

The Application of Social Media Use and its Challenges in Shaping Qur'anic Character

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ABSTRACT

The digital milieu, particularly social media platforms, currently presents an intricate paradox for youth character development. While these spaces ostensibly offer avenues for connection and knowledge, they simultaneously breed environments rife with superficiality, confirmation bias, and a troubling erosion of critical self-reflection. Much existing scholarship on digital literacy or Islamic ethics often fails to adequately synthesize the specific mechanisms through which social media directly impedes, rather than aids, the cultivation of robust Qur'anic character, neglecting the profound internal conflicts generated. This conceptual analysis, drawing from classical Islamic texts and contemporary digital sociology, dissects the subtle yet persistent challenges inherent in this digital immersion. Findings suggest that incessant digital validation fragments one's internal moral compass, algorithms foster an echo chamber antithetical to a balanced worldview, and the performative nature of online identity distorts sincere spiritual striving. Such insights compel a re-evaluation of current educational approaches, demanding a more proactive, ethically grounded digital pedagogy within Muslim communities.

Keywords: Qur'anic Character, Digital Ethics, Social Media Influence, Moral Fragmentation, Islamic Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

A teenager, head bowed over a glowing screen, scrolling endlessly through curated lives—this image, once a fleeting snapshot, has calcified into a default posture of contemporary existence. It begs a serious question: what precisely is this ubiquitous digital engagement doing to the inner person? The promise of global connectivity, once hailed as a civilizational advancement, has arguably transmuted into a pervasive, often insidious, current of distraction and moral relativism. We seem to have embraced these platforms with an almost blind optimism, rarely pausing to genuinely consider their deep-seated structural effects on the formation of identity and ethical dispositions. Why have we been so slow to grasp the implications? Past discussions, while often well-meaning, frequently misdiagnose the digital illness as merely an issue of 'screen time' or 'misinformation,' ignoring the very architecture of these platforms—an architecture arguably designed to exploit psychological vulnerabilities, thereby creating a profound chasm between proclaimed religious values and lived experience. The mechanisms by which these environments actively corrode, rather than strengthen, the foundations of a Qur'anic character remain woefully under-examined, leaving a gaping void in our collective understanding of spiritual resilience in the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly discourse surrounding social media and its wider societal influence presents a deeply fragmented picture, often oscillating between utopian pronouncements and dystopian warnings without truly interrogating the underlying mechanisms at play. Early proponents, such as Shirky (2008), saw in these platforms a new democratic space, a 'cognitive surplus' ripe for collective action and intellectual exchange; a rather optimistic,

perhaps even naive, outlook given what we now observe. Subsequent work, however, began to register the inevitable shadows. Turkle (2011) famously argued that our pervasive digital connections ironically leave us feeling 'alone together,' highlighting a superficiality in interaction that struggles to foster genuine empathy or deep relational bonds, an observation that has become more pertinent with each passing year. This superficiality arguably creates a fertile ground for the erosion of internal moral fortitude, a process that becomes particularly problematic when discussing the cultivation of character rooted in divine principles.

Indeed, some researchers, like those in the tradition of moral psychology, point to the diminishing capacity for sustained introspection—a foundational element for developing any robust ethical framework (Thakar, 2025). Arguments from proponents of virtue ethics, for example, often stress the necessity of solitude, contemplation, and deliberate practice in shaping moral habits; these conditions, it seems plausible, are directly contradicted by the relentless, often shallow, demands of continuous digital engagement (MacIntyre, 1984). The ceaseless quest for external validation through 'likes' and 'shares' displaces the internal barometer of conscience, rendering one perpetually dependent on the ephemeral opinions of a digital crowd. This shifts the very locus of ethical evaluation from divine command or reasoned conviction to popular consensus, a dangerous path for any faith tradition, especially one as deeply rooted in scriptural authority as Islam.

When we turn to specific Islamic scholarship on character, often termed 'adab' or 'akhlaq,' there is a rich tradition emphasizing virtues like sincerity (ikhlas), humility (tawadhu'), patience (sabr), and truthfulness (sidq) (AlGhazali, 1991). Yet, how these traditional virtues manifest—or, more critically, fail to manifest—in a digitally saturated existence remains stubbornly under-theorised. Some attempts have been made to outline a 'digital fiqh' or 'Islamic digital ethics' (Ess, 2018), often focusing on permissible content or online etiquette. These discussions, while important, frequently miss the forest for the trees. They address the 'what' of online behaviour but rarely delve into the 'how' of its psychological and spiritual impact on the very essence of character. The critical flaw here is an insufficient engagement with the insidious, structural pressures of platform design itself—algorithms that amplify bias, echo chambers that stifle intellectual humility, and incentive structures that reward performativity over authenticity.

