil that apply in the physical world also hold true in

the virtual world. As such, initially, one should express their disapproval inwardly, and then proceed to voice their opposition verbally or in writing, such as by sending emojis, and so on.

## Political Culture

The second step towards achieving cultural compatibility involves aligning the product with the political culture of the country. The political culture of a nation may include concepts such as elections, political participation, the autonomy of political entities, jihad, martyrdom, religious authority, and so on. Any opposition to these concepts may result in cultural incompatibility. Numerous values in a country's political culture are often derived from religious sources. The Holy Quran, in particular, provides various insights into how to counter the soft war waged by adversaries in the political arena of a target society. At times, the Quran identifies humiliation and weakening of the audience as a tactic employed by the enemy: "Thus did he mislead his people and they obeyed him" (Quran 43: 54). In other instances, the Quran attributes the act of public display and showing off to the enemy as a means to weaken the spirit of competition among Muslims: "Never be misled by the bustle of the faithless in the towns" (Quran 3: 196). At other times, the Quran refers to the deceptive tactics employed by the enemy: "Pharaoh said, 'O Haman! Build me a tower so that I may reach the routes. -the routes of the heavens- and take a look at the God of Moses, and indeed I consider him a liar" (Quran 40: 36-37). The Quran also expresses how the destruction of the competitor's character can be used as a ploy by the enemy: "Who seeks to expel you from your land with his magic. So what do you advise?" (Quran 26: 35).

It is important to note that in today's world, the media is considered a powerful tool in the realization of these plots by the enemy.

## Social Culture

The third step towards achieving cultural compatibility involves aligning the product with the social culture of the country. In the social culture, values such as mutual respect, friendly relations, and the observance of Iranian-Islamic traditions are commonly upheld. However, what we are currently witnessing in cyberspace is the

enemy's attempt to globalize and organize social relations in societies based on non-religious lifestyles, which runs counter to the values of Iranian-Islamic culture.

It is evident that this lifestyle clashes with the religious and social culture of our society across various social dimensions. The American lifestyle, in particular, seeks to promote promiscuity and free communication in society, whereas the religious and social values of the Iranian people resist pornography and liberal culture and do not accept such behaviors.

The Holy Quran provides detailed guidance on the appropriate ways for men and women to communicate with each other. In a beautiful verse, it explains the rationale behind these regulations, stating, "That is more decent for them" (Quran 24: 30).

Furthermore, a prominent characteristic of the American lifestyle is the pursuit of extreme pleasure and personal gain, whereas the Quran and religious leaders constantly command sacrifice and prioritizing the needs of others over personal benefit. The Holy Quran praises the sacrifices made by the people of the cloak, stating, "For the love of Him, they feed the needy, the orphan and the prisoner" (Quran 76: 8).

Another point of differentiation between the Islamic lifestyle and the Western lifestyle is the emphasis on respect and kindness towards others, particularly parents. The Quran also stresses the importance of treating the general society with kindness and compassion, commanding believers to respond to the evil of others with good, as stated in the following verse: "Good and evil [conduct] are not equal. Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] he between whom and you was enmity, will then be as though he were a sympathetic friend" (Quran 41: 34). In addition, in its instruction on proper treatment of one's parents, the Quran says: "Lower the wing of humility to them, mercifully, and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]!'" (Quran 17: 24).

Another point of divergence between religious social culture and liberal culture is the emphasis on social compassion and benevolence, as well as the propagation of goodness and the prevention of the spread of evil. This crucial matter, which holds a special place in the hearts of the Iranian people, is referred to in religious sources as "enjoining what is good and forbidding what

is evil." A chapter in *al-Kāfī*, titled "The Chapter on Caring for the Affairs of Muslims, Advising Them, and Benefiting Them", highlights the importance of promoting this authentic social culture through eleven hadiths, underscoring the religion's emphasis on this social obligation. One of these hadiths highlights the idea that people and society as a whole are dependent on Allah and are considered part of His family: "All creatures are dependents of Allah, so the most beloved of creatures to Allah is the one who benefits God's dependents and brings happiness to the household" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2: 164).

The necessity of enjoining good and forbidding evil in society is emphasized in several Quranic verses, including the following: "You are the best nation [ever] brought forth for mankind: you bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and have faith in Allah" (Quran 3: 110).

## Economic Culture

The fourth step towards achieving cultural compatibility involves aligning the product with the economic culture of the country. In the economic culture, values such as cooperation, charity, and the avoidance of usury and illicit income are commonly upheld. However, the economic practices that are popular in cyberspace can deviate from this model. Cyberspace users may encounter numerous dangers, such as gambling, betting, a focus on personal gain at the expense of religious financial obligations like Khums and Zakat, and so on. These practices can be considered hazardous to the economic culture of the society. Imam ʿAlī (a) emphasized the importance of learning the jurisprudential rulings of economics before engaging in any economic activity, to avoid falling into the trap of illegitimate acts such as usury. He said, "He who trades without knowledge gets involved in usury" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 5: 154).

## 2. The Need

The second criterion for adopting a media consumption regime is based on the audience's needs. It is important to determine our actual needs for media products, as creating a need for such products can be considered artificial. By carefully examining the product and comparing it to our needs, we can determine the

authenticity of the need and make an informed decision.

It is important to note that if media consumption is prioritized over human needs, it can lead to numerous problems that cannot be compensated for. While media is not a fundamental human need, it can play a supportive role based on human needs and can have a significant impact in this regard.

Ensuring accuracy in setting demands based on real needs is a strict religious command, and its importance can be found in religious sources through keywords such as "parsimony." Imam al-Sajjad (a) emphasized this point, stating, "Fear God and be frugal" (Saduq 1362 Sh, 1: 64). The Prophet Muhammad (s) also highlighted the importance of moderation and contentment in sustenance, stating, "The best sustenance is that which is enough to meet one's needs" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 74: 168).

## 3. The Age

Another criterion for adjusting the media consumption model is age. Although age is not a topic in the media, it is a crucial factor in media consumption due to its unique characteristics. Naturally, the way media is used will differ at every age, which makes understanding the age group's needs and preferences equally important. The Prophet (s) spoke about the different stages of life, stating, "A child is a master for seven years, a slave for seven years, and a minister for seven years. Therefore, if you are content with his nature at the age of twenty-one, give thanks to God. Otherwise, leave him alone, for you have been excused in the sight of God" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1406 AH, 21: 476).

When it comes to cyberspace, age proportions should be taken into account from at least two perspectives. The first perspective is the risk of exposure to false information. As both correct and incorrect information are present in cyberspace, it is crucial to ensure the safety of different age groups, especially children who may be more vulnerable to such content. Imam ʿAlī (a) emphasized the importance of guiding young people in his famous letter to his son, Imam al-Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (a), stating, "Certainly, the heart of a young man is like uncultivated land. It accepts whatever is strewn on it. So, I hastened to mold you properly before your heart hardened up and your mind became occupied" (Sayyid al-Raḍī 1414 AH, letter 31).

The second perspective is that of sexual education. According to religious sources, the act of gazing upon someone with lustful intent is prohibited for individuals of any age: "Tell the faithful men to cast down their looks… And tell the faithful women to cast down their looks…" (Quran 24: 29-30).

However, since the mind of a younger individual may be more susceptible to confusion and may retain thoughts and imaginations for longer periods, it is crucial to provide more intensive care during this stage of life. This care, known as sexual education, is emphasized in religious texts as a means of guiding individuals towards healthy sexual behavior and preventing harmful practices. For instance, Imam al-Kāẓim (a) emphasized the importance of respecting personal boundaries and privacy during childhood, stating, "When a girl reaches the age of six, it is not permissible for a man who is not her mahram to kiss or hug her" (Ṭūsī 1407 AH, 7: 461).

Furthermore, another hadith recommends to separate the sleeping arrangements of children once they reach the age of six. It is narrated, "He used to separate the boys in their beds at the age of six" (Ṣadūq 1413 AH, 3: 436). Moreover, the Quran emphasizes the importance of parents being mindful of their children's sexual education and the significance of teaching them to seek permission before entering their parents' private space (Quran 24: 59). Based on these commandments, it becomes evident that carefully addressing children's sexual matters is highly significant.

## 4. The Gender

Gender is an additional factor that affects how men and women engage with media. Certain media content is tailored specifically for men, while others are created with women in mind. Recognizing the distinct characteristics of both genders helps us navigate toward our desired objectives. Women exhibit certain characteristics such as being conservative and restrained, displaying concern for the emotions and feelings of others, experiencing heightened emotions, seeking security, demonstrating dependency, and being detail-oriented. On the other hand, men can display traits such as dominance, independence, emotional control, and a sense of responsibility.

Considering these gender differences, the utilization of

cyberspace is also influenced accordingly. Specific groups, channels, dress styles, hairstyles, and other aspects are designed specifically for women, just as there are similar groups tailored for men. When examining religious sources, it becomes evident that this gender differentiation is acknowledged within the religious framework. The teachings and actions of religious leaders affirm this perspective. For instance, one of the agreements made between the Prophet (s) and newly converted Muslim women was the pledge to avoid being alone with non-mahram men in private settings: "The Messenger of Allah (s) established a covenant with women … to refrain from sitting privately with non-mahram men" (Ṭabarsī 1412 AH, 233). Lady Zahra (a), in a reflective statement, highlights the noble stance of a Muslim woman to make an effort in avoiding interactions with non-mahram men and refraining from being in environments closely associated with men: "It is preferable for women not to see men, and not to be seen by men" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 20: 67). Imam ʿAlī (a), in his guidance to Imam al-Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (s), advised against involving women in exclusive men's affairs or assigning men's tasks to them. He explained that this prohibition is aimed at preserving the beauty of women, as they are inherently modest and delicate like flowers. Challenging and strenuous work is not expected from them.

## 5. The Time

Human activities can be categorized into two types: constrained and unconstrained. Constrained activities hold significant importance, and media consumption should be viewed in relation to these activities. Additionally, it is important to note that leisure time should not be solely focused on finding tasks to engage with media, but should be defined based on other meaningful relationships and pursuits.

Media engagement and behavior should not be solely regarded as leisure time activities, but also as a valuable educational pursuit. By planning and managing media usage for yourself and your family, you can avoid excessive reliance on media for mere entertainment purposes. It is important to recognize that leisure and enjoyment are essential human needs, and they can serve as catalysts for productivity throughout the day. Imam al-Riḍā (a) has advised to

allocate one's time into four parts, with one part dedicated to permissible pleasures. This allotted time for enjoyment serves as a means to effectively manage the other three parts: "Strive to divide your time into four: a time for devoting yourself to Allah, a time for earning a livelihood, a time for socializing with trustworthy companions who remind you of your shortcomings and genuinely care for your well-being, and a time when you can be alone to indulge in permissible pleasures. By managing this time for enjoyment, you can better navigate and balance the other three aspects of your life" (Majlisī 1403 AH, 75: 346).

Nevertheless, excessive indulgence in entertainment can lead to regret and neglect of important responsibilities for users of cyberspace. Time is one of the most precious assets for every individual. All the verses that emphasize the imminence of the Resurrection and the fleeting nature of time can be examined within the same framework, such as: "Mankind's reckoning has drawn near to them, yet they are disregardful in [their] obliviousness" (Quran 21: 1). Furthermore, the verses that encourage competition in performing good deeds also underscore the importance of being mindful of time: "Take the lead towards forgiveness from your Lord" (Quran 57:21) and "Hasten towards your Lord's forgiveness" (Quran 3: 133).

The Prophet (s) advised Abū Dharr to prioritize and make the most of his time, emphasizing its significance by saying: "O Abū Dharr! Value your time more than your Dirhams and Dinars" (Ṭabarsī 1412 AH, 460). The aforementioned hadith, along with the instruction to divide one's time into four parts, highlights the importance of effective time management. While cyberspace offers numerous advantages and benefits, it can also become a major time-consuming factor. Neglecting the necessary evaluation of online content can lead to significant time wastage.

## 6. The Specialized Knowledge

Specialized knowledge refers to information that is specific to a particular field or domain. Possessing specialized knowledge grants individuals permission to access and engage with specific media products. The question is, according to Islamic rulings, is it legitimate for a person to engage in a field outside of their proficiency and expertise?

In religious culture, great emphasis is placed on the source of

the message, as evidenced by the words of Imam al-Jawād (a): "When one listens to a speaker, it is akin to worshipping them. If the message conveyed by the speaker is divine, the listener is worshipping God. However, if the message is Satanic in nature, then the listener has worshipped Satan" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 6: 434). Individuals who lack the necessary expertise in the field of message analysis are not typically regarded as valid contributors in specialized channels and groups.

The arguments supporting the prohibition of the usage of misleading books can be relevant in this context as well, as preserving one's beliefs is both a rational decision and a Quranic directive. This is evident from the analysis of prominent jurists like al-Shaykh al-Anṣārī, who have emphasized the responsibility emphasized in certain Quranic verses, such as Quran (31: 6): "And among the people is he who buys hadith for himself, in order to lead astray from the path of God without knowledge, and takes it as a joke. For them is a humiliating punishment" (Anṣārī 1411 AH, 1: 115).

Ayatollah Motahhari's statements in this context can also be extended to encompass the utilization of cyberspace, particularly in cases involving deceit and false advertising. For instance, consider a scenario where an individual deliberately omits or alters a portion of a sentence or a Quranic verse, subsequently presenting this distorted statement as evidence. Similarly, one may selectively remove elements from historical facts and exploit this incomplete information to support personal agendas or assert scientific credibility, despite the inherent distortions within their claims.

Deception must not be allowed to thrive under any circumstances. In Islam, the act of buying and selling misleading books is explicitly prohibited, and even the permission to engage in such transactions is not granted due to the potential social harm they can cause (Yazdi 1379 Sh, 266).

## 7. General Knowledge Level

An individual's general knowledge serves as a foundation for processing and evaluating raw data, allowing them to confirm or reject its validity. The extent of this knowledge plays a crucial role in shaping one's approach to utilizing the media.

Indeed, media literacy can be regarded as a vital form of general

knowledge essential for navigating and utilizing media and cyberspace effectively. It is highly recommended that every user acquire media literacy skills to ensure optimal and responsible use of these tools, minimizing potential harm.

The concept and attributes of media literacy have been previously addressed. This section highlights a particular aspect of media literacy. Rumors, fake news, and false information circulating in cyberspace inevitably undermine audience trust and may even impact their worldview. Consequently, it is essential to consider the following points (which encompass general knowledge applicable to all facets of cyberspace) when encountering such news, in an effort to exercise discernment and critical thinking:

### First: Source Validation

When evaluating news sources, it is prudent to approach media outlets affiliated with perceived adversaries with suspicion. Imam ʿAlī (a) advises in his letter to Mālik al-Ashtar: "Do not be overly trusting of your enemy" (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 53).

When an English media outlet assumes the role of a news source, when supporters of the Pahlavi regime and the US president express concerns about Iranian people, and when media outlets associated with the People's Mojahedin Organization (a designated terrorist group) exhibit vehement responses, then in such instances, it becomes essential to exercise caution by meticulously verifying and researching the news until a reasonable level of certainty is attained, as the Holy Quran says: "O you who have believed, if an evil-doer comes to you with news, verify it, lest you strike people out of ignorance, then become remorseful for what you have done" (Quran 49: 6).

### Second: Implication Validation

It is crucial to actively seek evidence and analyze news before simply spreading it. Rather than accepting news at face value, it is important to compare it with verified information. The presence of significant doubts and uncertainties necessitates an individual's personal effort in assessing and verifying information, as there is no one-size-fits-all solution for providing ready-made information to everyone.

It is advisable to allocate sufficient time to carefully analyze

information before making a decision regarding its acceptance or rejection, as the Holy Quran says: "And do not follow that of which you have no knowledge, for the hearing, the sight and the heart are all of these for which they will be questioned" (Quran 17: 36).

The ear serves as the gateway to hearing, the eye provides insights, and the heart acts as the gateway to thoughts and imagination. Human information is predominantly acquired through these three faculties, and Allah has emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge and certainty in accepting information through all three.

## 8. Family Role

Each family member has a unique role that requires careful attention. Improper use of cyberspace can negatively impact the fulfillment of these roles. Spouses, for instance, should prioritize kindness, respect, patience, benevolence, and fostering joy and happiness in their interactions. Fathers, as the head of the family, have the responsibility of being exemplary role models. They should manage relationships between family members, ensure the safety and harmony of the home, and show dedication to the education and well-being of their loved ones. This duty is divinely mandated by God Almighty: "O you who have faith! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel will be people and stones" (Quran 66: 6).

A mother plays a critical role in creating an environment conducive to the growth and development of the family. She should prioritize the education and upbringing of her children, fostering an atmosphere of love and affection within the household through patience and composure. Such a mother embodies the profound wisdom behind the Prophetic saying: "Paradise is under the feet of mothers" (Nūrī 1408 AH, 15: 180).

In addition to obeying their parents, it is important for a child within the family to prioritize kindness and love towards them as their ultimate goal. They should endeavor to exhibit patience and understanding in response to any harshness or difficult circumstances they may encounter from their parents. The following verse from the Quran provides a practical and exemplary model for treating one's parents: "Lower the wing of humility to them, mercifully, and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on

them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]!'" (Quran 17: 24). Moreover, siblings should practice cooperation, empathy, support, and skill-building in their relationship.

The consolidation, vitality, and warmth of the family atmosphere hold such significance that even the smallest gesture contributing to them is regarded as an act of worship (ʿIbādāt). The Prophet (s) asserted, "When someone purchases something for their family and presents it to them, it is akin to giving charity to the poor. When he brings happiness to his daughter, it is as if he has liberated a slave. And when he brings joy to his son, it is as if he has shed tears out of reverence for God. And the reward for shedding tears in awe of God is Paradise" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 21: 514).

On the contrary, any action that undermines the strength of this sacred institution is detested in religion. Hence, the Prophet (s) declares, "Divorce shakes the Throne of God" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 22: 9). Therefore, if the utilization of cyberspace interferes with fulfilling one's family responsibilities and erodes the bonds of affection within the family, it becomes imperative to reassess such an approach.

## 9. Social Role

The selection and consumption of media are directly influenced by the social roles individuals assume. This influence is shaped by the characteristics inherent in these roles. For instance, someone who holds the responsibility of disseminating information, raising awareness about media literacy, and monitoring potential risks and opportunities as an observer, naturally dedicates more time to engaging with cyberspace. Likewise, an individual involved in cultural pursuits, whose work demands understanding contemporary matters and providing clarifications, as stated in the hadith: "One who is knowledgeable about the affairs of their time will not be plagued by uncertainties" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1: 27), must possess knowledge about the content and happenings in cyberspace. Furthermore, individuals whose profession revolves around cyberspace will naturally need to have a deeper involvement with it due to their social position. However, if someone's social presence and influence are not directly tied to cyberspace, spending excessive time in this virtual realm may not be justified.

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## Conclusion

Media users, in general, and users of cyberspace, in particular, should not only acquire media literacy but also equip themselves with media ethics and adopt responsible media behavior to fully utilize this platform. Religious sources provide a framework that can serve as a model for ideal media behavior. Drawing from the criteria derived from the Quran and hadiths, our family's media consumption model will be distinctive. By combining and considering these criteria as a whole, we can develop a more comprehensive approach to using cyberspace. This will equip us with the ability to adapt and modify our media consumption model effectively.

These criteria, which provide a general framework (with other cases referring back to these nine criteria), include cultural suitability, necessity, age, gender, timing, level of specialized information, level of general knowledge, family role, and social role. By adhering to this model derived from religious sources, the use of virtual space can be viewed as an opportunity-driven tool. However, if this model is not followed, the destructive and threatening aspects of virtual space are likely to overshadow its potential benefits.

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# Cyberspace and Religious Education in Family: Challenges and Solutions

■ Mohammad Ehsani[1]

## Abstract

The present article on cyber threats and vulnerabilities in religious education for families and its prevention strategies has been crafted through a combination of rigorous field research and careful analysis of relevant religious texts. This descriptive analytical research aims to investigate the challenges that cyberspace presents to religious education within families, and to propose solutions that can help ensure the safety of families in this context. The vast virtual environment of cyberspace has impacted almost all families and users in some way or another. The analysis derived from this research indicates that cyberspace has multiple impacts on the family and religious education of children. Cyberspace not only affects spousal relationships but also undermines children's religious upbringing, destabilizes families, weakens religious beliefs, and impacts religious mindsets and behaviors. To address these challenges, several solutions have been proposed, including religious education, strengthening moral values, teaching from the Quran, providing monotheistic education, and introducing positive role models to children. Implementing these measures helps safeguard children in cyberspace and enhances their religious education.

**Keywords**: family, religious education, cyberspace, challenge, solution

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## Introduction

In today's world, cyberspace has become an integral part of family life. It is rare to find a family that does not use this space in some capacity, whether it be for communication, networking, browsing websites, engaging with blogs, or joining groups. The vast expansion of communication tools, networks, and online platforms has preoccupied almost everyone on the planet. While cyberspace facilitates human relations and various scientific and social activities, it also presents significant risks and challenges for users, particularly children. It is crucial for researchers to consider these risks and make serious efforts to identify and mitigate them. They must also caution families about the dangers and find ways to prevent the younger generation from falling victim to potential threats. This research aims to address concerns about the influence of cyberspace on family dynamics, particularly in regards to religious education. There is concrete evidence that some family members, particularly vulnerable children, are exposed to significant risks. As such, the necessity of researching and addressing this issue is clear and requires no further argument.

The primary focus of this research is to explore the challenges that cyberspace presents to religious education within families and to identify potential solutions to address these challenges. The sub-questions that arise from the main research question are as follows:

1) What intellectual and ideological challenges does cyberspace present for religious education within families?

2) What are effective methods to prevent or address these challenges?

3) What are the practical and behavioral risks associated with the use of cyberspace by families and how do these risks impact the religious education of family members?

4) What are effective strategies to prevent cyberspace from becoming a source of danger for families?

The purpose of this article is to provide a descriptive and analytical study of the challenges and threats that cyberspace poses to religious education within families. Additionally, the article aims to identify effective ways to prevent and overcome these challenges. This article will present introductory points followed by an analysis of the threats and risks posed by

cyberspace to religious education within families. Existing literature and research on the topic will be relied upon to identify effective methods to address these challenges.

The background of cyberspace and its impact on families has been extensively studied and discussed in various books, articles, and academic conferences, symposiums, and meetings. A comprehensive search was conducted to find an article on the same topic in various online databases and libraries, but none was found. This suggests that there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the intersection of cyberspace and religious education within families. Several relevant works have been published on the topic of cyberspace and its impact on religious education within families, including:

1) "Challenges and solutions of Islamic education in cyberspace";

2) "Investigating the relationship between negative effects of cyberspace and religious education within families";

3) "The effect of cyberspace on religiosity and family values: a case study in Isfahan."

## General Concepts

### 1. Cyberspace

Cyberspace refers to the complex virtual environment that results from the interaction of people, software, and services on the internet, using various technology devices and networks. Unlike physical environments, cyberspace has no tangible existence. The capacities of cyberspace, where human interactions occur over computer networks through email, games, or simulations, have impacted all facets of family life. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran has stated: "Cyberspace has become a vital source of power in today's word, dominating human life across the globe. There are individuals who conduct all their work solely through cyberspace" (Khamenei, March 24, 2020). The advantages and disadvantages of cyberspace should be thoroughly studied and identified.

### 2. Family

The family is the smallest social unit, formed by the union of at least two individuals, a man and a woman, whose coexistence is based on a

religious and legal marriage. Over time, the family may expand as children are born and additional members are added to the household.

## 3. Religious Education

The term "religious education" is comprised of two words—"education" and "religious"—which will be further clarified as we delve into their meanings. The meaning of "religion" can be approached in two general ways. Firstly, from the perspective of the religion itself, it can be considered as a system that functions independently of man, comprising of creed, cult, method, sharia, belief, and faith (Azerbaijani 1999, 8; Dehkhoda, entry "religion"; Azarnoush 2002, entry "religion"). Scholars of religion argue that religion refers to the belief in the essence of man, the world, and the related regulations that apply to human life (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 2000, 27). Religion can be defined as a set of beliefs, morals, and practical rules revealed by God to guide mankind (Javadi Amoli 2001, 26). It is also considered a system of true beliefs and practices that have an effect on man's attainment of perfection and true happiness (Mesbah Yazdi 1998, 111).

The second approach to defining religion is that it refers to adherence to sharia, as well as religiousness and religiosity—human traits that describe one as being devout and pious. Religion, from this perspective, is closely tied to man's overt behaviors. It is believed that one's adherence to religion and sharia should be evident through their behavior and countenance (Azerbaijani 1999, 8). Religious education is an effort to instill religious values and practices in children and family members, with the goal of ensuring their material and spiritual well-being and happiness.

## 4. Pathology

Pathology is the study of the nature and causes of diseases, disorders, anomalies, disharmony, and imbalances. More broadly and metaphorically speaking, it encompasses various aspects of life, including the family and the relationships of its members, which may be exposed to various mental and behavioral disorders (Seddigh Sarvestani 2009, 10). The term "pathology" was primarily concerned with examining tissues, organs, bodily fluids, and conducting autopsies in order to diagnose and study diseases. Later, the sociologist Durkheim used the term in a sociological context, referring to deviant behaviors that are deemed immoral

or unacceptable by societies (Crumby 1997, 354). The concept of pathology applies the medical metaphor of pathology to describe and explain problems caused by cyberspace that may affect the religious education of families. The concept of pathology seeks to identify and highlight the negative effects of cyberspace on the religious commitment of family members in Muslim families.

## 5. Solution

The term "solution" refers to the method or approach that helps a person achieve their desired goal. In everyday language, "method" refers to a way of doing something or the quality of being well planned and organized. It has been defined as a systematic approach to achieving a goal (Hosseini Nasab and Ali Aghdam 1996, 489). Method can be defined as a well-organized procedure for studying facts and concepts (Shoarinejad 1996, 242). It is also seen as the mode of operation or the means by which one can achieve a particular objective (Farahani 1999, 369). In this article, the term "solution" refers to the methods of addressing the risks and challenges of cyberspace that may impact the religious education of families. These challenges are often unknown, and efforts are made to identify and inform families about them in order to mitigate their negative effects.

### Components of Religious Education

Religious education comprises several components that must first be possessed by the educator in order to guide the learner towards intellectual and spiritual perfection. These components can then be transferred to the learner and reinforced within them. Religious education is based on the existential structure of both the educator and the learner. It comprises several key components, including religious thinking, religious faith, religious orientation, and religious practice.

### 1. Religious Thinking

Religious thinking is a crucial component of religious education within families, as it forms the basis for guiding children towards correct and strong beliefs. The importance of religious thinking lies in its ability to provide motivation, purpose, and strength to

the learner, enabling them to strive towards the final goal with resilience. This is because an understanding of the religious knowledge and profound perspectives of the school of Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's Household) is essential to achieving the lofty goals of Islamic education. Religious thinking, which encompasses the belief in the origin and resurrection of human life, may face obstacles, some of which originate from cyberspace. Thus, managing cyberspace is essential in order to mitigate its negative impacts on religious education (Khamenei, July 13, 2020).

## 2. Religious Orientation

The emotional dimension and tendencies of humans are crucial aspects of their existence, as they are the root cause of many of their actions. In order for these tendencies, which are inclinations towards particular characteristics or types of behavior, to be manifested in the external world, they must go through several stages: receiving, reacting, valuing, regulating values, and instantiation of values within the human personality (Vakilian 2016, 21-37). Once these stages are completed, a tendency towards something arises and the person becomes interested in it. The formation of values within a person's personality can have a significant impact on their behavior, as human behavior is influenced by their beliefs and the value system that they have accepted intellectually and emotionally (Safavi 1997, 60-63). The love of God is a fundamental aspect of religious education and should be at the center of pedagogical activities in the process of educational efforts made by parents within the family setting.

## 3. Religious Faith

Religious faith is a significant component of religious education that emerges in the learner after the formation of religious thinking and orientation. It is only after this stage that the heart can be confirmed and linked to the beloved. According to the Quran (57:19), faith involves belief in God, the Day of Judgment, prophets, angels, and the Quran. Religious faith can be likened to a tree in the heart of a learner, serving as the source of all moral virtues. In its perfect form, religious faith requires belief not only in God's existence but also in prophethood and resurrection (Mesbah Yazdi, 2005, 1: 130). The cultivation and reinforcement

of religious faith should take place within the family environment, as childhood is the most appropriate time for children to learn. If parents fulfill their duty, they can utilize effective methods to cultivate the spirit of faith and obedience in their children.

## 4. Religious Behavior

Religious behavior, also known as "righteous deed" or good deed, is repeatedly mentioned in the verses of the Quran. The Quran provides various examples of righteous behavior and calls upon everyone to engage in such actions. In fact, there is a logical order between thinking, tendency, faith, and action, where religious thinking and tendency lead to religious belief, and in turn, result in righteous action. Righteous action is considered to be the product of faith in God (Mesbah Yazdi, 2005, 1:156). Therefore, those who have strong faith are more likely to perform righteous deeds.

## Cyberspace-Induced Challenges for Religious Education

The challenges posed by cyberspace for the religious education of families have various dimensions that cannot all be covered in one article. To make it easier to understand, these challenges are initially divided into two categories: intellectual challenges and practical challenges. Each category is accompanied by a brief conceptual explanation and examples. The main objective of this article is to discuss the challenges and risks associated with cyberspace in the context of religious education for families, particularly children. As such, the focus will be on the negative aspects of cyberspace and its potential impact on religious education. The positive aspects of cyberspace are beyond the scope of this discussion and will not be addressed.

## A. Intellectual and Religious Challenges for Family Members

This type of threat is often targeted towards the intellectual and religious thinking of families, and if it persists, it can have a detrimental impact on the faith of family members. This is mainly due to the fact that the virtual space contains a diverse range of anti-religious and secular as well as indecent and offensive content. Exposure to such content through reading, studying, or viewing can leave a lasting impact on the learner's mind and

belief, causing them to waver in their faith. In the following section, some of the threats and challenges of the virtual space that are targeted towards the thoughts and beliefs of families and children will be discussed.

## 1. Weakening the Religious Faith of Family Members

Religious faith is a matter of degree and is not always initially very strong. However, over time, it can gradually grow stronger and more steadfast as one continues to reflect on divine signs and engage in religious behaviors. The Quran (8: 29) states that faith and action are interconnected and interdependent, with each having an impact on the other. The Quran teaches that piety enables the learner to develop the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad. As a result, a person with a strong faith will be more resilient and less susceptible to potential threats and dangers. According to a hadith transmitted from Imam al-Bāqir (a), "The believer is stronger than a mountain" (Kulaynī 1413 AH, 2: 241). This means that even when faced with problems and dangers that threaten his religious beliefs, a believer remains resolute and unwavering in their thoughts and beliefs. Similarly, another hadith states that "A believer is like a firm mountain that cannot be moved by strong winds" (Māzandarānī 1963, 9: 181). This means that a believer is steadfast and unshakeable in their faith, much like a mountain that remains firm even in the face of strong winds.

The impact of virtual space on human thought is a phenomenon that many individuals can observe within their personal and familial lives. Parents may observe, both within themselves and their children, that continuous use of various social networks, websites, and online platforms can lead to a sense of doubt and indifference towards certain beliefs and values that they hold dear. For instance, in matters of faith, such as the existence and life of Imam al-Mahdi (a), the final Shia Imam, and the infallibility of the Imams (a), numerous questions are raised in virtual space, many of which are intended to sow seeds of doubt and weaken the faith of Muslims in the eventual reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (a). Research studies have indicated a direct correlation between

cyberspace and religious, moral, and social issues. In other words, cyberspace is a contributing factor to significant problems within families, and the prevalence of these problems is increasing with each passing day.

## 2. Formation of Wrong Beliefs in Children

This decline in religious thought and practice among family members, influenced by cyberspace, can result in the minds of family members, especially children, becoming filled with false beliefs. This is because the human mind, particularly during childhood and adolescence, is dynamic, creative, and constantly evolving, constantly renewing and developing. It is natural for a child's mind to become preoccupied with the abundant and diverse intellectual and practical content in cyberspace, which can gradually shape their mindset. Relatedly, Imam ʿAlī (a) says: "Certainly, the heart of a young man is like uncultivated land. It accepts whatever is strewn on it" (Nahj al-Balāgha, Letter 31).

These words by Imam ʿAlī express the reality that children possess a remarkable capacity for learning during the early stages of their lives, as they have a high level of cognitive ability and can absorb whatever is presented to them. Contemporary scientists have also acknowledged this phenomenon and proposed an upward trend for learning in children and teenagers up to the age of fifteen. In fact, the acquisition of comprehensive knowledge is increasing due to various environmental factors (Seif 2009, 75).

The younger generation's use of virtual space and the internet often results in exposure to false ideas, rather than accurate religious and Islamic principles. This is because such users tend to search for movies, clips, and networks that contain jokes, dramas, and thrilling sounds and images, which may have negative consequences. Field research has demonstrated that a significant number of websites and networks in cyberspace broadcast inappropriate and explicit content, such as erotic movies, pornography, and sexual dating, which promote sexual promiscuity and even homosexuality. Images, romantic stories, and similar content are readily accessible in the virtual space (Mojarradi 2012, 200).

## 3. Conflict of Values within Family Relationships

Conflict refers to an active disagreement between individuals

who hold opposing opinions or principles (Dehkhoda 1994), and it is a common occurrence in various family and social contexts. Conflict may take on physical, social, or cultural forms within the family environment or broader community. This article focuses on conflict within the family environment, particularly between spouses and between parents and children. Conflict typically arises when two ideas or things are incompatible with each other, as family members who are compatible with one another generally do not experience conflict.

The conflict of values within a family, particularly between husband and wife, arises when the values promoted in the virtual space clash with religious values. On one hand, religious commitment emphasizes the importance of upholding the honor and dignity of the wife. However, Western culture promotes absolute freedom for women and often discourages such religious commitments. This conflict between the two sets of values emerges initially in the spouses' thoughts and subsequently manifests in their actions. The conflict within each spouse's mind gives rise to a mental and psychological challenge for them, often stemming from a lack of analysis and a limited perception of this conflict (cf. Mojarradi, 2012, 70). The conflict between a child and their parents often arises from the influence of cyberspace, as the new generation is heavily exposed to an anti-religious culture facilitated by the widespread availability of mass communication tools such as the Internet and satellites. Children often resist their elders' attempts to enforce religious and moral values upon them, leading to a clash of ideologies and behaviors between parents and children. This conflict arises from the divergent perspectives and actions of each party.

## 4. Development of Anti-Religious Thoughts in Children

One of the significant challenges posed by the virtual space in the realm of religious education within families is the rise of anti-religious sentiments among family members, particularly children and teenagers. In reality, the influence of the virtual space gradually seeps into the family dynamics and the individual's mindset, potentially leading them to eventually adopt its effects. The transformation that takes place within their minds and hearts becomes an inevitable outcome of this process. Prophet

Muhammad (s) said, "When a believer commits a sin, a black dot appears in his heart. But if he gives it up, seek forgiveness, and repent, his heart will be purified. However, if he persists in committing the sin, the blackness will increase until it overcomes his entire heart." (Qurṭubī 1364 Sh, 19: 227).

The potentially harmful influence of cyberspace is a growing concern, particularly as children and young people spend more and more time online. In the absence of a strong religious grounding, they may be particularly vulnerable to the influence of foreign cultures and values encountered online, potentially eroding their previously held beliefs. Furthermore, exposure to anti-religious ideas in cyberspace may lead to the adoption of misguided beliefs and behaviors, potentially leading individuals down the wrong path. Moreover, young people are particularly susceptible to the influence of anti-religious and secular ideas in cyberspace, often more so than their parents. The virtual realm has a powerful allure for the younger generation, and its influence can alter their mindset and introduce them to ideas that run counter to their religious beliefs. Consequently, the political, moral, and religious perspectives of young users may take on a non-religious orientation and potentially conflict with Islamic values (cf. Mostaghimi 2011, 123).

## 5. Weakening the Islamic Identity of Family Members

Muslim individuals have a distinct Islamic **identity** that is rooted in the teachings of Islam and the Quran. This identity sets them apart from those who do not adhere to these religious beliefs and practices (Mansourinejad 2006, 15). Islamic identity is formed through a cohesive set of authentic religious beliefs, Islamic values, and a specific orientation towards oneself, God, others, and the world. These elements work together in an organized manner to shape the unique Islamic identity of the individual. This identity has the potential to be nurtured and developed, gradually evolving towards its ultimate perfection. The family serves as the core foundation where a child is raised and where their Islamic identity takes shape. This is where the child's identity is ideally forged and fortified through the nurturing guidance of parents. In addition, there are factors that can undermine the strength of the Islamic identity within the

family, particularly in the current context where cyberspace plays a significant role. Given that both family members and internet users interact with it on a daily basis, they may encounter anti-Islamic propaganda that challenges their ability to critically analyze and make accurate judgments about it (Bell 2011, 101).

## Solutions

To mitigate the adverse impact of the virtual space on the religious upbringing of the family, it is essential to explore solutions aimed at safeguarding the family environment against the risks and threats posed by the Internet and social networks.

## 1. An Instrumental View of Cyberspace

Various individuals hold diverse perspectives regarding cyberspace and its appropriate usage, particularly within families. Some adopt a goal-oriented approach towards cyberspace, considering extensive online browsing as the utmost priority, to the extent that a life devoid of social media is deemed insignificant. However, this viewpoint is flawed, as it entails relying solely on the virtual space to shape one's beliefs and values (cf. Burton 2003, 28). Cyberspace offers a plethora of religious programs and trustworthy Islamic resources. Moreover, it provides a platform where esteemed scholars and religious authorities address user inquiries. However, it is unfortunate that only a limited number of individuals take advantage of these valuable and educational programs. This is due to the prevailing tendency among some to prioritize entertainment through forums, drama series, and content containing inappropriate material in the virtual realm. The accurate understanding of cyberspace is that it should always be regarded as a tool or instrument, rather than a purpose in life. Embracing this mindset, cyberspace will naturally serve its intended purposes and be utilized for scientific, religious, and research endeavors. Within the family setting, it is essential to adopt an instrumental perspective towards cyberspace. Parents, as the primary caretakers of the household, should embody this outlook and subsequently impart it to their children. Undoubtedly, it can be challenging for parents to instill an instrumental attitude towards cyberspace and the internet in their children. It necessitates a familiarity with educational and training methods to effectively cultivate the appropriate mindset within their young minds.

## 2. Strengthening Islamic Faith in Family

Traditionally, due to the prevalence of Islamic culture in society, Muslim families typically hold religious beliefs, and the children raised within these families are likewise influenced by these beliefs through the religious teachings imparted within the family environment. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that these beliefs may not always be inherently robust and enduring, as they can be susceptible to the negative influences emanating from cyberspace. Hence, it becomes imperative to actively strengthen and nurture these beliefs, given that contemporary cultural challenges and numerous undermining factors persistently target the religious mindset of the younger generation.

One of the most logical and rational objectives of vaccination is to foster individual and herd immunity against infectious diseases. Similarly, the goal of countering the threat posed by the virtual space to the religious upbringing of families is to strengthen the religious beliefs of its members. In this context, strengthening religious beliefs can be seen as a form of vaccination against the potential dangers and negative influences of the virtual realm. Hence, a true believer with strong religious convictions is less susceptible to the influence of the virtual space and similar factors. Faith, being the most potent internal force, acts as a protective shield, rendering believers immune to the detrimental effects of the virtual realm (Karamollahi 2011, 234).

Parents bear a significant responsibility in shaping the religious upbringing of their children. They possess the ability to address this matter by employing effective educational methods tailored to their children's needs. There are two key considerations to be noted here. Firstly, if parents aspire to take direct responsibility for the religious education of their children, it is crucial for them to possess a strong belief in the principles of faith. As the famous philosophical saying goes, "someone who does not possess something cannot impart it to others" (Motahhari 1979). Secondly, if parents entrust their children's religious education to school teachers, it is important for them to seek out educators who are dedicated to religion and the Quran, while also being knowledgeable about the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (a), the Prophet's Household.

## 3. Promoting Familiarity with the Quran in the Family

Another effective approach to preserving and nurturing religion and its teachings within the family is to adhere to the Qur'an and cultivate a strong connection with it. The environment of a Muslim family should be marked by the regular recitation and adherence to the Quran, which is the divine Word of Allah, as emphasized by the saying of the Prophet (s): "When calamities surround you like the darkness of night, seek refuge in the Quran" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2: 599). This is because, as the Prophet (s) stated, "The Quran is a guide against misguidance and a source of clarity amidst darkness" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2: 601).

Once again, it is the duty of parents to imbue the family atmosphere with the beautiful fragrance of Quran recitation and to assist their children in becoming accustomed to reciting its verses.

By turning to the Quran, the religious and spiritual education of children and family members is reinforced, and the religious challenges engendered by cyberspace are mitigated. This is because when children devote their attention to the Quran, practicing its recitation and perfecting their pronunciation, they naturally reduce their reliance on mobile phones and the internet, thereby minimizing exposure to potential religious issues arising from cyberspace. Certainly, parents should strive to motivate their children to embrace the teachings of the Quran through proper methods, rather than resorting to coercion, as such an approach would likely yield counterproductive results. It is preferable for parents to embody and exhibit Quranic qualities themselves as a model for their children. They can employ accessible and practical approaches to guide their children towards the Quran. For instance, when watching Quranic programs on TV or online, consider searching for Islamic and ethical channels and encourage your children to do the same. Consistently practicing this behavior can help reinforce Quranic culture and religious education within the family environment, gradually minimizing the negative impact of cyberspace.

## 4. Strengthening the Spirit of Obedience in Family

Worship is a powerful remedy for the afflictions of the heart. It helps safeguard the worshipper against religious and behavioral difficulties, and those who possess a strong spirit of worship and

devotion will serve as guardians of their Islamic and religious identity. The Quran states that in a person's life, there are only two paths to choose from: serving God or following the devil (Quran 36: 60-61). A family that fosters a religious atmosphere is shielded in a way that protects its members from harm, even when using virtual spaces. Such a family views virtual space as a tool and utilizes it to pursue positive objectives and obtain useful information. Establishing an appropriate environment for worship and education within the family is a primary responsibility of parents. Parents are responsible for creating such an atmosphere through appropriate means, as emphasized by Imam ʿAlī (a) in his educational letter to Imam al-Ḥasan al-Mūjtaba (a). The Imam (a) first established a conducive environment for his children's education and then provided them with educational guidance (see *Nahj al-Balāgha*, letter 31).

The potency of worship and prayer in the family setting, coupled with the significance of religious education for children, is highlighted by God's command to Prophet Abraham (a): "And bid your family to prayer and be steadfast in maintaining it" (Quran 20: 132). This verse not only emphasizes the importance of prayer but also underscores the need for steadfastness and diligence in performing it within the family environment. Haste during prayer is incompatible with the spirit of worship and devotion. Genuine worship with a willing and sincere heart has both worldly and eternal benefits.

Additionally, irrational behavior towards children can lead to negative reactions and stubbornness. Imam ʿAlī (a) warns against excessive reprimanding, as it can ignite the fire of stubbornness (Ḥarrānī 1376 Sh, 84).

By utilizing appropriate methods to instill a sense of servitude in children, they become less susceptible to the dangers and negative effects of the world around them.

## 5. Introducing Quranic Role Models to Family

One of the most effective methods of religious education and learning is for parents to serve as role models for their children. Parents are instrumental in introducing Quranic and desirable models to their family members and children, which can help them use cyberspace in a safe manner while mitigating its

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negative effects. The Quran highlights the importance of presenting role models to learners (Quran 33: 21), which consistently introduces a model to the learner, influencing and motivating them through the desirable behavior of the model (Hosseinkhani 2003, 11). The importance of leading by example is emphasized in hadiths, where teachers are advised to educate their students not only through their words but also through their own good deeds (Majlisī 1403 AH, 68: 309).

There are numerous individuals and families in society who can serve as exemplary models of behavior in the virtual space for the younger generation. Ayatollah Khamenei and his family, who demonstrate caution and moderation in their use of cyberspace, are ideal role models for Muslim children, teenagers, young people, and families. For instance, the Supreme Leader encourages everyone to exercise prudence and moderation when using cyberspace (Khamenei, September 2, 2020). The importance of reading books as a significant aspect of family expenses was emphasized, with an emphasis on the need to prioritize book purchases, by the Supreme Leader (Khamenei, June 25, 2001). According to the Supreme Leader, cultivating a habit of reading books is a crucial step towards safeguarding families from the negative effects of cyberspace. He has mentioned that in his family, each member reads a book at night and falls asleep while doing so (Khamenei, June 25, 2001).

## B. Practical and Behavioral Challenges

Practical challenges pose a significant obstacle to religious education as they pertain to the behavior of family members who may become excessively engaged in cyberspace and social networks. These challenges impact both the spouses and children of the family and must be addressed separately.

### a. Problems Related to the Spouses

In today's world, spouses' excessive use of virtual space within the family environment has given rise to numerous problems that can strain marital relations and, in some cases, even cause the family to fall apart. Below are some examples of such problems:

## 1. Decline in the Quality of Family Relationships

Affection is the foundation of family life and marital relationships, and it plays an indispensable role in the success of the family. In today's world, the arbitrary and capricious use of virtual space and its various programs has significantly threatened and weakened the affection that is a key factor responsible for the strength of the joint life of a husband and wife. Ayatollah Khamenei has consistently emphasized the importance of strengthening family affection, describing it as the cornerstone of marital relationships. Ayatollah Khamenei advises young couples to prioritize love for each other after solemnizing the marriage contract. He stresses the importance of avoiding actions that could damage this love and of being mindful of behaviors that could lead to feelings of sadness or disgust towards each other (Khamenei December 15, 1992). Family love requires care and the removal of obstacles, as neglecting it can lead to weakness and even abandonment. The virtual space has become one of the most significant and powerful factors contributing to the decline of love and intimate relationships between husbands and wives, leading to numerous complications in their marital lives today. This problem has a detrimental effect on family relationships, as spouses may opt to spend time apart from each other and engage in leisure activities on social networks, which can also be influenced by negative role models from Western culture. Field research findings also confirm the negative impact of excessive use of virtual space on marital relationships (Haj-Mohammadi 2017, 209).

## 2. Overcoming Suspicions of Marital Infidelity

Optimism, trust, and mutual respect are all rooted in love, and when this chemistry of life exists within the family, marital life is relatively problem-free. Otherwise, the real friendship between husband and wife may gradually deteriorate and be marred by suspicion in their relationship. One of the problems that arises from excessive use of virtual space is the emergence of suspicion between husbands and wives. This is due to concealment in the use of this space, phone encryption, adult photos, as well as naked and vulgar video clips, which can create suspicion between them. In many cases among acquaintances and relatives, it has been observed that after marriage and engagement ceremonies, the bride

and groom become suspicious of each other due to one party seeing photos or communicating with a third party in virtual space. Such suspicions can grow to such an extent that the couple ends up separating from each other. In addition to objective observations, field studies conducted on the impact of cyberspace on family and marital relationships have confirmed a direct relationship between the use of this space and the emergence of suspicion between spouses (see Mousavi and Mousavi 2013, 31-51).

## 3. Mistrust in Marital Relationships

Trust is the cornerstone of any relationship, particularly in a marriage, and it is crucial to the success of the family. Without mutual trust, no progress can be achieved, and no relationship can survive. Ayatollah Khamenei emphasizes that trust can only be attained through love, honesty, and sincere actions. When a man or woman feels that their spouse is dishonest or insincere in their love, a sense of mistrust can arise between them. Therefore, the Supreme Leader advises couples to prevent mistrust from arising in their relationship (Khamenei, February 8, 2000). The role of cyberspace in creating mistrust between spouses is evident, as suspicion can gradually arise as a result of viewing inappropriate photos and listening to vulgar audio clips on each other's phones. The absence of trust in married life can result in the loss of numerous qualities that are essential to the family, such as love, intimacy, affection, secrecy, sacrifice, and more. This creates a breeding ground for negative traits to emerge in the family environment, ultimately destroying the atmosphere of interaction and compatibility (Alavi 2015, 21)

Mistrust between husband and wife can have unfortunate consequences. If the trust between them is damaged, a general sense of fear and unease towards each other can take its place. Their opinions of one another may change, and a sense of doubt can make the prospect of married life seem gloomier. In an environment dominated by mistrust, individuals can experience high levels of anxiety and a severe lack of self-confidence and self-belief. Mistrust can have both external and internal factors, with one of the most significant being the virtual space today. Instead of trusting each other, spouses may trust what they see and read in cyberspace, which can erode the values of the family and lead to pessimistic attitudes towards each other (Ahmadi 2013, 26).

## 4. Marital Conflict

Marital **conflict** is more than just a difference of opinion. It is a series of events that have been poorly handled, causing significant damage to the marriage relationship. Issues within the marriage can fester to the point where stubbornness, pride, anger, hurt, and bitterness prevent effective communication between spouses.

The final damage to marital relationships in the family caused by excessive use of virtual space, which is examined in this article, is the conflict that can arise between husbands and wives. If the couple does not make controlled use of cyberspace, their relationship can gradually deteriorate, leading to conflict due to suspicion, mistrust, and reduced marital emotions. This conflict can become more intense with the use of cyberspace. Field research findings have indicated that virtual space is a significant factor in the occurrence of conflicts within families. Unrestricted relationships can be established in virtual space, leading to the formation of an extramarital relationship between a non-mahram man and woman. If this situation persists, it can lead to a decrease in the love between husband and wife, marital commitment, and faithfulness of spouses to each other. Eventually, behavior such as quarreling, disrespect, blaming, stubbornness, and the like can emerge between spouses. If this situation is not controlled, it can seriously affect the family and eventually lead to its dissolution (see Ahmadi 2013, 112).

## Solutions

There are several solutions to address the problems caused by excessive virtual space use and the damages inflicted on the husband-wife relationships within the family environment. Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of the solutions depends on the willingness of the spouses themselves as two mature, intelligent, and strong-willed individuals to make efforts to avoid the dangers and problems and protect their family environment and marital relationships from the negative effects of excessive virtual space use. Without their active participation, any solution presented may not be effective.

