

# Roadmap to Social Reconstruction from Surah al-Hujurāt: Safeguarding Society from Misinformation and Disinformation

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**Abstract:** This study attempts to examine the issue of reckless use of the tongue in terms of spreading misinformation and disinformation in the Muslim society. It envisions a roadmap of social reform by incorporating perspectives of Social Reconstruction philosophy as applicable in Islam in the light of Surah al-Hujurāt. It is of utmost significance because misinformation and disinformation have devastating consequences. Moreover, with modern technology, they can spread like wildfire causing more damage instantly. To address this issue, we focus on the sixth verse of Surah al-Hujurāt, which discusses the social impact of misinformation and disinformation and illustrates a process of self-development that can limit chaos and build trust to improve social conditions. This work utilises a qualitative study whose findings demonstrate that Surah al-Hujurāt is pivotal in fostering Islamic values in Muslims thereby safeguarding society as a whole from misinformation and disinformation.

**Keywords:** Keywords: Surah al-Hujurāt, Social ills, Social reconstruction, Misinformation and Disinformation, Rumor.

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## Introduction

The Muslim world is facing many problems that challenge the stability of the society. The reckless use of tongue can be attributed as one of the problems, specifically the spread of misinformation and disinformation. While this discussion primarily revolves around inappropriate actions of the tongue, it also includes actions with similar implications in today's world such as text messages, emails, images, videos, audio, and other forms of multimedia or social media. They are so widespread that sometimes they may appear to be something insignificant. Nevertheless, they have devastating consequences. It is even more alarming in this age of information technology. Considering this grave danger, it is extremely important to address this issue on an urgent basis. Due to the nature of this unprecedented challenge, there is not much work in the literature addressing this issue, specifically within the context of social reconstruction of Muslim society.

There have been commendable works in the recent literature exploring misinformation. Haque, et. al (2020) discuss combating misinformation in a Muslim country (specifically Bangladesh) which is overwhelmed by chaos, hate crimes and killings. To combat misinformation, the authors suggest imposing technological constraints to limit misinformation. However, they were not intended to bring virtues to the members of society and transform society for the better. Sule and Yahaya (2020) offer Islamic but general solutions for the Muslims; they state that as Muslims, it is very important "to reflect on the teachings of Glorious Qur'an in our various homes and apply it in all of our social dealings which also include the activities on the social media ... Muslims will be able to avoid the evils that are associated with it and also guide one on the proper way of using most of the social media applications, be it Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram etc." (p. 18). While these are appreciable guidelines, they do not offer paths to social reconstruction. Tais (2019) discusses reconstructionism as one of the two distinct directions of modernist Islamic thought among contemporary Muslim thinkers in the Maghrib. They attempted to locate modern Western intellectual legacy and practice such as democracy, freedom of thought, and individual liberties within Islam. Their goal was to reimagine Islamic legacy. The author also mentions that, in this process, their Western intellectual

thoughts became more direct, and they somewhat embraced the secular political system.

Similar to the modernist view, Supriyadi, Julia and Firdaus (2019) discuss reconstruction within the context of Gender Equality. They suggest reconstructing traditional interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah to make space for women's leadership in Islam for current times. Additionally, they recommend that “any forms of interpretation of the sources of Islamic teachings that are contrary to the principles of justice and ignores the spirit of Islamic teachings that uphold the equality between men and women need to be reconstructed” (p. 106). While the authors consider Islam as a part of this reconstruction process, it is not Islamic at the core because the entire process is not guided by the traditional understanding of the Quran, Sunnah, or pious predecessors. However, there are other works that address social issues strictly based on the Quran and sunnah, specifically based on Surah al-Hujurāt. Javid (2019) discusses guidelines of Ethics and Morality that are found in Surah al-Hujurāt. Khasawneh and Al-Jamal (2017) presented the best ways of establishing interpersonal relationships on the basis of Surah al-Hujurāt. Waqar and Haq (2021) offer an overview of Surah al-Hujurāt and explain fundamental guidelines of a peaceful and fulfilling social life. Azzuhri (2020) goes further and presents the concept of constructing an ideal society based on Surah al-Hujurāt specifically starting with the issue of misinformation and disinformation as they can lead to major conflict in society. The author offers semantic analysis and composition examination of the word “tabayyanu (verification)” from the sixth verse of Surah al-Hujurāt along with beneficial exegesis promoting virtues in society. While these Qur’anic works are thought-provoking and inspiring in their discussion of one or more social issues, they are very limited in scope as they do not address the big picture of social reconstruction based on Surah al-Hujurāt with the corresponding implementation process. This work intends to fill that void and present a roadmap of social reconstruction upon Islamic principles in the light of Surah al-Hujurāt.

