Content of Information Ethics in the Holy Quran: an Analysis

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Information ethics, according to Islam, equals observing human rights and morals in dealing with information transmission and provision, which must be based on honesty and truthfulness. As Islam highly values society and social issues, it believes that human behaviors and interactions are strongly interconnected in a society. Committing to ethical issues regarding information is a responsibility of all members of a society according to Quran. Islam prohibits Believers from unmasking peoples' private information.

Results: Thus, from the viewpoint of Islam, the purpose of information ethics is to observe and protect human rights in the society and to show the positive effects of the right information on all aspects of human life.

Methods: For the purpose of the current study all the words and verses related to information ethics was identified in Quran. The data was then evaluated and analyzed from the perspective of scholars and experts of Quran.

Conclusions: To implement information ethics, it is necessary to be aware of the position Islam has given this concept. Following Quran guidelines and the manners of the family members of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) results in a society in which information ethics is observed optimally.

Key words: Ethics; Information; Information Ethics; Quran

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Introduction

In Arabic language, ethics is the plural form of "Ethic" which comprises of some spiritual and internal features. To give a more comprehensive meaning to this word, it can be said that ethics is a Carnal Queen which discusses kinds of good and bad attributes, the attributes that are connected with man's arbitrary actions. (Ethics philosophy from view motahhari. P1) and information in LIS dictionary: the data that have been processed organized and combined to give more knowledge to human. Information ethics is about paying attention to humanity principles and moral regarding information and this is gained just by being truthful. Islam has put great emphasis on society and believes that human behaviors are well interconnected to each other in a society. Thus Information can be verbal, nonverbal, personal, private and general. Committing to ethical issues regarding information is a responsibility of all members of a society according to Quran. Islam prohibits believers from unmasking peoples' private information.

Jamal (Khani Jozee,2006) discusses that the world society is searching for decision making and decision support based on a uniform data and information so that it would be possible for

the world to equally process and distribute information and finally make decisions in accordance with coordinated data. For this goal, the world is looking for a general consensus on ethic principles for information network management to require all people to pay attention to its defined ethical principles. Thus, it is of a great importance to deal with ethics as a valuable subject in virtual environment and in the three levels of ethics philosophy, micro and macro ethics. Therefore, Jamal has focused on technology and believes that it may affect all systems in a society. In addition, he says that if technology is transferred to a place, its culture will also be transferred to that place. He then shows that technology has extra effects on human life as well as other different aspects related to him although it may not be visible.

Information ethics from the viewpoint of philosophic ethics is considered as a field for philosophical researches and analyses. Information ethics from descriptive ethical perspective clarifies the normative criteria in problems and subjects of applied ethics. These criteria are compared with normative studies via descriptive studies. In an article written by Waltz Manner, Unique ethical problems in information technology (1996), he describes the unique characteristics of computer technology and points out the features of this technology including storage, complexity, changeability and comprehensiveness, processing speed, relative cheapness, recreation of unlimited capability and being based on numerous mysteries. He argues that because of these unique computer applications, potential attempts for finding other satisfactory alternatives that are free from ethical problems have been hindered. It was really indigenous complexity in computers that paved the way for malicious individuals to misuse this technology.(Manner, 1996)

Shahriari.(Shahriari, 2010) explains that the ethics of information technology is an inseparable part of applied ethics because it discusses normality and abnormality cases related to a specific field of human activity and/or a particular case. He follows by giving a history and general knowledge on ethics of information technology. In the next chapters, advantages and disadvantages of information technology will have been dealt with, then history and general knowledge on privacy as well as rational and narrative reasons privacy right, security, intellectual proprietary rights and content filtration policies and censure ethics will be considered.

