

Virtue in the Viral Age: Ethical Social Media Governance in the Age of Information

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ABSTRACT

The unregulated social media has led to an influx of information that has influenced the psychosocial character of Muslim societies, including Pakistan. While digital means of connectivity and expression have become vital for people, they are also supposed powerful tools for misinformation, slander, and a decline in morality, causing distress, distrust, and disruption to social systems within families, communities, and the nation. The idealization of false narratives, disrespect for state institutions, and viral negativity often lead to emotional distress, declining self-esteem, and societal polarization. The already available literature suggests that several reports and research papers have elaborated various dimensions of social media governance. Various scholars have established ethical grounds for social media in the light of Islamic principles. The study highlights the psychosocial trauma caused by social media through misinformation and suggests spirituality-based ethical guidelines for responsible digital behavior. Learning from various historical incidents from the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, this paper explores how defamation through unverified information can traumatize individuals and their communities. It is established in the paper that Qurān strongly discourages the spread of rumors and emphasizes verification before judgment. It also states that Prophet Muhammad PBUH condemned the dissemination of false information to save society from its negative psychosocial impact and trauma. Based on Sīrah, it advocates for public awareness, character building, and media ethics driven by Islamic teachings to avert the psychological harm of misinformation and help rejuvenate trust and social cohesion in Pakistan. Based on a qualitative analysis of Islamic texts and current sources, the study demonstrates community involvement, digital literacy, and faith-based ethical guidelines as ways to counteract the negative effects of social media.

Keywords: Social media, Rumors, Misinformation, Digital Platforms, Islamic Ethics.

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Introduction

Social media has surpassed both print and electronic media in influence, playing an important role in shaping public opinion about various national and international affairs, whether positively or negatively. News and information now spread globally within seconds, amplifying their impact. The power of social media is demonstrated through the strong digital presence of elements otherwise invisible are able to draw worldwide attention to their narrative, generating extensive discussions and analyses that continue to this day. In Pakistan, we are experiencing an unprecedented wave of internal and external propaganda, thereby warranting a serious response from the religious perspective, besides other angles by the state that claims to be based on Islamic ideology.

Various state institutions in Pakistan are actively exploring measures to regulate social media. During the recent past, a total of 462 social media accounts involved in spreading religious discord and harmful content have been blocked by the Anti-Extremism Unit of Islamabad Police. Additionally, 522 accounts engaged in negative activities have been flagged for closure in collaboration with the FIA. Among the blocked accounts, 65 were linked to religious extremism, 47 were involved in anti-state propaganda, and 350 were disseminating terrorist content. Authorities plan to shut down an additional 1,060 accounts soon as part of broader efforts to curb extremism and enhance national security.¹

While law enforcement agencies are also taking legal action against individuals engaged in such activities, public cooperation has been sought to discourage the spread of false and inflammatory content on social media. Many social media users, including Pakistanis living abroad, frequently post content on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram that promotes negative propaganda against political parties, the judiciary, the government, and other institutions, including the armed forces. It requires strategic measures to prevent misinformation and ensure the integrity of the nation. The Interior Ministry has been emphasizing the urgency of controlling social media, underscoring the need for regulation without undermining its positive potential.

Concerning excessive digital consumption and its negative impact extend beyond our geographical boundaries. The United Nations recently called for banning smartphones in educational institutions worldwide to improve students' learning abilities and shield them from online misinformation. A UNESCO report highlights evidence that excessive screen time negatively affects academic performance and emotional stability. The report warns that while digital technology offers opportunities, its benefits are often overstated, and its risks require careful attention. UNESCO advocates technology that enhances learning rather than distracts from it, emphasizing that digital connections cannot replace human relationships. The study, which analyzed 200 education systems globally, found that one in six countries has already implemented school smartphone bans, a policy Pakistan could consider adopting.²

Islam offers an enduring command that resounds profoundly in our modern, hyperconnected world, as Qurān says:

“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned.”³

1 Noorani, Syed Arif, Social media control: Government worried, Jang, April 17, 2024

2 Kirschner, P. A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2019). Association between Screen Media Use and Academic Performance among Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, (2018), P: 315.