Consider the concept of 'ghibah' (backbiting) or 'namimah' (slander) in Islam, gravely condemned practices. Social media, however, provides an almost effortless, frictionless medium for such acts, often disguised as 'critique' or 'sharing news' (Abdel-Haleem, 2004). The anonymity or semi-anonymity that platforms afford often disinhibits users, allowing for behaviours they might never exhibit in a face-to-face interaction (Suler, 2004). This disinhibition clearly works against the cultivation of a character that values restraint, respect, and compassion. Unfortunately, many religious educators seem to operate under the assumption that existing moral injunctions can simply be 'applied' to the digital realm without acknowledging the profoundly transformative nature of the medium itself; this is a serious misstep.

Furthermore, the relentless algorithmic curation of content arguably cultivates a narcissistic self-absorption, where one's digital feed becomes an endless mirror reflecting back one's own biases and preferences (Pariser, 2011). This intellectual insularity directly counters the Qur'anic imperative for seeking knowledge from diverse sources, reflecting on the signs of God in the universe, and engaging with different perspectives to strengthen faith and understanding (Qutub, 2023). A character steeped in Qur'anic principles ought to be open, reflective, and striving for an expansive, rather than constricted, worldview. The 'filter bubble' effect, therefore, isn't just an informational problem; it's a spiritual one, stunting the growth of intellectual humility and genuine curiosity.

Finally, the notion of 'ummah' or community, a bedrock of Islamic identity, also suffers a peculiar distortion in the digital space. While online communities exist, they often lack the depth, accountability, and physical presence necessary for true communal support and ethical formation (Zaman, 2019). The performative piety common on social media, where religious acts are shared for public acclaim, arguably undermines the sincerity (ikhlas) central to Islamic practice (Rahman, 2024). This public display, often a pursuit of ego rather than God's pleasure, stands in stark contrast to the quiet, humble acts of worship emphasized in Islamic tradition. The literature, while touching on these elements peripherally, has largely failed to consolidate these disparate threads into a coherent, critical conceptualization of how the very *architecture* of social media fundamentally challenges the spiritual and moral cultivation of Qur'anic character. This represents a significant oversight, one which this current conceptual exploration seeks to address by drawing together these fragmented observations into a more unified, critical framework.

METHODOLOGY

This inquiry advances through a rigorously applied conceptual analysis, fundamentally an intellectual defense of the library and the critical mind as primary tools for generating new theoretical understandings. The ambition here was not to quantify behaviours or survey opinions, which would inevitably miss the deeper, structural concerns we sought to probe, but rather to construct a coherent, robust conceptual framework outlining the challenges social media presents to Qur'anic character. One could easily be tempted to gather anecdotes, but those, while compelling, lack the analytical rigor needed to deconstruct systemic issues.

The process began with an intensive, deliberate engagement with foundational Islamic texts concerning 'akhlaq' and 'adab'—moral philosophy and etiquette—examining classical works by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh (Abd. et al., 2021). This wasn't a superficial scan; it demanded a deep immersion, identifying core virtues, their definitions, and the practical methodologies for their cultivation as envisioned within Islamic tradition. Simultaneously, we embarked on a systematic exploration of contemporary digital sociology, media studies, and psychology. We discarded outdated theories that focused merely on technological access, instead prioritising scholarship that critiqued platform design, algorithmic influence, and the psychological impact of constant connectivity. This wasn't about simply accumulating information; it was a manual, painstaking selection process, akin to an intellectual excavation.

Our 'data' thus comprised these textual bodies: classical Islamic moral treatises, seminal works on digital culture, and critical analyses of social media's societal implications. The analytical strategy involved a constant, iterative dialectic between these two seemingly disparate fields. Each identified Qur'anic virtue—sincerity, humility, patience, truthfulness, intellectual openness, communal responsibility—was held up against the prevailing operational logic and observable effects of social media (Akib, 2024). We asked, for instance, 'How does the algorithmic amplification of content affect the Islamic virtue of intellectual humility, which requires seeking truth beyond immediate gratification?' or 'Does the performative aspect of online identity fundamentally contradict the ideal of 'ikhlas' (sincerity in worship)?'