This study examines various aspects and impacts of misinformation and disinformation in the society. It envisions a roadmap of social reform by incorporating perspectives of Social Reconstruction philosophy and utilise its tenets as applicable in Islam in the light of Surah al-Hujurāt. To that end, verse six of Surah al-Hujurāt is explored which

primarily identifies tongue-related ills, specifically misinformation and disinformation. It discusses the social impact of such actions and illustrates a process of self-development by emphasising the importance of verification of information. When the ideas of this verse pertaining to character development are implemented, the long desired social reform will be ensured.

The goal of this study is to propose and detail explicit methods to safeguard the society from the harms of misinformation and disinformation and to transform its members such that it minimises chaos, builds trust, and fosters peace and stability in Muslim societies. This transformation or social reformation will require a simultaneous multi-pronged approach from different sectors of society, such as the government, educational institutions, media outlets, family units, and more. Ultimately, it will pave the way of success in both this life and in the next and as such, this study is of utmost importance because misinformation and disinformation with current technology can cause irreversible harm, spread hysteria, result in discord and aggression, and loss of confidence in the society.

This study adopts a qualitative approach whose findings are generally interpretive and based upon the examination of writings, experiences and reflections on the subject matter. Since this study investigates the issues of the Muslim world to pave the way for the reconstruction of their societies, it is essentially a study of the human experience. In other words, it is a study of perceptions surrounding events and circumstances and therefore, the qualitative approach is appropriate and justified. In general, this work examines the contents of the body of materials regarding social conditions around the world, specifically the Muslim world in relation to complications caused by misinformation and disinformation. Additionally, it explores Quranic exegesis and relevant texts specific to surah al-Hujurāt from both classical and modern sources to lay the foundation for a social reform that can lead to stability and peace.

Due to the qualitative nature of this work, there are inherent limitations in that. It depends solely on observation and subjective experience and does not involve quantitative information. Furthermore, it primarily depends on the content analysis of various subject matters without the involvement of any interviews or first-hand information.

Another limitation of this study is that it focuses on Muslim majority countries. Consequently, it excludes issues pertaining to Muslim minorities such as those in the West. It is not feasible to go into the fine details of all Muslim societies across the world as they are of different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. Resultantly, this work is forced to generalise the discussed social issues as no single formula can address an issue from every background. Rather, the solution needs to be contextualised when discussed or applied within certain social settings of a country or a culture.

This work is outlined as follows: firstly, it presents the overview of Social Reconstruction philosophy as it is the theoretical framework of this study. Secondly, it discusses the problems of misinformation and disinformation along with their intricacies and implications on society. Thirdly, we determine several pre-conditions that need to be satisfied prior to pursuing true and meaningful Islamic social reconstruction. Next, verse six of Surah al-Hujurāt is analysed to finally outline the steps of implementation of the social reconstruction philosophy from the verse's standpoint.

### **Social Reconstruction**

Social reconstruction is founded upon Pragmatism, a philosophy derived from subjective human experiences in which truth is relative and changing. Social Reconstruction philosophy promotes reform towards a just and better society through transformative education (Gutek, 1997). In the early twentieth century, Social Reconstruction finds its root among the progressive educators with pragmatic and social ideas such as John Dewey. Later, it was further developed by others including George Counts. After some ups and downs, finally in 1950, Theodore Brameld, laid the foundations of social reconstructionism (McNeil, 1990). Social Reconstructionists viewed the state of the society as troubling because it failed to reconstruct itself to adapt to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. They proposed a critical study of the past and to use inquiry, questioning, and experimentation to address the current challenges towards a new social order. They believed that the educators in the school system can be a vehicle towards a new social order by developing innovative curriculum, policies, and practices (Gutek, 1997). They are in the best position to take on such a noble,

