Confucian Values and Their Contemporary Applications on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the ethical implications of using social media and fostering interfaith dialogue across religious traditions and cultures, utilizing Confucian principles as a framework for analysis. This research delves into the nuanced exploration of the Confucian Golden Rule within the Analects focusing on the Confucian concept of Ren, a central virtue emphasizing humaneness, benevolence, and social harmony, which offers valuable guidance for ethical media practices. By examining specific case studies and analyzing the ethical implications of media portrayals, this research aims to identify areas for improvement and offer recommendations for more ethical and responsible media practices by employing the analytical perspectives of Alfredo Co, Richard Ang. Co's meticulous examination unveils the cultural and historical context shaping Confucius' moral paradigm, elucidating the subtle interplay between filial piety and ethical conduct. Ang's critical lens adds depth by dissecting the linguistic nuances embedded in the Analects, deciphering the layered meanings behind Confucius' aphorisms and their implications for moral conduct. Key findings include the challenges of misinformation, online

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harassment, and commercialization in social media. The research highlights the importance of using social media responsibly, promoting religious open-mindedness, and fostering community engagement. This research shows the moral framework created by Co and Ang and investigates the multifaceted pathways of Confucian philosophy, highlighting significance of Confucius' teachings as foundational guidelines for ethical behavior in modern society. It offers valuable insights for religious people, educators, and media professionals seeking to promote ethical and responsible online practices.

Keywords: *religious education, social media, Confucian virtues, ren*

1. Introduction

In today's society, individuals appear to be neglecting moral principles by disregarding fundamental ethical requirements in their communication, interactions, and relationships with others. As technology has advanced and social media platforms have become pervasive, the way we communicate and interact with others has fundamentally changed. This shift has led to a decline in empathy, a crucial component of healthy relationships and a functioning society. However, social media has become an integral part of contemporary society, revolutionizing communication, information sharing, and social interaction. Its impact is particularly significant in education, where it offers new opportunities for learning, collaboration, and engagement.

This research aims to analyze the distinct perspectives of Alfredo Co and Richard Ang. Co's work on Confucian ethics emphasizes the importance of *Ren* (humaneness) in fostering social harmony, their practicality in the fast-paced, often impersonal world of social media requires careful consideration. In his analysis, Co explains, *Ren* can be applied to modern contexts, such as social media, to promote ethical behavior and mutual respect. This aligns with my research as I explore how *Ren* can guide online interactions and interfaith dialogue. Ang's interpretation of Confucian virtues, particularly *Ren* and *Yi* (righteousness),

highlights the importance of self-cultivation and community responsibility. His insights are particularly relevant to my study, as they provide a framework for understanding how Confucian principles can be applied to social media to combat misinformation and promote ethical communication.

The Confucian Golden Rule, preserved within the Analects, has served as a foundational ethical principle shaping societies for ages. The rule is encapsulated in the famous saying, "Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you" (Analects, 15.23) is a fundamental principle that underscores the importance of empathy, compassion, and mutual respect. This principle aligns closely with the Confucian virtue of *Ren*. As Co (2009) explains, *Ren* is not merely a virtue but a foundational principle that guides ethical behavior in both personal and social contexts. This principle is particularly relevant in the digital age, where social media often lacks the empathy and respect that *Ren* promotes. It is the foundation in which we can see the *Zhong* as the positive aspect of the *Ren* and the *Shu* as the comforting reminder or prohibitive advice which is also known as the Confucian Golden Rule.

Confucian morality is deeply relational, emphasizing the interconnections of individuals within a social context. The Confucian virtues *Ren*, *Yi*, *Li*, *Zhi*, and *Xin* underscore this relational aspect, guiding individuals in their interactions and shaping the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Among these core principles, *Ren* stands out as the most fundamental. It is the foundation upon which other virtues are built. *Ren* encompasses a wide range of qualities, including kindness, compassion, love, respect, and empathy (Co 2009). The cultivation of *Ren* involves personal moral development, aiming to create a harmonious and compassionate society.

This research is significant because it addresses a timely and important issue in today's world. As social media continues to play a crucial role in education and communication, it is essential to consider the ethical implications and explore ways to use it effectively for religious education. Using Confucian principles, this research offers a framework for promoting positive and responsible use of social media in this context.