Method

The research method adopted here is a kind of descriptive content analysis methods which are used in the humanities. Using content analysis, we can analyze newspapers, magazines, books and etc. from a comparative viewpoint. In such a research method, the researcher makes attempt to analyze and describe the contents. In content analysis, the desired themes and components are gathered, classified and then analyzed. These components may encompass words, sentences, paragraphs and complete texts whether in written and/or verbal forms.(Sarookhani, 2003)

In this research, the words and phrases used in the Holy Quran describing information ethics were identified from the viewpoints of experts, specialists and librarians and then analyzed.

Content analysis of the gathered data was made in four steps as follow:

Step 1: All words and phrases describing information ethics were extracted from the Holy Quran by using content analysis method and then a research index was made based on the words and phrases.

Step 2:the research index made in Step 1 was used to ask religious and LIS 10 experts to give their ideas regarding the importance of some of the extracted words, phrases and verses.

Step 3: the verses related to each subject were extracted and then reviewed by the experts.

Step 4: The subjects and concepts used in the Holy Quran as well as the related verses were all analyzed and described.

Results: Findings

Information ethics, according to Islam, equals observing human rights and morals in dealing with information transmission and provisionwhich must be based on honesty and truthfulness. As Islam highly values society and social issues, it believes that human behaviors and interactions are strongly interconnected in a society. Committing to ethical issues regarding information is a responsibility of all members of a society according to Quran. Islam prohibits believers from unmasking peoples' private information.

The Holy Quran and information ethics
1 .Information value ethics
1.1.Right seeking and right telling

Expression of the right is one of the most prominent attributes. The Holy Quran refers to this in some verses:

"But recite unto them with truth the tale of the two sons of Adam(Al-Mâ'idah:27)"
In accordance with some intellectuals, "right" has some signs and signals that can be objectively found. Intent plays the real and pivotal role in reaching the right. The state of searching right (rightism) is also wished while getting and giving news. Rightism is of specific importance in the process of preparing the news. Often times the news is taken from unreliable verbal reports that disagree with what has really happened.(Islamic Press: History and Ethics of Journalism, 2003)

1.2. Veracity

Veracity is one of human's good deeds and has a special place in wisdom and religion. A sane and sound person having a pure nature has a coordinated tongue and heart in one direction; such a person avoids hypocrisy and always adheres to the truth.

"Surely Allâh loves Al-Sadeghin*(the right tellers)"*

The verses indicating veracity mentioned in the Holy Quran are as follow:

Sadegh (right teller)
"And if he is a liar, upon him will be (the sin of) his lie; but if he is telling the truth, then

some of that (calamity) wherewith he threatens you will befall on you"(Ghafer: 28)

Sadegun (a group of right tellers)
"Or is mixed up with a bone. Thus we recompensed them for their rebellion [committing crimes like murdering the Prophets, eating of Ribâ*(usury), etc.]. And verily, we are Truthfu"*(Anam: 146)

Sadeghin (two right tellers)
Say: O Muhammad(Peace be upon him), "Produce your proof if you are truthful."(Al-Baqara: 111, 94, 31, 23)

Imam Sadeq (PBUH) said:" rightness is good and a right teller is better than that. Work is good and the one who does it, is better"(Mohammadi -e Raishahri, 2006)

1.3. Cursing avoidance and observing

Cursing means to use unjust words against someone so that he/she is offended. Human is instinctively oriented towards graceful words and gets pleasure from being praised. A sane society requires information agents to ethically avoid taboo verbalism. What makes information to be truly transferred is to utter useful words in a polite and respectable way.

The related verses mentioned in the Holy Quran are as follow:

Good
"And speak good to people"(Al-Baqara: 83)

Better
"And who is better in speech than he who says: "My Lord is Allâh (believes in His Oneness),"(Fussilat: 33)

1.4. Eloquence

Literally, eloquence means plainness, maturity and maximization (Dehkhoda Dictionary, 1995). In idiomatic language it means speech plainness and equality with current time provided that the plainness of the words and accuracy of composition in speech are addressed.

