

Al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalah and critical analysis of its application in Mass media

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Abstract

The fundamental teachings of Islam provide comprehensive guidance that extends universally to all aspects of human life. The Holy Qur'an—interpreted and exemplified through the Sunnah—was revealed as the ultimate source of Sharī'ah, laying down enduring principles and moral frameworks for humanity's guidance until the Day of Resurrection. During the era of Khayr al-Qurūn (the best generations), alongside these primary sources, several secondary juristic principles emerged among the Companions and the Tābi'īn (their successors). Among these were Qiyās (analogical reasoning), Istiḥsān (juristic preference), and Istiṣlāḥ (consideration of public interest)¹. The significance of these principles transcended their immediate historical context, as they served to ensure that Islamic law remained relevant and adaptable in every age under the supervision of sound legal and ethical principles.

In the modern era, a new manifestation of al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalah has appeared in the form of mass media—a field so deeply woven into human life that the modern world seems incomplete and colourless without it. As media has grown into a central institution shaping public opinion, culture, and morality, it has expanded into countless dimensions and disciplines, each carrying profound ethical and social implications. Consequently, the study of al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalah and its application within mass media becomes a vital area of scholarly inquiry within Islamic jurisprudence.

In this rapidly evolving media landscape, it is imperative to reassert the boundaries and moral guidance of Sharī'ah. Without such ethical safeguards, even actions or technologies that appear legitimate may lose their intrinsic value and become detrimental to the collective good. Therefore, the intersection of al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalah and mass media must be examined not only as a matter of religious law but also as a means of ensuring that technological progress remains anchored in moral responsibility and the higher objectives of Sharī'ah.

1. Introduction:

Islamic teachings are deeply interconnected, forming a cohesive framework in which every issue is resolved based on the primary sources of Sharia — the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Both the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasize this principle.

Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an:

“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.

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¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, Iqtidhā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaḳīm, p. 281, Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, 1999

Then, if you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best course and the best in result.”²

This same principle is also reinforced in the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ, who consistently urged adherence to the Book of Allah and his own Sunnah. Through this foundational approach, Islamic law (Sharia) encompasses an extraordinarily broad and comprehensive scope. When humankind reached the stage of intellectual, cultural, and social maturity, divine revelation provided laws meant to endure until the end of time.

Just as the human body continues to grow until adulthood and then stabilizes, so too did humanity’s moral and intellectual capacity mature at the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. At that stage, the final and complete Sharia was revealed — one that would never become obsolete or restrictive. In Qur’anic terms, this perfection of divine guidance is described as “the completion of religion” (ikmāl al-dīn) and “the fulfillment of divine favor” (itmām al-ni‘mah). Allah Almighty declares:

“Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and chosen Islam as your religion.”³

In truth, it is impossible to present Islamic Sharia in its entirety within a limited scope, for its comprehensiveness embraces all of humankind across time and space. To describe it briefly as a complete and perfect religion is, in itself, a reflection of its beauty and universality.

The core subject of Islamic law is human nature (fiṭrah). By recognizing and aligning with this innate disposition, the Qur’an describes how Allah created human beings upon a natural state of truth and righteousness. The Qur’an states:

“So set your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the nature (fiṭrah) created by Allah upon which He has made mankind. There is no changing in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most people do not know.”⁴

Hence, Islam, through its divinely revealed law, harmonizes with human nature and provides a timeless framework for moral, spiritual, and societal balance.

1.1 Linguistic Definition of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh

The word maṣāliḥ (مصلح) is the plural of maṣlaḥah (مصلحت), which is derived from the Arabic root ṣ-l-ḥ (صلح) meaning goodness or righteousness. In Arabic, it carries the following connotations:

“Maṣlaḥah denotes goodness or welfare, and its plural is maṣāliḥ. The term istiṣlāḥ (seeking welfare) is the opposite of istifsād (seeking corruption).”⁵

Similarly, in Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah it is stated:

“The letters ṣād, lām, and ḥā’ form a root that signifies the meaning of its opposite, namely corruption (fasād). It is said: a thing became sound or proper, just as it is when it becomes correct or good.”⁶

Moreover, Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah further clarifies:

“By maṣāliḥ are meant those interests which the Sharia has neither explicitly recognized (mu‘tabar) nor explicitly rejected (ghayr mu‘tabar).”⁷

² Qur’ān 4: 59.

³ Qur’ān 5:3.

⁴ Qur’ān 30:30.

⁵ Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifriqī, Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn ‘Alī, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1414 AH / 1993 CE), 2:517, s.v. “Ṣulḥ.”

⁶ Ibn Fāris, Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyyā, *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1399 AH / 1979 CE), 3:303, s.v. “Ṣulḥ.”

