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## Between Scrolling and Sharia: The Ethics of *Ghadul Bashar* Among Generation Z Students in the Age of Visual Media

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This study aims to examine the construction of Generation Z's understanding of the concept of *ghadul bashar*, evaluate its implementation in the practice of using social media, and identify the complexity of ethical challenges that arise in the digital ecosystem. **Theoretical framework:** A theoretical framework integrating the principle of *Ghadul Bashar* in Islamic shari'a (QS. An-Nur 30–31) with the perspective of digital ethics and media behavior theory, to explain the interaction between religious normative values and the algorithmic logic of social media. **Literature review:** While Islamic ethical literature emphasizes self-discipline and visual control, studies of digital media show the dominance of algorithms, visual culture, and FOMO that tend to weaken such controls, thus indicating a tension between religious norms and contemporary digital practices. **Methods:** This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory design, through the extraction of empirical data from students as a representation of Generation Z, which is thematically analyzed to identify patterns of understanding and practice. **Results:** The findings show that there is a structural dilemma between the demands of shari'a and digital reality. The understanding of informants is heterogeneous, while key challenges include algorithmic pressure, automated scrolling behavior, normalization of visual content, FOMO, and the ambiguity of ethical boundaries in the digital space. **Implications:** Theoretically, this study expands the discourse of Islamic ethics in a digital context. Practically, this research offers an integrative approach based on Islamic digital literacy, self-reflection (*muhasabah*), optimization of content control features, and strengthening digital communities. **Novelty:** The novelty of this research lies in the synthesis between classical Islamic ethical concepts and algorithmic dynamics of social media, as well as the emphasis on Generation Z's lived experience in facing digital ethical dilemmas.

**Keywords:** generation z, islamic ethics, social media, visual content, digital literacy.

### INTRODUCTION

Generation Z is a generation that grows up in a digital ecosystem with a high intensity in the use of social media, especially on visual-based platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts. Scrolling has evolved into a daily practice that shapes visual culture, where images and videos dominate the way individuals consume information, build identity, and interact socially [1]. In this context, social media algorithms play a central role in curating and presenting content based on engagement logic, without considering value or ethical dimensions, thus potentially encouraging impulsive and uncontrolled visual consumption [2].

In the context of Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population, these dynamics present normative challenges for Generation Z Muslims, especially students, in maintaining consistency between digital practices and religious values [3]. This generation is in a dilemma between the demands to stay connected in an all-visual digital culture and religious obligations that emphasize self-restraint. This condition reflects the tension between prescriptive religious norms and the reality of the digital ecosystem that is algorithmic and persuasive [4].

From the perspective of Islamic law, the concept of *ghadul bashar* (maintaining one's views) is a fundamental principle in maintaining one's purity and moral integrity of the individual. This principle is explicitly affirmed in the Qur'an. An-Nur verses 30-31:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَعْضُوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ  
وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۗ  
وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۗ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ  
أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا  
مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ  
النِّسَاءِ ۗ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ ۗ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ  
لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

"Say to the believing man, that they guard his eyes and guard his genitals; that which is more holy to them... And say to the believing woman, that they guard her gaze and guard her genitals..."

The verse emphasizes that maintaining views is a form of moral control that is preventive in maintaining personal purity and preventing individuals from deviant behavior [5]. However, in the context of modern social media, the implementation of this principle faces new challenges due to the dominance of visual content, the normalization of body exposure, and the blurring of ethical boundaries in the digital space [6]. Empirical studies show that the practice of keeping an eye on it tends to be difficult to apply consistently, especially in young generations who are exposed to a permissive and addictive digital environment.

On the other hand, the study of Islamic ethics generally still focuses on a normative-textual approach, while the study of digital media emphasizes technological aspects and user behavior in general. This condition shows the fragmentation of science, where the integration between religious perspectives and socio-technical approaches in understanding digital behavior is still limited [7].