delicate, and complex task of social reform within the school system by educating future leaders. They claim that the present educational process is heavily influenced by the need of economy; it is too narrow and stagnant and does not offer the vital imagination and creativity to meet the current challenges. Teachers need to focus on critical issues and instead of just giving answers, they should raise more questions thereby stimulating students' thinking process and engaging them to have an active say in education. Unless overhauled, it will repeat the past and preserve the existing order of the broken society rather than being a means of its transformation. To make this overhauling effective, such a learning process need to be more action-oriented and more meaningful and centred around the social life of the students. It also should critically look into real world problems such oppression, violence, and inequality and hunger as such issues often raise controversy; moreover, there should be focus on inquiry, analysis, discourse, and perspectives (Beaudrie, et al., 2015). While this philosophy manifests noble ideas, it is essentially secular and therefore, may not be fully compatible for implementation in Muslim societies.

### **Misinformation and Disinformation: Intricacies and Implications**

Cambridge Dictionary defines misinformation as “wrong information,” whereas disinformation as “false information spread in order to deceive people”; both can be deceptive in effect. An act of deception can be explained as “intentionally causing another person to have or continue to have a false belief that is truly believed to be false by the person intentionally causing the false belief by bringing about evidence on the basis of which the other person has or continues to have that false belief” (Mahon, 2003, pp. 189-190). The deceptive information includes fake news, edited pictures and realistic deepfake videos that have the potential of harming individuals and societies by opening the door of mistrust, criminal accusations, extortion, and aggression. The information that people are exposed to can affect their perception of reality and truth; it can even alter their views about relationships, economics, politics, etc. (Pierre, 2020). When deceit becomes prevalent, it can lead to growing scepticism making it more challenging to believe the truth. The modern lies became so flawless and widespread, many people tend to be confused about the right course

of action (Shao, Ciampaglia, Varol, Flammini, & Menczer, 2017). For instance, in 2019, following the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, there were many fake videos and online posts portraying the Muslims as the cause of the fire; it resulted in a growing aggression against the Muslims in France (“Islamophobic Fake News Explodes After Notre Dame,” 2019). In 2018, a violent mob killed a number of people based on a lie about a child abduction that spread on WhatsApp (Gowen, 2018). A study published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2018 claimed that false information over social media spread to a broader audience in a faster pace than the genuine ones (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). It is also evident in the 2019 Spanish election that harmful lies against the Prime Minister reached a fourth of the population through WhatsApp (“Whatsapp: Social Media’s Dark Web,” 2019). The continuous exposure to false information may have a considerable impact on the audience to the point they may accept lie as truth; this phenomenon is known as the “illusory truth” effect (Fazio, Brashier, Payne & Marsh, 2015). A primary example can be the 2016 US Presidential election where the victory of Donald Trump was attributed to the spread of numerous pro-Trump false information prior to the election through Facebook (Blake, 2018). Another recent example of such type of misinformation can be the insurrection at the US Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. Congressional hearings, news media and other documents established that the spread of false information (largely on the digital media) was the primary cause of such a disgraceful and painful event in the history of United States (Rapport, 2021; Grant, 2022). The spread of such lies and harmful information is alarming because it can lead to the destruction of society from within.

It has become even more worrisome with rapid developments in the field of machine learning, that can be utilised to generate data that has grave implications regarding privacy, ethics, politics, security etc. (Qadir & Suleman, 2018). The recent development of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) models, including Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), have made it difficult to identify genuine digital artifacts from fake ones. With these technologies, it becomes easier to produce realistic looking handwritings, images, videos and fake evidence; they can produce the handwriting of a person which he never wrote, produce audios and videos showing the person saying or doing things which he actually

never did. For instance, researchers from the University of Washington utilised previous videos of President Barack Obama and produced fake videos synchronising his lip movements saying arbitrary statements (Suwajanakorn, Seitz & Kemelmacher-Shlizerman, 2017; University of Washington, 2017). Changing the words of a person in a video has become as easy as editing the text of a video transcript (Fried, 2019). Samsung has developed an algorithm that can use a still image of a person to produce videos showing that person speaking (Zakharov, Shysheya, Burkov, & Lempitsky, 2019). While these technologies and corresponding activities may appear entertaining, they will have devastating consequences if released for public and unrestrained use (Metz & Blumenthal, 2019).

