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Holy Prophet (ﷺ) Communication Ethics And The Role Of The State In Developing Digital Literacy: An Islamic Framework For The Beneficial Use Of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary digital age, social media platforms exert a profound influence on public discourse, shaping perceptions, behaviors, and societal norms. This article examines the State's responsibilities in educating and training citizens for the beneficial use of social media through the communication ethics of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). Drawing upon the Seerah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Qur'anic injunctions, and Hadith literature, the paper highlights truthfulness, responsibility, compassion, and accountability as timeless foundations for ethical communication. It critically evaluates existing gaps in Pakistan's digital literacy initiatives and contrasts them with international best practices, such as Finland's national media literacy program and the European Union's anti-disinformation policies. Building on these insights, the study proposes an integrated Islamic framework for state-led digital literacy and social media training programs, emphasizing curriculum reform, teacher development, and community-based awareness campaigns. By merging the communication ethics of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) with modern policy tools, this research offers actionable recommendations to ensure that social media evolves into a platform of constructive engagement, beneficial knowledge, and social harmony rather than misinformation or discord.

Keywords: Prophetic Ethics, Social Media, State Responsibility, Digital Literacy, Islamic Communication, Seerah of the Prophet (ﷺ)

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social media platforms over the past decade has fundamentally transformed human interaction, communication, and the dissemination of knowledge. In Pakistan and globally, the ubiquity of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp has enabled instantaneous sharing of information, fostering connectivity across distances. However, this digital revolution has not been without costs. Among the most significant are misinformation, echo chambers, extremist content, sectarian conflict, digital addiction, privacy violations, and the erosion of trust in public institutions (Ali & Qazi, 2022; Imran, Farooq, & Imran, 2023). These challenges are particularly salient in Muslim contexts, where religio-social content on social media can deeply influence beliefs, identity, and community relations. They provoke critical questions about the role of state institutions in educating, guiding, and regulating digital spaces so that social media does not become a source of harm but rather a tool for public good.

From the Islamic perspective, communication has always been enveloped in ethical mandates. The Qur'an admonishes believers to verify news before conveying it: "O you



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who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you harm people unwittingly and afterwards be regretful for what you have done.” (Qur’an 49:6). Similarly, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent” (Sahih al-Bukhari). These teachings reflect a framework of communication that emphasizes truth (sadaqah/haqq), trustworthiness (amanah), accountability, avoidance of harm (darar), and compassion. Classical works like *Riyad al-Saliheen* by Imam Nawawi and *Bulugh al-Maram* compile many hadiths related to speech, slander, backbiting (ghibah), lying, and false testimony, establishing the moral boundaries of communicative behavior. In the *Seerah*, many incidents illustrate how the Prophet (ﷺ) handled rumor, discord, differences, as well as compassionate counsel e.g., his handling of slander against Aisha (رضي الله عنها), the responses to false deposition (hadith of Hudaybiyyah), and other manners in speech that restored justice and peace (Hisham, 1955; Malik, 2014).

Despite these rich ethical moorings, modern state efforts in Pakistan toward digital literacy and governance show persistent gaps. Though policies like the Digital Pakistan Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2018) recognize the need for improved internet infrastructure,

e-commerce, and citizen digital skills, they provide limited direction regarding ethical communication, misinformation, sectarian content moderation, or religious content verification. Research from Lahore University of Management Sciences (Ali & Qazi, 2022) shows that lower levels of digital literacy are strongly correlated with higher vulnerability to misinformation among social media users. Another study among secondary school teachers in Peshawar (Ahmad et al., 2025) revealed that while basic digital skills are present, advanced competencies in particular content evaluation, creating safe online environments, and integrating ethical dimensions are largely lacking.

Islamic ethical imperatives and state practice raises complex policy questions: What are the responsibilities of the State from Islamic jurisprudence and modern constitutional law? How should educational curricula integrate Prophetic communication ethics? What institutional mechanisms (e.g., teacher training, regulatory frameworks, and community partnerships) are required? And how can comparative international models inform a culturally and religiously congruent framework?

International best practices already offer instructive precedents. Finland’s model of integrating media literacy into curricula from early school levels, incorporating critical thinking and respect in evaluating online content, and the EU’s regulatory frameworks show the effectiveness of combining education, regulation, and platform accountability (European Commission, 2022; Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, 2019). These models underscore that digital literacy is not only about technical skill, but also about values, ethos, critical discernment, ethical evaluation, and citizenship.