3 Qurān, Surah Al-Isra: 17:36

At the heart of this verse, Qurān has highlighted the need for responsibility of thought, word, and deed. It gives a warning against engaging in matters without evidence, as it happens on various social media platforms. We, daily, scroll through posts containing news, controversies, opinions, and personal stories. We too often react to the posts not only unwittingly, but also with instant judgment leading to the maligning of personalities, governments, and institutions. The idealization of false narratives, disrespect for state institutions, and viral negativity often lead to emotional distress, declining self-esteem, and societal polarization. This paper, learning from various historical incidents from the Sirah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, explores how defamation through unverified information can traumatize individuals and the communities. It is established in the paper that Qurān strongly discourages the spread of rumours and emphasizes verification before judgment.

Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to thoroughly investigate the effects of social media through the perspective of Islamic teachings and recent advancements in digital communication. The methodology involves a comprehensive analysis of secondary data, including official reports, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and news archives that record the challenges that social media presents within Pakistan and internationally. Particular focus has been placed on instances of misinformation, propaganda, and digital extremism, emphasizing how these concerns relate to societal values, national security, and religious sensitivities.

Simultaneously, primary Islamic texts—such as the Qurān, Hadith, and the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—have been examined to derive ethical insights that are pertinent to the responsible use of communication platforms. A thematic analysis has been employed to pinpoint consistent principles within Islamic literature that dissuade rumour propagation, slander, and making judgments without verification, thereby providing a moral framework to mitigate the detrimental effects of unregulated digital conversations.

To improve the linguistic precision, artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been utilized judiciously. These tools assisted in synthesizing extensive amounts of textual information, creating initial drafts, and refining the language without compromising the research's authenticity or originality. AI also helped in structuring available information from credible digital sources and academic databases, thus enhancing the efficiency of the literature review and the overall analysis. Nonetheless, all final interpretations, judgments, and recommendations have been derived by the researcher, ensuring that the application of AI acts as an aid rather than a determining factor in the research methodology.

By employing this combined qualitative approach, the paper seeks to provide both a thorough assessment of the adverse effects of social media and a constructive response grounded in Islamic ethical principles and historical examples.

Literature Review:

The increasing prominence of social media as a crucial entity in the distribution of information has garnered academic interest worldwide, particularly regarding its capacity to swiftly influence public perception, often obscuring the distinction between reality and misinformation. Researchers like Castells (2009)¹ have highlighted the changes brought about by the “network society,” in which digital communication surpasses traditional media in terms

1 Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), P: 19-35

of speed, scope, and impact. In Pakistan, this shift to digital media has significant consequences. Ahmad and Mustafa (2022)¹ note that social media acts as a double-edged sword, facilitating grassroots activism while simultaneously allowing the spread of false information, sectarian narratives, and political propaganda.

Numerous studies emphasize the growing prevalence of online disinformation and its socio-political impacts in vulnerable democracies such as Pakistan. As noted by Khan and Yousaf (2021),² social media platforms in the nation are often misused to harm state institutions, disseminate extremist ideologies, and sway public opinion. The unregulated spread of this type of content not only erodes national unity but also exacerbates sectarian conflicts and diminishes confidence in democratic systems. These conclusions are consistent with recent government statistics showing a concerning number of social media accounts that have been blocked or flagged for their roles in promoting terrorism, religious extremism, and anti-state propaganda.³

International organizations have addressed the issues stemming from excessive digital usage, particularly for young people. UNESCO's report from 2023 promotes the idea of digital moderation, especially within educational environments, presenting empirical studies that connect excessive screen time to negative educational results and emotional distress. The United Nations' suggestion to prohibit smartphones in schools highlights an increasing global agreement on the necessity for regulated digital interaction to protect mental health and cognitive growth⁴.

From an Islamic viewpoint, scholars have historically highlighted the ethical necessity of verifying information and maintaining honesty in communication. The principles outlined in the Qurān, particularly the warning in Surah Al-Isra⁵ against following matters without proper understanding, stress the vital role of accountability in discourse. Academic inquiries into Islamic ethics and the media frequently cite examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that addressed issues like rumor-spreading, defamation, and the societal damage caused by disseminating unchecked information.

Negative Impact of Social Media on Society:

In this digital age, social media has become an integral part of our daily life, especially among the youth. It presents an accessible platform to communicate, build networks, and share ideas and information. Despite its visible benefits, social media has led to a range of noxious effects that are increasingly impacting the psychological, moral and social fabric of the Muslim societies including Pakistan. Here are some of the negative impacts of social media on the society in Pakistan:

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment: There has been a visible surge in misuse of social

1 Masudi Aziz, J., & Mustafa, N. (2022). *Challenges and Opportunities of social media in Pakistan*. Pakistan Journal of Media Sciences, Vol: 3, Issue: 1, P: 484–495.

