

Communication as a Moral Calling in the Algorithmic Era: Reactualizing Inter Mirifica in Adolescent Character Education

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Abstract

Digital communication ideally constitutes a formative arena that cultivates the moral and intellectual maturation of adolescents as active constituents of the digital generation. Yet prevailing social media practices are frequently characterised by the proliferation of misinformation, cyberbullying, unrestrained self-disclosure, and compulsive validation-seeking, tendencies that progressively erode moral accountability and compromise the coherent development of personal identity. This study interrogates the principle of responsibility in digital communication as a normative substrate for adolescent character formation, and proposes a conceptual framework for embedding both personal and collective accountability into the fabric of everyday social media engagement. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in systematic literature review, conceptual excavation, and critical reflection on the prevailing dynamics of digital communication, the study delineates three cardinal dimensions of responsibility: personal responsibility, encompassing self-regulation and the rigorous verification of information; social responsibility, entailing a heightened awareness of public ramifications and an unwavering commitment to the inviolability of human dignity; and structural responsibility, pertaining to the constitutive roles of the family, educational institutions, government, the Church, and civil society in furnishing ethical guidance and regulatory oversight. Collectively, these findings substantiate the claim that responsibility-centred character education is both contextually urgent and normatively indispensable for adolescents navigating the complexities of the digital milieu. Responsible digital communication thus emerges as a strategic trajectory for cultivating a generation of reflective, autonomous, and integrity-driven youth capable of engaging thoughtfully and ethically with the profound challenges posed by contemporary digital technology.

Keywords: Adolescents, Character Education, Digital Communication, Media Ethics, Responsibility

1. Introduction

Communication is essentially an integral part of human existence. It is not merely an activity of exchanging information, but a moral act inherent in the dignity of human beings as rational creatures. In various disciplines, including theological reflection, humans are understood as creatures with reason and creativity. With their rationality, humans are able to create various means to support their lives, including modern communication technologies such as social media (Salamor & Salamor, 2021). Social media did not come into being on its own, but is the result of human creativity that developed through the guidance of reason. From a faith perspective, this ability can be understood as a gift from the Creator. Therefore, social media is essentially a good and positive tool, as long as it is used to build healthy and meaningful relationships (Tinambunan, 2016).

Humans are relational beings. They need communication to understand themselves and others. Communication involves meaning, value, and responsibility. Communication always involves messages, language, symbols, and reciprocal responses. Through communication, humans build their identity, create communities, and develop a harmonious social life. However, communication is not a



morally neutral act (Susanti & Rachmaniar, 2021). Every expression, whether verbal or written, has ethical implications. Communication demands responsibility, truthfulness, and respect for human dignity. What is conveyed must be accountable, especially when it has consequences for oneself and others. Thus, proper communication is communication that builds, restores relationships, and leads to the common good.

Without ethical guidelines, social media can actually damage social relationships and disrupt the formation of personal identity. This challenge is even more apparent in the lives of teenagers in the digital age. Adolescents are a group that is very familiar with technology and are often referred to as the digital generation. They have broad access to information and are able to adapt quickly to technological developments. However, on the other hand, they are also prone to identity crises, instant thinking, dependence on social media algorithms, and a lack of critical reflection skills (Ferdiana & Yuwono, 2023).

Social media algorithms tend to display content that matches user preferences, thus creating an echo chamber that limits perspectives. As a result, the ability for in-depth analysis and critical reflection can weaken. Knowledge becomes dependent on digital devices, while independent thinking processes are underdeveloped. This condition has implications for social relationships, character formation, and moral competence in communication. In the context of education, this situation poses a major challenge. Character education is not only the responsibility of schools, but also of families and society. Moral guidance and ethical attitudes in using social media are urgently needed so that the younger generation is able to use technology responsibly (Sagala et al., 2024).