In light of this, this research argues that the State has multifaceted responsibilities rooted in the communication ethics of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). First, educational institutions (schools, universities, madaris) must embed Qur’anic and Prophetic teachings on speech, truth, and responsibility into curricula not as optional modules, but as integral components of language, Islamiyat/Religious Studies, and communication/media studies. Second, the State should invest in systematic professional development so that teachers, religious educators (ulema), and media educators are equipped not just with technical digital tools but with ethical discernment skills. Third, public awareness initiatives especially through mosques, community centers, media outlets, and credible religious influencers can keep citizens conscious of moral obligations in online interactions. Fourth, regulation must balance the rights to expression with protections against harm:



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creating transparent guidelines for platforms, promoting content verification institutions, enforcing penal codes only when required, and ensuring due process.

This study presents an Islamic framework for the ethical and beneficial use of social media, rooted in the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) principles of truthfulness, trust, compassion, and accountability. It highlights how these timeless values can guide modern digital practices and offers practical policy directions to help Muslim societies, including Pakistan, promote moral integrity, civic responsibility, and collective well-being online.

Objectives of the Study

The study objectives are as follows:

To analyze the communication ethics of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) as derived from the Qur'an and Hadith relevant to truthfulness, responsibility, and social harmony.

To examine the existing policies and initiatives of the Pakistani State related to digital literacy and ethical social media use.

To identify the gaps between Islamic ethical principles and current state-led digital education frameworks

To evaluate international best practices in digital literacy and assess their adaptability within an Islamic ethical framework.

To propose a comprehensive, state-centered Islamic framework integrating Prophetic communication ethics into digital literacy and social media education policies

Research Question

How can the communication ethics of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) inform the State's role in developing digital literacy for the beneficial and ethical use of social media within an Islamic framework?

Significance of the Study

This study holds critical significance in responding to one of the most urgent ethical and social challenges of the digital era how to cultivate moral and responsible engagement with social media within Muslim societies. By anchoring its analysis in the communication ethics of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), the research reaffirms timeless Islamic values such as truthfulness (ṣidq), trust (amanah), and responsibility (mas'uliyah) as the normative foundations for digital interaction. These principles, derived from Qur'anic teachings and Prophetic conduct, provide a moral compass that counters misinformation, online hostility, and declining public discourse (Rahman, 2024; Al-Qaradawi, 2019). Within the growing field of Islamic media ethics, scholars increasingly emphasize that Prophetic communication values integrity, restraint, empathy, and justice offer enduring relevance for contemporary digital governance (Hassan & Kamali, 2025; Al-Azmi, 2023). Thus, this research not only contributes to the intellectual development of Islamic communication ethics but also bridges the gap between classical teachings and modern policy frameworks.

From a policy and governance perspective, this study is vital for clarifying the State's dual responsibility as both educator and regulator in the digital domain. State-led digital literacy programs must move beyond technical proficiency to include ethical and civic instruction based on Islamic teachings (Rana & Saeed, 2024). Integrating Prophetic communication ethics into digital education enhances social responsibility and fosters critical awareness among citizens a necessary foundation for countering misinformation and online extremism (Ahmad & Yousaf, 2023). By aligning these moral principles with



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Pakistan's Digital Pakistan Policy (2023–2025) and the global call for ethical digital citizenship promoted by UNESCO (2024), the study offers practical pathways for curriculum reform, teacher development, and inter-institutional collaboration. In doing so, it demonstrates how faith-based ethics can reinforce contemporary digital governance without compromising freedom of expression or innovation (Khan & Iqbal, 2024).

At a broader societal level, this research contributes to constructing an Islamic paradigm for media ethics applicable beyond Pakistan's borders. It provides a theoretical synthesis that connects Islamic moral philosophy with 21st-century digital literacy frameworks, enriching the interdisciplinary discourse on religion, media, and technology (Esposito & Voll, 2024; El-Fadl, 2023). For educators, policymakers, and religious leaders, the findings can guide the creation of ethically informed educational interventions, community campaigns, and proportionate regulatory measures. For academics, it opens avenues for comparative scholarship between Islamic and secular frameworks of digital citizenship. Ultimately, the study aspires to transform social media from a medium of discord into a vehicle for *da'wah*, constructive dialogue, and social harmony realizing the Prophetic (ﷺ) model of communication in the modern digital environment (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1996; Nawawi, 1999).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's digital age, social media powerfully shapes beliefs and behaviors but also fuels misinformation, moral polarization, and ethical decline (Van Dijk, 2020). For Muslim societies like Pakistan, where faith and governance are intertwined, a value-based response grounded in Islamic teachings is essential. The Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) communication model rooted in truthfulness, compassion, and responsibility offers timeless ethical guidance for individuals and the State (Sardar, 2017). While existing studies emphasize integrating moral frameworks into media governance and education (Hasan et al., 2024; Rashid, 2018), there remains a gap in linking Islamic principles with modern digital governance. This review, therefore, builds a scholarly foundation to address that connection.

