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The Decline of Modesty in Social Media: An Aqidah Based Solution

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a primary platform and plays a crucial role as a medium of communication in today's world. At the same time, it has inadvertently contributed to the erosion of modesty among users. Modesty, which should ideally shape the character of a Muslim, is increasingly diminishing due to the openness and unrestricted freedom of expression on social media. The rise in unethical content, excessive personal exposure, and the normalization of behaviors that contradict Islamic values are becoming more prevalent. Therefore, this study aims to identify the forms of modesty erosion on social media and analyze its solutions based on the Islamic Aqidah approach. This qualitative study employs data collection through documentation and data analysis, utilizing content analysis of social media cases and texts related to Islamic Aqidah. The findings indicate that there are three main forms of modesty erosion on social media: self-exposure of disgrace, inappropriate behavior, and the pursuit of popularity. In this regard, Islamic Aqidah, which emphasizes modesty as part of faith, is seen as a significant solution to this issue. The internalization of faith within a Muslim plays a crucial role in cultivating individuals with noble character, ultimately fostering social well-being among social media users.

Keywords: Modesty, Users, Social Media, Aqidah, Faith

INTRODUCTION

Modesty is one of the core values in Islamic teachings and is also highly regarded in Eastern cultural traditions. However, the advancement of technology and the explosion of social media have posed significant challenges to the preservation of this value. The open, instantaneous, and borderless nature of social media has contributed to the erosion of modesty, particularly among the younger generation. This is evident in the behaviour of social media users who excessively share photos, videos, or personal expressions without considering the boundaries of modesty, etiquette, or personal dignity. Furthermore, immoral content such as indecent dances, vulgar language, and sexually suggestive humour has become trendy and widely circulated, often without any sense of shame or remorse. Such users attempt to normalise immoral content openly and unashamedly. Additionally, the concept of "self-validation" through likes and comments encourages users to prioritise popularity over honour and self-respect. In contrast, within the framework of Islamic teachings, modesty is closely linked to a person's faith, rooted in the awareness that God is always watching. Therefore, this study aims to identify the forms of modesty erosion occurring on social media and to analyse potential solutions based on the Islamic theological (ʿaqīdah) approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are generally three main approaches to writing a literature review: chronological, thematic, and

methodological. In this article, the researcher adopts the thematic approach, focusing on two main themes: studies on modesty and studies on social media.

Studies on Modesty

Modesty is a commendable moral trait inherent in every individual. Among the Malay community, modesty is not merely an emotion but encompasses a broader meaning that forms an overarching concept. This is known as the Malay concept of malu (modesty), which includes a system of beliefs, behaviours, values, and social rules adhered to by the community. This concept, rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, forms the basis of ethical conduct and serves as a marker of Malay identity (Norazlina Hj. Mohd Kiram & Nik Farhan Mustapha, 2013).

At the same time, modesty can carry both positive and negative connotations. The negative perception of modesty often portrays it as a factor contributing to passivity, shyness, low self-esteem, lack of assertiveness, and an absence of self-confidence among Malays. In contrast, positive modesty is associated with courteous behaviour, the preservation of human dignity, and national honour. In the Malay worldview, the expression of modesty in thoughts and actions is deeply integrated with key concepts such as reason, knowledge, heart (qalb), religion, manners (adab), language, and morality. In this context, modesty serves as a personal restraint mechanism, a reflection of civility, and a symbol of moral life and national pride (Zarina Muhammad, Akmaliza Abdullah & Ratna Roshida Ab Razak, 2019).

From an Islamic perspective, modesty is referred to as al-ḥayāʾ, derived from the Arabic root meaning "to feel shame." It encompasses abstention from anything that is deemed reprehensible. According to Ibn Qayyim, ḥayāʾ stems from the word ḥayāh (life), suggesting that the presence of modesty correlates with a living, spiritually awakened heart. Conversely, the absence of al-ḥayāʾ reflects spiritual decay or the death of one's inner self (Siti Solehah Azhar & Suriani Sudi, 2018).

Linguistically, al-ḥayāʾ involves feelings of restraint, withdrawal, and submission due to fear of shame. Technically, it refers to a moral quality embedded in the soul that motivates a person to avoid sinful acts and fulfill their obligations to others. In essence, al-ḥayāʾ prevents immoral behaviour and contributes to moral uprightness, while also promoting virtuous deeds. The decline of al-ḥayāʾ is linked to numerous social issues, including immodest exposure on platforms like Facebook, oversharing of personal matters, and a rise in cases such as rape, sodomy, and other sexual misconduct, all stemming from a loss of inner modesty (Siti Solehah Azhar & Suriani Sudi, 2018).