Church documents such as *Inter Mirifica*, produced during the Second Vatican Council, provide an ethical foundation for the use of social communication tools. The document emphasises that the development of communication technology is a sign of the times that must be addressed wisely, with moral responsibility and adequate guidance. Based on this context, this study seeks to examine communication as a moral act and integrate the ethical principles in *Inter Mirifica* into character education for adolescents in the digital age.

As Zuboff (2023) explains that digital media operates within the logic of surveillance capitalism, which extracts and monetises user behaviour data. Algorithms are not neutral but shape user preferences, habits, and even decisions through systems of prediction and behavioural control. These findings are relevant to this study because they show that digital spaces have a strong character-forming power, especially for adolescents. However, Zuboff emphasises the economic-political aspects and has not integrated them with theological ethical reflection or character education. Livingstone (2014), in his article in the journal *Communications* (2014), highlights the importance of social media literacy for children and adolescents so that they can understand the risks and opportunities in digital spaces. He emphasises that adolescents need guidance from family and school to develop reflective abilities and critical judgement of digital content. This study reinforces the urgency of character education in social media use, but has not specifically linked it to the principles of communication ethics in Church documents such as *Inter Mirifica*.

Meanwhile, Soukup (2019) emphasises that communication from the Church's perspective is a moral act that demands truth, responsibility, and respect for human dignity. He underlines the importance of theological reflection on media as part of the Church's mission in the modern world. However, his study does not explicitly discuss character formation in adolescents in the context of contemporary social media, which is the main focus of the research, namely analysing communication as a moral act inherent in human dignity. Examining the ethical principles of communication in *Inter Mirifica*. Formulating a model for integrating these ethical principles into character education for adolescents in the digital age. In addition, it is integrative, combining theological reflection on

communication as a moral calling with the concrete context of social media use among adolescents. Contextual actualisation of Church documents, particularly *Inter Mirifica*, in the realm of digital character education, not only as a normative study but as a practical framework for ethical guidance. Emphasis on the moral dimension of digital communication, which not only discusses the impact of technology but also views communication as an existential and ethical responsibility of humans. Thus, as a guiding framework for this study, the focus is on understanding communication as a moral act in human life, examining how the ethical principles articulated in *Inter Mirifica* can be actualised in adolescent character education in the digital age, and analysing how the integration of these ethical principles of communication can contribute to the development of responsible and dignified communication on social media.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. The research sample is purposive (purposive sampling), which is data sources that are deliberately selected based on their relevance to the focus of the study. The sample consists of scientific literature in the form of books, indexed journal articles, education policy documents, and Church documents related to communication ethics and character education. In addition, the phenomenon of adolescent digital communication on social media is used as the context for empirical-conceptual analysis.

The reasons for selecting conceptual sources or informants were based on academic considerations that the literature had scientific authority, thematic relevance, and theoretical contributions to the discussion of responsibility in digital communication. The selection was made to ensure the depth of normative and contextual analysis. The research instrument was the researcher himself (human instrument), supported by a document analysis sheet to identify concepts, value categories, and ethical principles related to responsibility, digital communication, and character education. This instrument was used to systematically select, classify, and interpret data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Social Media as a Space for Character Formation

Social media today is no longer merely understood as a communication tool or a means of conveying messages. It has evolved into a space for character formation that significantly influences the way people think, act, and interpret reality. Continuous interactions in the digital space shape habits, patterns of reflection, and the construction of personal identity. In daily practice, social media is often used to display personal activities through photo uploads, videos, or short narratives about life experiences (Salsabila & Nur, 2025). On the one hand, this can be an expression of creativity and a means of sharing positive experiences. However, on the other hand, there is a tendency for activities to be carried out not for their intrinsic value, but for their potential to be published and attract public attention. Actions are no longer oriented towards meaning, but towards the possibility of becoming content.

This phenomenon shows a shift in the purpose of human actions. Daily activities are deliberately constructed to be post-worthy, sometimes even engineered to get likes, comments, or more followers. The value of an action is no longer measured by its goodness or usefulness, but by the level of popularity and public response it receives. Thus, the measure of self-success is slowly shifting from depth of meaning to quantity of appreciation. This condition has implications for character formation (Parancika, 2022). When someone continuously builds a selectively curated self-image in virtual space,

the identity that is formed is often an incomplete representation. The complex reality of the self is simplified into visual fragments and narratives tailored to the tastes of the audience. In the long run, this representation can form a personal narrative that differs from a person's authentic identity.