⁷ Muḥammad Rawwās Qal‘ajī and Ḥāmid Ṣādiq Qanībī, *Mu‘jam Lughat al-Fuqahā’* (‘Ammān: Dār al-Nafā’ is li-l-Ṭibā’ah wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1408 AH / 1988 CE), 54.

1.2 A comprehensive importance of Maṣlaḥah and Maṣāliḥ in the Light of the Qur'an

In the Holy Qur'an, the importance of reforming one's condition—both in actions and in affairs—has been expressed through various linguistic forms and meanings, numbering approximately fifteen.⁸ Collectively, these Qur'anic expressions emphasize the central significance of maṣlaḥah (welfare) and maṣāliḥ (beneficial interests).

For instance, Allah Almighty declares:

“I only desire reform (iṣlāḥ) as much as I am able; and my success is only through Allah. In Him I trust, and to Him I turn.”⁹

1.3 Definition of Maṣlaḥah and Mafsadah by Later Scholars

Among the later scholars, Imam al-Ghazālī (may Allah have mercy on him) defined maṣlaḥah and mafsadah as follows:

“By maṣlaḥah we mean the preservation of the objectives of the Sharia (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah).¹⁰ The objective of the Sharia concerning the creation of God revolves around five essential matters: the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property.

Whatever ensures the safeguarding of these five fundamental necessities is considered a maṣlaḥah (benefit), and whatever threatens them is deemed a mafsadah (harm or corruption). The removal of such harm is therefore regarded as a maṣlaḥah.”

2. Practical Application of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah in the Field of Mass Media

In contemporary times, the rapid integration of communication and media into our daily lives is undeniable. Certain forms of communication—particularly social media platforms—have become an inseparable part of modern existence. Given this reality, the importance and applicability of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah (unrestricted public interests) within the sphere of mass media become even more significant.

For a Muslim, the ultimate purpose of life is not merely to attain temporary worldly benefits, but to remain ever mindful of the higher spiritual objective of human existence as prescribed by Islam. Hence, applying the principles of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah to media ensures that technological progress and modes of communication remain aligned with ethical, moral, and religious values.

The practical application of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah can be extended to all branches of media—print, broadcast, and digital—based on various considerations. Media represents an institution of public welfare, and providing it with appropriate Shariah-based guidance is among the foremost objectives of Islam. The principles derived from Maṣāliḥ Mursalah help ensure that communication serves truth, justice, education, and social reform rather than misinformation, exploitation, or immorality.

2.1 Technical Definition of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah

⁸ Qur'an 2:11; 2:160; 2:182; 2:220; 2:224; 3:89; 4:16; 4:128; 4:129; 4:146; 5:39; 6:48; 6:54; 7:35; 7:142.

⁹ Qur'an 11:88.

Likewise, in the Qur'an, the root F-S-D (fasada) — meaning *to corrupt, cause disorder, or spread mischief* — is used fifteen times as the opposite of the root Ṣ-L-Ḥ (ṣulḥ), which denotes *peace, reform, or reconciliation*.

These occurrences are found in the following verses:

Al-Baqarah 2:11, 2:12, 2:27, 2:30, 2:60, 2:205, 2:220, 2:251; Āl 'Imrān 3:63; Al-Mā'idah 5:64; Al-A'rāf 7:56, 7:74, 7:85, 7:86, 7:103.

¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Al-Mustaṣfā fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. Vol. 1, p. 287. Cairo: Maṭba'ah Amīriyyah Būlāq, 1322 AH.

Given the comprehensive nature of Islamic teachings, the concept of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh holds immense importance. A considerable portion of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh)—especially in dealing with evolving and contemporary issues—is founded upon this principle. However, as a secondary source of Islamic law, jurists (fuqahāʿ) have presented diverse definitions and interpretations of it.

Among the classical scholars, Imam al-Ghazālī (may Allah have mercy on him) offers an extensive discussion on Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh in his monumental work *al-Mustaṣfā*. He summarizes the legal and rational authority of this principle as follows:

“Every maṣlaḥah (benefit or interest) that does not return to, or align with, the intended objectives of the Qurʾan, Sunnah, and Ijmāʿ (consensus)—that is, the established proofs of Sharia—is invalid and must be rejected.

However, any maṣlaḥah that conforms to and returns to the objectives of Sharia (maqāṣid al-sharīʿah) is legitimate and accepted, just as istiḥṣān (juristic preference) is considered a valid part of the Sharia.