This involved a meticulous deconstruction of arguments, identifying points of convergence and, more crucially, divergence between the traditional Islamic ideal and the digital reality. We were building a theoretical synthesis, not merely compiling a bibliography. It required constant cross-referencing, questioning assumptions in both fields, and identifying where the existing conceptual tools of one tradition might illuminate the blind spots of the other. The rigour lay in the intellectual wrestling match, in the persistent probing of how the inherent design principles of platforms—their incentive structures, their psychological hooks, their relentless demand for attention—might subtly, yet profoundly, re-engineer moral subjectivity. This method, far from being a passive review, was an active construction of an interpretive framework, aiming to bridge a critical gap in our understanding of digital life and its spiritual costs. It was a conscious effort to move beyond simplistic applications of old ethics to new technologies, instead seeking a deeper, conceptual confrontation.

RESULTS

The relentless quest for digital affirmation, one finds, fragments the very core of one's internal moral compass. Every 'like' or 'share' delivers a fleeting dopamine hit, training the user to prioritise external validation over quiet introspection or adherence to divinely ordained principles. This creates a deeply unsettling feedback loop; authentic action, born of sincere intention, gradually yields to performative piety, where religious acts become mere content for public consumption. Sincerity, a cornerstone of Qur'anic character, corrodes under this incessant digital scrutiny, becoming less about God's pleasure and more about human applause. Such a shift in motivational locus fundamentally undermines spiritual growth (Mohd Akib, 2025).

Beyond this, the ubiquitous algorithms, designed for engagement, systematically foster echo chambers and filter bubbles. These digital enclosures, rather than encouraging a balanced worldview, solidify existing biases and actively discourage exposure to dissenting opinions. Intellectual humility, a virtue that demands openmindedness and a willingness to seek truth from various sources, finds itself stifled by this curated reality. One finds a hardening of positions, a tribalism amplified by the ease of finding agreement, and a decreasing capacity for patient, respectful dialogue with those holding different perspectives. This selective exposure subtly reengineers one's cognitive landscape, making it difficult to appreciate the complexity of the world, much less the subtle signs of God's creation. It produces intellectual arrogance, not spiritual wisdom (Thakar, 2025).

Furthermore, the performative nature of online identity distorts sincere spiritual striving into a public spectacle. The curated self, always 'on stage,' often presents an idealised, sanitised version of reality, leading to widespread feelings of inadequacy and envy among observers. Humility, another critical Qur'anic virtue, struggles to breathe in an environment where self-promotion is often rewarded. The constant pressure to project an image of perfection—be it religious devotion, scholarly achievement, or personal happiness—creates an exhausting, unsustainable facade. This leaves little room for the quiet, often messy, internal struggle that is essential for genuine character refinement. It fosters hypocrisy, even unwittingly, where the outward show trumps the inward reality (Al Faruq et al., 2025).

Then there is the issue of attention span, a dwindling resource in the age of infinite scroll. The Qur'an repeatedly calls for reflection (*tadabbur*), contemplation (*tafakkur*), and deep engagement with its verses and the world around us. Yet, social media trains the mind for fleeting engagement, rapid topic switching, and superficial information processing. This erosion of sustained attention makes it incredibly difficult to truly ponder, to engage profoundly with scripture, or to reflect deeply on one's actions and intentions. Such a scattered mental disposition actively works against the cultivation of a grounded, reflective, and spiritually aware character. It promotes shallowness over depth, a severe handicap for any serious spiritual journey (Suwardi et al., 2025).

Finally, the ease with which gossip, slander, and backbiting (*ghibah* and *namimah*) can spread across platforms poses a dire challenge. The detachment of the digital interaction often disinhibits individuals, allowing them to engage in verbal transgressions they might otherwise avoid in face-to-face settings. A character built on Qur'anic principles demands restraint, truthfulness, and upholding the honour of others. The rapid dissemination of unverified information or malicious comments, often under a veil of anonymity, actively undermines communal trust and personal integrity. This digital environment, rather than fostering a sense of shared responsibility and compassion, frequently devolves into a breeding ground for division and moral carelessness (Abd Hamid et al., 2025).