The research gap in this study lies in the lack of optimal empirical studies that specifically examine how Generation Z Muslims interpret and implement the concept of *ghadul bashar* in the context of a social media ecosystem based on algorithms and visual culture [8]. In addition, there is still limited research that integrates Islamic ethical values with socio-technical system dynamics in explaining the interaction between religious norms and digital structures simultaneously.

Based on these gaps, this research is formulated in several research questions as follows: 1) How do Generation Z Muslims understand the concept of *ghadul bashar* in the context of social media use?, 2) How is the implementation of the principle of *ghadul bashar* in daily

digital practice?, 3) What are the challenges faced in implementing *ghadul bashar* in the midst of the dominance of algorithms and digital visual culture?

In line with the formulation of this problem, this study aims to examine the construction of Generation Z's understanding of the concept of *ghadul bashar*, analyze its implementation in the practice of using social media, and identify the complexity of ethical challenges that arise in the digital ecosystem. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of a more contextual study of contemporary Islamic ethics, as well as a practical contribution in formulating a digital literacy approach based on religious values that is adaptive to technological developments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of *Ghadul Bashar* from the perspective of Islamic ethics generally places this concept as part of a *self-regulation mechanism* that functions to maintain individual purity and social stability. In classical literature, *ghadul bashar* is understood as a form of normative obedience to the shari'a that emphasizes visual control over things that are forbidden, as stated in the Qur'an. An-Nur verses 30–31. Scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim emphasized that the control of views is the first door in maintaining individual morality, which is closely related to the control of lust and character formation. A number of contemporary studies have also shown that the internalization of religious values, religious education, and the social environment have a significant influence on the consistency of the practice of maintaining views in daily life [9].

However, the development of studies in the field of digital media shows a paradigm shift in understanding individual behavior. In contrast to the Islamic ethical approach that focuses on internal control, research in the field of social media confirms that user behavior is not entirely under the control of individuals, but is also significantly influenced by technological structures, especially digital platform algorithms. Social media algorithms are designed to maximize engagement through the presentation of engaging and addictive visual content with a *variable reward* mechanism [10]. This condition results in repetitive and often unrealized patterns of digital consumption, thus weakening the user's self-control capacity.

In addition to technological factors, studies on digital culture show that there has been a normalization of visual exposure in digital public spaces. Body representation, aesthetics, and even sensuality are part of communication practices that are considered natural in global visual culture. From the perspective of media studies, this phenomenon is understood as the result of social construction produced through interaction between users and digital platforms [11]. However, within the framework of Islamic ethics, such normalization has the potential to contradict the principle of *ghadul bashar*, which emphasizes visual restraint as a form of moral protection. This shows the tension between religious norms and the construction of digital culture that is growing globally [12].

Furthermore, psychosocial factors such as *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) also strengthen individual involvement in social media. FOMO encourages users to stay connected to the flow of information and digital trends, thereby increasing exposure to different types of visual content without adequate selection [13]. In this context, several studies suggest that digital literacy can help individuals in managing media consumption more selectively. However, other studies show that technical literacy alone is not enough without being accompanied by ethical and spiritual awareness. Thus, digital behavior control requires an approach that is not only technological, but also normative and reflective.

Conceptually, the existing literature shows two main tendencies, namely a normative-religious approach that emphasizes value-based individual self-control, and a socio-technical approach that highlights the role of technological structures in shaping user behavior.

However, the two approaches tend to develop separately and have not been comprehensively integrated in explaining digital ethical practices, especially for Generation Z Muslims [14].

Based on this synthesis, it can be identified that there is a research gap, namely the limited empirical studies that integrate Islamic ethical values with the dynamics of an algorithm-based digital ecosystem in understanding the practice of *ghadul bashar*. Most previous research is still partial, both those that overemphasize the normative aspect without considering the digital context, and those that focus too much on the technological aspect without including the religious dimension [15].

Therefore, this study takes a position as an integrative study that combines the perspective of Islamic ethics with a *socio-technical system* approach to analyze how Generation Z Muslims understand and implement *ghadul bashar* in the context of visual-based social media. With this approach, the research is expected to make a theoretical contribution in bridging the gap between religious studies and digital media studies, as well as offering a more comprehensive understanding of ethical dynamics in the digital age [16].