Understanding the concept of al-ḥayāʾ is crucial, as it plays a central role in an individual's transformation. The Sunnah places significant emphasis on al-ḥayāʾ, associating it with righteousness, deterrence from sin, a component of faith, and a characteristic of the Prophets. It is instrumental in shaping personal character and the Islamic personality, and should thus be nurtured to promote a wholesome and balanced life (Siti Solehah Azhar & Suriani Sudi, 2018).

In reality, the prevalence of social problems such as promiscuity, pornography, and fornication indicates a decline in modesty among today's youth. Yet al-ḥayāʾ is a trait exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions, and is a virtue that every human should embody. This characteristic protects individuals from sin due to their fear and reverence of Allah, the All-Seeing and All-Knowing. Therefore, instilling the value of al-ḥayāʾ in Generation Z youth is crucial for strengthening their moral compass. It helps maintain appropriate gender interactions, fosters noble conduct, preserves personal presentation, and shields them from social misconduct (Nur Anis Hanani Mohd Talib, Latifah Abdul Majid & Nurliyana Mohd Talib, 2019).

Studies on Social Media

The advancement of digital technology has led to the emergence of social media in the virtual world. This platform represents a new form of interaction in contemporary society, enabling communication without physical presence through a digital environment. Social media also facilitates various aspects of life, from personal affairs to professional matters (Muhammad Adil Fikri Mohd Hamizi, 2023). Beyond that, it serves as a channel for individuals to express opinions and share ideas in real time (Mohd Mokhtarishah Mohamed

Mokhtar & Hasmadi Hj. Hassan, 2021).

Several factors drive the use of social media among the public, including the expansion of social networks, communication and interaction opportunities, information sharing and retrieval, and entertainment. However, its existence also poses potential threats when misused, such as cybercrime, provocation, slander, and misinformation. The impacts of social media can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, it enhances civic engagement, serves as a medium for religious outreach (dakwah), information dissemination, and learning. On the negative side, it contributes to issues such as physical inactivity, moral and spiritual decline, and exposure to cyber threats. Therefore, stronger governmental regulation and individual responsibility are necessary to minimize personal and national security risks (Muhammad Adil Fikri Mohd Hamizi, 2023).

In the context of students, social media usage is primarily centred around communication, learning, and entertainment. Nonetheless, concerns persist regarding its addictive potential and adverse effects on academic performance. Excessive engagement with social media may not only impair academic achievement but also negatively impact students' mental health (Nurul Fatin Najihah Zulkifli & Muhammad Zaiamri Zainal Abidin, 2023). Similar concerns are observed among adolescents from the B40 income group in the Klang Valley, where social media is used mainly for social interaction and entertainment, raising issues related to exposure to harmful content and online safety (Shahrul Nazmi Sannusi, Fauziah Ibrahim, Azianura Hani Shaari & Nasrudin Subhi, 2019).

From another perspective, social media has also been utilised as a tool for political engagement in Malaysia. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter play a significant role in disseminating political information and mobilising support, particularly among the youth. This reflects the heightened awareness of current political discourse among the public. Hence, monitoring of political content on social media is essential to ensure that it is free from incitement and does not threaten national unity (Ali Salman, Mohammad Agus Yusoff, Mohd Azul Mohamad Salleh & Mohd Yusof Hj Abdullah, 2018).

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that the issue of the erosion of modesty on social media warrants further exploration. A deeper understanding of this phenomenon is needed to help society use these platforms ethically while preserving personal dignity. Therefore, this study is both relevant and distinct from previous research, as it specifically focuses on the erosion of modesty among social media users and seeks solutions from the perspective of Islamic theology (ʿaqīdah).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a content analysis research design. It is conducted systematically, following a structured process to ensure the accuracy and reliability of detailed information. Article selection involved three main filtering stages: identification, screening, and eligibility. To minimise data selection bias, Xiao and Watson (2019) recommend using two or more databases during the search process. In line with their assertion, "the more the merrier," this study utilised three databases: Scopus, MyCite, and Google Scholar.

To optimise search results, the researcher employed a variety of keywords. Mohamed Shaffril et al. (2020) highlight that expanding keyword usage by including synonyms and conceptually related terms can significantly assist in identifying articles aligned with the study objectives. Accordingly, five primary keywords were applied: modesty (sifat malu), users, social media, theology (akidah), and faith (iman). To further narrow the scope, only studies conducted in Malaysia were included.

