

Fiqh of
Social Media

40 HADITHS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

This short booklet is meant to provide a glimpse at some of our timeless prophetic traditions, and how to apply them in the age of social media.

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I. WHY?

Actions are judged by their intentions, so each man will have what he intended. Therefore, he whose migration was to Allah and His Messenger, his migration is to Allah and His Messenger. But he whose migration was for some worldly benefit, or for a wife he might marry, his migration is to that for which he migrated (Bukharī and Muslim).

Intention is at the core of any action and social media is no exception. It is famously said the intention should be checked before a deed, while performing a deed, and after the deed is done. We must assess why we are sharing something or posting a particular status update. What is the underlying message we're trying to convey? Who are we really writing it for? What do we actually hope the response is?

2. IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING GOOD TO SAY...

He who believes in Allah and the Last Day must either speak good or remain silent (Muslim).

This is a foundational principle for social media. It is hard because the entire purpose of social media is sharing and discussion. We often come to regret things we post, realizing too late that silence would have better served us.

3. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

From the excellence of a person's Islam is that he leaves what does not concern him (Tirmidhi).

You'll naturally come across lots of things that don't concern you but look interesting. The trick is to keep yourself from getting involved in them. Cut down on your overall consumption of information.

4. A RULE FOR ALL CIVILIZATIONS

None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself (Bukharī and Muslim).

The simplicity of this advice sometimes causes us to underestimate its magnitude. Treat others how you want to be treated in all online interactions. Not sure how to handle a certain email, text, or message? Use this rule.

This also is a reminder to subdue our own ego. Do not let the seemingly selfish nature of social media delude you. Do your best to constantly think of others and empathize with them.

5. YOU ARE WHAT YOU FEED

The example of good company and that of bad company is that of an owner of musk and of an iron-smith. The owner of musk would either offer you a free sample, or you would buy it from him, or you would smell its pleasant odor. As for the iron-smith, he would either burn your clothes or you have to smell its unpleasant odor (Muslim).

We check our feed (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, email, text, WhatsApp, etc) dozens of times a day. We mindlessly pull out our phones and check the feed while eating, waiting in line, using the restroom, at red lights (and even driving). Your feed is what you voluntarily allow into your personal space - it has an effect on you. Be vigilant about protecting your environment and who you allow to influence you.

6. ONLINE FRIENDS ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT

A man is upon the religion of his close friend, so he should consider whom he makes his friend (Abu Dawud).

For the first time in human history, people have an abundance of friendships and relationships with people they may have never met in real life. This does not preclude the basic principles of friendship in Islam. Know the value system, ethics, morals, and character of those you associate with online.

7. MODERATION

Love whom you love moderately, perhaps he will become hated to you someday. And hate the one for whom you have hatred moderately, perhaps he will become beloved to you someday (Tirmidhī).

There is an obvious meaning here about moderation in friendship. A deeper lesson here would be one about moderation in sharing. Be cautious regarding what you share with others, particularly sensitive family issues. You never know how what you share could be used against you later.

Similarly, if you don't get along with someone, do not hash it out on social media. You have the ability to block them or remove them. This is far better than openly displaying animosity toward someone. Social media magnifies the ability to love/follow someone. This might be a celebrity, athlete, or even an Islamic speaker. Do not obsess in idolization or demonization of any one personality.

8. THE REWARD OF GOOD FRIENDSHIP

Those who love each other for the sake of My Majesty shall be upon podiums of light, and they will be admired by the Prophets and the martyrs (Tirmidhī)

We talk a lot about the evils of bad company, but it is important to emphasize the reward of good company as well. Since social networking is a tool to facilitate friendship and interaction, it makes attaining this goal even easier. When you cultivate a friendship that is based on good, and for the sake of Allah, it becomes a means to achieving Paradise.

9. THE RIGHTS OF THE ROAD ON THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Beware of sitting on the roadways.” They said, “We have no alternative- that is where we sit and talk.” He said, “If you insist on sitting there, then give the roadway its rights.” They said, “What are the rights of the roadway?” He said, “Lowering your gaze, refraining from harming others, returning greetings, and enjoining what is good, and forbidding what is evil” (Bukharī and Muslim).

This hadith lays out a number of important rules - all of which are directly applicable to social networking. Lowering the gaze is a particularly important advice. This governs not just having a high level of modesty and decorum when interacting with the opposite gender, but it is a good reminder about guarding yourself from traps such as internet pornography.