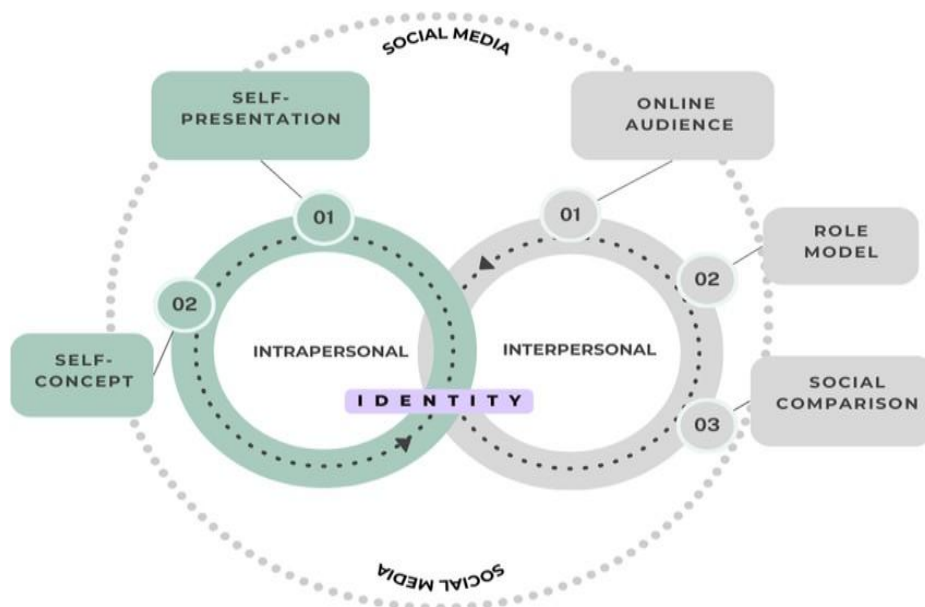


Fig.1 Digital Mechanisms Undermining the Internal Moral Compass and Sahsiah Qurani

DISCUSSION

The pervasive influence of social media platforms, as our conceptual findings suggest, represents far more than a mere technological convenience; it constitutes a profound re-engineering of the self, challenging the very bedrock of what it means to cultivate a Qur'anic character. So what, then, does this mean for the real world? It implies that simply admonishing users to 'be good online' or 'read more Qur'an' misses the central issue, which is the systemic pressure exerted by these platforms' architectures. One might suspect that the constant need for validation, manifest in the pursuit of likes and comments, fosters a contingent self-worth—a self-worth entirely dependent on external affirmation rather than internal conviction rooted in faith. This is a subtle yet devastating assault on the Islamic concept of '*tawakkul*,' reliance on God, and '*ikhlas*,' sincerity, as the driving force shifts from divine pleasure to public approval. It is entirely possible that this continuous external gaze cultivates a

fragile ego, perpetually seeking reassurance from a fickle digital audience, thereby hindering the development of an inner spiritual strength. This hints at a deeper issue: the commodification of self, where one's spiritual journey risks becoming a curated product for consumption (Jaenudin, 2022).

The algorithmic reinforcement of echo chambers is not simply an informational problem; it is a spiritual failing. A character developed along Qur'anic lines demands intellectual humility, a willingness to seek truth, and an openness to the vastness of God's signs in creation. The curated feed, however, systematically stifles this, presenting a narrowed, self-confirming reality. This leads to a kind of intellectual hubris, where one's own biases are continually affirmed, and dissenting voices are either filtered out or aggressively dismissed. Such an environment actively works against the Qur'anic call for reflection (*tadabbur*) and contemplation (*tafakkur*), which require a broad, enquiring mind. This situation arguably fuels sectarianism and intolerance within Muslim communities, as individuals become less equipped to engage with differing interpretations or opinions, preferring the comfort of their ideological bubble. The theoretical implication here is that traditional Islamic epistemology, with its emphasis on diverse sources of knowledge and critical inquiry, finds itself directly challenged by the epistemic closure that social media often imposes (Maspul & Mubarak, 2025).