Teenagers, as the digital generation, are particularly vulnerable to this dynamic. In the phase of identity development, they tend to seek social recognition and acceptance. Social media provides an instant space to gain validation through comments and public responses. When the responses received are positive, feelings of joy and encouragement to repeat the same behavior pattern arise (Afrilia et al., 2025). Conversely, when responses are negative or lack appreciation, self-esteem can decline and affect self-confidence. As a result, the measure of self-worth becomes highly dependent on external judgements. Personal authenticity is at risk of weakening because the identity is built based on audience expectations. Individuals may be compelled to maintain a certain image even if it does not fully reflect their reality.

In this context, the self becomes a product to be promoted, while privacy and personal depth are increasingly eroded. Furthermore, excessive exposure in the digital space can blur the boundaries between private and public spaces. Personal lives are widely displayed, so that the value of individuality and uniqueness is no longer wisely preserved. If left without critical reflection and ethical guidance, this situation can shape characters that are less autonomous, less reflective, and less responsible for their own dignity. From an ethical perspective, this issue shows that social media is not a neutral space. It has a strong formative power (Amril & Sazali, 2025). Digital algorithms that tailor content to user preferences reinforce certain patterns and indirectly shape habits of thinking and acting. Therefore, character building in the digital age cannot be separated from the way a person uses social media.

This is where the importance of character education integrated with digital literacy and moral guidance lies. Social media needs to be directed to become a space for growth, not merely a space for image building. Young people need to be guided to understand that self-worth is not determined by the number of public responses, but by their dignity as rational and moral individuals. Digital communication must be re-understood as a moral calling that demands responsibility, honesty, and respect for oneself and others (Salamor & Salamor, 2021). Thus, reflection on communication as a moral act becomes increasingly relevant. If communication is understood as an ethical calling, then the use of social media must also be placed within the framework of moral responsibility. The ethical principles formulated in Church documents such as *Inter Mirifica* find their actual context in the dynamics of character formation among young people in the digital age.

3.2. Actualization of the *Inter Mirifica* Principle as a Moral Calling

3.2.1. The Principle of Truth

The principle of truth is the main foundation in communication, including digital communication. Truth means conveying something as it is, without falsification, manipulation, or deception. In the context of communication, truth is not merely the correspondence between words and facts, but also fidelity to reality and moral responsibility for the impact of what is conveyed (Septiyadi et al., 2020). In digital communication, the principle of truth becomes even more important because the messages disseminated have a wide reach and rapid impact. False information, even if it seems trivial, can influence public opinion, damage a person's reputation, and even trigger social conflict. In the tradition of moral philosophy, Immanuel Kant asserted that honesty is a universal moral obligation. According to Kant, lying cannot be justified because it contradicts moral principles that should apply to everyone. Therefore, truthful communication must be based on the moral obligation to tell the truth and respect the rationality and dignity of others (Kant & Korsgaard, 1998). Therefore, every individual who uses social media has a moral responsibility to ensure that what is shared is true.

The Inter Mirifica decree produced at the Second Vatican Council emphasizes that the use of social communication tools must take into account moral norms and fidelity to the truth. Everyone is called to use communication technology wisely and responsibly (Amole, 2016). This requires moral consideration before conveying messages, uploading content, or disseminating information. These considerations cover several important aspects. First, the content of the message must be assessed from a moral standpoint. All content, whether in the form of writing, images, or videos, must be considered in terms of whether it is in accordance with ethical values and applicable norms. Not everything that can be published is appropriate for publication. Freedom of expression must still be limited by responsibility for the truth and human dignity. As Ratzinger (2009) emphasized in his work *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. 2004, communication is not merely a process of exchanging information, but a moral act related to human responsibility for the truth. In his view, every form of communication, including in the digital space, must be rooted in truth, respect for human dignity, and an orientation towards the common good.