Have good etiquette when interacting with others. This starts with giving each other proper greetings, and encompasses advocating righteousness and standing against evil in all forms.

10. HIDE YOUR SINS

All of my followers will have their sins pardoned except those who publicize them. An example of this is that of a man who commits a sin at night, and even though Allah screens it from the public, he comes in the morning and says, "I committed such and such sin last night." He spent the night screened by his Lord (none knowing about his sin), and in the morning he removes Allah's screen from himself (Bukharī and Muslim).

When a person sins, the inclination is to hide it so no one finds out about it. Social media has opened us up to a new kind of flagrant behavior - one in which people sin and then openly brag about it online. It's not uncommon to find people posting pictures of themselves engaged in immoral or illicit behavior.

When someone does this, it's as if they are boasting that they do not care if this behavior is displeasing to Allah and it is this arrogance that pushes them past the bounds of Allah's mercy.

II. CONCEAL THE MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE

The servant who conceals the faults of others in this world, Allah would conceal his faults on the Day of Resurrection (Muslim).

There's an ugly side of the social media culture where it becomes easy to attack or "expose" someone for an error. The digital footprint makes it easy for anyone to go through a person's history of status updates to find fault with something they said. The default behavior of a Muslim is to work hard to cover the faults of others, not spend time seeking them out and exposing them.

12. BE CONSCIOUS OF GOD IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Be conscious of Allah wherever you are. Follow up a bad deed with a good deed and it will blot it out. And deal with people in a good manner (Tirmidhī).

Though this is an advice we are familiar with, it warrants a special reminder in the context of social media. Modern technology has made it easy to commit practically any evil or sinful act behind the privacy (and anonymity) of a computer or phone screen. This narration provides the framework for making sure our private persona is in sync with our public one.

13. BEWARE OF SUSPICION

Beware of suspicion, for indeed suspicion is the falsest of speech (Tirmidhī).

It's easy to jump to false conclusions or assume the worst about others on social media. It's also easy to get offended, upset, or even angry based on what we perceive someone else is saying.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. By the same token, don't post passive-aggressive updates that others can misinterpret.

14. STOP HOLDING GRUDGES

Once the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was sitting with some of his Companions, and told them, "A man from Paradise will show up now." Soon a man came. He made this statement three days in a row, and each time the same man came in. There was nothing unique about him except that when he went to bed each day, he made sure there were no feelings of hatred or jealousy in his heart for any Muslim (Musnad Ahmad).

Grudges are bad in general, but they tend to get magnified on social media. People feel wronged much more easily because the majority of their conversations happen in the public sphere. Not only that, but the breadcrumbs are left there for anyone to come back later and look at. This is drastically different from an in-person conversation. This is one reason that people tend to get more easily offended and upset online, and become less forgiving of those that they perceive have wronged them..

15. SINCERE ADVICE

“The religion is sincere advice.” We said, “To whom?” He (ﷺ) said, “To Allah, His Book, His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims, and their common folk” (Muslim).

The etiquette and purpose of giving advice is an art that needs to be rediscovered in the social networking age. People tend to get unnecessarily competitive on social networks. Instead of giving advice, we try to prove someone wrong, or force someone to acknowledge our point of view. The purpose of advice is rectification and positive change. Keep this purpose in mind. It will guide you to the appropriate etiquettes such as advising someone politely and in private as opposed to embarrassing them.

Be so sincere in giving advice that you hope and fully expect to someday take advice from the one you are advising today.

16. FORBEARANCE

You have two characteristics that Allah likes: forbearance and modesty (ibn Mājah).

Forbearance is a difficult term to understand. It comes from the Arabic word hilm (same as the Name of Allah, Al-Halīm). There are a number of connotations to this characteristic, all applicable to social media. It means forgiving those who wronged you, even if it is your right to be upset. It means someone who acts with wisdom, takes time, and thinks deeply before reacting to something. It is another dimension of patience, one in which a person responds to harm with generosity.

Allah (swt) forgives us despite our evil thoughts and inclinations. This is a reminder to look inward. When faced with conflict, ask yourself what you may have harbored inside to add to a conflict, or what you may have done to trigger a reaction from someone. Remain calm and strong when angered.

17. ANGER MANAGEMENT

A man said to the Prophet (ﷺ), "Advise me," so he (ﷺ) said, "Do not become angry." The man repeated his request several times, and each time he (ﷺ) said, "Do not become angry" (Bukharī).