2 Yousaf, M. N., Shah, M. A., Khan, A., & Ahmad, A. (2025), *Implications of Misinformation and Disinformation Through social media on Public Opinion in Pakistan and Its Societal Repercussions*. Sociology & Cultural Research Review, Vol: 3, Issue: 1, P: 1299–1314.

3 Noorani, A. (2024). *Over 450 social media accounts blocked for spreading hatred in Pakistan*. Dawn, March 20, 2024.

4 UNESCO. (2023). *Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms? Global Education Monitoring Report 2023*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. P: 83-84. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723>, last Accessed on 15 June 2025.

5 Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra: 17:36

media platforms in Pakistan leading to cyberbullying especially targeting females, religious minorities, and younger generation and above all state institutions. Individuals develop their grievances online and often get involved in causing aspersion, threats, and character assassination of opponents. The females, particularly those active online, are common targets of trolling and sexual harassment. Harassers often exploit pictures or information shared online to blackmail or defame the targets. The emotional trauma initiated through these activities has lasting psychological effects. Such acts are against Islamic ethical principles of dignity and accountability. The victims suffer from anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, it can lead to even suicidal attempts.¹

Misinformation leading to Polarization in the Society: social media provides a platform to rapidly spread of false information about religion, politics, or even health. Unverified Islamic quotes, distorted Hadiths, research reports and various conspiracy theories gain traction, creating severe confusion among the masses, who shared these contents widely in good faith without making efforts to verify the same. In a country like Pakistan, where religious sentiments are deeply rooted, misinformation can fuel sectarian antagonism and harm the interfaith harmony, leading to societal unrest and distrust in institutions. This also contributes to political polarization, sectarianism, and rigid worldviews, making dialogue and tolerance more difficult.²

Digital Addiction and Social Distraction: Inordinate use of platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram has led to digital addiction. Thus, the youth, particularly students, often waste productive hours scrolling aimlessly. This not only impacts their academic performance and working efficiency, but also distances them from spiritual obligations such as prayer, recitation of Qurān, and social responsibilities, which are core elements of a balanced Islamic life. The culture of social gatherings, once a hallmark of our hospitality and brotherhood, is fast declining and people now prefer texting or commenting online over personal interactions. This digital shift erodes emotional attachment, family bonds, and community connection. Ironically, while users are more "connected" than ever, they also report increased feelings of "loneliness."³

Psychosocial Distortions: Many users of social media platforms unwittingly share their personal data on social media, which is reported to be exploited for financial scams, political manipulation, or social embarrassment. Moreover, misuse of data poses a serious threat to both individual safety, family honour, social values and societal stability. Social media often showcases the lifestyles that create unrealistic expectations and aspirations, particularly among young women and men, belonging to the lower middle class. Constant exposure to others' apparent successes, luxurious lifestyles, and beauty standards leads to jealousy and dissatisfaction. This constant comparison leads to emotional issues like low self-worth and a desire to imitate non-Islamic and undesired social values. The increasing depression and anxiety among Pakistani youth, especially females, can be attributed to this trend.⁴

1 Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin, *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2015), P: 42.

2 Sadaf Baig, *Social Media and the Spread of Religious Misinformation in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Pak Institute for Peace Studies [PIPS], 2022), P: 17.

3 Anum Qureshi, *Digital Addiction and Its Impact on Youth in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2022), P: 11–13.

4 Saeed, Muhammad, Uzma Nazir, and Faiza Asghar. "Excessive Usage of Social Media: A Potential Threat to Mental Health in Pakistan." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, Vol: 6, Issue: 1 (March 2025), P: 80–88. <https://www.thedssr.com/index.php/2/article/view/208>

Socioreligious Perspective on Misinformation and Disinformation:

In today's world, where numerous social and moral evils plague society, one of the most destructive is the spread of rumours or misinformation and disinformation¹ who engage in rumormongering often fail to recognize the severe consequences their words may have not only for individuals and institutions but for society and the state as a whole. Ironically, even the originators of rumours are not immune to their harmful effects.

