Role of Islam in promoting Happiness and decreasing Envy among social media users

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In Pakistan out of 220 million people [i], youth'soccupy 30 % of the population.[ii]A large segment of these youths use social media extensivelyto reach out to others to engage in both public and private communication.Since youths are at the critical age of seeking autonomy, attaining value, respect, freedom, recognition and fame in society. They may use social media to compare themselves with others leading to either positive feeling of emotional contentment, happiness or negative emotions of unhappiness and discontentment.The negative intensive pain in the heart or *Qalb* in Muslim perspective can only be reduced when it is filled with the *Noor* and the love of Almighty Allah.[iii] The present paper aims to understand the dynamic role of Islam in creating and flourishing the intense feeling of happiness and contentment in one's life. This article alsodiscusses the current emotional state of youths who indulge in comparing themselves in the digital world leading to feeling of envy and unhappiness and thereforeprovides suggestions for reconnecting with true source of happiness meaning spreading love of Almighty Allah in our hearts and being grateful for HIS endless bounties in order to attain eternal happiness.

Key words: Happiness, social comparison, envy, Qalb

Introduction:

United Nations defines, "persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by Member States".[4]At this delicate age where one is bombarded with social pressures, peer pressure, family responsibilities, career growth and a strong urge to fulfilone's own goals and aspirations of life. The emotional element of feeling at peace and contentment with oneself and enjoying moments in life and experiencing happiness is also one of the most significant mental health indicators of satisfaction in life.Since youth at this age are desperately trying to determine their identity where some are muddled up and disheveled with confused state of self .But the throbbing question is that in the search of happiness and in search of "the happy self", the immense role of social media where comparison with others to relate and identify with happiness has created immense damage on the psychological health of the youths .Hence we see youths of today being disconnected, dissociated ,distanced or even ignorant of the true meaning of happiness. Most youths tend to identify happiness through number of subscribers, likes or followers in their social media platform. Studies show about 70 % of Pakistaniyouthsare mobile users.[5]Since through android mobiles one can at any time easily log into Instagram, twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms. Between 2000 and 2022, internet growth rates was reported inAfrica (11.2%), Asia (54.2%), Latin America/Caribbean (9.9%), Middle East (3.8%), Europe (13.9%), North America (6.5%), and Oceana/Australia (0.6 %) during the same period of time.[6]

Sadly speaking most youths at this tender age if unable to develop positive self-esteem, strong family bonds, adherence to moral values and realizing the actual meaning of existence may than be trapped in this world of glamour. In the social media sites these youths may identify, learn, adopt, and replicate the understanding of happiness and success as reinforced in social media through personal looks, personal beauty, persona of status quo and hence drifting away from true happiness and developing a Social Chameleon Personality. Thus one can say that how youths use social media to meet their needs, values, and desires are utmost important in their mental health and wellbeing and in attaining happiness. In a systematic review analyzed 70 studies found that self-comparison was associated with depression.[7]

What is happiness?

Different research scholars hold different understanding of happiness. As it's a subjective state depending on how the individual's views ,feel ,comprehend and understand happiness .In the field of psychology happiness defined in the book "*The How of Happiness*[8]*"is the* experience of a meaningful ,worthy life filled with joy and contentment. Others define happiness in terms of six core virtues[9] (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These six core virtues are wisdom (e.g., love of learning, creativity), courage (e.g., bravery, persistence), humanity (e.g., kindness, social intelligence), justice (e.g., fairness), temperance (e.g., forgiveness, self-regulation), and finally, transcendence (e.g., gratitude, religiousness/spirituality).

In collective culture happiness is dependable on family'sties and bondage as important factors to generate and promote feeling of harmony and contentment.[10]One can therefore say that the definition of happiness depends on what is important or pertinent at that moment in individual's life, hence if one's peers, family, culture or religious beliefs and values are important than these influence ones definition of happiness. In Pakistan where both nuclear and joint family system operate. But with gradual pace of time the nuclear system is dominating more in cities, leading to decrease role of grandparents or elders role in younger generation's life decision. This may suggest that youths are now looking towards other directions to define happiness and success in their lives.