Therefore, every maṣlaḥah that aligns with the Sharia’s objectives—protecting religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property—is recognized as mashrūʿ (lawful and sanctioned).”¹¹

3. The Interrelation Between Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh and Mass Media

3.1 Sharīʿah Objectives and Media Ethics

In today’s information-driven world, media has become a powerful instrument that shapes human thought, culture, and behavior. It not only spreads information but also forms opinions and influences social values. Within an Islamic framework, media is not seen as a neutral or purely commercial activity. Rather, it carries a moral duty to reflect honesty, justice, and respect for human dignity. According to Islamic teachings, every form of communication must comply with the higher objectives of Sharia (Maqasid al-Shariah), which aim to ensure the welfare and harmony of individuals and society. Therefore, exploring how Sharia principles relate to media ethics is essential for maintaining moral balance in the modern age.

3.2 Understanding Maqasid al-Shariah

The Maqasid al-Shariah, or the higher goals of Islamic law, were outlined by classical scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali and Imam al-Shatibi. They described five universal objectives that guide all human activities:

1. Preservation of Faith (Din)
2. Preservation of Life (Nafs)
3. Preservation of Intellect (Aql)
4. Preservation of Lineage (Nasl)
5. Preservation of Property (Mal)

These objectives seek to promote justice, prevent corruption, and protect essential human values. Any system—social, political, or communicational—should work within these moral boundaries. The media, therefore, must operate in ways that safeguard truth, dignity, and fairness while avoiding content that leads to moral or social harm.

3.3 Media Ethics from an Islamic Perspective

Islamic teachings provide clear guidance on ethical communication. Core principles such as truthfulness (Sidq), justice (ʿAdl), responsibility (Masʿuliyah), and respect for human dignity (Karamah) form the foundation of media ethics.

¹¹ Imām al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā*, Ṣ:179 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1413 AH).

- **Truthfulness:** Islam strictly forbids spreading false information or unverified news. The Qur'an instructs believers to confirm any report before passing it on.¹² (Al-Hujurat 49:6), which directly supports the idea of fact-checking in journalism.
- **Justice and Fairness:** The media should not favor one group unfairly or spread hatred. The Qur'an commands believers to act justly, even towards those they oppose.¹³ (Al-Ma'idah 5:8).
- **Respect for Privacy and Reputation:** Exposing people's private lives, insulting others, or spreading rumors are all condemned in Islam (Al-Hujurat 49:12). Ethical media must therefore protect privacy and avoid sensational reporting.
- **Promotion of Good:** The media should highlight positive values and discourage harmful practices, in accordance with the Islamic duty of Amr bil Ma'ruf wa Nahi 'anil Munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil).

Contemporary Media Challenges

In the digital age, the ethical challenges of media have multiplied. Social networks and mass entertainment often prioritize fame, financial gain, or political control over honesty and morality. As a result, misinformation, defamation, and moral decline have become common. Islam, through the Maqasid framework, provides a moral compass that helps media professionals resist unethical trends and fulfill their social responsibilities.

Building an Ethical Media Culture

Creating a morally responsible media environment requires combined efforts:

1. **Ethical Training:** Journalists and content producers should learn about Islamic principles of truth, accountability, and justice.
2. **Internal Oversight:** Media organizations should establish ethics committees to ensure the reliability and decency of their content.
3. **Positive Storytelling:** Media should promote education, compassion, justice, and family values, instead of materialism or indecency.
4. **Audience Responsibility:** Viewers must also think critically, reject falsehood, and support media that reflects honesty and social benefit.

The objectives of Sharia and the principles of media ethics share the same moral foundation—truth, justice, and respect for human life. When guided by the Maqasid al-Shariah, media becomes a source of enlightenment, not exploitation. It uplifts minds, protects societies, and contributes to moral growth. Upholding Islamic ethics in media is not only a professional necessity but also a form of service to humanity and obedience to Allah's guidance.

The fundamental objectives (maqāsid) of Islamic law are goodness, justice, balance, and the welfare of humanity. When the media serve as instruments to fulfill these aims—such as:

- promoting truth,
- supporting justice, and
- avoiding oppression and discord—
then their use falls within the legitimate sphere of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah (unrestricted public interests).

In this light, the media are not merely channels of information but moral platforms whose ethical use supports the realization of divine objectives. By fostering honesty, fairness, and compassion, media practice becomes a form of social iṣlāḥ (reform) that aligns with the spirit of Shari'ah.

4. Media Responsibility in the Context of Public Interest (Maṣlaḥah 'Āmmah)

¹² 49:6

¹³ 5:8

A major responsibility of modern media is to guide collective awareness in a positive direction. Based on the principle of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh, the use of media is not only permissible but commendable when it serves:

- the promotion of social peace,
- education and moral training,
- social reform, and
- accurate communication of facts.

Conversely, if modern media practices threaten the moral or social order, then—according to the same principle—their use may be restricted or prohibited. Examples include:

- the spread of fake news,
- defamation or character assassination, and
- campaigns promoting immorality or indecency.