It is important to fathom the potential consequences of such advancements. For instance, a forged document can harm someone's personal and business interests, strain personal relationships, mislead court proceedings, etc. With fake audios and videos, it can show a person involved in embarrassing matters, thereby destroying his honour and family life, and opening the door to blackmail. Furthermore, extortion can be used to serve certain political, economic, and military interests. Within the context of economics, false information can change the direction of the stock market impacting the lives of millions of peoples and businesses. In the area of intelligence and national defence, such misleading information can be grounds justifying an invasion or pre-emptive attack. Even worse, in many cases, such misleading evidence can be deliberately generated as a false pretence by the invading nation. Evidently, there are much broader implications beyond just privacy, ethics, politics, economics, and military.

While misinformation and disinformation have always been shown to have serious consequences, they have become more concerning in the Internet Age where a problem in one place becomes a global issue in no time; the Muslim world is no exception to this. In relation to scandals in the entertainment industry of Indonesia, Nathalia, Chatterjee, & Fahmy (2010) writes in Reuters that "Indonesia's highest Islamic authority has forbidden Muslims from viewing gossipy content in the country's media after a celebrity...scandal dominated television news in the past month". Sometime rumour about a person is more than negativity and obscenity that may affect part of the society; it can have other implications such as military, political, and economic. A



profound example of it is when Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr was killed in the battle of Uhud. A rumour was started that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was killed and consequently, the Muslims lost their resolve and some of them stopped fighting (Mubarakpuri, 1996). Moreover, as recently as 2016, based on a false news report, it was believed that Pakistan's defence minister issued a nuclear threat against Israel (Goldman, 2016). Finally, in a local election in 2017 in Indonesia, lies spread over social media to get one candidate elected over the other (BBC News, 2017).

Reckless use of tongue is irresponsible behaviour that can cause pain, spread hysteria, result in discord and aggression, and loss of confidence in the society. It can destabilise the society; they must be addressed in an urgent and serious manner. It requires a holistic approach of social reconstruction as presented in Quran, specifically in Surah al-Hujurāt, that can bring integrity, trust, and positivity in the society through the development of virtual and responsible character.

### **Pre-conditions of A Meaningful Social Reform for Muslims**

As mentioned earlier, Muslims have engaged in social reconstruction initiatives; however, in many cases their efforts were not fully consistent with Islamic principles. Therefore, it is important to shed light on the preconditions of a meaningful social reform for the Muslims. It is to be noted that the ultimate success for the Muslims in both lives solely depend on the obedience of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ). Muslims must calibrate their thoughts towards full compliance with Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), putting aside all social norms and personal views. Muslim must address all of their issues, including social reform, based on the guidance of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) which surely will ensure their personal and communal benefit. According to Ibn 'Āshūr (2006), Allah's sharia (legal system), in general, is about protecting rights, benefiting people, and warding off harm from them. Specifically, it preserves and guarantees the indispensables of a healthy society, namely: religion, life, intellect, property, lineage, and honour (p.118). Therefore, obedience to Allah and Messenger (ﷺ) at all levels and at all times is not an option but an obligation, as Allah said: "It is not for a believing man or woman – when Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) decree a matter – to have any other choice in that matter. Indeed, whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) has clearly gone

astray” (Surah al-Aḥzāb, 33:36). Moreover, for lasting public welfare, He commanded Muslims to refer to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) in any dispute: “O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination” (Surah al-Nisā’ 4:59). In this verse, Allah commanded to obey the ruler (authority) as well; however, in case of disagreement, people are to refer back to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ). The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasised the matter by saying: “A creature is not to be obeyed when it involves disobedience to the Creator” (Mishkat al-Masabih, Book 18, *ḥadīth* No. 36, Sahih).

Quran explicitly associated the obedience of Allah to the obedience of the Prophet and obligated the people to obey the Prophet (ﷺ) without any form of opposition and hesitation: “But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission” (Surah al-Nisā’, 4:65).