From an Islamic perspective, spreading falsehoods and sowing discord through rumours is a grave sin and punishable. Qurān says,

"Not a word does a person utter without having a 'vigilant' observer ready to write it down".²

Rumours breed mistrust, ignite unnecessary conflicts, and foster baseless animosities between different segments of society. Given their devastating impact, it is the duty of every responsible citizen in an Islamic state not only to refrain from spreading rumours but also to counter those who propagate them. Falsehoods and fabricated statements are not only a social crime but also a sin punishable in the Hereafter.

In a narration from Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him), recorded in both Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet ﷺ said:

"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent".³

Similarly, another narration from Muslim states:

"It is enough for a man to be a liar that he narrates everything he hears (without verifying it)."⁴

Rumours are damaging to the individuals as well as the society, while Islam upholds the dignity of a believer with the principle of trust. A true believer does not deceive others with falsehood, as honesty is a mark of his nobility. Likewise, he does not allow himself to be deceived, demonstrating wisdom and prudence. A historical example⁵ from the time of the Prophet ﷺ illustrates this point. Abu Izza, a poet of the Quraysh, incited hostility against the Muslims through his poetry. After being captured in the Battle of Badr, he pleaded for his release, promising never to engage in such actions again. The Prophet ﷺ, showing mercy, released him. However, after his release, Abu Izza resumed inciting against the Muslims. When he was captured again in the Battle of Uhud, he once more pleaded for forgiveness, but this time, the Prophet ﷺ ordered his execution, saying:

"A believer is not stung twice from the same hole."⁶

1 Misinformation is false or inaccurate information—getting the facts wrong and Disinformation is false information which is deliberately intended to mislead—intentionally misstating the facts.

2 Quran, Surah Al-Kahaf: 18:18

3 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997) Book 78: Al-Adab, Chapter 31: *Whoever Believes in Allah and the Last Day Should Speak Good or Remain Silent*. Hadith No. 6136, Vol: 8, P: 106.

4 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Book 78: *Al-Adab (Good Manners)*, Chapter 112: *Whoever Narrates Everything He Hears Is Not Reliable*. Hadith No: 6130, Vol: 8, P: 103

5 Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1955), Vol: 2, P: 294–295. See also A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), P: 308–309.

6 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Book 78: Al-Adab, Chapter 91: *A Believer Is Not Stung Twice from the Same Hole*, Hadith

This statement underscores the intelligence and cautions a believer must exercise to avoid being deceived repeatedly.

A believer should refrain from sharing unverified negative information. At the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah describes the pious as those who "believe in the unseen."¹ However, this does not mean accepting every unseen claim—only that which is revealed by Allah and His Messenger ﷺ is to be believed without hesitation. Other sources of information are susceptible to falsehood. This is why the Prophet ﷺ warned:

*"It is enough for a person to be a liar that he recounts every news he hears."*²

Spreading rumours involves not only lying but also betraying trust. Abu Dawud narrates from Sufyan that the Prophet ﷺ said:

*"It is a great betrayal for you to tell your brother something, making him believe it is true while you are lying to him."*³

Psychological studies suggest that some individuals derive pleasure from describing the suffering of others, particularly when driven by malice, jealousy, or hatred. However, when genuine love and goodwill exist between people, one would never find joy in another's hardship.⁴ Islam strongly discourages deriving pleasure from others' misfortunes. The Prophet ﷺ said:

*"Do not rejoice at your brother's misfortune, lest Allah have mercy on him and afflict you with the same trouble."*⁵

Another reason people spread rumours is to instil fear in others. Some individuals enjoy making others anxious or use fear as a tool to manipulate people. Islam unequivocally condemns such behaviour. On one occasion, while traveling with his companions, the Prophet ﷺ said:

*"It is not permissible for a Muslim to frighten another Muslim." Satan also plays a role in spreading falsehood.*⁶

In Sahih Muslim, Abdullah ibn Masood narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said:

"Sometimes Satan takes the form of a man, approaches a group, and tells them lies. When the group disperses, one of them repeats the lie, saying, 'I heard a man

No. 6133. Vol: 8, P: 105.

1 Qurān, Surah baqarah: 2:2.

2 Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Book 43: *Kitāb al-Adab (Book of Manners)*, Chapter 80, Hadith No. 4992. Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), Vol: 5. P: 338.