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a *field research* design that aims to deeply understand the ethical practice of *Ghadul Bashar* among Generation Z students in the context of the use of social media. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can capture subjective experiences, meaning processes, and socio-religious dynamics that cannot be reduced to quantitative variables [17].

Epistemologically, this research is based on the *living Qur'an* paradigm, which is an approach that places the Qur'an not only as a normative text but as a living entity that interacts dynamically with social reality [18]. In this context, the *living Qur'an* paradigm is used to analyze how ethical values in QS. An-Nur verses 30–31 about *ghadul bashar* are understood, interpreted, and implemented by students in the practice of daily digital life. This approach allows for integration between the normative dimension (*das sollen*) and the empirical dimension (*das sein*), thus identifying the gap between religious teachings and actual practice in the digital space [19].

The research was carried out in one of the Islamic universities in Indonesia that represents an academic environment with a religious character. The research location includes lecture halls, student dormitories, and religious communities as social ecosystems where the interaction between religious values and digital practices takes place [20].

The subjects of the study are Generation Z students (age range 18–24 years) who are active in using social media. Informants were selected using *purposive sampling* techniques with the following criteria: (1) having a high intensity of social media use (at least 3–5 hours per day), (2) actively using visual-based platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube, and (3) having involvement in religious activities (e.g., participating in Islamic studies or organizations). The number of informants in this study was 10–15 people, which was considered adequate to achieve *saturation data* in qualitative research.

The data collection technique was carried out through three main methods, namely: (1) *in-depth interviews* to explore the understanding, experience, and reflection of informants related to the practice of *ghadul bashar*; (2) limited participatory observation of social media usage behavior in the context of daily life; and (3) documentation in the form of relevant field records and digital footprints. The interview guide is structured in a semi-structured manner to maintain a balance between open exploration and research focus [21].

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study uses the triangulation technique of sources and methods, as well as member *checking* by reconfirming the results of the interpretation with the informant. In addition, researchers also apply *reflexivity* to minimize subjectivity bias in the data interpretation process.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic *analysis techniques*, which refer to the following stages: (1) data reduction, (2) *open coding*, (3) categorization, (4) identification of main themes, and (5) concluding. The analysis process is carried out iteratively by linking empirical findings with the conceptual framework of Islamic ethics and *socio-technical system* approaches, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between religious values and students' digital behavior [22].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Generation Z's Understanding of the Concept of Ghadul Bashar

The results of the study show that Generation Z's understanding of the concept of *ghadul bashar* is heterogeneous and tends to be on the spectrum between normative and contextual interpretations [23]. In general, informants understand *ghadul bashar* as an obligation to hold back the gaze from things that are forbidden, especially those related to visual stimuli that trigger lust impulses [24]. This understanding refers to the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith as a normative basis for self-control.

In the theological framework, *Ghadul Bashar* has a preventive function in maintaining the moral integrity of individuals. This is in line with the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW:

الْعَيْنُ زَنَائَةُ الْقَلْبِ

"The eyes are (the door) of adultery of the heart."

The hadith emphasizes that visual activity has psychological and spiritual implications, so that the control of gaze is not only physical, but also concerns the internal dimension of the individual.

However, empirical findings reveal a reduction in the meaning of *ghadul bashar* in most informants, who still interpret it in a limited way in the context of direct (*offline*) interaction. This understanding has not fully accommodated the digital reality characterized by massive and continuous visual exposure. This condition shows that there is a gap between the normative framework of Islamic teachings and actual practices in the digital life of Generation Z [25].

Furthermore, the study identified three main factors that influence the construction of this understanding:

#### Digital Context and Social Media

Constant exposure to visual content through algorithm-based platforms shifts the *Ghadul Bashar* implementation space from the physical domain to the digital domain. In this context, individual control becomes limited because users do not fully determine the type of content consumed [26].

