DIGITAL**PROFILE**

The Me on the Screen. Who Am I, Really?



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SOCIAL ESSAY · DIGITAL SOCIOLOGY · SPIRITUAL SELF-RECKONING

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PREFACE

As We Change, Where Is the World Going?

People have always changed. We found new roads, made new tools, shortened distances. But no change has shaken the way we tell the world who we are so quickly or so deeply.

We no longer have just one life. There is the life we live, and there is the life we show. The second one we share, edit, and sometimes build again from scratch. We call it digital life.

With a photograph we can say we are happy, with two sentences what we think, with a location where we are. We witness the lives of people we have never met. And we care about the comments of people who have never met us. Spending most of the day in front of a screen, we build a new identity without noticing.

A profile photo, a username, a few posts, and the traces we leave behind. How much do these say about us? **Is looking at someone's profile enough to know them?**

Maybe that is not the real question. The real question is this: Why does a person need a profile to say who they are, and how does that profile come, over time, to take up so much room in their life?

We know people with thousands of followers who feel alone. We talk instantly with someone miles away and cannot talk with the person at our own table. We can make everyone hear us, yet we struggle to listen to one another.

It would be unfair to blame all of this on technology. Technology has made knowledge easier to reach and has opened doors in many fields, from education to health. I do not deny that.

But the greater the means in our hands, the more it matters what we use them for. The issue is not how far technology has advanced. **The issue is where the human being stands in that advance.**

Are we going to measure how advanced a society is by its phones, its software, its internet speed? What about respect, trust, mercy, justice, privacy, responsibility? Where do these values stand in our digital lives?

How do we treat someone whose opinion we do not share? How much responsibility do we feel when we write a comment about someone we do not know? When we share another person's private life, spread a piece of news without verifying it, or hurt the person at the other end of the screen, do we think about the consequences?

Why do we write so easily on a screen the words we could never say face to face? And perhaps most important of all: **Can we be the same person when we think no one sees us?**

DigitalProfile was written to go after these questions. I have no wish to disparage social media, reject technology, or declare digitalization an enemy of humanity. On the contrary: At a time when technology has become inseparable from our lives, I want us to think again, together, about what it means to be human.

Over these pages we will talk about digital identity, the wish to be liked, loneliness, family, friendship, privacy, digital ethics, and what artificial intelligence brings with it.

In doing so we will not only criticize others. We will ask ourselves questions too. Because when we describe how society is changing, we cannot leave ourselves out. Some of the habits we criticize are ours as well. I am not outside that sentence either.

The aim of the book is not to describe the perfect human being. It is to help a person, a little, to see what is lacking in themselves. I do not claim to give a definite answer to every question. I have tried to set side by side different views that draw on scientific studies, observation, and everyday life.

I do not expect you to agree with every thought of mine. I would value it more if you objected and asked the questions again in the terms of your own life. Thinking is not accepting an idea; it is being able to question it when necessary.

You may find a piece of yourself in this book. You may be reminded of someone close to you, or of a friend. Or you may notice a habit of yours that you had never paid attention to.

If these pages lead someone to listen to another person a little more carefully, to pause for a moment before sharing, to make a little more time for the people they love, then writing them will have been worth it.

All of us leave traces in the digital world. But a person's worth is not decided by how many people follow them or how many likes their posts receive.

A person is not just the faces they show. The good deeds no one sees, the sacrifices no one knows of, the burdens carried in silence, the courage to face one's own mistakes, and the traces left in other people's lives are part of them too.

Throughout this book we will try to understand the person behind the screen. We will look again at ourselves, at one another, and at the society we live in. At the end of the road we may be left alone with a single question:

If all our digital profiles were deleted one day, what would be left that truly says who we are?

That question is what this book is really about. You are invited to think, to question, and to understand the human being anew.

Happy reading.

01

PART ONE

Who Am I in the Digital World?

Identity, the self, and the wish to be seen



CHAPTER 1

01

Our Two Faces

What everyone sees, what no one knows

Before we leave the house in the morning, we look in the mirror. We fix our hair and glance over our clothes. When we pick up the phone, a different kind of getting ready begins. This time the mirror is not made of glass. It is the profile on the screen. We decide which photo to put up, which moment of our life to show. The same person stands in both mirrors. But the two do not always tell the same story.

The difference is not necessarily a deception. In every setting a person brings forward a different side of himself. A teacher is one way in the classroom and another at home. The way we talk at work is not the way we talk with childhood friends. Social life is made of roles to begin with. What the digital world has added is this: those roles are now permanent, editable, and played out in front of large crowds. A deleted remark travels on as a screenshot. A photograph turns up in front of us years later.

The Test of the Image

Let us picture an imagined scene. A young man wants to share a photo taken with a family he has helped. He is happy to have helped. He wants to encourage others to do good as well. But as he edits the photo again and again, he realizes he is busier with the image than with the help. Two questions appear before him: Whom will it serve for this good deed to be seen? If no one were going to see it, would I still have done it?

Here it is easy to pass judgment and hard to understand. Making a good deed known can set an example for others. Keeping it hidden protects us from showing off. Each person's intention is between that person and Allah. We cannot rule on someone else's heart, but we can question our own intention. We think about sincerity and showing off not to condemn others but to examine our own inner world.