Avoiding such maṣadāh (corruption or harm) is essential to the protection of public welfare, which is a primary goal of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh.

5. Practical Application of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh in Media

5.1. Use in Education and Preaching

Promoting Islamic values and disseminating the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah through modern communication tools represents one of the noblest forms of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh in action.

Examples include:

- online religious lectures and classes,
- digital Qur’anic lessons,
- Islamic educational videos and applications.

These platforms extend access to knowledge and spiritual guidance to a global audience, thereby serving a clear public benefit.

5.2 Raising Social Awareness and Supporting Welfare Initiatives

The media play a critical role in highlighting public welfare projects, such as campaigns for:

- healthcare,
- education,
- environmental protection, and
- peace and justice.

Such initiatives are entirely consistent with the objectives of Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh, as they promote collective good and human flourishing.

5.3. Transparency in Governance and Society

Islam encourages **consultation (shūrā)** and **accountability (mas’ūliyyah)**. “Surely, each one of you is a shepherd, and each one of you will be questioned about his flock.”¹⁴

Ibn ‘Abbās (RA) said regarding the verse “And consult them in the matter” that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“Allah and His Messenger are free from need of it, but He made consultation a mercy for my Ummah.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 7138 and Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1829,

¹⁵ Musnad Aḥmad (Hadith 2732) Classified as ḥasan by scholars such as al-Albānī.

Therefore, if the media expose corruption, injustice, or tyranny, they contribute directly to the preservation of justice and order, which are among the foremost aims of Sharī‘ah. Responsible investigative journalism and fair reporting thus embody the ethical dimension of Maṣlaḥah.

5.4. Moral Protection and Ethical Regulation

Media policies that establish systems to prevent obscenity, hate speech, and divisive propaganda exemplify a practical application of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah. Regulating such harmful content ensures the protection of morality and social cohesion, both of which are central to the Sharia’s preservation of religion, intellect, and society.

5.5 . Defining the Limits of the Lawful and the Unlawful in Light of Fiqh Principles

Within Islamic jurisprudence, the boundaries of permissibility (ḥalāl) and prohibition (ḥarām) in media practices are determined through fiqhī principles that balance benefit (maṣlaḥah) and harm (mafsadah).

- Any form of media that serves legitimate objectives, upholds truth, and benefits the community falls within the permissible and even praiseworthy domain.
- Conversely, any medium that spreads falsehood, harms reputations, promotes corruption, or undermines morality enters the impermissible and condemnable sphere.

Thus, through the framework of Maṣāliḥ Mursalah, Islamic jurisprudence provides a dynamic yet ethically grounded approach for engaging with modern media, ensuring that technological advancement remains guided by moral responsibility, justice, and divine wisdom.

Aṣl al-Ibāḥah (Principle of Permissibility)

It is a fundamental rule that "Al-aṣl fi al-ashyā’ al-ibāḥah" meaning, in things the original state is permissibility until any corruption (mafsadah) exists.

Therefore, the use of modern media platforms is mubāḥ (permissible) as long as they are not against maṣlaḥah ‘āmmah (public interest).

2: Sadd al-Dharā’i’ (Blocking the Means)

If any media source is apparently permissible but its result leads to corruption, then Sharī‘ah commands to close it. In a hadith: “There should be neither harm nor reciprocating harm.”¹⁶

3: Raf’ al-Ḥaraj (Removal of Hardship)

In media, sometimes relaxation or ease can also be given for the preaching of Sharī‘ah rulings or for reformative works, if from it general benefit (maṣlaḥah) is achieved.

Contemporary Examples

1. Islamic channels (Peace TV, JTR and QTV etc.) — Tablīghī maṣlaḥah (propagational benefit)
2. Qur’an apps and online educational platforms (Islam 360, Muallimul-Qurán etc)— Ta‘līmī maṣlaḥah (educational benefit)
3. Moral campaigns on social media — Samājī maṣlaḥah (social benefit)
4. Truthfulness in news reporting — ‘Adālatī maṣlaḥah (judicial benefit)
5. Digital fatwa services —(Darul uloom Karachi, Jamia Banori Town etc)‘Ilmī maṣlaḥah (scholarly benefit)

Maṣāliḥ Mursalah is that spirit of Sharī‘ah which provides guidance in the changing circumstances of time.

Since the means of communication have become the most powerful force of the present age, making their use subject to the objectives of the Sharī‘ah is the true foundation of Islamic media ethics.

It can thus be said that if the media become a means of promoting maṣlaḥah ‘āmmah (public interest), then they are strictly adhering to the principles of Sharī‘ah. However, if they become

¹⁶ Sunan Ibn Mājah, Hadith No. 2340, Book: Rulings (Book 13), Chapter 17

a source of corruption (*mafāsīd*), then imposing restrictions upon them is precisely in accordance with the principles of *Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh*.