Due to the fast-paced nature of social media, it is easy to get quickly frustrated or upset. Everyone has, at some point, fired off an angry text or email that they've later come to regret. If something is making you angry, do not respond to it. Let the email sit in drafts overnight, bookmark the Facebook status - find some way to table the issue at least overnight. Look at it again with a clear head and then respond accordingly without being in the heat of the moment.

18. ENVY AND HATRED

Do not cut another off, nor desert one another, nor hate one another, nor envy one another. O worshippers of Allah, be brothers. It is not lawful for the Muslim to shun his brother for more than three days (Tirmidhī).

The better of the two is the one who starts greeting the other (Bukharī).

Envy is one of the major spiritual diseases of social media. Everyone's profile looks like a highlight reel of their life. It's easy to see how well everyone else is doing and start feeling envy toward one another.

Be particularly careful of cutting people off or boycotting one another over something petty/personal. It is always encouraged to take the high road.

19. THE EVIL EYE

The effect of the evil eye is a fact (Bukharī).

The evil eye is what results after burning jealousy. A believer understands that jealousy destroys good deeds and tries to guard against it. A truly evil person, however, lets it go unchecked. When this happens, it causes a negative effect on the object of jealousy. It gives Shaytān fuel to get to the other person. There is no harm in enjoying the blessings of Allah, but it is blameworthy to flaunt them in such a way as to make people feel bad or envious. The obvious method of this is flagrantly showing off wealth and possessions, but it can also apply to flaunting your spouse, kids, and even experiences (exotic vacations). Remember that not everyone who has friended you on social media is actually your friend or wishes good for you. Utilize social networks with caution.

20. WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

A person utters a word thoughtlessly (i.e., without thinking about its being good or not) and, as a result of this, he will fall down into the fire of Hell deeper than the distance between the east and the west (Bukarhī and Muslim).

This narration is a reminder of our etiquettes with Allah. The Qur'ān regularly warns us about speaking without knowledge. We often feel pressured to say something or share our opinions on a matter, not realizing that we may be ignorant or incorrect.

Be mindful of leaving a negative comment about someone. It is bad enough to say something in person, but online it becomes public and recorded - can you imagine a one-liner that you post multiplying bad deeds months or years out?

21. BACKBITING AND GOSSIP

Among my people, the one who is bankrupt is the one who – after praying, fasting, and paying charity – arrives on the Day of Judgment having cursed one person and slandered another, assaulted another, and misappropriated the wealth of someone else. Then those people will be given of his good deeds, and if his good deeds run out before redress is made, then some of their sins will be taken from them and put upon him. Then he will be cast into Hell (Muslim).

Social media is a medium based on connections to others. This naturally lends itself to constantly talking about other people. Backbiting is one of the vilest sins in Islam - “And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it” (49:12).

22. DON'T CAUSE DRAMA

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do you know what calumny is?" They said, "No, Allah and His Messenger know best." He said, "Telling people what other people have said in order to create dissension between them" (Adab al-Mufrad).

The person who spreads calumnies will never enter Paradise (Bukharī and Muslim).

This is sometimes done overtly, and sometimes passively aggressively. There is a particularly high propensity for doing these types of things by way of screenshots and email forwards. Do your best to ensure you never help further any type of split between two people.

23. SEEKING LIKES

A man came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said, “O Messenger of God, direct me to an act, which if I do it, God will love me and people will love me.” He (ﷺ) said, “Detach yourself from the world, and God will love you. Detach yourself from what is with the people, and the people will love you” (ibn Mājah).

When it comes to social media we are constantly seeking the approval of others. We carefully monitor our status updates to see the number of likes, retweets, and comments we get. Our phones are set to alert us for every instance of this. We know off the top of our heads how many friends and followers we have.

24. GETTING A CHEAP LAUGH

Woe to him who tells things, speaking falsely, to make people laugh thereby. Woe to him! Woe to him! (Abu Dawud).

Everything in the social networking age boils down to traffic. How many likes/views/comments/shares/hits can you get? When this is the bottom line and the way we seek validation, it forces us to compromise our principles and judgment. One unfortunate example of this is seeing Muslims making videos where they prank their parents with some kind of devastating news just to get a reaction out of them and then post it on YouTube. This type of behavior - just to get views - is abhorrent to say the least, and in clear contradiction with Prophetic etiquettes.

25. DON'T USE A FAKE PERSONA

From the most evil of people is the two-faced person who shows one face to one group of people and a different face to another (Muwatta Mālik).