Secondly, the purpose of communication must be clear and good. Proper communication is determined not only by good content, but also by good intentions (Al Azis, 2021). Content that appears positive on the surface can lose its moral value if it is motivated by manipulative intentions, a mere desire for popularity, or a desire to harm others. Therefore, both the purpose and the method of delivery must be in line with the principle of goodness. Third, digital communication needs to consider the context, timing, and target audience. The timing of the message, the social situation, and the background of the recipient greatly influence the meaning of the communication. The way we speak to friends is certainly different from how we communicate with parents, educators, or public officials. Sensitivity to context helps maintain politeness, effectiveness, and communication ethics. From a theological perspective, Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes that human communication is not only about conveying information, but also about moral responsibility towards truth and human dignity. Therefore, every form of communication, including in the digital space, must consider interpersonal relationships, respect, and an orientation towards the common good so that communication does not become a means of manipulation or the spread of misleading opinions (Ratzinger, 2009).

Fourth, the maturity of information is an important requirement in the dissemination of messages. Every social media user needs to ensure that the information shared has been verified for accuracy. The dissemination of information from unclear sources has the potential to cause misunderstandings and harm. In this case, the ability to filter and control oneself is part of moral responsibility (Pambudi et al., 2023). Self-control in digital communication also means the ability to not react impulsively. Not everything needs to be commented on, and not all feelings need to be publicized. Self-awareness helps a person assess whether a message is truly important and useful or merely a momentary outburst of emotion. Thus, communication becomes a means of building, not destroying, relationships. Ultimately, the principle of truth in digital communication is closely related to one's conscience. Each individual is called to listen to their conscience before speaking or posting something. One's conscience helps assess whether the act of communication brings good or harms oneself and others. If communication is based on a clear conscience and a commitment to truth, then digital communication can be a means of personal and social growth.

3.2.2. The Principle of Responsibility

The Principle of Responsibility in Digital Communication In addition to the principle of truth, the principle of responsibility is a fundamental aspect of digital communication. Responsibility is not only related to what is conveyed, but also to the impact of that communication. Immanuel Kant emphasized that humans, as rational beings, have a moral obligation to act responsibly and respect the

dignity of others. This principle is known as the categorical imperative, which requires that every human action be considered as if it could become a universal law for all people. Therefore, in digital communication, each individual needs to ethically consider the impact of the message being conveyed, so that communication does not harm, mislead, or demean the dignity of others (Kant, 1997). In the context of social media, every post, comment, and dissemination of information has real moral and social consequences (Salamor & Salamor, 2021). Teenagers, as active users of social media, are a group that is vulnerable to various problems in the use of digital communication tools. Many cases show that imprudence in using social media can cause harm, whether in the form of cyberbullying, defamation, dissemination of false information, or excessive self-exploitation. This situation emphasizes that the use of social media is not only a right but also a moral responsibility.

Responsibility in digital communication cannot be placed solely on certain individuals. It is a shared responsibility that involves various parties. In the context of character education, the formation of a responsible attitude begins in the family environment as the first and foremost education. Moral values instilled from an early age form the foundation for the wise use of technology (Sulastri et al., 2023). Furthermore, formal educational institutions, from primary school to university level, play an important role in shaping ethical digital literacy. Education should not only focus on technical skills in using technology, but also on character building, moral maturity, and the ability to think critically about the information received and disseminated. However, the journey of shaping responsibility does not stop at the family and school. The government has an obligation to provide fair regulation and supervision of social media use, including digital companies operating in the public sphere. Churches and religious communities also play a role in providing moral guidance and spiritual counselling. Local communities and cultures with their traditional values also serve as ethical pillars in building collective awareness about the dignified use of technology (Bunthawee, 2025).