Furthermore, the performative aspect of online life, where religious acts are broadcast and spiritual milestones are announced, represents a significant tension with the Islamic emphasis on humility (*'tawadhu'*) and sincere intention (*'niyyah'*). It seems plausible that this public display often transforms acts of worship from an intimate communion with the Divine into a public performance designed to garner social capital. This hints at a dangerous erosion of the interiority of faith, where the 'how' of one's devotion is overshadowed by the 'what' and 'who' for. This shift could lead to a generation of individuals who prioritize the appearance of piety over its actual cultivation, creating a spiritual vacuum disguised by outward show. This interpretation challenges established theories of religious practice, suggesting that the digital medium fundamentally alters the phenomenology of religious experience, making sincerity harder to achieve. We must confront the discomfoting possibility that digital platforms reward the outward sign rather than the inward state (Nurhakim et al., 2024).

Finally, the fragmentation of attention, exacerbated by the relentless pace of digital content consumption, directly undermines the capacity for deep reflection and sustained spiritual engagement. A mind trained for constant distraction struggles to meditate on the profound meanings of Qur'anic verses or to engage in lengthy, focused prayer. This has grave implications for the development of *'sabr'* (patience) and *'hikmah'* (wisdom), both of which demand sustained effort and mental stillness. The theoretical impact here is a questioning of how character, traditionally understood as a stable disposition developed through consistent practice and reflection, can possibly form in an environment antithetical to these very conditions. It is entirely possible that we are witnessing the emergence of a 'liquid character'—one that is fluid, easily influenced, and perpetually adapting to external stimuli, rather than anchored by deep-seated moral principles. This interpretation compels us to reconsider the very mechanisms of moral formation in a hyper-connected world (Akib, 2024).

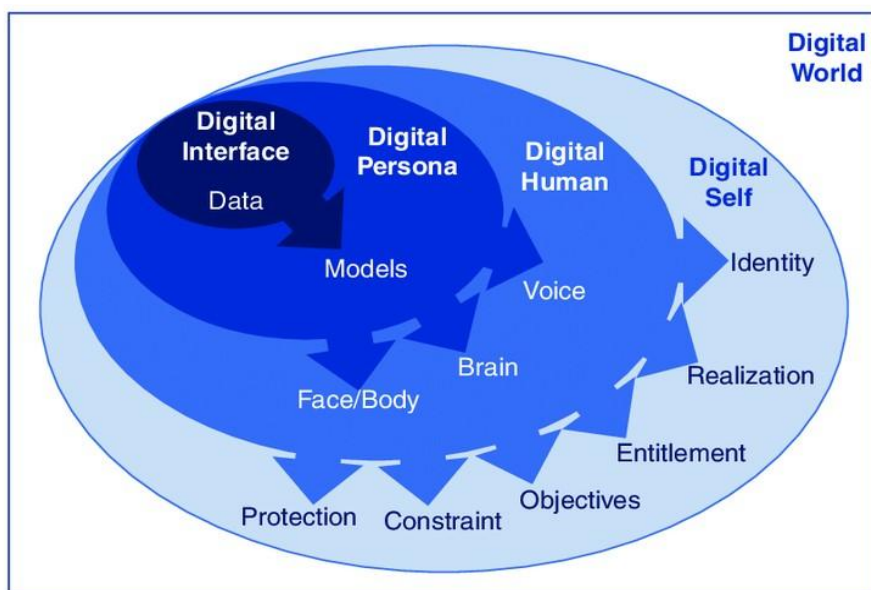


Fig.2 Re-Engineering of the Self – Digital Platforms and the Erosion of Qur'anic Character

The “How”: Psychological–Spiritual Mechanisms in Character Formation

The formative influence of the digital environment on character development does not operate merely at the level of exposure or behaviour, but through deeper psychological–spiritual mechanisms that reshape moral orientation and intentionality. Social media architecture, driven by algorithms, metrics, and the attention economy, gradually shifts the locus of moral evaluation from an internal, God-conscious compass to an external system of validation. As individuals become increasingly attuned to likes, shares, and visibility, moral worth and spiritual sincerity risk being recalibrated according to public approval rather than divine accountability. From a Qur’anic perspective, this externalisation of moral authority undermines the cultivation of *ikhlas*, as actions are subtly oriented towards recognition rather than sincere devotion, even when religious expressions are involved (Van Bavel et al., 2024; Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021).