Confucian *Ren* influences social media by promoting ethical technology use, encouraging respect and responsibility while avoiding harmful behaviors like cyberbullying. It fosters interfaith dialogue through respectful online discussions and helps build supportive communities for social communication. Confucian principles help create and share good religious educational materials. However, challenges remain, such as

misinformation, religious extremism, harassment, and distraction from spiritual pursuits. Commercial interests can also affect the spiritual significance of religious content. By adhering to principles of respect, harmony, and responsibility, individuals can influence social media to enhance religious understanding and community, while also addressing these potential issues.

This paper concentrates on Confucian *Ren* providing a valuable framework for understanding the ethical implications of using social media and religious traditions. Applying Confucian principles, individuals can use social media in a way that promotes positive values, fosters community and contributes to a more harmonious and just society. Let us now elaborate on the fundamental function of Confucian principles.

2. Confucian Ethics and Morality

2.1. The Philosophy of *Ru Jia*

The *Ru Jia* is a system of thought and social order; it is often described as a philosophy rather than a religion, as it focuses on ethical and social principles rather than supernatural beliefs. In the history of China, there has been no such thing as Confucianism. Confucius says, "A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old *P'ang*" (Analects 7.1). While the West refers to this as Confucianism, the Chinese term is *Ru Jia*, or the School of Literati. This 'Literati' school represents the philosophy of the lettered class, which, though often equated with the 'educated class' in the West, carries a distinct meaning within *Ru Jia*. Specifically, it's crucial to distinguish between those 'who know' and those merely 'educated,' as true education in *Ru Jia* is understood as a comprehensive cultivation of the self. In Confucian teachings, prophetic characteristics are represented throughout history by wise sages and role models. Profound ethical understanding and knowledge are frequently acquired through their grasp of the principle of harmony, righteousness, and propriety. Confucius is widely regarded as a wise individual whose teachings on ethics, good behavior, and societal balance having significant impact on East Asian culture and philosophy (Le Duc 2024). One of the key concepts in Confucian philosophy is the *Junzi*, translated as "gentleman" or "exemplary person." This is a person who,

though not necessarily possessing innate wisdom, diligently strives to embody Confucian values such as benevolence (*Ren*), righteousness (*Yi*), and propriety (*Li*). Through this dedicated effort, the *Junzi* becomes a moral role model within society, demonstrating a commitment to continuous personal growth and the consistent upholding of ethical principles, thereby demonstrating and pursuing a form of practical wisdom. They lead and inspire others through practicing Confucian values in their everyday lives and relationships (Le Duc 2024)

There are five core Confucian principles known as five Confucian virtues: *Ren* (仁): Humaneness, benevolence, or goodness. This is the central virtue in Confucianism, emphasizing empathy, compassion, and the importance of human relationships. *Yi* (義): Righteousness, justice, or duty. This refers to fulfilling one's obligations and acting by what is right. *Li* (禮): Propriety, etiquette, or ritual. This encompasses the proper way to behave in various social situations, including family, community, and state. *Zhi* (智): Wisdom, knowledge, or understanding. This refers to the ability to think critically, make sound judgments, and learn from experience. *Xin* (信): Trustworthiness, sincerity, or faithfulness. This emphasizes the importance of being honest, reliable, and keeping one's promises. Among these core principles, *Ren* serves as the foundational virtue upon which all others are built. *Ren* emphasizes the importance of human relationships and the cultivation of a moral character. By practicing *Ren*, individuals can contribute to a harmonious and just society.

2.2. Relationship of *Ren* and Confucian Golden Rule

Confucian ethics lies in benevolence or "*Ren*." Confucius regarded *Ren* as the ultimate virtue, emphasizing compassion, kindness, and love toward others. *Ren* involves treating people with empathy and fostering a sense of humanity. It extends beyond familial ties to encompass a broader social responsibility.

Ren has two dimensions: the universal and the particular. In the universal sense, *Ren* is the primary principle of human action. In its particular dimension, *Ren* is used as a principle of moral justification. Confucius considers the universal *Ren* as the first true moral consciousness in the reflection of humanity because the cognition of the other is people first moral awakening: I am not alone, for there is someone else other than I ready to receive me as much as they are prepared to receive attention from

me. For Confucius, the consciousness of *Ren* is not a difficult task as it is almost connected with one's consciousness. Confucius says, "I wish to be virtuous and lo! Virtue is at hand" (Analects, 7.29). *Ren* is, however, also a substantive principle of human conduct. It is love for humanity in the sense of conscious concern for the well-being of others. Confucius elaborates on this idea saying, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others" (Analects, 15.23). This principle, which also appears in Christian teachings, reflects a common human understanding of ethical behavior.