Researchers must explicitly define inclusion criteria to ensure the study remains focused on its objectives and purpose (Okoli, 2015). Based on the selected articles, this study limited its search to works published between the years 2000 and 2025. Eligibility screening was conducted after the articles had been preliminarily filtered. The next step involved reading the article abstracts. General information was then compiled, including publication year, study type, type of analysis (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method), and main findings.

All selected articles were verified to be relevant to the study's title and objectives. Each was then coded and analysed thematically. The analysis was conducted manually to comprehensively address the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In recent times, it has become increasingly evident that the value of modesty is deteriorating among social media users. Many individuals now shamelessly expose their own personal disgrace, engage in inappropriate behaviour, and resort to sensationalist self-promotion merely to gain attention and popularity. This phenomenon not only undermines personal dignity but also negatively impacts societal ethical norms, contributing to the normalisation of unethical behaviour in public platforms.

Driven by a desire to follow social media "trends," users often unknowingly engage in self-degradation. For instance, the "bride unboxing trend" that went viral involved individuals exposing intimate personal matters to the public, violating the boundaries of modesty. Likewise, content featuring personal confessions, or revealing the past experiences of one's parents or family members, is proudly shared without concern for the shame and dishonour it may bring—an act clearly condemned in Islam.

In addition, social media platforms have been flooded with indecent content, including vulgar language, videos of revealing dances, and depictions of casual sexual encounters. More concerning is the use of such modesty-eroding content as marketing tools for profit. For example, some marketing strategies openly employ sexually suggestive imagery—particularly involving the female body—as symbolic content in their advertisements, with no sense of shame or moral responsibility.

Such trends must not be allowed to persist. They not only degrade personal modesty but also reflect the declining level of faith (īmān) in individuals. Fundamentally, modesty (ḥayāʾ) is closely intertwined with one's theological belief system (ʿaqīdah) and spiritual integrity. Therefore, the erosion of modesty must be examined through the lens of Islamic theology, which places strong emphasis on nurturing īmān (faith) within the self.

This understanding is crucial, as it not only addresses the root cause of the problem but also offers a solution grounded in Islamic teachings. The following are selected ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that highlight the vital connection between faith and modesty:

Hadith on Modesty as Part of Faith

Modesty (ḥayāʾ) is a praiseworthy trait that every Muslim should possess, and it is regarded as an integral part of faith (īmān), as conveyed in the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

From Abdullah ibn Umar (RA), he reported that the Prophet (SAW) passed by a man who was advising his brother about being too shy. The Prophet said, "Leave him alone, for modesty is part of faith" (Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book of Faith, Chapter: Modesty is Part of Faith, Ḥadīth No. 24).

In essence, modesty can be categorised into three types: modesty before Allah (al-ḥayāʾ min Allāh), which is the highest and most authentic form; modesty towards oneself; and modesty towards others. A person who feels modesty before Allah will strive to fulfil His commands and avoid His prohibitions. Such a disposition is a key component of spiritual success and a stepping stone towards attaining taqwā (God-consciousness). Through modesty, a believer is motivated to align their actions with the standards of the pious (Siti Solehah Azhar & Suriani Sudi, 2018).

One who possesses modesty before Allah will inevitably develop modesty towards themselves. This manifests as self-restraint and the ability to control base desires and immoral inclinations. Furthermore, modesty before Allah and oneself naturally extends to modesty before others, guiding individuals to behave honourably in all social contexts. Modesty is thus a reflection of faith: the stronger a person's faith, the greater their sense of

modesty, and vice versa. For this reason, the Prophet (SAW) declared modesty to be a branch of faith (Siti Solehah Azhar & Suriani Sudi, 2018).

This hadith is especially important in today's context, particularly for social media users. Emphasising this teaching may help foster awareness of the need to uphold modesty before Allah, oneself, and others. Such awareness can serve as a moral compass, encouraging ethical behaviour and preventing misconduct in digital spaces.

Modesty as a Branch of Faith

Indeed, modesty (ḥayāʾ) and faith (īmān) are intrinsically connected, as modesty is recognised as one of the essential branches of faith. This is clearly stated in a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

From Abu Hurairah (RA), he reported that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "Faith has over seventy—or over sixty—branches. The most excellent of these is the declaration that there is no god but Allah (lā ilāha illā Allāh), and the least of them is removing something harmful from the road. And modesty is one of the branches of faith" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book of Faith, Chapter: The Matters of Faith, Ḥadīth No. 9, 1986 edition).