## 1. Cyberspace Management

Effective management of cyberspace is necessary both at the

national level and at the family level to prevent damages and threats. At the macro level, it is the responsibility of government officials, especially those in charge of telecommunications and related institutions, to manage cyberspace and mitigate its negative effects. In Iran, the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, formed by Ayatollah Khamenei, is responsible for addressing this issue. According to the Supreme Leader, the goal for the creation of the Council is to bring officials together, encourage them to think, and concentrate their wills, decisions, and actions to tackle this significant phenomenon (Khamenei, September 7, 2016). Effective management of cyberspace at the national level is crucial in reducing its harm to users. In this regard, the Supreme Leader specified guidelines for the establishment of a National Cyberspace Center, which would be responsible for comprehensive and up-to-date monitoring of cyberspace at both domestic and global levels. The Center would also make decisions on how the country should deal with this issue in terms of developing hardware, software, and content within the framework of the Supreme Council's approvals, as well as supervising the accurate implementation of decisions at all levels (Khamenei, March 7, 2019).

At the family level, and even for individual use, it is the responsibility of the head of the family, especially the parents, to establish a regular and specific program for the family and their children to use cyberspace. This planning should apply to all family members, especially children, and their opinions should be taken into account to increase the effectiveness of the program. Successful families that effectively manage cyberspace and prevent its negative effects on the religious education of the family are not uncommon. According to many educational experts, parents must control the virtual space in the family environment, or serious harm may be done to its members (see Khiḍr Sārī 1426 AH, 236).

## 2. Making Purposeful Use of Cyberspace

While the virtual space provides us with various facilities and means, it must be used properly to help the family achieve its material and spiritual objectives. Therefore, it is essential to manage cyberspace properly and efficiently, and it is equally

important to use it purposefully to achieve our predetermined goals. The virtual space has the capacity to help us achieve our material and spiritual objectives, and we should use it in a way that serves this purpose. Cyberspace provides various religious and Islamic programs that effectively guide families seeking spirituality, from answering their religious questions to dealing with profound scientific and ideological topics on websites, weblogs, forums, and more. Today, websites of the offices of religious authorities can answer questions on various legal and juridical matters quickly and easily, enabling those interested in religious teachings and spiritual wayfaring to achieve their goals (see National Studies Institute 2013, 14).

As a dynamic and rich source, cyberspace can assist users in their scholarly research on religious and Islamic topics, making the information they need readily available. By acquiring the necessary technical skills, families can guide their members towards research and useful activities through virtual space, making their use of cyberspace purposeful. In this case, not only can the family avoid possible problems, but the talents and potentials of both children and parents can also be ultimately perfected. Modern research confirms that users who utilize cyberspace have their talents grow and blossom (Pishgahifard 2013, 33). In summary, purposeful use of cyberspace can enable family users to make good use of it, while averting potential dangers and harms.

## 3. Being Forthright and Honest

Family problems caused by cyberspace, such as suspicions and conflicts between husbands and wives, often arise from individuals hiding things from each other. This can include using special codes and passwords on mobile phones to keep secrets from their spouse and others. As soon as spouses see things such as problematic photos, clips, or unknown numbers on each other's phones, suspicion can arise and cause conflicts between them. This is a common experience that can be observed in the lives of many people, including friends and relatives. Such spousal challenges can lead to serious problems and even separation if they are not addressed properly. To prevent and overcome such problems, it is essential to avoid being secretive about one's

activities or withholding information about one's relationships in the virtual space. If necessary, individuals should be open and honest with their family about their activities in cyberspace. Love, honesty, loyalty, and confidentiality are crucial aspects of a healthy marital relationship, and secretive and suspicious behavior should be avoided (see Seminary of Qom Website). Love and honesty are two fundamental factors in married life that, if strengthened, can protect children from many problems, including those mentioned above. These two characteristics are greatly emphasized in religious texts and the family environment, as confirmed by the normative conduct of the Infallibles (s).

## 4. Consulting Spouses about Using Cyberspace

Counseling is a fundamental aspect of social and family interactions, providing individuals with knowledge and tools to prevent potential future problems. Although the family environment ideally provides an atmosphere of peace and compassion, conflicts and arguments can still arise due to the family's existence in the material world and their susceptibility to the outward glamour of the world. If any signs of disagreement between husband and wife appear, it is important to seek a solution to make peace (*ṣulḥ*) between them, as God has ordered in the Quran. The Quran offers counseling, fair arbitration, and impartial examination of the issue as solutions to reconcile the spouses (Quran 4: 35). Seeking advice from elders can help prevent disputes between spouses. However, if signs of disagreement do arise, relatives can help end the dispute by offering their advice.

Consulting with each other regarding the use of cyberspace is crucial for spouses, as setting and agreeing on specific times to use this space during the day and night can improve their knowledge and access to acceptable entertainment while preventing potential problems. This can also help them develop new skills and acquire information. Consulting with others on family affairs can prevent spouses from being arrogant, selfish, and neglectful towards the rights of their spouse. Their behavior and conduct will be characterized by agreement, harmony, and respect for each other. Quranic verses that contain the word "counseling" (Quran 2: 233) urge spouses to consult experts and

elders when conflicts arise. If an unintentional error or mistake occurs after consulting with others on family affairs, God says: "They are not to blame" (Quran 2: 233), as things are done with the consent of both spouses. By utilizing various applications and programs in the virtual space, perhaps with the use of a mobile phone, spouses can achieve success in their married life, raise their children, and reduce financial costs.

## B. Challenges Facing Children

The most significant impact of the virtual space on religious education in the family is related to children, who are exposed to various intellectual and behavioral threats and dangers due to their young age. Research conducted on the negative effects of communication tools such as mobile phones, satellites, and the Internet on beliefs and worship has shown a significant relationship between the use of these tools and the weakening of belief and indifference towards worship and daily prayers (Zandavanian, et al. 2013, 210).

## 1. Indifference towards Religious Values

The virtual space has a negative impact on the religious education of children in the family environment, leading to their indifference, laziness, and lack of interest in religious and Islamic values. This behavior can be seen in most families, with children showing an unwillingness to perform prayers on time, lethargic performance of prayers, and lacking motivation to engage in supplications, participate in religious ceremonies, and visit pilgrimage places and holy sites. Recent research indicates that the younger generation, influenced by Western culture through the virtual space, pays little attention to religious values and old social traditions. A field research study comparing two groups of young people, one a subject group of users and the other a control group of non-users, found that the non-user group had higher adherence to religious and Islamic values (Karamollahi 2011, 336). This research highlights the negative impact of the virtual space on children's religious practices and religiosity, leading them to become indifferent towards religious and moral values.

## 2. Formation of Negative Attitudes and Negative Tendencies in Children

Children, including kids, teenagers, and young people, are at risk of developing negative tendencies due to their use of the virtual space. Imam ʿAlī (a) asserts that children learn from what is instilled in them or what they observe (Nahj al-Balāgha, letter 31). If children continue to engage with anti-religious literature or watch offensive movies and clips, it can strongly influence their behavior and mentality, causing them to gradually develop negative tendencies. Experts in education suggest that the virtual space has a more significant impact on users compared to other forms of mass communication. This is because it affects users in various intellectual, visual, auditory, and behavioral dimensions, occupying their minds and hearts (Mahdizadegan 2015, 53). Consequently, continued use of the virtual space, browsing social networks, and websites can lead to the development of negative tendencies in young users, causing them to deviate from the right path.

## 3. Influence of Negative Role Models on Children

Introducing role models to children and teenagers is an effective method of education and upbringing, as the role model is visible and present to them. Children and young people can assimilate and adapt their behavior to the model presented to them, satisfying their acquisitive sense. However, any type of model can be found in the virtual space, and young users tend to choose inappropriate and non-religious models if their parents do not monitor their online activities. Such models may appear more attractive to them, especially as virtual space programs are designed to appeal to the young generation. Consequently, many young people are attracted to negative role models in the virtual space. These role models can leave a lasting impact on the actions of users, particularly the young generation that has limited knowledge of religious and Islamic teachings and is strongly influenced by emotions and carnal desires associated with negative role models in the virtual space (Hamidian 2009, 83).

Accepting negative models introduced to children by the virtual space can have serious consequences, and the damage caused by assimilating these models is not easily treated. Children and teenagers may be resistant to giving up their accepted models,

making it challenging for families to protect them from harm. If a solution is not worked out to protect children from such damage, it will be difficult to save them from the challenges created by the virtual space. Field research involving young people, especially girls, affected by the virtual space, has shown how much irreparable damage they have suffered due to negative role models (Koohi 2008, 224).

## 4. Hatred towards Parents

The term inter-generational gap is widely used in today's society, particularly in the area of education, to describe the cultural duality between the old and new generation. It refers to the difference in values and attitudes between one generation and another, especially between young people and their parents. This difference is not just limited to physical age but includes distinctions in values and norms, which ultimately leads to estrangement between youth and adults. The virtual space is one of the significant factors responsible for this gap and the estrangement of children within the family setting. If this trend continues, it could lead to children harboring resentment towards their parents, as evidenced by new field research. A study conducted in Dezful city of Iran, surveying and distributing questionnaires among 18-24 year-olds and their parents, found that the generational gap is directly related to the widespread use of mass communication tools, including the virtual space (Mazaheri and Monajjezipour 2016).

Many children in families today express hatred and disgust towards their parents, although they have provided them with opportunities and amenities. Such children are often under the influence of the prevailing social situation and the virtual space, which causes them to disregard their parents' rights and treat them with disrespect and humiliation. This indifference towards parents can lead to the development of negative behaviors such as indulging in lust, pornography, and unconsidered friendships (Gustavas 2014). According to this research, the virtual space is one of the main factors responsible for the intergenerational gap between parents and children in the family environment. This gap can lead to arguments and friction between fathers, mothers, and children in some families. Adolescents and young children may

not prioritize traditional and religious values and may seek freedom from religious commitments.

## 5. Children's Aggressive Behavior in Family

The prevalence of aggressive behavior among children is a growing concern, exacerbated by the increasing amount of time they spend online. This trend has only accelerated in recent years, leading to a rise in cyber risks such as online bullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and digital addiction. While efforts to increase awareness and implement protective measures are underway, they are not sufficient. The issue of child protection in cyberspace is urgent and requires immediate attention with more targeted responses than what we have seen so far.

Exposure to aggression, profanity, insults, sarcasm, and rude words is prevalent in the virtual space, and field research on middle school students shows a significant relationship between aggressive behavior in the family and exposure to inappropriate content such as violent movies and online bullying (Haj-Khodadadi et al., 2014). Children are often attracted to computer games, war series, and exciting clips featuring fighting and killing, and they tend to use these types of networks frequently. Without parental supervision, children can develop a habit of violence and conflict, and their behavior may become increasingly violent. For example, children coming home late at night, avoiding their parents, and associating with bad friends may be a result of their excessive use of the virtual space (Mojarradi 2012).

## 6. Lack of Cooperation between Parents and Children

In many families today, teenage and young children do not cooperate with their parents in managing family affairs and exhibit lazy and lethargic behavior. They often disobey their parents and reject their suggestions, even for simple tasks such as simple house errands. They show little interest in school and prefer to associate with people of problematic character. At home, they spend most of their time talking on the phone or sleeping and may behave harshly and violently with their siblings. The primary cause of such behavior is the negative influence of the virtual space, where children are attracted to harmful content, including inappropriate movies and clips that

disregard religious and Islamic values related to family and parents. Field research conducted among middle school students found that when playing online games becomes a daily habit, it can lead to harmful effects such as aggressive behavior, foul language, and laziness (Haj-Khodadadi 2014).

## Solutions

In this section of the article, we will briefly discuss protective measures that can be taken to ensure the safety of the family environment, especially children, against the threats and risks posed by the virtual space.

## 1. Parents' True Love for Their Children

The family environment is the foundation of love and friendship between parents and children, where children's emotional and moral character is shaped. A strong and genuine bond between parents and children has a profound impact on their material and spiritual well-being. While parents naturally love their children, this relationship can weaken due to various factors. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen and cultivate love among family members, as emphasized by Ayatollah Khamenei. The key to solving family problems lies in the real love and affection between family members. According to the Supreme Leader, both the husband and wife should love and respect each other (Khamenei, December 15, 1992). Love in the family should grow with each passing day, and parents have the responsibility to promote it to gain the trust of their children.

Establishing a genuine and strong bond of love between parents and children is a proactive solution to ensure children's safety and well-being. When children feel that their biological parents are their true supporters, they are more likely to trust them in their lives. This kind of love fosters mutual respect, trust, and affection between parents and children, enabling them to develop healthy relationships. Children will then respect their parents, listen to their instructions, and incorporate them into their daily lives. As a result, their inclination towards the virtual space will decrease, and they will be under the complete guidance of their families. Experience has shown that many children who were previously aggressive and opposed to their parents changed their behavior

with the love and kindness of their parents and turned towards the path of Islam and Islamic ethics (Professors of the Comprehensive Plan of Family Education, 2006, 23).

## 2. The Bond between Parents and Children

The strong bond and close relationship between parents and children go beyond mere affection and have practical implications, particularly in family decision-making and planning. When children participate in family affairs and parents consult with them, they develop trust and a deeper sense of attachment to their families. This mutual trust between father and child reduces the risks associated with cyberspace and solves many problems. With real love and intimacy between family members, as well as participation in family activities, recreational trips both inside and outside the city, and efforts to create a suitable educational and spiritual environment, children's inclination towards the virtual space gradually decreases. Unemployment, lack of facilities, and an intergenerational gap in the family are among the main factors that drive children towards cyberspace. Initially, they may enter social networks for entertainment, but it can quickly become a permanent habit and source of amusement. Healthy relationships between parents and children can alleviate the problems of unemployment and feelings of isolation that affect many families today, and eventually eliminate them altogether (Zandi and Rezaei, 2015).

Establishing a deep bond between parents and children is a solution to many of the problems that families face today. Educational experts suggest that face-to-face conversations between parents and children play a fundamental role in creating an emotional and intimate connection between them. Dialogue is a model that forms the emotional atmosphere governing the interpersonal relationships of the family and deepens the bond between family members. Listening and sympathizing, which are crucial aspects of conversation, lead to mutual understanding and reciprocity (Pourhossein 2017, 198). Ultimately, creating a strong bond of love between parents and children is the way forward in family matters. It renders harmful factors ineffective since the harmony and agreement of family members pave the way for productive family activities and prevent unplanned and hazardous access to the virtual space.

## 3. Effective Parental Care

One of the crucial responsibilities of parents in the family environment is to take care of their children and monitor their behavior. As mentioned in a famous hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s), parents should take care of their children, just as

a shepherd takes care of his herd (Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj 1412 AH, 3:1459; Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī 1420 AH, 3: 130). Just as a shepherd never neglects his duty to protect and look after his flock for a moment, parents should also be vigilant in taking care of their children. Taking care of children is an educational method mentioned in the Quran (4: 1). When a child feels that there is someone who monitors their behavior, they are less likely to deviate and commit any wrongdoing. Therefore, care and supervision, as emphasized by the Quran and traditions, is an essential educational method. Imam ʿAlī (a), an exemplary and compassionate teacher of all people, warns against sinning in private places. This is because "the witness is the judge" (Nahj al-Balāgha, saying 324). Today's witness is the arbiter and teacher of the Day of Resurrection.

Effective and proper care of children cannot be achieved through ill-behavior, violence, or foul language. Inappropriate behavior towards children can result in negative reactions and stubbornness, which defeats the purpose of caregiving. Therefore, parents should take care of their children in a kind, friendly, and tolerant manner, which is more helpful and constructive. According to Imam ʿAlī (a), "Humans are the servants of good treatment" (Āmidī 1994, hadith no. 163). In fact, one reason for the growth of love is kindness or good treatment because humans. The human heart is designed to love those who do good and despise those who do evil. Rational and loving parents tend to have obedient children who get along with them. Consequently, a suitable environment is created in the family, and the negative effects of cyberspace are prevented. Effective care of children with affection and love is one of the essential ways to prevent and treat cultural and social harm that may be inflicted on them. Some educational experts suggest that if parents provide their child with a phone for virtual learning, they must ensure that it is healthy and that the child does not have access to VPN or inappropriate social networks. Additionally, the family should establish a limited time frame for internet use and not allow unlimited access, such as seventy or one hundred gigabytes of internet per month (see Young Journalists Club).

## 4. Strengthening Moral Values in Children

The fundamental solution to protect children from the threats of

cyberspace and negative cultural and social factors is to raise them with a strong belief in moral values. This will instill in them the need to apply these virtues in their lives and avoid vices in their actions, ensuring their intellectual and practical well-being. With such positivity, the young generation can guide society and the family towards moral values. Parents have a significant responsibility to ensure that their children can safely access the internet and its valuable resources. They must be aware of the risks associated with children using online services, including exposure to inappropriate material such as pornography and other obscenities. In the event that children are caught using inappropriate things, they should be treated and protected. Allowing children to make appropriate use of the virtual space is also a parental duty to control their behavior and help them use this space correctly (see Bangston, et al. 2013, 495).

Promoting moral values among today's young generation is a challenging task, requiring an understanding of the child's nature and awareness of appropriate educational methods. This enables the selection of the most suitable approach to educate children both mentally and spiritually. When done correctly, parents and children are freed from the worry and fear of cyberspace risks. The root of religious values lies in the nature and essence of young Muslims, as emphasized in the Quran: "But Allah has endeared the Faith to you, and has made it beautiful in your hearts" (Quran 49: 7).

The greatest blessing that God has bestowed upon His servants is to beautify their hearts with the light of faith and moral virtues. This blessing requires protection and nurturing to grow and become effective.

## 5. Monotheistic Education of Children

Religious and monotheistic education of children is the fundamental solution against the threats of cyberspace and other sources that endanger them. This education should start in the family environment and continue through school and university. Ayatollah Khamenei emphasizes the importance of monotheistic education to ensure the mental and spiritual well-being of the young generation. According to him, a person with a monotheistic belief moves forward based on their beliefs and stands steadfast in the face of deviations in various aspects of life (Khamenei, April 27, 2004). Ayatollah Khamenei's emphasis on deep-rooted religious beliefs and his description of a believer as a persevering and unwavering individual encountering events and changes indicates that education

should focus on deepening religious and monotheistic thought in trainees. It is easier to deepen belief during childhood and adolescence than during teenage and adulthood.

The most effective way to prevent cyberspace from becoming a source of danger within the family environment is by providing children with a monotheistic upbringing that emphasizes Islamic and moral values. This can make them strong and resistant against the negative influences of Western culture and the virtual space. Monotheistic belief makes one dependent on God, in which case the heart will be free from any slippage or wavering. A true believer always remembers God and understands the essential relationship between creatures and God. The Quran commands mankind to remember God often in their lives: "And remember God often" (Quran 3: 41). Remembering God creates a permanent bond with the Creator and provides immunity from mishaps (see Mūʿin 2008, 100). Parents should instill in their children a deep and firm belief in monotheism and the principles of Islam so that they do not waver in the face of harmful factors such as cyberspace. When parents are familiar with Islam and educational methods, they can start the religious and monotheistic upbringing of their children in the family environment and continue it during their education in school and university.

## 6. Introducing Worthy Role Models to Children

One of the most effective educational methods is to introduce a role model to the trainee. This encourages them to assimilate and follow their way of life. To counteract the negative role models presented in the virtual space, it is essential to introduce appropriate religious role models to children. This not only satisfies their instinct for a role model but also completes the educational process. Model-based education, accompanied by objective and concrete examples presented to the learner, can have a better impact on their character. God Almighty introduces the person of the Prophet Muhammad (s) as a good example for everyone to follow (Quran 33: 21) so that they can emulate his behavior in their own lives. It is important for children to first identify and then assimilate the chosen role model, so that their development is in harmony with both the material and spiritual aspects of the model.

Appropriate role models can be identified from the Quran and Hadith and introduced to the children, just as the Quran has done this and introduced pious people such as Prophet Yūsuf (a) to the young generation by mentioning his life story (Sūra Yūsuf). It is also possible to introduce models from the present era to the children, as there is no shortage of examples of good role models in the Islamic society today. As an example,

the great religious authorities, especially Ayatollah Khamenei, who are suitable models for families, fathers, mothers, and children, can be introduced to them. For example, the leader's and his family's normative conduct in terms of reading books and studying religious texts is the best model to protect the family against the harms of cyberspace (Khamenei, May 16, 1995). If the young generation is introduced to the practical lifestyle of people like Commander Soleimani, it will be very effective. What is important is that the normative conduct of these nobles in relation to the virtual space and what they used this space for should be explained to the learners (see Manẓūma Soleimani 2021). Further, the introduction of these role models, their way of life, and their activities in the virtual space will definitely have a profound constructive impact on the children's lives, as it will protect them from social and cultural evils such as those coming from the virtual space.

## Conclusion

This study sheds light on significant points related to the religious education of the family and the challenges posed by cyberspace. It is crucial for families to foster the components of religious education through awareness and the use of effective educational methods. In modern times, cyberspace has become an integral part of everyday life, making it difficult to escape its effects. The only option is to control it and purposefully use the information and knowledge available in this space. One of the most significant impacts of cyberspace is the undermining of the family's religiosity, morality, and traditional values passed down through generations. Weakening the religious beliefs of parents and children is the most fundamental harm inflicted through cyberspace, affecting the young generation both emotionally and behaviorally. The most effective way to prevent or mitigate the risks of cyberspace is through religious education and teaching children faith. Effective management, affection, intimacy, consultation, and introduction of good role models are useful ways to avert the dangers of the virtual space, protecting the family against the risks posed by cyberspace.

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# Cyberspace and Evolution of Religiosity

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## Abstract

Cyberspace is an electronic medium that generates, transfers, receives, processes, and deletes data. It has become an integral part of many people's lives, with different social, economic, entertainment, and educational aspects, serving various functions based on users' requirements. The impact of contemporary cyberspace and social media has expanded beyond virtual boundaries, transforming the physical world and society. In the digital age, cyberspace creates new cultural forms by changing culture and its components. Religiosity, as one of the main socio-cultural manifestations, is also affected by this process. This research aims to measure the scope and magnitude of the effects of cyberspace on religiosity. The study uses a descriptive-analytical method as well as Heidegger's and Baudrillard's approach to analyze the impacts of the virtual space on the evolution of religiosity. The research identifies the perceptual transformation of truth and the sacred matter, religious identity, religious authority, the concept of chastity, and the consumerization of the religious as the components of religiosity that have evolved under the influence of virtual space. The study concludes that the virtual space is secular by nature.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, religion, religiosity, evolution, the sacred, religious identity, religious authority, chastity, consumerization

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## Introduction

Rapid and effective development has occurred in both technological possibilities and transformations of individuals and societies resulting from this progress. The changes that began with the industrial revolution have continued to expand throughout the twentieth century, reaching broader dimensions than any other period in human history. With the invention of the internet and its widespread use across all layers of society in the last quarter of the century, this change has taken on another dimension and has now thoroughly transformed the behaviors of individuals as well as their personal and social lives (Haberli 2014, 237). The internet, which is the most important element of cyberspace, was first developed in the United States during the late 1960s by the "Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency" (DARPA) to connect computer systems in different areas. It was later adopted by civilian agencies and organizations, and today it is an integral part of our daily lives, serving a multitude of purposes beyond being a tool for mass media. This situation has convinced many social science scholars to focus on the internet as a serious subject for study. As a result, many events and social phenomena are being discussed in relation to the internet. Today, the internet plays a significant role in the realm of religions and religious developments, extending far beyond its function as a mass media (Candemir 2019, 159).

The global expansion of the internet, especially after the 1990s, and the online communication opportunities provided by computer networks have led people to connect with the virtual reality environment." Social media, a network that transfers messages created with digital systems, is one example of such virtual environments. Today, due to technological developments, new communication networks have disrupted the order of reality and formed a new daily reality by introducing a reformed shape to society (Timur 2018).

It is interesting to note that human society was first introduced to the concept of virtual space through cinema, rather than the internet. With the initiation of cinema in the 1890s, the virtual world entered human life and became an important center of attention. During that time, people had only weekly access to the virtual world through cinema. However, the expansion of the

influences of virtual space on humanity came during the era of television. From that point on, movies and news were watched every day. With the arrival of television as the second gateway for human societies into the virtual world, the two-hour screen time per week increased to four hours every day. The third era of the virtual space began with the internet age and has further increased the human thirst for using technology and machinery. In addition to the four hours of daily TV viewing on average, people now spend an additional two hours on average surfing the internet every day.

Mobile phones represent the fourth step in communicating with the virtual space, and their introduction has led to a significant increase in screen time compared to the past (Merter 2013, 506-8).

Cyberspace and social media have now found a perfect role in the daily lives of individuals, serving as a means to establish social relations, engage in economic activities, provide entertainment, and facilitate education. They serve various functions depending on people's ever-changing requirements. It is undeniable that individuals, societies, and states are affected by cyberspace and social media, in parallel with the contemporary changes taking place. Today, their influence extends beyond the virtual space and into the physical and social world (Metin and Karakaya 2017, 110). New technological and communication developments have brought about significant changes in human perception of "place" and "time." The expansion of cyberspace into new domains signifies that the world we were once familiar with has been reformed. It is crucial to examine the effects that have blurred the distinctions between physical and nonphysical, natural and fictional, and real and virtual for the human mind and society. Despite being virtual, cyberspace has become a significant part of the world's dominant culture and now plays a decisive role (Geraci 2010, 72).

Undoubtedly, religiosity is one of the areas that has been influenced by the virtual space. It is a well-established fact that cyberspace has created new cultural forms by altering culture and its components in the digital age. In the past, the role of religion, as one of the main components of cultural manifestations that plays an active role in the lives of many people, was often ignored in studies of the social sciences. However, over the past thirty

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years, researchers who focus on digital technology and the internet have increasingly paid attention to the interactions between cyberspace, new technologies, society, culture, and religion (Haberli 2019, 309). As religious individuals became more engaged with cyberspace and began to connect with religion through digital means, a two-fold effect emerged: on one hand, religious individuals began to make instrumental use of cyberspace, while on the other hand, the unique structure and nature of the virtual space began to influence religiosity. The main priority is to understand how the religious truth, as a sacred concept, as well as other main religious components such as religious knowledge, religious identity, and religious authority, are influenced by cyberspace. It is also important to examine and measure the extent of behavioral change among religious individuals in the face of the consumer culture that dominates the virtual world.

This research aims to provide answers to the above questions by drawing on the ideas of Heidegger and Baudrillard regarding technology and media.

## Relationships among Cyberspace, Religion, and Religiosity

From the most primitive means of communication such as cave paintings and ancient Egyptian sculptures and papyrus, to the printing press, electronic media, and today's virtual and digital communication technologies, almost all have been used as means of transmitting religious thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge to other societies. Therefore, it is evident that before the advent of modern communication facilities, sacred texts and information were transmitted and preserved orally or through books as an important element of written culture. In the digital age, a significant portion of religious literature that was once transmitted through oral or written culture has now been transferred to and distributed via digital and virtual environments. Websites, social media, forums, and cloud storage platforms now contain millions of religious data that is openly accessible to anyone. Furthermore, there are now numerous religious applications available on platforms such as Google Play Store and Apple Store, which offer features such as interpretation and exegesis of sacred texts (e.g., Quran and hadith), translations, self-education apps, and more. These

applications have made it incredibly easy for users to access religious information (Haberli 2019, 309).

The use of the internet by some universities marked the beginning of religions becoming acquainted with it. Chat rooms, forums, and categorized lists provided by some websites formed the first core of religious content on the web. The first religious websites were primarily designed for informational purposes. These websites contained information on subjects such as religion, history, and ethics, and enabled people from around the world to exchange ideas. On these pages, users began to communicate with one another based on their thoughts, views, and religious practices. These interactions were not subject to restriction or control, and as a result, they became popular and soon attracted a huge number of users. These communications and collaborations not only included amateur personal ideas but also became institutionalized and organized, with groups and managers appointed by prominent religious figures taking charge of them (Candemir 2019, 159-60).

Today, the virtual space provides a platform where people can communicate with others more smoothly, free from social concerns and boundaries, and thereby reduce their real-life loneliness (Morahan-Martin and Schumacher 2003, 659). Regardless of religion, language, or race, followers of different religions and schools of thought communicate with one another via social media. The virtual space and social media facilitate boundless communication, allowing users to freely share their beliefs. Various ideologies and schools of thought, from atheism to deism and agnosticism, from religious tolerance to radical religious movements, are present on this virtual space platform. Consequently, the confrontation of different or opposing ideas seems inevitable. In this context, digital religion reconstructs the real society and, as a result, reproduces traditional religion (Gezginci and Işıklı 2018, 115).

Communication scientists and sociologists, particularly sociologists of religion, have defined and categorized the interaction of religion with the virtual space and digital media from various angles. During the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, while interacting with religious content, the term "virtual religion" was frequently used to describe the phenomenon of "cyber

religion" or "virtual religion." This concept refers to a new type of interconnection that demonstrates an encounter between religion and computer technologies, as well as the transmission of people's religious and spiritual life to the virtual world. With the increase of web communications during the 2000s, the concept of "religion online" originated, which indicated the engagement of religions with the internet as a means of communication. The term "online religion" also emerged, revealing the use of the internet and new media as an interactive space by religions. Technological developments related to virtual space, the variety of performance, and the relationship between new media environments and religion have given rise to new definitions and conceptualizations in accordance with the spirit of the age. In recent years, the term "virtual religion" has been used more frequently to describe online religious practices.

The term "virtual religion" or "cyber religion" was coined to describe the phenomenon of the emergence of religion through media, cyberspace, and digital culture. This interpretation not only refers to religious perception that is portrayed and implemented online but also highlights how media and cyberspace shape religious practices (Haberli 2019, 309-10).

In comparison to traditional communication tools, cyberspace provides a fast and interactive network that offers a much broader space for religions and religious individuals. Consequently, religious communities and organizations have gained remarkable abilities to propagate and promote their belief systems and rituals to a wider audience. While cyberspace serves as an efficient medium for invitation and preaching, it can also act as a driving force for change and transformation of religion and religiosity. One example of this is the emergence of new virtual religious rites in religions with over a thousand years of history, which could be considered a significant alteration (Candemir 2019, 159).

In other words, after religious individuals began engaging with cyberspace, a debate arose regarding whether these activities serve the purpose of religion and religiosity or not. The emergence of these concepts and their meanings can be seen as a reflection of this ongoing debate. There are two main perspectives regarding this issue: the first is expressed through the concepts of "online religion" and "the online religious." According to this viewpoint, the virtual

space should be utilized as an opportunity and a means to serve religion and religiosity. The second perspective, based on the concept of "cyber religion," argues that religions which engage with and use the virtual space may be influenced by the unique characteristics of this platform, potentially leading to transformation and a loss of originality in their religiosity. Considering the extensive and multi-dimensional activities of religious individuals in cyberspace, and the resulting increase in religious knowledge, it is clear that the virtual space has a range of instrumental functions and achievements that cannot be ignored. However, despite these undeniable results, it is important to investigate the qualitative impact of the virtual space on religion and religious individuals, and to what extent their engagement with the web has influenced their transformation. This is a vital matter that requires further exploration. It appears that while the virtual space facilitates the activities of religion and religiosity at an outward, superficial, and quantitative level, and serves as a tool for religious individuals, its potentially hegemonic nature can negatively impact the quality of religiosity at deeper levels. Drawing on the perspectives of Martin Heidegger and Jean Baudrillard regarding technology and media, this view will be further explored as one of the main hypotheses of this research paper.

## Conceptual Framework

Despite frequent comparisons to and associations with terms such as "internet" or "digital virtual realm," the exact definition of "cyberspace" remains elusive, lacking international consensus. Diverse organizations, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), and the Russian-American Cyber Security Summit, among others, have put forth their own proposed definitions. The Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms of the Department of Defense defines cyberspace as "a global domain within the information environment, encompassing the interconnected network of information systems infrastructures, including the Internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers." Conversely, the Russian-American Cyber Security Summit characterizes cyberspace as "an electronic medium through which information is generated, transmitted,

received, stored, processed, and erased." Consequently, both descriptions underscore that cyberspace is a fusion of internet and telecommunications technologies that facilitate the obtaining, storing, retrieving, and transmitting of information (Mbanaso, 2015, 18). In this context, cyberspace relies on software as well as mental and cultural aspects. It is a conceptual construct where cultural principles take precedence over other elements (Borujerdi Alavi and Sadiq Yazdchi, 2017, 98).

Recognizing the significance of these two concepts becomes imperative in an era where technology and information play a central role in debates. Consequently, it is crucial to explore how these notions influence culture and religion as integral components, as well as the evolving dynamics between humans and truth. Addressing this matter holds substantial importance. Unsurprisingly, when discussing the nature of technology, particularly information technologies, the names of two prominent contemporary thinkers, Martin Heidegger and Jean Baudrillard, naturally come to mind. Heidegger's philosophical examination of technology, with its reductionist unauthentic approach toward the existence of the world, along with Baudrillard's insights on how new information technologies obscure reality and construct simulated images as reality, within the framework of simulation, offer valuable insights into how virtual space impacts religion and religiosity. These perspectives provide opportunities to explore the influence of virtual space on religion and religiosity.

Heidegger's analysis of the nature of technology involves a comparison between the attitudes and thoughts of ancient and modern humans. He argues that in ancient times, human beings engaged with the world through direct and spontaneous experiences, reacting to everything they encountered. This stands in stark contrast to the subjectivist approach of the present era. In today's world, individuals perceive themselves as subjects and study nature through the lens of modern science. However, these scientific experiments often position nature as an object to be observed from an external standpoint, creating a sense of separation between humanity and the natural world. The construction of subjects is a defining feature of modern scientists, who are driven to interpret and mold things according to their perspectives.

Consequently, science has played a role in alienating humans from nature. Heidegger strongly opposed technological determinism, asserting that underlying economic and ideological forces render technology inherently biased and non-neutral. Modern humans find themselves confined within a framework of rational and scientific thinking, which compels them to perceive reality through imposed concepts (Heidegger 1977).

According to Heidegger, modern technology can be described as a process through which humans seek to comprehend their experiences by reducing them to a set of physical laws and mathematical equations. By categorizing these experiences according to various criteria, individuals attempt to make sense of the world based on their personal existence and ultimately aspire to exert control over it. Through this reductionist approach, modern technology aims to establish a framework for understanding and manipulating the entirety of existence. This revelation highlights that the essence of technology does not reside solely in the machines and systems themselves, nor in the individuals utilizing them. Instead, it lies within the state of the human mind, which categorizes and interprets reality in a specific manner, reducing it to mathematical equations. It is this cognitive process of classifying and quantifying the world that truly defines the nature of technology (Heidegger 1977, 26). It is important to recognize that the desire for control over nature, as reflected in this attitude, is merely the initial step towards the domination of humankind (Harvey 1997, 26-27).

Baudrillard also cautions against underestimating the significance of communication tools by reducing them to mere technical instruments. He believed that the misconception of these tools as purely technical devices has led to a neglect of the revolutionary nature of communication itself. By mistakenly interpreting "virtual comprehension" as purely technical in nature, we risk overlooking its true importance and the transformative impact it holds (Baudrillard 2005). In the early stages, modern societies viewed technology as both an economic advancement and a beneficial tool that could enhance human relationships and values. However, over time, technology has shed these characteristics and transformed into a phenomenon that serves the consumer system. It has progressively eroded people's

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connections with one another and with reality. Baudrillard refers to this phenomenon as "contemporary alienation," where technology acts as a force that disconnects individuals from the true nature of existence (Baudrillard 2016, 244).

He argues that technology has severed the essential connections between individuals ("man to man") and between individuals and reality ("man to reality"). This state of "contemporary alienation" has led to a profound disconnection from the true nature of existence. As a result, people find themselves increasingly detached from reality (Metin and Karakaya 2017). By erasing the reality, technology assumes a significant role in the dominance of symbols and simulations. The advent of technology has systematically eradicated real images, a process that reached its culmination with the shift from analogue to digital technologies (Baudrillard 2012, 18). The influence of technology on society is the catalyst for significant transformations. People find themselves compelled to utilize various technological tools out of necessity. Technology instills a captivating optimism within individuals, leading them to embrace and rely on these tools. Baudrillard argues that humanity's submission to this virtual world order, brought about by technological processes, can be viewed as a form of enslavement (Baudrillard 2001, 54). In the contemporary world, people's identity and freedom are predominantly shaped by a virtual order. The dynamics of this virtual realm, governed by interconnected networks, exert a significant influence over individuals, resembling a mental diaspora (Baudrillard 2005, 55).

To elucidate his virtual order, Baudrillard introduces several key concepts, namely "simulation," "hyperreality," "implosion of meaning," and "hot and cool events." Simulation entails the replication of reality through symbolic representation. In simulations, realities often appear more authentic than they truly are (Baudrillard 2015, 69). It is an endeavor to portray something unreal as though it were real (Baudrillard 2014, 3). Hyperreality entails the dissolution of boundaries between reality and fiction, resulting in a blurred distinction between the two (Yumrukuz 2016, 88). "Implosion of meaning" refers to a category that engulfs the "contents of knowledge," "relations," and "social matter" that it has generated, leading to the destruction of meaning

and leaving social matter devoid of any meaningful information (Yumrukuz 2016, 89). The concept of the "hot and cool event" also highlights the influence of mass communication tools. These tools transform hot media events into cool events, thereby normalizing them and turning them into a source of entertainment (Yumrukuz 2016, 88).

He also posits the notion of reality's annihilation, emphasizing that it is not an ontological obliteration of reality itself. In its place, "signs" or "symbols" supplant reality. Additionally, certain factors impede the acquisition of knowledge from objects. While Foucault attributes this obstruction to "power," Baudrillard identifies the factor as "forces of production" (Güzel 2015, 68). According to Baudrillard's perspective, the transition to the state of hyperreality in postmodern society occurs through a series of distinct stages. The creation of signs can be understood within four stages. The first stage involves signs, which encompass words and images, developing as a reflection of reality. In the second phase, images begin to embellish, exaggerate, and distort reality. However, there is no complete detachment from reality, and signs continue to function as symbols reflecting aspects of reality. In the third and fourth stages, simulation takes over and a new symbolic society emerges. This society is characterized by the dominance of simulation and imitation, where symbols and signs become detached from their original referents in reality. As a result, human relationships appear to be merely symbolic in nature. In such a society, discussions about epistemological truth or objective reality become increasingly elusive (Güzel 2015, 69).

Social media play key role in this process. In social media, people are displayed with codes. They represent an ideal image of themselves. Social media characters are flawless. Regarding Baudrillard's thoughts, this state of perfection is defined as flawless hyper realities. Contrary to absolute reality which, is incomplete, the hyper realities are perfect in his take on it (Metin and Karakaya 2017). Moreover, in Western societies where simulations surpass reality, the very fabric of society begins to dissolve, giving rise to the emergence of what can be termed as "silent majorities." In this context, the conventional understanding of sociology, which revolves around the masses as a "black hole" where social dynamics are at play, becomes inadequate. This is

because the term "mass" contradicts the essence of "sociological matter" and cannot be regarded as a viable concept (Baudrillard 2015, 12-13).

The interactions between the masses and power structures involve the manipulation of the masses by these influential forces. The masses have become apathetic, a state of indifference carefully cultivated by those in power. As a result, these masses have undergone a process of desocialization, distancing themselves from the concept of collective identity. However, desocialization does not imply a complete loss of control. Public opinion polls, including those conducted through mass media, serve as a means of simulating the thoughts and sentiments of the masses, including the silent majorities. This system of simulation enables the power elements to stay informed about the prevailing opinions among the masses (Baudrillard 2015, 19-26). In this scenario, communication and information tools play a pivotal role in the production of truth (Baudrillard 2015, 65). According to Baudrillard's theory of consumer society, this notion of truth is manufactured to serve the interests of productive powers. Similar to how consumer goods are elevated to a godly status and imbued with sacredness within shopping centers, they are also presented as sacred in nature through social media platforms. Companies' advertisements and virtual shopping communities actively encourage individuals to make purchases. This virtual realm, where even currency exists in digital form, is often referred to as a "simulacrum world" (Metin and Karakaya 2017).

## Evolution of the Components of Religiosity in Cyber Space
### Cyberspace and the Loss of Truth as the Sacred Realm
In accordance with classical philosophy and the teachings of religions, the human relationship with truth extends beyond the realm of rational episteme alone. Given that the contemplation of transcendence is intricately linked to the transcendent realm of existence, the pursuit of truth for humans cannot be achieved solely through discursive and propositional reasoning, which relies on drawing inferences from premises to conclusions. As this phenomenon can occur through various forms of thinking, including intuitive thinking, it necessitates the evolution or spiritual perfection of the human being (Küçükalp 2021, 37). In

modern times, there has been a significant transformation in the nature of intellectual faculties, which were traditionally associated with knowledge and understanding. The intuitive or universal intellect has largely been replaced by a specific or calculative intellect. The universal intellect, which includes intuition, surpasses the particular intellect and enables human beings to perceive truth through thinking. On the other hand, the particular intellect separates truth by adopting a calculative thinking style, treating it as a computational subject. The specific intellect represents the thinking ability that allows one to grasp truth as a known and usable object within the confines of one's mind. This approach often leads individuals to become trapped in their own epistemic world, blurring the distinction between appearance and reality. As a result, this alteration in the concept of intellect, alongside the reduction of the soul to consciousness and intellect to intelligence, has led to a quantitative interpretation of existence, truth, value, and meaning through the lens of computational thinking. This quantitative perspective is reflected in the mind, resulting in the transformation of knowledge into an object for theorizing, as well as the emergence of subjective metaphysics in various forms (Küçükalp 2021, 39).

The identification of being with a reality that arises from an encounter with human epistemic capacities not only strengthens humanity's privileged and exclusive ontological stance but also leads to a narrowing of the scope of existence. Simultaneously, the reduction of the soul to consciousness or intelligence has elevated the humanistic metaphysics formulated through modern scientific and philosophical thought to the level of absolute truth. Additionally, with the rise of technology, there has been an idolization of intelligence and the emergence of a simulated world (Küçükalp 2021, 41).

Through philosophy, science, and modern technology, the world has turned into an object that can be controlled and grasped through computational thinking. Nature, in turn, has been transformed into an immense resource that is expected to fulfill the demands of technology and modern industry for a modern man who has largely neglected the importance of thinking (Heidegger 1966, 50). The quest for human mastery over resources necessitates the articulation of reality, which is

condensed within the human epistemic world, through a process of division and analysis, treating it as atomized parts within a calculative thought process. However, this division has resulted in the loss of the concept of unity. Consequently, knowledge has proliferated into numerous specialized fields, leading to the perpetual production of knowledge focused on distinct topics. As a result, knowledge has been transformed into mere information (Küçükalp 2021, 42).

In this context, the modern individual, immersed in the visual realm of cyberspace, experiences a complete oblivion of the ideas of truth and meaning (Küçükalp 2021, 45), and the proliferation of simulacra, which surpasses truth and reality, serves to obfuscate the act of forgetting the truth (Baudrillard 2015, 12). Put differently, the world portrayed in social media and cyberspace is often depicted as cosmopolitan, but this presentation often generates a multitude of images that lack substance or meaningful content (Baudrillard 1998, 22-23). Consequently, in the realm of virtual space and media, the distinction between the signifier and the signified has become blurred, making it challenging to cultivate a transcendent or realistic understanding of objects. This is a result of the overwhelming proliferation of signs within the virtual space, ultimately causing them to lose their connections to their signified meanings (Ashley 1997, 5).

**Virtual Space and Emergence of Techno-Religiosity**

The growing prevalence of virtual space has given rise to a distinct form of religion and religiosity known as techno-religion. Techno-religion envisions a realm that transcends human desires and experiences. One particularly intriguing emerging ideology is "dataism," which does not worship gods or humans but instead venerates data itself (Harari 2017, 381). Dataism posits that the universe is comprised of a continuous "data flow," and the worth of each phenomenon or entity is evaluated based on its contribution to the process of data processing. While this concept may initially appear ambitious or even outlandish, it has made an impact within scientific circles (Harari 2017, 383).

According to Harari, as the global data-processing system attains omniscience and omnipotence, being connected to this

system becomes the ultimate source of meaning. People are drawn to engage with the data flow because it grants them a sense of being connected to a superior entity. In traditional religions, every human action was viewed as part of a grand cosmic plan, with God overseeing and controlling every aspect of our lives, including our emotions and thoughts. In the realm of dataism, it is asserted that every word and action we take becomes part of a vast data flow, constantly monitored by algorithms that process our feelings and thoughts. Many individuals find contentment in this arrangement. For the followers of this religion, disconnecting from the data flow implies the risk of losing the very essence and purpose of life (Harari 2017, 403).

Simultaneously, data serves as discrete and objective facts about events, representing the raw material for analysis. Information, on the other hand, is the processed form of data, imbued with meaning and significance, and predates the scientific process. Nevertheless, knowledge and science serve as rational filters for data and information, applied as needed in decision-making, planning, comparison, evaluation, analysis, and production, drawing from personal experiences, perceptions, intuitions, feelings, and values. In essence, knowledge is personal and internal in nature. Information requires processing and reevaluation in light of individual circumstances. Unless knowledge is critically examined for accuracy and applicability, it descends to the level of mere information (Ekinci 2016, 291-92).

The degree of knowledge, enriched by personal experiences, can be elevated when it is internalized, integrated with other knowledge, and remains open to observation and receptive to criticism in the face of contradictions and inadequacies. The concepts of prudence, thinking, and reasoning play vital roles in facilitating the attainment of this level of knowledge. Achieving a genuine understanding of truth through knowledge is made possible by internalizing it and actively applying it to one's life. Knowledge that fails to transform one's way of life remains nothing more than a collection of information (Ekinci 2016, 292-93).

In the absence of the human factor, such as scholars or mystics, who played a pivotal role in the transmission of knowledge in ancient civilizations, particularly in Islamic civilization, the sources and references of information become obscure.

Consequently, religious knowledge that is transferred to the virtual environment is often reduced to the status of mere information. However, in Islam, the connection between knowledge and faith is rooted in the internalization of knowledge and its practical application in daily life. On the contrary, present-day religious perception and practice are fragmented and incomplete, resulting in a weakening of the relationship between religious knowledge and truth in the process of virtualization (Ekinci 2016, 297).

Hence, it can be argued that the information circulated in cyberspace and labeled as religious knowledge lacks epistemic value. In an insecure and unregulated environment, which is inherent to the cyber world, this information is prone to losing its credibility. It acquires characteristics akin to commodities, transforming into a fictional and manipulated representation. The virtual reality created by internet technology constructs a simulated world, detached from actual reality. This digital landscape manifests as a distant, intangible, and imaginary environment, enticing users and enabling manipulation. The ranking of websites based on popularity among search engines and the presentation of personalized alternatives aligned with user search history and preferences exemplify the utilization of cyberspace as a means of manipulation and control (Ekinci 2016, 294).

## Cyberspace and Consumerization of Religiosity

The essence of digitization and cyberspace is revealed by the fact that "digital representation" within this realm is essentially a numerical code composed of binary numbers, specifically "0" and "1." A digital representation can be understood as a calculable mathematical expression. The fundamental characteristic of digital representation is its "computability" or calculability. All digital identities, entities, and phenomena can be computed by transforming them into mathematical expressions. Moreover, computability, measurability, and evaluability imply objectivity in the context of digitization and cyberspace (Yurtsever 2021, 23-24).

Currently, leading virtual platforms and applications like Facebook and Google translate various aspects of human life, including actions, interests, emotions, aspirations, and experiences, into binary codes represented by "0s" and "1s."

These codes are then categorized, calculated, and interpreted through computational processes. Digitization encompasses not only material goods but also different facets of human experiences, transforming them into computable codes. This digitization enables the conversion of human behavior into computable data. Consequently, the emergence of "predictable behavioral structures" can be observed, with these structures being marketed based on calculations. Google, Facebook, and similar platforms generate and sell predictions about how people will behave in specific aspects of their daily lives, be it today, tomorrow, six months from now, or even in the following year, within the realm of cyberspace. In this "future market," human behavior is treated as a commodity, and forecasts regarding the future behaviors of specific groups with distinct characteristics are traded for monetary value. The algorithms of digital platforms not only predict users' future behavior but also shape and influence them, ultimately leading to an increase in the market value of these predictable structures (Yurtsever 2021, 27).

The process of identifying, forecasting, guiding, and commodifying desires, behaviors, and thoughts within virtual space extends to matters related to religion and religiosity. This includes the creation of secular and modern sacred entities, which are influenced by the reciprocal effects of religion and modernity, ultimately reshaping them within popular culture. There exists an interactive process where these two forces interact and influence each other. The culture of capitalist consumption and spiritual inclinations have become intertwined and well adapted to contemporary means of communication and global consumption. Within this realm, in addition to spiritual fulfillment, a new logic of consumption emerges, along with a mechanism for commodifying sacred entities. This phenomenon represents a new paradigm, as it involves the adaptation of the sacred to modern secular processes (Arslan 2016, 218).

Alongside the commodification of sacred entities and the commercialization of religion as a product within cyberspace, there are specific areas in the virtual realm that are designated for managing opportunities to display advertisements and generate revenue. With the advent of new media, which empower individuals to become content creators, various professionals

engage in these activities. This includes not only temporary content providers, consultants, producers, and hosts (such as anchors or presenters) who work in the media industry, especially during the month of Ramadan in the Islamic world, but also religious preachers and academics who frequently participate as guests in talk shows and similar programs within cyberspace. The presence of academics and religious scholars in the media, the efforts to disseminate knowledge through media platforms in cyberspace, and the commercialization of information hold significance from both legal and ethical perspectives (Aydeniz 2016, 309).