While compliance with the guidance of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) may be understood by many Muslims, sometime there are issues in terms of understanding the interpretation or application of such guidance. It is important to understand that the interpretation and application of Islam must be consistent with that of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) as they were the best of the people and with the best of the understandings regarding the details of this religion. Their importance and superiority in interpreting and implementing Islam is clearly established from the religious texts below: “Say, (O Prophet,) ‘This is my way. I invite to Allah with insight – I and those *who follow me*’” (Surah Yūsuf, 12:108). Furthermore, Allah has endorsed, praised, and is pleased with the actions of the companions. He is also pleased with those who follow their footsteps throughout the time: “As for the foremost – the first of the *Emigrants and the Helpers* – and *those who follow them* in goodness, *Allah is pleased with them* and they are pleased with Him...” (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:100). In addition to the endorsement of Allah, the Prophet (ﷺ) spoke in the honour of his companions: “Do not revile my companions, for by the One in Whose hand is my soul, if one of you were to spend the equivalent of Uḥud in gold, it would

not amount to a *mudd* of one of them, or half of that” (Bukhari, Book 62, *ḥadīth* No. 23). Prophet (ﷺ) also said: “... for those of you who live after me will see great disagreement. You must then follow my sunnah and that of the rightly guided caliphs. Hold to it and stick fast to it. Avoid novelties, for every novelty is an innovation, and every innovation is an error” (Abū Dāwūd, Book 42, *ḥadīth* No. 12, Sahih). It is a clear command for the generations to come to stick to the original sources of religion as found with the companions without innovating. As the companions taught Islam to their students (*tābi ‘ūn*: followers or successors), the excellence of those students was established. Moreover, the excellence of the students of those students (*tābi ‘ al-tābi ‘īn*) was also confirmed since the practice of the first three generations was to persevere in learning what the Prophet (ﷺ) brought, then to preserve in acting upon what they had understood. The significance of those golden generations is clearly established from sunnah: “The best people are those of my generation, and then those who will come after them, and then those who will come after them and then after them” (Bukhari, Book 81, *ḥadīth* No 18). Once the Muslims fulfil this basic condition of obeying Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) upon the understanding of the golden generations, it will put them in the right direction towards a successful social reconstruction upon Islamic theology.

### **Surah al-Hujurāt: A Roadmap to Social Transformation**

Surah al-Hujurāt is the 49<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur’ān. It is a Madani surah revealed in the 9<sup>th</sup> year after the Hijra when people were accepting Islam in large numbers. The name of the Surah is based on a word (*hujurāt*, meaning apartments) in the fourth verse. It primarily teaches Muslims basic manners (Philips, 2006).

Islam has long ago recognised the social problems of the tongue. Due to their harmful consequences in the society, many of them are even considered as major sins (Backbiting in Islam and Its Expiation, 2002). Specifically, Islam has taken a firm stance against misinformation and disinformation to save the society from the spread of evil. Allah says in verse 6 of Surah al-Hujurāt: “O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify (it) so you do not harm people unknowingly, becoming regretful for what you have done”. Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī (2007) say this verse was revealed regarding al-Walīd b. ‘Uqbah as he was

sent by the Prophet (ﷺ) to Banū al-Mustaliq to confirm their allegiance to Islam. He was concerned about his security due to some pre-Islamic conflict with them. Once he reached the area of Banū al-Mustaliq, the people came out in large numbers to meet him; consequently, he felt threatened and ran back to the Prophet (ﷺ). Based on his fear and erroneous assessment, he informed the Prophet (ﷺ) that they wanted to kill him. As a result, the Prophet (ﷺ) wanted to dispatch an army against them. Fortunately, Banū al-Mustaliq came to Prophet (ﷺ) and explain the situation to him; thereby avoided a bloody tragedy. Ibn Kathir (2003) says that Allah commanded the believers not to rush to conclusion in any matter prior to verifying information, especially when it is from people of no integrity; otherwise, it may result in sorrowful consequences and remorse. This guiding principle is to be followed on receipt of news.