The Implementation of *Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh* in the Field of Media

The implementation of *Maṣāliḥ Mursalāh* within the fundamental concept of media is in fact a continuation of the teachings of divine revelation. The instruments of communication possess power like a double-edged sword. A sword can be used to eliminate evil and establish an atmosphere of peace and harmony, and it can also be used for killing, bloodshed, and inflaming the emotions of discord and corruption.

The point worth pondering is — in whose hands is this sword?

Is it in the hands of one who does not understand the meaning of peace and harmony, who disregards human values, and who makes the violation of moral principles his habit? Or is it in the hands of one whose nature is grounded in justice and fairness, who regards peace and harmony as a divine blessing, who safeguards and upholds human values, and for whom morality is a foremost priority?

Such instruments which, on one hand, serve as a means of expressing the true sovereignty of the real Owner of this universe, and on the other hand, remind a person of accountability before his Lord in the life after death — these are the true foundations of ethical communication. Furthermore, statements made on the basis of truthfulness, justice, fairness, and careful investigation are the real manifestation of intellectual integrity. These are the very elements that contribute to the growth of human values within a region, a nation, a country, and indeed throughout the world.

These same principles serve as the driving force for fulfilling the duty of serving not only the nation but all of humanity.

This radiant teaching of the Holy Qur'an calls for reflection and action, emphasizing that any statement made on the basis of assumption or conjecture neither meets the standard of authenticity nor holds up to the scale of credibility. Moreover, such behavior often leads a person to shame and regret.¹⁷

Likewise, sowing discord, exaggerating matters, adding embellishments to information, adopting artificiality and pretension, and glossing over facts and issues—all these are practices contrary to the dignity of a healthy and responsible media. The Qur'an designates such speech as "*Lahw al-Ḥadīth*," which can be interpreted as enticing speech, or vain and frivolous talk. Such discourse does not enlighten or strengthen a healthy society; rather, it diverts people from the path of guidance and opens countless doors and ways toward misguidance and moral corruption. For this reason, the Holy Qur'an issues a declaration of humiliating punishment for those who spread and promote such speech within society.

Social corruption is so bad that The Qur'anic Perspective on Harmful Speech and Social Corruption is described in different verses as below:

The Qur'an places significant emphasis on the ethical responsibility of individuals regarding the speech they propagate. Sharing false, misleading, or harmful information is not merely discouraged; it is portrayed as an act with serious social and moral consequences.

Accountability for Falsehoods: The Qur'an underscores the importance of verifying information before dissemination. Spreading unverified or false news can lead to societal disruption, and individuals who do so are warned of divine accountability (Surah Al-Hujurat 49:6-7).

¹⁷ As in Surah e Hujurat.

Condemnation of Slander and Gossip: Malicious speech, including slander and gossip, is explicitly condemned. The Qur'an indicates that those who engage in such behaviors may face both social disgrace and divine retribution, reflecting the seriousness with which such actions are regarded (Surah An-Nur 24:19-20).

Prohibition of Social Corruption (Fasad): Acts that destabilize social order or spread corruption are strictly forbidden. The Qur'an highlights that even those who claim righteousness are not exempt from accountability if their actions harm others (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:11-12; Surah Al-A'raf 7:33).

Humiliating Punishment for Wrongdoers: In several passages, the Qur'an links immoral and harmful behavior to both divine punishment and public disgrace. For instance, individuals who slander, backbite, or otherwise corrupt society are warned of severe consequences, emphasizing the intertwined nature of ethical conduct and social harmony (Surah Al-Humazah 104:1-9).

Moral Accountability and Ethical Responsibility in Contemporary Mass-Media according to Maṣāliḥ Mursalah

In the Islamic worldview, media is not only a tool of communication but also a moral trust (*amānah*). Its use must reflect sincerity, responsibility, and awareness of divine accountability. The concept of answerability before Allah (*ḥisāb wa jāwābdehī*) and concern for the Hereafter (*fīkr al-ākhirah*) serve as the moral foundation for all forms of communication. Every word and image transmitted through media is a testimony that will be judged, as the Qur'an declares: "Not a word does he utter but there is a watcher by him ready to record" (Qur'an 50:18). Therefore, journalists, influencers, and media professionals must operate with a deep consciousness of accountability, recognizing that media ethics are not limited to worldly laws but are rooted in divine justice.

From Speculation to Verified Truth

Modern media often thrives on assumptions, unverified claims, and sensationalism. Islam, however, commands believers to rely on verified facts rather than conjecture (*qiyās wa zann*). The Qur'an repeatedly warns, "Indeed, conjecture does not avail against truth at all" (Qur'an 53:28). Hence, responsible media practice requires thorough fact-checking, cross-verification, and intellectual honesty. Reporting based on rumors or speculation leads to mistrust, division, and moral decay within society.