Youth's perception of personal success and happiness is based on financial security, careers of their choice, living independently and having a lifestyle of their choosing. Hence this may imply that through social comparison youths may measure their happiness.[11]This yard stick keeps on fluctuating leading to unrest as in circumstances where one engages in downward social comparison one experiences positiveself-esteemand its opposite meaning upward comparison may lead to jealousy and envy.Hence one can say engaging in social comparison has rapidly and dramatically transformed the lives of youths.

Definition of happiness:

Happiness to some is based on having a sense of purpose in life.[12]So if your purpose is to fit yourself in the glamorous world, by being one of the top trends in social media sites. Than this may cause vacuum a in your heart because one is ignoring the true meaning of happiness that is having a positive relationship with Almighty

Allah and having strong emotional ties with one's family, friends and social circle which results in long term and stable happiness.

Happiness has many different meanings some of which are mentioned below:

Happiness is conceptualized as an appraisal of life,a positive health indicator[13]

A state of mind[14]

A psychological state[15]

Is synonymous with subjective well-being Rodogno R. Happiness and well-being[16]

As overall satisfaction with everyday life[17]

As the overall quality of one's life [18]

Understanding happiness:

The World Happiness Report is an annual publication that began in2012 which measures global happiness and ranks countries according to their level of happiness. The report is published by United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network to display the state, the causes and implications of happiness. The report is drawn from various resources such as the Gallup World Poll and the World Values Survey. The World Happiness Report is edited each year, and in 2023 itmeasured happiness as in three areas which were:

1. Asking respondents to evaluate their current life

2. Measure if they experience or do not experience three positive emotions: laughter, enjoyment, and interest and also

3. Measure if they experience or do not experience Three Negative emotions: worry, sadness, and anger.

Furthermore the main ingredients of happiness ln life according to Happiness report are on:

1. physical and mental health
2. human relationships (in the family, at work and in the community)
3. income and employment
4. character virtues, including pro-sociality and trust
5. social support
6. personal freedom
7. lack of corruption
8. effective government

The latest World Happiness Reportalso ranked Pakistan at 108th number among 137 countries.[19]Furthermore the reportemphasized that one of the pillars of growing happiness in the first top ten countries are higher levels of trust and of mutual respect and support with superior social norms .This means that if youths are provided an environment where people respect each other and can rely on each other than this healthy relationship will make them happy.

Several studies imply that social trust is declining in today's society where youths feel that people cannot be trusted.[20] Thus automatically this leads to feeling of emotional distress and unhappiness. This feeling of social mistrust also has long damaging effect in society .As absence or decline of this feeling will make individuals less prone to build strong positive relationship with each other. Let's once again relate it to the dominating influence of Mobil usage in Youths.Most of the social media elaborates on a world of glamour where each individual wants to attain supremacy on other individuals at thecost of human values, trust, concern andcare of each other.

Social Media and Social Comparison:

In order to know how happy one is or to what extend we are living a successful life we tend to compare ourselves with others. Therefore we use reference group which is defined as "groups that people refer to when evaluating their personal qualities, circumstances, attitudes, values and behaviors".[21]

Social media has created a huge additional space within which people present and represent happiness and emotions. The World Wide Web is now over 30 years old, where the net is described as an "epitome of human life itself".[22]"Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others".[23]Therefore how one uses the internet has tremendous impact on one's mental health state. If it is used for constructive healthy relationship it promotes positive health, whereas in the other extreme if it is used to create or causes damage in the virtual users mentalhealth that it serves to aggregate negativity around our self and generate harmful thoughts and action in the community . Thus the outcome of the positively biased messages of happy, successful, and popular peers may lead to envy and negative psychosocial effects[24]or become a source of inspiration, and positive psychosocial outcomes[25] .