In concrete practice, responsibility is manifested through the moral obligations of social media users. First, every user has an obligation to be critical of the information they receive. Not all information that circulates is trustworthy or should be disseminated. The ability to select and verify information is a form of responsibility towards oneself and others. Second, responsibility means exercising self-control in the use of social media. Rapid technological developments often lead to addiction or excessive use. A responsible attitude requires freedom from such dependence, so that social media does not dominate one's personal life and social relationships (Pratidina & Mitha, 2023). Third, responsibility requires each individual to consider the impact of every piece of content they share. Prior to posting photos, videos, or statements, ethical reflection is required to assess whether the content may harm oneself or others and whether it compromises personal or others' dignity. When content has the potential to cause moral or social harm, refraining from sharing it constitutes a form of responsible conduct. In the context of the digital economy, there are also challenges related to seeking profit through social media. It is not uncommon for content that is substantially meaningless or even harmful to gain popularity and financial gain (Susan & Singgih, 2023). In this situation, the principle of responsibility demands that the pursuit of success and profit must still take into account ethical means. Good intentions cannot be justified if they are pursued through means that harm human dignity or moral values.

Governments and policymakers have a responsibility to ensure that digital companies and online businesses do not solely pursue economic profit, but also consider the social and ethical impact of the content they produce and distribute. Fair regulation and consistent oversight are part of the structural responsibility of building a healthy digital space. Thus, responsibility in digital communication encompasses personal, social, and structural dimensions (Roza, 2020). It requires self-awareness, self-control, and a commitment to the common good. In the context of character education for adolescents,

the principle of responsibility is key to shaping a digital generation that is not only technologically savvy but also morally mature and dignified in communication.

3.2.3. Principles of Digital Communication Ethics

The deepest foundation of any reflection on digital communication is human dignity. Human dignity is inherent, independent of public recognition, popularity, number of followers, or responses received on social media. This dignity stems from human nature as rational, free, and moral beings. Augustine of Hippo emphasized that language must be used to build truth and love in human relationships, because the purpose of communication is not only to convey information, but also to guide humans towards true understanding (Augustine, 1999). In line with this, Hans Urs von Balthasar asserts that human communication should reflect God's truth and love in human relationships, so that communication becomes a means of building dignified dialogue and strengthening communal life (Von Balthasar, 2013). In the context of digital communication, human dignity becomes the main benchmark for assessing whether a communicative act is justifiable or not. Every post, comment, or dissemination of information must take into account respect for human values, both for oneself and for others. No one should be treated as an object of entertainment, a tool for image building, or a means of obtaining profit (Pakpahan, 2021). A problem that often arises in the digital space is the reduction of the individual to an image. Human identity is narrowed down to visual appearance, interaction statistics, or public perception. When a person is judged solely by the number of likes or followers, their dignity is reduced to a quantitative measure. In situations like this, humans risk losing their existential depth and becoming trapped in the logic of popularity.

Digital communication ethics demand that humans not be used as objects of content. Privacy must be respected, personal integrity must be maintained, and the boundaries between public and private spaces must be considered wisely. From a moral philosophy perspective, Immanuel Kant asserts that every human being has dignity and should not be treated merely as a means to achieve a particular end. This principle is known as the categorical imperative, which demands that humans always be treated as ends in themselves, not merely as tools for the interests of others. Therefore, in digital communication, the use of personal information, images, or stories must take into account respect for individual dignity and freedom, so that the media does not become a means of exploitation or violation of privacy (Kant, 1998). Exposing oneself excessively without ethical consideration can damage personal dignity and form a character that depends on external recognition. Thus, dignified communication is communication that humanizes (Leliana et al., 2024). This principle is the foundation for shaping the character of adolescents so that they are able to use social media reflectively and ethically.