Al-Sa'dī (2018) says that any information received from a wicked person should not be given the same status as that from a truthful person, because an evil person has the disposition to propagate incorrect or falsified information which is why Qutb (2015) says that the verse specifically mentions evil doers as they are more likely to lie. If a person has a shady character or an uncontrolled tongue, that itself can be sufficient ground for rejecting or further verifying that information. As the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “it is enough for a man to prove himself a liar when he goes on narrating whatever he hears” (Muslim, Introduction, *ḥadīth* No 5). If the information relates to the matters of religion, such as narrations from the Prophet (ﷺ), then the Muslims need to be extra careful when accepting or relating them because the Prophet (ﷺ) said “lying about me is not like lying about anyone else. Whoever tells a lie about me deliberately, let him take his place in Hell” (Muslim, Introduction, *ḥadīth* No. 5). The Prophet (ﷺ) also said: “do not lie upon me; indeed, whoever lies upon me will enter the Fire” (Muslim, Introduction, *ḥadīth* No. 1). Accordingly, it was the practice of the scholars of hadith to be reluctant in accepting narrations from people whose reliability was not established. Therefore, people need to be meticulous about verifying information in order to properly practice only the authentic aspects of the religion.

Mawdudī (2006) says that no government should take action against any person, or a group solely based on information received from people whose characters are in question. Doing so will upend

the lives and properties of innocents just merely on suspicion based on unreliable sources. Taking such information without verification can even lead to political and military consequences; a few such instances are listed below.

1. In the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), his companions made the first migration from Mecca to Ethiopia, where they were safe from the harm of the idol worshippers. However, due to the spread of a rumour that the ruling elite of Mecca had become Muslims, they returned to Mecca only to realise that the rumours were false. As a result, they were captured by the elite once more and subjugated to abuse (Mubarokpuri, 1996).
2. Muṣ‘ab ibn ‘Umayr (may Allah be pleased with him) was killed during the Battle of Uhud. Unfortunately, in the heat of battle, a rumour started that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) himself was killed leading to many of the Muslims to become depressed, hopeless, and thus many abandoned their weapons simply awaiting death on the battlefield (Mubarokpuri, 1996).
3. The infamous story of slander against ‘Ā’ishah, the pure wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), which resulted in a lot of anguish for the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as well as for the Muslims. She was later cleared of the charge by Allah Himself (Surah Al-Nur, 24:11-20). These events show that the actions based on unconfirmed information often led to negative outcomes of catastrophic proportions (Mubarokpuri, 1996).

People in the society deserve to live in security, harmony, and peace. No one has the right to cause confusion, fear, and instability by spreading harmful information. However, that does happen as people usually like to talk about exciting new information. The Qur’ān identifies these actions as the characteristics of the hypocrites in the following verse: “when they have any alarming news, they broadcast it” (Surah al-Nisā’, 4:83). Considering the three unfortunate historical occurrences discussed above, it is important to visualise how they would have been exponentially worse in modern times with the Internet at our disposal. People must be extra careful today when posting comments, liking, and sharing on social media because such

actions only popularise the content even further by means of advanced algorithms. Therefore, people must not rush to forward information as Allah dislikes those who are hasty, as He states: “humankind is ever hasty” (Surah al-Isrā’, 17:11). Meticulous vetting of information and thoroughness is required in these situations because “two qualities which are liked by Allah are forbearance and deliberateness” (Muslim, Book 1, *ḥadīth* No. 25). Although this is applicable in dealing with simple everyday news, it is even more important when doing so with news that are religious in nature. Those who contribute to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, even unintentionally, bear some responsibility. People need to contain harmful information by restricting its speed and reach (Tandoc Jr, Lim & Ling, 2018). Muslims must take inspiration from their pious predecessors who travelled around the world and made tremendous sacrifices to verify Prophetic narrations; their legacies resulted in an authenticated religious foundation, leading to a comprehensive legal system and healthy society. In general, Muslims are obligated to stay on the side of clarity and shy away from doubtful matters as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “give up what is doubtful to you to that which is clear” (Tirmidhī, Book 37, *ḥadīth* No. 104, Sahih). Hence, Muslims need to carefully assess the message and messenger from multiple reliable sources to attain certainty prior to acting upon it. In today’s world, it is not a difficult task because of the availability of advance technological tools. However, Qutb (2015) clarifies that there should not be unnecessary suspicion about all people and every piece of information; otherwise, it will lead to hysteria in the society damaging mutual trust among the people. There needs to be a middle ground. In some cases, information from evil people can be accepted upon verification or observation of any indicators or circumstantial evidence of truthfulness of the statement. It is evident in the incident when *shaytān* (devil) gave information regarding Āyat al-Kursī (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:255) to Abū Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him). The Prophet (ﷺ) approved the information received from *shaytān* and said, “he told you the truth, though he is a liar, and he himself was the Satan” (Bukhari, Book 59, *ḥadīth* No. 84).