This hadith clearly affirms that modesty is a component of faith. Preserving one's faith is key to attaining the pleasure of Allah SWT and serves as a moral compass that guides behaviour. Positive modesty, in this regard, can act as a motivator towards good deeds and as a deterrent against misconduct. It functions as a regulating force, restraining individuals from actions and attitudes prohibited by religious teachings. A person who possesses a sense of modesty before Allah SWT will not willingly transgress divine commandments (Nur Anis Hanani Mohd Talib, Latifah Abdul Majid & Nurliyana Mohd Talib, 2019).

This concept should be emphasised, particularly for social media users, so that every Muslim becomes a God-conscious digital citizen. A believer who engages with social media should embody al-ḥayāʾ, as this trait inspires virtuous behaviour and acts as a shield against actions displeasing to Allah SWT.

Hadith on Modesty as a Barrier Against Immorality

Modesty (ḥayāʾ) plays a vital role as an internal safeguard that prevents individuals from engaging in immoral or sinful behaviour. This is clearly illustrated in the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

Abu Masʿūd reported that the Prophet (SAW) said: "One of the sayings of the early Prophets that people have inherited is: If you feel no shame, then do as you wish" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book of Manners, Chapter: If You Feel No Shame, Do as You Wish, Ḥadīth No. 5769).

This statement can be interpreted in two ways. First, it can be understood as a warning rather than a directive—meaning that if a person lacks shame, they may proceed with their actions, but they will be held accountable by Allah. This interpretation aligns with the verse in Sūrah al-Fuṣṣilat (41:40), which warns of consequences for wrongdoing. Second, it can be interpreted as a conditional encouragement—if the action one intends to do is not shameful in the eyes of Allah, oneself, or others, and is considered righteous or virtuous, then one is free to proceed (Mustafa 'Abdul Rahman, 2001).

According to Imam al-Nawawī in his commentary on the 40 Hadith, modesty is the inner feeling that compels a person to avoid dishonourable acts and to perform praiseworthy deeds. Its source lies within a spiritually awakened heart that is conscious of divine surveillance, which preserves both one's external actions and internal intentions from anything that incurs the wrath of Allah SWT (Mustafa 'Abdul Rahman, 2001).

This hadith is particularly significant for social media users today. With such awareness, Muslims who engage with digital platforms can regulate their behaviour and avoid falling into the negative trends previously

discussed. Truly, a heart adorned with modesty reflects a strong faith in Allah SWT. Moreover, it cultivates noble character traits and contributes to the overall moral and social well-being of the community.

The Attribute of Modesty in Guarding One's Speech from Vulgarity on Social Media

In the fast-paced and open world of social media, the use of vulgar, harsh, and uncivil speech has become increasingly rampant, often unchecked by moral boundaries. This phenomenon reflects the erosion of modesty among users who should, in fact, uphold proper speech as a reflection of their faith. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent."(al-Bukhari, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 6019)

This ḥadīth emphasises that strong faith encourages individuals to guard their tongues from uttering words that are harmful or devoid of benefit (al-Bukhari, 1986). In the current social media context, many users brazenly resort to abusive language, vulgar humour, and slander to gain virtual attention and influence (Nurul Fatin Najihah & Muhammad Zaiamri, 2023). Furthermore, the culture of sarcasm and sharp-witted insults is increasingly normalised in digital interactions, even though such practices reveal a weakening of faith and the loss of ḥayā' (modesty) (Siti Solehah & Suriani, 2018). Therefore, cultivating a sense of shame before Allah and fellow human beings serves as a moral safeguard, ensuring that communication remains ethical and guided by the values of faith (Nur Anis Hanani et al., 2019).

In addition to being a benchmark of faith, control over speech signifies the maturity of one's creed. This ḥadīth illustrates that speaking good or remaining silent is the hallmark of a true believer (al-Bukhari, 1986). On social media, where anonymity often gives an illusion of boldness, many individuals lose sensitivity to the impact of their words on others' dignity (Nurul Fatin Najihah & Muhammad Zaiamri, 2023). A sense of modesty that stems from the awareness that Allah is All-Knowing can inspire users to engage in self-reflection before speaking (Siti Solehah & Suriani, 2018). Hence, internalising the message of this ḥadīth is essential to fostering healthy and respectful communication in an increasingly challenging digital environment (Nur Anis Hanani et al., 2019).