## Cyberspace and Evolution of Religious Identity

Religious identity is shaped through the adoption of specific beliefs, values, and lifestyles, as well as through emotional connections formed during interactions with others. In real-life settings, believers experience a sense of social cohesion that aligns with their chosen path, and they engage in communication with outsiders within certain necessary boundaries. However, this dynamic changes in the virtual space, as cyberspace is structured according to its own distinct set of values. Even if one's intentions and motivations are pure and transcendent, the religious identity within the virtual realm, if taken seriously, can become susceptible to becoming lost amidst the virtual world's values. The prevailing humanist and consumerist culture in virtual space, often disguised as promoting dialogue, seeks to transform and neutralize religious identity and lifestyle by imposing its "pluralistic value judgments." Dialogue itself is not inherently problematic; however, the issue arises because cyberspace is recognized as a non-neutral platform.

Today, religious communities exhibit diverse attitudes and identities within the cyber world while actively engaging in the construction of a lifestyle that aligns with the advancements of modern technology. Religious communities are undergoing a transformation in the digital world, adopting unique approaches to redefine their presence. Social and religious identity has been transformed in the online space, consequently reshaping the realms of religion and spirituality. The process of rationalization, virtualization, and digitization has unveiled a novel society and way of life. The advent of digitalization has fundamentally altered

our understanding of values, the content of religion, and the perspectives of the faithful. While the presence of religious data has expanded in virtual spaces, it inevitably brings about transformations in traditional forms of religion. Particularly within societies that have embraced technology as consumers, these changes can have far-reaching and potentially disruptive consequences. Indeed, the intertwining of religion and the cyberworld poses a threat not only to religious identity but also to the inherent risk of virtualization, potentially leading to the loss of its original essence (Dağ 2021, 68-69).

The virtualization of religion within the realms of time and space carries significant consequences. These include the transformation of religion from a practical arena to a theoretical entity, the diminishing of religion to the level of media programs and applications, and the superficialization of the sacred dimension and religious truths.

Religion has distanced itself from being a historical, sacred, and profoundly human activity, resulting in the gradual disappearance of these defining characteristics. The virtual space lacks the presence of faith, tradition, theology, and the transcendent spiritual essence. Given that one of the vital dimensions of religion is to foster and fortify connections with the sacred realm, virtual space and media have not been particularly successful in fulfilling this role (Ekinci 2016, 295). The rise of digital or virtual religion has resulted in a diminished influence of traditional religious organizations and figures. The emergence of a new form of digital religion, built upon images and symbols within cyberspace, has led to reduced mental and spiritual impacts within the digital realm due to the process of digitalization. Users within social media, one of the arenas of digital religion, strive to emphasize their religious identity as part of their digital presence and online persona (Eker 2020).

## Virtual Space and the Religious Authority

True religiosity is a multifaceted process encompassing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It necessitates traversing through challenges, fostering curiosity, and cultivating focused attention. God says in the holy Quran: "And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the

heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that" (Quran 17:36); "And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation — so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know" (Quran 16:43); and "Yet it is not for the faithful to go forth en masse. But why should not there a group from each of their sections go forth to become learned in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware?" (Quran 9:122). The holy verses mentioned above illuminate the universal nature of this path, which leads to the attainment of accurate beliefs, applicable across all times and contexts. The establishment of this authority among people initially originated from the "Islamic sciences/scholars" and subsequently by "Sufis, masters, and mentors" throughout the history of Islam. This approach stands in stark contrast to primitive religions and religiosity, which rely on spontaneous speech, dogmatism, imitation, and superstitions (Güler 2016, 230). In contemporary times, the authority of religious figures such as scholars and theologians has been somewhat marginalized, giving way to transformed relationships and the emergence of virtual spaces. In today's world, the internet serves as the foundation for the coexistence of religious data and the faithful (Dağ 2021, 54).

Within this new digital realm, a religion that fails to effectively promote itself and gain recognition will gradually lose its significance among individuals who seek meaning and spiritual fulfillment in the virtual/digital world. The emergence of pragmatic, functional, and individualistic forms of religion often results in the marginalization or negation of traditional religious practices. As daily life increasingly adopts an economic and virtual nature, all aspects, including religious authority, undergo a transformation into data within the cyberspace.

Furthermore, even in moments where individuals seek seclusion and are supposed to delve into their inner worlds, privacy often becomes compromised. For instance, individuals may find themselves sharing posts of the "Kaaba" and the city of "Medina" solely to garner more "likes" on social media platforms. One of the most widespread misconceptions among users is the belief that they can find answers to any questions simply by remaining online in the cyberspace. Debate, once a tradition with a dialectical nature in the history of Islam, is now often perceived as a determining factor for

rating or evaluating individuals in the eyes of the people. The debates that were once conducted with kindness, rationality, and tolerance have now given way to intolerant and aggressive controversies. The only thing that will matter in this vicious shift is the platform and audience. Within the cyberspace, religious activists (clergies and religious preachers) and their audiences form distinct group structures that revolve around various content (Dağ 2021, 69). The classification of people's concerns and interests exerts a transformative influence on the essence of religious knowledge, resulting in changes to religious authority. In other words, scientific advancements and technology contribute to the erosion of traditional authorities and the sources of social legitimacy (Ekinci 2016, 295).

## Cyberspace, Self-Exhibition, and Evolution of the Concept of Chastity

Descartes' famous quote "I think therefore I am" has found a new iteration in cyberspace as "I appear therefore I am." Consequently, for many individuals, the desire for visibility and self-promotion becomes a driving force that they strive to fulfill, requiring dedicated effort. As a result, the concept of chastity has undergone changes, particularly among religious individuals, due to the prevalent inclination towards self-exhibition and the individual's desire for increased visibility, since the notions of modesty and chastity can be perceived as constraints on the freedom of self-exhibition. By promising unlimited freedom, the cyberspace instills in individuals the notion of transparently witnessing private affairs (Aycan 2019, 19).

Indeed, an important question that arises is why people are inclined to showcase themselves in cyberspace and what detrimental effects it has on modesty and chastity, particularly among the faithful. The misconception that dignity and social status, which are traditionally achieved through responsibilities and real-life efforts, can be attained through visibility and self-promotion in cyberspace can be approached from two perspectives. Firstly, it is observed that socially isolated individuals often perceive cyberspace as their primary domain of existence. Secondly, by examining the aesthetic values prevalent in virtual spaces and the consumer culture that dominates this realm, a deeper

understanding of this phenomenon can be gained. Driven by the desire to capture others people's attention, these observations and assessments intensify individuals' yearning for greater presence and self-exhibition in the cyber realm, leading them to disregard religious and social norms regarding their appearance. Consequently, the conventional notion of religious chastity undergoes a transformation, giving rise to a new concept.

Matchmaking sites are one of the domains where the concept of chastity loses its significance due to the emphasis on self-display. The so-called Islamic matchmaking websites, in reality, commodify and undermine values, deviating from their professed purpose, and instead operate within a marketer-customer dynamic. These websites not only exploit Islam as a marketing tool but also, at times, engage in fraudulent practices. Furthermore, by incorporating certain images, they contribute to transforming themselves into centers of sensual attraction (Büyükaslan 2016, 209).

## Conclusion

The technology we have today has brought convenience to human life since its inception, and as a result, it has facilitated the reproduction of humans for the sake of data convenience. Today, human beings are increasingly living a digital life. There is a growing argument that in the future, whether it be near or distant, this way of life may give rise to a new form known as the "post-human" within the realm of "transhumanism." The ability to anticipate the characteristics, beliefs, behaviors, and inclinations of future generations, particularly in relation to religious beliefs, is intertwined with studies on virtual religion. The phenomenon of "techno-religiosity" emerges from the interaction between religion, the faithful, and the cyberspace. In the realm of techno-religion, the traditional mosque has been replaced by the monitor screen, and physical prayer has been substituted with keyboard interactions. This transition gives rise to a form of spirituality known as online religion, which is fostered and disseminated through various online communication platforms such as email, WhatsApp, sermons

in the form of podcasts on YouTube, forums, and infographics. In this context, virtual space and the internet are not only seen as mere tools or technological entities but are also recognized as social connectors and dynamic arenas where culture is both created and negotiated.

Virtual space, on one hand, offers opportunities for the expression of diverse religions and thoughts, fostering a pluralistic environment. However, on the other hand, it also serves as the medium through which these expressions can be co-opted and transformed within the dominant influence of postmodern techno-capitalism. In essence, the virtual space encompasses a wide range of religious and secular ideas at a superficial level, creating an illusion of pluralism. However, its underlying objective is the fundamental transformation of the entire landscape, aligning with postmodern techno-capitalist ideologies and values.

As the faithful's engagement with the internet and their utilization of virtual space as the primary domain for religious activities grow, several interconnected phenomena emerge. These include the evolution of the perception of truth as sacred, the consumerism of religiosity, the rise of dataism, the transformation of religious authority and identity, and the redefinition of the concept of chastity. These developments can be seen as part of a larger trajectory.

The transformation of religiosity is a consequence of the secular nature of cyberspace, as it influences the way religious practices are conducted and the perception of spirituality. The inclination to shape technology in accordance with humanistic goals and personal interests, along with the tendency to perceive existence through specific patterns and an egotistical lens, are the fundamental components of the thought that has given rise to technology. Hence, the ideology underlying virtual space, as an integral part of digital technology, possesses a dominant and power-seeking nature, serving the interests of the productive forces. Furthermore, the simulated nature of virtual space and the prevalence of simulacra contribute to the devaluation of truth and the sacred, reducing them to mere quantities and virtual

appearances. Therefore, due to its secular and materialistic nature, virtual space lacks the capacity to uphold the weight of truth and the sacred, as they necessitate distinct epistemic and ontological means and processes. It is essential to acknowledge that this incapacity is not considered a neutral deficiency. Virtual space attempts to tailor the truth and the sacred according to its own capabilities, resulting in their devaluation to a superficial and distorted state. As a result of the human inclination and constant pursuit of novelty and transient innovations, individuals become alienated from the truth and the sacred, which are characterized as stable and profound concepts.

Given the multi-layered and intricate nature of cyberspace, it becomes crucial for Muslims, who may struggle to differentiate between knowledge on different levels, faith, and morals, to develop awareness and media literacy. This is particularly important in grappling with the superficialization of the sacred, religious truth, and the emergence of new epistemologies facilitated by information technologies. It is necessary to understand these new epistemic hegemonies that often prioritize knowledge and values based on mass approval. Undoubtedly, factors such as the duration, frequency, and quality of internet usage, user intentions, the illusion of reality within cyberspace, and the level of user engagement with the internet and social networks all play a significant role in shaping the extent to which society is influenced.

It is important to acknowledge that religious activities in the virtual environment can lead to a sense of pseudo-satisfaction, which may prevent religious individuals from fulfilling their obligatory or recommended practices and duties in the physical realm. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that virtual activities are complemented by corresponding real-world actions. By establishing a strong connection between the virtual and physical realms, more effective outcomes can be achieved. In essence, individuals with religious concerns should prioritize the real world and society over the virtual space. Moreover, the concept of social theology should be given due importance. Engaging with the real-world society

allows religious individuals to develop a genuine understanding of their religion, apply sacred teachings in practice, and safeguard themselves from the transformative influences of techno-capitalist civilization. In this context, the virtual space can serve as a complementary tool for religiosity and religious practices within society.

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# Networking of Cyberspace Users in the Islamic World

■ Halimeh Akhlaqi[1]

## Abstract

The virtual environment is a powerful realm and tool that has transcended numerous boundaries. Within this environment, there are countless active users who engage in various fields, including that of Islam. The level of user engagement within the Islamic world does not adequately meet the diverse needs of this community. The most strategic, vital, and essential step is to connect users within a network in order to leverage the abundant resources, opportunities, markets, and capabilities available, and to overcome limitations and challenges. The objective of this research is to establish a network among cyberspace users within the Islamic world and address the question of how we can effectively connect users in the cyberspace of the Islamic world. The data collection method employed in this study is primarily based on documentary research and library resources. The data analysis adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing a series of systematic procedures to inductively develop a theory for the phenomenon being investigated. The networking of cyberspace users within the Islamic world encompasses a series of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes that collectively form a model for connecting users in the virtual environment of the Islamic world.

**Keywords:** networking, cyberspace users, networking actions, stable relationships, network knowledge, Islamic network identity

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## Introduction

The virtual environment has surpassed numerous boundaries of time, place, structure, territories, and culture, giving rise to a new world with distinctive coordinates unique to itself. This space represents the most potent tool in today's world, introducing new opportunities and challenges alike. The virtual environment attracts a multitude of users, with its numbers growing constantly with each passing moment. Users actively engage in shaping and contributing to the dynamic and collaborative nature of this environment. Users derive benefits from this environment based on their knowledge, insights, preferences, tastes, and interests. They actively contribute by either creating content or sharing existing content. Within this specific environment, there are users who utilize it to disseminate information about Islam, both in positive and negative ways. Today, there exists a significant number of anti-Islamic communication websites, channels, and groups, numbering in the thousands. These platforms aim to promote Islamophobia by distorting the teachings of Islam, misinterpreting its principles, fostering skepticism, and sowing seeds of uncertainty. Their activities pose numerous harms to the Islamic Ummah. Moreover, this environment has brought about significant transformations in the beliefs, inclinations, and behaviors of users within Islamic society. Simultaneously, concerned users strive to highlight the profound truth of Islam, defend the Islamic identity, and actively generate, disseminate, and publish Islamic content. They initiate campaigns aligned with Islamic teachings, aiming to foster Islamic movements. However, the current level of activities falls short in meeting the diverse needs of modern individuals. These users operate within this environment based on their individual interests and the cultural, climatic, national, and familial context they belong to, resembling isolated islands. Yet, if they were to establish an organized, constructive, consistent, committed, and robust network, they could assume a dynamic role and engage in extensive activities that cater to the needs of users within this environment. It is evident which group of users is more capable of presenting the truth of Islam to the world: those who spread doubt with bias or those who actively seek the truth?

Research indicates that one of the primary means to bridge the gap and achieve a dynamic, effective, efficient, up-to-date, and relevant presence in the realm of Islamic teachings and identity is through the establishment and advancement of a network among cyberspace users within the Islamic world. This network aims to leverage diverse resources, opportunities, markets, and capabilities available in order to meet the needs of users in a comprehensive manner. This objective can be readily accomplished through the establishment of meaningful communication, long-term commitment, and sustainable engagement within the networking framework. Networking has emerged as one of the most essential and strategic approaches for organizations to address resource limitations and share the risks associated with commercialization over the past decade (Maghsoodi Ganjeh, et al. 2019). Hence, the most strategic course of action to effectively leverage the diverse resources, opportunities, and capabilities of users while mitigating risks, limitations, and potential harms is to establish a network among cyberspace users within the Islamic world. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to address the question of how the users within the virtual environment of the Islamic world can be effectively connected through networking. To achieve this goal, the research has gathered relevant data and developed a model for networking cyberspace users within this context.

## Questions

Main Question: How can cyberspace users be effectively networked?

Sub-questions: To address the main question, the following integrated sub-questions are considered:

1. What constitutes the central phenomenon of networking cyberspace users within the Islamic world?
2. What are the causal factors influencing the networking of cyberspace users within the Islamic world?
3. What are the contextual factors shaping the networking of cyberspace users within the Islamic world?
4. What are the intervening conditions that impact the networking of cyberspace users within the Islamic world?
5. What strategies can be employed for effectively

networking cyberspace users within the Islamic world?

6. What are the outcomes and results of networking cyberspace users within the Islamic world?

## General Concepts

### Cyberspace

The term "cyberspace" or "cyber" originates from the field of cybernetics. The term "cyberspace" (or virtual space) was popularized by William Gibson, the author of the science-fiction novel *Neuromancer*. It refers to the interconnected realm of human interactions facilitated by computers and modern technologies, transcending the constraints of time and physical space. Gibson's initial concept of "cyberspace" may have been more closely associated with artificial intelligence and robotics, rather than the contemporary understanding of the term (Brier 2010, 14). Over time, this concept evolved to become the focal point of philosophical discussions within the field of cyberspace, shifting the focus from a laboratory or scientific domain to an independent world (Bell 2009, 24). The concept of cyberspace pertains to the fictional and imaginative realm of virtual reality and the Internet, serving as an entry point for humans to engage with virtual reality (Khaniki and Babaei 2011, 77).

Cyberspace has garnered significant attention from computer and telecommunication engineers, as well as science fiction writers and scholars in various social sciences disciplines such as communication sciences, sociology, psychology, social psychology, anthropology, and philosophy (Islamic Science and Culture Research Institute 1999, 2). The technological view of cyberspace focuses on aspects such as hardware, software, data transfer quality and quantity, and network interactions. In contrast, the psychological approach examines concepts like mental space, human-computer behavioral patterns, imagination, identity, and personality, while considering the boundary between reality and fantasy (Suler 2004). Additionally, the sociological perspective plays a crucial role, exploring online communities, cyber social networks, and the social impacts of human-computer interaction.

Michael Benedict offers a significant description of cyberspace, emphasizing its importance: Cyberspace is a novel and parallel world constructed and sustained by global communication

networks and computers. It is a world where knowledge, secrets, measurements, indices, entertainment, and various human aspects circulate globally. This electronic realm represents an unprecedented phenomenon, where all visible phenomena, sounds, and presences thrive in an expansive electronic radiance—an experience yet unseen on Earth (see Bell 2010: 22-23). The virtual environment is a multi-dimensional world, encompassing various dimensions and components that have profoundly impacted contemporary societies across economic, industrial, business, public services, and social relations domains (Khaniki & Babaie 2011, 78; Woodward 2009). According to Ramsey and his colleagues, companies can significantly reduce costs associated with transactions, information gathering and dissemination, stock management, and quality control through engagement in the virtual environment (Ramsey, et al. 2003: 250-64).

## Communication Instruments in Virtual Space

Modern communication technologies have created an internet-based space that goes beyond the scope of traditional media, encompassing various forms of interactions and communications. This digital realm has eliminated the limitations of one-sidedness and passivity traditionally associated with the audience. Through video-conferencing and chat systems, we can experience the sense of "simultaneity," while discussion groups, mailing lists, and chat platforms enable "multidirectional" interactions (Khaniki & Babaie 2011, 80). Interaction within cyberspace can be facilitated through various mechanisms, including social networks, weblogs, emails, websites, chat rooms, video conferences, instant messaging systems, mailing lists, discussion forums, and podcasts. Each of these communication channels offers a unique level of interaction aligned with its distinctive features. The choice of communication mechanism depends on the intended type of interaction, the requirements of the software environment, and the potential outcomes that can be achieved through them (Khaniki & Babaie 2011, 81).

## Users and Types of Virtual Space

Users are active participants within the virtual space, a realm that offers them a wide range of capabilities and facilities.

However, not all users benefit from these features to the same extent. The virtual space, equipped with various tools, encourages individuals to express their personal, social, political, and religious inclinations. Users engage in diverse activities within the virtual space, such as branding, personal development, forming social circles and audiences, sharing content, mobilization and organization, establishing friendships, building trust, citing and generalizing information, utilizing multimedia, engaging in chat conversations, providing critical feedback, following and being followed, publishing short and long blog posts, producing and sharing cyberspace content, participating in chat rooms, uploading personal photos, voices, and videos, creating fan pages, seeking entertainment, harnessing the power of social capital, social mobility, demonstrating initiative, fostering innovation, and accessing numerous other capabilities made available to them within the cyberspace.

Users can be categorized based on their level of involvement within this virtual space. One notable categorization is the research conducted by Anderson Analytics, which focused on American internet users of social networks, specifically Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and MySpace. While this research primarily examined American users, its findings can potentially be extended to other societies as well.

The research categorized users into seven distinct groups, focusing on their engagement levels within social networking sites. The first four groups are as follows:

Professional users: These individuals are considered key, active, highly skilled, well-paid, and extensively connected users within the social networks.

1. Leisure users: This group exhibits relatively passive behavior, adapting to cyberspace with some delay, and primarily using social networks to communicate with friends and family.
2. Users seeking entertainment: This group engages in social networks casually for entertainment purposes and interacting with friends and family. Over time, they may transition into becoming more skilled users.
3. Business users: These individuals utilize social networks

purposefully, employing systematic and logical approaches. They recognize the value of virtual networking, its advantages, and its productive applications in both their personal and professional lives.

Additionally, there are users who do not show enthusiasm for social network membership and do not utilize such platforms in their online activities. These non-social-network users can be further classified into three groups:

4. Occupied users: This group holds a negative perspective toward social media but may be inclined to join virtual networks and become business users in the future.

5. Concerned users: These individuals express concerns about their security and privacy, but as they invite their friends, they become leisure users within social networks.

6. Pessimistic users: This group holds a negative view of social networks, considering them to be of little or no benefit. However, some of them may still be professional users of other technology and internet tools.

Users within the virtual space can be grouped based on their level of activity, ranging from active to passive users. Each user is driven by specific goals and engages in various activities within the virtual realm. For instance, users assume different responsibilities and roles in the production, publication, and utilization of content. However, according to an analysis, it was found that content contributors, who actively produce and publish content, constitute only one percent of all users. This creates a sense among users that the content they publish receives little to no attention. For example, in the case of the ice water bucket challenge, ordinary people's videos received fewer than a hundred views, while famous individuals' videos garnered several thousand views. The graph below illustrates the distribution of user roles in social networks, with approximately ninety percent of users observing, nine percent republishing content, and only one percent actively producing content (Haji Hashemi 2016, 167).

The presence of users active about Islam, including those who engage in the production, publication, and consumption of Islamic content, is not an exception. Despite the profound teachings of Islam, the vast population of Muslims, and the number of Islamic countries, active users do not currently hold a prominent and influential position within this space. Studies indicate that one significant approach to amplify the active presence of users is to accelerate and streamline the dissemination of Islamic teachings. This can be achieved by fostering networking among virtual space users, aiming to leverage diverse resources, opportunities, markets, and capabilities. Such an objective is accomplished through fostering meaningful communication, establishing long-term commitment, and nurturing sustainable networking practices.

## Networking

Networking is a fundamental strategy in career and career path management, involving purposeful efforts to establish relationships with others. By doing so, individuals increase their access to resources (Hakkak & Feli, 2020) and unlock new opportunities, resources, markets, and capabilities for both themselves and their organizations. Furthermore, networking enhances the potential for acquiring new and supplementary knowledge (Sakhdari, 2015) and contributes to the creation of competitive advantage and organizational improvement (Öberg, 2018, 124-28). Business networks serve as connections between organizations with diverse assets, capabilities, opportunities, and qualifications, enabling the creation of fresh chances and openings (McGrath et al., 2018). These networks also facilitate a company's access to novel abilities (Najafi-Tavani et al., 2018).

A well-built network reveals relationships based on trust and cooperation within communities. It represents a potential and

actual resource that can be accessed through individual connections within the network (Thompson, 2010). Networking behavior involves creating, maintaining, and utilizing relationships to facilitate career-related activities and predict and maximize their benefits (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). A networker is an individual who is knowledgeable about the methods of developing and nurturing their network. An effective strategy for managing an individual's career path through networking involves cultivating and maintaining personal relationships that facilitate the exchange of career-related resources (Forret & Dougherty, 2001).

In general, there are two types of relationships within and between organizations: formal and informal relationship networks. The formal relationship network refers to a deliberate structure of roles within an organization or between multiple organizations that is officially established and defined (Seyyed Javadin, 2004). On the other hand, the informal relationship network emerges within an official organization and simultaneously influences it (Haddadiyan & Ghorbani, 2015).

Individuals or specific organizations alone cannot effectively produce, publish, and promote Islamic content on a national and international scale in the world. This is because organizations and individuals have their own responsibilities and focus on their specific target regions and societies, which limits their ability to have a holistic approach and cater to the entire population. To bridge this gap, a global relationship network can play a vital role.

## Types of Networking

Networking can be categorized into three types:

1. Micro-networking: This type of networking is organized based on individuals.
2. Meso-networking: Meso-networking revolves around organizing networks based on organizations.
3. Macro-networking: Macro-networking encompasses very large networks that consist of a combination of human and organizational networks. (Zolfaghari and Zand Hesami, 2016, 59; Arani et al., 2021, 205)

Networking occurs within various environments such as family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, associations, charities, trade

shows, media, training classes, and internet communication. In the context of virtual space networking within the world of Islam, it entails connecting Muslim and non-Muslim users residing in Islamic regions who are engaged with the Muslim community and share an interest in Islamic values. These individuals may actively use or produce Islamic content, promote and publish it, teach it to others, or possess experiences and knowledge about Islam and its teachings. They strive to ensure that the contemporary world has an accurate and realistic understanding of Islam and Muslims.

The focus of networking in this research is on the users of virtual space who reside in the world of Islam and maintain connections with the Islamic community.

## The Prerequisite of Networking

The significance of virtual space has been amplified due to the contrasting dynamics of the salvation and prosperity Islam offers to everyone, alongside the prevalence of Islamophobia and the proliferation of complex issues within the Islamic world. The utilization of powerful tools, such as virtual space, has further accentuated the importance of this domain. Within this space, some users propagate Islamophobia, while others utilize it to introduce Islam and promote its teachings. Although these users may initially appear isolated, there is a potential for productive, effective, active, and influential presence when they are connected in a network that caters to the needs of users worldwide. Therefore, it becomes essential to bridge this gap through networking. As a result, we examine the advantages and necessity of networking among users of virtual space in the world of Islam:

1. Companionship with valuable friends: Networking fosters the sense of having supportive friends and like-minded companions who share a common concern for Islamic values. It creates a feeling of unbreakable brotherhood, as emphasized in the Quranic verse "the believers are brothers" (Quran 49:10). This connection generates self-confidence and synergy among the involved users, instilling a sense of trust that they will not be abandoned or lost in the rapidly changing and transformative contemporary world. Through Islamic

identification, networking transforms the user's personal assets into social assets and sources of support.

2. Networking enables users to showcase, identify, attract, and distinguish their novel aptitudes and abilities.

3. Acquiring new information and opportunities leads to a fresh perspective and standpoint for ideation and the production of new knowledge in the direction of Islamization of content, aligning with the needs of users at various levels.

4. Networking serves as a platform for the exchange of opinions between Muslims and the wider human society. It acts as a highway for the flow of ideas, where through long-term and committed relationships, users recognize and share information with each other, leading to the emergence of diverse notions.

5. Networking facilitates the exploration of modern strategies and methods for introducing Islam and its teachings to diverse communities and in different languages. Through networking, new approaches are discovered, allowing for innovative ways of spreading knowledge about Islam and promoting its teachings.

6. Networking enhances the effectiveness of Islam by taking into account the regional, cultural, social, economic, and political environment of the users. It achieves this by creating new opportunities that align with the specific contexts and needs of the users, thereby maximizing the impact and relevance of Islamic efforts.

7. Networking plays a crucial role in highlighting, evaluating, and boosting the self-confidence of users. By connecting with others, networking helps users distinguish themselves and assess their abilities. When users' skills and services are recognized and they establish strong networks and relationships, it creates numerous opportunities for collaboration. Networking serves as a pathway for growth in innovative activities, fostering self-confidence and self-belief. Over time, the self-confidence built through connections with like-minded individuals in one's field of activity can place a person in a positive and advantageous position.

8. The dynamic nature of Islam's response to the contemporary human needs becomes evident through networking. By bringing together diverse perspectives, networking highlights the relevance of Islam and uncovers its hidden treasures. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of Islamic principles and their application to address the evolving needs of humanity.

9. Creation of opportunities: Networking inherently paves the way for new opportunities. It provides avenues to connect with ideal users, engage with globally influential figures, evaluate Islamic scientific teachings in laboratories, demystify them, foster ideation, and generate synergy among individuals and groups.

10. Accessing current resources and information: Networking enables users to benefit from up-to-date and novel resources and information. It ensures that users have access to relevant and timely knowledge, which can be utilized when needed.

11. Support: Networking provides users with the opportunity to gain the support of influential individuals. Through networking, users can establish connections with high-ranking individuals who can offer assistance during challenging times, such as resource or financial constraints. These individuals can provide valuable support by sharing their experiences and expertise, or by facilitating connections with suitable sources of financial aid. This support network enables users to navigate difficulties effectively and optimize their ability to overcome obstacles.

12. Long-term mutual relationships: Networking facilitates the establishment of enduring and mutually beneficial connections among users. This addresses a significant gap that users in the world of Islam often encounter. Through networking, exchange relationships have the potential to evolve into strong and committed partnerships.

13. Production of up-to-date Islamic content tailored to users: Networking facilitates the ideation and production of content by the users themselves. Content based on Islamic teachings is created in accordance with

the specific local, cultural, economic, social, and political requirements of the users, with their active participation. The speed and breadth of content production are also crucial considerations. According to estimates on social networks, Facebook users share 2,460,000 pieces of content, Twitter users tweet 277,000 times, and so on, every minute (Taylor 2015). Achieving such a volume of Islamic content production is only possible through effective networking among users (Samsar et al., 2015, 47). Moreover, the originality of content has become increasingly important in the public sphere of social networks. If content is perceived as repetitive, it significantly diminishes its potential profitability and impact.

14. Networking alleviates users from engaging in parallel and repetitive tasks, which is a common challenge faced by Muslim users. It addresses the issue of recurring work that fails to consider the potential of the virtual space and the specific needs of the target community.
15. Networking eliminates the need for costly advertisements.

As a result, networking the users of the cyberspace in the world of Islam becomes the most effective, economical, and fastest approach.

## The Research Background of Networking Muslims' Activities

There are various resources available on the Muslim network and networking, a few of which are mentioned in what follows.

The book *Building Moderate Muslims Networks* is the result of extensive research conducted at the Rand Institute, organized into ten chapters. The authors of this book advocate for the United States to engage with moderate individuals and groups as a means to counter the threats of jihadi terrorism and the violence associated with traditional Muslims. The book proposes strategies for the United States to address the challenges posed by Islamic communities and their threats, drawing parallels to the approach taken during the Cold War. The main objective is to establish extensive networks and provide intellectual and financial support to moderate voices, along with specific strategies. The book covers topics such as the Cold War experience, similarities between Cold War supporters and challenges in the contemporary Islamic world,

a roadmap for networking moderate elements in the Islamic world, the European pillar, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, networking secular Muslims, and strategic recommendations.

The paper titled "Criticism and Investigation of the Link between the Networks of Moderate Muslims" written by Gholamreza Khosravi sheds light on the formation of networks among moderate Muslims. The article-book emphasizes several key aspects, including the role of American policy in contributing to the rise and support of terrorism in the Islamic world, as well as the lack of transparency in American networking processes.

The "Networking Muslim Scholars" meeting focuses on the exchange of science and technology experiences. This annual event, hosted by the Mustafa Science and Technology Foundation, aims to foster collaboration and interaction among experts and scientists from Islamic countries. The meeting serves as a platform, known as the "neeting for the exchange of science and technology experiences of Islamic countries," which facilitates the creation of synergy and the development of scientific cooperation. It plays a crucial role in promoting discourse on science and technology and advancing the communication network among scientists in the Islamic world through international events. Furthermore, it supports the growth of scientific and technological activities in countries affiliated with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The meeting also endeavors to enhance scientific interactions at the international level by providing financial support for applied research and connecting researchers and professors from the Islamic world to a network of prominent scientists.

The book titled *Shia in Cyberspace*, authored by the Research Center of Islamic Science and Culture, explores the sociological theorization of the Shia cyberspace and the media norms associated with it. The book delves into the background of the active presence of Shia communities in the digital realm. The author also examines various waves of change within the Shia cyberspace, including the text-centered wave, institution-centered wave, ritual-centered wave, encounter-centered wave, discourse-centered wave, social-centered wave, education-centered wave, and the role of certain seminaries and Shia policies. The book proposes several strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the Shia cyberspace, which include:

1. Paying attention to the content of the Shia cyberspace to avoid repetitive works and fully utilize the opportunities presented by the virtual space.
2. Focusing on communicational and interactional aspects to foster meaningful engagement within the cyberspace.
3. Emphasizing a social-centered approach, considering the impact and influence of social dynamics within the Shia cyberspace.
4. Recognizing the international aspects of the Islamic cyberspace, acknowledging the global reach and interconnectedness of digital platforms.

These strategies aim to optimize the potential of the Shia cyberspace, promote effective communication, and leverage the international dimensions of the Islamic digital landscape.

The article titled "The Reflection of Shia Studies in Cyberspace," written by Hamidreza Kahani, explores the interconnected nature of the web in the realms of humanities, religion, and the increasing importance of Shia intellectual movements. This study delves into the virtual landscape of the English-speaking online sphere, investigating which websites provide information about Shia and the kind of experience an unfamiliar user encounters when searching for the Shia school to gain an understanding of Shia beliefs. Furthermore, it examines whether the existing content on Internet databases effectively conveys an accurate understanding of Shi'ism, appealing to the mindset of a non-Shia audience.

The article titled "Muslim Networks, Muslim Selves in Cyberspace: Islam in the Post-Modern Public Sphere," written by John W. Anderson from the Catholic University of America, explores the significant aspects of the intersection between social dynamics and the evolution of the Internet, and its impact on the dynamic nature of Muslim public spheres. The paper examines three stages: technological specialists, official activists, and the emergence of online moderate Islam, investigating the process by which Muslim presence has developed on the Internet.

A. Technologists: The technologists have shown their Muslim identity for the first time by sharing authentic Islamic texts online, utilizing the Internet as a primary

platform for scientific and research purposes.

B. Official Activists (scholars and official organizations): This stage emerged as a response to the previous stage and aimed to establish alternative communication channels with people, particularly at the international level. Various organizational spokespersons (Islamic organizations), the International Islamic University (Islamic Conference Organization), numerous national organizations, and schools of scholars emerged with a focus on introducing Islam and promoting its correct interpretation. They placed significant emphasis on maintaining boundaries and addressing practical concerns of Muslims, such as the availability of mosques, halal butchers, and schools in Western countries. Their attention was directed towards fulfilling the ritual needs of Muslims and addressing their calls for support. Moreover, they increasingly focused on educational initiatives to shape the lives of Muslims and disseminate relevant information. In the 1990s, extensive texts of religious teachings and interpretations were published online through research conducted in cities like Qom and other seminaries. By 1999, Al-Azhar University published content online in both Arabic and English, serving as a web-based resource for authentic religious guidance on behalf of religious organizations. This stage facilitated the development of a broader network, network processes, network habits, producers, consumers, and identities in general, benefiting from the user-friendly advancements in global web technology.

C. The Emergence of Moderate Online Islam: Moderate Islam encompasses a wider spectrum of perspectives and signifies a shift in discourse and communication aimed at harmonizing religion and contemporary life, particularly in adapting Islam to modern circumstances. Many individuals involved in this stage exhibit interests and professional styles that establish transnational connections, linking Middle Eastern countries and the global Islamic community. This connection between

local and transnational movements spans various regions. During this stage, a variety of Islamic media outlets have emerged. Some of them align with the objectives of the first stage, such as a fatwa website established by a Muslim youth who graduated from a Catholic university, aiming to share personal experiences. Others follow the active approach of the second stage, like Hezbollah's website in Lebanon, as well as websites belonging to religious schools and foundations in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Al-Azhar. Additionally, there are cases where platforms have garnered broader and more diverse audience engagement, such as Online Islam, which utilizes the latest web technologies proficiently in both Arabic and English. Similar Islamic portals with similar features also exist.

The article titled "Muslim Usage of the Internet," authored by Steven (Musa) Woodward Furber (2017), examines statistical data that establishes a correlation between Internet usage and residence in Muslim minority or majority regions. The objective is to explore how Muslims seek answers to their religious queries by utilizing information resources available both online and offline, apart from the Internet.

The article titled "Muslims in Cyberspace: Exploring Factors Influencing Online Religious Engagements in Malaysia," written by Azimaton Abdul Rahman, Nor Hazlina Hashim, and Hasrina Mustafa, highlights the authors' perspective on the development of Islam and Muslim public spheres in the virtual realm, evolving alongside information and communication technology. Similar to believers of other religions, Muslims are eager to share their faith, beliefs, and values with just a click of a mouse. This study aims to identify the factors that influence Muslims' participation in online religious activities. The research reveals five key factors that predict online religious interactions: Internet attitude-perception, societal religious norms, Internet self-efficacy, level of religiosity among Muslims, and the utilization of media for religious purposes.

It is noteworthy to highlight the emergence of social networks specifically catering to the Muslim community. Recognizing the need for a secure and protected environment with religious content, Muslims have taken the initiative to establish social networks that address doubts, educate and introduce authentic Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims, and filter out content that contradicts religious beliefs. These

networks include platforms like Taj Al-Islam (similar to Facebook), the Social Network of Tutlub, Shia Chat, the Social Network of Medina, Muxlim PAL, Muxlim, 4visit (http://4visit.com), the Virtual Society of Nasr, the Supporters of Vicegerency, and the Internet Network of Muslim Youth (www.muslimyouth.net).

The existing background research reveals a significant research gap concerning the "networking" and "users of virtual space in the world of Islam." Thus, it is essential to address this gap and contribute to the existing knowledge. In light of this objective, the present study aims to explore and discuss the processes and patterns of networking among users in the virtual space within the context of the Muslim world.

## Research Method

The data for this study was collected through the document method, and the gathered information has been presented in the form of a paradigm model that depicts the networking of users in the virtual space within the world of Islam. This model is derived from a comprehensive framework, including causal, intervening, contextual, phenomena-centered conditions, strategies, and outcomes, as presented by Strauss. The data-based approach utilized in this research is qualitative and follows an inductive methodology, employing a series of systematic procedures to develop a theory regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss and Corbin, 2011). This method gained significant recognition and validation following the publication of the influential book by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. The data collected by the researchers to describe the networking processes encompass various types of qualitative data, such as observations, conversations, interviews, and government documents (Hakkak and Feli, 2020, 202).

## A Proposed Model for Networking the Users of Virtual Space in the Islamic World

Following the data collection process and in-depth analysis of interviews, articles, books, and news related to the networking of users in the virtual space within the Islamic world, a conceptual model has been developed. This model is based on theories that are relevant to the topic and encompasses six key components that are integral to any networking phenomenon.
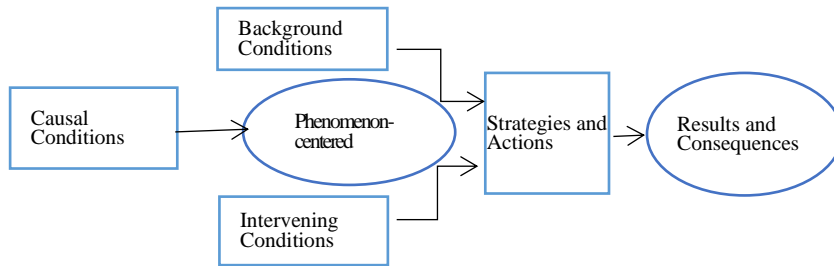
**Causal Conditions:** These conditions contribute to the initiation and progression of the phenomenon in question. Causal conditions represent the prerequisites and interests that drive individuals, groups, and organizations to engage in networking activities. In the context of networking users in the virtual space within the world of Islam, the following causal conditions are identified:

| Main Category | Subcategory | Basic Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Causal Conditions | The Need for Power | The need for the solidarity of the Islamic Ummah to become a world power |
| | Material Need | The need to have access to financial resources |
| | Communication (social and emotional) Needs of the Users | Dynamic and reciprocal social interaction of users<br>Islamic identity formation<br>Value correlation of users |
| | Spiritual Needs | Giving meaning to the life based on monotheism<br>Performing worshiping rituals and practices in relation to the Muslims |
| | Information Needs | The need to know Islam and introduce its teachings correctly in various languages |
| | Defending Islam and Islamic Identity | Defending Islam<br>Information about and response to the doubts and attacks on Islam<br>Defending Islamic identity against Islamophobia |
| | Creating New Opportunities and Innovation | Creating new opportunities for production, spread and use of Islamic content<br>Innovation in introducing Islam<br>Production and publication of Islamic content altering to the needs of users |
| | Islamic Response to the Needs | Islamic response to the individual, national and global needs of the users of the virtual space proportionate to today's needs |

Motives serve as the underlying causes for networking. Within the context of networking users in the virtual space of the world of Islam, several motivations can be identified. One significant incentive is the desire for solidarity within the Islamic Ummah and the aspiration to establish a global influence. Individuals and organizations require access to financial resources in order to support their virtual activities, thus seeking to connect with like-minded individuals and organizations. The interactive communication needs, both social and emotional, of the users also play a crucial role in driving networking activities.

According to Anderson (2001), networking among Muslims is a dynamic social interaction that stems from the characteristics of networks and Islamic identity. It revolves around organized social technology. In the virtual space, Muslim users can shape and safeguard their identity. They seek to fulfill their spiritual needs by connecting with like-minded friends, sharing worship rituals, and establishing a spiritual space of solidarity and communication with other Muslims. Another driving factor for networking is the need for information and insight about Islam. Individuals and organizations engage in networking in various languages to gain a proper understanding of Islam and effectively promote it. Building a strong, committed, and efficient network is crucial for Muslims to obtain information, address Islamophobia, counter doubts, defend their identity, and respond to individual, national, and global demands within the virtual space.

Furthermore, networking in the world of Islam facilitates the creation of innovative opportunities to introduce Islam and generate impactful Islamic content. It also enables the Islamic community to respond to the diverse needs of virtual space users at individual, national, and global levels.

**Background Conditions:** specific situations that affect the strategies.

| Main Category | Subcategory | Basic Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| | Individual Characteristics | Individual efforts to expand and maintain relationships with users <br> Having strong public relations <br> Having the reason for the establishment of network of users |

| Background Conditions | | Believing Islam and its values<br>Having tendency towards the Islamic values and conformity with its norms |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Leader̕s Characteristics | The power of influence<br>Making coordination in the network |
| | Career Characteristics (Virtual Activity) | Mutual interaction in joint activities<br>Interest and expertise in the field of activities in the virtual space |
| | Cultural– Normative Characteristics | Mutual recruitment of individuals and organizations<br>The existence of similarities in terms of attitudes, values, social status, and other individual characteristics<br>Common language and racial characteristics<br>Religious (Islamic) characteristics<br>Tendency towards helping others |
| | Infrastructures | Technological infrastructures<br>Tools and equipment of networking |
| | Environmental Characteristics | Individual, group, organizational, regional, national and global characteristics |

Among the individual characteristics of networkers in the world of Islam are their individual efforts to establish, develop, and maintain relationships with users in the virtual environment. They possess strong public relations skills and a motivation to create networks of users. Furthermore, they have a strong belief in Islamic teachings, demonstrate an inclination towards Islamic values, and conform to its norms.

The characteristics of network leaders in the world of Islam include their power of influence and ability to establish coordination. There is a complementary relationship between network members and the network manager. Network managers play a crucial role in establishing mutual norms and fostering an atmosphere of trust among network members, contributing to network stability. The presence of a collaborative infrastructure that aligns the interests of various partners is also essential.

Network managers can enhance goal alignment between network members and the entire network by facilitating communication and

bringing members together. This positive impact on network functions has been highlighted by Mandell and Keast (2008). To ensure internal stability, network managers create an environment that encourages favorable and beneficial interactions. They strengthen participation, promote data exchange, maintain coordination, and devise strategies to address strategic and operational challenges, as emphasized by Turrini (2010).

Therefore, the characteristics of a network leader and manager in the virtual environment involve a genuine interest in the field of activity, expertise, and mutual interaction with network members. These factors are crucial for effective networking within the world of Islam.

The cultural-normative characteristics of users play a significant role in networking within the world of Islam. The mutual attraction between individuals and organizations, shared attitudes, values, and social status, as well as other individual characteristics, have an impact on networking dynamics. Commonalities in language, race, sect, or religion, such as being Arab or Turkish, can contribute to the attraction towards networking. The religious aspect and Islamic orientation of users are constructive factors in networking, as like-minded individuals who share religious concerns tend to participate in such networks.

Another important and effective factor is the willingness to help others, which is essential for networking. Individuals who lack this characteristic may have difficulty engaging in networking effectively. Additionally, the availability of appropriate technological infrastructures and the possession of desired tools and equipment are crucial for making progress in the virtual space. Without these resources, it becomes challenging to initiate networking activities.

Environmental and organizational features also play a significant role in networking. The social, political, cultural, economic, and international environment in which organizations and individuals operate, as well as their specific requirements, have an impact on the goals and strategies of networking. These factors shape the context in which networking takes place and influence the overall networking outcomes.

**Intervening Conditions:** These conditions serve as general and mediating factors that exert influence on strategies and actions within networking. They can either facilitate or limit the impact of other factors involved in the process.

| Main Category | Subcategory | Basic Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| **Intervening Conditions** | Mutual interaction and exchange between users | The level of participation and interaction of users<br>The mutual social interaction<br>The exchange of preferences (friendship, interests and information) |
| | Users᾽ interests | The rate of results and desired rate of the users |
| | The structural characteristics of the network of users | The size of the network<br>The variety of the network<br>The flexibility of the network |
| | Quick response to the needs | The rate of quick response to the demands |
| | Resources for the network of users | Scientific, educational, and content–based<br>Communicative<br>Financial |
| | The manner of power in the network | Powerful members of the network |

Users join a network based on their shared interests and goals with the network. Several facilitating conditions contribute to the success of a network. Dynamic interaction and active participation among users are key factors that contribute to the growth and expansion of the network. When members engage in mutual social interaction and demonstrate a willingness to exchange friendship, interests, and information, it enhances and facilitates networking processes.

Access to network resources also plays a significant role. The more users have access to resources within the network, the greater the positive impact on network actions, procedures, and strategies. Users' expectations regarding the results and benefits they anticipate from the network also influence the network's strategy and goal attainment.

Several factors can either facilitate or hinder networking strategies. These include the source of financial, information, and communication resources available to users, the prominence and influence of certain users within the network, and the level of need for timely responses to Islamophobia and attacks on Islam. The

flexibility, size, and diversity of networks also impact the strategies employed.

Companies can leverage the structures of their networks to enhance performance. Appropriate network structures for business can facilitate commercialization by providing opportunities and network resources derived from diverse partners with distinct characteristics. However, having diverse network structures alone does not guarantee efficient attraction and exploitation of these resources and opportunities. Research indicates that networking capabilities improve the impact of business network structures on performance.

By considering these factors, network leaders and managers can create an environment conducive to effective networking and maximize the potential benefits for all participants within the network (Maghsoodi Ganjeh et al., 2019; Mu, 2014).

**Phenomenon-Centered:** This serves as the foundation for a process (Strauss 2011). When selecting a category, it is essential to position it at the center so that it meets several criteria:

1. All other main categories can be connected and related to it.
2. The category should emerge repeatedly within the data.
3. The explanation associated with the category should logically and incontrovertibly expand by linking to other categories.
4. The chosen concept should be capable of explaining both the main point derived from the data and the subsequent transformations (Strauss 2011).

Establishing network connections among users within the virtual space serves as a pivotal category that operates across various dimensions, including:

| Main Category | Subcategory | Basic Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Networking (its dimensions) | Illustration management to attract the users | Self-promotion<br>Self-monitoring<br>Positive reputation |
| | Network relations management | Establishing a network relationship<br>Expanding, maintaining and using network relations<br>Ending a network relationship |

| | Network learning (network knowledge management) | Knowledge gained from the experience of user relationships<br>Knowledge obtained from the quality of network relations<br>Knowledge of the shared content |
|---|---|---|
| | Searching for new active users | Monitoring new users<br>Evaluating new users |

1. Illustration management constitutes a significant dimension within networking. The ability to attract new network participants and foster relationships holds paramount importance. Furthermore, employing illustration management techniques can cultivate trust in inter-enterprise relationships. Research indicates that trust-building acts as a catalyst for the exchange of knowledge and information within cooperative ventures, mitigating opportunistic behavior from both parties involved (Sakhdari 2015). Illustration management emerges as a vital solution to address intra-network conflicts that may arise within intercompany relations. Therefore, particular attention should be dedicated to the four techniques of illustration management capabilities, namely self-promotion, self-exhibition, self-monitoring, and positive reputation (Zahedi 2017).

The appropriate illustrations of user networking are as follows:

A. Self-promotion: The extent to which individuals or organizations actively promote themselves and play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge about Islam, producing, and publishing Islamic content within the virtual space directly influences their ability to attract network connections. By effectively showcasing their expertise and contributions, they become more persuasive to potential collaborators, thereby facilitating their own networking efforts.

B. Self-monitoring: Engaging in self-monitoring practices, both individually and within the network, plays a crucial role in achieving goals and plans, ultimately leading to more effective recruitment efforts.

C. Positive reputation: The reputation individuals or organizations possess in terms of their contributions to

the establishment and promotion of Islamic sciences, as well as their production and publication of effective and up-to-date content, directly influences their ability to attract capable individuals.

2. Network relationship management: Network relationship management encompasses the individuals' ability to establish, develop, and maintain connections with individuals who can provide support in their careers or areas of expertise (Forret and Dougherty 2001, 2). Networking involves engaging with a diverse range of individuals and organizations who collaborate to achieve mutual goals and success. It aims to foster enduring, long-term relationships where members know and assist one another. Users strategically adopt networking as their policy and approach. Networking involves establishing, nurturing, and utilizing relationships to facilitate career-related activities and maximize their benefits (Forret and Dougherty 2004; Wolff et al., 2008).

The main components of relationship management are as follows:

Establishing new relationships: Recognizing the dynamic nature of the environment and the emergence and disappearance of opportunities over time, entrepreneurs who are committed to networking should not only nurture and leverage their existing connections to the fullest extent, but also continually forge new relationships within their network. By actively seeking new connections, entrepreneurs can gain a better understanding of opportunities and threats, leading to enhanced performance (Neghabi et al., 2012, 39). New relationships bring fresh opportunities and information to the network. In the user network of the Islamic world, each new user adds value to the overall network, contributing to its growth and potential.

A. Expanding, maintaining, and leveraging relationships: A networking entrepreneur strives to both maintain and expand their relationships, recognizing the competitive advantage that can be derived from strong connections (Neghabi et al., 2012, 39). Preserving network relationships not only enhances coordination and builds trust but also places network commitment at the

forefront. Furthermore, establishing both intra- and inter-organizational coordination is vital for sustaining existing relationships (Parida and Westerberg 2017, 20).