Rejection of Falsehood and Frivolous Content

The Islamic principle of truthfulness (*ṣidq*) demands that facts remain unaltered. Distorting information, misrepresenting realities, or producing content filled with frivolity (*laghw*) contradicts Qur'anic ethics. The Qur'an praises believers who "turn away from idle talk" (23:3), emphasizing that meaningful, purposeful communication is a sign of faith. Media professionals should therefore avoid manipulating facts for entertainment, ratings, or financial benefit.

Curbing Indecency and Promoting Modesty

The spread of vulgarity (*faḥāshī*) through television, films, or digital media poses a serious ethical threat. Islam commands believers to promote modesty and prevent indecency, stating, "Indeed, those who love that immorality should be spread among the believers will have a painful punishment" (Qur'an 24:19). The media's responsibility is to protect moral sensibilities

rather than exploit them for profit or popularity.

Need for Ethical Codes and Regulation

To ensure responsible conduct, there must be a clear code of ethics (ḍābiṭ al-akhlāq) governing media operations. Ethical regulation and accountability frameworks help prevent misinformation, slander, and moral corruption. Islamic ethics urge that freedom of expression be accompanied by restraint, integrity, and social responsibility.

The Problem of Sensationalism

Sensational reporting has become a dominant trend, where exaggeration replaces accuracy. This culture of sensationalism damages credibility and promotes anxiety within society. Islamic ethics call for calm, balanced, and truthful reporting that educates rather than provokes. Reforming this trend requires media institutions to adopt principles of justice, moderation, and factual representation.

Advertising and the Ethics of Commercialization

One of the most alarming issues in social media advertising is the normalization of materialism and deceit for financial gain. Paid promotions often encourage false impressions—portraying luxury as necessity and manipulating consumer desires. Islam condemns deceit in trade and publicity, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever deceives is not one of us.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 102). The portrayal of costly products as essential or using celebrities for dishonest endorsements constitutes moral dishonesty and consumer exploitation.

False Promotion by Entertainment Industry

Actors, influencers, and members of the showbiz industry frequently promote products or lifestyles they do not personally use or believe in. Such endorsements blur the line between truth and deception. In Islam, lying for profit is a grave sin, regardless of social status. When media personalities publicly endorse impermissible or harmful items, they become complicit in spreading falsehood and moral corruption.

Promotion of Prohibited and Harmful Content

The advertisement and glorification of unlawful (ḥarām) products or activities—such as intoxicants, gambling, or immoral behavior—directly contradict Islamic teachings. Media platforms that facilitate or promote such acts are ethically responsible for the resulting harm. The Qur’ān commands believers to cooperate in righteousness and piety, not in sin and transgression (5:2).

Assisting in Wrongdoing

When media campaigns or individuals assist others in unethical practices or harmful behavior, they violate the Qur’ānic principle of *lā ta’āwanū ‘alā al-ithm wal-‘udwān* (do not cooperate in sin and aggression). True professionalism demands refusing involvement in actions that misguide people, distort values, or damage the collective conscience of society.

Classical scholars, most notably Imam al-Ghazali and later scholars of the Maliki madhhab, systematized *maṣlaḥa mursala* by imposing stringent conditions to prevent arbitrary application. For a consideration to be jurisprudentially valid, it must fulfill three core criteria: Genuineness (Ḥaqīqiyya): The purported benefit must be objective and substantive, not merely speculative or predicated on whimsical desire.

Generality (Kulliyya): The benefit must serve the collective welfare of the community, transcending the interests of a specific individual, faction, or class.

Textual/Principial Non-Contravention: The ruling derived from *maṣlaḥa* must not abrogate or conflict with a definitive (*qat'ī*) injunction from the Qur'an, Sunnah, or consensus (*ijmā'*). For instance, it cannot be invoked to legitimize financial interest (*ribā*), which is explicitly prohibited.

Towards a Principled and Maqāṣid-Oriented Framework

To mitigate these challenges and enhance the legitimacy of its application, the use of *maṣlaḥa* *mursala* in media must be re-anchored in a more rigorous methodology.

Maqāṣid as an Objective Benchmark: Analysis should be explicitly framed within the taxonomy of the *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property). This provides a more objective, classical standard against which any purported benefit can be measured, moving beyond vague utilitarian claims.

Deliberative and Participatory Governance: The process of defining *maṣlaḥa* should be democratized, involving not only state jurists but also independent scholars, media experts, and civil society representatives in a transparent deliberation.