Prophetic Model of Communication

Islamic communication ethics originate from divine guidance found in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), which collectively emphasize the moral responsibility of speech, sincerity in intention, and compassion in dialogue. Communication in Islam is not merely a social exchange but an act of worship, bound by the principles of truth (*ṣidq*), trust (*amanah*), justice (*'adl*), and responsibility (*mas'uliyah*). The Qur'an enjoins believers to "speak justice even if it concerns a near relative" (Qur'an 6:152) and warns against "false speech" (Qur'an 22:30). Moreover, the Prophet (ﷺ) declared: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6018), establishing silence as a form of moral discipline when speech may cause harm.

According to Al-Qaradawi (2021), the Prophet's (ﷺ) communication reflected a profound awareness of context (*fiqh al-waqi'*), emotional intelligence, and the capacity to balance truth with compassion. His dialogue practices were never aimed at domination but at transformation seeking to correct, educate, and unify. Classical scholars such as Ibn Hisham (1955) and Ibn Kathir (1998) recorded several incidents where the Prophet (ﷺ) used calm reasoning, empathy, and restraint even toward his opponents, demonstrating a communicative style rooted in mercy (*raḥmah*) and *hikmah* (wisdom). These models of interaction form the basis of *adab al-ḥiwar* (etiquette of dialogue), a



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concept later expanded by contemporary scholars to address challenges in the digital sphere.

Recent research by Akhter and Saeed (2023) emphasizes that the Prophetic model provides an ideal framework for guiding online behavior, especially in countering misinformation and hate speech. The authors note that amanah (trustworthiness) in communication today extends beyond personal truthfulness it now encompasses digital responsibility, including verifying information before sharing and avoiding slanderous or emotionally charged content. Similarly, Rahman (2022) argues that the Prophetic approach integrates ethical cognition with emotional regulation, teaching Muslims to engage online with respect, humility, and sincerity rather than reactionary aggression.

The Seerah literature also highlights the Prophet's (ﷺ) skill in audience adaptation addressing people according to their understanding, culture, and emotional state (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1996). This principle resonates with the modern concept of “contextual communication competence” (Saleh & Nuruddin, 2023), suggesting that ethical communication requires awareness of social and digital environments. For instance, while the Prophet (ﷺ) corrected misinformation through dialogue and reasoning, he avoided public humiliation or emotional escalation an approach that parallels digital media ethics emphasizing respectful discourse and constructive engagement.

Islam views communication as a trust (amanah) and a test of one's faith. As Syed and Rahim (2023) observe, the misuse of speech through gossip (ghibah), slander (buhtan), or spreading fitnah constitutes not only social harm but spiritual transgression. These moral restrictions align closely with modern ethical codes for responsible media use, underscoring the timeless relevance of the Prophetic (ﷺ) communication model in digital spaces.

The Prophetic model offers both moral philosophy and practical principles for developing ethical communication frameworks in the digital age. By internalizing values such as *ṣiḍq*, *amanah*, *ḥikmah*, and *raḥmah*, individuals and institutions can transform social media into a platform of constructive dialogue, social unity, and spiritual growth reflecting the ultimate objective of Islamic communication ethics: promoting truth and goodness for the collective well-being of humanity.

Contemporary Challenges of Social Media

The contemporary digital ecosystem has profoundly reshaped how individuals perceive, communicate, and construct social meaning. Social media platforms, while empowering citizens through real-time information exchange and participatory communication, have simultaneously produced severe moral, psychological, and epistemic challenges. The unregulated spread of falsehood, moral disengagement, and religious distortion poses a threat not only to individual ethics but also to collective social harmony. In the context of Muslim-majority nations like Pakistan where faith, morality, and community life are deeply interconnected these challenges demand a principled response that combines digital literacy with the ethical teachings of Islam (Ahmed, 2025).

Misinformation and Fake News

Misinformation and disinformation are among the most pervasive issues of the digital era. False narratives circulate at unprecedented speed, exploiting emotional triggers, algorithmic biases, and the public's limited capacity for critical verification (Raza & Malik, 2024). In many Muslim societies, including Pakistan, misinformation often manipulates religious sentiments, invoking Quranic verses or fabricated Hadiths to legitimize certain ideologies or discredit others (Naseem & Qureshi, 2023).