The Attribute of Modesty as a Catalyst for Self-Reflection and Repentance

Human beings are not immune to committing mistakes, yet the attribute of modesty plays a crucial role in awakening the conscience to reflect and return to the path of Allah. Shame over one's sins opens the door to sincere repentance and continuous self-improvement. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

"Every son of Adam commits sin, and the best of those who sin are those who repent."(al-Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Tirmidhi, no. 2499)

This ḥadīth highlights that while sin is part of human nature, modesty over one's wrongdoings becomes a key motivator for repentance (al-Tirmidhi, 2007). In the digital era, however, modesty is increasingly diminished as social media users proudly expose their personal sins or past mistakes in the name of "honesty" and "transparency" (Mohd Mokhtarishah & Hasmadi, 2021). Without ḥayā', the process of self-reflection becomes stifled, as the heart is no longer moved by guilt or remorse (Siti Solehah & Suriani, 2018). Thus, Islamic theology, which emphasises repentance as a conscious and purifying act of the heart, is vital in addressing the culture of sin normalisation in the digital realm (Nur Anis Hanani et al., 2019).

Modesty before Allah SWT is the primary trigger for sincere repentance, while modesty before others prevents the repeated public display of sinful behaviour (al-Tirmidhi, 2007). On social media, many treat their own and others' flaws with indifference, as if openness equates to courage (Mohd Mokhtarishah & Hasmadi, 2021). The concept of ḥayā' in Islamic doctrine serves to cultivate the awareness that every action is observed and will be accounted for by Allah, thereby motivating behavioural change and spiritual renewal (Siti Solehah &

Suriani, 2018). Hence, embodying the values conveyed in this ḥadīth is essential in shaping social media users who are conscious, responsible, and obedient to divine commands (Nur Anis Hanani et al., 2019).

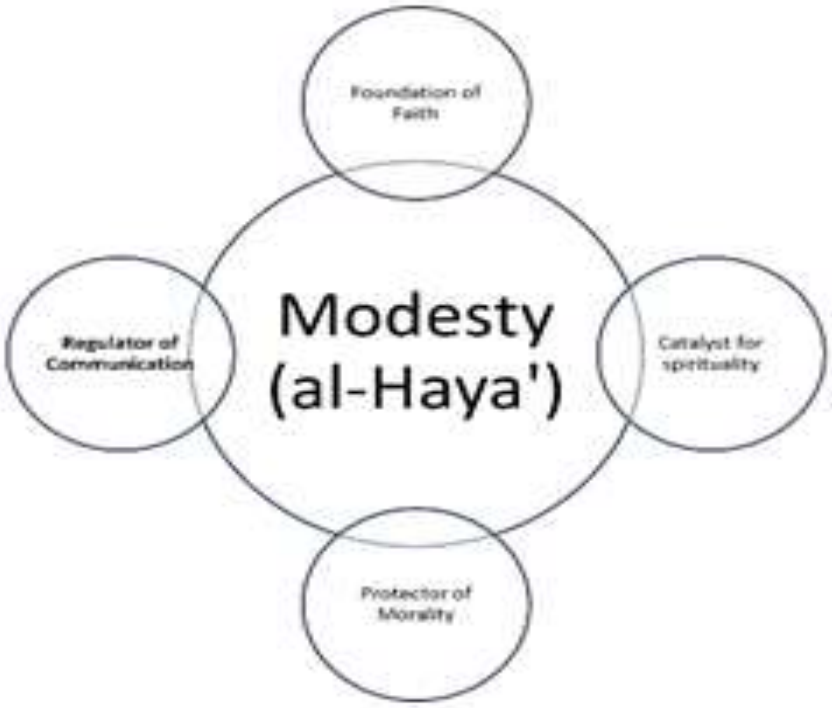

Figure 1: The Role of Modesty (al-Ḥayāʾ) in Shaping Muslim Personality in the Era of Social Media

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that modesty is an essential trait for every Muslim and plays a crucial role in controlling the behavior of social media users. This is particularly significant in the current context, where individuals are exposed to various "trending" influences that erode the modesty within themselves. The findings of this study, from an aqidah perspective, reveal three hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that emphasize the importance of modesty and its relationship with faith in Allah (SWT). The first hadith explains that modesty is a part of faith, the second states that modesty is one of the branches of faith, and the third positions modesty as a shield against committing sinful acts. These three hadiths are seen as crucial solutions in raising awareness among social media users, ensuring that they do not fall prey to the negative phenomena currently prevalent, and addressing the ongoing issues they face. Therefore, it is undeniable that the importance of possessing modesty within oneself must be emphasized, and one should not allow themselves to be influenced by negative phenomena on social media to the point where modesty, which is a part of faith, is diminished.

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