There is nothing wrong with sharing a success. But sharing a success and living for success are different things. Do we live a moment because we find it worth living, or because it looks worth sharing? If our hand goes to the phone first when we look at our child's smile, we are choosing between being that moment's witness and being its exhibitor.

Not Two-Faced, Just Two Spaces

The "two faces" in this chapter's title were not chosen to accuse anyone of being two-faced. What I mean is the difference between the visible space and the private one. No one has to share every thought with everyone. Privacy is not a shortcoming. It is a boundary that protects human dignity. The problem is not guarding our boundary; it is systematically distorting our reality for the sake of being seen, and ending up a prisoner of the image we built ourselves.

A family may look flawless from the outside, but every family has troubles it must work through. A student who posts one success after another may be struggling inwardly with a fear of failure. Knowing this reminds us, instead of envying the lives on display, that everyone may be carrying a burden we cannot see. Profiles are incomplete windows. Through that window we cannot see every room of the house.

The Line Between Role and Character

Behaving differently in different settings does not mean becoming someone else each time. A person can be serious in a meeting, cheerful while playing with a child, quiet at the bedside of a sick relative. Character is not using the same words everywhere. It is being able to keep the same values everywhere. The language of a work account and that of an account for friends may differ. What matters is that behind the changing tone there stands a line of honesty that does not change.

The real problem arises when we begin to turn out, without pause, a story about ourselves that even we do not believe. Someone who feels obliged to look happy all the time cannot admit unhappiness even to himself. Someone who talks like an expert on every subject is ashamed to ask a question. For someone who appears never to make a mistake, apologizing gets harder. The profile is no longer a space set up to impress others. It becomes a mold that squeezes us.

Taking a photo with a forced smile on a tired evening is no great problem. But if it happens all the time, and hiding our state of mind has become an obligation, we need to ask a more basic question: Why do I think I have to look strong in front of everyone, always? One sincere answer given in the company of a friend can bring more relief than hundreds of likes.

Responsibility on the Unseen Side

A person who knows he is being watched follows the rules more easily. When the watching eases, his values decide his choices. In the digital world, anonymity, distance, and speed create a feeling of invisibility. People write with a harshness they would never use face to face. They copy someone else's work with ease. They assume what they do will never come back to them. Yet moral

responsibility reaches much further than the chance of getting caught.

Suppose a colleague has shared with you a presentation she prepared. You could publish it under your own name without crediting her. Technically, no one would stop you. But you know the work is not yours. Respect for someone's labor does not begin with the firewall added to a system. A person shows his character when he chooses not to do wrong even though he could.

This is why digital security and digital ethics complete each other. Security blocks unauthorized access. Ethics places a responsibility on the authorized as well. An employee may have access to customer data. Poking through it out of curiosity, using it for his own business, or handing it to someone else is another matter. A sense of trust (*amanah*) is more than protecting a password.

Small Moments That Test Intention

It is often not the big events that reveal a person's inner world but the small acts. Correcting a friend who has shared false information without embarrassing him in front of everyone. Not rushing to make a good deed known. Naming those who contributed. Being able to stay silent on a subject you do not know. These do not show on a profile, but they nourish character.

We do not have to explain our intention to everyone. What matters is being genuine inside. The weight Islamic ethics gives to sincerity offers a footing here: without treating people's appreciation as wholly unimportant, to find the real measure in doing what is right and in seeking Allah's approval. We cannot read another person's heart. We can put questions to our own.

A Mirror Exercise for the Reader

Divide a page into three columns. Head the first “What I know about myself,” the second “What I show online,” and the third “What those close to me see in me.” Then add a few qualities: patience, truthfulness, diligence, compassion, listening, control of anger, sharing. A difference between the columns is not a sign of something bad. It only shows that there is a distance worth thinking about.

Next, choose a single behavior. If you talk about courtesy online and are short-tempered at home, pay attention for one week to how you speak with your family. You do not need to announce the result to anyone. Sometimes a quiet correction made in your life is worth more than the most brilliant introduction you could write about yourself.

? A QUESTION FOR MYSELF

What are the differences between the me that everyone knows and the me that no one sees? Which of them is privacy, and which is an inconsistency I need to work on?

END OF THE SAMPLE

The journey does not *end here.*

The pages you have read are only the beginning. The full book is a self-reckoning that runs from the wish to be liked to the family table, from privacy to artificial intelligence.

05	parts, 20 chapters
20	“A Question for Myself” stops
30	-day Digital Self-Reckoning Journal
+	Epilogue, notes, and annotated references

If all our digital profiles were deleted one day, what would be left that truly says who we are?

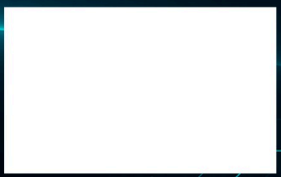
We know people with thousands of followers who feel alone. We talk instantly with someone miles away and cannot talk with the person at our own table. We type on a screen, with ease, words we could never say face to face.

DigitalProfile neither condemns social media nor rejects technology. It follows a single question: Can we be the same person when we think no one is watching? From the wish to be liked to the family table, from friendship to privacy, from algorithms to artificial intelligence, it looks at every corner of digital life through conscience, trust, and responsibility.

A question to ask yourself waits at the end of every chapter, and a thirty-day digital self-reckoning journal at the end of the book.

ERKAN EROL

Pursuing graduate studies in software engineering and artificial intelligence. He looks at technology through the eyes of both those who build it and those who live with it.



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