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According to Ahmed (2025), unchecked digital behaviors and unverified content sharing are major factors behind the “digital moral crisis,” where individuals unconsciously contribute to the spread of misinformation. Moreover, platforms prioritize engagement over authenticity, rewarding content that provokes emotional reactions rather than rational deliberation (Yousaf & Zainab, 2023). As a result, individuals who lack adequate media literacy are more vulnerable to ideological manipulation, especially in societies where religious symbolism carries deep emotional authority. Ahmed (2025) emphasizes that social media users often fail to differentiate between authentic Islamic discourse and manipulated religious rhetoric, making them susceptible to misinformation that undermines true Islamic values of *sidq* (truthfulness) and *amanah* (trust).

Online Hate Speech and Polarization

Digital spaces have also become breeding grounds for hate speech, hostility, and sectarian polarization. Researchers argue that algorithmic curation tends to amplify outrage, deepening divisions within societies (Bauman & Lyon, 2022). In Pakistan, online platforms have been used to propagate sectarian intolerance, defame religious scholars, and distort Islamic teachings for political or personal gain (Naseer & Jamil, 2023). The result is an environment where digital aggression replaces dialogue, contradicting the Prophetic model of *rahmah* (compassion) and respectful communication.

The absence of ethical frameworks and institutional regulation further aggravates polarization. Online campaigns driven by sectarian rivalry or political identity can easily spiral into misinformation loops, promoting hostility and mistrust among citizens (Rafiq, 2025). Ahmed (2025) observed that such digital toxicity is not merely technological in nature but reflective of a deeper ethical void where self-restraint, empathy, and moral responsibility central to Islamic *akhlaq* are sidelined.

Psychological Impacts: Anxiety and Comparison Culture

The psychological costs of social media use are equally concerning. Constant exposure to curated lifestyles fosters comparison culture, leading to dissatisfaction, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem (Khan & Batool, 2023). Scholars report a rise in “digital anxiety” and social isolation despite increased online connectivity (Zubair & Faridi, 2024). Continuous scrolling and social validation loops condition users to measure their worth through likes and shares rather than genuine human connection, contradicting Islamic principles of humility and inner peace (*sakinah*).

Ahmed (2025) found that excessive social media use particularly affects youth, influencing academic performance, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships. These psychological consequences manifest as digital fatigue, loss of concentration, and spiritual detachment conditions that ultimately weaken the moral fiber of society. Integrating mental health education with digital literacy, therefore, becomes a critical policy imperative.

Religious Misuse: Distorted Islamic Content and Sectarianism

One of the most alarming trends in the digital landscape is the religious misuse of social media. Distorted or fabricated religious messages, unauthorized fatwas, and misleading interpretations of Islamic texts often circulate widely. According to Rafiq (2025), online preachers without authentic scholarly credentials use religious symbolism to gain influence, spreading sectarian divisions and misinformation in the guise of *da'wah*.

Ahmed (2025) asserts that such misuse undermines Islam’s intellectual integrity and public trust in authentic scholarship. When digital platforms are flooded with pseudo-religious content, users lose the ability to distinguish between credible sources and ideological propaganda. This phenomenon calls for urgent intervention by both religious



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authorities and state institutions. Promoting verified religious education online rooted in Prophetic ethics of truthfulness and sincerity can help counteract this digital fitnah (discord).

The Need for Ethical Grounding and State-Led Literacy Initiatives

The cumulative impact of misinformation, hate speech, psychological harm, and religious misuse illustrates that the digital sphere is not merely a technological medium but a moral and educational domain requiring active state involvement. The absence of digital ethics education in Pakistan's national curriculum has created a vacuum that allows harmful content to thrive (Rashid & Idrees, 2024). Effective governance must thus involve collaboration among educators, policymakers, religious scholars, and civil society to promote akhlaq-based digital literacy programs.

As Ahmed (2025) highlights, "the ethical transformation of digital behavior cannot be achieved through regulation alone it requires nurturing moral awareness grounded in Islamic values and Prophetic communication ethics." The integration of these values within educational systems and community outreach initiatives represents a sustainable pathway toward responsible social media use.

Ultimately, addressing the contemporary challenges of social media demands a synthesis of technology, education, and ethics. The Prophetic (ﷺ) model provides this synthesis by promoting truthful speech, compassionate engagement, and responsibility in communication principles that remain as relevant in the digital age as they were in seventh-century Arabia.

State Responsibilities in Islam and Modern Governance

The ethical governance of communication and media is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, where the state functions as a moral guardian responsible for upholding justice, truth, and public welfare (maslahah). Within this framework, the principles of Amr bil Ma'ruf (enjoining good) and Nahy anil Munkar (forbidding evil) establish a moral foundation for ensuring responsible communication and protecting society from harm (Kamali, 2023). These principles are not confined to personal virtue; they extend to collective and institutional responsibilities, including the regulation of speech, education, and public discourse.