Confucius states that true learning extends beyond academic study or the mere accumulation of knowledge. It involves sincerely embracing virtues, committing fully to serving parents and leaders, and engaging sincerely with friends (Analects, 1.7). Confucius is saying that learning is more than intellectual, academic study, or the accumulation of facts. It is the process of manifesting one's *Ren* by developing oneself in self-reflection through the various types of human relationships.

Confucius' philosophy is founded on the premise of an inherent human nature, upon which he constructed his moral imperatives. In his effort to transform the inner moral consciousness of *Ren* into concrete form, he tried to elaborate on the overlying unity of his teaching. *Ren,* in a broad sense, denotes the *Zhong* and *Shu* concepts in Confucianism; these two related principles act as the concrete model and direction for achieving the ideal of *Ren*. Initially, the character *Zhong* 忠 is made up of two characters, the primary character *Zhong* 中, representing 'center', 'central', or 'middle'; and *Xin* 心, denoting 'heart' and 'mind,' leading to both emotions and logic. Similarly, the character *Shu* 枢 is an intricate ideogram consisting of two radicals: *Nu*, signifying 'woman'; *Kou*, meaning 'mouth'; and once more, *Xin* (Co 2009, 113).

Zhong reflects the positive traits of *Ren's* practice: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." A person embodying *Ren* is aware of others without pretension. It's not about selflessness but doing something both for oneself and for others, seeing others as extensions of oneself. In the Analects, Confucius says, "The man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, also seeks to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he also seeks to enlarge others...to judge others by what is nigh in ourselves; this may be called the art of virtue" (Legge 1893, 6.28). *Zhong* is also tied to *Li*, which governs relationships in society, dictating how individuals should treat each other, such as how a younger brother should treat an elder. It emphasizes kindness, empathy, and respect for others,

beginning with self and extending to family, relatives, and society. Thus, *Zhong* is seen as a 'moral injunction.'

On the other hand, *Shu* carries a negative aspect, focusing on caution or prohibition. When a disciple asked Confucius about perfect virtue, he replied, "It is not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself" (Analects, 12.3). This is a moral refrain, offering cautionary advice similar to a mother's guidance. *Shu* is associated with 'woman' or 'mother' and aims to prevent harm by doing the right thing and avoiding the undesired actions others may inflict. In *Shu*, one's conduct is measured by personal standards, not by others' responses. The practice emphasizes that actions should not depend on others' appreciation (Ang 2011). One should do the right thing, regardless of whether others reciprocate, as it is inherently the right way to behave.

Zhong and *Shu*, known as the 'principle of measuring square' or the Golden Rule of Confucius, stands to regulate conduct and behavior towards others. These principles are what a person of *Ren* adheres to in their moral life, making them the practical application of *Ren*..

The concept of *Ren* may have various aspects, depending on how it is taken, but it is also regarded as the cornerstone of all Confucian teachings (Moore 1951). It means that *Ren* has priority over the other concepts, such as *Li* or *Yi*, and also guides all of the teachings of Confucius, including his teachings on ethics and politics. Moreover, the concept of *Ren* can be identified as Confucius' life ideal: what a person should aspire for and what society should equally strive for to have lasting peace and harmony (Ang 2011).

Ren encourages religious educators to approach social media with compassion and empathy, recognizing the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of their audience. By fostering benevolence, religious institutions can create an inclusive online community that promotes mutual respect and understanding. Additionally, the principle of *Li* can help maintain propriety and ethical conduct in social media use. In an era of misinformation and sensationalism, adhering to propriety ensures the integrity of religious teachings. By following ethical guidelines, religious educators can deliver their messages respectfully and with dignity, free from the distractions and distortions of online discourse.

In conclusion, while *Ren* may be an aspirational ideal, we can make it more practical on social media by actively applying Confucian principles like the Golden Rule, *Li*, and *Yi*. These values provide a clear and adaptable

framework for ethical behavior in digital spaces, helping users navigate the challenges of social media while promoting empathy, respect, and social harmony. Let us now elaborate on the use of social media in relation to the Confucian principle.

3. Using Social Media in Relation to Confucian Principle

Social media consists of Internet-driven applications built on the principles of Web 2.0, which enables the creation and sharing of user-generated content. It facilitates social interaction, allowing users to exchange ideas, viewpoints, and information globally, regardless of time or location (Tartari 2015). Web 2.0 includes social networks like Pirate Bay and MySpace, blogs, and platforms like Facebook, where users create content. These platforms are the foundation of social media (Carlsson 2010).