It's always strange to meet someone that projects one thing online and something completely different in person. How you portray yourself online should be congruent with reality. This is something that goes both ways - some try to appear more pious online, and some more rebellious. Represent yourself honestly.

26. PRIVACY

If any person peeps at you without your permission and you poke him with a stick and injure his eye, you will not be blamed (Bukharī).

Our religion emphasizes going out of our way to protect people from harm. To poke someone's eye out for violating privacy shows its severity. Not everyone knows how to properly set their privacy - that is why it's an individual responsibility to respect others.

One of the biggest pain points for privacy is respecting the hijāb. This includes posting pictures without permission of someone, and also creeping (or stalking) someone's profile. This is a serious issue that cannot be taken lightly.

27. EAVESDROPPING

Whoever eavesdrops on the conversation of other people when they do not want him to listen, or they move away from him, molten lead will be poured into his ears on the Day of Resurrection (Bukharī).

The key here is understanding what people do not want heard. A person may post something without understanding their privacy settings, or have a conversation that they do not want others to interfere in. Their wishes in this must be strictly respected. Sometimes we also do seemingly harmless things that constitute eavesdropping - such as taking someone's phone and going through their text messages without their permission.

28. BE PRESENT

He (ﷺ) faced the person he spoke to, with his chest and body. When he addressed someone, he completely turned his face towards that person, and did not give a side glance (Shamā'il Muhammadiyah).

A modern display of bad manners in our time has become conversing with one person while simultaneously texting someone else. Even the simple act of glancing at your phone while speaking to someone can give the impression that you have something better to do than speak to this person. Be fully present in your conversations with others - especially when it comes to your parents, spouse, and children.

29. EXCLUDING THE THIRD PERSON

When three people are sitting together, then two of them should not hold a secret conversation excluding the third person. Wait to be in a larger group so as not to upset the other person (Bukharī).

It is amazing how applicable this is in our times. What is referenced here is for two people to not speak secretly to one another while in a group of three because it makes the other person feel excluded. We find that this happens commonly now, the greatest example being two people texting each other to exclude someone else in their company, while trying to make it look like they are texting someone else.

30. AVOID THESE FOUR

There are four things that whoever has them, then he is a hypocrite. Whoever has one attribute from among them, then he has an attribute of hypocrisy until he leaves it. (1) When he speaks, he lies, (2) He breaks his promises, (3) He is vulgar whenever he argues, and (4) Whenever he makes an agreement he proves treacherous (Tirmidhī).

Lying on social media is something we often do inadvertently. For example, a person may request you to make dua for someone, and you hit the like button and leave a comment saying “OK” - but then never make dua for them. It is just as important to keep your word online as it is offline.

Vulgarity is a major issue as well. People tend to become more courageous from behind a keyboard. This makes what would normally be a run-of-the-mill disagreement turn into an aggressive exchange with obscenities.

31. LEAVE THE DEBATES ALONE

I guarantee a house in Paradise for one who gives up arguing even if he is in the right. And I guarantee a house in the middle of Paradise for a man who abandons lying even if he were joking. And I guarantee a house in the upper part of Paradise for the one who actively corrected his manners (Abū Dawūd).

Debates on the internet are a black hole that suck you in, waste your time, and produce nothing of value. They quickly degenerate into personal attacks. One of the greatest tricks of the internet is to make you feel accomplished and productive after giving your views in a debate and refuting someone else.

This hadith teaches us to be less concerned about being right, and more concerned about upholding good moral conduct no matter what the circumstance. This goes so far as to include not lying even if it's a joke.

32. KNOW YOUR ROLE

“There will come to the people years of treachery, when the liar will be regarded as honest, and the honest man will be regarded as a liar. The traitor will be regarded as loyal, and the loyal will be regarded as a traitor. And the Ruwaybidah will decide matters.” It was said, “Who are the Ruwaybidah?” He (ﷺ) said, “Ignorant people who comment on public affairs” (ibn Mājah).

People online love to show others that they care about causes, or that they are socially/politically/religiously active by commenting on anything and everything. This has given rise to a culture of ‘outrage trolling’ where people simply wait around for something to get upset at and then post statuses about it. It’s not necessary to have an opinion about every issue or comment on it.

33. MAINTAIN GOOD TIES WITH YOUR FAMILY

Spread the greeting of Salam, feed others, uphold the ties of kinship, and pray during the night when people are sleeping, and you will enter Paradise with peace (ibn Mājah).

Maintaining good ties with family is heavily emphasized in Islam. This is one place where social media really makes it easy to perform a good deed with a maximum reward. Use your social networks to facilitate staying in touch with relatives as much as possible.