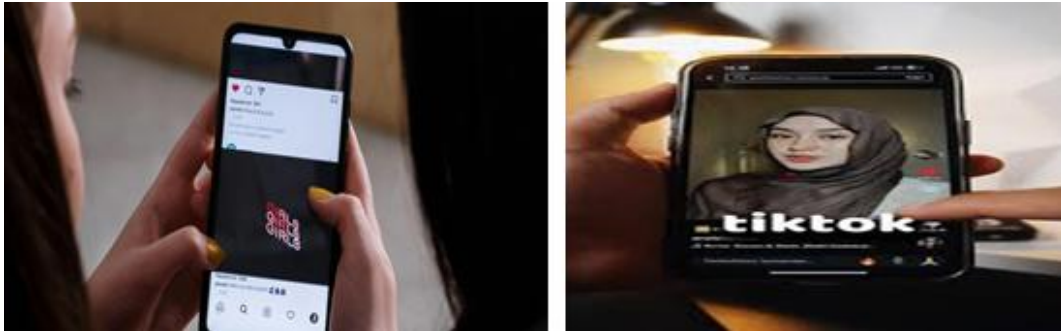
#### Normalization of Visual Culture

Digital culture has normalized various forms of visual representation that normatively contradict Islamic values. This leads to moral desensitization, where the line between appropriate and inappropriate content becomes increasingly blurred [27].

#### Diverse Spectrum of Understanding

Variations in understanding show that *Ghadul Bashar* has not been consistently internalized. Some informants are still in the literal stage, while others are beginning to develop more adaptive contextual interpretations of digital reality [28].

However, there are indications of adaptation efforts among students, such as limiting content consumption and managing social media use. However, these efforts are still individual and have not been able to fully compensate for the structural pressures of algorithms and digital culture [29].



**Figure 1. Generation Z Models are Scrolling Through Social Media**

These findings confirm that the practice of *ghadul bashar* in Generation Z cannot be understood solely as an individual moral issue, but as a phenomenon formed through the interaction between religious values and persuasive digital systems. Thus, the understanding of *ghadul bashar* in Generation Z is in a transitional phase, where there is a shift from normative interpretation to contextual meaning, but it has not been accompanied by a strong internalization of values.

### **The Implementation of *Ghadul Bashar's* Ethics in the Life of Generation Z**

Generation Z is a group that grew up as *digital natives* in an intensive and visually based social media ecosystem. The high duration of social media use shows that interaction with digital content has become an integral part of daily life. In this context, *scrolling* is no longer just information consumption, but has evolved into a social practice that shapes individual mindsets, preferences, and identities [30].

Nevertheless, the findings of the study suggest that the implementation of *Ghadul Bashar* ethics in this context faces significant structural challenges. The dominance of social media algorithms that work based on the principle of *engagement maximization* causes users to be constantly exposed to visual content without considering ethical dimensions or religious values. This condition reduces individual control over the type of content consumed and increases the potential for exposure to content that is not in accordance with *the principles of Ghadul Bashar*.

This phenomenon is amplified by psychological mechanisms that are addictive. Social media is designed using the principle of *variable reward*, which is a system that provides unexpected stimuli, such as notifications or new content, which triggers a dopamine response in the brain and encourages repetitive consumption behavior. In this condition, the ability of *individual self-regulation* becomes increasingly limited, so that the implementation of *Ghadul Bashar* not only depends on moral awareness but is also influenced by persuasive technological design [31].

Empirical findings show that the practice of *ghadul bashar* in Generation Z tends to be reactive. Informants reveal that they often only realize and avoid inappropriate content after being exposed, rather than controlling it in the first place. As stated by one of the informants:

"Sometimes I accidentally see content that doesn't fit, because it keeps appearing in the feed. Usually, I just skip it after seeing it, not from the beginning, avoiding it."

The statement shows that visual control has not been fully internalized as a preventive awareness, but is still in the response stage to digital stimulus. This indicates a gap between the normative understanding of *Ghadul Bashar* and actual practice in digital life.