Kreutzer and Hinz (2010) classified various types of social media platforms, including blogs, microblogging sites like Twitter, media sharing platforms such as YouTube, social bookmarking platforms like StumbleUpon, and discussion boards like Facebook. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) expanded this list to include virtual environments (e.g., Second Life), virtual gaming realms (e.g., World of Warcraft), and collaborative platforms like Wikipedia. These platforms offer entertainment and communication opportunities, especially for young people, and enable global connections that foster relationships and community engagement (Al-Sammak et al. 2024). They can also improve academic performance through collaborative learning, especially in areas like language learning and digital storytelling (Maher 2024). Additionally, social media provides a sense of belonging and support, which is important for personal development (Popovac et al. 2023).

In today's digital age, social media has become a key part of our daily lives, serving as a platform for communication, information sharing, and community building. Religious institutions have also embraced these platforms to connect with their followers and share their teachings. However, using social media for religious education brings unique challenges, especially in preserving the integrity and authenticity of religious teachings in the digital space.

The use of social media presents a complex mix of benefits and challenges that impact individuals and society. It offers advantages such as improved communication, education, and public engagement. However, it also brings risks like mental health issues and misinformation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for maximizing the benefits while minimizing the drawbacks. Social media also poses challenges like cyberbullying, privacy concerns, and addiction, particularly affecting children and teens, requiring effective strategies to address these risks (Tartari 2015).

In a connected world, the complexities of social media culture highlight the global interconnectedness of media and communication. It serves as a double-edged sword, fostering cultural exchange and understanding while raising concerns about homogenization and dominance. Social media facilitates the broad dissemination of Confucian teachings, connecting diverse audiences globally and enhancing understanding of its principles.

Confucian principles present both opportunities and challenges in the realm of social media, particularly in shaping digital interactions and governance. While Confucian values can enhance social cohesion and ethical engagement online, they can also impose constraints on freedom of expression and individual autonomy. Confucianism emphasizes relationships and community, fostering a more respectful and harmonious online environment (Dennis and Ziliotti 2022). It promotes digital well-being through interconnectedness, suggesting individuals thrive within social structures (Dennis and Ziliotti 2022). Social media can serve as a platform to promote Confucian values, enhancing cultural identity and collective values on a global scale (Lingzhi 2022).

However, this potential for enhancing digital well-being is challenged by the tension between individualistic social media practices and Confucian ideals, which prioritize community and social order (Wong 2013). The integration of Confucian principles into technology policy, such as China's digital governance, raises ethical concerns about privacy and state control, revealing the complexities of aligning modern technology with traditional values (Kirk et al. 2020). Ultimately, the challenge is to reconcile the individualistic nature of social media with the collectivist ethos of Confucian teachings, while leveraging its potential to enhance societal cohesion (Lingzhi 2022).

Despite the potential benefits, there are also challenges in using social media for religious education about Confucian teachings. One primary challenge is the risk of misinformation and misinterpretation. Social media

is a decentralized platform where anyone can create and share content, leading to the spread of inaccurate or misleading information about Confucian teachings. This can distort the original teachings, mislead followers, and undermine the integrity of Confucian education (Co 2020).

Another challenge is the potential for digital distractions and information overload. The fast-paced, constantly evolving nature of social media can be overwhelming, making it difficult for followers to focus on deepening their understanding of Confucian teachings or engaging in meaningful dialogue. Moreover, the superficial nature of social media interactions may not always facilitate the deep reflection and contemplation required for studying Confucian principles (Victoria 2019).

To conclude, despite the global reach of social media, Confucian principles offer valuable guidance for ethical conduct in online interactions. Drawing on Confucian principle, I argue that the concept of *Ren* can serve as a guiding virtue for online behavior. Unlike Western approaches that often emphasize individual rights, Confucian ethics focus on relational harmony and mutual respect. This perspective is particularly valuable in addressing issues such as cyberbullying and misinformation, which flourish in environments lacking empathy and accountability.

This research will proceed by investigating the contemporary application of Confucian teachings, specifically through the analytical lenses offered by Alfredo Co and Richard Ang.

4. The Relevance of Confucian Principles and Their Contemporary Applications on Social Media

4.1. Alfredo Co's Perspective on Confucian Ethics

Alfredo Co, a distinguished Filipino philosopher, has made significant contributions to the field, particularly in exploring Confucian ethics within the context of Filipino cultural values. Co's work delves into the intersection of traditional Confucian principles or the Five Confucian Virtues: benevolence (*Ren*), righteousness (*Yi*), rituals (*Li*), wisdom (*Zhi*), Integrity or Sincerity (*Xin*), and the unique sociocultural landscape of the Philippines. One of Co's notable contributions lies in his analysis of Confucian ethics and its resonance with Filipino values. In ancient China, Confucianism emphasized moral virtues, social harmony, and ethical conduct. Co

skillfully interprets these principles through the lens of Filipino culture, recognizing the importance of familial ties, respect for elders, and communal well-being in the Philippine context. He explains that Confucian principles, particularly on *Ren,* can be applied to the ethical use of social media. Co emphasizes the importance of using social media to promote human flourishing and social harmony.