3 Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), Book 43: *Kitāb al-Adab (Book of Manners)*, Chapter 85: *Telling Something to Your Brother While Lying*. Hadith No. 4971, Vol: 5, P: 328.

4 van de Ven, Niels, Charles E. Hoogland, Richard H. Smith, Wilco W. van Dijk, Seger M. Breugelmans, and Marcel Zeelenberg. "When Envy Leads to Schadenfreude." *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol: 29, Issue: 6 (2015), P: 1007–1025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2014.961903>, last accessed on 16 June 2025.

5 Muḥammad ibn 'Isā. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, al-Tirmidhī*. Book 36: *Kitāb al-Zuhd (Book of Asceticism)*, Chapter 54: *Do Not Show Delight at the Misfortune of Your Brother*. Hadith No. 2506. Translated by Abu Khaliyl (Muhammad Al-Jibaly), (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), Vol: 4, P: 665.

6 Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Book 43: *Kitāb al-Adab (Book of Manners)*, Chapter 92: *It Is Not Permissible to Frighten a Muslim*. Hadith No. 5004. Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), Vol: 5, P: 347.

say this, and I recognize his face but do not know his name."¹

A Muslim must uphold his honour by refraining from spreading unverified information. The Prophet ﷺ advised:

*"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent."*²

Furthermore, one should not pass on harmful news to others. Allah loves those who conceal others' faults rather than spreading negativity. If someone propagates a rumour, they should be stopped and reminded to verify information before sharing it. If they insist on spreading unverified claims, one should pray for the well-being of those affected rather than engaging in baseless talk.

Rumours, whether aimed at the government, institutions, individuals, or any segment of the Muslim Ummah, are condemnable in all circumstances. History provides countless examples where a handful of individuals spreading misinformation led to national disgrace, long-term suffering, and irreparable damage to society. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the hypocrites frequently spread rumours to create instability within the Muslim community. They exploited situations, especially those involving war or conflict, either to incite fear and panic or to lull Muslims into a false sense of security. In response, the Holy Qurān commanded believers to verify information before spreading it. It states:

*"And when there comes to them a matter of security or fear, they publicize it. But if they had referred to the Messenger or to those of authority among them, then the ones who can draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it. And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few."*³

This verse makes it clear that spreading unverified news is a satanic act. Responsible citizens must inform relevant authorities about suspicious news instead of propagating it themselves. This prevents the spread of unrest and safeguards the social fabric. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

*"It is enough sin for a person to narrate everything he hears."*⁴ The Qurān further instructs: *"And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned."*⁵

This verse warns against acting on speculation, as baseless accusations, suspicions, and rumours are all forms of societal corruption. A well-functioning society should be free from such evils.

1 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Introduction (al-Muqaddimah)*. Section: *The Obligation to Verify Reports and Reject the False Narrations*. Hadith No. 9. Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007) Vol: 1, P: 14.

2 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Book 78: *Kitāb al-Adab (Book of Manners)*, Chapter 31: *Whoever Believes in Allah and the Last Day Should Speak Good or Remain Silent*. Hadith No. 6136. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh: Darussalam 1997), Vol: 8, P: 106.

3 Qur'ān, Surah An-Nisā', 4:83

4 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Muqaddimah (Introduction)*. Chapter: *The Prohibition of Narrating Everything One Hears*. Hadith No. 5. Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), Vol: 1, P: 10.

5 Surah Al-Isrā', 17:36

Surah Al-Hujrat provides a comprehensive code of conduct for maintaining harmony within the Muslim community. It explicitly warns against actions that create division and resentment, such as mockery, slander, backbiting, and suspicion. Allah ﷻ commands:

*"O you who have believed! If a wicked person comes to you with news, investigate it thoroughly, lest you harm people out of ignorance and then become regretful for what you have done."*¹

The revelation of this verse stemmed from a real incident in the Prophet's ﷺ time when false reports about the tribe of Banu Al-Mustaliq nearly led to unwarranted military action. When the truth emerged, it was clear that a malicious attempt had been made to incite conflict. This incident underscores the necessity of verifying information before acting on it.

