

Reporting and Disclosure of Information from an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract: According to the Islamic point of view, principles and elements of media ethics could be approached in three main aspects: the right to learn, explain, and spread news, ideas and opinions. Free circulation of information can take place only through the presence and true recognition of these rights. However, a set of criteria exists while exercising the right to learn, explain, and spread news, ideas and opinions, and this article will discuss some of the criteria to the use of these rights within the framework of "media".

Key Words: Islamic Law, Human Rights, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of the Press, Freedom of Thought.

To create one's own thoughts and opinions, a person must learn other people's thoughts and opinions in a healthy and safe way. Thus, one can improve or even partially or completely change their thoughts and opinions by comparing them to those of other people. In that regard, the underlying fact of learning different points of view is the recognition of freedom of receiving news and information.

Testification

Not only media professionals, but all people are the witnesses of their age and the world they live in.¹ This testification must be performed properly and honestly so that it will set a good model and reflect the facts as wit-

1 See. 2 / Surat al-Baqara, 143, 3 / Surah Al-i Imran, 140; 22 / Surat al-Hajj, 78, 57 / Surat al-Hadid, 19.

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nessed.² Islamic laws strongly condemn all types of³ false testimony and ban false accusation, imputation and slander.⁴

Right to Privacy

A person's privacy consists of qualities, conditions and documentation that the person does not want to share with or avoids revealing to a third party. The 19th meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of *The Islamic Conference Organization* on 5 August 1990 in Cairo adopted the *Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* in which the right to privacy in article 18 is proclaimed as follows:⁵

(a) Everyone shall have the right to live in security for himself, his religion, his dependents, his honour and his property.

(b) Everyone shall have the right to privacy in the conduct of his private affairs, in his home, among his family, with regard to his property and his relationships. It is not permitted to spy on him, to place him under surveillance or to besmirch his good name. The State shall protect him from arbitrary interference.

(c) A private residence is inviolable in all cases. It will not be entered without permission from its inhabitants or in any unlawful manner, nor shall it be demolished or confiscated and its dwellers evicted.

Obligation not to Disclose and Publish Wrongdoings

Almighty Allah has prohibited the spread of foul behavior,⁶ because enabling the evil to be heard and contributing to its dissemination means regarding it legitimate, and in a sense, promoting the evil. On the other hand, hidden sins fall under God's forgiveness.⁷ Concealing one's sin is the believer's duty, but disclosing them constitute a sin.⁸

2 See. 2 / Surat al-Baqara, 282-283, 4 / Surat an-Nisa, 135, 9 / Surat at-Tawbah, 119; 25 / Surat al-Furqan, 72, 65 / Talaq Qur'an, 2.

3 Bukhari, Şehâdât, 10; Adab, 6; Diyât, 2; Muslim, Iman, 39, Tirmidhi, Tafsir, 5; İbnMâce, Ahkam, 32.

4 See, for example. Bukhari, Hudud, 44-45; Vesâyâ, 23; Adab, 44; Muslim, faith, 144; Vesâyâ, 10; Birr, 60; Ebû Dâvûd, Hudud, 34; Tirmidhi, exegesis, 25; Faith, 16; Judgement, 2; Muvatta, Border, 5; Musnad, VI, 30, 35 Also seeSslander. The caller, 2000: 522-523; about *kazf* see. Aktan, 2002: 148-149; about *lian* see. Aydin, 2003: 172-173.

5 İHA, 2004: 196-197.

6 "Those who wish to spread obscenity (ugly words and actions) among the believers will be punished painfully in this world and the world after. Allah knows and you do not know." (24 / Surat an-Nur, 19).

7 See. Buhari, Atrocities, 2; Adab, 60; Muslim, Repentance, 52.

8 Bukhari, Adab, 60; Muslim, Zuhd, 52. On revealing the weaknesses of others, See Kemâlî, Freedom of Expression in Islam, p. 127-129.

Reporter's Reliability

A reporter's utmost responsibility is to reports the phenomena he has seen or learned as they are. For this reason, reporters should possess *mental faculties* which will enable them to grasp the content of the news and a *powerful memory* to be able to transfer the news as it is. Confidence in any news is essentially linked to this criterion of the reporter.

Ethical Principles Related to the Freedom of Expression

Truthful Words

Everybody and particularly reporters must report the events and situations they have witnessed or learned in an accurate, unbiased and truthful manner. Communicating the news truthfully is called *sıdk* in *Islam* and the person reporting the news in compliance with this principle is called *muhbir-i sâdik* (*truthful messenger*).

Good Words

Good words are straightforward word, uttered without bending and twisting, free from lies. Good words are like an almighty tree whose roots are deep underground, and branches toward the sky. This tree always yields fruit with the permission of its Creator, whereas bad words are like a dead tree, uprooted from the ground.⁹

Respect for Faith and Thought

International and national declarations of human rights contain articles on freedom of expression and freedom of faith. Article 22 of The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam says everyone shall have the right to express his opinion freely, and everyone shall have the right to advocate what is right, and propagate what is good, and warn against what is wrong and evil. The article also reminds us that information should not be exploited or misused in such a way as may violate sanctities and the dignity of Prophets, undermine moral and ethical values or disintegrate, corrupt or harm society or weaken its faith.

9 14 / Surah Ibrahim, 24-27. See also. 17 / Surat al-Isra ' , 53, 39 / Surat az Zumar, 18.

Prohibition of Backbiting and Gossiping

Gybet as a religious concept means talking behind somebody's back, or casting aspersions in the person's absence.¹⁰ Islam, has often attached special importance to the principle of personal immunity which is generally expressed as the concept of chastity. Accordingly, belittling a person or his family and relatives in his absence is regarded within the scope of backbiting.¹¹

Public Order and Safety

Protection of and adherence to the codes of law relating to public order are good for the general interests of society. Therefore, while exercising freedom of speech, rules providing public order must be respected.

Notification and Rumor

Information and news, when transmitted to others, are called *notifications, declarations, narrations or rumors*. Once they have declared their news, thoughts and convictions, people would like them to become public and open for discussions by the masses. News, opinion and convictions have to be reflected accurately, without being distorted. Missing or distorted news, thoughts and convictions fail to communicate the sender's intentions truthfully and deprive the receiver of genuine reasoning and evaluation. This is why those who report have to be loyal, or as mentioned above, they have to be *truthful messengers (muhbir-i sâdik)*.

To Order Goodness, To Deter from Evil

Muslim community should set an exemplary role model for the entire world, and with their balanced and moderate approach¹² they should follow the good and prevent the evil.¹³ In this regard, media as a narrator should favor the spread of goodness and decrease the evil, because witnessing a wrongdoing and not doing anything to stop it not only adversely affects the victim, but also creates repercussions on the whole community.

10 Muslim, Birr, 70, Abu Dawud, Adab, 40; Tirmidhi, Birr, 23; Musnad, II/384, 386; Dârimî, Rica, 6.

11 Backbiting is also related to intentions. Talking about a person's wrongdoings with the intention of belittling is a sin, however if the intention is to correct the person, it is not. Also, complain about the person who did injustice to the relevant authorities, to ask fatwa, to protect people from evil, to seek support to prevent evil, to introduce someone who is famous for that specific nickname, to talk against people in order to condemn cruelty and immorality is now within the scope of backbiting. For more information, see. Canbulat, 2006: 202-203.

12 Surat al-Baqara, 143.

13 Surah Al-i Imran, 104, 110, 9 / Surat at-Tawbah, 67; 16 / Surat an-Nahl, 90, 24 / Surat an-Nur, 21.

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