B. Terminating network relationships: Organizations, particularly companies, should appropriately end unprofitable relationships (Maghsoodi Ganjeh et al., 2019). Researchers have recognized the ability to terminate network relationships as a crucial aspect of management capability in network relations (Ritter and Geersbro 2011, 988-93). It becomes necessary to terminate a relationship when either the network as a whole or a member within the network acts contrary to Islamic values or the goals of the network.

3. Network learning (network knowledge management): Network learning pertains to an organization's capacity to leverage experiences gained from previous relationships to foster more profitable connections and improve the management of existing relationships. Additionally, as a learning organization, companies should consistently seek to learn from the talents and abilities of their partners during the establishment of network relationships. They should effectively manage the knowledge acquired from their business partners throughout the course of network relations and disseminate it to all employees (Maghsoodi Ganjeh et al., 2019, 164).

4. Seeking new active users: The pursuit of users to enhance networking performance is crucial. An essential aspect of the capability to find partners is for managers to be cognizant of the knowledge gaps within their company. Through this awareness, they can view every inter-organizational link as a channel to fill these information gaps. This approach not only reduces the likelihood of redundant work and unnecessary challenges but also maximizes the utilization of all available potentials in the business (Sakhdari, 2015).

**Strategies:** Action strategies encompass purposeful behaviors, actions, and interactions that are adopted in response to a central category, influenced by intervening conditions (Hakkak and Feli, 2020, 220).

| Main Category | Subcategory | Basic Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Strategies and Actions | Network actions to plan strategies | Sincere intention<br>Goal setting<br>Determination of societal goals<br>Determination of the field of activity<br>Determination of the characteristics of network users<br>Determination of network structure |
| | Network actions for illustrations (self–promotion, self–supervision, and positive reputation) | Honesty in illustration<br>Holding periodic meetings to provide reports and transparency of performance in virtual network<br>Active presentation in the meetings, exhibitions, formal and informal internal and foreign gatherings |
| | Network action to recruit new users (monitoring and evaluation) | Monitoring new users according to the desired features in online and offline media<br>Participating in conferences, exhibitions, as well as cultural, Islamic, and cyberspace festivals, |
| | Individual actions of users for fostering promoting, maintaining, and terminating relationships | Honesty in action<br>Investment on new users to create, maintain and develop their relations with others<br>Creation of cooperation based on trust<br>Creation of a stable relation<br>Considering the personality aspects of users (compatibility, being introvert or experience–oriented) before starting a relationship<br>Building trust by creating and maintaining relations and cooperation of users with each other<br>Inviting an influential colleague to a meeting or business activity<br>Communicating with an expert to obtain knowledge and information<br>Communicating with interactive users<br>Communicating with people more powerful than oneself<br>Adhering to Islamic moral and axiological principles<br>Focusing on the shared characteristics of users<br>Discovering users' interests |

| | | Asking new users to contribute to the improvement of network activities |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | Improving communication skills of users, especially effective listening |
| | | Consulting and being consulted in the field of expertise (by users) |
| | | Dynamic interactive and exchanging communication between users |
| | | Developing and maintaining relationships with expert and capable users |
| | | Close interaction with professional users to create and develop deeper relationship with them |
| | | Dynamic assistance of users to each other |
| | | Holding periodic meetings to enhance the communicative capabilities of users |
| | | Following up and constantly communicating with users and not abandoning them |
| | | Sending posts to users on the networked platform |
| | | Exchanging personalized messages on a particular occasion between users |
| | | Terminating relations in accordance to criteria |
| | Network action for network learning (network knowledge management) | Knowledge management according to relationship experiences of uses and the quality of formation of these relations |
| | | Collecting information, processing and converting it to the knowledge of networking |
| | | Supplying, demanding and expanding the network knowledge information |
| | | Circulation of knowledge and communication in the network and receiving feedback from it |
| | | Sharing the produced content, evaluating them, and converting them into knowledge |

Networking strategies and actions of users involve a dynamic communication process that encompasses a series of individual actions by users and a series of network-level actions.

Determined by the effective conditions, actions, and strategies of networking users in the virtual space are:

A. The strategic network actions: to devise a strategy, the first step is:

1. Sincere intention: In any Islamic activity, whether in the virtual or real world, the most crucial element is having a sincere intention. It is not about seeking personal recognition or gaining power. In the virtual activity and

networking of users, individuals should prioritize genuine intentions and place their trust in God.

2. Determination of goals: Determining goals is a vital step in networking. The purpose of networking users is to facilitate extensive, interactive, and enduring communication among individuals in cyberspace, focusing on Islam and its teachings. This enables users to create an interactive and dynamic environment where they can support each other in utilizing and producing Islamic content, publishing and disseminating these materials, and sharing their experiences with others. Each network may have a distinct purpose based on its unique circumstances and background. Consequently, every network should establish both short-term and long-term goals, firmly believe in its path, and strive towards achieving them.

3. Determining the target community: The focus of user activities is determined by the target community they aim to engage with. This target community can encompass various groups such as networks, families, children, teenagers, adults, students, the general public, Muslims, non-Muslims, individuals from specific ethnicities, races, or nations, and those who speak certain languages. Answering these questions helps identify the specific target community and the nodes within the network that users should prioritize in their networking efforts.

4. Determining the field of activity: The field in which the network will operate is a crucial consideration. It could involve various areas such as the production of Islamic content, education, raising awareness about Islam, addressing doubts and misconceptions, countering Islamophobia, and launching campaigns centered around Islamic themes like Hijab, Hussain gathers us, and the question of "Who is al-Husayn?"

5. Determining the characteristics of network members: Determining the criteria and indicators for selecting individuals to be part of the network is crucial. For instance, it is essential to establish that individuals in the

network should not be anti-Islamic or hypocritical when the goal is to produce and promote Islamic content.

6. Determining the network structure: The type of networking we engage in determines the monitoring and evaluation approach for the users involved. Our networking falls under the micro and individual type, where active and influential users with resources and expertise are connected. Additionally, there is a possibility of a mezzo type network, which involves active organizations in the Islamic field. Examples of such organizations include Al-Mustafa International University, Al-Azhar University, Cairo University, the University of Quran and Islamic Sciences of Sudan, the Quran Faculty of Tanta (Egypt), the International Islamic University, Islam Online, Islamic University of Madinah, Al-Asmariyah University (Libya), Higher School of Basic Doctrine of Islamic Faith of Tunisia, the Faculty of Promotion and Basic Doctrine of Islamic Faith of Jordan, University of Gaza, International Islamic University of Malaysia, the Quranic Guidance Association of Lebanon, Central Florida Muslim Academy, and Saudi Islamic Academy (USA), among others.

The most basic level of networking with these organizations is to include links to their websites or resources on our platforms. By doing so, users can easily access information directly related to their specific sect or Islamic perspective. For example, if a user belonging to the Sunni sect searches for Sunni-related information, they can be connected to the Research Center of Al-Mustafa through the provided link. This direct access allows users to obtain accurate information without the filtration of rumors or misinformation. Consequently, this approach helps dispel accusations, misunderstandings, and judgments, bringing us closer to fostering unity within the Islamic Ummah.

If the network structure is of a macro type and operates at a global level, involving organizations and individuals, it impacts the networking processes and strategy formulation differently. Establishing a robust, stable, and interactive network, such as the Conference of Islamic Countries, can lead to the formation of a network that encompasses the following sections:

1. Introducing Islam and its teachings in various languages worldwide, emphasizing Muslim commonalities.
2. Creating a section dedicated to newly converted Muslims, providing a platform for sharing their experiences and supporting their journey.
3. Sharing the experiences of Muslims and non-Muslims in their interactions with Islamic teachings and Muslims, fostering understanding and promoting dialogue.
4. Producing Islamic content that caters to individual, national, and global needs, addressing diverse topics and formats.
5. Organizing exhibitions to showcase Islamic productions and widely promoting these exhibitions globally through shared links.
6. Highlighting religious and contemporary role models who exemplify living according to religious standards, inspiring others through their actions and conduct.
7. Initiating campaigns with Islamic content using hashtags and actively supporting such campaigns. For instance, launching campaigns on social networks, like the "#hijabtome" hashtag, to address misunderstandings about the hijab and empower veiled Muslim women.
8. The process of attracting users and organizations to the network involves employing techniques of self-promotion, self-supervision, and building a positive reputation. Honesty and transparency in illustrating the network's purpose and performance are essential principles that generate trust and encourage cooperation among users. Holding regular meetings to provide transparent reports on the network's performance is another effective technique. Actively participating in both domestic and international official and unofficial meetings not only allows for network exposure but also facilitates learning from others. Attending exhibitions, seminars, and conferences presents valuable networking opportunities, enabling the network to attract a larger community of like-minded individuals who share similar goals and interests.

B. Various techniques can be employed to recruit new active users and effectively monitor and evaluate them. According to Tajweedi and Karami's research, active presence on both online social media platforms (such as Aparat, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn) and offline channels (including radio, television, exhibitions, and festivals) can aid in monitoring and identifying potential partners, as well as enhance organizational performance. Significant activities related to monitoring potential partners can be conducted within the realm of social media (Maghsoodi Ganjeh 2019, 164). Furthermore, when evaluating potential partners, one can consider criteria such as possessing adequate financial resources, complementary capabilities, shared goals, and organizational cultures (Alves and Meneses 2015, 23-35). Active participation in the cyberspace to produce, expand, and disseminate Islamic content while adhering to criteria like upholding Islamic values and receiving material and spiritual support can also be used as evaluation indicators. The most suitable venues for establishing connections and networking are festivals, conferences, lectures, campaigns, and significant scientific and Islamic events such as Hajj, Arbaeen, and the Conference of Islamic Countries. These gatherings provide excellent opportunities for engaging with like-minded individuals, exchanging ideas, and forming beneficial partnerships within the network.

C. Individual actions of users play a crucial role in networking, encompassing the establishment, advancement, maintenance, termination, and utilization of relationships between users. Sincerity is an integral component of every user's activities in the virtual space. It is essential to adhere to moral and Islamic principles while considering users' personality dimensions such as extroversion, adaptability, and empiricism. Seeking membership and engaging users' assistance in promoting network activities are also necessary. Networking requires long-term commitment and investment from users to foster stable relationships based on trust. Interactive and reciprocal relationships between users contribute to the dynamism of networking. The provision of services and assistance to others, even before seeking help oneself, is a fundamental principle in

networking. Users should engage in dynamic circulation of mutual support. Strengthening one's capabilities involves networking with capable individuals and organizations, as well as interacting with users who are willing to share resources (time, energy, money, knowledge, experience, and connections) when needed (Pakdaman 2022, 22). Inviting influential users to gatherings or business activities helps deepen relationships, while focusing on commonalities and discovering shared interests expands connections. Effective communication skills, particularly active listening, are essential for network stability. Consulting with and being consulted by experts and professionals contributes to the growth and expansion of relationships. Close interaction and expanding connections with knowledgeable and capable users are significant communication activities within networking. Establishing stable communication and cooperation based on trust is a fundamental aspect of networking. Adhering to ethical principles such as honesty, commitment, and faith values is crucial in Islamic networking. Holding periodic meetings to enhance users' communication capabilities is important for strengthening relationships. Sending personalized posts and occasional messages in a networked platform fosters interactive interconnections among users, deepening their commitment to the network. It is important to maintain dynamic and continuous communication with network users and members, avoiding abandonment. However, if a relationship exhibits harmful criteria or features, it should be terminated in order to maintain a healthy network environment.

D. Network action for network learning (network knowledge management) involves the continuous management of knowledge within the network. It should be based on users' relationship experiences and the process of forming relationships. Collecting information, processing it, and transforming it into network knowledge are essential aspects of knowledge management. Facilitating the provision, demand, and expansion of network knowledge management among users helps eliminate redundant and repetitive tasks. The flow of information and relationships within the network, along with received feedback, contribute to the expansion of network knowledge management. Additionally,

sharing produced content, evaluating it, and transforming it into network knowledge supports the development of knowledge management within the network. For instance, consider the production of content on monotheism during a specific time, addressing a significant need for Western Muslims. Similarly, there may be instances where the method of Islamic sacrifice (*dhibḥ*) faces criticism from animal rights advocates. In response, scientific research can be conducted, providing answers and capturing the attention of users. Effectively managing such information prevents users from engaging in repetitive tasks, optimizing their efforts within the network.

**Results:** The implementation of these strategies yields tangible outcomes that contribute to the growth and achievement of excellence.

| Main Category | Subcategory | Basic Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| The Outcome of Networking (the Excellence of Network) | Promotion of effectiveness and efficiency of the network | Users' regular and coordinated interaction and exchange<br>Increasing the skills and capabilities of like–minded users<br>Network users' synergy in the production and publication of Islamic content<br>Coordination between the network users<br>Efficiency and effectiveness of network users' activities<br>Effective decisions in the network field<br>Production of diverse, up-to-date content catering to the users' needs<br>Fulfilment of ritual, social, and spiritual needs of users<br>Satisfaction of information and educational needs of users<br>Increased effectiveness of network activities<br>Identity formation and promotion of Islamic identity |
| | Network relationship improvement | Increased user cooperation and interactive communication<br>Deepening of stable and strong relationships<br>Relations based on trust and honesty<br>Formation of social capital |
| | Negative outcomes | Network user conflict |

Considering the factors that influence networking and its procedures and outcomes, Gibson et al. (2014) have highlighted that

networking leads to gaining power, advancing in business, achieving excellence, and attaining career success. Networking among users in the virtual space yields positive results and outcomes, including improved relations and increased effectiveness and efficiency of the network. In scientific networking and making appropriate choices, the establishment of criteria and features based on Islamic identity and moral values fosters the formation of social capital and enhances users' cooperation and exchange of communication. These relationships are strong and stable due to their alignment with the users' faith identity.

Networking also enhances users' skills and capabilities. With the flow of network information resources and regular, flexible interaction between users, synergy is created in the production, expansion, and dissemination of diverse, up-to-date, and Islamic content that caters to the users' needs. The network activities are effective, aligned with the network's objectives, and reach the desired level in terms of financial, information, and communication resources. Additionally, one significant outcome of networking is the formation and development of an Islamic identity in accordance with Islamic values and principles.

Networking among employees can have both positive and negative outcomes, and it is crucial for organizations and management to carefully observe and address the negative consequences. While networking among employees can bring about positive results such as problem-solving, facilitating management activities, preserving organizational values and identity, and fostering unity and harmony, the negative implications of this phenomenon on individuals and organizations often receive less attention.

Some of the negative consequences of employee networking include inappropriate interference in decision-making processes, undermining the unity of command, spreading rumors and false information, and generating conflicts between formal and informal organizational roles (Hakkak and Feli 2020). These negative outcomes can also manifest in networking among users in general. Conflicts arising from divergent interests and performance discrepancies among users are examples of such negative outcomes.

It is important for organizations and management to be aware

of these potential negative consequences and take proactive measures to mitigate them. This can involve setting clear guidelines and boundaries for networking activities, promoting open and transparent communication channels, and addressing conflicts or issues that arise promptly and effectively. By proactively managing the negative outcomes, organizations can ensure that networking among employees or users remains beneficial and conducive to overall organizational success.

Based on the discussions thus far, we can propose the following model for networking among virtual space users in the world of Islam.
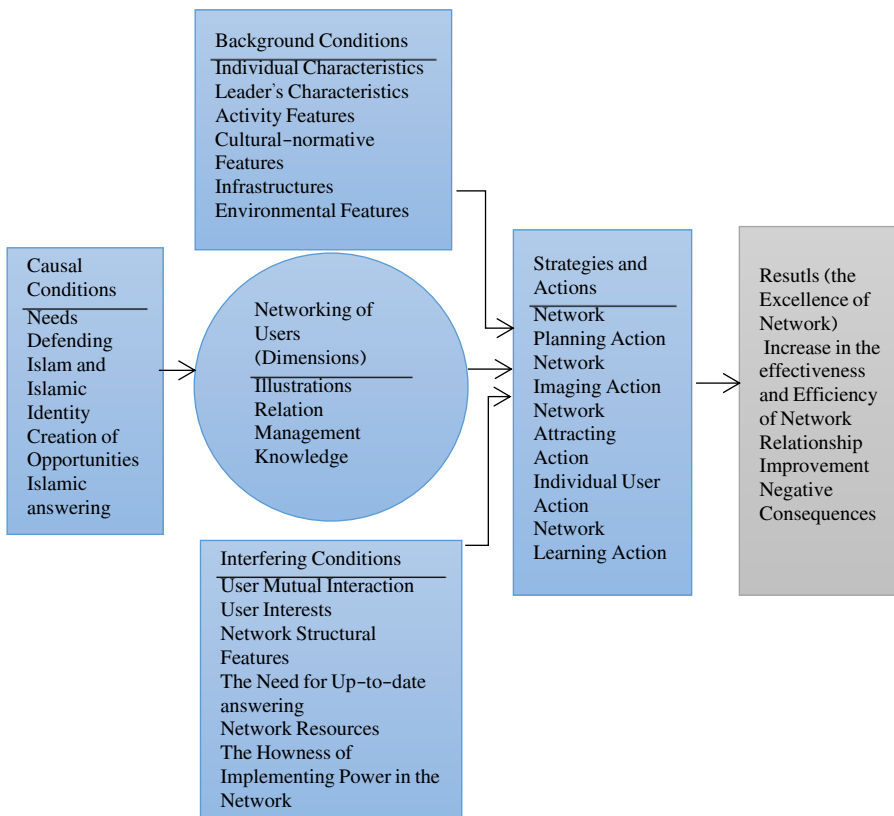
## Conclusion

The activities of virtual space users in the world of Islam are in need of networking. Despite the presence of engaged Muslims in the cyberspace, these activities often occur in parallel without fully utilizing the opportunities presented by the cyberspace environment. There is a lack of attention to the interactive and exchange relationships among users, limited production and dissemination of Islamic content involving user participation, and insufficient focus on Islamic needs at individual, national, and international levels. Networking users can address these gaps.

Each networking process consists of various causal, background, intervening, and phenomenon-centered conditions, strategies, and outcomes. Causal conditions include prerequisites, creating opportunities and innovation, defending Islam, forming Islamic identity, and addressing Islamic needs. Background conditions encompass individual characteristics, leadership, cyberspace activity, cultural norms, environmental factors, and infrastructure, all of which influence networking strategies. Interfering conditions involve the mutual interaction of users, users' interests, network structural characteristics, the need for up-to-date responses within the network, network resources, and the implementation of power in the network. These interfering conditions either facilitate or restrict networking strategies and actions.

The networking aspects center around imaging management, relationship management, knowledge management, and user recruitment, which are the focus of phenomenon-centered research. Networking actions include strategy planning, the use of illustrative techniques, user attraction techniques, network learning, and individual actions. These strategic actions contribute to the excellence of networking, increased effectiveness and efficiency of the network, improved relationships, and the mitigation of negative consequences such as conflicts.

While the general framework of networking entails processes, relationships, and components, each individual network is unique based on its specific background, phenomenon-centered conditions, and strategies. It is recommended that the model for each networking endeavor be localized and tailored to the specific conditions and requirements of that network.

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# The Role of Cyberspace in Religious Education of Teenagers and Introducing them to the Mosque

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## Abstract

The mosque plays a crucial role in familiarizing children with religious concepts and teachings. Today, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the physical presence of families and their children in the mosque may have declined as a result of the necessity to maintain social distancing measures. Hence, it is essential to utilize the potential of cyberspace to introduce teenagers to the mosque and its teachings. This article aims to elucidate the mechanisms and capabilities of the virtual mosque in cyberspace, while exploring its role in educating teenagers through the application of crucial educational principles in religious education. The article will adopt an analytical approach to explain the content, providing citations to reference different opinions and perspectives. The research findings of this article illustrate that leveraging cyberspace enables the establishment of two-way communication with a vast audience, transcending geographical and temporal limitations. Furthermore, it allows the utilization of innovative advertising methods to effectively engage with the target audience. By utilizing this platform effectively, it becomes feasible to educate and guide young

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individuals who spend a significant amount of their leisure time in the cyberspace, ensuring they are exposed to genuine religious teachings amidst the abundance of entertainment content. By harnessing the mechanisms and responsibilities of the mosque in the cyberspace and digital realm, such as the virtual pulpit, social networks, webinars, and computer games featuring accurate and reliable content, the cyberspace emerges as an ideal platform for delivering cultural, artistic, educational, and social modeling and guidance to children and teenagers. It proves to be highly effective in their educational development and overall growth.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, mosque, education, teenagers, webinar, social networks

## Introduction

In today's world, information and communication technology have become deeply integrated into human life, offering a platform for genuine religious leaders and individuals concerned with guiding humanity to present their authentic and reliable concepts and teachings to the global community. However, it is worth noting that the cyberspace and media are also utilized by false purveyors of peace and adversaries of Islam, who employ cultural attacks as a means to achieve their objectives.

In this context, individuals who embrace the correct beliefs are likely to excel in effectively presenting moral, religious, spiritual, and belief systems by employing logical and persuasive arguments. Therefore, it is crucial for religious entities to proactively take measures to disseminate the genuine teachings of Islam, utilizing the potential of virtual space and actively engaging within the virtual sphere. This will contribute to ensuring that teenagers are properly introduced to the virtual mosque and have access to authentic religious guidance.

At the present time and age, the influence of mass media on the identity formation of children and adolescents is inescapable (Melvin et al., 2004, 300). Furthermore, the utilization of the internet and social networks by young people and adolescents surpasses that of any other age group (Bullen 2000, 5). Therefore, it becomes imperative to leverage the educational potential of cyberspace to provide original educational solutions, concepts, and teachings to the youth. This article aims to shed light on the significance of the virtual mosque, highlighting its capabilities in the education of teenagers. By drawing upon important principles in education, we will examine and analyze the role of the virtual mosque, as well as its impact on the educational development of teenagers.

## 1. Functions of the Mosque in Cyberspace

The term "masjid" (mosque) etymologically signifies a place of prostration. According to Ibn al-Manẓūr's work, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, "Masjad and masjid refer to a location where individuals bow in prostration, and 'masjid' is the singular form of 'masājid'" (Ibn al-Manẓūr 1405 AH, 3:204). Al-Zubaydī adds, "Masjad refers to the prayer area and chamber within homes, whereas the masjid is the communal prayer space, and its plural form is 'masājid'" (Zubaydī 1414 AH, 5: 7).

The mosque has functions in Islamic culture. It is stated in a hadith that anyone who goes to the mosques will get one of these eight things: either a religious brother who will benefit from him, or gain knowledge and a wise point, or comprehend a strong sign, or receive the expected mercy (from Allah), or hear a word that prevents him from destruction, or a word that leads him to guidance, or leaves a sin because of the fear of God (Majlisī 1403 AH, 80: 351).

Based on this hadith, it becomes evident that many of the functions attributed to the mosque can be accessed and fulfilled through the cyberspace. Establishing a virtual mosque not only facilitates the dissemination of religious messages but also becomes a source of cultural and spiritual movements, providing guidance for people. The responsibilities of a mosque encompass various aspects such as worship, education, upbringing, culture, communication, social interaction, political involvement, architectural significance, and role-playing functions within the physical urban space (Alviri 2007, 9). Interestingly, most of these functions can be observed as being fulfilled by the virtual mosque in the realm of cyberspace.

This virtual space can be designed in a manner that obliges users to observe the specific customs and conditions necessary to enter a physical mosque. For example, a mechanism can be implemented where users must perform ablution before engaging in spiritual gatherings such as virtual classes or educational webinars. Similarly, if a user intends to make purchases within this space, they may be required to fulfill their zakat obligations. In such a scenario, the statement of the Prophet (s) could potentially extend to the users present in this virtual realm, as he stated, "As long as you are sitting in the mosque, the Exalted God will grant you one degree in heaven for every breath you take, and the angels will send blessings upon you" (Majlisī 1403 AH, 76: 336). Consequently, the functions of the virtual mosque in the cyberspace would create a religious media platform that not only disseminates messages but also strives to present realities in an authentic and meaningful manner, catering to the spiritual needs of individuals in a digital context.

The duties of the mosque in the cyberspace refer to those aspects of the physical mosque's functions that can be translated

into the virtual realm (Jahangiri Sohravardi 2008, 72). The virtual space of the mosque and webinar platform can be created in various ways. Apart from designing this space through websites and social networks, it can also be developed as software. This software would leverage the capabilities of the computer's virtual world to introduce, familiarize, and educate users about the different areas, sections, elements, and functions of the mosque. By utilizing computer features such as animations, videos, photos, and information sources, along with the three-dimensional and virtual representation of the mosque, a suitable platform can be established for cultural, artistic, educational, and instructional modeling and guidance.

Through the development of such software, which can be accessed for free, any user, regardless of their technical or computer proficiency, can enter the virtual realm of the mosque and explore its various stages by simply inserting a compact disk into their computer. This will grant them access to the virtual space of the mosque, allowing them to familiarize themselves with all the components of a physical mosque, including prestigious mosques and models adhering to Islamic traditions. Once fully immersed in this environment, users will have the opportunity to explore and learn about every aspect of the mosque (for more see Ghaemi 1984).

It is crucial to emphasize that highlighting the significance of the virtual mosque in cyberspace does not imply diminishing the importance of physical mosques. It is evident that the virtual mosque cannot replicate or encompass all the functions and experiences of real mosques. Despite enhancing the quality, impact, and immersive nature of the virtual mosque, it cannot replace the profound experience of being physically present in a mosque, participating in Hajj rituals, attending Friday prayers, and other similar rituals.

Nevertheless, it is crucial not to overlook the valuable role of the virtual mosque as a stepping stone to engage and attract young individuals who may feel lost or disconnected within the vast digital landscape, ultimately leading them towards real and traditional mosques. The undeniable reality is that there has been a decline in the acceptance of mosques among young people, while their acceptance and engagement with the internet and

virtual spaces have increased significantly.

Indeed, the virtual nature of an experience does not diminish its impact or significance; rather, it presents a different manifestation of reality in a virtual form. In parallel with the physical world, virtual reality endeavors to construct new environments and imaginative realms that can evoke a sense of "realness" in distinct ways. Although these virtual realms may appear detached from our tangible reality, they are intricately connected and offer unique opportunities for exploration and understanding.

## 2. The Educational Significance of Virtual Mosques for Adolescents

Failing to recognize the potential of cyberspace can have significant consequences, not only for future generations who will bear the responsibilities of tomorrow but also for society as a whole. Neglecting the influence of the digital realm, particularly during adolescence, can lead to substantial educational deviations and subsequent challenges.

This is because the formation of teenagers' personalities is influenced by a multitude of factors and components. In addition to elements such as heredity, family, society, nationality, ecosystem, social class, contemporary national and global culture, and religion, their presence in the expansive realm of cyberspace and the internet also exerts a profound and extensive impact. Cyberspace, particularly the internet and social networks, can greatly influence the knowledge and beliefs of individuals in various age groups, with teenagers being particularly susceptible (Hosseini Anjdani 2009, 52). In nearly all countries, especially developing ones, the youth population is larger, and their engagement with mass media is more prevalent.

Given that a significant portion of users and interactions in the cyber environment and cyberspace involve teenagers, it becomes imperative to develop a program tailored to this large demographic. Such a program should aim to guide them towards religious and spiritual teachings. One effective approach is to utilize the mechanisms of the mosque within the cyberspace.

Introducing the younger generation to religious and epistemological principles through the cyberspace, with a wealth of relevant and meaningful religious content, can fortify them against the influence of foreign cultures and safeguard their

future, as well as the well-being of society, by upholding norms and values. Considering that young individuals are particularly susceptible to cultural influences during this phase of their lives, and that they are among the primary users of cyberspace, this relationship can serve as an exceptional platform for fostering positive outcomes. It has the potential to enhance their awareness, as well as develop a range of skills.

Furthermore, teenagers and young people possess an inherent essence of evolutionism, wherein they strive for positive change, growth, and progress (Lotfabadi 2001, 112). By actively engaging them in the planning, programming, and interactive discourse within the cyberspace, as well as involving them in mosque-related activities, we can steer them away from mundane pursuits and pave the way for transformative experiences. Their thinking across various domains will naturally align with the content available to them in the cyberspace, facilitating their adaptation and development.

## 3. Religious Education Initiatives of the Virtual Mosque

Religious education is defined as a deliberate and purposeful endeavor aimed at imparting the valid tenets of a religion to others, with the intention of fostering their commitment and adherence to these teachings in both practice and belief (Davoodi 2004, 1:26). The teaching of religious principles is guided by fundamental principles and characteristics, such as creating a contextual framework, allowing for personal choice, acknowledging innate tendencies, and more. It is within this context that the role of the virtual mosque, as previously outlined, can be elucidated and examined in terms of educating children and teenagers. In other words, the methods employed to teach religious doctrines to children and adolescents are rooted in principles that can be effectively implemented in the virtual mosque, thereby institutionalizing educational principles in the lives of young individuals. These principles and characteristics encompass:

1. The principle of foundational and progressive instruction in religious matters: Education experts hold divergent views regarding the appropriate initiation point for religious education and the teaching of spiritual programs and religious teachings. One school of thought asserts that children and adolescents lack the cognitive capacity to comprehend religious teachings until

they reach maturity and growth, and therefore should not be exposed to religious education. Conversely, another viewpoint maintains that children and teenagers are deserving of and possess the inherent capacity to engage in religious education. Proponents of this perspective argue that educators can simplify and present religious content in a manner that is accessible and comprehensible to children (Kariminia 2007, 212).

Islam offers clear and definitive perspectives on this issue. According to Islamic law, children bear no responsibilities until they reach the age of puberty. However, once they reach the age of *taklīf*, which is the age at which they become obligated to adhere to Islamic laws, it becomes challenging for them to accept and fulfill these religious obligations without prior familiarity and preparation.

While it is true that boys are assigned religious responsibilities after reaching the age of fourteen, and girls after reaching the age of nine, it is not advisable to delay the performance of religious duties until puberty. It is crucial for individuals to become accustomed to worship and religious obligations from childhood, so that they develop a desire to fulfill them when they reach the age of puberty (Amini 2006, 156). Children should be trained to pray from a young age, and it is recommended to teach them the practice of prayer starting from the age of seven. Although a seven-year-old child may not be able to perform prayer perfectly, they can learn the structure of prayer and become accustomed to it. Therefore, whether they are boys or girls, it is important to introduce prayer to children as they enter primary school, both within the educational setting and within the family (Motahhari 1994, 100).

Consequently, one of the fundamental principles in religious education is the principle of "establishing a foundation" and mentally, psychologically, and emotionally preparing children for religious matters. Since the groundwork for embracing spiritual and moral virtues is typically laid during adolescence and youth, it is crucial to create an environment that facilitates religious engagement among teenagers (for more, see Ghaemi 1984). It is essential to provide a supportive environment where their inclination and desire to fulfill devotional duties stem from an inner motivation. Familiarizing them with the worship environment is necessary to cultivate this interest and desire from within.

Given that the majority of teenagers spend a significant amount

of time in the cyberspace and social networks, it becomes necessary to consider a mechanism that can compensate for their reduced physical presence in the mosque, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when health regulations limit gatherings. In this regard, familiarizing them with the functionalities of the virtual mosque within the cyberspace can serve as a means of establishing a solid foundation. Effectively acclimating and instructing children and teenagers on religious and moral matters can be achieved through the virtual mosque. By immersing themselves in this spiritual environment, behaviors and moral teachings become ingrained in their existence, often without conscious awareness.

2. The principle of the innateness of religion: This principle highlights the inherent inclination within human beings to worship and pray. The need for worship and prayer is a fundamental and profound aspect deeply rooted in the human psyche. Historical research has unequivocally demonstrated that worship is an integral part of human existence and a natural inclination. At times, this desire and inclination towards worship are channeled correctly, leading to the worship of God. However, there are instances where due to ignorance, deviation, and obstinacy, various entities and objects such as stones, wood, the moon, the sun, and others are worshipped, or it may result in irreligion.

As Motahhari says, one of the most enduring and ancient manifestations of the human spirit, and one of the most fundamental aspects of human existence, is the sense of prayer and worship. The study of human history reveals that prayer and worship have existed whenever and wherever humans have inhabited the earth. The only thing that has changed is the manner of worship and the object of worship (Motahhari 2017, 21).

To nurture and safeguard this inherent inclination and prevent its deviation, it is crucial to create suitable conditions that cater to this natural tendency. Considering that most teenagers spend a significant amount of time in the virtual realm, it becomes essential to utilize the functionalities of the virtual mosque in an appealing manner, aligning with the aesthetic nature of humans. This can play a vital role in cultivating the innate purity within individuals. It is worth noting that if teenagers are not engaged in this virtual space, they may end up aimlessly spending their time

on pornographic websites where immoral content is presented through advertisements, movies, and even computer games. It is important to recognize that adolescents may lack the ability to discern these inappropriate materials. In today's world, where teenagers devote much of their time to computer games and exploring the cyberspace, if we observe a lack of interest or desire among a group of teenagers regarding religious matters such as prayer, it may be attributed to the non-religious nature of the cyberspace, which has led their innate disposition astray.

3. The principle of autonomy in religious matters: This principle emphasizes the inherent freedom of human beings. As individuals possess a multidimensional nature and are bestowed with divine magnificence, they have the capacity to elevate their dignity through their own volition. From the Islamic perspective, human beings are unique creatures endowed with spiritual aspirations and attractions that are absent in other beings. A person has the ability to resist their inner desires and refrain from acting upon their commands. They have the power to exercise restraint over certain desires while directing others towards specific purposes. The Quran and Islamic educational sources provide numerous reasons that affirm the freedom and agency of human beings.

In accordance with this principle, it is important to never impose religious beliefs upon teenagers. Instead, we should always provide them with a space where they can freely choose their own path. The mosque, both in its physical and virtual forms, serves as an ideal space that offers a foundation for individuals to explore the path of religion and discover a deep inner conviction. This conviction should not be driven by personal gain or fear of coercion, but rather be rooted in alignment with the spiritual and divine nature of humanity. When teenagers are not compelled or forced into religious practices, and religion is presented to them in a rational manner within the right conditions and atmosphere, they have the opportunity to develop a genuine understanding. Even if they arrive at this understanding through abstract thinking and within a virtual space, they will be able to articulate well-founded reasons for their beliefs, according to their cognitive abilities. They will embrace a religion that is not merely inherited or hypocritical, but rather sincere and driven by personal choice.

Considering this reality, if parents desire their children to develop a habit of prayer and become believers, they should make an effort to familiarize them with the religious environment during their early years. Mosques are among the most important and commonly utilized spaces for religious activities. Given the significant presence of teenagers in the cyberspace, it becomes necessary to devise a strategy that aligns with this digital realm. In this regard, the virtual mosque and purposeful computer games emerge as promising options. By leveraging their appeal, these platforms can guide aimless users in the cyberspace towards religious engagement.

4. The principle of observing and experiencing the benefits of the mosque: This principle underscores the significance Islam places on observation and firsthand experience. Observation, experience, critical thinking, and education are the tools that empower individuals. Children, through observation and experience, inherit their initial and most profound lesson on religiousness and establishing a spiritual connection with God in a religious environment. This observation and experience can be effectively attained in physical spaces. Consequently, when children participate in religious settings and programs, particularly congregational prayers, it motivates them to attend the mosque and engage in prayer.

Observation and experience can also be facilitated in the cyberspace, where devotional and religious practices can be presented through the virtual mosque. This allows teenagers, who spend a significant amount of their time engaging in computer games and similar activities, to witness and experience the spiritual atmosphere of the mosque. By immersing children and teenagers in both real and virtual mosque environments, we can encourage them to engage in acts of worship and foster a conscious inclination towards religious practices (Motahhari 1994, 100). It is worth noting that the level of a child's interest in this sacred environment is directly linked to their level of participation, communication, and engagement within this environment (Bahonar 2008, 122). Therefore, the greater the child's involvement and activities within these environments, the more likely they are to develop a deeper religious attitude.

5. The principle of insight: Numerous questions arise in the

minds of individuals, particularly teenagers, encompassing matters related to religion and transcendence. Adolescents are constantly seeking to comprehend their origins and their ultimate destination. They have an inherent inclination to worship and establish a connection with a higher power, as the sense of worship is ingrained within them (Motahhari 1994, 100). However, questions such as the philosophical and purposeful nature of these acts of worship, the meaning of life, the significance of prayer and its methodology, and the philosophy behind fasting consistently occupy their thoughts. Moreover, due to the current era and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people and teenagers have become more distant from physical mosques, spending the majority of their time on social networks and in the cyberspace. Consequently, they seek answers to these inquiries within the realm of the internet. It is crucial that university professors, seminary preachers, and mosque administrators in the cyberspace make the necessary arrangements and leverage this opportunity to provide content that addresses the needs of teenagers and young adults. If they fail to do so, they may encounter misleading and deviant answers. It can be argued that one of the reasons for the abandonment or neglect of prayer is the lack of understanding among teenagers and young adults regarding the philosophy of worship. However, if the performance of acts of worship during adolescence is rooted in knowledge and fostered through the development of religious insight, their behavior transitions from mere imitation to a conscious and attitudinal approach. As a result, teenagers will remain steadfast in their religious practices in later stages of life.

Hence, it is imperative to elucidate the philosophy behind devotional practices and teachings to individuals, taking into account their intellectual development and capacity for understanding. By doing so, they can engage in devotional actions based on knowledge and heartfelt conviction. This significance can be effectively conveyed to teenagers through the creation of concise and impactful videos in the cyberspace, the establishment of groups on social networks that offer well-reasoned, logical, and captivating content, hosting educational webinars, and maintaining informative Instagram pages. The virtual mosque platform presents an opportunity for inquisitive seekers of truth to

access the necessary information swiftly and discover suitable answers to their inquiries. Within this digital space, the interaction between users and preachers, operating in the form of a virtual forum, facilitates engaging conversations between them.

When a specialized preacher provides compelling answers to the user, the two-way intellectual interaction and conversational space greatly contribute to the user's acceptance of the responses based on their own choice and insight. As a result, these responses have a lasting impact on the user's mind. It is important to recognize that the acquisition of genuine religious knowledge goes beyond mere theoretical education. Religious education should be accompanied by the nurturing of a religious sense, which involves cultivating spiritual insight and internalizing religious knowledge. Through this process, belief and a heartfelt connection to religion and its obligations become deeply embedded within the individual's being, leading to a profound transformation facilitated by the teacher.

By adhering to the principle of enlightenment, if we foster and encourage religious sentiments in children, they will develop into believers, worshipers, and individuals with firm faith in subsequent stages of life. Utilizing the educational environment, we can facilitate the triple skills of inclining towards spirituality, attaining spirituality, and strengthening spirituality within them (Kashani 2009, 126). It is for this reason that Islam places significant emphasis on the fact that the principles of religion should not be accepted blindly but rather with awareness and freedom. Therefore, we should make efforts to invite children and teenagers to embrace religion through positive and persuasive means. Seeking assistance from expert preachers, we can create an environment of sincere dialogue in the cyberspace, fostering meaningful interactions that facilitate their genuine understanding and acceptance of religious teachings.

6. The principle of media literacy: This principle holds great significance, particularly for individuals in contemporary societies, including young people and students. In today's digital age, where a substantial amount of time is spent on the internet, the media exerts a powerful influence on their lives. According to James Potter, media literacy entails the perspective through which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the

messages we encounter (Davis 1999, 8). Dechiara defines media literacy as the ability to comprehend the language of the media (Dechiara 2002, 1). Similarly, Zill, an expert in this domain, regards media literacy as the understanding of the structure and function of media messages and the organizations responsible for creating them (Zill 1998, 10).

The concept of media literacy operates under the premise that exposure to the cyberspace has an impact on the audience, and these effects can be altered, mitigated, or directed towards more positive and creative pursuits through various educational and training programs. With the decreased proximity of young people to physical mosques and religious spaces, particularly in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread disasters, and their increased reliance on the internet and cyberspace, they may not be fully aware of the potential harms associated with the online world. Over time, this lack of awareness can result in educational deviations and negative influences emerging from their online experiences.

Hence, it is crucial to devise a solution to address these challenges. One potential solution lies in creating spiritual capacities within the cyberspace, establishing virtual pulpits, cultural platforms, and a virtual mosque. This approach can serve as a means to cultivate media literacy among teenagers and their parents, enabling them to navigate the online world while avoiding its destructive effects. Knowledgeable preachers play a pivotal role in this endeavor by creating virtual platforms and engaging with internet users in meaningful two-way dialogues. Through these interactions, the hidden ideologies embedded within symbolic media content can be unveiled, raising awareness about the dangers associated with the internet, satellite broadcasts, and social networks. Furthermore, this engagement will promote individuals' safety in the cyberspace and set them on the right educational path. The involvement of knowledgeable preachers in establishing virtual platforms and fostering interactive dialogues with internet users is instrumental in revealing the ideologies concealed within the symbolic content of the media.

By raising awareness about the dangers associated with the internet, satellite broadcasts, and social networks, individuals can be better equipped to navigate cyberspace safely and find themselves on the right educational path. It is crucial to note that

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users typically seek internet experiences that provide them with the utmost satisfaction (McQuail 2010, 47). Therefore, in order for teenagers to develop the necessary media literacy, it is essential to provide them with a suitable religious space that offers precise and accurate content. By offering such a space, users will be more inclined to stay within this environment and spend their time in the cyberspace, ensuring they remain on the right educational trajectory.

## 4. Webinar Pulpits and their Role in Fostering Religious Feelings in Children and Teenagers

The virtual mosque provides an ideal platform for establishing a webinar pulpit, enabling religious preachers to deliver tailored content and information suitable for various cyberspace environments. Through the virtual pulpit and webinar speeches, a religious preacher can reach different audiences and users simultaneously with just one click, using email or messaging platforms. In essence, the virtual mosque serves as both a webinar pulpit and a presence on social networks. Alongside the physical mosque, the pulpit is an institution that regulates the moral, spiritual, and political behaviors of young people, teenagers, and even children (Latifpour 2000, 156-57). With the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread availability of the internet and cyberspace across families and society, the webinar pulpit can effectively fulfill the same educational function for children and teenagers in the virtual realm as it does in physical spaces.

The distance between people and teenagers has significantly increased, particularly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in reduced attendance at physical mosque pulpits. Consequently, they spend a majority of their time on the internet and in cyberspace. Additionally, it is natural for young people and teenagers to exhibit an inherent inclination towards exploring new things and innovative approaches (Falsafi 1969, 137). In this context, virtual pulpits, when creatively utilized, can serve as influential factors in the development of their religious and moral sentiments. During the stage of puberty, young individuals experience a heightened awareness of their religious and moral inclinations, and they become increasingly curious

about understanding the causes and meanings behind them.[1] The flourishing of these moral inclinations compels individuals to embark on a quest for truth, leading them towards asceticism, piety, and worship during this stage of life. They strive to unlock the doors of knowledge and awaken their latent instincts. It is during this period that mystical leaps emerge in them, and the relationship between humans and God, which used to seem absurd to them, takes on profound meaning.

During this phase of life, in order to ensure that young individuals do not make mistakes in their pursuit of good morals and character development, and to prevent them from falling into moral pitfalls, they require teachers who can guide them indirectly or sometimes directly towards their aspirations. As they spend a significant amount of time in the cyberspace, they explore virtually, searching for these teachers within this realm. It becomes the responsibility of religious preachers and cultural guardians to establish virtual pulpits and tailor the educational programs for youth and teenagers accordingly. These programs should encompass religious, moral, scientific, practical, physical, psychological, spiritual, and material values. Furthermore, it is crucial to carefully calibrate the quality and quantity of the program materials, ensuring that their implementation does not become burdensome or exhausting for the youth. The aim is to strike a balance that preserves their enthusiasm, vitality, and strength, while safeguarding their well-being (Falsafi 1969, 46-46).

Young individuals who lack access to religious and practical programs, as well as those who lack qualified teachers in this domain, are often vulnerable to moral deviations and mental

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1. This approach holds significant potential in the realm of advertising, and it is evident that a shift in students' attitudes towards internet advertising could contribute to the growth and prosperity of religious teachings and Islamic education in the cyberspace. Likewise, students themselves can utilize this platform to disseminate their advertisements to individuals seeking pure religious teachings in a quicker and more accessible manner. To facilitate this process, the establishment of virtual seminaries and religious schools would create an ideal environment in the cyberspace. Such platforms would enable the audience and users interested in exploring religious concepts, accessing religious content, and obtaining information from various parts of the world with ease.

illnesses. The intense and impulsive emotions experienced during youth can lead them towards a path of downfall and destruction. Unfortunately, certain social networks, blogs, movies, and TV series promote negative influences such as running away from home, undue independence in teenagers, seeking constant variety in life, disrespecting parents, aggression towards elders, an excessive focus on materialistic pursuits, and more. These influences act as traps for users and audiences who lack proper guidance and religious educators in the cyberspace.

In this context, the cyberspace presents an opportunity for religious preachers and teachers to make a difference. Through their speeches delivered via electronic pulpits or through online platforms hosting scientific and cultural classes, they can reach audiences from all around the world. This enables them to foster the development of moral and spiritual awareness among users, particularly the teenagers who often navigate social networks. By providing proper guidance, these educators can steer users towards healthier and more appropriate thoughts, thereby instilling a sense of morality and spirituality in their existence within the cyberspace.

Certainly, the administration of the virtual pulpit entails specific considerations. Religious preachers who are responsible for virtual platforms should understand that in order to establish a strong preaching presence among diverse communities, they need to familiarize themselves with new methods of exploring cyberspace and learn about emerging technologies. When engaging with the digital realm, preachers should strive to become experts with informed opinions, rather than presenting an array of theories and answers that may render the issues meaningless and discourage users. It is crucial to recognize that if the educational process, particularly pertaining to stages of psychological development of children and adolescents, is excessively accelerated, the acquisition of moral-educational concepts and values can become unstable. In such cases, children may struggle to apply learned principles to novel conditions and situations (Karimi 2002, 181). Additionally, possessing professional ethics is paramount. Internet education, as well as the management of virtual platforms or successful and impactful webinar sessions, necessitates adherence to professional ethics.

To ensure a successful virtual pulpit, several factors must be considered. These include audience analysis, which involves having precise knowledge about specific and general audiences, as well as appropriate planning tailored to each group. Understanding the needs and demands of users is crucial, as is employing impactful methods and being mindful of time constraints. Having accurate knowledge of the geographical location, timing, and proficiency in working with software and meeting platforms are also important considerations. Moreover, to expand the reach of the virtual pulpit and engage a wider user base, it is essential to present the pulpit contents in popular languages such as Arabic, English, French, German, and others. Therefore, it is necessary for the preacher to familiarize themselves with these languages as well.

## 5. Strategies for Enhancing the Role of Mosques in the Digital Space

Recognizing the significance of pulpit mechanisms, cultural meetings, and propaganda in the digital realm, it becomes crucial to address the educational needs of teenagers and young individuals who are increasingly distanced from physical mosques, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given their extensive online presence and reliance on the internet, it is essential to explore solutions for establishing virtual mosques or organizing cultural-religious webinars. These initiatives aim to facilitate religious education within society.

1. Establishing Dedicated Virtual Social Networks for Teenagers and Young People with Religious Themes at the Core: By leveraging multimedia communication tools, including audio and video content, and incorporating attractive and engaging materials, it is possible to redirect the attention of teenagers away from potentially traumatic social networks towards active participation in religious social networks. One example of such networks is the self-control network for prayer accuracy. This platform aims to cultivate and expand the culture of correct recitation and practice of prayer within the digital space. By utilizing this network, teenagers can personally monitor and ensure the accuracy of their prayers, eliminating the need for physical oversight from others and alleviating any feelings of embarrassment or fear. This strategy effectively introduces

teenagers to the fundamental principles, rules, rituals, and teachings of religion, while also facilitating the proper recitation of the Noble Quran, among other benefits.

Likewise, the establishment of various scientific, sports, and news-focused hubs within social networks, particularly targeted at mosque students and graduates, can have a significant impact. Creating these groups or hubs in the digital space encourages communication and interaction among users, fostering an environment for the exchange of knowledge and interests. When accompanied by relevant and informative content, the formation of such groups can enhance the audience's scientific knowledge and engagement. This approach effectively provides teenagers and young individuals with a virtual atmosphere akin to a real mosque, facilitating targeted guidance and preparation for their spiritual development. Furthermore, it serves as a platform for teenagers and young people to engage in information sharing and participate in publications and the press. This prevents aimless wandering in cyberspace and promotes a sense of positive activity and purpose in their online presence.

2. Emphasizing the Significance of Digital Mosque Libraries: The realm of books and reading is a vibrant area where teenagers and young people actively participate. Establishing a digital library in mosques can greatly enhance their engagement. However, prior to creating such a library, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of teenagers' tastes, interests, and reading levels to ensure the desired outcomes. Organizing book-reading contests, implementing a structured study curriculum for users, and teaching book creation within social network spaces can be effective methods for educating teenagers and young individuals. Additionally, offering a selection of favorite books with appropriate content can help familiarize them with religious concepts and increase their interest in attending mosques.

3. Establishing a "Virtual Husayniyya" or "Internet Husayniyya" Incorporating Authentic Islamic Art and Architecture: Throughout history, authentic Islamic and Iranian art and architecture have held a special place within Islamic and non-Islamic societies, with immense potential to captivate individuals and foster a deep connection to religious spaces. Regrettably, we have yet to fully leverage these beautiful and

alluring art forms to present religious content and information in the digital realm. Creating online spaces, such as the Virtual Husayniyya and the Hajj ceremony, that draw inspiration from traditional and religious architecture can be highly effective in attracting users. By designing the website format to reflect the intricate tiling of mosques and Islamic architectural elements, and by incorporating poems and key Islamic phrases, the ambiance of the Husayniyya and the mosque can be evoked. The creation of such a space allows users in the digital realm to experience a sense of closeness to the physical environment of these sacred places.