Historical Perspective on Impact Rumours from Sīrah:

Throughout history, enemies of Islam, including hypocrites and certain factions within the Jewish communities, used rumours to divide Muslims. Abdullah bin Ubayy, the chief of the hypocrites, repeatedly attempted to instigate discord between the Ansaar and Muhajireen. Similarly, the hypocrites would engage in secret meetings and whispering campaigns to create an illusion of privileged knowledge, making it easier to deceive the masses.² Here are some of the incidents from Islamic history when rumours have caused significant turmoil:

The Incident of Ifk: The slander against Sayyidah Aisha (RA), initiated by hypocrites like Abdullah bin Ubi, deeply affected the Muslim community. The Prophet ﷺ and Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) suffered immense grief until Allah revealed verses exonerating Hazrat Aisha (RA).³

A false claim circulated in Medina that Jews had cast a spell preventing Muslim births. This was disproved when Abdullah bin Zubair (RA) was born, bringing great joy to the Muslims.⁴ During the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, Hazrat Uthman (RA) was detained by the Quraysh, leading to rumours of his murder. This caused distress and severe anguish among the Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ took an oath of allegiance (Bay'at al-Ridwan) from his companions to avenge him, though Uthman (RA) later returned unharmed.⁵

During the Battle of Uhud, amidst chaos, the rumor was spread by miscreants that the Prophet ﷺ was dead. This caused a great deal of grief and confusion among the Muslims.⁶

A rumour spread that the Prophet ﷺ had been captured. Hazrat Zubair (RA) rushed with his sword to defend him, only to find the news false. The Prophet ﷺ prayed for him.⁷

These incidents highlight the devastating impact of rumours. It may be noted that spreading unverified information is a trait of hypocrites and polytheists, not of true believers. Islam teaches vigilance, verification, and restraint in speech, ensuring that truth prevails over falsehood.

1 Qur'ān, Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:6

2 Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar): Biography of the Noble Prophet* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2002), P: 190–91.

3 Ibn Hishām, 'Abd al-Malik. *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*. Translated by Alfred Guillaume. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), P: 496–504.

4 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Book 66: *Kitāb al-Anbiyā'* (Book of the Prophets), Hadith No: 5469, Vol: 7, P: 400.

5 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Book 64, Chapter: *The Ghazwah of al-Hudaibiyah*. Hadith 4189, Vol:5, P:513

6 Ibn Hishām, 'Abd al-Malik. *Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah) 1955, Vol: 2, P: 70–72.

7. Abī Ḥayyan al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muḥīt*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif), Vol: 3, P: 97.

Islam on Preservation of Society from Disinformation and Misinformation:

1. Validation of Information:

Islam categorically condemns rumour-mongering, considering it a grave sin and a social evil. It warns against its consequences, both in this world and the hereafter. Many people engage in spreading rumour from morning to evening, subjecting society—especially the Muslim Ummah to trials, anxiety, and sorrow. In modern times, media outlets, communication channels, and news agencies play a significant role in disseminating unverified information, often leading to chaos. False news about illicit relationships, family dishonour, fabricated deaths, or sectarian conflicts can incite hatred, break families, and cause societal discord. Hence, Qurān teaches:

*"O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful."*¹

In the digital age, social media platforms like WhatsApp facilitate the rapid spread of misinformation. A mere spark can turn into a wildfire, causing irreparable damage. Even religious scholars and leaders, once cautious, now inadvertently partake in rumour circulation. Islamic Shariah combats misinformation by emphasizing truthfulness. Allah warns: "May God curse the liars."² The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ further stated that Lying leads to immorality, and immorality leads to the Fire. A person will continue to lie until he is recorded with Allah as a liar.³

Hazrat Hassan bin Ali (RA) narrated:

*"The Messenger ﷺ of Allah said: 'Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt. Truthfulness brings peace of mind, and falsehood brings doubt.'"*⁴

2. Propagation of Misinformation/Disinformation:

In Islam, a severe warning is given to those who spread falsehood. The Prophet ﷺ described the treatment of those spreading false rumours in these words:

*"A man was lying on his back, and another held an iron hook, tearing his jaw, nostrils, and eyes apart. By the time one side healed, the other was being torn. When asked about this punishment, the angels replied, 'This is a man who left his home spreading lies that traveled far and wide.'"*⁵

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ warned:

*"A person may utter a word without realizing its impact, and it may plunge him into Hell further than the distance between the East and the West."*⁶

1 Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:6.

2 Surah Al-Imran, 3:61.

3 Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, n.d.), *Kitāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah wa al-Adāb*, hadith: 2607, Vol:5, P: 200.