The discussion clearly establishes that one of the conditions of social stability is the regulation of the tongue. Hence, if a Muslim hears doubtful information, he must ask for proof as the Quran says: “Bring your proof, if you are truthful” (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:111). Then, if it

is not substantiated, he should not believe it or repeat it; additionally, he must leave it and advise others to do the same. Muslims need to be conscious about Allah and suppress their desire of short-term excitement. They need to be patient and thoughtful which can act as a guardrail against rumours.

### *Implementation Steps*

The values and measures discussed above need to be cultured within the society for a successful and lasting social reform. According to social reconstruction philosophy, education must be the principal means for sketching a clear and precise social action plan. Therefore, there must be discussions, dialogues and debates in the society including parents, teachers, community leaders, labour leaders, religious scholars, and students towards decisive working plan. To that end, there need to efforts at all levels in the society. Specifically, the parents and the teachers ought to play a positive role in the homes and schools respectively. To play such role, they themselves need to be aware of the necessity social reform and actively take part in self-development and be willing to be the role model for those who look up to them. Consequently, there must be relevant trainings for parents, teachers, and ordinary people in general as misinformation and disinformation can start at any level in the society.

**Parents.** Firstly, as the member of the society, parents as adults need to be trained with the Islamic values so the society remains safe from misinformation and disinformation. Such trainings can be offered through adult learning centres in the community. Furthermore, they need to be trained to prepare the next generation for a lasting social reform. The parents have a greater role of culturing children than the school teacher because prior to attending school, children are taught at home. In other words, the parents are the primary and the first teacher of children and are expected to take part in the moral learning process of their children at home rather than solely relying on the school. Therefore, they need to be trained to infuse Islamic social values into their children; such training can be offered through various prenatal and postnatal workshops, and community learning centres. Moreover, parents are to be involved in the planning process of moral learning programs in schools.

**Teachers.** There must be a fresh look upon the educational process involving teachers training, curriculum design and instructional methods. When the child is ready to go to school, then the teachers have a role to play not just by educating them but also being an outstanding role model. If the teachers themselves are lacking fundamental values, then they cannot motivate students merely by lectures. Therefore, teachers must be provided with on-the-job training in addition to whatever training they receive as an ordinary member of the society. They also must be trained to develop viable curriculum where various Islamic solutions to social ills (including those of the tongue) are integrated; furthermore, the training should include effective methods of transferring that knowledge to the student so that results in positive social outcomes. It is important to consult the behavioural sciences to recognise people's value system so that the path to reconstructions becomes easier, of course anywhere that contradicts basic values of Islam then we are to take the Islamic values.

**Media.** To integrate precautionary measures in the society in information age, the general population requires information literacy training that will allow them to navigate through the process of understanding and using information in a proper manner (Parrott, 2018). These precautions apply to the media industry and journalism more than any other sector because their words reach a larger audience quickly with large-scale implications (Ahmed, 2018). Therefore, Siddiqi (2012) emphasises that they must be ultra-careful and need to be trained to work within the Islamic framework.

**Government.** The government has the overall responsibility to address any social issue at the higher level since they have the needed resources and authority. They can bring integrity, trust, and positivity in the society by training the public servants at various levels. The process can start at the hiring stage of employees and refresh the training on a periodic basis. Such training should include all the branches of government, including military, law enforcement, legislative, judiciary etc. Companies can institute required trainings while governments may have civil service exams (or their equivalents) to ensure that these concepts are indeed hard-wired into government officials, employees, office holders, etc. The government also sets the standards for national tests and the topics studied herein can also be incorporated into exams (such as college-entrance and other licensing exams). When the key



sectors of the society maintain higher standard, the society becomes peaceful and stable.

## Conclusion

This work discusses the issue of widespread misinformation and disinformation and its impact in the society. It further illustrates the values and processes of self-development from surah al-Hujurāt towards a social reform that can protect the society from social ills including misinformation and disinformation. Finally, the actual process of implementation through social reconstruction philosophy is presented. To culture such noble characters, Muslims need more than just courses or training in social science; they require active and perpetual consciousness of Allah and longing for the life of hereafter. When such a level of consciousness is developed, it works as a guardrail at the individual level which then transforms the society.

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