Theoretical Responsibilities: Islamic Perspective

In classical Islamic governance, the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) communication model emphasized sidq (truthfulness), amanah (trust), and rahmah (compassion), which together form the ethical bedrock of responsible communication. Modern Islamic scholars argue that these principles must guide the ethical use of media and technology in contemporary Muslim societies.

Kamali (2023) elaborates that maṣlaḥah (public interest) justifies state action to prevent digital harm and misinformation that may threaten social stability. Similarly, Abou El Fadl (2024) stresses that Shari'ah encompasses moral and legal obligations, and therefore, governance in the digital age should safeguard public ethics, not merely enforce legal codes.

According to Al-Halabi (2025), Islamic governance demands a proactive approach where leaders and institutions ensure that communication platforms promote honesty, respect, and social unity. This reflects the Prophetic duty of leadership as amanah a trust to protect society from psychological, moral, and intellectual corruption. Hence, the state's theoretical responsibility includes the moral regulation of communication and promotion of virtuous media literacy consistent with Islamic ethical values.



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Constitutional Responsibilities of the State in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan (Article 31) directs the State to enable Muslims to live in accordance with Islamic moral principles, while Article 19 guarantees freedom of expression “subject to reasonable restrictions” concerning the glory of Islam, morality, and public order. This dual responsibility protecting freedom while upholding morality positions the State as both a regulator and a facilitator of ethical discourse.

Recent research (Hassan & Qureshi, 2024) notes that while the Constitution provides a normative foundation for moral governance, policy implementation often falls short of integrating ethical communication values. State bodies like the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) possess regulatory authority but rarely frame policies grounded in Prophetic communication ethics.

The Punjab Defamation Act (2024) and Cyber Crime Prevention Rules (2023) aim to curb fake news and online harassment. However, as documented by Zafar and Murtaza (2024), these laws remain reactive rather than preventive and seldom address the moral education component of responsible communication. Thus, constitutional obligations need to be translated into curricular, institutional, and ethical frameworks that foster public awareness and civic responsibility.

Practical Responsibilities: Institutional Implementation

In practical terms, the State’s responsibility extends beyond regulation into education, training, and digital ethics promotion. Under the Digital Pakistan Policy (2023), the government has initiated programs for digital inclusion, yet the ethical dimension of online engagement remains underdeveloped.

Educational scholars (Rahim & Batool, 2024) emphasize the need to integrate digital literacy and Islamic ethics into curricula to prepare youth for responsible media participation. Teacher training programs can embed modules on ethical technology use, emphasizing compassion (rahmah), truthfulness (sidq), and social responsibility (mas’uliyah).

Similarly, regulatory and enforcement agencies, including PEMRA, FIA Cybercrime Wing, and the Ministry of Information Technology, must collaborate with academic institutions and religious scholars to ensure that communication policies reflect moral integrity. According to Khalid (2025), cross-sectoral collaboration between religious authorities, educators, and policymakers can strengthen social cohesion by promoting ethical digital citizenship aligned with Prophetic values.

Public awareness campaigns, led jointly by the State and civil society, can further enhance responsible online behavior and resilience against misinformation. The integration of Prophetic communication ethics truthfulness, patience, and mutual respect within these initiatives ensures that governance is not only regulatory but also morally transformative.

Integration of Theory and Practice

A balanced Islamic governance model thus requires the fusion of theoretical principles with actionable policies:

Dimension	Responsibility	Application in Digital Governance
Theoretical	Amr bil Ma’ruf, Nahy anil Munkar; Amanah; Maslahah	Promoting truth, curbing harmful speech, protecting collective morality
Constitutional	Upholding Article 19 & 31 of the Constitution	Ensuring freedom with moral accountability in digital expression
Practical	Curriculum reform, teacher	Implementing ethical literacy,



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	training, cyber awareness campaigns	laws,	regulating misinformation, promoting responsible online culture
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This multidimensional responsibility situates the State as both moral guardian and educational facilitator, ensuring that digital transformation aligns with Islamic ethical values and public welfare. By grounding policies in Prophetic communication ethics, Pakistan can develop a morally aware digital society that harmonizes technological progress with spiritual and social well-being.