Such an environment, when complemented with appropriate content, has the potential to become a comprehensive and immersive online Husayniyya. For instance, by presenting a schedule of lectures, tables of lamentations, and nightly events throughout the holy month of Ramadan, including diverse speeches, lamentations, mourning ceremonies, and films from the shrines of the Imams, the online Husayniyya can offer a complete and authentic experience. Moreover, it eliminates the constraints of time and place, enabling individuals to engage in religious practices simultaneously regardless of their location or distance. This virtual platform allows individuals to participate in religious rituals and events, transcending physical boundaries and fostering a sense of unity and connection among users.

4. Facilitating the Launch and Expansion of a Mosque Blog Program for Promoting and Cultivating Mosque Culture: Such a program in the digital realm is another essential step towards institutionalizing the functions of the mosque. The mosque's Board of Trustees can establish a Bloggers Association, comprising of motivated teenagers and young individuals, who can create diverse blog formats. These formats may include question-and-answer blogs and personality-oriented blogs. By providing the necessary resources and support, the association can encourage the development of engaging and informative blog content centered around mosque-related topics. This initiative aims to foster a sense of community and promote the culture of the mosque, while also catering to the interests and preferences of the digital-savvy younger generation.

In question-and-answer and doubt-resolving blogs, authors should prioritize identifying the topics in which the audience faces

uncertainties and challenges. Subsequently, they can address these issues by providing reasoned explanations and inferences, offering comprehensive answers to alleviate doubts.

On the other hand, in personality-oriented blogs, the focus should be on presenting role models for the users. Religious scholars, religious thinkers specializing in various scientific fields, as well as pious and revered individuals, should be identified and highlighted. These blogs should provide a wide range of information about these exemplary figures, allowing young people to learn from their experiences and follow their righteous path.

## Conclusion

Upon careful examination and analysis of the influence of the cyber world and cyberspace on the education of teenagers and young people, it becomes evident that contemporary circumstances have led to an increased physical distance between mosques and the younger generation. The dominance of cyberspace, coupled with social barriers such as the ongoing challenges posed by diseases like COVID-19, has resulted in young individuals devoting a significant portion of their free time to seeking answers to their questions and uncertainties online, driven by their inherent curiosity. This trend highlights the pressing need to harness the potential of social networks, webinar platforms, and Instagram pages to establish virtual pulpits and create mosque mechanisms in the digital realm.

With careful consideration and planning by religious preachers and mosque trustees in the digital realm, the virtual mechanisms of a mosque can serve as a stepping stone for teenagers and future generations to engage with physical mosques, thereby facilitating religious education and fostering a strong connection with Islam. Adhering to the fundamental principles of religious education, such as insight, observation, experience, optionality, and the innate nature of religious matters, as well as emphasizing the necessity of media literacy, placing importance on mosque activities in the cyberspace can create an ideal environment for teenagers to develop a religious and Islamic identity. When these activities align with the guiding principles, incorporate creativity,

and embrace the aesthetic nature of human beings, they can profoundly contribute to nurturing the innate purity of children and teenagers, while satisfying their spiritual needs and safeguarding them against falling into the trap of false spirituality.

In light of the strengthened virtual infrastructure across various institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become crucial for cultural and promotional institutions to leverage the cyber environment and cyberspace as platforms for promotion and information dissemination. This approach ensures that children remain connected to a religious atmosphere despite physical limitations. Alongside their responsibilities in leading and managing physical mosques, cultural centers, mosque trustees, and congregational imams should actively engage in showcasing religious concepts and programs related to the virtual mosque in cyberspaces and social networks. Establishing Quranic and religious think tanks in the cyberspace, encouraging active youth participation through blogging contests on the topic of virtual mosques, organizing blogging contests with religious themes, and designating independent groups to curate impactful mosque programs on social networks are key solutions that cultural institutions should prioritize to institutionalize virtual mosques and guide young individuals towards the cyberspace.

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# The Scope of Governmental Monitoring and Regulation of Cyberspace in Relation to Individual Privacy (Based on Imami Jurisprudence)

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## Abstract

The government's actions in monitoring and regulating content in cyberspace are deemed necessary for various reasons, including the maintenance of a stable system, the preservation of the supremacy and authority of the state, and the promotion of religious values. On the contrary, general religious principles emphasize the prohibition of spying, highlighting the importance of respecting individuals' privacy. It is evident that the act of monitoring and regulating cyberspace can potentially infringe upon this privacy, particularly in terms of information and communication privacy. Given that the extent of governmental intervention in monitoring and regulating cyberspace, as well as the prohibition of infringing upon individuals' communication and informational privacy, is not clearly defined in Imami jurisprudence, the question of how much intervention is permissible raises a significant problem. It is essential to delve further into this issue to arrive at an appropriate and satisfactory resolution. The preservation of the Islamic system, the maintenance of the supremacy and authority of the Islamic state, and the establishment of religion are among the reasons that justify the exercise of authority in monitoring and regulating cyberspace, even if it infringes upon privacy. However, a careful analysis of the evidence suggests the hypothesis that these governance practices

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should be conducted based on scientific principles while observing the limits of necessity. It is crucial to ensure that such measures are implemented without disclosing individuals' hidden secrets within this realm. This article aims to explore the limitations and deficiencies in the evidence relating to monitoring and regulating cyberspace while safeguarding individuals' information privacy. It seeks to elucidate the jurisprudential factors contributing to privacy violations. To achieve this objective, the methodology employed involves collecting library data and analyzing jurisprudential propositions. The outcome of this analysis is the examination and clarification of the extent to which governmental intervention in monitoring and regulating cyberspace is permissible in relation to individuals' privacy.

**Keywords:** Exercise of authority, monitoring and regulating cyberspace, privacy, Imami jurisprudence.

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## 1. Introduction

The advancement of technology has profoundly impacted human life, particularly in the realm of social interaction. This transformation has been facilitated by the establishment of interconnected computer networks on digital platforms. These platforms have catalyzed high-speed communication, leading to transformative changes. For instance, they allow easy and unrestricted access to any data and messages, irrespective of geographical boundaries. This has ushered in an era of trans-spatial and timeless communication, thus revolutionizing how we connect and interact globally. The virtual space has brought about substantial progress across various domains such as the economy, culture, politics, law, and more. Furthermore, the rapid advancement of cyberization has fueled significant developments, albeit with new challenges emerging in the field of jurisprudence. While jurisprudence aims to govern all aspects of human life, its ability to effectively address the demands and navigate the dynamics of cyberspace in diverse spheres remains unproven.

It is important to acknowledge that jurisprudential rulings on cyberspace are not separate from the physical realm; rather, it is an integral part of it. Many legal rulings in cyberspace align with those in the physical world, even when the actors involved are real individuals. However, due to the unique nature of cyberspace, specific regulations are required, and it is imperative for jurisprudence to actively engage in this domain. One notable concern revolves around the government's authority in monitoring and regulation of cyberspace, particularly in relation to individuals' privacy rights. This issue is closely monitored and scrutinized by advocates of human rights and civil liberties at the community level, who approach it with utmost sensitivity. Undoubtedly, the anonymity of user identities within this digital realm, along with the capacity to conceal one's identity, has resulted in its macro-management extending beyond national borders. While cyberspace has led to significant communication possibilities, it has also presented governments with a range of social, cultural, economic, political, and security challenges both domestically and internationally. Consequently, governments engage in the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace within their territories, even though they do not publicly acknowledge it.

While they claim to safeguard individual freedoms, particularly in terms of privacy, they often implement monitoring and restrictive measures when national security concerns arise. However, it is important to note that privacy remains an unfulfilled demand and desire of the people.

Due to the historical exclusion of Shiites from attaining a political system and establishing a government based on pure Islam, and the emergence of new governance challenges in the realm of cyberspace, the jurisprudential issues concerning government, particularly in governing cyberspace, have received less attention from Shiite jurists. However, it is worth noting that the scholarly foundations and basic principles pertaining to these issues can be found within jurisprudential texts and sources.

Given the significance of protecting individuals' privacy within cyberspace, along with the general prohibition of spying and the need for monitoring and regulating, it becomes essential to establish a framework for exercising authority over cyberspace while upholding individual privacy. This framework should align with the principles of Imami jurisprudence, which emphasize the necessity of preserving the system, establishing religion, and safeguarding the supremacy and sovereignty of the Islamic state. This approach aims to prevent any unwarranted leniency or extremism when attributing the perspective of jurisprudence to potential violations of individuals' privacy. By elucidating the extent of sovereignty within this context, it is crucial to strike a balance that avoids excessive intrusion or negligence in practice, even though occasional instances of excess or deficiency may occur to a certain degree.

The research begins by outlining the fundamental concepts involved and then proceeds to elaborate on the necessity of monitoring and regulating cyberspace. This is accomplished by presenting three reasons that demonstrate the importance of such measures in the context of cyberspace. Subsequently, the conflict between the imperative to preserve privacy and the process of monitoring and regulating cyberspace is explored, followed by a jurisprudential analysis that offers two approaches to reconciling these concerns. Lastly, the research addresses the jurisprudential factors involved in privacy violations within the context of monitoring and regulating cyberspace.

## 2. Explanation of Basic Concepts

Providing an explanation of the fundamental concepts in the research serves not only to enhance the purposefulness of the dialectic but also to facilitate the reader's understanding of the author's perspective regarding the interpretation of the terminology used in the study. This clarification is crucial in order to mitigate any potential misunderstandings that may arise during the course of the research.

### 2.1. Exercise of Authority

The term "exercising authority" refers to the actions carried out by those in positions of superior command power or acts of will that surpass the will of others (Ghazi 2004, 180). This encompasses the governmental actions undertaken with universal power and as expressions of that power (Jafari Langroodi 2017, 471). If a jurist assumes leadership in a government and oversees the administration of society during the period of the Major Occultation of the final Shiite Imam, with the aim of discovering Islamic rulings and establishing a government based on pure Islamic teachings, as well as the theory of absolute or unconstrained authority or guardianship of the jurist, they would possess the powers and authority akin to an Infallible Imam in matters pertaining to social affairs and the welfare of the Islamic society (Imam Khomeini 1421 AH, 1:637; Sabzawārī 1413 AH, 1:261; Momen 1425 AH, 1:414; Ḥāʾirī 1424 AH, 23). The term "exercise of authority" refers to the actions of guardianship carried out by the jurist in the management of the Islamic society. These responsibilities may be delegated to certain governing bodies, enabling them to act independently and directly in some or all stages of implementation.

### 2.2. Regulation of Cyberspace

Although significant attention has been given to "cyberspace" in cultural matters and the realm of communication, we continue to encounter diverse interpretations when attempting to describe it. Through an extensive examination of existing definitions and an analysis of its elements, some authors have made notable efforts to provide a comprehensive understanding. Consequently, we can define cyberspace as a virtual and intangible domain,

serving as an environment for social interaction that emerges through a network of interconnected computers on a digital platform (Esmaeeli and Nasrollahi 2016, 60).

Furthermore, as indicated by other authors, the scope of cyberspace encompasses a wide range of data and communications, including information transmitted through websites, blogs, chat rooms, forums, social networks, dating platforms, electronic mail, mobile phones, SMS, Bluetooth, and similar mediums (Tabatabaee and Layali 2018, 87).

The regulation of cyberspace should not be solely understood as a means of deprivation, obstruction, limitation, or negation, as defined by the competent authorities in the field, aimed at purposefully and systematically impeding the flow of information (Ismaeeli and Nasrollahi 2016, 57). It is important to acknowledge the positive aspect of regulation as well. In other words, regulating cyberspace does not merely entail restricting and preventing access, such as through filtering. In many instances, it may involve the creation of a new domain independent of the international scope, as well as the inclusion of educational, promotional, and preaching content. Therefore, in the context of this research, the concept of regulating cyberspace also encompasses such positive elements.

## 2.3. Monitoring Cyberspace

The monitoring of cyberspace involves gathering information about deficiencies and strategizing to enhance productivity in implementing the government's small-scale and large-scale plans across social, cultural, economic, and political domains, as well as ensuring the resilience of society within this realm, including both hardware and software aspects. The primary objective is to secure and safeguard cyberspace while identifying any social irregularities within it. Thus, in this research, monitoring is recognized as an initial stage in regulating cyberspace, encompassing both negative and positive aspects.

It is important to highlight that the ultimate objective of monitoring and regulation, as described above, is the pursuit of personal and social excellence for individuals within society. According to the Islamic worldview, this pursuit aligns with the enlightenment of the human soul through divine guidance and the

progression towards a fulfilling life. Moreover, by embracing religious principles and implementing Islamic values in both personal and social matters, it becomes feasible to attain this ultimate goal in the physical realm as well as in the cyberspace platform of society.

## 3. The Necessity of Monitoring and Regulating Cyberspace

Given that the regulation of cyberspace encompasses both its positive and negative aspects, it is essential to support the analysis of monitoring and regulating it with evidence that is not limited to any particular claim. In order to illustrate the necessity of monitoring and regulating the cyberspace in a comprehensive manner, the following three reasons shall be presented, shedding light on both its positive and negative dimensions.

## 3.1. Maintaining System Integrity

In the realm of political jurisprudence, the term "system" encompasses various aspects, including the administration of people's lives and well-being, the foundation of an Islamic country (referred to as the Islamic system), the current political regime, as well as the political, economic, cultural, and social micro-systems. Additionally, it encompasses the overall system of the nation and the principles of Islam (see Malek Afzali, et al. 2012, 129-33). The necessity and obligation to protect and preserve the Islamic system are determined based on its alignment with the collective welfare of society.

According to common sense, it is deemed essential to prioritize the public interests of society (see Montazeri 1409 AH, 4:298). Rational judgments are considered obligatory under the principle of mutual entailment between Sharia and reason (which states that whatever reason dictates, God's law also dictates). Consequently, the necessity of preserving the Islamic system is rooted in safeguarding the general social interests, just as its disruption would entail neglecting those very interests. Therefore, the preservation of the Islamic system is independent of factors such as objection, harm, coercion, and necessity. Based on the aforementioned rationale, members of society hold an obligation to preserve the Islamic system, irrespective of whether its preservation may involve challenges to public interests,

difficulties, objections, coercion, and similar circumstances (see Alidoost 2009, 127).

The preservation of the Islamic system is closely linked to safeguarding the overall societal well-being. In the context of the Islamic worldview, the concept of exigency refers to benefits that encompass spiritual goodness, both in the individual and societal sense, with a primary focus on attaining eternal happiness and true perfection in the afterlife (Dargahi 2020, 110). It becomes evident that securing the spiritual and material well-being of society can only be achieved by adhering to divine commands. The government's claim to prioritize the interests of society can only be substantiated by nurturing the genuine perfection of individuals, which can be accomplished through the practice of the teachings of pure Islam. Furthermore, within our sacred religion, there are explicit references to the duty of preserving the Islamic system. According to reports from the Infallibles (cf. Montazeri 1409 AH, 300-6), one of the fundamental divine responsibilities bestowed upon duty bearers, especially the Islamic ruler, is to protect the core principles of Islam or the Islamic system (see Imam Khomeini 1999, 11:494 and 15:329).

In the present day, the preservation of the Islamic system is intricately tied to the preservation of the Islamic government, which was established with the aim of implementing the principles of Islam in accordance with the teachings of pure Islam (see Imam Khomeini 1415 AH, 2:665). Furthermore, ensuring the protection of the Islamic system, in line with reason and conscience, necessitates the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace, including both its negative and positive dimensions. In fact, prioritizing the monitoring of information within the virtual realm, both domestically and internationally, takes precedence over monitoring activities in the physical realm. This approach recognizes the vital role that cyberspace plays in safeguarding the integrity of the Islamic system. In essence, akin to the Islamic system in the physical world, the monitoring of government officials and agents by the Islamic system is imperative to curbing abuses of power, ensuring the protection of public freedoms, rights, and, ultimately, serving the overall public interest. This discreet monitoring serves as a mechanism to hold accountable those entrusted with positions of authority and to maintain a system that upholds the principles of justice and transparency.

The objective is to monitor the continued qualifications of government officials, as well as to continuously track the anti-Islamic and military activities carried out by foreign governments, nations, hypocrites, and their associated underground groups. This comprehensive monitoring approach aims to identify and counteract the schemes and conspiracies orchestrated by the adversaries of the Islamic system, thereby equipping it with the necessary means to thwart their efforts. Moreover, by acquiring information about the conditions of the general public and social trends, the government becomes aware of issues, needs, legal gaps, and administrative shortcomings. It then endeavors to address these concerns and improve the overall well-being of society. Similarly, in the realm of cyberspace, a parallel approach should be adopted. By monitoring the digital landscape, the government can gain insights into emerging challenges, societal demands, and regulatory gaps, allowing for proactive measures to address them effectively. Considering that cyberspace provides a cost-effective, rapid, and unconventional means to undermine the Islamic system, it has become a crucial area of focus. The anonymity and ability to conceal one's identity within this realm have facilitated its external manipulation, extending beyond the physical boundaries of the Islamic system.

Furthermore, apart from the ongoing monitoring and regulation, it is essential to enable the Islamic system to take appropriate actions and reactions against cyber-attacks. These attacks aim to destroy and compromise computer infrastructure, disrupt data by denying or altering access, manipulate personal and financial information of individuals, and spread false information. Such cyber-attacks are conducted with the intention of tarnishing the reputation of individuals, undermining the economy, security, politics, and even the reputation of the country and its government.

The response to religious, sectarian, moral, cultural, and social attacks should be conducted with heightened sensitivity. Neglecting preventive measures, procrastinating and failing to plan for the creation of authentic Islamic content for teaching, preaching, and promotion within this realm can have detrimental consequences. Such negligence can disrupt the economic, cultural, political, and social systems within Islam, ultimately

posing a threat to the Islamic system and the Islamic state over time. It is crucial not to underestimate the impact of the virtual space and assume it is disconnected from reality, as technological advancements have enabled cyberspace to permeate various domains such as politics, law, culture, economy, and security. Additionally, the cyber environment has facilitated transnational activism without direct human intervention. It is important to recognize that the realm of culture and ideas is not confined to a virtual space; rather, it holds tangible significance in both real and virtual domains.

Any entity that directly influences the thoughts of thinkers, imparts messages to the mind, or instills attributes in the soul is undeniably real and not merely virtual. Thought exists everywhere, and the transmission of knowledge and ideas is a tangible reality (Javadi Amoli 2013). The intermingling of virtual and physical spaces in the present era highlights the interconnectedness between preserving the Islamic system in the physical realm and preserving it in the realm of cyberspace.

In light of the practical examples set by the infallibles, particularly the Prophet Muhammad (s) and Imam Ali (a), in their administration and governance, their emphasis on reminding their appointed governors is evident through numerous reports found in hadith sources (Muntazeri 1409 AH, 4:309-379). Recognizing that the physical realm lacks distinctive characteristics in this context, it follows *a fortiori* that information surveillance and regulation in the virtual space are important. This approach is adopted to protect the Islamic system, leveraging the necessity and requirement of monitoring and controlling the digital realm.

## 3.2. Establishment of Religion

Based on both speculative and textual evidence, and in accordance with the theory supported by certain Imami jurists, the responsibility of establishing an Islamic government during the occultation of Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) falls upon a just and qualified jurist (see Andalibi and Dargahi 2015, 33-49). Quranic verses (Quran 42:13; 22:41) outline the duties of prophets and Islamic leaders, which we have reason to believe are not exclusive to them and encompass the jurist guardians who are entrusted with political and

administrative affairs. These verses emphasize the critical obligation of establishing the religion and creating the necessary conditions for the implementation of divine decrees, as well as preventing their abandonment. Based on the principles of ontology and anthropology, establishing the religion or implementing Islamic teachings within society, both in the physical and cyberspace realms, provides the means for individuals to attain personal and social perfection, ultimately leading to a virtuous and fulfilling life—an Islamic life, to be precise (see Momen 1425 AH, 1:329).

When the conditions for implementing Islamic rulings in both the physical and virtual realms are met, and the implementation of one does not contradict the implementation of the other, the complete implementation of Islamic rulings can be achieved. However, if certain conditions necessary for implementing specific Islamic rulings in either the real or cyberspace are not present, or if the implementation of certain rulings hinders the implementation of others, the responsibility of the ruler and, consequently, the government becomes twofold.

First and foremost, a practical approach is employed to distinguish between rulings of varying importance, allowing for the establishment of necessary conditions to implement the more important rulings within society. This prioritization aims to create an environment that removes obstacles hindering the simultaneous implementation of both more and less important rulings. By adopting practical solutions, the Islamic government endeavors to enable the implementation of both categories of rulings concurrently. Consequently, the responsibility of the ruler and subordinates of the Islamic government, in both the physical and virtual domains, can be summarized as follows: The implementation of Islamic rulings should consider the relative importance of each ruling, taking into account the specific requirements of time and place. In this comprehensive framework, the ruler and subordinates are tasked with ensuring that both more and less important rulings are implemented in society. This approach involves assessing the qualitative and quantitative significance of each ruling within the context of their coexistence. In certain cases, this responsibility can be delegated to specific governing bodies within the Islamic

government, empowering them to independently and directly address this matter.

If we consider the duty of the ruler and, by extension, the Islamic government to enforce rulings as the major premise of our reasoning, and view each imagined ruling in the cyberspace as its minor premise—a ruling that has been deduced, explained, and presented by scholars in the field of jurisprudence—we can conclude that the implementation of each of these rulings is indeed among the responsibilities of the ruler and the Islamic government.

It may be argued that the ruler and the government are only accountable for implementing social orders and do not have the responsibility or authority to govern individual matters concerning members of society, especially in the cyberspace. However, this perspective stems from a limitation placed on the powers and responsibilities of the ruler solely in social affairs, and a division between individual and social rulings. Yet, it is important to note that this division and the criterion used to define it, which aims to explain the powers of the ruler and the government in exercising authority, is not accurate. This is because such a division does not exist within religious sources, which primarily involve the concepts of "God's right" and "people's right." It is clear that this division is not the determining factor for defining the powers of the ruler and the government.

To provide further clarity, it is essential to outline the premises. Based on the explicit or implicit contents of certain Quranic verses (Quran 3:104, 110, 114; 4:63, 79; 7:157; 9:71, 112) and the authentic hadiths transmitted from the infallible Imams (a), one of the obligatory rulings is the duty to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil. The interpretations found in some hadiths regarding this duty, such as referring to it as "the highest and most honorable duties" and "the foundation of obligations" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 5:55), signify its status as a significant divine obligation and a guarantee for the implementation of religious commands.

Regarding the duty of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, hadiths (Ḥurr a-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 16: 133-35) and the statements of jurists (e.g., Najafī 1404 AH, 21: 383; Montazeri 1409a AH, 2: 215) suggest that one of its stages necessitates physical intervention in the affairs of others. However, in order to prevent chaos, such intervention becomes obligatory (Muḥaqqiq

al-Ḥillī 1412 AH, 2: 15). Nevertheless, the legitimacy of this order is contingent upon the permission of the Islamic ruler, or *Walī al-amr* (Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī 1415 AH, 1: 259; Najafī, 1404 AH, 21: 383-96). Originally, it is considered one of the powers and duties of the ruler to act directly, or grant permission or delegate others to act on their behalf (Ṭūsī 1996, 150; Imam Khomeini, n.d., 1: 482; Montazeri 1409b AH, 2: 218).

Neglecting this duty by the ruler or their authorized representatives and delegates can lead to the normalization of forbidden acts and the neglect of obligations, blurring the distinction between good and evil in the eyes of the people (see Kulaynī 1407 AH, 5: 59). Such abandonment not only undermines the principles of Islam but also creates a contradiction between claims and actions, fostering pessimism among the people towards the ruler and the Islamic government. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the ruler and their appointed officials within the Islamic government to implement and establish the necessary conditions for the realization of divine decrees in both the physical and virtual realms. There is no realm of decrees beyond this realm of responsibility. However, it is important to note that the significance of each ruling and the consideration of public interests may vary. Therefore, in the implementation of guardianship and governance, priority is given to rulings that have social impact, consequences, and outcomes. This approach aims to create an Islamic living environment for the members of society.

Hence, it is incumbent upon the ruler or the governing bodies acting on their behalf to utilize the comprehensive and applicable principles of enjoining good and forbidding evil. Through careful groundwork and strategic planning, both in terms of infrastructure and policies, they should establish the justifications for implementing Islamic rulings in both physical and virtual spaces. This entails the essential task of monitoring and regulating the cyberspace, addressing its negative aspects while also fostering its positive elements. It is important to note that regulation may be necessary in certain domains, encompassing both negative and, in some cases, positive aspects.

## 3.3. The Supremacy and Authority of the Islamic Government

Acknowledging the comprehensive, all-encompassing nature of

Islam, supported by philosophical arguments in both classical and contemporary theology, entails the recognition of its teachings as superior to the rulings derived from prior religions, laws, and human-made legislations. This understanding, rooted in reason necessitates the authority of a government that upholds Islamic values and teachings. It becomes evident that honor and excellence are achieved through the implementation of Islamic ideology and principles in the governance and exercise of authority (Dargahi 2020, 104).

According to the interpretations of certain scholars, Quranic teachings, and the prophetic tradition (Montazeri Moghaddam 2011, 49; Katānī, n.d., 1: 205), it becomes imperative for individuals within the Islamic society, particularly the rulers and officials, to regulate and govern their actions in all domains in alignment with the progress of the Islamic state. The cyberspace is among these domains, as contemporary human life has expanded extensively within the realm of technology. This expansion has significantly impacted cultural, economic, social, political, and military systems, leading to the emergence of virtual reality as an influential element alongside the external and physical reality we experience.

Given the influence of non-Muslim entities over the content and structure of the virtual space, it becomes even more crucial to safeguard the dignity and prestige of the Islamic government in this realm. In particular, the emergence of cyberspace, currently under the direct influence of the United States (Bell 2010, 169), including the configuration of popular social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google+, underscores this point. Consequently, it is essential to monitor and regulate the cyberspace, considering both its negative and positive aspects, with the aim of preserving the honor and dignity of the Islamic government and averting any potential harm, particularly cyber-attacks, as outlined in the preceding explanations.

It is important to note that based on the aforementioned three pieces of evidence, the need for monitoring and regulating cyberspace is evident. Such operations and activities should be carried out through an organized approach or mechanism, much like the establishment of an institution or a regulatory body. Furthermore, it is crucial to

develop a well-defined and comprehensive legal framework encompassing all aspects of cyberspace. This framework should be formulated through consensus and consultation with experts in the field. By doing so, it can serve as a standard for distinguishing between extreme and moderate practices within the context of monitoring and regulation.

## 4. Privacy Considerations in the Surveillance and Regulation of Cyberspace

Preserving individuals' privacy is a crucial aspect when it comes to the surveillance and regulation of cyberspace. In the subsequent discussion, we will briefly address the prohibition of privacy violations and its boundaries. We will then delve into the inherent conflict between the imperative to protect privacy and the necessity to monitor and regulate the virtual realm. This will be followed by a jurisprudential analysis of the relative prioritization of these two concerns, considering two different approaches. Finally, we will explore the jurisprudential criteria and factors that contribute to understanding this delicate balance.

### 4.1. Respect for Privacy and Its Scope

The authority to enter, gather information, and monitor individuals' privacy, as perceived by those who believe they are exempt from prosecution and legal consequences in this domain (see Eskandari 2010, 157), has led some authors to address specific examples of privacy in a dedicated, codified, and independent manner. Numerous articles emphasize the prohibition of privacy violations, drawing support from certain Quranic verses and hadiths. However, it is important to note that some of these propositions have limitations in their scope, lacking the necessary inclusiveness and generality to establish the prohibition of violating certain categories of privacy, such as information privacy and communication privacy. Their focus lies primarily on the prohibition of physical privacy violations, encompassing aspects related to physical space and sexuality.

For instance, verses that emphasize seeking permission before entering someone's house (Quran 24: 27-28) or family members seeking permission to enter their parents' room at specific times (Quran 24: 59; Kulaynī 1407 AH, 3: 67; Ṣadūq 1403 AH, 163)

primarily underline the importance of preserving individuals' spatial and sexual privacy (see Ṭabarsī 1994 and Makārim 1995, under those holy verses). On the other hand, certain hadiths that mention the legitimacy of self-defense in the face of violations of territorial integrity and the permissibility of using force, including shedding the aggressor's blood if necessary (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 7:290, 291), pertain to privacy violations within the context of spatial privacy (see Imam Khomeini 1403 AH, 1: 487; Sabzawārī 1413 AH, 28: 156).

Similarly, there are arguments concerning hadiths that highlight the obligation to keep one's secrets from others (Ṣadūq 1413 AH, 1:482) or the prohibition of revealing the secrets of others (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2:359). While these hadiths underscore the significance of maintaining confidentiality, it is important to note that the obligation to keep secrets or the prohibition of revealing them is not directly linked to the prohibition of privacy violation. Thus, the arguments put forth by certain authors, relying solely on these narrations, may warrant scrutiny and further examination.

Certainly, Quranic verses (Quran 49: 12) and hadiths (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2: 354, 355, and Majlisī 1403 AH, 71:7, 72: 252) explicitly state "do not spy," indicating that all forms of spying, regardless of the motive, are prohibited. The general nature of this prohibition extends to all categories of privacy, including information privacy and communication privacy. In essence, spying entails investigating and obtaining concealed information about matters that individuals consider private and personal (Ardabīlī, n.d., 417 and Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1417 AH, 18: 323).

Spying can be categorized into different types based on the underlying motives and intentions. It can be conducted with corrupt motives, aiming to harm a believer. Alternatively, it can be carried out without harmful intentions, driven by a mere curiosity to uncover hidden aspects of others' lives (which can be considered as intrusion). Furthermore, spying can also occur with good intentions. In such cases, it may serve a necessary purpose, such as uncovering instances of bribery, embezzlement, enemy forces, and similar matters. Additionally, there are instances where spying may be motivated by good intentions but is unnecessary, such as identifying qualified individuals for government positions and similar purposes (see Kharrazi 2001, 57).

All the aforementioned scenarios fall under the category of "spying," and based on the evidence provided by the term itself, the ruling of prohibition applies regardless of motives and motivations. It may be argued that the verse "do not spy" in the twelfth verse of Surah al-Hujurat, within its contextual framework, only prohibits spying with corrupt intentions in the affairs of believers, thereby excluding spying with good intentions and spying into the matters of hypocrites and disbelievers. However, it is evident that the nature of the matter does not prevent the application of the prohibition ruling in all cases since they all constitute instances of "spying" in general, regardless of the people involved or the specific circumstances. Even allowing open inspection, under the pretext of immorality, raises concerns (Imam Khomeini 1415 AH, 1: 278).

Furthermore, the application of the prohibition ruling on spying is not limited to the Quranic verse alone. A reliable hadith from Imam al-Ṣādiq (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2:354) establishes the unequivocal prohibition of spying without any constraints or conditions.

Based on the perspective outlined earlier, which draws upon the evidence and the breadth of its implications, it can be concluded that spying on privacy, particularly in the realm of information and communications within both physical and virtual spaces, which individuals generally prefer to keep hidden from others, is considered haram (forbidden). This prohibition applies to all individuals and entities, including the government and governing bodies.

## 2.4 A Jurisprudential Analysis of Privacy Considerations being outweighed by Considerations of Cyberspace Monitoring and Regulation

Cyberspace possesses the unique characteristic of enabling users to conceal their identities, facilitating bold acts of theft, data denial, data manipulation, and an overall increase in cyber-attacks. Unlike the tangible world, the government's ability to swiftly respond to such deviations and their perpetrators is severely limited. Exploiting this aspect, adversaries target the Islamic system, tarnishing its reputation and sowing doubt among society members regarding Islamic beliefs, teachings, and

principles. This medium serves as a cost-effective tool for distorting the honor of the Islamic state and disseminating false news and misinformation, while also promoting social and Islamic abnormalities.

Given the possibility of anonymity in cyberspace, there arises the necessity to regulate and monitor its negative and positive aspects. This serves the purpose of identifying disruptive elements that may undermine micro or macro systems or pose significant threats to social interests. However, it is important to acknowledge that such regulation and monitoring can potentially encroach upon individuals' privacy within the cyberspace.

In further explanation, people's actions can be categorized into three states: purely personal with no social aspect, or having social effects that individuals attempt to contain, or possessing a social and general aspect inherent to the nature, essence, consequences, and outcomes of the action.

Monitoring and filtering of cyberspace, particularly in cases with a public aspect like the second and third cases, may inadvertently encroach upon personal privacy. These encroachments could be inevitable as a means to accomplish such measures. Consequently, it becomes essential to conduct a jurisprudential analysis of privacy violations resulting from the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace by governing bodies.

*4.2.1. A Preliminary Hypothesis: Applying the Principle of "Priority of the More Important over the Less Important"*

In the context of monitoring and regulating cyberspace, when assessing the trade-off between the advantages and disadvantages of privacy violation, the rule of "prioritizing the more important over the less important" comes into play. According to this rule, if the benefit derived from privacy violation outweighs its drawbacks, priority is given to the party with the more compelling justification (Meshkini, n.d., 87; Khoei 1420 AH, 4: 278). Additionally, it is worth noting that some scholars also reference this rule in relation to the principle that "the end (goal) does not justify the means" (Alidoost 2009, 453).

Given the displeasure of the religious legislator towards neglecting or abandoning the maintenance of the system and disregarding public interests, as well as violating the authority and dignity of the Islamic system, it can be inferred that the prohibition of spying and privacy infringement is a "potential" rather than

actualized ruling. As previously stated, the duty of the ruler within an Islamic government is to prioritize divine decrees within the societal context, even if certain decrees hinder the implementation of others. This underscores the importance of preserving the system and upholding the glory of the Islamic system.

Furthermore, it is crucial to establish the conditions for enforcing decrees by devising practical solutions during the implementation phase, particularly when conflicts arise. Resolving such conflicts becomes paramount in order to ensure the implementation of important matters or, in the event of violation or closure, to confine the impact to a minimum. Hence, within the context of monitoring and regulating cyberspace, which encompasses information gathering, uncovering hidden truths, and addressing anomalies and cyber-attacks, as previously elucidated, intruding upon individuals' privacy is not only permissible but also necessary and obligatory in cases of significant importance (refer to Kharazi 2001).

In addition to addressing the issue of conflicts when complying with jurisprudential rulings and the necessity of prioritizing the more important over the less important, another hypothesis is put forward to account for the jurisprudential aspect of privacy violations in the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace. This hypothesis is not without plausibility as some scholars of the principles of jurisprudence believe in the problem of "gradation" (*tarattub*) that the more and the less important rulings are simultaneously actualized (Sadr 1418 AH, 1:v340-39), in addition to the application of protecting the system and arguments in its favor in light of preserving public interests according to the earlier hypothesis.

### 4.2.2. The Second Hypothesis: Use of Secondary Titles and the Introduction of Secondary Rulings

As previously mentioned, the Islamic system was established with the purpose of upholding Islamic principles and implementing them according to pure Islamic teachings. The adherence to these teachings by individuals within society stands as a prominent factor in safeguarding the Islamic system and government. To illustrate this point, it is imperative for everyone, including both natural and legal entities, to refrain from infringing upon the privacy of individuals, where this obligation stems from the prohibition of prying into and spying on the confidential matters of others. Failure

to fulfill this obligation by members of society can significantly undermine the integrity of the Islamic system.

As pointed out earlier, the preservation of the Islamic system is intricately linked to the collective welfare of society. It is the responsibility of the society to safeguard the system and prevent any harm, disruption, hardship, emergency, or other factors that may jeopardize its stability. Now, let us consider a scenario where maintaining the system conflicts with certain fundamental principles or implementing those principles leads to the disruption of the system in specific circumstances. In such cases, as the circumstances or titles change, the corresponding Islamic rulings must also adapt accordingly. When primary titles shift, the applicable ruling must adjust, and when secondary titles emerge, corresponding secondary rulings come into play.

In other words, adhering to the principle of not violating individuals' privacy and upholding the primary ruling of the prohibition of spying can, in certain cases, lead to the disruption of the Islamic system. In these situations, the public interest of society becomes compromised due to the violation of the primary ruling. Consequently, this shift in circumstances necessitates a transformation of the ruling from the primary ruling to the secondary ruling of legitimacy, where the violation of privacy becomes both permissible and obligatory in order to protect the overall integrity of the system.

Therefore, if government agencies were to cease entering people's privacy during the process of monitoring and regulating cyberspace, specifically in the context of uncovering and tracking hackers and perpetrators of cyber-attacks, under the pretext of preserving the system and safeguarding the public interests of society, a secondary ruling permits such actions. In fact, based on the importance of certain examples, it may be deemed necessary to violate privacy. This is what Imam Khomeini meant when he said, "[spying] is obligatory for the preservation of Islam and the preservation of the lives of Muslims" (Imam Khomeini, 15: 116).

## 4.3. Jurisprudential Elements of Privacy Violation in the Process of Monitoring and Regulating Cyberspace

The process of prioritizing the more important over the less important or determining the secondary ruling relies on recognizing the significance or relevance of the secondary title. Consequently, the primary criterion used to assess the legitimacy of government institutions

encroaching upon people's privacy, particularly in cyberspace monitoring and regulation, is knowledge rather than mere assumptions or speculative reasoning. In other words, there must be specific knowledge, or at the very least general knowledge, that it is impossible to protect the system or establish religion or the Islamic government without infringing the privacy of certain individuals during the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace.

In essence, when discussing the importance of preserving the public interest or the honor of the Islamic government as the primary consideration in the first hypothesis, or the secondary title of preserving the system in the second hypothesis, it becomes necessary to clearly define the scope of individuals who need to be subject to control and surveillance by governing bodies in the process of monitoring and regulating cyberspace. For example, in order to track and identify perpetrators of cyber-attacks on the country's fuel distribution system, it may be imperative to monitor the activities of specific individuals in cyberspace and intrude upon their privacy within this realm. Thus, engaging in discussions about prioritizing the more important or proposing a secondary ruling is not permissible when it comes to other individuals, and violating their privacy based on mere assumptions and speculations would lack jurisprudential legitimacy.

The second aspect regarding the legitimacy of violating people's privacy through monitoring and regulating cyberspace is that it should be limited to the extent of necessity. The application of secondary titles, such as maintaining the system, protecting public interests, or upholding the honor of the Islamic state, becomes doubtful beyond this particular extent. By default, the principle should not apply in those situations.

In the scenario mentioned above, it is possible to determine the relevant dimensions of governing bodies by examining a specific set of data within the realm of general knowledge, without the need to violate other data, location privacy, or the privacy of individuals and their dependents. In such cases, the principles of prioritizing the more important or secondary titles do not apply, and therefore further unwarranted investigations are not considered legitimate. However, it should be noted that if competent authorities recognize the necessity of such actions in specific instances, it becomes legitimate and even obligatory based on the significance of the matter. This may be the only

viable approach to safeguard the honor of the Islamic government, protect the Islamic system, or establish religious principles.

One aspect of monitoring and regulating cyberspace, in order to safeguard the Islamic system and establish religious principles, is to prevent the dissemination of indecency within society and take action against those who promote it on the internet. However, when assuming the legitimacy (both permissible and obligatory) of violating individuals' privacy, it is crucial that such encroachments, carried out by governing bodies within the limits of general knowledge and necessity as previously explained, do not contribute to the spread of indecency or expose the faults and hidden secrets of individuals.

This aspect is based on evidence for the prohibition of spreading indecency. It is supported by the holy verse, "Indeed those who want indecency to spread among the faithful—there is a painful punishment for them in the world and the Hereafter, and Allah knows and you do not know" (Quran 24:1 9), as well as similar themes found in hadith sources (e.g., Ṭūsī 1414 AH, 357). The spreading of indecency is considered one of the actions for which severe punishments, both in this world and the Hereafter, are promised.

The afterlife punishment mentioned in the verse indicates the prohibition of this act from a jurisprudential standpoint. Furthermore, the verse's reference to a worldly punishment for spreading indecency could encompass both Sharia punishments and the individual and social consequences that arise from such actions. Quranic exegetes have interpreted the meaning of "spreading indecency" to encompass a broad range of acts involving the dissemination of indecent content under any circumstances. Therefore, it is incorrect to restrict its meaning solely to lies and baseless accusations and their dissemination (see Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1417 AH; Makarim 1995).

During the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace, government agencies may come across mistakes and wrongdoings unrelated to the specific issue being investigated while encroaching upon people's privacy. Such cases are prevalent in societies where faith is weak. However, it is important to prevent the spread of these cases. By doing so, not only can we uphold the sanctity and honor of individuals, but we can also avoid the desecration that would occur through the dissemination of these flaws and wrongdoings, which would be considered as spreading indecency.

These issues are addressed in the fifty-third letter of Nahj al-Balaghah by

Imam ʿAlī (a). It highlights that in intelligence activities aimed at gathering information about the integrity of government officials, there may be instances where the ruler becomes aware of certain matters that should remain hidden. In such cases, it is necessary to refrain from revealing the hidden faults and avoid defaming individuals in all information-related practices, including the exercise of authority during the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace.

## Conclusion

In light of the evidence pointing to the importance of protecting the Islamic system, establishing religion, and maintaining the supremacy and authority of the Islamic state, it is crucial to analyze and apply these principles to the realm of cyberspace. In order to achieve an Islamic way of life through the negative and positive monitoring and regulation of cyberspace, governing actions must be carried out while simultaneously ensuring the privacy of individuals within society is preserved.

In situations where conflicts arise between the need to preserve privacy and the process of monitoring and regulating cyberspace, it is important to consider the principle of prioritizing what is more important over what is less important. Additionally, introducing secondary considerations can help inform the decision-making process. In this context, it can be argued that monitoring and regulating cyberspace, even if it involves violating individuals' privacy, can be deemed legitimate based on these two hypotheses. Moreover, depending on the significance of the matter at hand, it may even be considered obligatory.

The legitimacy of entering into individuals' privacy during the process of monitoring and regulating cyberspace is contingent upon certain conditions that serve as criteria for evaluating the validity of such violations. These conditions include having knowledge, even if it is general knowledge, limiting the violation to the extent of necessity, and ensuring that any hidden flaws or defects discovered by governing bodies in the process are not disclosed. These three conditions are essential for legitimizing governmental intervention into individuals' privacy during the monitoring and regulation of cyberspace.

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# The Factor Structure of Family Communication Issues and Limits of Using Cyberspace

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## Abstract

The ever-expanding cyberspace has led to individuals spending long hours online each day. From a scientific standpoint, questions arise regarding what constitutes normal daily cyberspace usage and what amount can be considered harmful. Another crucial inquiry pertains to the impact of cyberspace usage on family dynamics. To address these questions, the present study employs an experimental survey method. Specifically, a "Questionnaire of Family Communication Issues" developed by the researcher and the "Cyberspace Checklist" were administered to 240 seminary students and students from Qom University. The collected data were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling (KMO), Bartlett's test, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings reveal that family communication issues can be categorized into five fundamental factors: intra-family relationships, extra-family relationships, family violence, psychological disturbances within the family, and family identity crisis. Furthermore, cyberspace users in the study were grouped based on their usage patterns: half an hour, one hour, two hours, three hours, and more than three hours of daily cyberspace use. The results indicate a significant difference between the fifth

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group (more than three hours) and the first four groups, with the last group exhibiting all forms of family communication disorders. Finally, the findings are discussed and compared with the outcomes of other relevant studies.

**Keywords:** Family, cyberspace, communication issues, factor structure, use of cyberspace

## Introduction

Cyberspace is an expansive and intricate realm inhabited by diverse groups of people with varying inclinations and beliefs. The term "life" is not misused here, as this realm intertwines with the physical world and significantly influences an individual's existence and beliefs. A notable feature of this space is the eradication of spatial barriers, allowing for an unparalleled surge in human capacity to connect and communicate with others. This transformation has had a profound impact on the process of collective identification among individuals.

In recent years, extensive research has been conducted on the issues caused by cyberspace (Parish and Rezvani 1400 Sh, 123). However, it is important to acknowledge that cyberspace also offers numerous positive effects, particularly in the field of education. These include increased access to content, digital libraries, distance education, and electronic learning (Najafi and Vahedi 1398 Sh, 31). Furthermore, cyberspace enables individuals to express their ideas and showcase their creative works, fostering self-confidence (Ataei 1394 Sh, 6). It also facilitates global communication among family members, allowing individuals to connect with friends and relatives around the world (Hertlein and Ancheta 2014, p. 2). Another significant benefit of cyberspace is its contribution to the growth of communities and families through the dissemination and transmission of cultures (Etemadi, Asemi, and Jafari 1395 Sh, 85). Moreover, cyberspace provides users with extensive and diverse information in various fields, leveraging the collective intellectual power of thousands of users from different geographical locations (Soleimanipour, 1398 Sh, 14).

Despite the numerous benefits and applications of cyberspace, concerns have been raised regarding its potential negative impact on religious, economic, political, cultural, social, and family issues (Brun 1398 Sh, 80-107). However, studies focusing on the issues caused by cyberspace often fail to consider the extent of its usage and neglect to explore whether any level of cyberspace usage can lead to these harms or if it is specifically excessive use that poses risks. Furthermore, existing research lacks a clear definition of what constitutes excessive use, leaving uncertainty regarding the number of hours per day that can be considered excessive.

A significant area of research in the realm of cyberspace revolves around Internet addiction, which has garnered considerable attention (e.g., Bahrami et al., 1398 Sh; Rastegar et al., 1393 Sh; Masoudnia 1391 Sh). Internet addiction refers to the excessive, improper, and pathological use of the Internet, which can lead individuals to neglect their social responsibilities, jeopardize their health, and result in psychological and moral deterioration (Jafari 1398 Sh, 4). The duration and extent of excessive cyberspace usage are key factors contributing to addiction. However, the aforementioned studies have not precisely defined this "extent" and have not experimentally or conclusively determined the harmful threshold of cyberspace use. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct further experimental research to investigate this matter in detail.

Cyberspace poses various challenges to families, resulting in detrimental effects. These drawbacks encompass issues such as heightened levels of family dissatisfaction, identity crises, conflicts of values, unconventional relationships among young individuals, generation gaps, instances of sexual abuse, and social isolation (Zeynalipour 1396 Sh, 75-81).

The extent of cyberspace usage within families has a significant impact on their value system. Empirical research indicates that Internet usage contributes to a decline in religious values among families (Zanjanizadeh and Javadi 1384 Sh, 121), resulting in the fading of traditional and religious values while new values emerge. The proliferation of cyberspace has brought about cultural value shifts in many contemporary societies, prominently exemplified by the rise of secular as well as existential or liberating values (Hakiminia and Ahmadi 1395 Sh, 29). The prevalence of pop music among young individuals serves as a notable illustration of how media has influenced the values of the current generation (Motahhari Kalur et al., 1396 Sh, 61).

Cyberspace significantly contributes to the decline of intimate relationships among family members. Even when physically present in the same room, individuals often retreat to their own virtual spaces, diminishing direct interactions. The prevalence of social networks further reduces face-to-face communication, resulting in reduced quality time spent between family members. This pattern can evoke negative reactions from others, leading to

a breakdown in communication (Eslami and Jahangir, 1396 Sh, 7). Extensive global research supports the notion that cyberspace has a strong adverse impact on people's in-person relationships (Norman et al., 2002, 151).

One of the detrimental effects of cyberspace within the family is the stimulation of sexual instincts among young individuals. Sometimes, users may initially intend to visit websites for entertainment or to access educational content. However, inadvertently, they may stumble upon immoral websites, unintentionally exposing themselves to sexual content. Three factors contribute to the stimulation of online sexual tendencies: availability, as there are countless websites accessible to individuals at any time of day; affordability, as one can access multiple websites with minimal cost over the Internet; and anonymity, as individuals are aware that their online interactions can remain anonymous (Cooper, 1388 Sh, 8).

Engaging in excessive cyberspace activities can have a detrimental impact on marital relationships. Couples who spend excessive time online may experience a decreased desire for physical intimacy. This can arise from feelings of mistrust or unrealistic comparisons with the physical appearances of movie actors/actresses and sexually stimulating images found in cyberspace. Research indicates that sixty-eight percent of couples who are addicted to the Internet have reported a decline in their sexual desire, with some experiencing extended periods without engaging in sexual activity, spanning months or even years. Moreover, the decline in quality of marital relationships should also be acknowledged. Individuals addicted to pornographic websites often struggle to find satisfaction with their spouse and fully enjoy sexual experiences. Those addicted to Internet images may develop a habit of comparing their partners to an idealized imaginary woman in terms of appearance, attractiveness, and a range of sexual behaviors. Both the addicts themselves and their partners have reported the emergence of such comparisons (Cooper 1388 Sh, 43).

The negative impact of cyberspace on family extends beyond marital issues and also affects the overall intimacy between spouses. Intimacy is a fundamental aspect of marital relationships, encompassing various dimensions that involve sharing private

thoughts, emotions, feelings, and beliefs. In normal circumstances, it is expected that couples maintain open communication and nurture a high-quality relationship that fosters an intimate atmosphere (Taghvaei and Abkar 1396 Sh, 129). Families with children who are heavily dependent on the Internet often experience a range of problems such as strained relationships, conflicts, divorce, and challenges related to education and employment (Khodamoradi, Saadat, and Khodamoradi 1393 Sh, 155).

One of the prevalent harms associated with cyberspace today is commonly referred to as the "internet widow" phenomenon, which applies to the spouses of individuals who are addicted to the Internet. The term highlights the significant impact of internet addiction, as it can leave the spouse feeling emotionally neglected and the children deprived of parental attention. The addicted individual's constant engagement in online activities leads to a lack of quality time spent together and can result in feelings of boredom and dissatisfaction when they are offline. Consequently, the addicted person's presence as a spouse becomes overshadowed by their continuous involvement in internet-related pursuits, causing distress to their partner (Morrison and Krant 2001, 156).