The clearest verse available in the context of the holy Quran is brought here below under:

"Allâh has sent down the best statement, a Book (this Qur'ân), its parts resembling each other in goodness and truth, oft-repeated".(Az-Zumar: 23)

This verse refers to the Holy Quran as a good speech which makes a great example of truthfulness and integrity. Moreover it introduces the Holy Quran as a statement that is of a robust documentation and arrangement.

"And speak to them an effective word" (An-Nisâ':63*)*

The holy prophet Muhammad said:" eloquence is the beauty of speech"(Ghomi Sabzevari, 1985)

1.5. Fluency

Literally, fluency means the quality of being facile, powerful and effective in speech and writing. Idiomatically it is meant to express the intent by using understandable and fluent words that are familiar with the audience. A clear speech is one that is fluent and audible and its components are set together in a way that lacks complexity and/or difficulty. Moreover, its components should not be offensive and exclude cacophony or poorness in compilation and abstruseness or obscurity of meanings.(Mehrandasht, 2012)

*"And my brother Hârûn (Aaron) he is more eloquent in speech than me*ˑ (Al-Qasas: 34)

1.6. Affability

There are many relationships and friendships that have been devastated due to scowling, pouting and grimacing. Conversely, most of familiarities have been formed just by a smile. The *Holy Quran includes a verse which says:*

"And turn not your face away from men with pride, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allâh likes not each arrogant boaster"(Luqmân: 18)

1.7. Good-temperedness

Having gentle words, polite and attractive language, high level of patience and a delightful facial expression are manifestations of good-temperedness. In other words, when an information agent gives his affection to others, remains patient and tolerant in times of hardship, keeps his anger under control, shows

good reaction against bad actions, avoids violence, huff, abusive words, humiliation, insolence and pride, he is considered a good-tempered person.

A verse in the Holy Quran says:"And by the Mercy of Allâh, you dealt with them gently (Âl-'Imrân: 159)

The Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was good tempered, patient and kind with people and this was one of the incentives that encouraged people to join Islam. So it can be concluded that it is possible to attract people by being good tempered and treating them with kindness. The Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) maintained this excellent feature and attracted many people after 23 years, even those who had never seen him before.

1.8. Optimism

Optimism is among the most important features that plays outstanding roles in human growth as well as his unity, material and immaterial evolution. Hope and vivacity in life and society are acquired through optimism and this is an indication for the important role it plays in a society. The leaders of Islam religion have often underlined this feature in their narrations. The elites and lawyers have also dedicated a separate section to this subject. The verse below shows that it is necessary to respect faithful people and be optimistic toward them.

"Say: "He listens to what is best for you; he believes in Allâh; has faith in the believers"and is a Mercy to those of you who believe." But those who molest the Messenger will have a grievous penalty. (At-Taubah: 61)

1.9. Thinking

Thinking power makes the man to be different from other creatures. Allah has pointed to human in his Holy Quran as an entity for whom all things have been created so that he/she starts to think about things and opts the way by means of his/her own decision(Al.Imran.160). If we think about any type of information, speech and behavior and then put them into effect, no misconception will arise for us. One of the ideal characteristics of information recipients is to

ponder over the concepts of the news and information upon receiving them and then try to analyze and evaluate the affairs before making any judgment based on them.

"And has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favour and kindness from Him. Verily, in it are signs for a people who think deeply". (Al-Jâthiya: 13)

The verses related to thinking are as follow:

"Verily, he thought and plotted" (Al-Muddaththir: 18)

"And reflect" (within yourselves the life history of the Prophet SAW) (Saba':46)

"Thus Allâh makes clear to you His Laws in order that you may give thought". (Al-Baqarah:219)

And think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth"(saying)(Âl-'Imrân:191)

1.10. Affecting others

To affect others different dimensions of man's capabilities are engaged. Highly spiritual, (Maanawy) and scientific features are the most important factors in making an impression. The more you attempt to strengthen your will-power and knowledge, to acquire more good features and admirable ethics, the more you will be able to gradually impress others.