Educating and Training for Beneficial Use of Social Media

In the framework of Holy Prophet (ﷺ) Communication Ethics and the Role of the State in Developing Digital Literacy, education and training form the cornerstone for ensuring that social media becomes a tool of benefit rather than harm. Based on Prophetic ethics truthfulness (sidq), trustworthiness (amanah), compassion (rahmah) the State has both a moral and civic duty to institutionalize learning and awareness at multiple levels. Below, the following headings align with this responsibility:

Curriculum Integration of Digital Literacy (School to University Level)

Curriculum integration means more than adding a course; it involves embedding digital literacy and communication ethics across subjects. Literature indicates that when students begin to engage with media ethics, verification of information, and critical thinking early (middle school onward), they are less likely to spread misinformation and more likely to adopt virtuous online behaviors (Saleem, Khan, & Fatima, 2023).

A study in Lahore's university communication departments showed that embedding modules on Islamic communication ethics (derived from Prophetic teachings) alongside technical media literacy significantly improved student ability to discern between credible religious content and manipulative content (Rashid & Iqbal, 2024). These modules included case studies from Seerah showing how the Prophet (ﷺ) handled false rumour, and how trust and honesty were maintained even in difficult times.

Teacher Training in Digital Ethics

Teachers are not just transmitters of information but moral guides. In Sindh, a training program for teachers in both public and private schools developed a short certificate course on digital ethics and social media: focusing on issues such as defamation, online sectarianism, religious misinterpretation, and ethical speech. Participants reported increased confidence in guiding students to avoid false content and promoting Prophetic values of honesty (sidq) and patience (sabr) in online interactions (Javed, Shah, & Zaman, 2023). Similarly, a pilot project by NGO and a religious seminary collaboration involved madrasa teachers in Karachi. They were trained to use digital tools and religious criteria for vetting religious content shared online. The State's role in supporting such programs (funding, curricula, and oversight) has been praised as essential in several qualitative studies (Naqvi, 2024).

Community Awareness Campaigns (Masajid, Media, NGOs)

Grassroots initiatives have strong impact because they reach communities in trusted environments. For example, a campaign by an NGO in Rawalpindi engaged local mosque Imams to deliver Khutbahs (sermons) on truthful speech online and dangers of misinformation; follow-up workshops for congregants improved awareness of content verification (Sabir & Ali, 2024).

Media outlets have also started dedicated segments in Urdu to teach audiences how to check the credibility of religious content, using examples from Seerah, and advising caution. NGOs in Karachi and Lahore work with youth clubs to teach digital literacy



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through social media challenges and competitions, emphasizing the Prophetic model's stress on compassion and not harming others with speech (Amin & Raza, 2025).

Partnerships with Influencers and Islamic Scholars for Online Campaigns

Influencers and respected scholars hold sway in communities, especially religiously inclined ones. When influencers adhere to Prophetic communication ethics ensuring truthfulness, avoiding exaggeration, refusing to spread rumors they serve as role models. A study in Islamabad (Farooq & Zaman, 2024) documented that when Islamic scholars teamed up with social media creators to produce correct religious content, misinformation about tenets of faith dropped significantly among viewers in follow-up surveys.

Another project in Balochistan used SMS campaigns by religious scholars to counter sectarian fake content in local languages. This partnership included State-supported vetting of content and result evaluation, showing higher trust from community members as opposed to generic public service announcements (Khan & Yasmin, 2025).

Global Insights: Comparative Practices

States around the world employ different mixes of education, regulation and public engagement to limit digital harms and strengthen citizens' resilience to misinformation. Comparative practice is useful because it shows concrete policy instruments that can be adapted and Islamically reframed for Pakistan. The section below reviews four strands: Finland's

school-based media-literacy model, the European Union's regulatory architecture against disinformation, UAE and Saudi initiatives on responsible online behaviour, and practical lessons Pakistan can adopt within an Islamic framework.

Finland mainstreaming media literacy through the school system

Finland's approach is widely cited as a successful example of national, cross-curricular media education. Rather than isolating "media literacy" as a single subject, Finland treats media education as a cross-cutting competence embedded across subject areas and age groups. The national policy prioritizes teacher training, public-sector coordination (Ministry of Education & Culture working with national audiovisual institutes) and a combination of formal and non-formal learning opportunities (e.g., libraries, museums, youth centres) to strengthen critical thinking, source evaluation and democratic participation (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019; KAVI, 2021). Importantly for Islamic adaptation, Finland's strategy emphasizes values education (media responsibility, respect for pluralism) alongside technical skills a model that can be reframed to include Prophetic ethics (truthfulness, amanah, restraint) within Pakistan's Islamiyat and civic curricula.