The Principle of Minimal Restriction: Any regulatory measure based on *maṣlaḥa* should adhere to the principle of proportionality, employing the least restrictive means necessary to achieve the stated objective.

Emphasis on Ethical Formation over Coercion: A long-term strategy should prioritize cultivating media literacy and a strong ethical consciousness (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*) among content creators and consumers, thereby fostering self-regulation grounded in Islamic values.

Negative Impacts of Mass Media on Individual Life Without the Guidance of Al-Maṣaleḥ al-Mursalah

In the absence of ethical and juristic guidance derived from *al-Maṣaleḥ al-Mursalah*, the influence of mass media on individual life can become deeply problematic. Modern media is not merely a channel of information; it is a powerful social institution that shapes human perception, emotion, and behavior. When its operation and content are detached from moral responsibility and the higher objectives of *Sharī'ah* (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), it can easily shift from being a means of enlightenment to a source of moral and psychological harm.

One of the most serious consequences of unregulated media influence is the erosion of moral consciousness. In a value-free media environment, individuals are continuously exposed to content that normalizes indecency, falsehood, and materialism. Such exposure gradually desensitizes the human conscience, weakening the internal capacity to distinguish between right and wrong. In Islamic jurisprudence, the role of *al-Maṣaleḥ al-Mursalah* is precisely to safeguard those universal interests that preserve morality and human dignity. Without this framework, the individual becomes vulnerable to the cultural relativism and ethical confusion that dominate global media trends.

Another major impact lies in the distortion of intellectual and emotional balance. The constant stream of sensationalized news, commercial advertising, and entertainment fosters superficial thinking and emotional instability. Individuals begin to assess truth through popularity rather than authenticity, and morality through social approval rather than divine guidance. In such a setting, *maṣlaḥah* *mursalah* would normally act as a moderating principle, reminding both producers and consumers of media that public interest must never override spiritual and intellectual integrity. Without it, information becomes a commodity, and the mind a marketplace for manipulation.

Furthermore, the misuse of communication freedom often leads to the spread of misinformation, defamation, and hate speech. When mass media is left without ethical regulation inspired by *maṣlaḥah*, it can harm reputations, invade privacy, and incite division among communities. The Qur'an explicitly warns against suspicion, backbiting, and spreading false reports (Qur'an 49:6–12), emphasizing the need for responsible communication. Yet,

without a juristic mechanism such as al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalāh to translate these divine values into practical policies, these principles remain neglected in modern media practice.

The psychological dimension is equally concerning. Continuous exposure to negative, violent, or overly glamorous content leads to anxiety, dissatisfaction, and distorted self-perception. Individuals begin to measure their worth by unrealistic media standards, resulting in identity crises and social alienation. From an Islamic ethical perspective, this represents a failure to protect the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-‘aql*) and the soul (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), both of which are essential objectives of Sharī‘ah. The absence of maṣlaḥah-based guidance allows such harm to persist unchecked, undermining human well-being in both spiritual and psychological terms.

Lastly, the commercialization of values under uncontrolled media influence shifts society’s focus from collective welfare to individual pleasure and profit. The pursuit of ratings and revenue often leads to the exploitation of human emotions, religion, and culture. Here again, al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalāh could function as a guiding principle—ensuring that economic and creative freedoms remain consistent with the moral welfare of society. Without it, even legitimate progress becomes morally hollow and socially destructive.

In essence, the absence of al-Maṣāleḥ al-Mursalāh in the regulation of mass media results in the loss of ethical equilibrium. Individuals, exposed to unfiltered information and unchecked influences, face a gradual erosion of moral, intellectual, and emotional stability. This highlights the urgent need to reintegrate Islamic ethical jurisprudence into the discourse of modern communication, so that technological advancement may continue to serve humanity rather than undermine it.

Conclusion

The principle of al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalāh occupies a distinctive position within Islamic jurisprudence as an adaptive mechanism for addressing emerging realities not explicitly covered in the textual sources of Sharī‘ah. Its conceptual essence rests upon the preservation and promotion of public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) while ensuring that no contradiction arises with established Qur’ānic or Prophetic injunctions. Historically, this principle has empowered jurists to formulate rulings consistent with the higher objectives of Sharī‘ah (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*), encompassing the protection of religion (*dīn*), life (*nafs*), intellect (*‘aql*), lineage (*nasl*), and property (*māl*) (al-Ghazālī, 1997)¹⁸. Within the modern landscape, the realm of mass media—encompassing digital communication, social networks, journalism, and entertainment—presents complex ethical dilemmas that demand such a purposive framework.

