



State Responsibilities in Educating and Training the Public for the Beneficial use of Social Media

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Abstract

Social media has become one of the most influential communication technologies of the contemporary world. It enables rapid communication, the exchange of knowledge, public participation, and the dissemination of useful information; at the same time, its misuse can contribute to misinformation, online harassment, defamation, indecent content, hostility, and social fragmentation. This dual character raises an important question concerning the responsibility of the state: should its role be confined to regulating harmful content, or should it also educate citizens in the ethical and constructive use of digital platforms? Drawing on the *Sīrah* of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, this article examines the principles that may guide public policy and social education in the digital age. It discusses the Prophetic approach to moral formation, including the correction of intention (*iṣlāḥ al-niyyah*), good character (*ḥusn al-khulq*), gradual instruction (*tadarruj*), wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and compassionate guidance. It also considers the juristic principle of *Sadd al-Dharāʾiʿ*—the blocking of means that may lead to harm—and its possible relevance to social-media governance. The article argues that effective state responsibility should combine education, public awareness, ethical guidance, proportionate legislation, accessible complaint mechanisms, and cooperation with educational institutions and digital platforms. The objective is not merely to restrict harmful behaviour, but to cultivate a digitally responsible society in which freedom of expression is balanced with public welfare, dignity, social harmony, and moral accountability.

Keywords:

Social Media, State Responsibility, *Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, Digital Ethics, Islamic Moral Education, *Sadd al-Dharāʾiʿ*, *Iṣlāḥ al-Niyyah*, *Ḥusn al-Khulq*, Digital Citizenship.

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1. Introduction

Islam presents itself as a comprehensive way of life, offering guidance for the challenges faced by humanity in different periods of history. Its guidance is not limited to ritual worship; it also addresses social, economic, political, and ethical affairs. Human beings have been endowed with reason, understanding, and the capacity to learn from revelation, enabling them to respond thoughtfully to changing circumstances. Islamic principles are therefore not to be understood as a collection of disconnected rules, but as enduring foundations from which responsible responses to new challenges may be developed.

The most vivid practical interpretation of these principles is found in the blessed life of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Throughout his life, he demonstrated how foundational religious values could be upheld while responding wisely to changing conditions. In Makkah, Muslims faced intense opposition, and the Prophet ﷺ responded with patience, wisdom, and invitation to faith. In Madinah, after the establishment of the Muslim polity, he used treaties, correspondence, public addresses, and other means of communication to promote peace, justice, and knowledge. Even during difficult periods of conflict, he maintained high standards of ethics and humanity. His Sīrah teaches that new social conditions and technological developments should not simply be rejected; rather, their potential should be directed towards beneficial ends.

Social media is one of the most consequential communication transformations of the present age. It can serve as a valuable means of learning, awareness, cooperation, and public service, but it can also be used to spread falsehood, hatred, humiliation, and confusion. In the absence of ethical guidance, a technology with considerable constructive potential may become an instrument of harm. The state, which bears responsibility for public welfare and contributes to the intellectual, moral, and social development of its citizens, therefore has a role in educating people about responsible social-media use. This article considers the guidance that may be derived from the Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah and examines how it can inform the state's educational, regulatory, and preventive responsibilities.

2. Social Media: Definition and Concept

Social media refers to digital platforms and applications that allow users to communicate with one another, exchange information, share ideas and experiences, and create or distribute content in written, visual, and audio-visual forms. These platforms are characterised by interaction and user-generated content. Ari-Matti Auvinen, in *Social Media—The New Power of Political Influence*, describes social media as information networks and

technologies that use interactive, user-produced communication through which interpersonal relationships are created and maintained.

A report by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, entitled “Social Media: The New Factories of Public Opinion” (2017), describes social media as modern electronic networks through which people exchange information, opinions, and content—including texts, images, and videos. Such networks connect virtual communities and can influence public opinion, awareness, and social behaviour. Research associated with Racha Mourtada and Fadi Salem similarly highlights the potential of digital platforms to connect individuals and communities, facilitate the exchange of information and opinions, express social and cultural identities, and encourage civic participation when directed towards constructive purposes.

These definitions share a central insight: the social impact of social media depends substantially on how it is used. It may function as a source of benefit or become a means of harm. Its interactive nature gives ordinary users the ability to publish information and influence public discussion, but that same accessibility can facilitate the rapid spread of misinformation and abusive content. The need for responsible use consequently involves both individual ethical conduct and an enabling framework of education, public awareness, and appropriate state policy.