First, freedom and its limitations in the digital communication space are often associated with freedom of expression. Social media provides a wide space for each individual to express their opinions, share experiences, and express themselves. However, freedom in the moral sense is not unlimited freedom. Freedom is always associated with responsibility. Freedom that is not guided by truth and responsibility can turn into abuse (Muhmidayeli, 2017). For example, freedom of opinion does not mean freedom to spread hatred or unverified information. Freedom of expression does not mean freedom to demean others. From an ethical perspective, true freedom is the ability to choose what is good. This means that a person is free when they are able to control their emotional impulses, weigh the impact of their actions, and consciously choose to act in accordance with moral values. In the digital space, mature freedom is reflected in a wise attitude before uploading something, in the ability to refrain from reacting impulsively, and in the willingness to accept the consequences of every act of communication. For adolescents, guidance on responsible freedom is very important (Sari et al., 2020). Without adequate guidance, digital freedom can lead to patterns of behavior that are harmful to oneself and

others. Therefore, character education must emphasize that freedom is not just the right to speak, but also the obligation to speak correctly and kindly.

Second, synthesis, digital communication as a moral calling based on the description of truth, responsibility, human dignity, and freedom, it can be asserted that digital communication is essentially a moral calling. It is not only a technical or social activity, but an ethical act that involves all dimensions of the human person (Nisa et al., 2023). Social media as a space for character formation can be a means of growth if used correctly. However, it can also be a space for identity distortion if used without reflection and responsibility. Therefore, the integration of ethical principles in adolescent character education is an urgent need in the digital age. Third, the formation of healthy digital character requires loyalty to the truth in every communication. Awareness of personal and social responsibility. Respect for human dignity (Sukatin et al., 2021). Understanding freedom that is directed towards goodness. With this foundation, digital communication is no longer a threat, but an opportunity to build authentic relationships, deepen self-identity, and bring goodness to communal life.

The findings of this study directly respond to the three research questions raised at the outset. First, regarding how communication is understood as a moral act, this study confirms that communication, particularly in the digital space, is not a morally neutral activity. It is an inherently ethical act grounded in human dignity, rationality, and freedom. Every act of digital communication involves a moral decision: whether to uphold or diminish the dignity of oneself and others. Second, with respect to how the ethical principles of *Inter Mirifica* can be actualized in adolescent character education, this study demonstrates that the principles of truth, responsibility, human dignity, and responsible freedom are not merely abstract theological norms but practical guides for shaping the character of young people in their everyday digital interactions. These principles can be concretely integrated into educational programs through critical digital literacy, reflective practices, and value-based guidance both in schools and in family contexts. Third, concerning how the integration of these principles can build responsible and dignified communication on social media, the findings show that when adolescents internalize these ethical principles, social media transforms from a space of identity distortion and moral risk into a space of authentic self-expression, meaningful relationship-building, and communal growth. Thus, the integration of communication ethics rooted in the *Inter Mirifica* tradition offers a coherent and practical framework for guiding adolescents toward dignified, responsible, and humanizing digital communication.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are offered for educators and families as the most immediate agents of character formation. Schools are encouraged to formally integrate digital ethics into the character education curriculum, not merely as a standalone module but as a cross-disciplinary value embedded across subjects. Teachers are urged to facilitate reflective discussions that help adolescents critically examine their own digital habits in light of moral principles such as truth, responsibility, and human dignity, fostering a culture of thoughtful and intentional communication. For families, parents are called to actively accompany their children's use of social media through open and consistent dialogue about digital values, recognising that the family remains the primary environment in which moral foundations are built. Rather than relying solely on technical restrictions, families are encouraged to model and reinforce ethical communication practices in everyday life.

At the broader institutional level, the Church and religious communities are invited to contextualise the principles of *Inter Mirifica* within youth pastoral programmes that speak directly and concretely to the realities of digital life experienced by young people today. Policymakers and

government institutions are urged to strengthen and enforce regulation of digital platforms, ensuring that algorithmic systems and content distribution practices do not undermine the dignity and moral development of young users. Cooperation between educational institutions, religious communities, and the state is essential in building a healthy and ethical digital ecosystem. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to investigate empirically how these ethical principles are received and practised by adolescents across diverse cultural and educational contexts, and to explore how different faith traditions may contribute complementary frameworks for digital character formation.

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