The end of this hadith gives us a quick reminder about our time. Don't spend so much time on social networks that you stay up all night connecting with everyone else except Allah.

34. TEACH YOUR FAMILY PROPER USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock. The ruler over a people is a shepherd and responsible for his flock. A man is a shepherd of his household and responsible for his flock. A woman is a shepherd responsible for her husband's house and children. A man's servant is a shepherd responsible for his property. So each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock (Abu Dawud).

One of the biggest pain points for parents is teaching their kids how to responsibly utilize social media. Many do not know how to even approach the conversation, and in response they end up ignoring it. Families must come together and set appropriate guidelines for themselves for responsible use of technology and social media. To shepherd well in this regard means having open and honest conversations about it, and establishing firm principles that hold true regardless of technological changes.

35. FULFILL THE RIGHTS OF THOSE AROUND YOU

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "O Abdullah! I have been informed that you fast all day and stand in prayer all night?" I said, "Yes, O Allah's Messenger!" He said, "Do not do that! Fast some days, and leave it off on other days. Stand for prayer at night and also sleep some nights. Your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you and your wife has a right over you" (Bukharī).

It is interesting to note that this advice of creating balance was given in context of someone overexerting themselves in worship. In the context of social media, we have to apply this advice in context of fulfilling the rights of others due to over-exerting ourselves on social networks.

The last part of this narration is one of the most important in our times. We often neglect our families due to social media. We might ignore our children or miss an opportunity to spend quality time with them because we are engaged in a debate online, or leaving comments about how appetizing someone's samosa on Instagram looks.

Do not neglect yourself either. While this narration speaks of physical exertion, we need to remember that our mind has a right on us and needs time to rest and reflect as well.

36. TIME MANAGEMENT

There are two blessings which many people lose: Health and free time (Bukharī).

Wasting time is one of the main complaints people have against social media. Left unmanaged, it can consume a person's life. Many of us already check our phones constantly throughout the day. We even shun conversation in person in someone's company in favor of reading status updates on our phones. Set strict time limits for your usage of social media so it does not take over all your free time.

37. IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING ALLAH

Do not talk too much without remembrance of Allah. Indeed excessive talking without remembrance of Allah hardens the heart. And indeed the furthest of people from Allah is the harsh-hearted (Tirmidhī).

It is somewhat cliché to hear people say things like ‘spend more time with Allah’s Book than Facebook.’ There is a lot of truth to this statement though. The tongue of the believer should be moist with the remembrance of Allah. It is meant to be a constant throughout the day. Give some of the free time spent on your phone to remembering Allah. Also, do not let reading “religious” status updates become a crutch in this regard. The focus is on developing your personal connection.

38. GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

Indeed when the Muslim mixes with the people and is patient with their harm, he is better than the Muslim who does not mix with the people and is not patient with their harm (Tirmidhī).

It has become popular for many people to dismiss social media as inherently evil and something that should be avoided. Social media is a tool that can be used for benefit or harm. Since it has become the predominant medium of communication, it is imperative that we take part in the best way possible.

39. MAKE DAWAH

Whoever directs someone to do good will be rewarded equivalent to him who practices that good action (Muslim).

Convey from me, even if it is one ayah of the Qur'ān (Bukhari).

Let those who are present convey to those who are absent. For perhaps the one to whom it is conveyed will understand it better than the one who first heard it (ibn Mājah).

Dawah doesn't have to be some form of aggressive proselytization or an inauthentic portrayal of piety. Utilize the tool of social media to try to encourage others to do good, and use it as a motivation for yourself as well. It does not need to be your sole purpose in being online, but within balance it is something beneficial to you and your network.

40. HATERS GONNA HATE

If you're about to plant a tree, and the Day of Judgment commences, finish what you started (Musnad Ahmad).

Anytime you try to do something good, it will be met with criticism. People will try to shame you into thinking that whatever you are working on is not as important as another more pressing cause, and therefore should be avoided. Disregard the haters and follow through on whatever you are working on.

41. STOP OVERSHARING

Umar ibn al-Khattāb, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “It is enough for a man to be considered a liar that he narrates everything he hears” (Muslim).

What you share is a representation of who you are. Many people put things in their profile like “RT ≠ Endorsement” but the reality is that it shows something about you when you share certain things. Represent yourself authentically. Verify the accuracy of anything you post. Before you share something, as the first narration in this collection indicated, assess your intention of why you are sharing it in the first place.

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