3. Social Media as a Communication Revolution

In the twenty-first century, social media is more than a technological innovation; it has transformed human relationships, information exchange, and social structures. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram connect people across geographical and social boundaries and make information accessible to large audiences. A single post can reach thousands or even millions of people within seconds. Unlike traditional print and broadcast media, in which publication was largely controlled by a limited number of institutions, social media allows individuals to act as publishers, commentators, and content creators.

This transformation has affected political participation, public health communication, and collective mobilisation. During the Arab Spring of 2011, for example, social platforms were used to coordinate demonstrations and circulate information internationally. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital networks also helped disseminate public announcements and health-related information. The scale of social communication is therefore not only quantitative but qualitative: images, short videos, personal accounts, and emotionally compelling messages can shape how people understand events and respond to them.

Yet the same speed and reach create serious risks. A false claim can circulate widely before it is verified; a hostile comment can become a campaign of harassment; and an unsubstantiated allegation can damage a person's reputation. Social media can also encourage impulsive reactions, excessive self-display, and the pursuit of approval through likes and shares. The article's cited studies discuss online harassment, misinformation, narcissistic self-presentation, excessive screen time, and the exposure of young people to inappropriate material. These concerns reinforce the need to treat social media not merely as a device or entertainment medium, but as a social environment requiring ethical literacy and responsible participation.

4. Social Media: A Blessing and a Test

The extraordinary reach of social media makes it a double-edged instrument. Its benefits include access to knowledge, public awareness, communication, and opportunities for cooperation. Its misuse, however, can intensify false information, defamation, indecent material, hostility, and social division. Users may conceal their identities, insult others, or circulate unverified allegations with little regard for the consequences. Online activity can also encourage envy, resentment, self-promotion, and the waste of time and attention.

These risks are not simply technical problems. They concern character, responsibility, and the quality of social relationships. If online conduct weakens truthfulness, modesty, respect, and mutual trust, its effects may extend beyond individual users to the moral fabric of society. The Qur'anic principle that God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves (Qur'an 13:11) is invoked in the source to emphasise the importance of personal and collective reform. The statement attributed to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb—"We are a people whom God honoured through Islam; whenever we seek honour through something else, God brings us low"—is used to underline the significance of Islamic moral teachings.

The challenge is therefore to preserve the benefits of social media while reducing the harms associated with irresponsible use. This requires more than asking individuals to exercise self-control. Citizens need the knowledge and practical skills to assess information, communicate respectfully, protect themselves from online abuse, and recognise the consequences of what they publish. The state has a legitimate educational role in supporting these capacities, while any regulatory response should be carefully designed and proportionate.

5. Social Media and the Role of the State

In an environment in which information reaches people continuously, the state's role cannot be confined to legislation or the removal of unlawful content. It should also support the

intellectual, ethical, and social education of citizens. The problem is complex because an individual cannot always manage the pressures of an information-saturated environment without institutional support. When truth and falsehood become difficult to distinguish and online behaviour threatens social trust, the state has a responsibility to help citizens develop the knowledge and judgement needed to respond.

The Qur'an describes those entrusted with authority on earth as people who establish prayer, give zakāh, encourage what is right, and discourage what is wrong (Qur'an 22:41). In the article's argument, this verse provides a broad ethical framework for public responsibility. The Sīrah shows that the Prophet ﷺ not only guided the community through new challenges but also educated and prepared people to respond to them. The state's responsibility is particularly important where the circulation of rumours and false reports may contribute to disorder or violence.

Within the Islamic political and legal perspective presented in the source, the purpose of governance extends beyond maintaining public order, securing borders, and improving material conditions. It also includes promoting moral and spiritual values conducive to human welfare. In the digital context, this suggests a combination of preventive education, public awareness, protection against harmful conduct, and legislation where necessary. Regulation should not be treated as the only instrument: people must also be taught why responsible behaviour matters and how to practise it.

6. Social Ethics and the Moral Education of Individuals

The individual is a fundamental unit of society, and personal character contributes to the moral quality of collective life. From childhood to adulthood, people are shaped by their social environment, education, habits, and relationships. Truthfulness, respect, justice, compassion, and responsibility help individuals become constructive members of society. Social media introduces a new dimension to this process because it both reveals existing attitudes and has the capacity to reinforce or alter them.