Youths of todays are highly engrossed in social networking; wherethey appear to get their sense of thrills or excitement through time spend on these social networking sites. Some also present an optimized version of themselves in order to boast their online reputation and feel flattered, overjoyed and elated in response to the positive feedback by the viewers. Through internet youths position jumps between simple viewers or audience to real participants who can interact, voice and communicate, comment or respond to anyone who they want to online and post anything they like. The real danger is when reading or responding to this post creates feeling of anxiety, unrest, sadness or envy. Especially when sub consciously the post is made to "look the best" or "stating I am the best". The daily post of one's achievement gives an indirect message to the viewers that it symbolizessuccessful life filled with happiness. If the delivered message is only centered on worldly materialistic, superficial images of success that this may drive onto understand that attainment of happiness based on this cold calculated attainment of happiness devoid of human element of compassion and empathy which is true ladder of happiness.

Social media may be especially important in shaping adolescent social status.[26]The preoccupation with popularity on social media may have reframed adolescents' traditional desire for popularity into aspirations for fame and stardom. Internet provides "the opportunity to build new kinds of communities, virtual communities, in which we participate".[27]Social Networking Sites (SNSs)is defined as 'web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'[28]. Examining the data for social media users, it is clear a huge market are consumers are available .As of October , 2023,according to Social Media Stats Pakistan the Facebook users are 79.32 %,twitter 12.28% ,you tube 5.63 % ,Instagram 1.74% ,P interest 0.64 % and Linked In 0.13 %[29] .

Facebook users often post about their positive life events, successes, and entertaining status updates and sometimes even present themselves in overly flatting ways"[30].A user on Facebook claimed that "we share things for glory" and "to feel […] slightly superior", summarizing that "its competitiveness" that makes us share content.[31]Studies show that greater time spent on Facebook was positively associated

with having the perception that other people are happier and have better lives[32], is positively linked with Students' well-being[33] and also with poorer self-perceptions.[34]

The disturbing and damaging reality is that mostof these sites are prone to promote worldly desires of success and becoming too overly depended on their limited definition of a successful life, most youths are experiencing loss and remorse in their lives. These sites have lasting effect on individual's mental health and wellbeing .The youths engage in comparison of their life success and failures with others on social media sites. This comparison may be upward where one compares with people better than self-leading to reductions in self-esteem, increased feelings of jealousy, anger, injustice, pessimism and arrogance and envy[35].

On other-hand, this comparison maybe downward that is comparing self with others who are low than you leading to feelings ofhappiness, positiveaffect and mental wellbeing.[36]Well-being is a state in which one is happy, in which one experiences many pleasures and few pains, or has many positive and few negative emotions, in which one is well satisfied with one's life.[37]The basic premise of the theory of social comparison processes is that one has "a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities".[38]

Envy is a painful emotion triggered by an unfavorable upward comparison with someone who possesses something we desire, but lack,[39]include affective reactions such as frustration[40], depression, and anxiety[41] are only some of the unpleasant psychological outcomes of envy. Envy isdefined as "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings […] caused by a comparison with a person […] who possesses something we desire",[42]gossiping or "participating in evaluative comments about someone who is not present in the conversation"[43] tends to be a negative term.[44]

In using socialmedia individuals prefer to display their aspects of which they find desirable or feel proud.[45]Since using socialmedia one often compares one's opinions, emotions ,abilities and successes with others on the internet which may lead to feeling happy or unhappy, emotionally content or distressed , feeling competent or incompetent or feeling worthy or less worthy than others Also, people reported more distress when exposed to others' Facebook profiles with successful career.[46]

Effect of social comparison:

By engaging in upward social comparison one may experience envy. Envy is defined as "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by comparison with a person or group of persons who possess something we desire".[47]Due to feeling of envy one may want to

obtain the same status as the other person or wish something bad happens to that person so that helosses his/her better position than self. In addition, upward comparison processes where one becomes self-focused state, and obsessed in meeting external standards such as being better than others consequently being unhappy. Therefore in comparing oneself with others in Facebook can provoke negative psychological responses such as mental distress and anxiety , given that looking at superior others generates feelings of relative depravation that one has fewer possessions or abilities than those people[48].Thus if feelingof envy is triggered the person may feel threatened and engage in negative gossiping behavior.