The start of social media has fundamentally transformed human interaction, creating new opportunities for connection but also introducing challenges such as misinformation and online harassment. In this context, Confucian principles like *Ren* and *Li* offer a valuable framework for navigating these complexities. It promotes peace, tolerance, and understanding among diverse faith communities (Mukherjee 2022). By facilitating cross-cultural dialogue, sharing religious knowledge, and fostering empathy, social media can contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive society. Nevertheless, it has also transformed into a channel for disseminating false information, promoting hate speech, and encouraging religious intolerance. To tackle these obstacles, it is essential to promote a culture of respect, tolerance, and understanding in digital environments. Confucian values, with their emphasis on humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, provide a valuable framework for understanding the ethical implications of using social media for religious purposes. The focus on humaneness (*Ren*) in Confucian values offers a helpful guide for navigating the challenges of social media and encouraging dialogue between different faiths.

Co's (2009) meticulous examination of Confucian ethics reveals the cultural and historical context that shapes Confucius' moral paradigm. He emphasizes the interplay between filial piety (*Xiao* 孝) and ethical conduct, which is crucial for understanding how Confucian values can be applied to modern challenges such as social media. Co's work provides a bridge between traditional Confucian thought and contemporary issues, offering a framework for ethical behavior in digital spaces. In the Filipino context, Co highlights the reciprocity inherent in the *Bayanihan* spirit—communal unity and cooperation. The ideal society of Confucius promotes a harmonious relationship among morally perfected individuals with a well-ordered structure based on citizen's mutual attachment to individual obligations.

Social media can promote religious tolerance by providing a platform for people to share their stories and experiences. As Co interprets it, this interconnectedness aligns with the Confucian ideal of fostering a

harmonious society through mutual respect and understanding. By sharing personal narratives about their religious beliefs and practices, individuals can make their faith more relatable, helping to dispel misunderstandings and stereotypes. A study by the Pew Research Center (2018) found that 53 percent of social media users have changed their views on an issue because of something they saw on social media. Thus, sharing personal stories on social media can be an effective way to challenge negative stereotypes and foster empathy and understanding among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.

However, it is important to use social media responsibly and ethically. Confucian principles can guide individuals in navigating the complexities of the digital world. For example, the principle of *Yi* (righteousness) encourages individuals to use social media to promote truth and justice (Co 2009). This means avoiding the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and harmful content. By applying the principle of *Yi* to social media, individuals can use their knowledge and critical thinking skills to identify and debunk false information, promoting accurate and reliable information online. By following the values of integrity and transparency, people can encourage productive communication and prevent damaging actions such as online harassment and discriminatory remarks. Understanding the importance of privacy, individuals can be mindful of the information they share online and take steps to protect their own and others' privacy. By using social media to advocate for social justice and environmental sustainability, individuals can contribute to a more just and equitable world. As individuals, we should commit to verifying information before sharing it, producing truthful, respectful, and informative content, and consciously managing our screen time to avoid excessive social media use.. And lastly by embracing the Confucian principle of *Yi*, individuals can use social media as a tool for good, promoting understanding, compassion, and social justice.

In addition, practicing *Li* (propriety) as proper digital etiquette and responsible behavior online (Co 2009). *Li* refers to appropriate behavior and societal conventions. Within the realm of social media, it leads the way to ethical online conduct. *Li*, reminds us that online interactions, though virtual, are still social. Just as we adhere to etiquette in face-to-face encounters, we must uphold "netiquette" in online spaces, respecting community norms and engaging in civil discourse. Confucian teachings, with its emphasis on wisdom (*Zhi*) and trustworthiness (*Xin*) (Co 2009), offers a