4 Imām Al-Tirmidhī. *Jāmi' Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, trans. Aisha Bewley, (Ṭab'ah Mu'assasah al-Risālah/Dār al-Tirmidhī, 1991), hadith: 2518 Vol. 1 (Kitāb al-'Ilm), Vol: 1, P: 300.

5 Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), *Kitāb al-Ru'yā*, ḥadīth 5745, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan vol: 8, P: 215.

6 Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Riyadh: Darussalam, n.d.), *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa al-Riqā'iq*

Islam also discourages blind acceptance of hearsay. Many people justify spreading rumours by citing news sources or hearsay, which the Prophet ﷺ explicitly condemned:

*"It is enough for a person to be a liar that he narrates everything he hears."*¹

Instead, the Prophet ﷺ advised:

*"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should either speak good or remain silent."*²

Every word uttered is recorded in the dossier of each individual, as mentioned in Qurān:

*"Not a word does he utter except that by him is an observer prepared [to record]."*³

Those who deliberately spread rumours often act as hypocrites, seeking to destabilize Muslim society. Therefore, the believers are instructed to distance themselves from rumourmongers:

*"And when they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say, 'To us our deeds, and to you your deeds. Peace be upon you. We seek not the ignorant.'"*⁴

Conclusion:

Social media has undoubtedly transformed modern communication, offering unprecedented access to information and enabling global connectivity. However, its unregulated use presents serious challenges, particularly in Pakistan, where ideological sensitivities and emotional responses often shape public discourse. The unchecked spread of misinformation, religious distortion, and anti-state propaganda threatens not only national security but also the moral and social fabric of a country founded on Islamic principles.

This paper has underscored the urgent need for a balanced strategy that protects freedom of expression while curbing the harmful misuse of digital platforms. Through qualitative analysis of contemporary reports and Islamic sources, it has been established that the Qurān and the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provide enduring ethical guidance that discourages rumor-mongering, slander, and uninformed judgment—behaviours that are increasingly prevalent online.

A multidimensional response is essential to mitigate these risks. Regulatory frameworks must be reinforced by public awareness campaigns, educational interventions, and the proactive involvement of religious scholars who can provide values-based counternarratives. Educational institutions, in particular, can play a vital role by promoting media literacy and ethical digital engagement among youth.

Ultimately, the integration of Islamic ethical principles with modern governance mechanisms can foster a digital culture rooted in truth, responsibility, and respect. It is imperative that state institutions, civil society, educators, and faith leaders collaborate to transform social media from a source of division and discord into a platform for constructive dialogue, ethical communication, and national unity.

the Book of Asceticism and Softening of the Hearts, hadith: 6478, vol: 8, P: 215.

1 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, n.d.), *Muqaddimah*, "The Prohibition of Narrating Everything One Hears," Vo: 1, P: 19.

2 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh: Darussalam, n.d.), *Kitāb al-Adab*, hadith: 6136, vol: 8, P: 200.

3 Surah Qāf: 50:18,

4 Surah Al-Qasas: 28:55.

Recommendations:

1. Promote Public Awareness and Education in Digital Literacy:

- The government should launch nationwide campaigns to educate the masses, especially the youth and online content creators, about the risks involved in the use of social media to spread misinformation and the psychosocial harm it can cause to society.
- Education and religious institutions should incorporate digital literacy and responsible social media handling into their curricula, emphasizing the need for ethical online behavior as guided by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

2. Integrate Islamic Ethics into Social Media Guidelines:

- The academic institutions should develop and implement media ethics frameworks based on Islamic teachings, which should focus on promoting integrity, truthfulness, and respect for the dignity of others, following the Prophet's ﷺ Sīrah.
- Content creators, media influencers, and media outlets should be held accountable for the accuracy of the information they disseminate as per the law of the land.

3. Establish a National Oversight Mechanism for Social Media Content

- The government should create an independent regulatory body to monitor social media platforms for harmful content such as misinformation, religious extremism, and defamation to check the spread of false information and promote positive, ethical narratives rooted in Islamic teachings.
- At the national level, strengthen cooperation between government bodies, religious scholars, and media organizations to create an Islamic code of conduct for online behavior.

4. Strengthening Family and Community Support Systems:

- Families should engage in open dialogues with the children and young adults about the psychological risks of social media.
- Community leaders should host workshops and seminars to help individuals and families recognize the harms of digital misinformation and learn coping strategies informed by Islamic principles.

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