A very important principle of being safe from jealousy and inferiority has been described by the Messenger of Allah in the following hadith:

On the authority of Abu Huraira, may Allah be pleased with him, the Messenger of Allah, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: "*Look at that which is inferior to you, and do not look at that which is superior to you, so that you do not despise the blessings of Allah".*[49]

This hadith contains a comprehensive discussion of beneficent wills and various virtues and describes the *minhaj-e-saleem* (right path) that a Muslim adopts in this life. If people adopt this will, they will live a patient, grateful and happy life. There are two commandments in the hadith: The first commandment: that a person should look at those who are inferior to him and have less wealth in worldly affairs. The second commandment: Do not look to those who are superior to you in worldly affairs. One who does this; he will get heart contentment and a happy life. He will realize the blessing of Allah, for which he will be grateful and adopt humility and humility. This hadith is specific to worldly affairs. As for the matter of the Hereafter, in this regard, a person should look to someone superior to him; So that he can imitate and follow him, his own shortcomings will be clear and he will be encouraged to obey and worship more.

Happiness in Islam:

The *fitrah* (natural inclination by Almighty Allah) is feeding the spiritual soul with Allah's presence, submission and close bondage with our creator .When one looks at Islamic perspective of Happiness. We find that happiness is actually a permanent state and totally dependable on living a life grounded on Islamic Principles. Thus the reward is obtained in hereafter by permitting entrance in Jannah.

The word happiness (سعاده in Arabic) is statedtwice in the Holy Qur'an, as an adjective and as a verb.

"The Day it comes no soul will speak except by His permission. And among them will be the wretched and the prosperous (happy)"[50]

*"And as for those who were [destined to be] happy, they will be in Paradise, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will - a bestowal uninterrupte*d"[51]

Saada has two dimensions of existence: the hereafter (اخرويہ) which is ultimate form of happiness, and the present world (دنياويہ). The opposite of *Saada* is *Shaqawah*(شقاوہ)conveys a general meaning of 'greatmisfortune. This misfortune includes feeling of grief or unknown fear or envy.

misfortune', 'distress', 'misery', 'disquietude', 'despair', 'the adversity', 'straitened of circumstances' and

'Suffering'. It is from the Shaqwah, its constituent elements such as khawf (fear ohuzn(grief, sorrow, sadness, roughness of soul), khawf(fear of the unknown) dhank (narrowness,), hasrat (profound grief and regret for something gone and never to be experienced again) and similar emotions were derived fro

We also find that joys (فرح) in this world, however, are of two types: negative (blameworthy) joy and positive (praiseworthy) joy. Blameworthy joy is worldly joy.

The Noble Qur'an **states:**

*"They rejoice in the life of this world, yet the life of this world compared to the hereafter is but a fleeting joy"*Praiseworthy joy, however, is to enjoy the bounties of God and to be grateful to Him for those bounties.[52]

The Noble Qur'an "Say: *In the bounty of God, and in His Mercy—in this, then, let them rejoice. That is better than what they hoard (of worldly goods)*"[53] ().

Thus, if one rejoices in these material bounties purely for the sake of worldly acquisition, then it is a blameworthy joy. However, if one rejoices in it as a gift from God, and for the benefit it brings, then it is a praiseworthy joy.