valuable framework for navigating the complex landscape of social media. These two virtues, when applied to online interactions, can help individuals to use social media ethically and effectively. Wisdom, as understood in Confucian teachings, involves the ability to discern right from wrong, to think critically, and to make sound judgments. In the context of social media, wisdom can be applied in the following ways by encouraging individuals to critically evaluate information and to be wary of misinformation and disinformation. Promoting digital literacy skills, such as the ability to identify credible sources to recognize bias and use wisdom to make informed decisions about how to use social media, including the types of content to share and the amount of time spent online. The importance of trustworthiness (*Xin*) is another key Confucian virtue that can be applied to social media. By being honest, reliable, and keeping one's promises, individuals can build trust with others and contribute to a positive online environment. Some ways to apply *Xin* to social media include being genuine and authentic in online interactions. Engaging in respectful and civil discourse, even when disagreeing with others respecting the privacy of others, and avoiding sharing personal information without consent. By integrating the principles of *Zhi* (wisdom) and *Xin* (trustworthiness), individuals can use social media to engage in ethical and responsible social communication. This includes sharing accurate and reliable information, engaging in constructive dialogue, and fostering a sense of community. Eventually, the goal is to use social media as a tool for good, promoting peace, understanding, and spiritual growth. By applying Confucian principles, individuals can navigate the challenges of the digital age and use social media to benefit themselves and others.

Afredo Co's philosophy provides a crucial lens through which to apply these Confucian principles. Co emphasized the importance of contextualizing ethical frameworks, recognizing that abstract principles must be adapted to specific situations. This approach is particularly relevant to social media, a dynamic and ever-evolving environment. Co's work encourages us to move beyond a rigid interpretation of Confucianism, instead urging us to apply its core values in a manner that addresses the unique challenges of the digital age.

The framework proposed here, combining Confucian principles and Alfredo Co's contextual approach, offers a powerful tool for fostering ethical social media communication. By cultivating empathy, respecting online etiquette, promoting truth and justice, using wisdom and critical

thinking, and building trust, we can create a more positive and productive online environment. By grounding our online interactions in these timeless values, we can harness the power of social media for good, promoting connection, understanding, and positive change.

4.2. Richard Ang's Perception on Confucian Virtues

In the digital age, the ethical challenges presented by social media demand a healthy framework for moral guidance. Richard Ang, O.P., a respected Filipino philosopher and priest, offers a crucial perspective by bridging ancient Confucian wisdom with contemporary realities. Ang's scholarship, marked by a commitment to academic excellence and social responsibility (University of Santo Tomas, n.d.), delves into the enduring relevance of Confucian virtues, particularly benevolence (*Ren*) and righteousness (*Yi*), in navigating modern ethical dilemmas. Importantly, Ang's work goes beyond mere historical analysis, demonstrating how these core Confucian principles can be practically applied to today's complex social landscapes. This contextualization is especially pertinent to the realm of social media, where issues like misinformation, online harassment, and the cultivation of virtual communities require a nuanced ethical approach. By illuminating how Confucian values can inform our understanding of these challenges, Ang provides a valuable foundation for exploring the application of these principles in fostering ethical and harmonious online interactions.

Confucian teachings presents both opportunities and challenges in the context of social media, particularly in Confucian-influenced societies. On one hand, social media can facilitate the expression of Confucian values such as harmony and collective well-being, fostering connections with Confucian emphasis on relational roles within society (Dennis and Ziliotti 2022). This potential for enhancing digital well-being and community engagement is significant, as Confucian ethics advocate for flourishing through social structures (Dennis and Ziliotti 2022). Social media can help reduce conflicts stemming from religious differences by linking various people and promoting information sharing. To enhance its beneficial effects, users must be able to analyze, comprehend, and assess content while steering clear of biases (Jacoba 2023). Using Confucian values, emphasizing humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, provides a valuable framework for ethical social media use. By applying

Confucian principles, individuals can use social media to promote positive values and avoid harmful behaviors.

Ang's perspective on cultivating Confucian virtues is grounded in the belief that these qualities are not innate but must be actively developed through practice and reflection. He draws on the teachings of Confucius and his disciples to illustrate this point. For example, in the Analects, Confucius famously states, "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself." This principle, known as the Golden Rule, is a cornerstone of Confucian morality and highlights the importance of empathy and reciprocity in cultivating benevolence (Ang 2011, 561).

Ang explains that the development of benevolence requires both empathy for others and deep self-reflection. He emphasizes the importance of "self-cultivation" (*xiushen*), a process of introspection and self-improvement that enables individuals to develop their moral character. According to Ang, self-cultivation involves lifelong learning, self-reflection, and a willingness to acknowledge one's shortcomings and strive for improvement (Ang 2011, 553-558). The Confucian *Ren* involves recognizing and responding to the feelings and needs of others. It encourages individuals to extend their empathy beyond their immediate circle and act with kindness and understanding toward everyone. This compassionate attitude fosters harmony and strengthens social bonds, which are vital for a stable and just society.