European Union platform accountability and multi-stakeholder rules (Digital Services Act)

The EU's layered response combines regulation, transparency requirements for platforms, and support for media literacy and fact-checking. The Digital Services Act (DSA) requires large online platforms to assess systemic risks (including disinformation), increase transparency of algorithms and content moderation, and provide greater access for researchers and civil society (European Commission, 2022; Publications Office of the EU, 2023). Scholarly analyses note the DSA's emphasis on risk management, transparency, and due process, which strikes a balance between curbing harmful content and protecting free expression (Husovec, 2024; policy reviews



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2024). For Pakistan, the DSA model suggests how platform obligations (transparency, rapid take-down for clearly unlawful content) can be combined with state-led education to avoid over-reliance on punitive censorship a balance resonant with Islamic principles of justice and proportionality.

UAE & Saudi Arabia national campaigns, guidelines and curriculum initiatives

Gulf States have taken rapid, state-led approaches to govern online behaviour, combining legal measures with public campaigns. The UAE, for example, has issued government social-media guidelines for public bodies, run digital inclusion and e-participation programmes, and tightened laws against “fake news” and harmful online content (UAE Social Media Guidelines, 2021; UAE Digital Inclusion portal, 2024). Freedom House and other monitors have noted the legal enforcement dimension in the UAE (2022), underlining the line between public-interest regulation and limits on speech. Saudi Arabia has also invested in digital citizenship/ethics education in schools and research-led curriculum reform, with recent studies examining ways to integrate emotional intelligence and civic agency into digital education (Alenezi et al., 2024). Both states demonstrate the value of state resources and institutional coordination to scale literacy campaigns but they also show the importance of legal safeguards and public legitimacy to avoid perceptions of heavy-handed control.

Comparative lessons Pakistan can adapt within an Islamic framework

Across these models, four transferable policy features emerge that can be Islamically reframed for Pakistan:

Cross-curricular integration and teacher capacity building

Finland’s success rests on early, curriculum-wide integration and strong teacher development; Pakistan should embed Prophetic communication ethics (truth, amanah, avoidance of fitnah) within Islamiyat, language and civic courses and fund large-scale teacher training programs (Ministry model adapted to national curricula).

Platform accountability plus ethical education

The EU’s DSA indicates that platform obligations (transparency, risk assessments) work best when paired with public education; Pakistan can require platform transparency for high-risk disinformation while investing in mass literacy programmes that foreground Islamic ethical norms.

Localized, trusted messengers

UAE/Saudi initiatives illustrate the power of combining national campaigns with trusted local messengers (religious scholars, community leaders). In Pakistan, mosque-based workshops, Ulema councils and certified religious content networks can lend credibility to fact-checking and counter-misinformation work.

Rights-respecting legal frameworks

Comparative practice shows the risk of overbroad enforcement. An Islamic governance approach would insist on **proportionality, due process and maslahah** (public interest) when drafting cyber rules protecting dignity and order without silencing legitimate debate.

Taken together, these global insights suggest a hybrid model for Pakistan: (a) embed Prophetic communication virtues across curricula and teacher training; (b) legislate



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platform transparency and responsibility with clear due-process safeguards; (c) mobilize religious institutions and influencers in verified, state-supported literacy campaigns; and (d) evaluate impact with independent research and public reporting. Such a model aligns with both international best practice and Islamic ethical commitments to truth, justice and communal well-being.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, relying primarily on content analysis to explore the ethical principles of communication as practiced by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) and their relevance in shaping modern digital literacy policies. The study systematically examines selected verses of the Qur'an, authentic Hadiths, and classical Islamic teachings to establish an ethical framework for responsible online engagement. In addition, the research analyzes constitutional provisions of Pakistan, international digital literacy models (such as those from Finland, the European Union, and the UAE), and relevant academic literature to identify comparative insights. This integrated qualitative method enables a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic ethical communication can inform state-led initiatives for promoting beneficial and morally grounded use of social media in contemporary society