On the other hand, there are adaptive efforts made by some students, such as limiting the duration of social media use, selecting the accounts that are followed, and utilizing content control features. However, these efforts are still individual and have not been able to fully compensate for systemic algorithmic pressures. As a result, the implementation of *Ghadul Bashar* in the digital context shows an imbalance between individual capacity and the strength of technological structures [32].

Thus, these findings confirm that the practice of *ghadul bashar* in Generation Z cannot be understood solely as an individual moral obligation, but as a phenomenon formed through the interaction between religious values and persuasive digital systems. Therefore, a more integrative approach is needed that not only emphasizes strengthening individual awareness but also the development of critical digital literacy in the face of a complex social media ecosystem.

### Generation Z's Challenges in Applying Ghadul Bashar's Ethics

Ghadul bashar (غض البصر) or subduing one's gaze is an Islamic ethical principle that emphasizes visual control as a form of moral protection of the individual. However, in the context of the digital ecosystem, the implementation of these principles faces increasingly complex challenges, especially for Generation Z, who grew up in a visual-based social media environment.

The results of the study show that several main factors are challenges in the application of *Ghadul Bashar* in Generation Z:

#### Algorithms That Are Addictive

Social media platforms are designed using algorithms that aim to retain users' attention for as long as possible through an *infinite scrolling* mechanism. This system keeps users exposed to content without clear pauses, reducing the ability to control what is seen. Research shows that this design is based on the principle of *variable reward*, which is effective in creating addictive behavior [33].

#### Unfiltered Mixed Content

Unlike conventional media, social media presents various types of content at the same time, ranging from education and entertainment to content that is not in accordance with Islamic values. In a single *feed* stream, users can switch from religious content to content that goes against *the principles of ghadul bashar*, thus creating a recurring ethical dilemma [34].

#### Normalization of Visual Exposure

Digital culture has normalized various forms of visual representation that were previously considered inappropriate. Generation Z grew up in an environment where the boundaries between decent and unworthy are becoming increasingly blurred, resulting in a desensitization to visual content that is contrary to moral values [35].

#### FOMO and Social Pressure

The phenomenon of *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) encourages individuals to stay on top of trends and content that is going viral [36]. This social pressure makes users continue to consume content, even though they are aware of the potential violation of the values of *Ghadul Bashar*.

#### Unlimited Access and High Privacy

Smartphones provide personal and unrestricted access to social media. In contrast to traditional media, which tends to be collective, the use of social media is private, so external control is minimal and depends entirely on individual awareness [37].

The empirical findings in this study show that students are aware of these challenges, but the implementation of *Ghadul Bashar* still faces difficulties. As one of the informants revealed:

*"Ghadul Bashar is indeed important, especially for young people today. But to be honest, social media is very difficult to maintain because the content keeps appearing. So it takes effort and strong faith to be able to avoid it"*. That is why

The statement shows that the application of *Ghadul Bashar* is not only related to normative understanding but is also influenced by structural pressures from digital systems and psychosocial factors [38].

However, several adaptive strategies have begun to be carried out by Generation Z, such as limiting the time spent using social media, selecting the content consumed, and building a healthier digital environment [39]. However, these efforts are still individual and have not been able to fully keep up with the power of systemic algorithms.

Thus, the challenge of applying *Ghadul Bashar* (غض البصر) to Generation Z shows that Islamic ethical practices in the digital era cannot be separated from the context of technology [40]. Therefore, a more integrative approach is needed that combines the strengthening of religious values with critical digital literacy, so that individuals not only have moral awareness, but also the ability to manage visual exposure in the social media ecosystem more reflectively [41].