Confucius stressed that *Ren* should be cultivated through practice and reflection, with the ultimate goal of creating a more humane and just world. Reaching the peak of self-cultivation involves seeing oneself as interconnected with others and prioritizing their needs over selfish desires. As Huston Smith remarks, shifting empathy from oneself to one's family helps overcome selfishness. Extending this empathy from the family to the community transcends favoritism, and moving from a local community to a larger nation helps overcome narrow-mindedness. Ultimately, shifting toward a focus on all of humanity combats extreme nationalistic pride (Le Duc 2023).

Confucian *Ren* emphasizes the importance of respecting others, even those with different beliefs. Social media can serve as a platform to foster interfaith dialogue and promote mutual understanding. Communication, within the Confucian framework, is not limited to humans, but ethical communication among individuals necessitates personal self-cultivation and transformation, striving to embody the traits that signify complete self-

realization (Le Duc 2023). Confucian principles can guide social media users to engage in respectful and constructive online discourse, helping to avoid harmful language and behavior.

Ang's insights into the practical application of Confucian ethics in contemporary contexts are particularly relevant in light of global challenges such as social inequality. He explains that Confucianism offers a unique perspective on these issues, emphasizing the importance of community responsibility and inter-generational justice. *Ren* as love or benevolence begins in the family but does not end there. It is continually extended to society until it covers all people. Confucius argued that the natural affection between relatives within one's family is the starting point of social morality. Ang explores the concept of filial piety (*xiao*), which he explains has important implications for environmental sustainability. According to Ang, filial piety involves a sense of responsibility for future generations, which can be extended to include environmental responsibility (Ang 2011, 548).

Ang suggests that Confucianism offers a unique perspective on human rights that emphasizes community responsibility and interdependence. Ang explains that Confucianism emphasizes the importance of balancing individual rights with community responsibilities, highlighting the need for individuals to act in ways that promote social harmony and benefit society, particularly on social media.

Social media can create online communities that support spiritual growth and provide opportunities for shared learning and reflection. This viewpoint examines the possibility of nurturing spiritual development by acknowledging the relationship between humans and Artificial Intelligence (AI). By taking a balanced approach, recognizing the distinctiveness of human intellect, and comprehending the intricate dynamics between humans and with the use of AI, we can foresee a future in which the rise of robots, especially in this time of digital advancements, does not endanger humanity but brings about a period defined by harmony and coexistence (Jacoba 2023). One of the most significant benefits of social media is its ability to reach a wider audience. By utilizing platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, religious organizations can connect with people from all over the world. This can be particularly beneficial for smaller religious groups or those with limited resources. In the Philippines, they have begun integrating Confucian principles like *Ren* and *Li* into their social media strategies. For instance, the University of Santo Tomas has used Facebook to promote interfaith dialogue, emphasizing respect and empathy in online

discussions. This approach aligns with Confucian values and demonstrates how traditional ethics can inform modern digital practices. By engaging with people of different faiths, individuals can learn from one another and build bridges of empathy and respect. This aligns with the Confucian principle of *Ren*, which emphasizes the importance of humaneness and compassion. In the online world, this means being respectful, kind, and empathetic towards others. Individuals can cultivate digital empathy by considering others' emotions before posting or commenting online, and foster online compassion by utilizing social media to support and encourage others and spread positivity. Furthermore, preventing cyberbullying requires discouraging any online harassment or bullying and stressing the negative impact it can have. The concept of Confucian *Ren* stresses the importance of human kindness, goodwill, and understanding, providing a useful guide for dealing with the challenges of social media. Through the utilization of *Ren* principles, people can encourage empathetic communication, facilitate comprehension, and reduce the adverse effects of online interactions. Knowing one's cultural heritage can boost empathy, enhance communication, and promote collaboration in varied environments. When individuals neglect their cultural heritage, they are more likely to overlook its importance. Due to the impact of mass media, it is challenging to reclaim the role of our culture in influencing our identity. The truth is that although we are not as unified, coherent, consistent, and enduring as we often think, we are still genuine and unique (Placido 2024).