At the cognitive and intellectual level, algorithmic filtering mechanisms foster a condition of intellectual insularity that constrains reflective and critical engagement. Exposure to homogenised viewpoints limits opportunities for meaningful *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*, both of which are central to Qur’anic moral formation. When individuals are repeatedly presented with affirming content that mirrors their existing beliefs, humility and openness to correction are diminished, weakening the ethical virtues associated with *tawadhu’* and intellectual responsibility. This narrowing of epistemic horizons is not merely an informational concern but a spiritual one, as it reduces the capacity for self-questioning, moral growth, and sincere engagement with divine signs across diverse contexts (Neumann, 2023; Sunstein, 2018) .

Simultaneously, the attention-fragmenting design of digital platforms disrupts the sustained focus required for deep spiritual practices and moral self-regulation. Constant notifications, rapid content consumption, and performative self-presentation cultivate a mode of religiosity that is episodic, image-driven, and emotionally reactive rather than contemplative and transformative. This environment facilitates the emergence of performative religiosity, where outward expressions of faith may increase while inner moral depth stagnates or declines. Without deliberate interventions that nurture internal validation, self-accountability, and spiritual discernment, these psychological–spiritual mechanisms collectively risk producing a generation whose character is shaped more by digital signals than by enduring Qur’anic values, thereby compromising the integrity of Sahsiah Qurani in an increasingly mediated world (Carr, 2020; Liu et al., 2024).