Islam contains many rules that help humans reach satisfaction, peace of mind and happiness and as a result, happiness in hereafter.
Islam not only allows humor, sports and other valid modes of entertainment, but also sets rules and regulations within which human beings can fulfill their natural desire.[54]

An Islamic view of happiness is shown directly in many places in the Noble Qur'an and Hadith, including methods and instructions to become happier. Happiness

is mentioned indirectly in the Noble Qur'an and Sunnah. EveryMuslim's firm belief is that living a life based on Islamic values and principles leads to happiness.[55]Similarly, research among Pakistani Muslims (N = 200) has found that Islamic spirituality is associated with more positive mood and higher meaning in life[56].

"Whoever does well whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a good life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did"[57]

Happiness is "a state of being – a state in which our mind's habitual agitation is calmed". [58]This state of calmness can be only achieved through reconnecting with Allah subhanawatallah.

The Noble Qur'an says :

"*Happy is he who purifies himself and invokes the Name of his Lord and prayeth*"[59],hence a clean heart or purified soul will lead to a happy and contentment soul.

In another verse of Holy Qur'an:

"*Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it be sound, all the body is sound and which, if it be diseased, all of it is diseased. Truly it is the heart*"[60]

"*So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts*"[61]

"*Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah. For without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction – tatma'innu al-Qulub.*[62]"

It is crystal clear in this verse that (true) peace of mind or tranquility can only be obtained from *zikiru'llah*. This verse can be taken as a formula for positive mind and attainment of happiness in this world and in the Hereafter.

Researches on impact of social comparison show that this leads to envy. This envy or Hasid eats up the soul. When oneis immensely engrossed in social networking sites and rigorouslychanges his/her profile to make a glorifying image of oneself. In this state of mind one also consciously or unconsciously envy those on the internet site who share their success or achievements. They may also post criticism or sarcastic comments on the net. This can be further understood by the "internet meme" which gainsvirility online. The Internet meme is a broad category - encompassing still images,

video footage, looping GIFs and text-based jokes. One can say that this than can lead to feeling of envy which is caused by seeing what others have and one does not have. This can be understood with the following verse of the Noble Qur'ān: *Or do they envy [other] people because of what Allah has given them of His bounty?*[63]

Abu `Abd Allah (al-Imam al-Sadiq) (a) said thatAllah Almightyaddressed Musa ibn `Imran (a) as follows:

"O son of `Imran, never be envious of people concerning the favours I have conferred on them by Mygrace; do not glower at them, and do not succumb to your (envious) self. Indeed, the envious man isindignant at the bestowal of Myfavour, and contests My apportioning of gifts among My creatures. Whoever is such, he neither belongs to Me nor do I belong to him"[64]

The Prophet Muhammad (sallallahualaihiwa-sallam) said: "Beware of jealousy, for verily it destroys good deeds the way fire destroys wood.[65]"

When Allah's Messenger (sallallahualaihiwa-sallam) was asked who are the best of people? He (sallallahualaihiwa-sallam) replied: "the one with a clean heart and truthful tongue." They asked: 'We understand a truthful tongue, but what does a clean heart mean?' he (sallallahualaihiwa-sallam) answered: "It is the heart of one that is pious, pure, and is free of sin, transgressions, hatred and Hasad"[66]

The Prophet Muhammad (s) said: "Beware! Do not bear enmity with the blessings of Allah." When asked about the people who bear enmity with the blessings of Allah, he (s) replied: "Those who are envious"[67]

Envy is such a malicious evil that

"Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn… from the evil of envious when he envies"[68]. The fight against feeling of envy is possible when we stop comparing our life style with others and be grateful with whatever we have which leads to happiness.Thus when we are browsing on social network site and find someone who has more worldly good than us so we should not hold grudges against that person.

As the Qur'ansays "Do not strain your eyes in longing for the things that we have given to some groups of them to enjoy, the splendor of the life of this world through which we test them. The provision of your Lord is better and more lasting[69]".