The article expresses concern that online environments may normalise obscenity, exhibitionism, lying, slander, backbiting, character assassination, envy, the pursuit of fame, and divisive behaviour. It argues that such practices can weaken social solidarity and distract people from ethical conduct. These observations are presented as a call for reform rather than as a claim that every user or platform behaves in the same way. The relevant principle is that moral decline cannot be addressed solely by technical restrictions; education and character formation are also necessary.

The Qur'anic statement in 13:11 is again relevant to the article's argument: sustainable reform requires a change in people's own attitudes and conduct. The quotation attributed to 'Umar reinforces the idea that dignity and collective strength should be sought through principled conduct rather than through imitation detached from moral commitments. If digital culture continually rewards self-display and hostility, young people may acquire technical fluency without developing equivalent ethical judgement. Education and training are therefore essential to connect digital competence with character.

7. The Prophetic Method of Education and Training

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is presented in the article as an exemplary model for human society. Among the purposes of his mission were the purification of people, their education and training, and their moral and spiritual reform. The Qur'an states that God sent a Messenger among the unlettered people to recite His revelations to them, purify them, and teach them the Book and wisdom (Qur'an 62:2). The Prophetic approach to education was comprehensive and practical, addressing individual and collective life, outward behaviour and inward disposition, thought and action, and bodily and spiritual development.

Social media has given contemporary individuals a public reach that was once available only to a limited number of influential people. Their words, opinions, images, and emotions may reach very large audiences. Without ethical formation, this capacity can become a source of harm. The article therefore applies several features of the Prophetic method to digital conduct: the correction of intention, good character, gradual instruction, wisdom, sensitivity to individual circumstances, and attention to the wider consequences of public communication.

7.1 Iṣlāḥ al-Niyyah: Correcting One's Intention

The Prophetic method places intention at the foundation of action. The well-known ḥadīth states: "Innamā al-a'mālu bi'l-niyyāt, wa-innamā li-kulli imri'in mā nawā"—"Actions are judged by intentions, and each person will have only what they intended." Recorded at the beginning of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, this report highlights the centrality of sincerity in Islamic practice.

The principle is especially relevant to social media, where users routinely share photographs, videos, opinions, religious reminders, personal experiences, and charitable activities. Before posting, a person should consider the purpose of the action: is it intended to inform, benefit, encourage reform, and serve others, or primarily to obtain praise, likes, popularity, and status? The article warns that ostentation (riyā') can undermine acts that appear outwardly virtuous.

In another report, the Prophet ﷺ expressed concern about minor shirk and identified ostentation as an example. A further ḥadīth warns that whoever acts to be seen or heard by others will be exposed in accordance with that motive. Sharing religious knowledge or inviting others to good may be beneficial, but the intention should not be to manufacture an image of piety or to cultivate fame. The ḥadīth that God does not look at people's outward forms and bodies but at their hearts and deeds reinforces this point. Digital users should therefore cultivate sincerity and ask whether their online activity serves a genuine good.

The heart is central to this ethical process. The well-known ḥadīth describes a piece of flesh in the body which, when sound, makes the whole body sound, and when corrupt, corrupts the whole body: it is the heart. In the digital context, this encourages users to examine the motives behind their posts, comments, and shares. When the intention is sincere benefit and the content is responsible, online activity may become a continuing source of good rather than an exercise in self-display.

7.2 Ḥusn al-Khulq: Good Character in Online Communication

Good character was a central pillar of the Prophet's educational method. The Qur'an describes him as possessing an exalted standard of character (Qur'an 68:4). His conduct was marked by patience, gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness. He did not ordinarily respond to insult and hostility with vindictiveness or harsh language; instead, he maintained ethical standards even when dealing with opponents.

The episode of Ṭā'if is presented as a particularly powerful example of forbearance. After the Prophet ﷺ was rejected and injured, the angel responsible for the mountains offered, by God's permission, to crush the people between the mountains. The Prophet ﷺ, denied, expressing hope that descendants would emerge from among them who would worship God alone. This account exemplifies a preference for compassion and future reform over immediate retaliation.

These values are urgently relevant to online behaviour. Digital discussions can turn disagreement into hostility within moments. False reports, backbiting (ghībah), slander (buhtān), and hurtful comments are often circulated without verification. The ḥadīth "Kafā bi'l-mar'i kadhīban an yuḥadditha bi-kulli mā sami'a" means that it is sufficient for a person to be considered a liar that they repeat everything they hear. Users should therefore verify information before forwarding it.