One of the detrimental effects of cyberspace is the proliferation of indecency in sexual relations. The presence of explicit images, movies, and relationships that exist outside the Islamic framework serves as a catalyst for obscenity and illicit sexual behaviors. Research conducted by Kimberly et al. (2005) highlighted that the use of pornography was identified as the most significant internet-related issue among families seeking counseling at treatment centers (Kimberly et al., 2005, 506). Furthermore, studies indicate that individuals who engage in relationships with the opposite sex in cyberspace have a higher likelihood of experiencing illicit sexual relations compared to those who do not (Daneback et al., 2005, 326).

The aforementioned harms experienced by couples have created a conducive environment for divorce. Online infidelity, as highlighted by the president of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, is identified as one of the significant factors contributing to the rise in divorce rates (Cooper 1388 Sh, 83). A study conducted in England revealed that approximately one-third of divorces in the country were linked to issues arising

from the use of the Facebook social network. The findings of this study indicated that one of the parties typically utilized Facebook in a manner that resulted in dissatisfaction for the other party (Motahhari Kalur et al., 1396 Sh, 43).

Cyberspace not only contributes to physical divorce but also increases emotional divorce among couples. The process of divorce often commences with emotional detachment, where the husband and wife become emotionally distant and attempt to cope with the deterioration of their relationship. However, their efforts prove futile, leading to a practical drift apart. Subsequently, legal issues arise, which typically involve aggression and hostility (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 1396 Sh, 43). Addiction to sexual relationships in cyberspace plays a significant role in both actual divorce and emotional divorce. Research indicates that twenty-two percent of individuals who engage in internet-based sexual relationships end up divorced or seriously consider separation (Cooper, 1388 Sh, 43).

However, it is important to note that the aforementioned research fails to investigate the correlation between the extent of cyberspace usage and the issues experienced within family relationships. Specifically, it does not address whether the mere usage of cyberspace leads to detrimental effects on individuals and families, or if these issues are influenced by the amount of time spent engaging with cyberspace. Independent studies exploring this aspect are lacking, leaving a gap in understanding. The present study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between the extent of cyberspace usage and the issues appearing within family relationships. Additionally, the study seeks to identify which specific issues in family relationships are associated with the level of cyberspace usage. To achieve these objectives, an experimental research methodology has been employed in the current study.

## Research Method

The present research adopts a practical approach with a focus on the application of knowledge. To collect data, an experimental descriptive survey method was utilized. The statistical population of this study comprises all students enrolled in the Seminary of Qom, including both male and female students, as well as students from

University of Qom during the academic year 2018-2019. Using JPower software, a sample group of 240 individuals (120 seminary students and 120 university students) was selected from this population, which is estimated to consist of over 10,000 individuals. To determine the sample size, it was necessary to assess the "power of analysis." To accomplish this, a questionnaire was initially distributed among sixty individuals (thirty seminary students and thirty university students), and the effect size (ES) in the two groups was evaluated using the mean t-test.

The research employed two data collection tools: the "checklist of using cyberspace" and the "questionnaire of relationship issues." The checklist of using cyberspace (Vejdani 1397 Sh) consisted of eight multiple-choice questions, each with varying numbers of response options. It assessed various aspects related to cyberspace usage, including the frequency and duration of cyberspace usage, the extent of engagement in computer games, common activities performed in cyberspace, types of social networks utilized, preferred locations for cyberspace usage, and the timing of cyberspace engagement.

The "questionnaire of family relationship issues" was specifically developed by the researchers for this study. Initially, thirty-six items were generated to assess various aspects of family relationship issues, drawn from existing studies. Subsequently, the researchers sought expert opinions and conducted content validity checks to refine the questionnaire. Through this process, a final set of twenty items was selected for inclusion in the questionnaire.

To establish formal validity, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of sixty individuals from the target population. Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was employed to examine the construct validity of the questionnaire. The analysis revealed that the items related to relationship issues could be classified into five independent factors.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.88, indicating a desirable level of internal consistency. The questionnaire utilizes a five-point Likert scale for scoring, ranging from "I completely agree" (5) to "I completely disagree" (1). Notably, items 7 to 20 correspond to issues, while items 1 to 6 indicate the absence of issue. Therefore, the scoring for the first six questions

should be reversed when computing the total score.

Data analysis for this study involved descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis with principal component analysis and varimax rotation, and one-way analysis of variance with Bonferroni's post-hoc test. The data were analyzed using G\*Power and SPSS v24 software.

## Research Findings

The findings of the current research are reflected in two types of descriptive and inferential findings.

## Descriptive Findings

Descriptive findings include age, sex, and marital status.

Table 1: Description of Research Participants

| Group | variable | frequency | percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| gender | male | 105 | 45 |
| | female | 135 | 55 |
| | total | 240 | 100 |
| age | 17-30 | 159 | 66.3 |
| | 31-40 | 59 | 24.6 |
| | 50 and above | 22 | 9.2 |
| | total | 240 | 100 |
| Marital status | Single | 121 | 50.4 |
| | married | 113 | 47.1 |
| | divorced | 6 | 2.5 |
| | Total | 240 | 100 |

Table 1 displays the demographic distribution of the participants. Among the participants, 45% were male, while 55% were female. Regarding age, 66.3% were under 30 years old, 24.6% were between 30 and 40 years old, and 2.9% were over 50

years old. In terms of marital status, 50.4% were single, 47.1% were married, and 2.5% were divorced.

## Inferential Findings

The primary objective of this research was to examine the relationship between the extent of cyberspace usage and family relationship issues. As the factors contributing to family relationship issues were not previously identified, factor analysis was employed to extract these factors. One assumption of factor analysis is that there should be minimal "partial correlation" among the items. To assess this assumption, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used, with a cutoff point above 0.6 considered acceptable. Additionally, the correlation between the items should meet a certain threshold to avoid the "unity matrix" problem, which was evaluated using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Table 2: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Tests

| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy test | | 0.87 |
|---|---|---|
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | square | 1848.87 |
| | degrees of freedom | 190 |
| | significance level | 0.0001 |

The results presented in the table indicate that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient exceeds 0.6, indicating its suitability for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's test is highly significant at the 0.0001 level, demonstrating that factor analysis can be effectively conducted on the collected data.

In factor analysis, the pebble diagram serves as one criterion for determining the appropriate number of factors. In the present study, the pebble diagram indicates that the data is conducive to extracting five factors.
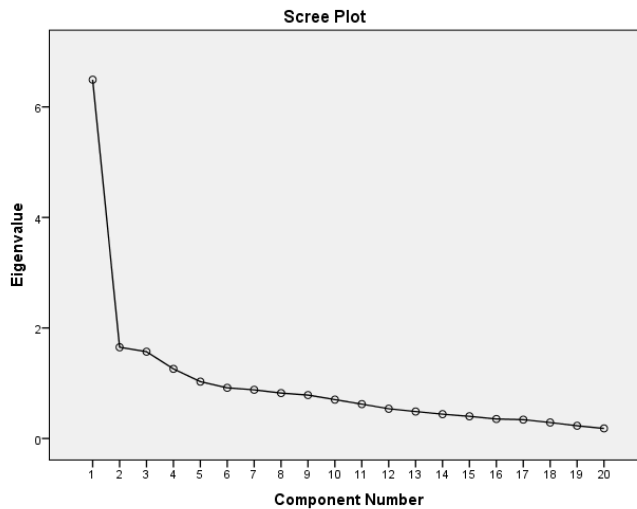
Figure 1: Pebble diagram for identification of the number of factors

As depicted in Figure (1), the presence of five factors is evident, with each factor displaying an eigenvalue greater than 1. This indicates that extracting these five factors would sufficiently explain a substantial portion of the variance in the data.

The table below presents the eigenvalue, variance explained by each factor, and Cronbach's alpha for each factor, pertaining to the issues:

Table 3: Eigenvalue, Variance Explained, Cronbach's Alpha, and Number of Items in Each Factor

| factor | Eigenvalue | percentage of variance | compressed variance | Cronbach's alpha | number of items |
|--------|-----------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 6.49 | 32.46 | 32.46 | 0.84 | 6 |
| 2 | 1.65 | 8.25 | 40.71 | 0.83 | 5 |
| 3 | 1.57 | 7.85 | 48.57 | 0.51 | 3 |
| 4 | 1.26 | 6.30 | 54.87 | 0.65 | 3 |
| 5 | 1.02 | 5.14 | 60.01 | 0.49 | 3 |
| Total | – | 60.01 | 60.01 | 0.87 | 20 |

As shown in Table (3), the first factor has an eigenvalue of 6.49, explaining 32.46% of the variance in family issues, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. The second factor has an eigenvalue of 1.65, explaining 8.25% of the variance, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. The third factor has an eigenvalue of 1.57, explaining 7.85% of the variance, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.51. The fourth factor has an eigenvalue of 1.26, explaining 6.30% of the variance, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65. The fifth factor has an eigenvalue of 1.02, explaining 5.14% of the variance, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.49. Collectively, these factors account for 60% of the variance in family issues, and the overall Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.87.

The following table presents the results of the exploratory factor analysis conducted using principal component analysis and orthogonal varimax rotation:

Table 4: Factor Loadings Obtained from Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation

| Number of item | Text of item | First factor | second factor | third factor | fourth factor | fifth factor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | I have a good emotional relationship with my family | 0.803 | | | | |
| 3 | I communicate easily with my family | 0.803 | | | | |
| 13 | I have less communication with my family | 0.687 | | | | |
| 14 | I have less verbal communication with my family | 0.671 | | | | |
| 6 | I participate and cooperate with my family | 0.643 | | | | |
| 18 | I hide my relationships from my family | 0.473 | | | | |
| 1 | I enjoy life | | 0.809 | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | Life is meaningless to me | | 0.716 | | | |
| 2 | I feel less alone | | 0.700 | | | |
| 20 | I feel less happy | | 0.637 | | | |
| 5 | I have a definite plan for the future | | 0.617 | | | |
| 10 | I have disturbed dreams at night | | | 0.655 | | |
| 19 | I have high expectations from my family | | | 0.617 | | |
| 11 | Sometimes I think I am delusional | | | 0.495 | | |
| 9 | I do not often attend family parties | | | | 0.844 | |
| 8 | I do not hang out with friends and family much | | | | 0.823 | |
| 12 | Most of the time, I like to be alone | | | | 0.372 | |
| 7 | I do not follow the restrictions of communication with the opposite sex | | | | | 0.734 |
| 17 | In family discussions, I never fall short of my word. | | | | | 0.616 |
| 16 | I easily get angry | | | | | 0.599 |

Table (4) displays the factor loadings for the items corresponding to each factor. The first factor is represented by 8 items with factor loadings ranging from 0.47 to 0.80. The second factor comprises 5 items with factor loadings between 0.61 and 0.80. The third factor consists of three items with factor loadings ranging from 0.49 to 0.65. The fourth factor includes three items with factor loadings between 0.37 and 0.84. Lastly, the fifth factor comprises 3 items with factor loadings between 0.59 and 0.73.

The following table presents the titles of each factor, along with their respective selection and correlation with other factors and the total score.

Table 5: Factors of Family Communication Issues and Correlation with Total Score

| | total score | First factor | second factor | third factor | fourth factor | fifth factor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Factor 1: communication issues within the family | 0.837** | | | | | |
| Factor 2: communication issues outside the family | 0.844** | 0.861** | | | | |
| Factor 3: family violence | 0.630** | 0.356** | 0.432** | | | |
| Factor 4: Mental turmoil in the family | 0.653** | 0.432** | 0.445** | 0.329** | | |
| Factor 5: family identity crisis | 0.519** | 0.320** | 0.308** | 0.316** | 0.146* | 0.100** |
| ** The coefficients marked with two stars are significant at the 0.01 level.<br>* Coefficients marked with one star are significant at the 0.05 level. | | | | | | |

The significance of the relationship between the five factors and the total score is evident from Table (5). This indicates a high level of internal consistency within the questionnaire, suggesting that all these factors are interconnected and related to the same underlying construct. However, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of factor redundancy, where the combination of all factors may converge into a single factor.

**Family Communication Issues and the Amount of Use of Cyberspace**

The following are five subscales of family communication damages within groups. To compare these subscales across different groups, the appropriate statistical analysis is a one-way

analysis of variance (ANOVA). One of the underlying assumptions of this test is the normality of the data. To assess the normality of the data in the current study, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed.

Table 6: Normality Assessment of Data using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

| | | total score | First factor | second factor | third factor | fourth factor | fifth factor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| number | | 240 | 240 | 240 | 240 | 240 | 240 |
| Normality parameters | Average | 4.955 | 38.12 | 28.11 | 93.6 | 8.07 | 27.7 |
| | standard deviation | 12.44 | 4.76 | 4.44 | 51.2 | 91.2 | 34.2 |
| Maximum differences | absolute | 0.08 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.10 | 0.10 |
| | Positive | 0.08 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.10 | 0.10 |
| | negative | -0.05 | -0.09 | -0.08 | -0.08 | -0.08 | -0.07 |
| Statistical test score | | -0.09 | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.10 | 0.10 |
| Significance level | | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0001 |

Based on the results presented in Table (6), it is evident that the scores of all variables, including the total score of communication damages and the scores of each factor, fall within the normal range. Consequently, the assumption of normality has been satisfied. With this confirmation, it is appropriate to proceed with the analysis of variance test using this data.

To investigate the relationship between cyberspace usage and family damages, the sample group was initially divided into five groups based on their daily cyberspace usage. The first group represents individuals who use cyberspace for half an hour a day, the second group for one hour a day, the third group for two hours a day, the fourth group for three hours a day, and the fifth group comprises individuals who use cyberspace for more than three hours a day. Subsequently, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine the differences among these groups concerning family communication damages. The outcomes of this analysis are presented in the table below.

Table 7: Group Differences in Family Communication Issues using One-Way Analysis of Variance

| Variable | Type of variance | sum of squares | sum of squares | average of squares | F | significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| total score | intergroup | 6433.91 | 4 | 160.477 | 1.362 | 0.0001 |
| | intragroup | 30559.66 | 235 | 130.04 | | |
| | Total | 36993.58 | 239 | | | |
| Intra-familial damages | intergroup | 823.16 | 4 | 205.79 | 10.50 | 0.0001 |
| | intragroup | 4603.79 | 235 | 19.59 | | |
| | Total | ۵۴۲۶/۹۶ | 239 | | | |
| Extra-familial damages | intergroup | 234.51 | 4 | 133.62 | 7.49 | 0.0001 |
| | intragroup | 4188.21 | 235 | 17.82 | | |
| | Total | 4722.73 | 239 | | | |
| family violence | intergroup | 140.58 | 4 | 35.14 | 6.01 | 0.0001 |
| | intragroup | 1372.35 | 235 | 5.84 | | |
| | Total | 1512.93 | 239 | | | |
| Family turmoil | intergroup | 77.11 | 4 | 19.27 | 2.32 | 0.05 |
| | intragroup | 1948.38 | 235 | 8.29 | | |
| | Total | 2025.49 | 239 | | | |
| Family identity crisis | intergroup | 107.51 | 4 | 26.87 | 5.22 | 0.0001 |
| | intragroup | 1208.33 | 235 | 5.14 | | |
| | Total | 1315.85 | 239 | | | |

Based on the findings presented in Table (7), there is a significant difference in family communication damages across all groups based on the duration of cyberspace usage. The analysis of variance yielded a score of 12.36 for the total damages, 10.50 for intra-family damages, 7.49 for extra-family damages, 6.01 for family violence, and 5.22 for family identity crisis. All of these scores demonstrate statistical significance at the 0.0001 level. However, for the family turmoil factor, the variance analysis score is 2.32, which is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 8: Bonferroni's Post-Hoc Test for Group Differences in Cyberspace Usage

| Amount of usage | Groups | average | Difference in average | Standard error | significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Half-hour | one hour | 39.37 | 4.86 | 2.45 | 0.49 |
| | two hours | 41.14 | 3.08 | 2.59 | 0.100 |
| | three hours | 45.97 | 1.74 | 2.45 | 0.100 |
| | More than three hours | 52.86 | 8.63* | 2.17 | 0.001 |
| one hour | half an hour | 44.23 | 4.86 | 2.45 | 0.49 |
| | two hours | 41.14 | 1.77 | 2.59 | 0.100 |
| | three hours | 45.97 | 6.60 | 2.45 | 0.07 |
| | More than three hours | 52.86 | 13.49* | 2.17 | 0.001 |
| two hours | half an hour | 44.23 | 3.08 | 2.59 | 0.100 |
| | one hour | 39.37 | 1.77 | 2.59 | 0.100 |
| | three hours | 45.97 | 4.83 | 2.59 | 0.63 |
| | More than three hours | 52.86 | 11.72* | 2.32 | 0.001 |
| three hours | half an hour | 44.23 | 1.74 | 2.45 | 0.100 |
| | one hour | 39.37 | 6.60 | 2.45 | 0.07 |
| | two hours | 41.14 | 4.83 | 2.59 | 0.63 |
| | More than three hours | 52.86 | 6.89* | 2.17 | 0.01 |
| More than three hours | half an hour | 4.234 | 8.63* | 2.17 | 0.001 |
| | one hour | 39.37 | 13.49* | 2.17 | 0.001 |
| | two hours | 41.14 | 11.72* | 2.32 | 0.001 |
| | three hours | 45.97 | 6.89* | 2.17 | 0.01 |
| * Significant differences are marked with an asterisk. | | | | | |

Based on the data presented in Table (8), this study categorized cyberspace users into five groups based on their daily usage. The results of Bonferroni's post-hoc test indicate significant differences among the groups. Specifically, the first group (half an hour) shows a significant difference only with the fifth group (more than three hours) at the 0.001 level. Similarly, the second group (one hour) exhibits a significant difference only with the fifth group (more than three hours) at the 0.001 level. The third group (two hours) demonstrates a significant difference only with the fifth group (more than three hours) at the 0.001 level. The fourth group (three hours) reveals a significant difference only with the fifth group at the 0.01 level. Importantly, the fifth group, which utilizes cyberspace for more than three hours a day, exhibits significant differences with all other groups. This suggests that exceeding three hours of daily cyberspace usage is associated with significant harm and impacts various aspects of family communication damages.

## Conclusion: Analysis and Interpretation of Results

The findings of this research reveal that the family communication issues questionnaire comprises five distinct factors: communication issues within the family, communication issues outside the family, family violence, psychological turmoil in the family, and family identity crisis. Furthermore, the study identifies five distinct groups of cyberspace users based on their usage patterns: individuals who use cyberspace for half an hour per day, one hour per day, two hours per day, three hours per day, and more than three hours per day. The results demonstrate that the group utilizing cyberspace for more than three hours daily significantly differs from the other groups across all categories of communication issues. These findings suggest a significant association between daily usage of more than three hours and all forms of family communication damages. It appears that individuals who exceed the three-hour threshold of cyberspace usage exhibit various types of family communication damages. Conversely, those who utilize cyberspace for less than three hours per day show no signs of such damages.

How can these findings be explained? In other words, why

does spending less time not cause issues, but spending more time does? These findings can be explained based on addiction to cyberspace. Long-term use can lead to addiction, and the intensity of addiction is closely related to the time spent using cyberspace. Individuals who are addicted to cyberspace constantly engage with online content and experience restlessness, discomfort, and irritability when they are not using it (Sabzpishkhani 1379 Sh, 225). These situations can create issues in their relationships with their families.

Moreover, internet addiction has a negative impact on mental health. Individuals addicted to the internet often exhibit insecure attachment styles and struggle with problem-oriented confrontations (Bahadori Khosrowshahi and Hashemi Nusratabad 1390 Sh, 177). As a result, their relationships with their families can be affected. Additionally, internet addicts tend to have poor social skills (Kouraki et al., 1390 Sh, 279), which can contribute to problems in their family relationships. Furthermore, there is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and internet addiction (Jafari and Fatehizadeh 1390 Sh, 79). Internet addicts may face challenges in effectively communicating with family members due to a decrease in their emotional intelligence.

The factors mentioned above, such as irritability, restlessness, difficulty with problem-oriented confrontation, weak social skills, and low emotional intelligence, which are associated with internet addiction, can significantly impact family communication issues.

The findings of this research align with the studies conducted by Khodamoradi, Saadat, and Khodamoradi (1393 Sh), Hajmohammadi and Hajmohammadi (1396 Sh), Sadeghi (1398 Sh), Asadi and Hosseinnejad (1397 Sh), Sadeghi Isfahani et al. (1397 Sh), and Hassanpour (1398 Sh).

Khodamoradi, Saadat, and Khodamoradi's (1393 Sh) findings suggest that prolonged cyberspace usage has an impact on family values, consequently leading to harm in relationships among family members. Hajmohammadi and Hajmohammadi (1396 Sh) found that excessive use of cyberspace weakens the family's role as a reference point, diminishes parent-child relationships, fosters mistrust between couples, promotes deceit, increases emotional and spiritual distance among family members, contributes to divorce rates, and leads to violations of moral norms, virtual

infatuations, neglect of responsibilities, erosion of moral values, and engagement in illicit relationships. This array of damages can significantly disrupt relationships within families.

Asadi and Hosseinnejad's study (1397 Sh) highlights that many parents, due to the novelty of cyberspace, often lack sufficient time, opportunities, or abilities to fully comprehend its nature and uses. This lack of familiarity with cyberspace disrupts various family functions, ultimately leading to strained relationships among family members.

The findings from Sadeghi Isfahani et al. (1397 Sh) indicate a significant correlation between the emotional atmosphere within a family and susceptibility to cyberspace addiction. The study suggests that a family environment characterized by love, affection, trust, and security contributes to better psychological well-being and overall quality of life while reducing the propensity for cyberspace addiction.

Hasanpour's research (1398 Sh) reveals that certain aspects of cyberspace are not aligned with the Islamic lifestyle. Specifically, in terms of values and time management, as well as family and social relationships, these aspects of cyberspace are incongruent with the principles of the Islamic lifestyle. Consequently, these misalignments within cyberspace can result in damages and disruptions to the relationships between family members.

One limitation of the present research is its focus on students, thus suggesting the need for investigating the relationship between cyberspace usage and family communication damages across other segments of society, particularly among children and teenagers. Additionally, while the current findings revolve around family communication damages, it is recommended that future studies explore the association between cyberspace usage and other aspects of family life, including lifestyle, religiosity, mental health, life satisfaction, academic performance, and career success. By examining these broader dimensions, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of cyberspace on families can be gained.

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# Opportunities and Challenges of Virtual Education for Seminaries during the COVID-19 Era

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## Abstract

This research aimed to explore the opportunities and challenges of virtual education for seminaries during the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. A descriptive-analytical method was employed for this study. The findings revealed that virtual education during the pandemic presented several positive aspects, including network-based learning, flexibility in selecting study time and location, cost and time savings, elimination of the need for physical presence, and the removal of restrictions on student recruitment. However, it also encountered several issues and limitations. These included the absence of face-to-face interactions between professors and students, excessive reliance on technology, insufficient availability of qualified staff, social isolation, reduced sense of competition, elimination of educational programs, and a lack of control and supervision over student interactions and programs. To mitigate potential damages and minimize the consequences in the post-pandemic era, it is recommended to address these challenges proactively.

**Keywords**: Virtual education, seminaries, opportunities, challenges

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## Introduction and statement of the problem

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus resulted in a crisis for higher education institutions as classrooms were forced to close. As the crisis expanded, various learning policies utilizing communication technologies gained significant attention from educational managers and planners across the country. However, the onset of the coronavirus in Iran revealed a lack of preparedness within the Ministry of Science, leading academic and seminary educational centers to rely on hardware and software capacities for virtual education.

In a circular issued on February 29, 2020, the Ministry of Science established a specialized working group for electronic education. This group was tasked with planning, guiding, and overseeing universities and higher education institutions as the central authority for non-attendance education. The formation of this working group served as an immediate solution, indicating that there was no pre-existing department responsible for virtual education within the ministry's structure. Consequently, a portion of the aforementioned letter referred any queries, concerns, or uncertainties regarding the implementation of this educational model to an academic staff member at the universities (source: The website of the Deputy Education Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, February 29, 2020).

Furthermore, the Higher Education Planning Council had previously approved a resolution allowing universities to offer up to ten percent of the course units for their associate and bachelor's programs in a virtual format. Priority was given to basic and general courses, excluding Islamic and general Persian studies. However, universities were required to obtain permission from the Ministry's Planning Council to conduct these virtual courses (source: Ministry of Science, Research and Technology Deputy Education website, April 29, 2014).

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Science issued a letter on March 14, 2020, removing the ten percent restriction and urging higher education centers to incorporate virtual education into their plans. Additionally, the Ministry of Science announced a policy shift, advocating for electronic education as a replacement for face-to-face instruction in the higher education system. To facilitate coordination between universities and higher

education institutions nationwide, a specialized working group on electronic education was established.

Subsequently, each university made varying efforts to implement virtual education based on their infrastructure and capacity (Moradi 1399 Sh, p. 353).

Similar processes were implemented in seminaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of classrooms, the implementation of social distancing measures, and the adoption of various virtual education methods were among the crucial strategies employed by most seminary centers to prevent the spread of the disease while ensuring continuity in the educational process. However, it is important to note that seminary educational centers faced more significant challenges compared to universities, as they lacked the necessary infrastructure and technical staff. Consequently, uncertainties surrounding virtual education arose.

Numerous questions emerged from the outset, highlighting the lack of familiarity among professors, seminary students, and even education department personnel regarding these systems. How could virtual space be effectively utilized for teaching seminary courses? Which software would be most suitable? Was it possible for a teacher to engage with multiple seminary students simultaneously? To what extent could educational files be uploaded onto the system? Were these systems exclusively for university courses, or could they also accommodate field courses? These questions underscored the limited knowledge and experience within seminaries, with some individuals still struggling to acquire the necessary skills and utilize virtual training correctly. This situation highlighted the insufficient knowledge, weak infrastructure, and lack of necessary experience within the seminary context.

The COVID-19 crisis swiftly propelled theological centers towards the adoption of virtual education, similar to their university counterparts, inadvertently entering a domain for which seminaries were ill-prepared. This circumstance emphasized the need for seminary centers to acquaint themselves with this type of education while raising questions for seminary officials and trustees about the opportunities and challenges associated with virtual education. Over the past two years, the

focus has primarily been on the technological aspects of virtual education, neglecting its educational and training functions, which are equally significant. This research aims to explore the positive and negative aspects of virtual education in the fields of education and training within seminaries.

## Research Method

The research employed a descriptive-analytical method, which aims to provide a detailed description and understanding of the phenomenon, variable, object, or subject under investigation (Hafeznia 1389 Sh, 71). This type of research focuses on examining the current situation and, when appropriate, describing and explaining favorable circumstances, as well as the underlying factors that contribute to their occurrence and understanding the how and why behind them.

## Research Findings

Virtual education is an urgent and essential requirement for seminaries. The need for seminary fields of study and the limited access to physical seminaries, combined with economic constraints, lack of educational space, and high costs of traditional education, justify the necessity and importance of virtual education for seminaries. Additionally, virtual education serves as a suitable solution for individuals who cannot attend seminary in person due to factors such as time limitations, geographical distance, physical disabilities, work and family obligations, social issues, and more. Seminaries can efficiently educate a large population simultaneously through virtual education and information technology.

Virtual education holds significant potential, particularly for the international segment of seminaries. Certain sections of seminary centers have recognized the advantages of virtual education in previous years, leading to the establishment of Al-Mustafa Virtual University with the aim of achieving this objective. In other areas of seminaries, virtual education has sparked a notable transformation, and it is anticipated that we will witness a fresh outlook on seminaries in the post-coronavirus era.

The primary and crucial aspect of virtual education for seminaries is its ability to introduce innovative educational methods. Through

this approach, programs can be tailored to meet the specific needs of learners, allowing everyone to benefit from the seminary's educational offerings. The experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated a greater acceptance of virtual education within seminaries. It has rapidly gained traction as one of the primary educational methods employed during this period, experiencing significant growth in its relatively short history. The subsequent discussion will outline the positive and negative aspects of virtual education in seminaries.

## A. Advantages and Capabilities of Virtual Education

1. Enhancing the Potential for Delivering Superior and Enhanced Information: Virtual education harnesses the full range of computer resources for educational purposes, with the only constraint being the bandwidth of users. Consequently, greater bandwidth enables the exchange of a larger volume of information, thereby ensuring higher quality outcomes.

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3. Unrestricted Freedom in Time and Location Selection for Education: Virtual education grants seminary students the freedom to access their desired course materials anytime and anywhere through online platforms. This flexibility allows individuals to study at their convenience, transcending time and geographical constraints. Whether its day or night, weekdays or holidays, people can engage in educational programs and classes from the comfort of their homes, workplaces, universities, or any location with internet access. By embracing virtual education, seminary students can allocate dedicated time for their studies while efficiently managing their remaining hours for other responsibilities. Unlike traditional face-to-face education in seminaries, virtual education eliminates age restrictions and removes specific conditions, particularly for applicants from abroad.

4. Catering to Individual Educational Needs: Virtual education places a strong emphasis on addressing the unique requirements

of learners. It offers audiences the opportunity to acquire essential knowledge and select educational topics based on their interests. Seminary educational centers can effectively fulfill people's needs by offering practical and short-term courses, a feature that is absent in traditional seminary education. This tailored approach ensures that learners can access relevant and specialized content that aligns with their specific educational goals.

5. Cost and Time Efficiency: Virtual education offers significant cost and time savings compared to traditional education methods. In conventional seminary education, both the institution and the individuals had to allocate substantial financial resources. This was primarily due to the fact that access to educational content was contingent upon specific time and location requirements. However, virtual education eliminates these constraints by providing learners with unrestricted access to course materials and content, regardless of their location or the time of day. Moreover, virtual education significantly reduces the overall costs associated with education, including expenses related to infrastructure, staffing, and administration. The need for students to commute back and forth also incurs additional expenses in traditional education, whereas virtual education minimizes these costs.

6. Eliminating the Requirement for Physical Attendance and Offering Flexible Schedules: Numerous individuals desire to pursue seminary courses; however, their work commitments, family responsibilities, geographical distance from seminary centers, or other obligations often hinder their ability to benefit from these courses. Virtual education within the seminary context provides a viable solution for such individuals, as it allows easy access and participation. Bocchi et al.'s research highlights the significance of virtual education's flexibility in course delivery, which has been a crucial factor contributing to learner satisfaction.

7. Lifting Student Admission Restrictions: By leveraging computer networks, virtual education provides unrestricted access to electronic learning, eliminating any limitations on its usage for users, scholars, and other individuals. The sole requirement for engaging in this form of training is access to a computer. In contrast, traditional face-to-face education in seminary educational centers often faces constraints when it comes to accepting students. Virtual education breaks down these barriers,

offering an inclusive learning environment that transcends geographical boundaries and admission restrictions.

8. Enhancing Professor-Student Interaction: Virtual education strives to optimize the interaction between professors and students, similar to traditional seminary education. However, virtual education introduces a distinct advantage in this regard. During virtual discussions, when two individuals engage in a conversation, other class members can seamlessly continue their learning without being interrupted or feeling obliged to participate in the ongoing discussion. This unique feature allows for a more focused and efficient learning experience, as learners have the freedom to choose whether or not to engage in a particular discussion while still benefiting from the overall educational content (Soleimani and Asghari, 1400).

9. Facilitating Simulations of Diverse Seminary Subjects: Virtual education offers seminary educational centers the opportunity to simulate a wide range of subjects, including jurisprudential, historical, and related topics. Traditional education often presents challenges when it comes to comprehending and conveying certain seminary subjects, such as the teachings of rulings. However, virtual education leverages its available resources to simplify the process of simulating these subjects. Through virtual education facilities, individuals can easily engage in immersive learning experiences that enable them to grasp complex rules and concepts effectively.

10. Enhanced and Diverse Capabilities in Delivering Seminary Courses: Virtual education offers a multitude of advanced capabilities for providing seminary courses. Course materials are delivered to students through the utilization of multimedia tools, including sound, images, and animations. This characteristic aligns with the very definition of virtual education, which refers to an educational approach that leverages electronic tools such as audio, video, and computer networks (Aminpour 2007, 218). Numerous studies have highlighted the inclusion of multiple and advanced capabilities as key features of virtual education (Holmes and Gardner 2006). Virtual learning enables the integration of text, audio, still images, and moving visuals to effectively present course content.

11. Enhanced Appeal to Students: Virtual education holds a

unique appeal when compared to traditional education. It offers the advantage of accessing a wide array of information resources, including texts, educational slides enriched with moving images, videos, and more, all through the convenience of a computer (Miley and Lawler, 2000). The availability of such diverse and engaging learning resources undoubtedly serves as a catalyst for motivation among seminary students.

12. Interactivity with Course Content: Another notable advantage of virtual education is its capacity to enable individuals to interact with course content independently, without the immediate presence of a teacher. Through virtual education, learners can benefit from a wide range of electronically available materials, including texts, slides, videos, and files.

Benefits of Virtual Education during the COVID-19 Era: The mentioned advantages highlight some of the benefits that seminary students have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic through virtual education. One significant and crucial aspect of virtual education, particularly for students of Al-Mustafa University, has been the ability to learn and attend classes without the need to be physically present in Iran. This aspect not only provides cost savings but also addresses various challenges that students have historically faced, such as being away from their families, feelings of loneliness, depression, and other related issues (Abedini, 2017).

## B. Challenges and Harms of Virtual Education

Despite the numerous advantages of virtual education for seminaries, it is crucial not to overlook its disadvantages and limitations. The COVID-19 era served as an opportunity to recognize that virtual education, while offering positive aspects, can also have negative effects and consequences for seminaries. Although no specific research has been conducted on the effects and consequences of virtual education in seminaries, numerous studies have been carried out in academic institutions both within and outside Iran (Farsi et al., 1400). Researchers have explored the limitations and challenges of virtual education, highlighting issues such as a weak focus on the educational program, a lack of virtual education experts, technology implementation without a clear strategy, disregard for the unique characteristics of learning,

inadequate assessment and measurement methods, insufficient supervision, and inadequate financial support (Kurbakova et al., 2020; Reninger and Shumar, 2002).

Virtual education for seminaries has also encountered a range of problems and limitations, among which the following are particularly significant:

1. Limitations in face-to-face and direct interaction between teachers and students: One of the drawbacks of virtual education is the absence of direct and in-person communication. Although technological advancements have largely addressed this issue by providing options for face-to-face interaction in virtual education, professors often underutilize this feature. Even when virtual interaction is employed, it lacks the effectiveness of face-to-face engagement.

2. Excessive reliance on technology: Virtual education exhibits a significant dependency on technology, a limitation inherent to its nature that continues to grow more pronounced with each passing day. The use of computers, proficiency in navigating the Internet, information retrieval abilities, and familiarity with web-based interactive tools such as online chat and video conferencing are essential components of virtual learning. However, many individuals may still lack the requisite skills in this domain. This aspect alone can pose a substantial limitation for seminary students.

3. Insufficient presence of skilled administrative personnel: Successful implementation of virtual education requires a diverse team of specialized administrative staff. Organizations and institutions can effectively utilize this educational approach if they possess an adequate number of technical personnel. However, seminaries and Al-Mustafa University, in particular, face a shortage of technical staff for virtual education. As a result, this issue has led to a sense of tedium and diminished motivation among professors and students alike.

4. Social isolation and diminished sense of competition: In virtual education, students utilize educational resources and programs individually from their homes or workplaces, thereby lacking the dynamic and vibrant interactions of a traditional classroom setting. Consequently, the opportunities for healthy competition within this type of training are significantly limited compared to conventional methods.

5. Lack of student engagement and motivation: Another

drawback and limitation of virtual education during the COVID-19 era is the prevalent lack of enthusiasm and weak motivation among students. Evidence indicates that despite the appeal of virtual education, many students do not approach it with the necessary seriousness and fail to exhibit sufficient motivation to actively participate in online classes. It appears that one significant factor contributing to this issue is the frequent disruptions and internet connectivity issues during lessons, which hinder effective communication. Additionally, the dismissive attitude and lack of seriousness displayed by some professors may also contribute to students' lack of motivation and disinterest.

6. Diminished spiritual growth in education: Prior to the COVID-19 era, the professor-student relationship in seminaries was characterized by intimacy, with students frequently engaging in personal interactions and building relationships with their professors. This dynamic allowed students to learn manners and ethics through observational learning, which was a fundamental aspect of the seminary experience. Face-to-face classes played a vital role in fostering the moral and spiritual development of students. However, with the advent of virtual education during the pandemic, the interaction between teachers and students has significantly decreased, reducing seminary education to a mere focus on completing coursework, grades, and exams. The lack of sufficient face-to-face communication, particularly for individuals solely reliant on virtual training, limits the professor's influence. Consequently, virtual education fails to capture the essence of the teacher's personal touch, leading to potential harm to the spiritual well-being of seminary students.

7. Elimination of educational experiences: Virtual platforms are incapable of fostering deep human connections among individuals. Numerous educational programs, such as prayer ceremonies, pilgrimages, celebrations, group camps, and lectures, which used to play a significant role in the past, have been discontinued in the current virtual landscape. Consequently, the educational objectives in virtual education are considerably weakened. As a result, some researchers identify the most significant drawback of virtual education as the erosion of educational goals.

8. Excessive student autonomy: In traditional education,

students' behavior was guided by specific principles and rules, with programs closely monitored. However, in virtual education, students and learners experience a significant degree of freedom. The COVID-19 era highlighted that it is challenging to control student performance during virtual exams and ensure their attendance and active participation in online classes. It becomes unclear whether the student themselves are the ones engaging in the system or if someone else is participating on their behalf. It should be noted that the essence and nature of virtual space can be elusive, particularly when the educational system of the seminary lacks appropriate educational and moral programs. This vulnerability of students is amplified in such circumstances. In essence, the normative system within virtual education is open and expansive. Therefore, one of the weaknesses of virtual education in seminaries lies in the absence of traditional structures in education and the diminishing of human relationships and educational mechanisms within the educational environment.

## Discussion and Conclusion

COVID-19 crisis and online education have not only raised concerns regarding the standardization of educational programs but have also posed challenges to the educational and moral dimensions of the lessons being offered. While many seminary centers have swiftly adapted to the prevailing conditions and implemented online education, concerns persist regarding the effective transfer of knowledge to students and learners. The online teaching method encounters additional obstacles, particularly in seminary courses that rely on mutual discussions between professors and seminary students. Professors often express dissatisfaction with the outcomes of this mode of instruction.

In light of the experiences during the COVID-19 era, it becomes possible to assess the positive and negative aspects of virtual education and envision its future in seminaries and Al-Mustafa University. On the positive side, the pandemic offered a golden and unique opportunity for seminary administrators to establish the necessary infrastructure and identify deficiencies and weaknesses in the educational system. This experience enables the education department to proactively prepare for a potential widespread adoption of virtual education in the near future.

Additionally, online education has provided a platform for innovation among professors who have long sought creativity and novel approaches in the classroom. The era of virtual education during the pandemic has also prompted the modification and improvement of teaching methods among instructors who relied on a single approach across various classes for years. Assessing professors' ability to transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to effectively managing online classes with multiple participants is another result of virtual education during the COVID-19 era. Furthermore, this period has offered an opportunity for professors who may have had technophobia or apprehension about working in the field of electronic education to overcome their fears. The telework phenomenon experienced by faculty members during the pandemic has also opened new horizons in research activities, as knowledge production can now occur from both the researcher's home and workplace. Quality of research output, rather than working hours, has become the basis for evaluating and assessing faculty members, potentially fostering stronger mutual trust between faculty and management. The implementation of short courses on distance work at the Al-Mustafa International Research Institute has provided an opportunity to test the feasibility and identify the strengths and weaknesses of this work method for Al-Mustafa University.

After nearly two years of experiencing virtual education during the COVID-19 era, it is evident that virtual education is rapidly expanding. Regardless of personal opinions on the matter, this trend will continue even beyond the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge that virtual education has filled gaps, addressed educational needs, and provided convenience in the realm of learning. The seminary cannot prevent the integration of virtual education, and it should embrace this mode of education despite its limitations and challenges. However, it is crucial to take measures to mitigate any potential harm and problems that may arise from virtual education.

While seminaries and Al-Mustafa University are currently focusing on immediate issues, it is crucial not to halt progress at this stage. As an international part of the seminary, Al-Mustafa University requires a theoretical model and a mindset that views the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to reevaluate and rethink the

entire process of virtual education, spanning from admissions to content creation, teaching, curriculum implementation, graduation, and evaluation. The experience of the Corona era has demonstrated that online teaching and learning differ significantly from face-to-face classrooms. To effectively utilize virtual education in seminaries and Al-Mustafa University, it is essential to train skilled personnel and enhance the infrastructure of virtual education while considering the core elements of the seminary curriculum. Developing a tailored model of virtual education that aligns with these elements is crucial. It appears that both in the current situation and in the post-corona era, an education-oriented virtual model is required for seminaries and Al-Mustafa University. An initial plan, proposed by Shojaei (1396 Sh), for Al-Mustafa Virtual University outlines five key elements of education-oriented virtual education: goals, content, resources, learning activities, teaching strategies, evaluation, grouping, and time and place.

Education-oriented virtual education can be defined as a form of virtual education that prioritizes the development and enhancement of individuals' biological, psychological, emotional, political, social, cultural, economic, moral, religious, and spiritual aspects within the digital realm. It is designed by drawing upon the philosophy of education and the mission of Al-Mustafa University, while also aiming to promote the expansion and cultivation of the culture of Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's Household) within the virtual space in alignment with civilizational goals.

According to this model, the components and axes that should be the implementation of virtual education planning in seminaries and Al-Mustafa University inherently differs from the planning process in other universities and institutions. Moreover, even within the seminary, the educational planning for virtual education departments differs from other educational units. In an education-oriented program, it is crucial to consider the unique capabilities of virtual education in relation to the goals of the seminaries. It is essential to accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of virtual education and develop strategies to enhance and improve the educational and technical skills of the faculty and staff involved in the virtual education department. This

comprehensive assessment will enable effective planning to optimize the potential of virtual education in alignment with the seminaries' objectives.

Education-oriented planning in virtual education at Al-Mustafa University should be influenced by the major policies and principles of the seminary, aligning with the objectives of Islamic education and training that are reflected in the formulation of goals, task descriptions, and educational programs of the institution. As the purpose of education-oriented training is to foster the development of individuals' abilities, beliefs, and values, virtual education at Al-Mustafa University should aim to strengthen and solidify religious knowledge, insight, and beliefs. It should be designed and implemented in a manner that considers the unique conditions and requirements of the virtual space. Following this model, virtual education in seminaries and Al-Mustafa University requires purposeful and organized planning and action. By leveraging the experiences gained during the Corona era, the education system can take substantial strides towards improving education in both current and post-corona circumstances.

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# Faith-Based Peacebuilding in Cyberspace

■ Mohsen Ghanbari Alanag[1]

**Abstract**

The contemporary world is filled with tensions, challenges, conflicts, and wars among humans, nations, and states. To overcome this situation, it is crucial to establish an atmosphere of kindness, reconciliation, and collective efforts towards peacebuilding. Another significant aspect of modern human life is the existence of a second life facilitated by advancements in communication technologies. This virtual existence replicates the complexities and intricacies of real life, including behavioral and communicational dynamics. Faith-based peacebuilding emerges as a promising approach to address human conflicts and foster peace, stability, and a harmonious faith-based life within both physical and virtual realms. Faith-oriented activists utilize this model to overcome conflicts, promoting a blissful existence for the human community. By exploring key research terms in this field, the present study aims to propose a faith-based peacebuilding model encompassing all four categories of conflicts in cyberspace.

**Keywords**: Peacebuilding, faith-based, cyberspace

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## General Concepts

To start, let us provide an overview of the key terms relevant to the current research area.

### 1. Faith

Faith is commonly understood as the belief in the teachings of a particular religion. The term "religion" encompasses a range of literal meanings, such as habit, status, worship, serving, wrath, edict, tradition, reflection, providence, piety, nation, and reluctance (Ibn al-Manẓūr 1375 AH, 13:170; Murtaḍā al-Zubaydī 1414 AH, 9:208).

When examining its usage in the Quran, the term "religion" encompasses several meanings, including recompense, reckoning, rule, the revealed law, serving Allah, total submission, Islam, ways and methods, and monotheism (*tawḥīd*) (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1414 AH, 175; Ṭurayḥī 1375 Sh, 76-77; Ghorashi Bonabi 1352 Sh, 2: 380-81).

In its technical sense, the term "religion" has been used at times to signify a compilation of rules, rites, and laws. At other times, it is employed to encompass a set of faith-related matters, in addition to the aforementioned issues (Makarem Shirazi 1373 Sh, 2: 369). In essence, the technical meaning of religion includes both descriptive and doctrinal propositions.

Drawing upon the diverse definitions of religion offered by Muslim thinkers, a comprehensive understanding of this concept can be formulated as follows: religion encompasses a body of theoretical and doctrinal knowledge, accompanied by practical laws, rules, and moral instructions that pertain to various aspects of human personal and social life. These teachings are in harmony with human intellect and innate disposition and have been revealed by Allah to His prophets as a comprehensive guide for both material and spiritual aspects of human existence. When implemented faithfully, this comprehensive plan ensures the salvation and prosperity of individuals in both worldly and otherworldly realms (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1378 Sh, 2:130, 16:193; Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1386 Sh, 2-3; Javadi Amoli 1372 Sh, 3; Mesbah Yazdi 1384 Sh, 1: 28).

It is important to highlight that in the context of Islam, being the final and most comprehensive religion revealed by Allah, the aforementioned rules, laws, teachings, and instructions are derived

through a profound comprehension of the Four Principle Sources: the Quran, the Sunnah, reason, and consensus. This pursuit has been the focus of Islamic scholars and jurists throughout history, as they have diligently fulfilled their duties in interpreting and applying these sources in their respective time periods.

## 2. Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a comprehensive term that encompasses several related concepts (for further details, refer to Schirch 2008):

- Conflict Resolution: Many individuals perceive conflict resolution as the ultimate outcome of the peacebuilding process. However, conflicts are often complex and protracted, making resolution a challenging and time-consuming endeavor.
- Conflict Management: This focuses on guiding conflicts towards the resolution of underlying issues. It entails strategies and approaches to effectively handle conflicts and navigate them towards constructive outcomes.
- Conflict Mitigation: Some state organizations employ this term, emphasizing the reduction of pain and suffering caused by conflicts. Critics argue that while mitigation can alleviate the immediate consequences of conflicts, it does not address their root causes.
- Conflict Prevention: This involves proactive peacebuilding efforts aimed at preventing violent conflicts from occurring. Certain perspectives suggest that conflicts, under specific circumstances, can create opportunities for positive change. Therefore, the focus should be on preempting the violence rather than the conflict itself.
- Conflict Transformation: This concept highlights the need for a fundamental transformation in the nature of conflicts, rather than solely managing or resolving them. However, proponents of this idea have not clearly outlined the specific processes of this transformation or identified the precise elements that require transformation.

It is worth mentioning that certain individuals favor terms like coexistence or reconciliation when discussing the enhancement of intergroup relations. However, some states have undermined the credibility of these notions through superficial actions and by

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neglecting the fundamental aspects of conflicts, namely their criminal, judicial, and economic dimensions.

In general, individuals who prioritize broader aspects of peace and security over the specific issue of conflicts tend to favor the term "peacebuilding." This preference arises from the understanding that terms associated with the concept of conflict often emphasize its negative aspects, drawing from experiences that revolve around various conflicts, while overlooking the potential for peace.

## 3. Faith-Based Peacebuilding

Religion has emerged as a significant factor in contemporary politics, and policymakers recognize the influential role it can play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. While there have been instances where religious individuals seemingly instigated conflicts, it is important to acknowledge that religious teachings can also serve as a vital tool in resolving conflicts and alleviating tensions.

Given these observations, faith-based peacebuilding represents a distinctive model for conflict resolution and the promotion of peace. This approach emphasizes the constructive influence of religion and faith-based institutions within society. It recognizes their potential to contribute positively to peacebuilding efforts.

Faith-based peacebuilding activists strive to assist societies affected by war, advocating for peace by embodying religious teachings and drawing upon moral and spiritual principles derived from their respective faiths. Their efforts encompass mediating between conflicting parties, fostering goodwill, facilitating dialogue, promoting disarmament, cultivating stability, and upholding principles of integrity.

Faith-based peacebuilding encompasses a diverse array of actions rooted in primary religious sources, such as the Quran and the Sunnah. These actions include defense and support, education and training, inter- and intra-religious dialogue, mediation, as well as oversight, guidance, and the promotion of justice. These indicators demonstrate the path towards faith-based peacemaking.

Faith-based reformers possess notable advantages, including a profound religious motivation, unwavering dedication, and an enduring presence in conflicts throughout history. Their purpose is to guide the warring parties towards peace and stability, driven by their strong commitment to their faith.

## 4. Cyberspace

The term "cyberspace" originates from the Greek word "cybernetics," which connotes "ruling" or "guidance." Plato frequently employed this term in his works with a similar connotation. In English, we can interpret it to signify knowledge associated with guidance, control, self-direction, or self-governance.

In modern times, the term "cybernetics" has, to a certain extent, retained its original meaning, signifying the knowledge that empowers both humans and machines to govern and exert control (Motamed Nejad 1395 Sh, 41-42).

In its contemporary usage, particularly in reference to cyberspace, the term denotes an imaginary realm where computer communications occur (as per the Oxford Dictionaries Website). It gained significant popularity in the 1990s alongside other computer science-related terms like the internet, networking, and digital communication. The term cyberspace had the capacity to encapsulate and represent these emerging concepts and ideas.

According to Kramer et al. (2009), there have been twenty-eight distinct definitions put forward for cyberspace, with the most recent being an operational domain defined by the utilization of electronics and the electromagnetic spectrum. It encompasses the creation, storage, modification, exchange, and exploitation of information through interconnected and internet-enabled information systems along with their associated infrastructures.

