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

1. Assistance Professor of Al-Mustafa International University/The Head of Quran and Science Department, Quran and Hadith Complex. E-mail: dr.mostarhami@chmail.ir
2. Graduate of the Center for Management of Women's Seminary: E-mail: hamidehhadibeh@gmail.com

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.

References

1. Dehkhoda, Ali Akbar. 1377 Sh. *Lughatnāmih Dehkhoda*. Tehran: Tehran University Press.

2. Eskandari, Ali; Ramin Chaboki Darzabi. 1391 Sh. *ʿAwāmil-i muʾaththir dar ʿanāṣir-i irṭibāṭī az dīdgāh-i Qurʾān*. *Muṭāliʿāt bayn reshte-ī Rasānih wa Farhang*, 2, No. 4 (autumn): 1-24.

3. Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥassan. 1409 AH. *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*. Qom: Āl al-Bayt (a) Institute.

4. Ibn Bābawayh, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī. 1376 Sh. *Al-Amālī*. Tehran: Ketabchi.

5. Ibn Bābawayh, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī. 1413 AH. *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*. Qom: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī.

6. Kulaynī, Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb. 1407 AH. *Al-Kāfī*. Edited by Ali Akbar Ghaffari and Muḥammad Akhundi. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya.

7. Majlisī, Muḥammad al-Bāqir. 1404 AH. *Mirʾāt al-ʿUqūl fī sharḥ akhbār Āl al-Rasūl*. Edited by Sayyed Hashem Rasuli Mahallati. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya.

8. Makārim Shīrāzī, Nāṣir. 1386 Sh. *Payām-i Qurʾān*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya.

9. Makārim Shīrāzī, Nāṣir. 1374 Sh. *Tafsīr Nemūneh*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya.

10. Mesbah Yazdi, Muḥammad Taqi. 1391 Sh. *Akhlāq dar Qurʾān*. Qom: Publication of Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute.

11. Mohseni, Manuchehr.1380 Sh. *Jāmiʿishināsī jāmiʿ iṭṭilāʿātī*. Tehran: Didār Publication.

12. Mojtahedi Najafi, Mahmoud. 1395 Sh. *Dark-i shabake-hāyi ijtimāʿī*. Tehran: Subhan Publications.

13. Narāqī, Muḥammad al-Mahdī. 1967. *Jāmiʿ al-saʿādāt*. Edited by Muḥammad Kalantar. Beirut: Muʾassasah al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt.

14. Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad. 1374 Sh. *Mufradāt alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*. Tehran: Mortazavi Publications.

15. Sayyah Taheri, Mohammad Hossein, et al. n.d. *Ḥaqīqat majāzī*. Tehran: National Center for Cyberspace.

16. Sharīf al-Raḍī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn. 1414 AH. *Nahj al-*

Balāgha. Edited by Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ. Qom: Hijrat Publications.

17. Ṭabarsī, Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan. 1360 Sh. *Persian Translation of Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Edited and translated by Reza Sotudeh. Tehran: Farāhānī Publications.

18. Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. 1374 AH. *Persian Translation of Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. Translated by Sayyed Muhammad Baqir Musawi Hamdani. Qom: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī.

19. Tamīmī al-Āmidī, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Muḥammad. 1410 AH. *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa-durar al-Kilam*. Edited by Sayyid Mahdi Rajai. Qom: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya.

20. Ṭurayḥī, Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Muḥammad. 1375 Sh. *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*. Tehran: Mortazavi Publication.

21. Zowragh, Mohammad Hassan. 1388 Sh. *Irtibāṭāt wa āgāhī*. Tehran: Sorush Publications.