Empathy is a central belief of *Ren*, involving the capacity to comprehend and resonate with someone else's emotions. In my view, Confucian *Ren* goes beyond mere empathy; it calls for active engagement in fostering social harmony. This principle is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where anonymity often leads to a lack of accountability. By applying *Ren*, individuals can create more respectful and inclusive online communities. It also stresses the significance of showing respect towards others. In the digital era, this means showing considerate behavior online by refraining from cyberbullying, hate speech, and personal attacks. Treating others with dignity and respect helps create a positive and constructive online atmosphere. Growing hours of screen usage among young people has a detrimental effect on their language abilities and social engagements, especially if they spend over two hours per day on screens (Dy et al. 2023).

Excessive social media use among youth can disrupt sleep, lower academic performance, and increase anxiety. While media like anime promote

values such as friendship, concerns about violence and inappropriate content make their impact on youth uncertain. Medina's research links sexual content in mass media to increased sex crimes, and the accessibility of online pornography has contributed to a rise in 'cybersex' among youth (Nuncio, 2019). This misuse of social media can lead to mental health issues like depression and anxiety, pushing young people toward violence to resolve problems. Confucian philosophy advocates for responsible and ethical technology use. In social media, this means avoiding misinformation, protecting privacy, and promoting positive change. Applying Confucian principles can help foster understanding, build community, and support social justice.

In conclusion, Ang's work on Confucian virtues and moral development has provided valuable insights into the enduring relevance of Confucianism in modern society. His emphasis on self-cultivation and community responsibility offers a unique perspective on social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability. As we grapple with global challenges such as social inequality, especially in Social media Ang's insights offer a valuable resource for understanding how traditional philosophies can inform contemporary debates about morality and social responsibility.

Social media, while offering many benefits, also presents challenges such as the spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, and addiction. By applying Confucian principles, individuals can mitigate these challenges and promote a more positive online experience. Countering misinformation by critically evaluating information and avoiding the spread of false or misleading content, individuals can help combat the spread of misinformation. Promoting digital citizenship using Confucian principles can guide individuals in becoming responsible digital citizens, respecting others' rights, and promoting online civility. By balancing digital and real-world relationships by maintaining a balance between online and offline interactions, individuals can avoid excessive screen time and prioritize real-world relationships. Confucian principle emphasizes the importance of respecting others, even if they hold different opinions or beliefs. This can be applied to social media by avoiding personal attacks, engaging in constructive dialogue, and promoting respectful debate. By engaging in respectful dialogue, individuals can foster positive relationships and promote a more inclusive online community (Berling 1996). Encouraging honesty and truthfulness, *Ren* advises people to be genuine and truthful in their dealings with others. In the realm

of social media, this involves refraining from sharing false or misleading information. By providing truthful and dependable information, people can help enhance a well-informed and enlightened conversation. Confucian principle highlights the significance of social harmony and peace. In today's digital era, this involves utilizing social media to advance comprehension, acceptance, and collaboration. Individuals can help create a more peaceful and harmonious online space by promoting constructive dialogue and avoiding divisive language.

Lastly, Confucian ideas about *Ren* offer a helpful way to manage social media. By focusing on empathy, respect, and responsibility, as described by Alfredo Co and Richard Ang, people can use social media to create positive change and build a kinder online community. While existing research has explored the application of Confucian principles to social media, there is a need for a more systematic approach to integrating these values into digital platforms. I propose that social media platforms adopt 'Confucian Ethical Guidelines,' which would encourage users to prioritize empathy, respect, and responsibility in their online interactions. These guidelines could be implemented through features such as content moderation algorithms that prioritize respectful discourse and educational campaigns that promote digital literacy and ethical behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how Confucian values, particularly *Ren* (humaneness), intersect with social media in the context of religious practices. It highlights the importance of ethical considerations and the application of Confucian principles when evaluating the advantages and challenges of using social media for religious purposes, drawing on the analytical perspectives of Co and Ang.Confucian *Ren* provides a valuable framework for navigating the complexities of social media. By emphasizing empathy, compassion, and social harmony, *Ren* can guide individuals to use social media responsibly and ethically. Through the lens of *Ren*, people can foster dialogue among different religions, combat misinformation, and build a sense of community. However, it is also crucial to recognize the potential challenges associated with social media, such as the spread of false information, cyberbullying, and addiction. Individuals must develop digital

literacy skills, apply critical thinking, and remain mindful of their online behavior to effectively address these issues.

In summary, when used wisely, social media has the potential to promote religious education and facilitate discussions between different practices. By adhering to Confucian teachings, individuals can use these platforms to create a more equitable, compassionate, and peaceful society. We are encouraged to explore further research on how social media shapes individual and collective religious identities and practices. By continuing to investigate these areas, researchers can enhance our understanding of the intricate relationship between religion, technology, and society.

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