In the contemporary era, media serves as a central instrument for shaping perceptions, constructing social realities, and influencing both moral and political behaviors. While it possesses enormous potential for social reform and public education, it simultaneously harbors the capacity for misinformation, moral degradation, and manipulation of collective consciousness. The Islamic legal tradition, through the principle of al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalāh, offers an avenue for reconciling technological innovation with moral integrity. This principle can be instrumental in setting ethical standards for the dissemination of information, privacy protection, and avoidance of slander or defamation—values directly rooted in the Qur’ānic injunctions against false testimony and backbiting¹⁹.

¹⁸ al-Ghazālī, A. H. (1997). *Al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.

¹⁹ Qur’an 24:15–19

The critical application of *maṣlaḥah mursalah* in the field of mass media thus requires an epistemic balance between legal flexibility and ethical discipline. The challenge lies in avoiding unrestrained subjectivity under the guise of public interest while also preventing rigid literalism that fails to address the evolving human condition. Classical scholars such as Imām Mālik and al-Shāṭibī advocated a cautious but active use of *maṣlaḥah* in legislation, emphasizing its legitimacy only when aligned with the Sharī‘ah’s universal purposes (al-Shāṭibī, 1999)²⁰. In this respect, modern Muslim societies must reinterpret this legal tool not as an arbitrary human invention, but as a methodological bridge between revelation and rational moral reasoning.

From a communicative standpoint, the media industry profoundly influences public ethics, social cohesion, and the moral compass of nations. Applying *al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalah* to media governance ensures that production, broadcasting, and consumption of information are measured by their contribution to public good rather than profit, popularity, or political gain. Media guided by *maṣlaḥah* becomes a means of cultivating truthfulness (*ṣidq*), safeguarding honor (*‘ird*), and protecting human dignity (*karāmah insāniyyah*). These dimensions resonate deeply with the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, ensuring that communication upholds justice, transparency, and the collective good (Kamali, 2008)²¹.

Moreover, this principle can act as a corrective measure against the rising trends of sensationalism, hate speech, and disinformation prevalent in digital communication. Under the guidance of *maṣlaḥah mursalah*, scholars and policymakers can derive media ethics frameworks rooted in both rational utility and divine morality. The inclusion of this juristic approach into contemporary media studies provides a fresh paradigm that blends faith-based morality with humanistic principles. It reinforces that Islam does not oppose freedom of speech; rather, it seeks to channel it toward constructive, truthful, and dignified expression.

Nevertheless, a critical evaluation of *al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalah* reveals inherent challenges. Its interpretive elasticity may invite misuse by individuals or institutions seeking to legitimize practices contrary to Sharī‘ah. To prevent such distortions, contemporary jurists must develop methodological parameters—anchored in consensus (*ijmā‘*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*)—to assess the authenticity of claimed public interests. The legitimacy of *maṣlaḥah* should always be judged by its conformity with the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* and the absence of direct textual prohibition. In this sense, the principle’s effectiveness depends on the intellectual integrity and spiritual accountability of its interpreters (Auda, 2008)²².

Furthermore, within the context of globalized media, Muslim communities face the dual challenge of engaging with modernity without succumbing to moral relativism. Here, *al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalah* serves as a moral compass—affirming that technological and communicative progress must never compromise the sanctity of truth or the ethical fabric of society. By employing this principle, Muslim media practitioners can actively participate in global discourse while preserving the distinct identity and moral vision of Islam. It allows for contextual innovation—adopting modern tools, platforms, and strategies—without detaching from divine guidance.

²⁰ al-Shāṭibī, I. (1999). *Al-Muwāfaqāt fi Uṣūl al-Sharī‘ah*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth.

²¹ Kamali, M. H. (2008). *Shari‘ah Law: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

²² Auda, J. (2008). *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought.

In light of these discussions, it becomes evident that al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalāh is neither an outdated legal concept nor an abstract theory detached from reality. Rather, it is a living, dynamic principle that embodies Islam's capacity for renewal (tajdīd) and relevance in all epochs. Its critical application in mass media signifies an intellectual awakening within Islamic jurisprudence, inviting scholars, policymakers, and communicators to collaborate toward a just and ethically responsible information order.

To conclude, the future of media ethics within Muslim societies must rest upon a synthesis of revelation and rational moral reasoning. Al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalāh provides this synthesis—allowing for creative engagement with modernity while safeguarding the foundational objectives of Sharī'ah. By integrating this principle into media governance and content regulation, Islamic thought can offer a holistic ethical paradigm to a world struggling with moral fragmentation. The challenge for contemporary scholars is not merely to apply this principle theoretically, but to translate it into actionable policies and educational frameworks that nurture ethical awareness among media professionals. Ultimately, the success of al-Maṣlaḥ al-Mursalāh in this domain will depend on its capacity to balance freedom with responsibility, innovation with faith, and progress with moral truth. In doing so, it can contribute meaningfully to a global communication culture rooted in justice, compassion, and human dignity.

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