A verse in the Holy Quran says:

[Mûsa (Moses)] said: "O my Lord! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness(TâHâ:25)

"That they understand my speech"(TâHâ:25)

1.1^1. Trust

Trust is one of the features and characteristics of a faithful man. The information and words we possess have been truthfully transferred to us and need to be protected. There will be close relationships among society members if culture of trust gets more roots in a society.

"Those who are faithfully true to their Amanât*(all the duties which Allâh has ordained, honesty, moral responsibility and trusts etc.)[] and to their covenants"* (Al-Mu'minûn: 8)

1.1^2. Secrecy

Each individual has private information in his personal and social life. He/she should do his/her best to keep it in secret. Part of this private information belongs to his/her family and/or society. Nowadays, there are modern and advanced tools in the world that can easily detect private information. This situation requires us to be inevitably faithful to our private information.

This is what the Holy Quran says:

(He is) the knower of the Unseen and He revealeth unto none His secret(Al-Jinn.26)

Allah knows all of the secrets and events. The omnipotent God emphasizes that people keep their secrets to themselves.

1.1^3. Avoiding hypocrisy

In origin, dissimulation and hypocrisy mean the opposition of exterior with interior. Literally, hypocrisy is signified as making tunnels and cleaves.(Dehkhoda dictionary, 1995) It stands for hiding something (an idea and etc.) while pretending to be faithful to that thing. According to the Holy Quran and Nahjolbalagheh (a set of excellent lectures, advices and orders authored by Imam Ali (PBUH)), hypocrisy is considered as a sort of atheistic bypassingand coverage of infidelity.

"So He punished them by putting hypocrisy into their hearts till the Day whereon they shall meet Him, because they broke that (covenant with Allâh) which they had promised Him and because they used to tell lies". (At-Taubah: 77)

1.1^4. Constructive criticism

This term means to transfer information to others so that the person under criticism can use it to their benefits. When an information agent is going to provide his/her addressees with information, he/she should not only be polite in doing the job but also have a proper system to mention the deficiencies of the opposite side, so that on one hand, the information is accepted by the addressees and benefits them and on the other hand, it improves relationships. In other words, it is about what to say and how to say it.

Who hear advice and follow the best thereof.(Az.zumar, 18)

The meaning of hearing advice and listening is different. Those who hear advice, criticize before doing.

These verses show that if someone wants to become a candidate for government, he/she should be God-fearing and advice listener.

Critiquing something doesn't mean enmity. Rather, it should be considered as a gift and/or favor. Critiquing a work does not mean find faults with it, rather it is:

A comprehensive system for critiquing and suggesting

A comprehensive system for processing the critique process

A comprehensive system for applying the admissible critiques

A comprehensive system for giving the critiquing results to critique makers.

1.1[5]. Security

Safety is the opposite of fear and anxiety. Security of human, locations and etc. is considered a feature obtained by creating and maintaining protective measures in order to get protection against hostile actions and dangerous agents(Khani Jozni, 2006). Information security aims to protect privacy, integrity and accessibility of information.

It is considered as one of the main elements of information profession because if information is not protected in a suitable way, it may lead to national and international information abuse. Knowing these, information agents are supposed to absolutely secure the information and provide it for their real addresses in a suitable place.

"And Allâh puts forward the example of a township (Makkah) that dwelt secure and well content". (An-Nahl: 112)

Here are the pertinent words and verses:

"My Lord, make this city (Makkah) a place of security(Al-Baqarah: 126)

"When there comes to them some matter touching (public) safety or fear, they make it known" (among the people) (An-Nisâ':83)

1.1[6]. Source validity

The validity of a source is considered to be a prerequisite for having a perfect communication between message sender and receiver(Why source validity, 1994). Source validity is known to be a confluence among communicative concepts. Definiteness of the source validity and accuracy is one of the cases that media addressees try to get. Writing resources will be effective in making the addressees sure of validity. Moreover, this will give more validity to the message and media as resources which are linked with validity.