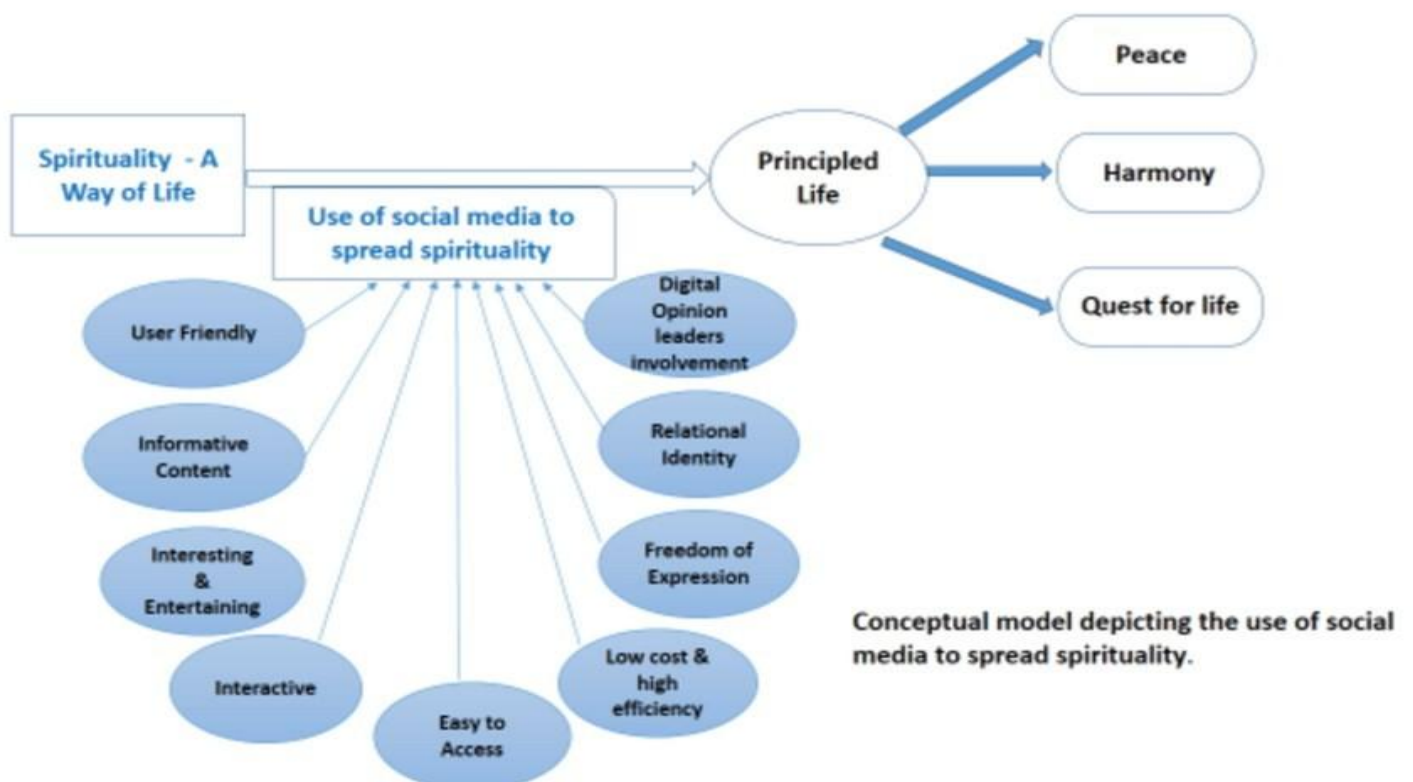


Fig.3 Social Media and the Formation of Qurani Character

CONCLUSION

The digital world, particularly through its social media manifestations, presents an undeniable and profound set of challenges to the cultivation of a robust Qur'anic character. The issues identified—the fragmentation of internal moral guidance by external validation, the intellectual insularity fostered by algorithms, the performative distortion of sincere spiritual striving, and the erosion of sustained attention—are not peripheral concerns; they strike at the very heart of what Islamic tradition understands as 'akhlaq'. We are witnessing a systemic undermining of virtues like sincerity, humility, intellectual openness, and deep contemplation, virtues that are absolutely essential for a morally grounded existence. This isn't merely a matter of individual misuse; it is a structural dilemma, embedded in the very design of these ubiquitous platforms.

Ignoring these fundamental challenges would be a grave error, leaving future generations ill-equipped to navigate a world that increasingly demands spiritual resilience. The current, often piecemeal, approaches to digital literacy within Muslim communities are clearly insufficient. A more holistic, proactive, and critically engaged digital pedagogy is urgently required, one that explicitly addresses the architectural and psychological impacts of social media on moral development. This demands a candid theological reckoning with the digital age, moving beyond simple prohibitions to foster genuine spiritual discernment. Educational institutions, families, and religious leaders must collaborate on strategies that empower individuals to cultivate an internal locus of moral authority, independent of fleeting digital approval.

Future research should specifically test the efficacy of pedagogical interventions that incorporate critical media literacy directly alongside traditional Islamic ethical instruction, focusing on longitudinal studies to observe the development of virtues such as 'ikhlas' (sincerity) and 'tawadhu' (humility) among young Muslims who engage with social media. We need to understand whether explicit training in algorithmic awareness, coupled with practices that cultivate internal validation, can genuinely mitigate the corrosive effects identified. A failure to confront these challenges head-on risks producing a generation whose spiritual compass is perpetually calibrated by external digital signals, leaving them adrift in a sea of performativity and superficiality, ultimately compromising the very essence of their faith and character.

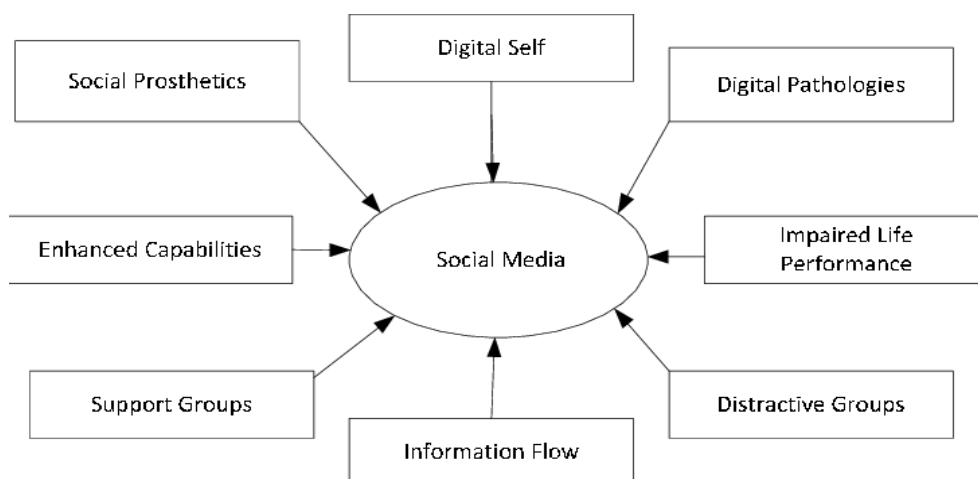


Fig.4 Challenges of the Digital World to the Formation of Qur'anic Character

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