Another ḥadīth states: "Al-muslimu man salima al-muslimūna min lisānihi wa-yadihi"—a Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe. Applied to the digital environment, the "tongue" includes written comments, captions, voice notes, and public

accusations; the “hand” includes the act of posting, forwarding, or amplifying harmful content. The Prophet ﷺ also taught that those with the best character would be among the most beloved to him and closest to him on the Day of Resurrection. Online conduct should consequently be assessed by the same ethical standards as conduct in face-to-face life—and, given its potentially vast reach, with particular care.

7.3 Tadarruj and Hikmah: Gradual Instruction and Wisdom

A prominent feature of the Prophetic educational method was gradual reform. Rather than demanding immediate and complete transformation without regard to a person’s circumstances, the Prophet ﷺ took account of understanding, age, psychological condition, and context. He taught: “Yassirū wa-lā tu’assirū, wa-bashshirū wa-lā tunaffirū”—“Make things easy and do not make them difficult; give glad tidings and do not drive people away.” This principle is relevant to education, public communication, and digital behaviour.

When sending Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, the Prophet ﷺ instructed him that he would be approaching a community among the People of the Book and that the invitation should begin with the testimony that there is no deity worthy of worship except God. The report illustrates a structured approach in which foundational beliefs are introduced before further obligations.

The article also discusses the young man who asked the Prophet ﷺ for permission to commit fornication. While those present reacted negatively, the Prophet ﷺ addressed the young man with compassion, engaged him through questions, and prayed for his moral protection. The lesson drawn is that effective guidance requires listening, understanding, and patient correction rather than humiliation.

Digital culture often encourages immediate judgement. A person may be condemned on the basis of a single post, without consideration of context or the possibility of correction. The Prophetic method suggests a more measured approach: avoid attacking a person’s motives without evidence, distinguish criticism of an action from the destruction of a person’s dignity, and favour education and gradual reform where possible.

The Prophet’s decision not to permit the killing of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy is also discussed in relation to public perception and wisdom. The reported statement, “Lā yataḥaddathu al-nāsu anna Muḥammadan yaqtulu aṣḥābahu”—“I do not want people to say that Muḥammad kills his companions”—illustrates that the likely social consequences of an action must be considered. The article further notes that the Prophet ﷺ assigned responsibilities in accordance with individuals’ abilities, including the mission of Muṣ‘ab ibn ‘Umayr in Madinah and the appointments of experienced companions. Applied to social media, this

means that education and responsibility should be adapted to users' levels of understanding and circumstances.

8. Social-Media Challenges and State Legislation in the Light of the Sīrah

Social media offers individuals an opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, and emotions, but its effects extend beyond individuals to communities and states. It can facilitate freedom of expression and public participation, while also being exploited for incitement, false propaganda, threats to public safety, and the promotion of social hostility. Individual freedom is important, but its misuse may create risks for the rights of others, social cohesion, and public welfare.

The article cites the maxim attributed to 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān: "Inna Allāha yaz'u bi'l-sultāni mā lā yaz'u bi'l-Qur'ān"—God may restrain through political authority what is not restrained through the Qur'an alone. The maxim is used to support the proposition that moral exhortation may sometimes need to be complemented by legitimate public measures. The state should take steps to prevent conduct that causes disorder and should run public-awareness initiatives to help citizens recognise and avoid digital harms.

However, regulation requires balance. The objective should be to protect people from demonstrable harm while preserving legitimate expression and ensuring that restrictions are not arbitrary. Education, transparency, accessible reporting systems, fair procedures, and proportionate enforcement should accompany any legal response. The article refers to examples of content regulation in Pakistan and China to illustrate that governments adopt different approaches in the name of social order and national security; such examples also underline the importance of considering how regulatory powers are exercised.

9. Sadd al-Dharā'i': Blocking the Means to Harm

In Arabic, sadd means to close or block, while dharī'ah refers to a means or route through which something is reached. In Islamic jurisprudence, Sadd al-Dharā'i' refers to restricting a permissible means when it is likely to lead to a prohibited or harmful outcome. The jurist Muḥammad Abū Zahrah discusses the concept in his work *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. The underlying idea is preventive: a means may be restricted not because it is intrinsically prohibited, but because its likely consequences create a serious risk of wrongdoing.