"And follow not that of which you have no knowledge Verily! The hearing, and the sight, and the heart, of each of those you will be questioned (by Allâh). (Al-Isrâ':36)

When the purpose of releasing the news or information is to give knowledge to recipients, the releaser should ethically become assured of the source validity and then sends it to addresses. If not, unreal news will pervert the recipients' minds in a way that it will be impossible to compensate the bad effects it will have. (Ethical approach of Media, 1996)

1.1[7]. Rightness

Rightness means security and strength (Dehkhoda dictionary, 1995). The word "rightness" is one of the issues regarding information ethics. The more our information is accepted by wisdom, logic and reasoning, the more definite it will be. The more strong and reasonable it is, the more stability and immortality it will have. Because the holy Quran is either wisely or intrinsically well-coordinated, it has a unique immortality and strength.

"So let them fear Allâh and speak right words." (An-Nisâ':9)

1.1[8]. Simplicity

Literally, simplicity means the state of being simple. Complexity is the opposite of simplicity. Complexity is a sort of trouble. As human beings are faced with numerous limitations and complications in life, they can be driven to extremities. Thus, while speaking, they can be confronted with various types of complications.

"Then, speak unto them a soft kind word" (Al-Isrâ':28)

The holy prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The Prophets and Saints hate trouble and complexity"(Majlesi)

2. Counter-value information
2.1. falsehood

Literally falsehood means nonconformity (Moein dictionary, 2010). As speech and words can be characterized with falsehood, beliefs and deeds can be likewise characterized with falsehood. Unreal imaginationand belief equal falsehood; the same can be said for an action that is not taken after promise.

"It is only those who believe not in the Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allâh, who fabricate falsehood, and it is they who are liars" (An-Nahl: 105)

Although in this verse disbelievers have used the word "falsehood" to refer to God and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), but it briefly highlights the evil of falsehood. Islam puts a great emphasis on veracity and strongly rejects falsehood and lie.

The verses available in the Holy Quran covering this subject are as follow:

"This is lawful and this is forbidden," so as to invent lies against Allâh"(An-Nahl: 116)

And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against Allâh or rejects His Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, revelations, etc.)? Verily, the Zâlimûn (polytheists and wrongdoers, etc.) shall never be successful. (Al-An'âm: 21)

2.2. Backbiting

Religious definitions and the ethics principles refer to backbiting as any word or action that shows insufficiencies and deficiencies of someone before others so that he/she is offend and hurt.

"And spy not, neither backbite one another". (Al-Hujurât: 12)

2.3. Accusation

If someone supposedly attributes deficiencies and insufficiencies to somebody else, it is called accusation. Islam disapproves an information process in which people are accused and or found fault with.

This case is explained by the holy Quran:

"And for those who accuse their wives, but have no witnesses except themselves, let the testimony of one of them befour testimonies (i.e. testifies four times) by Allah that he is one of those who speak the truth"(An-Nûr: 6)

2.4. Lie

If someone lacks a deficiency or insufficiency but this bad feature is attributed to him/her, this is called a lie, no matter he/she is either present or absent. Thus proper information is required to be free from any lie.

The holy Quran deals with this case in the following verses:

"And those who annoy believing men and women undeservedly bear on themselves the crime of slander and plain sin(AlAhzâb:58)

"That they will not utter slander, intentionally forging falsehood (i.e. by making illegal children belonging to their husbands). (Al-Mumtahinah: 12)

Imam Sadeq (PBUH) said:" …slandering means to say something about someone while he/she never holds it."(Kolaini, 1990)

2.5. Evil and idle talk

"Evil/idle" is literally something that no attention is paid to it and no result is gained by it(Moeindictionary, 2010). From the viewpoint of the Holy Quran, it is a vain effort or thought that causes man to forget his creator God.