The virtual space comprises various elements, including:

1. Infrastructure and telecommunication devices that enable the connection of communication and network technology systems.
2. Associated computer and software systems that ensure the fundamental functionality and connectivity of a specific domain.
3. Interconnected computer networks.
4. A network formed by the organization of multiple computer networks.
5. User access to network interfaces.
6. The network of networks, commonly known as the internet. (Mayer, et al. 2014)

## Religion in Cyberspace and its Phasing

Understanding and elucidating the presence of religion in cyberspace necessitates a structured approach, which can be outlined as follows:

1. Digitalizing religious contents by religious individuals;
2. Religious authority websites affiliated with Islamic experts and religious centers;
3. Interactive Q&A websites related to various religious fields;
4. The experience of religious life in virtual reality.

## The Faith-Based Peacebuilding Model in Cyberspace

The conceptual and schematic model of Islamic peacebuilding encompasses a systematic framework that accounts for the different stages of digitalization. It also anticipates the future trends of Islamic peacebuilding in the realm of religious life within virtual reality. Furthermore, it envisions the potential for establishing a network-based international community grounded in peace and faith.

The proposed model consists of the following elements:

### 1. Peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding portrays Islam as a proponent of peace (Quran 2: 208), with Muslims characterized as individuals who refrain from causing harm to others through their words or actions. They are entrusted with the lives and possessions of others (Sadūq 1361 Sh, 1: 239). These Muslims, who embody these qualities, are envisioned as the peace builders and mediators who strive to resolve conflicts among people, particularly during the End of Time (see Sadūq 1361 Sh, 1: 239).

This study specifically focuses on the faith-based peacebuilding environment for Muslim activists within cyberspace, a digital realm where a substantial number of users from around the world spend significant amounts of time.

### 2. Stages of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding unfolds through various stages, which include:
- Announcing the religion: This involves presenting religious content and teachings in cyberspace, making them accessible to users.

Digitalization of religious content by religious individuals: As the presence in cyberspace has become a prevalent practice worldwide, religious individuals aim to convey their message of peace and faith. They achieve this by uploading digital religious content on the internet, attracting users' attention to the life-affirming message of Allah. The primary objective is to guide hearts towards faith and mindfulness of God.

It is important to note that during this process, the message of religion is shared alongside other voices without any coercive efforts to impose the religion or undermine the beliefs of others.

Simultaneously, users who lack knowledge and understanding of authentic religious teachings, and who may harbor prejudice or animosity towards Islam, can potentially gain awareness and insight through the religious content accessible in cyberspace. By encountering Islam's message of peace, their animosity is likely to diminish naturally. It is an undeniable reality that humans tend to be critical of or opposed to things they do not comprehend or are unfamiliar with (refer to Nahj al-Balāghah, aphorism no. 163).

The notable feature of this phase is the prevalence of religious texts, which are stored and shared as information, compared to other forms of religious interactions in cyberspace. Consequently, text-based websites with straightforward designs and user interfaces have emerged as a result of this approach.

This type of internet usage primarily revolves around the storage and accessibility of online information. Cyberspace serves as an ideal platform for storing religious texts, which is why the initial presence of religions in this realm was predominantly text-based. As a result, the first Shi'a websites that emerged on the internet, such as "al-Islam," "al-Kawthar," "aalulbayt" (al-Shi'a), and "hawzah," primarily contained the most authoritative and reliable Shi'a books and other reference materials.

According to the findings of the current study and the statistics available on the "Shiasearch" website (www.shaisearch.net), it has been observed that over 4,000 renowned Shi'a books and references have been uploaded to the internet as of today.

The phase of Religious and Scientific Authority involves the accreditation of content provided by real individuals, including religious authorities, Islamic experts, as well as legal entities such as religious seminaries and academic institutions.

During this phase, as users become attracted to religious teachings, they strive to find authentic religious content in cyberspace. In response, religious individuals who feel a responsibility to promote their faith create websites that serve as religious and scientific authorities. These websites aim to fulfill the users' needs for reliable and credible religious information.

The websites of religious authorities, Islamic seminary teachers, university professors, as well as seminaries, religious institutions, and centers, represent additional examples of endeavors to present religious content in a rational and well-documented manner. These initiatives aim to reference original and authentic religious sources, making them acceptable to users and religious researchers. Through these efforts, religious peacebuilding gains a strong and reliable foundation on which to build.

Additional notable examples of such endeavors include the development of software programs by the Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences. This includes programs like "Noor al-Anwar" and "Jami al-Tafasir," which provide valuable resources for religious studies. Similarly, the Yasin Rayaneh Institute and the Ayatullah Golpaygani Seminary School have developed software programs like "Mu'jam Fiqhi" and "Mu'jam ʿAqā'idi," which offer comprehensive collections of legal and theological references. These software programs contribute to the accessibility and dissemination of religious knowledge in a digital format.

During this phase, religious authorities and scholars aim to establish their presence in cyberspace and extend the religious services that were traditionally limited to their physical offices. An essential aspect emphasized during this phase is the necessity of providing content in multiple languages. Recognizing the global nature of the internet, efforts are made to ensure that religious materials are accessible to diverse audiences by offering translations and resources in different languages.

In this stage, a significant number of religious websites receive support from dedicated state, public, and religious institutions, thereby enhancing the visibility of religion in cyberspace. In addition to religious scholars, institutions such as Al-Mustafa International University, Islamic Propagation Office, and Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute have expanded their operations in the digital realm (Jahangir, n.d.).

## Faith-Based Interactive Network

This phase encompasses both intra- and interreligious dialogues among users and between users and the religious webmasters.

This phase involves the inclusion of question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions pertaining to various religious domains. As the world experiences evolving challenges, users pose new questions that necessitate the provision of timely and reliable answers.

This phase encompasses various features, including peacebuilding across different dimensions of life. It also involves addressing the theoretical and practical challenges encountered by believers, offering solutions to navigate the complexities of daily life. By providing a way out of these challenging issues, this phase aims to promote peace and facilitate the resolution of difficulties faced by users.

Through the power of faith-based synergy, users can experience a profound sense of religious brotherhood (Quran 49: 10) transcending geographical boundaries.

## Experience of Faith-Based Life in Virtual Reality

This phase encompasses multiple objectives, including the establishment of communities of faith in the digital realm and fostering meaningful connections among users through a network. Additionally, it aims to forge links with other faith-based networks, collectively working towards cultivating a virtuous and morally grounded atmosphere in the cyberspace.

Following the establishment of interactive websites as faith-based networks, an interconnected web of interfaith communication is formed. This network of networks facilitates various activities such as education, research, business, online religious rituals, and curated entertainment programs. Through this immersive digital experience, individuals can lead a faith-based life while fostering connections with fellow believers in the cyberspace. The realization of this vision gives rise to a virtual international community rooted in shared faith, providing a promising foundation for global harmony and the promotion of world peace.

One of the longstanding categories of ritual-based websites includes supplication websites like www.duas.org, which provide a rich collection of Shi'a supplications and Ziarats in various multimedia formats for diverse occasions. Additionally, numerous other websites are dedicated to commemorating the

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martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn. These websites predominantly focus on mourning rites and rituals, offering an array of content related to this solemn observance.

The emergence of ritual-oriented Islamic websites, along with their diverse contents and activities, has contributed to the development of innovative terminologies within the realm of religious online communications. These terminologies encompass concepts such as "online worship," "digital pulpit," "online pilgrimage," and "e-masjid."

It is worth noting that the term "online worship" is not exclusive to the Shi'a school or Islam in general, as other religions have also adopted similar terminologies. For instance, terms like "cyber church" and "cyber temple" have been employed to describe the online religious rituals and rites of various faith traditions.

Broadly speaking, the terms "virtual church" and "virtual temple" predominantly pertain to websites catering to Christian and Buddhist religious practices, aiming to provide users with a virtual experience of faith-based living. These websites offer a range of services, including the option to send religious prayers via email to their members and access religious texts, multimedia content, and more. Virtual temples often seek to recreate the ambiance and features of physical temples within the digital realm. They enable followers to navigate through different sections and engage in virtual rituals, simulating an immersive temple experience (Campbell, 2006).

The emergence of a faith-based network of interconnected networks that oversees virtual religious communities is generally regarded as a positive phenomenon. However, if faith-based peacemakers, particularly those within the Muslim community who actively work towards fostering unity and harmony among different Muslim schools of thought, fail to engage with these developments, it could potentially lead to the fragmentation and discord among various virtual communities.

However, it is important to recognize that even if confrontations arise, individuals with religious beliefs can also focus their attention on other aspects beyond these conflicts. By "others," I refer to those who hold different convictions and engage in active confrontations with individuals of differing beliefs. For example, Shi'a Muslims may feel threatened by Sunni Muslims, and vice versa. Muslims may feel threatened by the People of the Book, while the People of the

Book may feel threatened by Muslims. Monotheists may feel threatened by atheists, and so on. Consequently, the cyberspace becomes a virtual arena where diverse convictions and beliefs often clash and confront one another.

Undoubtedly, the outcome of online confrontations can give rise to concerning issues such as online Takfir, virtual terrorism, virtual jihad, and attempts to hack opposing religious websites. These activities pose significant threats to the online faith-based community and its overall well-being.

Believing peacemakers bear the responsibility of advocating for faith-based unity, promoting religious brotherhood, fostering the unity of mankind, and advocating for the equality of all individuals as fellow human beings (as emphasized in Nahj al-Balāgha, letter 53). These values, when embraced and practiced, possess the potential to transform the cyberspace from a realm of confrontation into a platform for peaceful online dialog and harmonious coexistence among all human beings.

One notable example of a dialogue-oriented website within the Shi'a community is the website of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought. This platform has been established with the specific aim of promoting proximity and fostering unity among diverse Islamic schools of thought.

## Peacemaking Strategy

The peacemaking strategy comprises the following components:

- Strengthening users' faith: This strategy focuses on enhancing the faith of individuals, emphasizing the importance of inner peace and cultivating a sense of God-consciousness.
- Faith-based networking: This strategy involves promoting faith-based synergy among users within a dedicated network, emphasizing the significance of faith-based brotherhood and fostering connections within the community.
- Embracing a faith-based life: This strategy entails connecting various faith-based networks together and facilitating the experience of a faith-based life within the cyberspace. It serves as a stepping stone towards establishing a global faith-based community.

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# Promoting Unhealthy Patterns of Spouse Selection and Family Formation for Youths: The Challenges of Cyberspace

■ Rokhsaneh Banoo[1]

## Abstract

The process of selecting a life partner significantly impacts both marital satisfaction and the formation of a family. The fulfillment of an individual's needs is often achieved through their marital relationship with their partner. The selection of a life partner greatly influences the establishment of a thriving and harmonious family. This research aims to investigate and shed light on the diverse patterns of selecting life partners across different cultures and regions worldwide. Detailed explanations are provided regarding the advantages and disadvantages of these patterns, the influence of cyberspace on marriage, the challenges it presents, and Islam's stance towards these patterns. The present study employs a comparative and descriptive methodology to examine the subject matter. If an individual chooses to commence their married life in accordance with Islamic principles, they can do so and strive to establish a healthy family, which is the ultimate objective of marriage. The primary focus of this article is to initially identify the various patterns of spouse selection across different regions worldwide. Subsequently, the article delves into the challenges posed by cyberspace in the

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context of spouse selection. Finally, it elucidates the principles and guidelines of Islamic teachings on selecting a suitable life partner. The article introduces the challenges arising from cyberspace in the process of selecting a suitable pattern for spouse selection. It provides solutions to effectively address these challenges in accordance with Islamic principles.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, marriage pattern, family, youths

## Introduction

Spouse selection is an immensely crucial decision in an individual's life as it marks the first step towards the establishment of a family. The choice of a spouse significantly impacts personal and social aspects of life, as well as the upbringing of children. Its importance is such that the happiness, satisfaction, or even regret experienced by a person in life can often be attributed to the process of spouse selection. Marriage, regarded as a sacred contract, holds great significance in most religions and is viewed as a spiritual and functional relationship between men and women in many cultures.

Recognizing the significance of marriage as a pivotal event in human life, extensive research has been conducted to explore marital satisfaction and family formation, which contribute to the maintenance of happiness within the marital bond. Marital satisfaction is defined by how well one spouse perceives their needs and desires being fulfilled by their partner. It is closely linked to the well-being of the family unit and a higher quality of life. Conversely, dissatisfaction in marriage can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and, in some cases, even the dissolution of the family.

The objective of this research is to examine the diverse forms and patterns involved in the process of marriage and spouse selection worldwide. Various methods, such as traditional intermediation, education and workplace relationships, and computer-mediated communications, have been investigated by social scientists who have authored numerous books and articles on the subject. By comparing these different patterns, the research provides illustrative examples to highlight which methods of spouse selection are considered more reliable and preferable.

This study, conducted through a descriptive-comparative approach, aims to outline the various patterns of spouse selection, including an exploration of the Islamic perspective on the topic. Additionally, the challenges posed by cyberspace within the realm of suitable patterns are examined. By delving into the intricacies of spouse selection, this research aims to enhance people's understanding of how to choose a suitable life partner before marriage. Ultimately, it endeavors to contribute to the promotion of successful marriages and the formation of healthy families.

Considering the paramount importance of the family institution, marriage holds a special significance as its bedrock. The well-being of the family is inherently tied to the strength of the marital bond and the principles and patterns that guide the decision-making process.

The advent of modernity and modernism has brought about transformative changes in social, moral, cultural, and family dynamics, not only in Western societies but also across various other societies, including Iran. These changes have had both positive and negative consequences. They have significantly influenced the collective lifestyle and reshaped societal perspectives on sexual relationships, giving rise to new forms of marriage and family formation.

One such emerging concept is what came to be known in Iran as "white marriage" or cohabitation, which has introduced significant challenges to society and families. These challenges include a decline in the prevalence of formal marriages, reduced rates of childbearing, and a lack of commitment and responsibility towards one another, among other issues.

The institution of the family faces significant challenges in the realm of social relations, particularly due to the shifts in attitudes, beliefs, norms, and customs surrounding marriage and spouse selection. These changes, observed at a macro level, have resulted in substantial transformations in the process of marriage, which serves as the fundamental cornerstone of family life in the present era.

This article aims to address the following inquiries: What are the diverse patterns of spouse selection observed globally? What are the challenges posed by cyberspace in the context of selecting a spouse? What are the appropriate guidelines for choosing a wife in accordance with Islamic principles?

## 1. The Concepts

### 1.1. Preaching (*Tablīgh*)

The term "tablīgh" has unfortunately undergone a misinterpretation in various contexts, including social, political, and cultural spheres, distorting its original meaning. It is crucial to reclaim and restore the true essence of the word "tablīgh" from these incomplete and diverse interpretations.

Etymologically, *tablīgh* means conveyance; however, within

Islamic culture, it encompasses more than mere message transmission. It involves a clear and comprehensive delivery of the message, as mentioned in the Quran: "Nothing is incumbent on the messenger but a plain delivering (of the message)." This underscores the importance of conveying the message in a way that is expressive, communicative, and culturally relevant to each era, effectively touching the hearts and minds of the audience.

The term "plain" mentioned in the aforementioned verse, along with other verses, signifies that *tablīgh* goes beyond mere message delivery. It necessitates presenting the content of the message, which encompasses the guidance of Sharia (Islamic law), in a clear and unambiguous manner, leaving no room for excuses or misunderstandings.

Considering the significance of *tablīgh* in Islamic culture, as well as the global mission of Islam and the role of preaching in fulfilling this mission, Islam places great emphasis on *tablīgh* through various means, including acts of worship, congregational prayers, Friday prayers, and religious occasions. These avenues serve as platforms for spreading the message and engaging with the community (Ganjīni-yi Maʿārif 2010).

## 1.2. Patterns of Spouse Selection

Selecting a spouse entails choosing a lifelong partner who will be involved in all aspects of life. The advantages and benefits of making a wise and appropriate choice, guided by the right criteria and methods, are numerous, while the repercussions of hastily choosing based on incorrect criteria can be detrimental. Marriage represents a crucial and pivotal chapter in human existence, and a successful union serves as the foundation for the material and spiritual growth of family members. Conversely, a failed marriage brings unforeseen dangers, struggles, hardships, and challenges for survival. Therefore, it is essential for both men and women to possess self-awareness before embarking on marriage, as well as an understanding of the moral qualities and the objectives of marriage.

## 1.3. Cyberspace

The term "cyberspace" was first introduced by William Gibson in his novel *Neuromancer* in 1984. It refers to a range of computer-accessible information resources. Gibson

conceptualized cyberspace as a graphical representation of data from computer systems, transcending the limitations of time and physical space. Essentially, he depicted cyberspace as a computer network within a world inhabited by artificial intelligent entities.

Initially, this concept was not fully defined, but it gradually became the subject of philosophical discourse in the realm of cyberspace. Soon enough, cyberspace was no longer seen solely as a laboratory or scientific field, but rather as an independent world. Over time, different perspectives on virtual space emerged. The concept of virtual space refers to the imagined and fictional realm of virtual reality and the Internet, where humans can enter and interact. It is a parallel world created and maintained by the communication lines and computers of our world. In this virtual space, there is a global exchange of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, entertainment, and various other human activities.

Numerous definitions of virtual space exist. One such definition describes it as a computer-simulated place or environment that users can interact with through an interface (Khaniki and Babayi 2011).

## 2. Different Patterns of Spouse Selection Worldwide

Human social life is characterized by a rich tapestry of multiplicity and diversity. Geographical, racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural variations contribute to a wide array of behavioral examples and patterns within collective human existence. At times, these differences are so profound that identifying shared values among societies becomes challenging. As a result, due to the existence of diverse cultures and civilizations, behavioral patterns naturally vary across different societies.

Every society formulates distinct behavioral patterns based on its unique set of values, beliefs, traditions, and customs. Consequently, marriage, as a cultural practice, exhibits varying patterns within each society. Rather than a singular pattern, we can identify several diverse models or patterns of marriage. The primary classification that can be made and presented regarding marriage patterns is as follows.

### 2.1. Traditional Intermediaries in the Family and Neighborhood

In traditional societies, social interactions predominantly occur

within a network of closed relationships characterized by gender segregation. Daily interactions between individuals of different genders are limited and adhere to conventional social behavior, with specific boundaries and red lines that, if crossed, can result in losses and destruction for those involved.

In the traditional family system, the family is viewed as a simplified model of social structure, marked by a strong sense of collectivism. Family decisions are typically made through consultation and consensus among family members. As a result, individual autonomy in decision-making, particularly in matters concerning family honor and establishing kinship ties, is significantly reduced.

Within the context of traditional society, the process of pursuing marriage requires adherence to social customs and manners. Men's courtship of women follows a distinct protocol, and the marriage itself is facilitated through a series of customs and traditions. It is essential to approach marriage in a respectful manner, upholding societal norms and etiquette.

In traditional societies, matchmaking through intermediaries is a prevalent practice. Acting as intermediaries between two families is considered one of the most common forms of matchmaking. This approach serves as a valuable behavioral strategy, as it helps make men's courtships more acceptable to women.

Additionally, intermediaries often play a crucial role in providing essential information about the prospective partner's family. They serve as a vital source of knowledge, enabling individuals to access the necessary details and insights about the other party's background and characteristics. In many cases, intermediaries serve as the primary means of obtaining such information.

Intermediation in marriage is widely seen as a humanitarian endeavor, with individuals acting as intermediaries between families to foster cooperation and social harmony. It is not regarded as a profession, nor is it expected to be a means of earning a livelihood. Instead, the practice is rooted in traditional customs, where people express their appreciation and gratitude to the intermediary by offering property or monetary gifts.

In many traditional forms of intermediation, it is common for intermediaries to be appointed by the groom's family to facilitate communication and reach an agreement with the suitor's family. As a

result, the intermediaries often prioritize the interests and preferences of the groom's family. Unfortunately, this can lead to negative consequences. In certain instances, due to their strong allegiance towards the groom's family, intermediaries may resort to dishonest and fraudulent tactics, such as deception and trickery, in order to persuade the girl's family to give their consent to the proposal.

## 2.2. Building Acquaintances in Work and Study Environments

Universities and workplaces play significant roles in facilitating connections and relationships in non-traditional societies. In many countries, the educational system and work environments are not gender-segregated, allowing both boys and girls to study or work together. Presently, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, universities have emerged as crucial hubs for selecting potential spouses and eventually leading to marriage. The prevalence of university marriages is steadily increasing with each passing day.

Due to the nature of relationships formed at universities or workplaces, the process of reaching an agreement and taking action towards marriage and starting a family is generally smoother. The presence of a long-term acquaintance or relationship during the educational or employment period allows both parties to gain a relative understanding of each other's tendencies, emotions, likes, and dislikes. This familiarity provides a foundation for entering into marriage with a relatively comprehensive knowledge of each other.

The university serves as a prominent intermediary in both official and unofficial capacities when it comes to facilitating marriages. In an official context, the university is recognized as an institution that actively promotes and facilitates the formation of family bonds among students, aiming to address their needs and concerns. As part of this strategy, the university consistently encourages students to consider marriage and offers specific benefits to those who choose to marry. These benefits encompass educational support, research opportunities, and access to welfare facilities.

However, in the informal context, the university does not play a direct role in facilitating marriages or establishing matrimonial bonds between students. Instead, it serves as a platform where individuals have the opportunity to meet and form connections that may lead to marriage. In many societies, the university is

regarded as an informal intermediary, providing an environment that fosters the potential for marriage to develop among students.

## 2.3. Marriage Offices or Business Centers

In western societies, the utilization of computer information banks has become a prevalent method of marriage intermediation. Initially, intermediation companies recruit individuals from various social backgrounds and compile their relevant information into a computer network. This network allows individuals to browse through profiles and discover potential matches based on their preferences, desires, expectations, and preferred attributes in a partner. If someone finds a suitable match for marriage, the intermediation computer company assists both parties in getting acquainted by providing a platform for them to meet and offering necessary guidance on marriage. In certain cases, the computer company may also suggest matches by comparing the requirements and characteristics of both parties, offering marriage opportunities to individuals who share similar qualities and criteria.

## 2.4. Computer-Mediated Friendships

In recent times, online marriage has become an increasingly popular phenomenon, with many young individuals utilizing internet platforms to find their prospective life partners. Dating in the online realm typically occurs through two primary methods. Firstly, individuals often join websites that offer services for making friends, initially motivated by the intention of forming connections. However, as discussions progress and deepen, one party may propose marriage to the other, and despite knowing that they are not genuinely committed to the idea, the other party accepts the offer to sustain the relationship.

Another approach involves individuals who, after experiencing disappointment in their search for a compatible spouse, resort to specialized dating websites to find someone who aligns with their preferences and desires.

While utilizing the Internet and virtual platforms may appear as the easiest method to find a spouse, it is important to recognize that the uncertain nature of the virtual space does not provide a reliable and solid foundation for finding a long-term partner.

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Initial assessments indicate that numerous individuals initially engage in online interactions with the intention of forming friendships and fostering communication. However, as time passes, these connections can evolve into romantic feelings, ultimately leading to marriages between the individuals involved. It is worth noting that while such outcomes are possible, relying solely on the virtual space as a criterion for finding a lifelong partner may not be deemed as a dependable approach.

The outcomes and conclusions of these marriages are often not particularly captivating. While there have been instances where couples have successfully sustained their relationships, there is typically a lingering sense of concern and lack of trust among individuals who have chosen to marry through this means.

In addition to the benefits, it is crucial to consider the significant disadvantages associated with online communication and virtual friendships in the context of the marriage process. Here are some of these drawbacks:

Firstly, the abundance of like-minded individuals within the online space, coupled with the physical separation from family, can contribute to feelings of isolation and depression.

Secondly, individuals within these online spaces often present their ideals and aspirations, making it unclear how closely aligned these aspirations are with reality.

Thirdly, individuals who rely heavily on online friendships and dating apps may encounter difficulties when it comes to engaging with the real world, potentially leading to mental health issues and psychological disorders.

Fourthly, mutual trust in relationships formed through online platforms is often compromised and uneasy. This is due to the possibility that individuals you encounter may have connections with multiple other people, leading to frequent comparisons and suspicions within such acquaintances.

Fifthly, in online friendships, attachment often develops before the parties truly get to know each other. This attachment can hinder a comprehensive understanding of the other person, as certain facts may be overlooked, particularly if the attachment was formed between individuals of opposite sexes prior to getting acquainted on a deeper level.

Sixthly, theft and fraud are significant and prevalent drawbacks

of virtual friendships. With the increasing accessibility of the Internet and online dating applications, opportunists have found ways to deceive and defraud young individuals. Virtual relationships are often challenging to monitor, and individuals involved in emotional entanglements or fearing damage to their reputation may be hesitant to address issues or follow up on suspicious activities. Moreover, criminal groups exploit virtual friendships by engaging in deceptive advertising strategies, leading unsuspecting individuals into criminal activities or forming illicit gangs.

Seventhly, cheating is a notable disadvantage of virtual friendships. Many individuals engage in extensive virtual relationships with others, using excuses such as being alone, needing emotional support, or experiencing difficulties in their lives. This can lead to extramarital affairs, as the virtual space provides a platform for infidelity. While some people may initially enter into these relationships out of sympathy or seeking friendship without intending to cheat, the mere act of getting to know someone in the virtual realm can create significant differences and problems within couples' lives. Moreover, in virtual friendships, individuals do not witness each other's flaws nor possess sufficient knowledge of one another, leading to an idealized perception of the other person that likely does not align with reality. As a result, the mental image they hold does not correspond to the actual person.

## 2.5. Cohabitation

Cohabitation poses as a concealed social challenge that presents significant obstacles to family, religious, and legal marriage within a society. In Iran, it is referred to as a "white marriage," as it lacks any official registration on individual identification certificates. Essentially, cohabitation entails couples starting a life together without a formal marriage contract (Ansari 2014). Such unions often arise when individuals, irrespective of gender, lack self-belief, confidence, and optimism for the future. They choose to live together under the same roof without assuming any obligations or reciprocal responsibilities. Additionally, as divorce rates increase in society, both formally and emotionally, some young people opt for secluded cohabitation as an alternative.

Unfortunately, there are instances where certain individuals disregard moral rules and principles altogether (Seddighi 2014).

From a psychological perspective, it is noteworthy that certain shifts have transpired in relationships between men and women within society, giving rise to the phenomenon of cohabitation. This term refers to marriages that are not officially registered or documented, hence the moniker "white." In instances where divorce rates escalate, some young individuals, both men and women, choose to cohabitate without pursuing legal marriage registration. Moreover, some women, faced with challenges in obtaining their mahr (dower) or removing their ex-husband's names from their identification certificates, may opt for this approach. Others may engage in cohabitation to avoid being alone or to share living expenses with a partner..

From a sociological standpoint, it is observed that the concept of family holds a distinct definition in Iranian society, representing one of the most cherished and sacred social institutions. However, regrettably, its integrity and validity have been undermined by certain individuals over the course of several years. This is evident when a man and a woman choose to cohabit without engaging in an intimate relationship. In such cases, there is no future or shared responsibilities between the individuals involved. Unfortunately, this living arrangement has been influenced by Western influences. When religious and moral beliefs experience a decline in strength, these types of phenomena tend to emerge.

From a legal perspective, marriage is regarded as a contract. Similar to purchasing a house or a car where a contract deed is provided, marriage also involves a contractual agreement. When an individual's name and details are registered in a marriage certificate, it signifies the presence of specific rights and obligations. Conversely, the absence of a formal contract and certificate indicates the commission of a punishable offense as it involves engaging in a prohibited act. Moreover, in legal terms, when disputes arise between individuals in such relationships, neither men nor women have the ability to seek legal representation. They also face limitations in terms of inheritance rights. Furthermore, if they have a child, the child may be treated as

being born out of wedlock, thus potentially forfeiting inheritance rights from their parents.

In their research, Glass and Wright (1992) concluded that men's inclination towards excitement and their positive attitude towards extramarital relationships are contributing factors to the rise in such relationships. Their findings highlight key reasons behind the phenomenon of cohabitation, as evaluated by experts and individuals involved in these relationships. These reasons include a disregard for prophetic traditions and a lack of belief in the religious importance of lawful union. Additionally, factors such as a lack of commitment, fulfilling psychological needs, and dissatisfaction with existing laws concerning women in the country were also deemed significant. The ranking of vulnerability factors in cohabitation, categorized broadly, emphasized the influential role of cultural factors. The absence of belief in the religious significance of establishing lawful connections and aversion to traditional values are of particular cultural importance. It is possible that such attitudes arise from growing disillusionment with religion and resistance to established traditions. Regardless of the underlying causes, these issues suggest a lack of effective engagement between religious and cultural institutions and the new generation, leading to the distancing of youth from religious and cultural values.

Furthermore, the fulfillment of psychological needs and individual responsibility are best realized within the institution of marriage. However, due to the high costs associated with marriage, which are further compounded by potential separations, individuals may seek to satisfy their emotional and psychological needs outside of marriage. This pursuit allows them to avoid the significant expenses and responsibilities associated with formal marriage. Women's complaints about problematic laws in the country also contribute to their decision to forgo official and legal marriage. They argue that official marriage deprives them of certain rights, prompting a preference for alternative arrangements.

Additionally, based on the experts' analysis of existing conditions and trends, cohabitation is expected to continue increasing in the future.

An analysis of the relationship between categories, concepts, and contextual conditions reveals that several factors can potentially

diminish the prevalence of cohabitation. These factors include personality traits, individual characteristics, cultural influences, economic circumstances, and social dynamics. However, for the reduction in cohabitation rates to occur, specific societal changes in the economic and cultural domains, as well as shifts in people's attitudes towards social issues, are necessary. Moreover, effective intervention strategies can contribute to optimal control by promoting trust and honesty within society. These strategies may involve facilitating the conditions for traditional marriage in the society and increasing awareness through media platforms about the challenges and issues associated with unconsummated marriages. By implementing such measures, the societal centrality of cohabitation can be diminished.

## 3. Islamic Guidelines for Selecting a Suitable Spouse

As a unifying religion, Islam highlights the significance of all processes and matters that contribute to the strengthening of the foundations of social life. Hence, it is inherent in Islam to emphasize the institution of marriage as a fundamental process that fosters social cohesion and continuity. Islam consistently condemns hypocrisy and any actions that disrupt social harmony, instead calling upon individuals to cultivate empathy, promote harmony, and foster social integration.

As previously mentioned, the family stands as the central social institution. The stability, continuity, and overall social fabric of human collective existence are intricately linked to the presence and functioning of families. The cohesiveness of society, formed by individuals living together and sharing common values and norms, is fortified through the establishment of family systems. Serving as the facilitator of procreation, the family enables the perpetuation of the human population, forming the fundamental building blocks of collective and communal life. Moreover, marriage serves as a fundamental form of mediation, fostering empathy and social solidarity. It is therefore unsurprising that Islam places great significance on marriage as one of the pivotal means of shaping social life.

Islam places strong emphasis on the role of intermediation, or acting as a bridge between two individuals, particularly in the context of facilitating agreements regarding marriage. Imam al-

Ṣādiq (a) narrates a profound statement attributed to the Holy Prophet (s), wherein he proclaimed, "Whoever facilitates a believer in finding a spouse whom they find comfort in, Allah will reward them by granting them a heavenly companion (Houri) and providing solace through their loved ones among family and friends."

In this hadith, the Holy Prophet highlights the rewarding outcomes of intermediation and linking people together for the purpose of marriage. The Prophet emphasizes the intermediary's acquaintance with friends, family members of the Prophet, as well as friends and religious brethren. Moreover, the hadith mentions the heavenly reward of marrying a houri as a result of such intermediation and connection.

Imam ʿAlī (a) further emphasizes the significance of intercession by an individual who facilitates the union of two individuals and the establishment of a family. He regards this form of intercession as the most excellent and paramount intercession from the Ahl al-Bayt (a). One of the most commendable forms of intercession is facilitating the marriage between two individuals, leading to a divine attraction between them. As stated in verse 32 of Chapter al-Nūr in the Holy Quran: "And marry those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves."

One of the effective methods to facilitate marriage between two individuals is through introductions and connections. It is beneficial for individuals who are well-acquainted with families and friends to introduce suitable and virtuous individuals to one another. This is because one of the obstacles in pursuing marriage is the lack of familiarity between the parties involved. The aforementioned hadiths affirm that individuals who serve as intermediaries between two people will be rewarded. The Prophet (s) stated, "Whoever facilitates a believer in finding a spouse whom they find comfort in, Allah will reward them by granting them a heavenly companion (Houri) and providing solace through their loved ones among family and friends" (Majlisī 1364 AH, 77:199).

According to narrations, Imam ʿAlī (a) has expressed that "one of the most commendable forms of intercession is facilitating the marriage between two individuals, leading to a divine attraction between them" (Ḥur al-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 20:45). Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) stated, "Whoever assists an unmarried individual in

getting married will be counted among those whom God Almighty will favorably regard on the Day of Resurrection."

As mentioned earlier, the practice of intermediation in marriage is a significant aspect of familial dynamics and can be examined within the context of family behaviors. Consequently, alterations in the pattern of intermediation are closely intertwined with broader transformations occurring within families and societies. The traditional model of intermediation aligns with the conventional framework of family and societal norms, wherein parents play a central role in all family systems. On the other hand, the non-traditional form of intermediation is influenced by the structure and dynamics of contemporary family life, where many traditional functions and roles of the family, including fostering social connections in individuals, have diminished. Hence, it is evident that intermediation, as a process facilitating the establishment of family life, will naturally undergo changes to adapt to these evolving circumstances.

In non-traditional societies, one notable characteristic is the increased openness in relationships and social interactions across genders. The complexities of modern social life, urbanization, advancements in women's education and literacy, and the industrialization of societies have eroded many barriers and distinctions that previously delineated behaviors and transactions between women and men. In developed societies, there is a significant rise in women's participation in external affairs and activities beyond the confines of the family institution. This has undoubtedly facilitated direct communication between individuals of different genders who seek marriage, outside the realm of the family. Factors such as co-educational environments in universities, women's involvement in industrial production, the presence of diverse gender dynamics within economic, political, cultural, and social structures, and a new perspective on women's status and role across various levels of social life have created platforms for mutual interaction and recognition between individuals of opposite sexes. Consequently, the role of families, particularly parents, in the marriage process of young men and women has diminished in many cases, resembling more of an advisory role. In numerous instances, it is the young individuals themselves who make the decisions regarding marriage, and only

after reaching an agreement do their parents become aware of their intention to marry. As a result, the patterns, mechanisms, and frequency of intermediation in modern and non-traditional societies have undergone significant and fundamental changes.

While the average frequency of intermediation in non-traditional societies tends to be lower compared to traditional societies, the nature of marriage intermediation in non-traditional societies has undergone a notable transformation. It has evolved from an occasional occurrence to a recognized social profession. Institutions and organizations have emerged to actively engage in the business of marriage matchmaking, operating in a defined and formal manner. As a result, intermediation in industrial and non-traditional societies often takes on collective and communal characteristics, with a shift away from individual endeavors.

Non-traditional intermediation has a broader territorial reach compared to traditional methods. Intermediation centers in non-traditional societies identify and connect with a diverse range of individuals from various social strata who are seeking marriage, providing assistance and guidance in the process. As a result, intermediation extends beyond the boundaries of familial, kinship, and friendship networks, encompassing a much wider scope. Modern technological tools such as mass media, computers, and other communication means play a crucial and significant role in facilitating this expanded reach. Given the diverse methods and forms employed by intermediation in non-traditional societies, it is worthwhile to explore the various forms and centers that have emerged in these modern contexts.

Intermediation and matchmaking, like other social phenomena, undergo constant evolution. As human social life and interpersonal communication expand and diversify across various levels, new forms and patterns of marriage emerge. Traditional patterns gradually lose their effectiveness and efficiency, making way for newer patterns that align with evolving societal needs. It can be anticipated that in the future, existing methods and patterns of intermediation and spouse selection will be replaced by new approaches. What remains crucial for the religious community is to prioritize the incorporation of sublime religious values in the development of matchmaking methods and intermediation processes, with the ultimate objective of facilitating connections

between individuals for the purpose of marriage.

Some existing methods of spouse selection and intermediation solely focus on facilitating communication and laying the groundwork for the formation of a marital bond between a man and a woman, without adequately considering the spiritual, moral, humane, and religious dimensions. From a religious standpoint, such approaches not only fail to address the issue of marriage effectively, but they can also result in harmful moral and social consequences for society. In a religiously inclined society, behavioral patterns are guided by religious teachings. Therefore, if a behavioral pattern, such as the approach to intermediation in marriage and matchmaking, contradicts religious teachings, it should not be allowed to propagate.

Conversely, there should be continual efforts to update and refine the patterns inspired by religious teachings, utilizing the available modern resources in contemporary societies. These updated patterns can serve as viable and efficient alternatives alongside traditional methods in these modern contexts. Given the significant changes in the form and structure of social life, the traditional pattern has become inadequate, as it fails to address the diverse and expansive realms of social interaction. Conversely, the absence of a proper intermediation mechanism in marriage can complicate the process for individuals seeking to marry. This, in turn, can contribute to the exacerbation of social corruption and the proliferation of illicit and unhealthy sexual relationships within the community, further deteriorating the situation.

Hence, recognizing the significance of "marriage intermediation" and adapting its practices to uphold social cohesion and preserve the family system rooted in religious values and norms becomes crucial and foundational. Without a proper framework for establishing a lawful bond between individuals, we are bound to witness a surge in illicit relationships. The intertwined nature of our social lives has made interactions between men and women increasingly effortless, thereby expanding the breadth of their engagements day by day. Consequently, it is imperative to enhance and modernize the intermediation mechanism, while simultaneously rectifying misconceptions, values, and norms surrounding marriage. This multifaceted approach serves as the most effective means to

reduce and prevent illicit sexual relationships, as well as safeguard the integrity and stability of the institution of family.

## 4. Challenges of Cyberspace in Presenting Inappropriate Patterns

An essential message that must be communicated to the online dating community is to refrain from viewing matchmaking apps and websites as mere shopping platforms, where one can easily choose and obtain an ideal partner with specific desired traits. It is crucial to avoid approaching these platforms with the expectation that personal criteria should be rigidly met, as if one can demand any feature without any compromises. Occasionally, these criteria may be misguided or overly stringent, yet users eagerly anticipate the introduction of numerous options by the applications, even if their preferred choice may be potentially mistaken.

Users should take the initiative to assess whether their criteria align with the general consensus among marriage counselors. It is crucial to consider which criteria are more worthy of emphasis. This evaluation should consider how effectively the program incorporates protocols and algorithms that accurately capture and present human characteristics, in line with expert opinions and reflecting the realities of traditional society.

Furthermore, it is important for users to understand that these programs simply present them with potential options, without implying that the application itself confirms the suitability of a match for marriage. Users in the online realm should be mindful of seeking traditional qualities within these options, disregarding the features offered by the online platform. Instead, they should independently determine whether the individuals in question align with their own goals and intentions.

Even if the most sophisticated computer programs are meticulously designed and extensive personality tests are conducted, suggesting that case A1 in boys and case B2 in girls are a perfect match for forming a family, it is still an incorrect approach. Emotional and intellectual evaluations of both individuals should be prioritized, allowing each party to make their own personal decision rather than relying solely on artificial intelligence. Additionally, it is crucial to consider verifying the information provided by users through the National Organization for Civil Registration. This measure ensures that fraudulent

activities are prevented, and individuals who are already married, for instance, do not exploit the platform for dating purposes.

The anonymity and invisibility of users in internet relationships have significant moral and psychological implications, as individuals can hide their true identities in cyberspace and freely express themselves without fear of identification or blackmail. This characteristic diminishes users' self-restraint against engaging in immoral and anti-social behaviors. The implementation of punishments at the community level serves as a deterrent among society, particularly for criminals and dangerous individuals. However, this deterrent effect has been weakened due to the proliferation of crimes and offenses, especially those of a sexual nature, committed in the online realm. If this erosion of societal restraint continues, it may have a profound impact on crime rates and people's overall sense of self-control.

## 4.1. Drawbacks of Cyber-Mediated Marriage

In the realm of spouse selection, the virtual space is generally deemed an unsuitable environment due to the following reasons.

### 4.1.1. Overlooking Undesirable Qualities of the Other Party

This lack of awareness leads to individuals in marriages neglecting to consider the rights and wrongs of their partners, as well as the upbringing of future generations. Uninformed individuals, driven solely by their whims, desires, and lust, may unknowingly select an unsuitable spouse and subsequently find themselves entangled in the troubles that follow, ultimately contributing to the corruption of society's future. When embarking on the journey of marriage, it is essential for a man to contemplate the impact his chosen spouse will have on the life of their future child, just as a woman should carefully consider the qualities of a husband who will shape and nurture their child's life. This is why Islam regards a poor wife as being lower in value than soil itself. Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) states, "With regards to an unsuitable wife, her worth does not surpass that of soil; soil is superior to her" (Majlisī 1379 Sh, 100:233).

### 4.1.2. Choosing a Non-religious Spouse

The absence of religious beliefs among men and women is identified as a significant factor contributing to cyber-mediated

marriages. Regrettably, in the majority of cases where relationships begin online and culminate in marriage, both parties involved often lack a strong commitment to religious principles. It is worth considering how successful a marriage between individuals who disregard each other's religious values can truly be. One commendable tradition during the marriage ceremony is the inclusion of the Quran on the wedding table. This symbolizes the couple's commitment to align their actions with the teachings of the Quran and make it the guiding principle in their shared life. However, if their religious convictions are weak or deficient, the well-being of the family and the spiritual upbringing of their children become vulnerable. When the values, attitudes, and beliefs of prospective spouses are centered around indulgence, materialism, and hedonism, it is undeniable that their relationship will lack spiritual depth.

According to religious perspectives, it is not permissible to marry individuals of any belief indiscriminately. In Islam, it is considered unlawful for a Muslim to enter into a permanent marriage with a member of the People of the Book, as well as marrying a polytheist, either on a permanent or temporary basis. This is because a polytheistic or unbelieving woman is not regarded as an equal match (*kufw*) for a believer. The Quran states: "And do not marry polytheistic women until they believe, and certainly a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry polytheistic men [to your women] until they believe, and certainly, a believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you" (Quran 2:221).

If an individual's sole criteria for choosing a partner is based on superficial qualities such as physical attractiveness, wealth, or material possessions, while disregarding religious considerations, they are unlikely to experience a fulfilling and loving life, nor raise obedient children. A life devoid of spirituality tends to lack purpose and significance.

Having shared beliefs within marital relationships plays a crucial role in giving life meaning, fulfilling responsibilities, and avoiding prohibitions (Heidari 2015, 20-33). Virtual spaces, on the other hand, are unable to adequately provide suitable options for individuals in this regard.

### 4.1.3. Disregard to Moral Compatibility

One of the challenges faced in relationships is the absence of moral compatibility between couples. When a boy and a girl do not share similar religious beliefs, lifestyle choices, or accepted family values, such as one partner adhering to practices like hijab, prayer, and sharia rules while the other does not, or when one partner is content while the other is financially irresponsible, a future together becomes uncertain. In the virtual space, where emphasis is often placed on external factors, there is a lack of understanding regarding the moral values of individuals. The absence of moral compatibility not only disrupts the harmony within the family but also hinders the spiritual and moral development of children.

### 4.1.4. Intellectual and Cultural Inequality

It is important for individuals who choose to enter into marriage to be intellectually and culturally compatible, as the presence of such inequality can give rise to significant issues in their lives. Cultural heterogeneity serves as an indicator that distinguishes couples from one another, considering that marriage is a union established between two individuals. The greater the similarity in mindset and values between a couple, the stronger their bond will be, whereas the fewer shared values they hold, the weaker their bond becomes. In accordance with the principles of marital psychology, it is advisable to prioritize homogeneity, as a lack of ideological and cultural equality between husband and wife can result in conflicts and disagreements (Heidari 2015, 75), preventing the couple from attaining their marital goals.

When men and women are not intellectually and culturally equal, they often face disagreements on various matters, such as attending religious ceremonies or events where religious norms are violated, interactions with non-mahrams, compromising on certain matters, and distinguishing between halal and haram earnings. Such disagreements or similar conflicts can give rise to differences and conflicts between couples. Consequently, the secure and stable life of the husband and wife, including the spiritual and moral upbringing of their child, may suffer. With cultural disparities, each individual tends to raise the child according to their own beliefs and values. When there are divergent approaches, the realization of a

cohesive spiritual and moral upbringing becomes challenging, akin to constructing a building where one engineer wants to follow correct architectural principles to create a strong structure, while the other engineer aims to build it according to personal preferences. Therefore, intellectual and cultural compatibility between men and women can significantly reduce obstacles when it comes to raising children. The negative impact of intellectual and cultural inequality becomes more evident when couples completely reject each other's beliefs. As Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) states, "A knowledgeable woman should be with a knowledgeable man and not with anyone else."

### 4.1.5. Blind Love

In certain situations, young individuals may develop romantic feelings for one another based on superficial attractions, without truly knowing each other. However, if a marriage is founded solely on fleeting emotions and shallow grounds, it is unlikely to endure. Momentary romantic feelings may bring temporary joy, but a marriage built solely on such sentiments is destined to face challenges. Without a foundation rooted in prudence and rationality, the couple will struggle to provide successful spiritual education for their child.

During the course of marriage and throughout their lives, it is essential for couples to approach their decisions with rationality and prioritize the development of their intellectual capacities. By employing rational methods and adopting reasonable approaches, they can experience reduced mental stress and achieve a sense of tranquility (Imani 2002, 137). Marriages that solely rely on virtual acquaintances often face difficulties since they fail to consider the religious perspective or seek the guidance of experienced individuals. Such negligence can lead to detrimental consequences. How can one be certain that similar proposals were not made to others before? Sometimes, individuals spend hours seeking opinions on their clothing choices, while research and understanding about a prospective lifelong partner, who will not only impact their own lives but also contribute to the future generation, are of far greater significance and necessity.

### 4.1.6. Avarice

Some individuals, unfortunately, base their assessment of

others solely on their wealth, valuing a person's character based on their financial status. The virtual space, which often showcases material luxuries, can be misleading when it comes to selecting a life partner. Many people are eager to marry someone who is wealthy, even though wealth itself is unstable and true happiness cannot be attained solely through material possessions. In Islam, it is not permissible for a Muslim to marry their daughter to someone solely because of their wealth, even if it may be seen as an advantage. There are instances where parents, upon finding a financially well-off bride or groom, may attempt to force their child into a marriage against their will (Amini 2011, 121). If a wife is solely infatuated with jewelry and material possessions, she cannot fulfill the role of a good life partner who provides mental comfort for her husband and children. Therefore, if wealth and affluence become the primary motivation for selecting a spouse, rather than seeking the satisfaction of Allah and prioritizing the spiritual and moral education of the child, religious sources indicate that such a marriage will not be successful. As the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family, said: "He who marries a woman for her wealth, Allah will leave him only with that; and he who marries a woman (only) for her beauty, he will see in her what he does not like; but he who marries a woman for her religion, Allah will gather those merits for him" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d., 14:31).

### 4.1.7. Marrying a Woman for Her Beauty

Undoubtedly, some individuals utilize the virtual space as a platform to showcase their physical attractiveness, and it is not uncommon for people to develop infatuations with individuals they encounter in this virtual realm alone. While it is natural for humans to be drawn to beauty and possess inherent inclinations and desires, solely marrying a woman based on her physical appearance will ultimately lead to relationship discord (Behpajooh 2009, 21-22). Consequently, beauty should not be the primary objective, to the extent that it overshadows the qualities of faith, chastity, and decency in a wife. A devout and virtuous wife holds greater worth than a beautiful one. When faced with the choice between a physically attractive yet irreligious wife and a religious but less aesthetically pleasing wife, it is preferable to select the wife who possesses religious devotion.

Excessive emphasis on physical beauty when choosing a wife can lead to regret, as it should not surpass the usual limits. Allah, the Glorified, has established a balanced measure for each desire. Going to extremes and indulging in excessive behavior hinders the attainment of perfection. The pursuit of beauty should not overshadow the importance of other qualities in a wife. The Messenger of Allah (s) wisely stated, "Whoever marries a woman solely for her beauty, without considering her faith, will not find the satisfaction he desires. And whoever marries a woman solely for her wealth, Allah will leave him with only that wealth. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to seek a wife who is devout" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d., 14: 31).

## 4.2. Islamic Solutions

Technological advancements have had a profound impact on social values and norms. One of the significant challenges faced by cultures is addressing this phenomenon. The advent of the Internet, accompanied by Western values, has presented new challenges in various countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, where certain aspects of this phenomenon clash with the prevailing culture. Consequently, it can be asserted that the Internet can give rise to numerous moral dilemmas for families, as it brings about substantial changes in the value system. Islam offers solutions that, if sought and implemented, can help mitigate the challenges posed by the virtual space. The following are the enumerated and explained solutions provided by Islam.

### 4.2.1. Encouraging Piety

In today's world, establishing secretive friendships with individuals of the opposite sex has become remarkably accessible. It is particularly convenient for those who are physically separated from their families due to reasons such as work or education, to engage in cohabiting relationships without the commitment of marriage. Given the ease with which individuals can form friendships with the opposite sex, it is crucial to identify the internal factors that can serve as deterrents, preventing individuals from embarking on relationships that may eventually lead to illicit sexual activities.

Undoubtedly, the strength and depth of an individual's religious

devotion, chastity, and piety play a significant role in reducing the likelihood of succumbing to wicked temptations. This is because a person's actions and behavior are largely shaped by their beliefs and worldview. The term "taqwā" is derived from "wiqāya," which means protection (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1404 AH, 503). Piety, in this context, refers to safeguarding one's soul from the contamination of sin and the things it fears (ibid. 503). Legally speaking, piety entails protecting oneself from sinful acts and actions that are unworthy. From a religious standpoint, divine piety is an educational objective that every individual should strive for, ensuring that their actions, behavior, and speech are influenced by it (Faghihi 1997, 22).