**Table 1. Bridging Ghadul Bashar Ethics and Digital Realities Among Generation Z Users**

Key Aspect	Main Findings	Implications
Understanding of <i>Ghadul Bashar</i>	Heterogeneous, ranging from normative to contextual interpretations; most still perceive it as physical (offline) gaze control.	Indicates a gap between Islamic normative teachings and the digital realities faced by Generation Z.
Digital Context	Massive visual exposure from algorithm-based social media limits individual control over consumed content.	Ethical implementation becomes more complex due to persuasive technological systems.
Visual Culture	Normalization of visual content that contradicts Islamic values leads to moral desensitization.	The boundary between appropriate and inappropriate content becomes increasingly blurred.
Ethical Implementation	Tends to be reactive; users avoid content after exposure rather than preventing it initially.	Value internalization remains weak in daily digital practices.
Key Challenges	Addictive algorithms, FOMO, mixed content, unlimited access, and social pressure.	Requires strengthening digital literacy and ethical awareness.
Adaptive Strategies	Limiting usage time, selecting content, and managing followed accounts.	Efforts remain individual and insufficient to counter systemic pressures.

The findings indicate that the ethics of *ghadul bashar* among Generation Z are undergoing a significant transformation shaped by the digital environment. While normative religious understanding remains present, its translation into daily practice is constrained by structural and technological factors. The dominance of algorithm-driven social media creates continuous and often uncontrollable visual exposure, weakening the preventive nature of gaze control and shifting it toward reactive behavior.

This condition highlights a critical tension between individual moral agency and systemic digital influence. Generation Z users are not merely passive recipients but are situated within persuasive systems designed to maximize engagement, often at the expense of ethical considerations. Consequently, the internalization of *ghadul bashar* is fragmented, as users

struggle to reconcile religious values with the demands of digital participation and social belonging.

Moreover, the normalization of diverse visual content contributes to gradual moral desensitization, further complicating ethical decision-making. Although some adaptive strategies are evident, such as selective content consumption and time management, these efforts remain insufficient against the scale of algorithmic influence. Therefore, the study underscores the need for an integrative framework that combines religious ethical reinforcement with critical digital literacy, enabling Generation Z to navigate visual media environments more consciously, ethically, and reflectively.

## CONCLUSION

Generation Z Muslims face a structural dilemma in implementing *Ghadul Bashar* ethics in the midst of a social media ecosystem dominated by visual exposure and algorithmic logic. The practice of maintaining one's view is no longer in a neutral moral space, but in a digital system that actively shapes visual consumption patterns through *algorithmic exposure* mechanisms and *engagement-driven architecture*. This condition puts individuals in a paradoxical position, where the demand as a *moral agent* based on shari'a values is faced with the pressure of technological systems that tend to weaken the capacity for self-control. The findings of the study indicate that Generation Z's understanding of *Ghadul Bashar* is in a transitional phase, from a literal interpretation to a more contextual meaning. Despite efforts to adapt to digital practices, the internalization of holistic values that include visual, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions has not been optimally formed. This shows that there is a gap between normative knowledge and actual practice in everyday digital life. This study identifies that the challenges of *implementing Ghadul Bashar* are multidimensional, including the dominance of algorithms, automatic *scrolling behavior*, normalization of visual culture, social pressures such as *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO), and limitations of digital literacy based on Islamic values. These factors not only work separately but also interact with each other in forming a complex digital ecosystem that is difficult for individuals to fully control. Theoretically, this study emphasizes the need to expand the Islamic ethical framework from an individual normative approach to a more contextual and structural approach by considering the dynamics of *socio-technical systems*. Practically, this study recommends strengthening integrative Islamic digital literacy, increasing reflective awareness through *muhasabah* practices, optimizing technological control features, and developing a supportive digital community ecosystem. Thus, the implementation of *Ghadul Bashar* in the digital age cannot be solely imposed on individual capacity, but requires an adaptive and critical collective response to the technological structures that shape digital behavior.

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## Author's Contributions

Moch Risyad Abdillah contributed to conceptualization, data collection, and drafting the initial manuscript. Ahmad Nurrohim was responsible for methodology, data analysis, and substantive revisions. Mohd Rab provided academic supervision, theoretical validation, and final manuscript refinement. All authors actively participated in discussions, interpretation of findings, and approved the final version of the article for publication.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted in the absence of any conflicts of interest, whether financial or non-financial. There are no personal, institutional, or commercial relationships that could influence the objectivity of this study. All research processes, analysis, and writing were carried out independently, adhering to principles of academic integrity and established scientific ethics.

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