DISCUSSION

The present study critically examines the issue of digital misinformation, cyberbullying, and ethical communication within the framework of the Holy Prophet's (ﷺ) communication ethics and the State's responsibility in fostering digital literacy for the beneficial use of social media. Theoretically grounded in the Prophetic principles of *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trust), *tabayyun* (verification), *la ḍarar* (no harm), and preserving dignity, this analysis interprets contemporary challenges through empirical cases such as misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, polio vaccination drives, and growing instances of cyberbullying in Pakistan. Recent studies have shown that false narratives such as claims that COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility or violate religious norms spread rapidly through social media, largely due to low digital literacy and the absence of credible verification mechanisms (Panhwar et al., 2022; COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in Pakistan, 2023). Similarly, in the polio eradication campaign, misinformation fueled by religious fatalism and fabricated online videos significantly weakened vaccine acceptance, while public service advertisements rooted in factual and ethical messaging improved trust and participation (Jin et al., 2022; Arif et al., 2023). In parallel, cyberbullying has emerged as a serious online harm: female university students in Sindh report high levels of online harassment, yet many remain silent, showing the lack of safe reporting channels and weak regulatory awareness (Ahmmad, Iqbal, & Naz, 2024). Also, a study among adolescents in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, found that youth from poorer families suffer more from cyberbullying, which damages their psychological well-being (Nasar Shah et al., 2025). These findings affirm the research objectives by demonstrating that misinformation and cyberbullying, when unregulated, not only endanger public health but also violate the Prophetic injunction to speak only what is true, beneficial, and non-harmful. From a governance perspective, the State's moral and constitutional duty aligns with the Qur'anic directive of *amr bil ma'ruf wa nahy 'anil munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), necessitating policies that merge digital regulation with ethical education, protection of victims, and promotion of safe speech. However, gaps persist particularly the lack of integration of Islamic communication ethics in digital literacy curricula, weak monitoring of online falsehoods, and insufficient



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legal enforcement and reporting mechanisms for cyberbullying which limit the effectiveness of existing initiatives. Therefore, this study suggests an integrated model where the State collaborates with educators, policymakers, religious scholars, and civil society to promote an ethical digital culture rooted in Prophetic communication values. Such an approach can prevent harm (la ḍarar), enhance truthfulness (ṣidq), protect dignity, and nurture a digitally literate ummah capable of using social media responsibly and constructively within both Islamic and modern frameworks.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study titled “Holy Prophet (ﷺ) Communication Ethics and the Role of the State in Developing Digital Literacy: An Islamic Framework for the Beneficial Use of Social Media” emphasizes that the ethical communication model of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) serves as a timeless foundation for addressing contemporary challenges in the digital age. His teachings on truthfulness, respect, compassion, and responsibility are not only spiritual principles but also practical guidelines for digital conduct. In an era where misinformation, hate speech, and moral degradation often dominate online spaces, the Prophetic framework provides a moral compass for constructive engagement and social harmony. The State’s role, therefore, is pivotal in institutionalizing these values through education, regulation, and public policy. By integrating Islamic ethics into digital literacy programs, teacher training, and curriculum development, governments can ensure that citizens especially youth are equipped to use social media responsibly and productively. Moreover, the collaboration between scholars, educators, and policymakers can establish a balanced digital culture where freedom of expression coexists with ethical accountability. Thus, the beneficial use of social media in Muslim societies depends on a shared commitment: the State as the protector of moral integrity, educators as ethical guides, and individuals as practitioners of Prophetic communication ethics. Through this holistic approach, digital platforms can evolve into means of spreading knowledge, fostering empathy, and promoting unity in alignment with the Prophet’s (ﷺ) mission of mercy, truth, and communal well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following research-based recommendations are proposed to align educational, social, and policy practices with the Prophetic (ﷺ) model of ethical communication and to promote the beneficial, responsible use of social media in contemporary society:

Integrate the Prophet Muhammad’s (ﷺ) communication principles truthfulness (ṣidq), trust (amanah), verification (tabayyun), and non-harm (la ḍarar) into early education curricula to help students understand the importance of ethical speech and honesty.

Conduct specialized workshops for teachers focusing on Islamic communication ethics and digital ethics to enable them to serve as practical role models for students.

Encourage parents to monitor their children’s social media activities and provide home-based moral guidance inspired by the Prophet’s teachings on truth, respect, and avoiding harm.

Introduce programs in schools, mosques, and community centers that promote the practical application of Islamic ethics in everyday interactions and online behavior.

Incorporate Islamic principles of communication into digital literacy curricula from school to university level to help youth recognize misinformation, cyberbullying, and hate content.



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Launch community awareness campaigns through mosques, religious institutions, media, and NGOs to promote the Prophet's ethical model of communication and responsible online behavior.

Embed Islamic communication ethics within state policies to strengthen moral dimensions in media regulation, cyber laws, and educational frameworks.

Enforce stricter implementation of laws against cybercrime, hate speech, and misinformation while ensuring safe and accessible reporting mechanisms for victims.

Train religious scholars, preachers, and social media influencers to promote ethical online communication and constructive engagement based on the Prophet's (ﷺ) teachings.

Encourage universities and research institutions to continue empirical and theoretical studies on Islamic communication ethics and digital behavior to guide future policy and curriculum development.

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