The article identifies examples from the Prophetic period to illustrate this preventive reasoning. It refers to the reported instruction that a prescribed punishment should not be carried out in a particular wartime circumstance where doing so could drive the offender to join the enemy or reveal sensitive information. It also refers to the prohibition on selling weapons to an enemy during hostilities, even though buying and selling are generally permissible

activities. The reasoning is that an otherwise lawful act may need to be restricted when the circumstances make it a means of serious harm.

The article further discusses the collection and standardisation of the Qur’anic codex during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. According to the account presented, this measure was intended to prevent disputes among communities unfamiliar with the different modes of recitation from developing into division. The argument is that collective decisions may sometimes be adopted to prevent foreseeable harm, without denying the underlying legitimacy of what is being regulated.

Applied to social media, Sadd al-Dharā’i‘ may provide a framework for considering restrictions on specific practices that are likely to facilitate serious harm. The article argues that social-media use is generally permissible, but that intervention may be justified where it becomes a means of incitement, disorder, or other prohibited conduct. Such intervention should not automatically imply blanket restrictions. The principle requires careful assessment of context, likely consequences, public interest, and the extent of the restriction, with attention to the balance between individual liberty and collective welfare.

10. Public Education, Training, and Institutional Cooperation

The state’s responsibility should not be reduced to controlling or censoring online content. It should actively help citizens acquire the skills and ethical awareness required for responsible use. When false information, hostility, and harmful behaviour spread online, public education can improve people’s ability to recognise risks and respond constructively. The article recommends coordinated action by the state, educational institutions, parents, social-media platforms, and users.

Digital literacy should include the ability to verify sources, distinguish fact from opinion, recognise manipulated or misleading material, protect personal information, report abuse, and communicate respectfully. From the Islamic ethical perspective developed in this article, these practical skills should be accompanied by instruction in truthfulness, modesty, respect for dignity, avoidance of backbiting and slander, and accountability for what one shares.

Public-awareness campaigns can use television, radio, newspapers, websites, and social-media channels to communicate these principles in accessible language. Scholars, teachers, parents, relevant professionals, and responsible digital influencers can contribute to such efforts. Collaboration with platforms may also help provide short courses, awareness videos, and learning resources in Urdu and other local languages. The purpose of such programmes should be to make ethical digital participation understandable and practicable for people of different ages and educational backgrounds.

11. Conclusion

Social media is a powerful and far-reaching communication medium that shapes not only the circulation of information but also public opinion, social behaviour, and intellectual trends. Its benefits are considerable, yet irresponsible use can intensify misinformation, hostility, moral harm, and social disorder. The Sīrah of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ offers enduring guidance for addressing these challenges through sincerity, compassion, patience, gradual instruction, good character, and attention to consequences.

The principle of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* further highlights the importance of preventing foreseeable harm, while also requiring careful judgement about when and how a permissible means should be restricted. A balanced approach to social-media governance should therefore combine ethical education, digital literacy, public awareness, proportionate legislation, fair enforcement, and accessible complaint mechanisms. Regulation alone cannot produce a morally responsible digital culture; nor can individual advice replace institutional responsibility.

The article concludes that the state, educational institutions, religious scholars, families, platforms, and users should work together to make social media a means of learning, compassion, constructive participation, and public benefit rather than a vehicle for hostility and disorder. Such a strategy can help cultivate future generations who are digitally capable, ethically grounded, intellectually aware, and respectful of human dignity.

12. Recommendations

1. Introduce formal curricular modules on responsible social-media use, misinformation detection, online communication etiquette, and ethical guidance informed by Islamic teachings.
2. Organise training workshops, seminars, and online courses for teachers, parents, and students at federal and provincial levels, covering cyberbullying, online risks, backbiting, slander, and other forms of digital misconduct.
3. Launch public-awareness campaigns through electronic, print, and digital media to explain Islamic ethics, the Sīrah of the Prophet ﷺ, and practical standards of online conduct. Scholars, subject specialists, and responsible influencers may help communicate these messages effectively.
4. Encourage social-media platforms—including Facebook, YouTube, and X—to develop Urdu-language short courses, awareness videos, and digital-ethics resources, with certificates where appropriate to encourage participation.

5. Enforce laws against unlawful online conduct, including incitement to hatred, harassment, slander, and the distribution of prohibited content, while ensuring clear procedures, proportionate action, and accessible and secure complaint mechanisms.

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