Cleansing of the heart:

The term *Qalb* is an Arabic word derived from the letters q-l-b. The term takes plural forms such as *qulub*, *eqlab*, *qilaba* and '*aqlub*. The term denotes turning something inside out, inverting and transforming[70].

*Qalb*is also defined as "changing something from its existing state to another one[71]".

Al-Firuzabadi (d. 817/1414) states that the word *qalb* refers to "turning and rotating an object [and] changing its direction" and notes that "such rotating involves turning something upside-down, inside out, left-to-right, right-to-left and front-to-back".[72]The word *qalb* in the Qur'an is used to express three meanings. These are the mind, thought and perception, as well as the physical heart itself.

The heart's structure, comprises of :

the bosom (*sadr*) is the seat of Islam,

the heart (qalb) the seat of belief, with cognition being a the function of the heart;

the pericardium (*shaghaf*)[73] , is the seat of love and compassion;

the inner heart (fuad) is seat of beholding Him;

the grain of the heart (*hubbat al-qalb*) is for love of God;

the black dot (suwayda') for disclosure of the Unseen, and the seat of spiritual knowledge and

Divine secrets;

and the blood of the heart (muhjat al-qalb) is the site where God's attributes are manifested"[74]

The following three verses indicate these meanings respectively:

"*Surely in that is a warning reminder for anyone who has a heart (that is truly alive), and who gives ear (to the one conveying this reminder), with eyes able to see well*"[75]

"*You think of them as one body; but, in fact, their hearts are at odds with one another. This is because they are a people who do not reason (and come to an understanding about the situations they face*"[76]

The human heart is also defined as:

Spiritual heart is defined as the luminous jewel addressed by God, held responsible for their actions, punished and rewarded.[77]According to Ghazali "Heart belongs to God rather than the human being, by defining it as the "divine subtle faculty".[78]

Thus this heart when filled with compassion and care of humanity instead of envy and greed will open doors to eternal happiness. This is reflected in another hadith

by Prophet Muhammad where he said : "The people of Yemen have come to you, and they are more soft hearted and gentle hearted people. The capacity for understanding religion is Yemenite and Wisdom is Yemenite[79].

Hence for the heart to be filled with happiness the only road mapis living a life in obedience to Almighty Allah ,through *Salah* and *Zikr* .The question is when youths spend most of the time on the internet and connect with people around the world. Do theythink, probe,question and discuss concepts surrounding true happiness meaning understanding and endorsing actual purpose and meaning in life. Or do they spend time posting or following post related to temporary unstable happiness that is centered on a fake world where everyone tries to portray a positive biased world of themselves. This would automatically create envy and unhappiness. Hence for apure happy content heart Muslims require to hold onto strong faith and be master of good character .A character which is virtuous, holding good qualities and *Amal* which is the nearest means to happiness. Thus both physical health and mental health is mandatory to achieve happiness[80].So when youths connect with people through social media the essence of happiness cannot be obtained through upward social comparison of worldly successes but engaging in productive actions based on good deeds, goodacts, respect and care of humanity and also attaining spiritual growth and development.

That's why Islam has given lot of importance in social relationships and has set rewards on maintaining close ties social ,where there is high rewards for people who take the first step in initiating relationships with significant others.In this way hearts are connected, mutual relations are deep, each other's needs are fulfilled, all members of the society make good behavior and best interaction second nature, then the balance is also filled with goodness and the grades are also elevated.

When social rights are fulfilled, relationships are strengthened, resulting in a strong, iron, and deep-rooted society. The Messenger of Allah said: "A Muslim has six rights over another Muslim. It was asked: The Messenger of Allah is from whom? So he said: When you meet, greet each other and when he invites you, accept it, and when he asks you for advice, give him benevolent advice, and when he sneezes, say Alhamdulillah, then Pray for mercy for him. When he falls ill, visit him and when he dies, go to his funeral".[81]

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