Piety, as a behavioral-ethical principle, holds significant importance and is highly recommended in the Holy Quran. This principle finds particular relevance in the context of managing and controlling one's sexual instincts, as it is considered a crucial aspect of behavioral conduct. This is exemplified by the words of Prophet Lot to his people: "And his people came hastening to him, and before [this] they had been doing evil deeds. He said, 'O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?'" (Quran 11: 78).

Prior to the arrival of the angels, the people of Lot were immersed in a continuous cycle of sin. They brazenly engaged in various forms of immorality, including prostitution, driven by their addictive tendencies. Their actions were not restrained by modesty or repulsion towards the wickedness they indulged in. Preaching and condemnation failed to have any effect on them, as the power of habit had made every repugnant act appear desirable and even acceptable. When Prophet Lot (a) witnessed the people's unified plot against his guests and realized that mere words or forceful admonishment would not dissuade them from their impending evil, he resolved to prevent them from committing this sinful act. He decided to offer them a lawful and religiously legitimate alternative, one that did not involve sin: marriage. In doing so, he presented his daughters to them and emphasized the virtue of marriage, stating, "O my people, these (girls) are my daughters; they are purer for you" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1374 Sh, 10: 505).

While the ultimate aim of both paths is to fulfill the sexual instinct,

piety guides individuals to choose the lawful and wholesome means to satisfy this powerful need. Piety grants us the discernment to distinguish between right and wrong, righteousness and corruption, guidance and misguidance, and the straight path from treacherous pitfalls. Furthermore, piety influences a person's past and history in such a way that the Merciful God pardons their previous sins, preventing them from having a negative impact on the pious individual's future life (Modarresi 1998, 42). A hadith states, "For the one who possesses desires and inclinations but refrains from indulging in them out of fear of Allah, the Almighty and Glorious, Paradise will be made forbidden for the Fire, and protection will be granted against the Great Fear. Allah will fulfill what He has promised in His Book, where He, the Exalted, says, 'He who fears standing before his Lord will have two gardens'" (Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī 1413 AH, 4: 14).

Another hadith emphasizes the importance of restraining and controlling one's lustful desires: "Subdue your desires before they become strong, for if they overpower you, they will take control and you will be unable to resist them" (Tamīmī al-Āmidī, 1366 Sh, 241).

### 4.2.2. Refusal to Exhibit One's Adornments

To uphold the well-being of society and prevent the proliferation of sins and corruption, Islam prescribes certain codes of conduct for women, particularly when they venture outside their homes and participate in mixed gatherings. These codes of conduct aim to minimize sexual provocations within society, foster healthy social relationships, and provide guidelines for maintaining appropriate boundaries in sexual relations that may eventually lead to marriage. Two verses in the Holy Qur'an explicitly prohibit women from engaging in a conspicuous display of their adornments, known as "tabarruj." These verses are verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzab and verse 60 of Surah An-Nur. The term "tabarruj" derives from the root "baraja," which, according to Ibn Fāris, signifies revealing, showing, and displaying one's finery (Ibn al-Fāris 1404 AH, 1: 238).

The term "Tabarruj" mentioned in verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzab has been understood to refer to the explicit and ostentatious display of something with the intention of attracting attention. The

display of any object or action should be evaluated based on its inherent nature. Therefore, any movement or behavior by a woman that involves deliberately shaking her body or standing in a way that draws the attention of non-mahram individuals, or is deemed to reveal her adornments in a manner that entices them, would be considered *tabarruj*. Such behavior is prohibited according to the verse in question (Muṣṭafawī 1360 Sh, 1:242).

*Tabarruj*, as defined in dictionaries, refers to a woman's manner of dress or behavior that is excessive and aimed at attracting attention when she ventures out of her home. It involves intentionally displaying beauty and charm in the presence of others. The term "jāhiliyya" denotes a period of "ignorance" or "barbarism" and carries a negative connotation among Muslims, representing a comparison between the teachings and practices of Islam and the pre-Islamic life and culture in Arabia (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1374 Sh, 16: 462). In this context, *tabarruj* signifies the time when women experienced an unfortunate state and lacked individual and social rights. It was an era characterized by self-adornment, exhibitionism, and the public flaunting of ornaments and sexual allurements in social gatherings (Heidari 2016, 84).

*Tabarruj*, in its various forms, can serve as a source of stimulation for individuals who are unable to fulfill their sexual needs in a lawful manner. By reducing or eliminating these stimuli, it becomes possible to keep these desires within their normal bounds and prevent them from escalating. It is evident that adhering to hijab, Islamic modest clothing, and making adjustments to one's clothing style are among the measures that can contribute to diminishing sexual provocation and misconduct.

In Surah An-Nur of the Quran, women are instructed to maintain modesty and refrain from displaying their adornments. The verse states: "Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and not display their adornments except for what is apparent, and to draw their veils over their chests and not reveal their adornments."

According to the interpretation of ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī, this verse implies that women should not gaze at anything that is impermissible for men to look at, and they are obligated to cover their private parts from strangers, regardless of their gender. The term "ibdāʾ" in this context means display. The

word "zīnat" (adornment) refers to the parts of a woman's body that she embellishes, as displaying and revealing ornaments like earrings and bracelets are not inherently prohibited. Therefore, the prohibition of displaying adornments pertains to their location rather than the ornaments themselves. God, the Almighty, has exempted from this prohibition what is apparent, including the face, the palms of the hands, and the feet (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1374 Sh, 15:156).

### 4.2.3. Observing Modesty and Decency

One effective approach to prevent sexual misconduct and deviations is by cultivating and strengthening modesty. Embracing modesty not only enhances sexual purity in individuals, but it also serves as a deterrent against various forms of social deviations. The stronger one's sense of modesty, the more powerful the restraining influence becomes (Taghipour 2016, 3). Hayāʾ, which encompasses concepts such as bashfulness, decency, modesty, and shyness, refers to the natural inclination or inherent fear of engaging in unseemly actions (Ghorashi Bonabi 1412 AH, 2: 215). According to a hadith, it is mentioned that Hayāʾ (modesty) is a part of faith (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 3: 274). Just as faith prevents an individual from committing sins, modesty also safeguards them from engaging in forbidden acts and behaviors.

The term "iffa" (chastity) carries various meanings. In its literal sense, iffa denotes a state of the soul where one has the ability to overcome lust and desires. Essentially, it involves finding contentment with less (Rāghīb Iṣfahānī 1404 AH, 393). In other words, chastity refers to the state or practice of controlling one's sexual desires and sensual impulses through the eyes, guided by faith and certainty. The eyes serve as the primary gateway through which a person perceives and encounters sin. Failing to control one's gaze can lead to personal downfall and humiliation. Allah, as the Creator of humanity, possesses complete knowledge of all human inclinations. Allah desires what is ultimately best for mankind (Rabiee Nataj and Ruhollahzadeh 2010, 154). Therefore, the practice of maintaining chastity of the eyes is recommended to prevent an individual from engaging in impermissible gazes.

Chastity is widely recognized as one of the fundamental virtues, and its definition is sometimes understood by examining its opposite quality (Taghipour 2016, 3). Chastity should not be misconstrued as complete abstinence, but rather as the practice of moderating natural desires, such as the sexual urge. Psychologists suggest that this desire stems from the instinct to survive and propagate. Fulfilling these desires within certain limits is deemed necessary for human beings, and both Sharīʿa (Islamic law) and reason acknowledge this aspect (Hejazi 2017, 54). Hence, in many cases, chastity is described as the state of refraining from any sexual activities considered immoral (Makarem Shirazi 1372 Sh, 2: 308).

The Holy Quran emphasizes the significance of this precautionary measure and advises both men and women who are unable to marry to maintain chastity. It states, "And let those who find not the means for marriage keep themselves chaste, until Allah enriches them of His bounty" (Quran 24: 33).

This serves as a divine test to gauge an individual's strength of chastity and piety when they face the challenge of being deprived of the rightful and religious means to fulfill their sexual needs. The significance of chastity is such that God mentions it following prayer and zakat (Quran 23: 2 & 4), placing it above fulfilling pledges (Quran 23: 8). When describing the qualities of believers, God succinctly and meaningfully includes chastity and refraining from sexual sins: "And they who guard their private parts [from illegal sexual acts]" (Quran 23: 5).

## Conclusion

The institution of marriage, serving as the primary foundation for legitimate reproduction and family formation, has witnessed significant transformations in the modern era. Alongside these changes, there have been shifts in the patterns of spouse selection. This article aims to explore various spouse selection patterns, focusing on the appropriate Islamic perspective while addressing the challenges posed by the virtual realm in presenting inappropriate patterns. Challenges such as a lack of knowledge about the negative qualities of potential partners, selecting a non-religious spouse, disregarding moral values, intellectual and cultural disparities, fostering infatuation, and prioritizing physical attractiveness in a potential life partner are prevalent in cyber-mediated spouse selection. Consequently, by highlighting the solutions offered by Islam to address these challenges, we discuss key principles that, if followed, can minimize the risks associated with the virtual space.

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# Safeguarding Children from Sexual Risks in Cyberspace

■ Zahra Askari[1]

## Abstract

Sexual education within the framework of Islam is rooted in the Islamic perspective on the relationship between individuals and God. Islam acknowledges the existence of carnal desires and does not advocate for their suppression. However, it also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a controlled and regulated approach, rather than endorsing unrestricted freedom. The objective of this research is to address the challenges associated with navigating sexual risks faced by children in the realm of cyberspace. The research methodology employed is analytical-descriptive in nature. Amongst various instincts and motivations, sexual instinct holds a significant position, leading to profound transformations in both individual and societal aspects of life. Islam, as a religion, comprehensively addresses the diverse needs of humanity. Specific problems concerning sex education in the digital realm include the proliferation of pornography and the dissemination of moral deviations within society. Islamic teachings propose several religious solutions to tackle these common issues. These solutions include fostering modesty and strengthening faith, cultivating an emotionally supportive atmosphere within the family, monitoring children's access to tools and environments associated with sexual content, providing timely and accurate sex education, promoting constructive use of

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leisure time, implementing preventive measures against premature sexual awakening, shaping individual personalities, and imparting knowledge regarding the appropriate use of virtual spaces and social networks. Moreover, certain research findings indicate that parents' lack of knowledge regarding effective approaches to sexual education for their children, as well as their hesitancy and modesty in addressing sexual matters, have contributed to deviations and challenges in this domain.

**Keywords**: Solution, sexual risks, teenagers, virtual space, sexual education

## Introduction

Sexual education is an integral component of a comprehensive educational framework that encompasses social, intellectual, and moral aspects. The objective of this research is to present solutions that address the challenges associated with protecting children from sexual dangers in the online environment. Extensive research has been conducted across various disciplines, including psychology and biology, to explore the complexities surrounding human desires and instincts. However, numerous unresolved issues persist in understanding and managing sexual desire. By reframing the discussion of sex as an essential aspect of human activity, rather than isolating it or labeling it as sinful, many issues can be better understood, leading to the identification of viable solutions.

Through a descriptive-analytical approach and reliance on literature-based studies, this article aims to analyze solutions for addressing the sexual dangers faced by children in cyberspace. By prioritizing the psychological well-being, personal growth, and development of children, and by establishing a framework that regulates sexual desire and eliminates abnormal contexts and deviations, it becomes possible to prevent sexual risks encountered by children. Accordingly, this research elucidates the fundamental concepts of cyberspace and sexual education, shedding light on common problems associated with sexual education in the online realm. Subsequently, strategies for effectively addressing these challenges are examined, followed by a comprehensive analysis of the findings and conclusions.

## Terminologies

Sexual education

There are various definitions of sex education, including the following:

a) One definition states that the purpose of sex education is to nurture a child in a manner that enables them, upon reaching puberty, to differentiate between what is permissible (halal) and forbidden (haram) in matters of sexuality. Additionally, it aims to ensure they are knowledgeable about their marital responsibilities and maintain chastity in sexual affairs (Beheshti, 1372 Sh, 11).

b) Another definition proposes that sex education aims to organize the elements associated with sexual issues in a way that

fosters the individual's personal growth and enables them to attain voluntary perfection. It seeks to provide a conducive environment for individuals to achieve their desired level of personal development (Sabet, 2001, 14).

c) A broader definition encompasses all measures taken from early stages of human life to promote balanced and appropriate development of sexual motivation. The purpose of this type of education is to provide sexual knowledge, facilitate the development of healthy sexual behaviors, fulfill sexual responsibilities, ensure the continuity of future generations, and foster kindness, mercy, and contentment in life (Rostami et al., 2004, 4).

The above definitions are not without ambiguity. Sexual education can be understood as the process through which an individual is raised and educated in a manner that encompasses several key aspects. This includes developing a healthy acceptance of one's gender, cultivating a sense of pride in one's existence, acquiring social understanding of gender roles, gaining knowledge of religious guidelines pertaining to personal sexual matters and relationships with both same-sex and opposite-sex individuals, psychological readiness for marriage and family formation, and becoming acquainted with various aspects of family life. The ultimate goal is for individuals to find inner peace and empowerment, utilizing their emotions and engaging in sexual activities in a way that aligns with the pursuit of pleasing God (Faghihi 1387 Sh, 12).

Therefore, it is important to recognize that sexual education goes beyond the mere transmission of sexual knowledge or the development of sexual instincts. Sexual empowerment cannot be solely defined as the dissemination of awareness regarding sexual issues or the establishment of a foundation for sexual development (Shokoohi 1368 Sh, 438, 431).

## Key Challenges Associated with Sex Education in the Online Realm

1) Pornography and Sharing of Free Relationships

Pornography infringes upon the fundamental right to live with dignity and has detrimental effects on the well-being and development of children and teenagers. Moreover, it is closely intertwined with prostitution and child trafficking, and the

proliferation of commercial websites selling pornographic material is a cause for concern, as it signals an alarming rise in prostitution and child trafficking (Naghi 2011, 137). In today's society, with the widespread use of smartphones and the accessibility of various software, pornography has stealthily infiltrated family circles. At times, family members inadvertently stumble upon such content while engaging in conversations during family gatherings, as they can easily access it through their mobile phones. Regrettably, the presence of children, especially teenagers, in such gatherings often goes unnoticed by family members. The issue of pornography not only affects children and teenagers but also extends to the workplace (Lasser 1382 Sh, 25). However, it is particularly concerning for the younger demographic, as it not only wastes their time but also contributes to early sexualization.

2) The Spread of Moral Deviations in Society

In general, individuals are influenced by their surroundings to varying degrees. Each social network promotes its own idealized identity. Unfortunately, certain networks undermine social and cultural cohesion by eroding national identity and replacing it with a global one. This erosion can have a detrimental impact on the national identity of teenagers. One particularly destructive consequence of the digital realm is the emergence of sexual disorders and deviations. This alarming phenomenon blurs moral boundaries and has the potential to lead teenagers to experience premature sexual development, which may manifest in the display of explicit behaviors (Taremi 1387 Sh).

On the contrary, upholding the integrity of social norms and adhering to moral values is a cornerstone of any culture. Consequently, the proliferation of obscenity in the digital realm has a direct impact on the extent to which individuals in society abstain from engaging in immoral and deviant behaviors. It is worth noting that certain unethical actions in society find their roots in the permissiveness of such behaviors within cyberspace (Taremi 1387 Sh; Erfani and Own Naghavi 1396 Sh, 8-9).

## Strategies to Address Common Challenges in Sex Education

### 1. Increasing faith

One of the primary factors contributing to anomalies in

cyberspace is the inherent secrecy of actions within it. This anonymity allows individuals to act according to their desires without the fear of being observed or their privacy invaded. Unlike the physical world, cyberspace provides a private and secure environment where users can engage in even the most severe deviations without detection. Consequently, the online realm becomes a secluded space where children may mistakenly believe they are free to utilize the various facilities of cyberspace however they please. However, if individuals perceive themselves as being constantly monitored by an all-knowing God and held accountable for their actions, the likelihood of deviant behavior decreases. Religious teachings extensively emphasize this psychological aspect of human nature, highlighting that in solitude, the temptation to commit sins tends to increase. Belief in God as the ultimate observer of human behavior serves as a deterrent against transgressions. In a hadith known as "ʿilal al-ahāʾiʿ" (grounds of sharia rulings), Imam Reza (a) asserts the significance of faith in God as a restraining factor. He states that the absence or weakening of faith in God as a supervisor is the root cause of numerous individual and social deviations. When a person engages in sinful behavior, indulging in all that they desire without the presence of an observer, it creates a breeding ground for societal destruction and harm inflicted upon others. This can lead to tarnished reputations, theft, the devaluation of human life and dignity, and even violence against one another (Ṣadūq 2018, 2:421). In the subsequent paragraph of this profound hadith, Imam Reza acknowledges the psychological inclination of individuals to feel less afraid in solitude. He affirms that accepting the existence of God and the unseen world serves as a deterrent against sinning in isolation. It is observed that individuals sometimes commit sins in secret, away from the prying eyes of others. Without faith in God and the fear of the unseen world, there would be no restraining force to prevent people from engaging in transgressions, including major sins.

Belief in God cultivates a positive mindset within individuals, fostering a predisposition towards virtuous actions while deterring them from engaging in harmful behaviors. These inherent qualities contribute to a person's self-control. Religion, by establishing a robust internal regulatory system, acts as a

safeguard against wrongdoing. Moreover, faith on an individual level brings about effects such as mental serenity, life satisfaction, and the provision of meaning. By instilling children with a proper understanding and interpretation of faith, it lays a solid foundation for their sexual education. Consequently, they are inclined to refrain from sinful conduct, even in private and when not under the watchful gaze of human observers.

The verses of the Quran effectively elucidate the deterrent role of a monotheistic worldview in preventing crime and sin. It is important to recognize that monotheism extends beyond an internal belief; rather, it holds practical implications for an individual's material, spiritual, and social life, influencing their actions in various spheres. Embracing Islam entails acknowledging God's sovereignty over the world and humankind, with the understanding that all aspects of life exist in the presence of the Most High. This belief, coupled with faith in resurrection, plays a significant role in deterring individuals from engaging in sinful behavior. From this perspective, a monotheistic worldview serves as a compelling factor that safeguards humans from deviation and sin under all circumstances.

The deterrent impact of this factor varies among individuals and is contingent upon their level of adherence to the principles of the divine worldview. Consequently, the stronger the belief in God held by children, the less likely they are to commit sins. The story of Prophet Joseph in the Holy Quran serves as a sensitive portrayal, illustrating the significance of ideological foundations and the deterrent effects derived from embracing a monotheistic worldview (Gholami 2013, 222).

The impact of faith is such that it is often suggested that "teaching religious practices" to children and teenagers serves as an indirect form of sexual education. Additionally, religious education holds the potential to shape how adolescents perceive pornography, leading them to view its usage as distasteful. Hence, religious education emerges as a potent tool in mitigating the consumption of pornography among affected adolescents (Rasmus and Beerman 2016, 193).

Engaging in specific acts of worship, such as reciting dhikrs or supplications and special prayers, fasting, attending prayer gatherings, and visiting religious sites, particularly the shrines of

the imams, holds significant influence in preventing pornography consumption. The Quran emphasizes this by stating, "And establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing" (Quran 29: 45).

If a prayer is accompanied by submission and the presence of heart, it will give you the strength not to engage in pornography, and if you come across pornographic content, you will control yourself and will not pay attention to it.

Imam Ali (a) has expressed that prayer serves as a shield for believers, protecting them from adversities and deviations (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 4: 214). The Quran also affirms this concept, stating, "Indeed, those who fear Allah, when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight" (Quran 7: 102).

Reflecting on aspects like God, divine blessings, death, and resurrection forms the foundation for restraining lustful desires (Sharif 1391 Sh, 156).

In Islamic teachings, the remembrance of God holds great significance in preventing pornography. Imam Sadiq (a) emphasizes that by consistently remembering God and feeling obliged to obey Him, it becomes feasible to uproot lustful inclinations (Majlisī 1365 Sh, 70: 396).

Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) prayed to God, seeking to control his gaze and preserve his chastity (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 4:74). Safaee Moghaddam (1388 Sh, 259) has highlighted several benefits of worship, including:

a) Exerting mastery over one's instincts and desires, and attaining self-possession.

b) Exercising control over one's thoughts and imagination.

c) Regulating and gaining command over one's bodily faculties.

d) Achieving dominance over worldly temptations and distractions.

The occurrence of sin stems from a state of "negligence," wherein individuals disregard the presence of God. Worship, on the other hand, serves as a means to transform this negligence into awareness. When a person engages in worship, they become conscious of God's presence and perceive themselves in His divine presence (Safaee Moghaddam 1388 Sh, 260).

## 2. Strengthening Modesty

The term "ḥayāʾ/modesty" is defined in the dictionary as refraining from engaging in abominable acts that are condemned by others (Ṭurayḥī, 1375 Sh, 1: 116). Ragheb Esfahani, however, suggests that this abstention from wrongdoing arises from recognizing the ugliness and inherent badness of the act itself, rather than merely being motivated by fear of people (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, 270).

The Holy Quran indirectly highlights the innate nature of modesty through the story of Adam and Eve, narrated in two chapters (7:22; 20: 121). In these verses, it is mentioned that when Adam and Eve tasted the forbidden tree, their own evil inclinations became apparent to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from the garden (Quran 7: 22).

Hadiths also highlight modesty as one of the distinctive qualities of human beings (Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar 1379 Sh, 79). They establish a correlation between modesty and faith, such that the presence or absence of one affects the other (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 2:106). The connection between these two virtues is so intimate that Imam Sadiq (a) describes a person lacking modesty as someone devoid of faith, stating, "He who lacks modesty lacks faith" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 4: 323).

In another discourse, it is mentioned that Imam Ali (a) regarded modesty, reason, and religion as inseparable companions. He narrated a conversation between Gabriel and Adam, where Gabriel asked Adam to choose one of three things and set aside the other two. Adam inquired about the three options, and Gabriel responded: reason, modesty, and religion. Adam chose reason, and Gabriel instructed modesty and religion to depart from him. However, they replied to Gabriel, stating that they were commanded to be with reason wherever it may be. Gabriel then acknowledged their response, leaving the choice to Adam, and ascended (Kulaynī 1429 AH, 1: 10).

In order to promote and reinforce modesty within the family, Islam deems it obligatory for spouses to uphold sexual morality in the presence of their children. Parents are prohibited from engaging in sexual relations even in the presence of their infants. This is because such behavior can lay the groundwork for potential sexual deviations in the child's adulthood. The

detrimental impact of this issue is significant, as indicated by a statement attributed to the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him. He said, "By the One in whose hands my life is, if a man engages in sexual relations with his wife while a child is awake in the room, witnessing or hearing them, the child will never be safe. The child, whether a boy or a girl, will be exposed to the influence of adultery" (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 5: 500).

Furthermore, fostering modesty within the family also entails refraining from engaging in sexually stimulating behaviors. Actions such as touching a child's genitals (Ṣadūq 1413 AH, 3: 43) or kissing and hugging a non-mahram girl hold significant importance in upholding modesty. In a hadith, it is stated that "A boy should not kiss a non-mahram woman once he reaches the age of seven, and a girl who has reached the age of six should not be kissed by a boy" (Ṣadūq 1413 AH, 3: 437).

It is crucial to pay attention to certain practices to strengthen modesty within the family, such as the separation of children's beds. Some traditions suggest separating beds from the age of ten, while others recommend it from the age of six (Ṣadūq 1413 AH, 3:436). The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him, stated, "When boys and boys, boys and girls, and girls and girls reach the age of ten, their beds should be separated from each other" (Ṣadūq 1413 AH, 3: 436).

In addition to bed separation, parents should be mindful of their attire, speech, and interactions with each other within the home. Children, particularly before the age of seven, have a strong inclination to imitate others, particularly their parents. Alongside their natural curiosity about sexual matters and their quest for answers in various fields, children observe and emulate their parents' way of speaking, dressing, and behaving. Consequently, parents should exercise great care in their conversations, jokes, and other behaviors in the presence of their children.

Moreover, it is essential for mothers and fathers to maintain appropriate attire when in the presence of their children, as improper clothing can create a foundation for children's vulnerability to immodesty.

The significance of paying special attention to modesty stems from the numerous blessings associated with it. Often, individuals lacking this trait tend to disregard moral principles, neglect their

responsibilities, fail to honor entrusted obligations, and engage in deceitful behavior. Over time, they become susceptible to acquiring various negative qualities. Modesty serves as a safeguard against numerous moral vices, providing individuals with immunity and protection.

When examining the origins of modesty in humans, two factors come into play. Firstly, there is the innate human desire to appear flawless, seeking to present oneself in the best possible light. Secondly, there is the inclination to conceal potential imperfections from others. A person experiences shame when they become aware of a fault within themselves, and someone else becomes aware of it as well. If an individual behaves in a manner that others perceive as unseemly, thus revealing the hidden flaw, it leads to a state of embarrassment. This state is not desirable but rather painful and uncomfortable for humans.

According to a hadith attributed to Imam Sadiq (a), the purpose of embarrassment is to deter individuals from committing unsightly acts, preventing their faults from being exposed and sparing them from shame. Inherent in human nature is the tendency to become distressed when realizing that one's faults are visible to others or when there is a possibility that others may notice them. In response, individuals strive to cover up their flaws (Mesbah Yazdi 1392 Sh, 293-94).

Hence, it is evident that it is natural for individuals to desire that their flaws and imperfections remain hidden from others. When their faults are exposed, they experience a sense of embarrassment. This discomforting state aligns with the concept of modesty. By fostering modesty in their children, families can cultivate intrinsic self-control and innate self-supervision within them.

If a person lacks the fear that their existence is flawed and remains unperturbed by this state, they may engage in unsightly behavior. However, a sense of shame arises when one desires to be flawless. The pursuit of self-dignity, a manifestation of self-love, is essential for human existence. Consequently, when a person perceives actions or circumstances as undermining their dignity, they strive to rectify them. The human tendency to feel shame stems from the innate aspiration to be perfect in all aspects. This yearning for self-respect and dignity, combined with the inclination to conceal one's flaws from others, gives rise to

feelings of shame. Without the presence of self-love and self-respect instilled by a higher power, humanity may not have pursued moral virtues and the quest for perfection (Mesbah Yazdi 1392 Sh, 294).

Sex education psychologists stress the significance of sex education within the family setting and highlight the development of modesty in both girls and boys. They underscore the importance of instilling this characteristic in children, as modesty is a crucial aspect of human morality. It entails the ability to conduct oneself appropriately in society. Modesty serves as the foundation of chastity, which is manifested in one's speech, behavior, and attire. Nurturing this essential trait should commence at an early stage. To achieve this objective, it is imperative to create conducive conditions within the family. By cultivating modesty, individuals develop a profound sense of respect and chastity when interacting with the opposite sex (Faghihi 1387 Sh).

Hence, it can be asserted that fostering modesty among adolescents is one of the primary means of preventing sexual deviations. Modesty involves a sense of shame towards indecent actions and encompasses self-restraint from evil. In children and teenagers, modesty is one of the earliest faculties to manifest in their understanding. It has been bestowed upon humanity by a higher power to steer them away from immoral behavior and prevent them from descending into an animalistic state. Modesty not only reinforces sexual chastity but also serves as a deterrent against various forms of societal deviance. The strength of one's modesty directly correlates with its ability to act as a restraining force, reducing the likelihood of engaging in indecent acts (Farmahini and Farahani 1385 Sh, 163).

The connection between faith and modesty is incredibly close, to the extent that some hadiths consider modesty as a component of faith, while others regard it as faith in its entirety or as its adornment. Strengthening one's faith is essential to embody the principle of modesty. As a person's faith strengthens, their chastity and modesty increase, enabling them to resist their desires more effectively (Sabet 1379 Sh, 613). According to certain hadiths, modesty is a branch of faith, implying that one lacking modesty

lacks faith. Faith is depicted as being bare, with piety serving as its clothing and modesty as its adornment (Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd 1404 AH, 19: 219).

## 3. Creating an Emotional Atmosphere in Family

Recognizing and understanding a child's unique qualities and abilities, which are among the greatest gifts from a divine source, plays a vital role in enabling parents to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. Adolescents, like all individuals, have spiritual and psychological needs in addition to their physical requirements. Respecting their inherent dignity is key to addressing these needs. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) emphasized the significance of honoring children, stating, "Respect your children and cultivate good manners in them. By doing so, you will receive divine mercy and forgiveness." One way to demonstrate respect for children is by actively involving them and instilling a sense of responsibility. As Imam Ali (a) wisely observed, "The goodness of a person's speech is a testament to the perfection of their intellect."

Parents should consider the child's age, understanding, and abilities, and provide encouragement and guidance accordingly. If a teenager makes a mistake, discipline should be applied with the intention of correcting their behavior, avoiding resorting to violence. Some scholars state that discipline is permissible as long as it benefits the children and remains within reasonable limits. Thus, both discipline and encouragement are integral to the education of teenagers. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) mentions in Wisdom 368 of Nahj al-Balaghah: "Indeed, God has established rewards for obedience and punishments for disobedience to save His servants from His torment and guide them towards heaven."

However, excessive encouragement can sometimes lead our children to disregard our words, while perceiving discipline as the norm without feeling any shame in it. As an alternative approach to preventing mistakes, Islam emphasizes the promotion of good deeds. This method, if implemented effectively, can effectively eliminate many deviations and corruptions. It is a method that God Almighty has ordained for the education of all human beings. In verse 6 of Surah at-Tahrim, God explicitly addresses the

importance of recommending good as a moral duty: "O you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is people and stones." Additionally, in verse 125 of Surah an-Nahl, God instructs: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided."

Hence, a meaningful sermon is one that is delivered by a devout preacher with the intention of correction and guidance. To ensure the effectiveness of preaching, it should be characterized by gentleness and sincerity.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) wisely states, "A Muslim is the mirror of his brother. If you observe a mistake in your brother, do not attack him. Instead, guide him and exercise patience." It is important to recognize that those who seek advice have their rights. Imam Sajjad (peace be upon him) addresses this matter by stating, "The right of those who seek advice is to be directed towards the right path and to be spoken to in a manner that suits their level of understanding." This is because every individual possesses a unique intellectual capacity, and your approach should always be accompanied by kindness and compassion.

Nonetheless, within the emotional dynamics of the family, it is possible to steer an adolescent's sexual education in the correct direction by understanding their personality and capabilities. The sense of emotional inadequacy in adolescents can contribute to various deviations. Respecting and engaging with an adolescent through encouragement, balanced discipline, and gentle guidance can effectively guide their sexual instincts.

By fostering an emotional bond with adolescents and providing them with suitable answers to their inquiries, we can assist them in developing a healthy sexual identity. This approach helps prevent the negative consequences of their curiosity, such as seeking answers from harmful online spaces, immoral literature, or questionable media outlets. However, it is crucial to recognize that education encompasses more than merely conveying information to children. The conduct and behavior of parents and educators play a significant role in the effectiveness of education as well.

## 4. Child-Focused Monitoring Tools and Environments

The advent of cyberspace has brought about significant changes in the parent-child relationship. These changes include a weakening of the family's role as a reference point, decreased communication between parents and children, a generation gap resulting from technological advancements, diminished privacy between children and parents, and instances where children may oppose one or both of their parents. In the current circumstances, the relationship between parents and children has become distant, characterized by social differences and contrasting life experiences. Each generation perceives and interprets life from their own perspectives and personal visions. The older generation (parents) often feels knowledgeable and experienced, while the younger generation (children), seeking to adapt to the rapid developments of the present, may react against them and become stubborn when they find it challenging to reconcile their own logic with the deeply-rooted advice of their parents (Rahimi 1390 Sh, 18).

It should be emphasized that the family serves as both the nurturing environment and a secure haven for our children, providing them with essential material and spiritual support. The family holds an irreplaceable position in the lives of teenagers. However, in today's world, the realm of educational and supportive institutions has expanded to include schools as well. Alongside caring parents, educators and the government collaborate step by step to raise children. Based on the principles of Sharia and customs, our children are a significant trust and a valuable asset to society. Thus, God states in verse 27 of Surah al-Anfal: "O you who have believed, do not betray Allah and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know [the consequence]." In accordance with this verse, efforts should be made to ensure the physical and mental development of adolescents, removing any obstacles in their path. To bestow the blessings of education upon teenagers, it is crucial to provide them with appropriate guidance and supervision tailored to their mental and physical maturity. Regrettably, the use of toys, recreational and educational devices, particularly media, has become a potential threat that jeopardizes their sexual education. Additionally, social media's influence is increasingly shaping the personalities and behaviors of teenagers.

Indeed, various entities such as bookstores, video and computer program producers, television networks, and others strive to create products that align with their own objectives and ideologies in order to captivate teenagers. Unfortunately, many of these programs have negative effects on teenagers. Moreover, adolescents are increasingly exposed to harmful information through avenues such as computer games, mobile phones, the Internet, movies, television programs, and social and satellite networks. As a result, it is vital to exercise control over teenagers' access to violent content, incorrect sexual education, illicit relationships, as well as anti-religious and immoral propaganda. Families and individuals involved in the lives of teenagers should be vigilant and monitor everything that influences their mental environment. Imam Ali (a) expressed his concern about his young son encountering biased messengers who could sow doubts and manipulate his perception of the truth. He stated, "I feared that the desires and beliefs that divide people and create suspicions would assail you. Although I hesitated to inform you about these matters, I chose to disclose them to you and keep you steadfast, so that you may avoid societal destruction."

Therefore, it is important to recognize that sex education should be provided in a thoughtful and structured manner, taking into account the age, mental development, and specific needs of children and adolescents. By understanding their requirements and capabilities, we can create an appropriate and timely plan for imparting sex education.

## 5. Providing Accurate and Timely Sex Education

The objective of sex education is to offer teenagers accurate and comprehensive information about the physical and psychological changes they experience, as well as to guide them during this crucial stage of their lives, both in relation to themselves and others. Sex education encompasses teaching the appropriate ways to express desires, establishing healthy relationships, and avoiding deviant behaviors. Another definition of sex education involves imparting knowledge about reproduction and childbirth, helping individuals understand and regulate their sexual impulses and behaviors, and educating them about the principles of personal and social matters pertaining to both men and women (Faghihi 1382 Sh, 21).

Providing accurate and comprehensive education on sexual matters at any stage of personal development, coupled with learning religious values and norms, promotes moral behavior and helps individuals steer clear of corruption.

Timely and appropriate sexual education creates a conducive environment for the healthy sexual development of children. One of the crucial objectives of providing education at the right time is to ensure that teenagers receive accurate information from trustworthy sources, in a suitable manner and free from any distortions. It is essential for children to experience their growth stages in a calm and nurturing environment, free from stress, anxiety, and premature sexual activities. This allows them to develop optimally and naturally during their teenage years. If a child does not receive adequate sexual development during their early years, it can lead to sexual deviations that persist into adolescence, youth, and adulthood. Consequently, they may struggle to fulfill their role as parents effectively, potentially resulting in an undesirable family dynamic (Faghihi 1387 Sh, 27).

These instructions also contribute to developing a proper understanding of sexual identity and fostering realistic expectations surrounding it. This accurate awareness aligns well with an individual's sexual capabilities. It is important to achieve this goal during childhood or adolescence, as it enables a person to assume their responsibilities as an adult in alignment with their gender.

## 6. Educational Strategies in Family

### 6.1. Prevention of Early Sexual Awakening

Parents should approach the sexual awakening of their children with caution. It is important not to leave children ignorant about these matters, as it can have certain disadvantages. Unfortunately, in today's world, parents unintentionally contribute to the early or premature sexual awakening of their children and teenagers by providing them with unrestricted access to devices such as phones and tablets equipped with various features. The need for information in the realm of sexuality is one of the fundamental human needs. This is why the internet has become a prominent platform for sexual topics. Initially, a child or adolescent may explore or engage with pornography online out of curiosity and a desire for information. However, over time, they can become

desensitized to it. Sexual instinct is not bound by limits. The more attention one gives to their sexual instinct, the stronger its pull becomes. Teenagers are more likely to turn to pornography seeking information, especially in societies where there are restrictive guidelines regarding sexual matters, and proper information is not readily available.

One of the important responsibilities parents have regarding the sexual education of their children is to uphold proper sexual conduct within the home. Unfortunately, this aspect has often been neglected despite its significance. Parents should be mindful of their behavior regarding sexual matters to prevent premature sexual awakening in their children. It is crucial for parents to maintain boundaries regarding their own sexual relationships, even when their children are minors. Islamic texts explicitly highlight that the lack of adherence to chastity and sexual morality within the family environment can contribute to girls engaging in prostitution and boys developing sexual deviancy in adulthood (Haji Dehabadi 1385 Sh, 189). Parents should demonstrate modesty and discretion towards their children. If parents fail to uphold modesty, it can impact the chastity of their children, particularly if they continuously witness such behavior throughout their childhood.

Another important recommendation is for parents to exercise caution when selecting videos or media content, ensuring that it is appropriate for their children's age. Furthermore, parents should make an effort to avoid engaging in conversations or creating situations that may stimulate sexual desires in the presence of their children. It is crucial for parents to take sexual ethics seriously when it comes to their children, preventing any potential premature awakening in them during their childhood and adolescence. It is important to acknowledge that topics that were previously overlooked or given little attention now hold significant relevance in discussions surrounding sexual issues. For instance, the role of social media needs to be addressed, considering its influence on shaping an individual's sexual identity. Adapting to the requirements of the time necessitates being aware of the future prospects for teenagers and young people. They should be cognizant of the merits and drawbacks of the time they live in. By being aware of detrimental factors and

obstacles to personal growth within society, while also understanding the evolving landscape of sexual awareness, the harmful effects can be mitigated (Haji Dehabadi 1385 Sh, 67; Razavi Fard, et al. 1397 Sh, 45 and 64).

## 6.2. Shaping Sexual Personality

It can be argued that one of the most significant aspects of an individual's overall personality is their sexual identity, which develops throughout life in response to various factors. In this regard, the role of the family should not be underestimated, as it can have a profound influence even before other institutions come into play. Undoubtedly, individuals often have questions and uncertainties about the formation of their sexual identity. Parents should recognize that it is normal for children to have sexual questions and should never humiliate or blame them for asking such questions. It is important for children to find answers to the questions that arise in their minds. When responding to these questions, the educational process should be gradual, avoiding overwhelming them with all the details at once. Answers should be concise, straightforward, correct, and free from superstitions. It is important to avoid careless responses and tailor the answers to the age and understanding of the children and teenagers. Many parents face challenges such as feeling embarrassed, fearing misunderstanding, and lacking awareness when addressing their children's sexual questions. Consequently, they may avoid providing accurate answers, unaware that their child will seek answers elsewhere. This is a result of the family not fulfilling its educational role effectively. One of the most common avenues for seeking answers to such questions is through the virtual space and social networks. Children, especially curious teenagers, may venture beyond parental control and seek information from external sources. Due to their curiosity, children may explore online content related to explicit sexual topics, potentially exposing them to individuals engaged in such activities. Exploiting these characteristics and needs, sexual offenders target children, while teenagers are also susceptible to being enticed by peers their own age. Although these perpetrators may not fit the stereotypical image of adult criminals, they pose similar risks. Through online communication, children attempt to find answers

to their questions and satisfy their curiosity. However, this can be dangerous and potentially lead them towards the realm of sexual abuse and deviant behavior. Adolescents often turn to pornography in cyberspace to seek information, mainly to understand the subject matter, particularly in societies where there are restrictive norms surrounding sexual issues and where proper information is not readily available. Consequently, they resort to alternative means for obtaining information.

Parents should talk to their children and teens about sexual abuse and online dangers. They should also spend time with them online and teach them about good online content (Razavi Fard, et al. 1397 SH, 46 and 47).

## 6.3. Promoting Responsible and Safe Use of Cyberspace and Social Networks

The family plays a significant role in upbringing and education, particularly in the context of this research. In today's world, where individuals have access to various communication tools and are part of diverse social networks, it is crucial for parents to monitor their children's appropriate use of virtual spaces and social media. Criminologists suggest that the most effective way to protect children from online dangers is by implementing a curriculum called "Introduction to Internet Culture and Environment" in middle and high schools. It is evident that the cultivation of a healthy cyber culture and responsible use of social networks should start within the family. Parents need to familiarize their children with the potential risks and hazards of cyberspace while teaching them the norms of engaging with social media. However, it is important to note that completely disconnecting children from the virtual world and social networks is unnecessary for the sake of education. According to Jane Hitchcock, director of the Efforts Institute, parents of children belonging to the cyber generation have a primary responsibility to educate their children about cyber culture. Nonetheless, children should not learn about cyber culture arbitrarily. Therefore, families, as one of the most crucial pillars of education, should teach their children the proper use of virtual spaces and equip themselves with cyber knowledge. Parents should emphasize to their children that social networks, like any other aspect of the virtual realm, have both positive and

negative aspects. Failure to adhere to norms while using virtual spaces can lead to problems. Children should also be educated about the fact that the Internet and social networks are not solely for entertainment and leisure but can also be utilized in positive ways. By implementing these educational measures, parents can help prevent instances of sexual abuse. Many abuses on social networks can occur due to a lack of understanding about the advantages and disadvantages associated with these platforms. Through appropriate and timely education, such abuses can be mitigated (Razavi Fard, et al. 1397 SH, 47-48).

## 7. Enhancing Leisure Time Experiences

Improper management of leisure time poses a significant threat to the moral and psychological well-being of society. It can be argued that a lack of individual and social planning regarding leisure time is a major contributor to delinquency and social deviations. It is essential for cultural authorities to regulate society's free time in accordance with Islamic values and national principles. Failure to do so can result in irreparable damage to the cultural and ethical fabric of the society.

Failure to proactively plan for people's free time, particularly teenagers, leaves an open opportunity for others to step in. Neglecting this aspect would essentially hand over a fertile ground to cultural adversaries within society. These adversaries, driven by their own values, will attempt to influence and shape the leisure activities of our youth according to their own agenda (Sharifi 2011, 77).

According to Imam Ali (a), free time often accompanies the emergence of evil desires (Tamīmī al-Āmidī 1360 Sh, hadith 7594). In his *al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādiyya*, Imam Sajjad offers a supplication: *"If Thou hast ordained for us idleness from these occupations, make it an idleness of safety, within which no ill consequence visits us or no weariness overtakes us! Then the writers of evil deeds may depart from us with a page empty of the mention of our evil deeds, and the writers of good deeds may turn away from us happy with the good deeds of ours which they have written"* (Ṣaḥīfah al-Kāmilah Sajjadiyah, 2000, 86-87).

An overview of research conducted on teenagers, specifically regarding their leisure activities, reveals that ignorance, improper

planning, and ineffective implementation of cultural and social policies contribute to deviant behavior among youth. Additionally, studies examining the causes of social harm among young individuals highlight that the lack of a structured approach to leisure time and a lack of engaging and healthy activities significantly influence deviant behavior (Fazel Ghane 1392 Sh, 138). Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of actively engaging with our free time and utilizing it optimally through effective management and comprehensive planning. This approach enables individuals to derive physical and mental strength for their active periods from this allocated free time (Sharifi 1391 Sh, 84).

In Islam, there are several activities that are encouraged to make the most of one's free time. These include:

## 7.1. Sport

The Prophet (s) emphasized the importance of a father fulfilling his responsibilities towards his child. He stated that it is the father's duty to teach his child writing, swimming, and shooting (Payandeh 1394 Sh, 447). Furthermore, in another hadith, the Prophet (s) regarded swimming as the most commendable leisure activity for a believer (Mohammadi Reyshahri 1377 Sh, hadith no. 18069).

## 7.2. Tourism

The Quran states, "Have they not traveled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts" (Quran 22:46). Additionally, the Quran encourages people to explore and learn from their surroundings, as mentioned in the verse, "Say: Travel in the earth, then see how was the end of the guilty" (Quran 27:69). There are several other verses in the Quran that touch upon this topic, such as (Quran 3:137, 6:11, 14:36, 30:42, 29:20, 30:9, 12:109, 35:44, 40:21-22, 82; and 47:10).

## 7.3. Promoting Healthy Friendships and Social Interactions

From the age of seven, children begin to be influenced by their peers and friends, with this influence reaching its peak during adolescence and youth. In some cases, the influence of friends can

surpass that of the family. It is crucial for parents to ensure that their child is not surrounded by an environment or individuals that foster deviant behavior. Allowing a child to spend excessive time playing on the street with peers who engage in explicit conversations and share sexual information can make it challenging for parents to exert control during adolescence. Similarly, children who have classmates with disruptive behavior at school are more likely to be exposed to various forms of misconduct. It has been observed that schools can serve as the setting for initial discussions related to sexual encounters among peers of the same sex (Faghihi 1387 Sh, 365).

According to certain narrations, one method of assessing a person's religious inclination is by examining their choice of friends. As Sa'di eloquently expressed, "Tell me first who you lived with, so that I can tell you who you are." Imam Ali (a) wisely cautioned, "A bad companion is akin to a piece of fire." He further advised, "Every good thing has its enemy, and the enemy of goodness is a bad companion." Imam Ali (a) also advised against associating with malicious individuals, as our own nature may unknowingly adopt traits from theirs.

The Holy Prophet (s) advised Abu Dharr al-Ghifārī, "O Abu Dharr, a righteous companion is preferable to solitude, and solitude is better than an unrighteous companion." In the Quran, it is mentioned, "And on the Day when the wrongdoer will bite his hands \[in regret\] saying, 'Oh, I wish I had taken a path with the Messenger. Woe to me! I wish I had not taken that one as a friend. He led me astray from the remembrance after it had come to me.' And Satan is always a deserter of man" (Quran, 25:27-29).

## 8. Effective Time Management for Leisure Activities

Job creation plays a crucial role in addressing unemployment and preventing the vulnerability of young individuals on social networks. However, it is important to recognize that effective management of free time aims to enrich the leisure activities of young people and teenagers, particularly those who are not yet of an age to take up employment (such as middle school and high school students) for whom job opportunities are limited. These individuals often have a significant amount of free time available. It is worth noting that even individuals with jobs may still have

substantial free time due to the industrialization of life and the pace of work.

One of the reasons why teenagers and young people resort to high internet usage is because they seek to fill their free time in this manner. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of adequate sports and recreational facilities available to them. Families may also view their teenagers spending time at home using a computer or phone as a positive form of entertainment, unaware of the potential negative and destructive effects of inappropriate internet use, which can outweigh other forms of entertainment.

Many teenagers utilize the internet for entertainment, recreation, filling their free time, or seeking answers to unmet needs in the real world (Ghasemi 1389 Sh, 27). Iranian teenage internet users often lack a specific purpose for their internet usage. However, by organizing free time in a productive manner, it can become an excellent opportunity for personal growth, breaking bad habits, and fostering creativity. Properly structured leisure programs, such as educational or recreational classes, can effectively prevent idleness, deviations, and the risk of sexual abuse. Cooperation among different organizations is necessary to develop expert plans, establish clubs, organize public exhibitions, promote scientific knowledge through mass communication, and create an environment for engaging in scientific activities. These measures are essential in filling free time and nurturing the potential talents of young individuals (Razavi Fard, et al. 1397 Sh, 57-58).

## Conclusion

An objective examination of the sexual instinct and its orientation contributes to the personal growth and happiness of individuals and serves as a means of spiritual development, promoting peace and harmony within human society. Conversely, neglecting this aspect of human nature poses a significant risk to both individual and societal mental health and can lead to the deterioration of communities. It is important to recognize that pornography not only poses a threat to the well-being of children and teenagers but also presents challenges within the workplace environment. In essence, it represents a serious concern for the younger generation. Apart from being a waste of time, it is particularly concerning due to its potential to contribute to

premature exposure to explicit content. Conversely, upholding the integrity of social laws and adhering to moral teachings are fundamental principles in every culture. Consequently, the proliferation of obscenity in cyberspace inevitably influences the extent to which individuals in society refrain from engaging in immoral and deviant behavior. It is worth noting that the permissibility of certain unethical actions within the online realm can serve as a catalyst for their manifestation in the offline world.

Addressing the harms of cyberspace requires an emphasis on fostering modesty. Modesty not only reinforces sexual chastity within individuals but also serves as a deterrent against various forms of societal deviations. In essence, the stronger one's sense of modesty, the greater the inhibitory force that diminishes the likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviors. The relationship between faith and modesty is intricately intertwined, as reflected in various teachings. Certain hadiths refer to modesty as an integral component of faith, while others describe it as encompassing faith or embellishing its essence. To uphold the principle of modesty, it is essential to cultivate and strengthen one's faith. The deeper one's faith, the more pronounced their commitment to chastity and modesty becomes.

Sin occurs when an individual is "heedless," meaning they are unaware of the presence of God. Worship serves as a means to transform this heedlessness into mindfulness. Through acts of worship, individuals cultivate a heightened awareness of God and perceive themselves in His presence, leading to a state of reflection and remembrance. By effectively managing our leisure time, we can undoubtedly prevent the emergence of the aforementioned issues.

Hence, the implementation of educational and recreational classes, among other leisure programs, is highly recommended for preventing vagrancy, deviations, and sexual abuse. It is imperative for various institutions and organizations to collaborate and develop specialized initiatives. These may include the establishment of clubs and public exhibitions, utilizing mass communication tools to promote and popularize science, and creating an environment conducive to scientific engagement. These proactive measures aim to effectively occupy leisure time and unlock the hidden talents of young individuals.

In order to ensure compliance with time requirements, certain prerequisites must be met, with foresight being the most crucial. Teenagers and young individuals should possess an understanding of the era they live in, enabling them to recognize its merits and demerits. By being aware of detrimental factors and societal obstacles to growth, as well as having a contemporary understanding of sexuality, the harmful effects can be reduced. An educational solution to address these concerns involves parents engaging in open conversations with their children and teenagers about sexual harm and the potential dangers associated with cyberspace. Moreover, parents should actively spend time with their children and teenagers online, guiding them towards consuming positive online content. It is essential to teach children that the Internet and social networks are not solely for entertainment and leisure, but can also be utilized in constructive ways. By implementing these educational measures, parents can help prevent sexual abuses among many users of cyberspace, as many instances of such abuses on social networks may arise from a lack of knowledge regarding the advantages and disadvantages of these platforms.

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