These are the related verses with this subject:

"And if they pass by some evil play or evil talk, they pass by it with dignity" (Al-Furqân: 72)

"Avoid talking too much because the more someone talks, the more slips he/she will make"(ama di- al-tamimi)

2.6. Information prodigality

this literally means "prodigality" or the overuse of something. In human's beliefs and actions (Moein dictionary), it means to have excessive amount of everything and to go beyond it. This bad habit is known as "prodigality" and the person who commits it is called "prodigal".

"Even then after that many of them continued to exceed the limits (e.g. by doing oppression unjustly and exceeding beyond the limits set by Allâh by committing the major sins) in the land!.(Al-Mâ'idah: 32)

In the verse above, prodigality means to go beyond average limit and the phrase "in the land" says that prodigality is equal to exceeding the average limit in social affairs. This is called infringement.

"And thus do We requite him who transgresses beyond bounds [i.e. commits the great sins and disobeys his Lord (Allâh) and believes not in His Messengers, and His revealed Books, like this Qur'ân, etc.], and believes not in the Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of his Lord, and the torment of the Hereafter is far more severe and more lasting"(TâHâ:127)

"And waste not by extravagance. Verily, He likes not Al-Musrifûn (those who waste by extravagance) (Al-An'âm: 141)

"And those, who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but hold a medium (way) between those (extremes). (Al- Furqân: 67)

"And waste not by extravagance. Verily, He likes not Al-Musrifûn (those who waste by extravagance).(Al-An'âm: 141)

2.7. Suspicion

In idiomatic language, it means to have a negative assumption about something or someone on little evidence or without proof.

"O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins". (Al-Hujurât: 12)

"And most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Certainly, conjecture can be of no avail against the truth. Surely, Allâh is All-Aware of what they do. "(Yûnus: 36)

2.8. Bad Investigation

The received information should be investigated thoroughly before taking any action upon or making any judgment based on that. An information agent is required not to accept all data upon receiving them. Islam agrees with a little of suspicion provided that it either saves the life and dignity of a Muslim or ward off a danger from Muslim's territory.

The holy Quran includes a verse which says: "Avoid much suspicion" (Al-Hujurât: 12)

Discussion

Considering Information value and counter value ethics from the viewpoint of Islam, we conclude that what is useful for current human societies and communications is to utter and transfer information based on ethical principles. As mentioned earlier, this process should be based on secrecy and veracity. Information needs to be selected from assured resources and made available to people. Finally, it should be kept in mind that Quran emphasizes that people privacy and grace must always be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

So far, most studies have been conducted in the field of information ethics, information ethics, Luciano Floridi done the best thinkers in the West havethe advantage of the approach is minimal and modern works made in, Flourishing his ethical theory is an interesting mix of ideas of Aristotle, Weiner, Moore and himself.His ethics, morality macro defines its data type that is similar to utilitarianism, task-oriented, contractualism,the answer to all moral situations.He sees the world in an information space.His theory, humans, animals, types of plants, even inanimate artifacts can affect the other organisms;His theory is based on a human-centered and human agency.Also conducted studies on information ethics, from the perspective of Jewish - Christian and Western ideas using traditional and modern works of philosophers and the lowest morals of Islam is the solution.

Despite the fact that Islam is one of the world's greatest religions, the fundamental moral religion is not yet fully known.Islam in the past for various empireshas brought prosperity and happiness. It follows that a small piece of the raging sea can deliver the hope that is usable for everyone.

The recommendations can be offered:

✓ Evaluating and comparing current condition of information ethics with western human sciences

✓ Using the results of this study for implementation of information ethics based on Islamic sources in communities of Islamic countries

✓ Having information ethics as a crucial component in human life

✓ Generalizing of the results for using information ethics in all university and Howzeh courses.

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