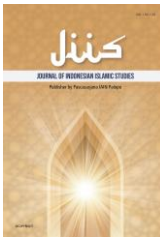
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Social Media and Islamic Youth Character among Indonesian Students

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Abstract

Social media has become a routine environment in which Indonesian adolescents communicate, imitate social norms, encounter religious and non-religious content, and negotiate their everyday identities. Although previous studies have discussed social media as either a learning resource or a risk environment, less attention has been given to how students' online experiences can be interpreted through Islamic values and youth character formation. This study examines Indonesian students' social media practices and the moral concerns observed by parents and teachers. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, the study integrates survey data from 163 Indonesian students with written responses from 38 parents and teachers. Quantitative findings show very frequent social media use, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok as the dominant platforms. Students reported positive perceived effects for social interaction and social awareness, but also acknowledged behavioral influence, changes in self-perception, and social-life disruption. Qualitative findings reveal adult concerns about excessive use, reduced responsiveness, imitation of online behavior, weakened discipline, exposure to negative content, and the need for value-based guidance. Integrated interpretation suggests that social media is not merely a communication tool; it is a moral-learning ecology in which character may be strengthened or weakened depending on guidance, self-control, and ethical mediation. Building on akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs, this study proposes Islamic Values-Based Guided Social Media Learning (IV-GSML) as a framework for supporting responsible digital character education in Indonesian Islamic educational contexts.

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Introduction

Social media has become one of the most influential social environments in adolescents' everyday lives. For many students, platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are not only channels for communication, entertainment, and peer interaction, but also spaces where values, norms, emotions, and social behaviors are observed and practiced. Students learn how to speak, respond, imitate, judge, share, and participate in social life through digital interaction. Consequently, online behavior should not be treated as separate from character formation. Posting a comment, forwarding information, following a trend, responding to conflict, or consuming inappropriate content can become an ethical act that shapes habits, moral sensitivity, and social responsibility.

This issue is especially important in Indonesia, where education is closely connected with family expectations, religious values, and character formation. In Islamic education, character is not limited to politeness or discipline; it is connected to akhlaq, amanah, honesty, modesty, self-control, care for others, and responsibility before God and society. From this perspective, social media use is not only a digital literacy issue but also a moral and spiritual education issue. Students' digital actions can support positive character when they use media to learn, communicate respectfully, verify information, and maintain social bonds. However, the same environment can weaken character when use becomes excessive, impulsive, imitative, disrespectful, or disconnected from moral reflection.

Recent scholarship shows that digital media has become part of Islamic learning and Muslim social life. Islamic educational institutions use social media to communicate public identity and educational values (Maemonah et al., 2023; Sayan, 2021). Indonesian students increasingly access Islamic knowledge through online resources and social media groups (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025), while Muslim communities also negotiate religious authority through online sources (Askar et al., 2025; Rusli & Nurdin, 2022). At the same time, social media exposes young people to problematic content, risky behavior, misinformation, compulsive consumption, and peer pressure (Chairiyati et al., 2026; Hasyim et al., 2025; Saud et al., 2025). These studies suggest that digital participation must be examined not only in terms of access or frequency, but also in terms of moral direction, self-regulation, and guidance.

A key gap remains in the literature. Many studies examine online Islamic knowledge, digital da'wah, religious identity, or online risk separately, but fewer studies integrate students' self-reported experiences with parent and teacher perspectives to understand how social media affects youth character in Indonesian Islamic educational contexts. Students may perceive social media as useful for communication and information access, while adults may observe more subtle moral and behavioral changes, such as weak discipline, reduced responsiveness, imitation of online behavior, and less sensitivity to family or social norms. A mixed-methods perspective is therefore necessary to capture both students' digital experiences and adult moral interpretations.

To address this gap, this study develops an Islamic values-based interpretation of Indonesian students' social media use. Rather than asking whether social media is simply good or bad, this study asks how social media becomes a moral-learning ecology depending on value-based guidance, reflective self-control, and ethical mediation. The study proposes Islamic Values-Based Guided Social Media Learning (IV-GSML) as a framework for aligning digital participation with Islamic character education. The

framework extends general digital guidance by explicitly connecting social media practices with akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do Indonesian students' social media practices relate to social behavior, moral sensitivity, and character formation? (2) How do parents and teachers interpret the influence of social media on students' akhlaq, self-control, responsibility, and moral sensitivity? (3) How can students' social media experiences be interpreted through Islamic values such as akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs? (4) How can Islamic Values-Based Guided Social Media Learning support responsible digital character education in Indonesian Islamic educational contexts?

Literature Review

Social Media as a Moral-Learning Ecology

Social media has increasingly become a moral-learning ecology because it provides repeated exposure to behavioral models, social expectations, religious messages, peer approval, and public judgment. Unlike formal classroom learning, social media learning is informal, continuous, algorithmically mediated, and emotionally engaging. Students do not only receive information; they observe what is rewarded, imitated, criticized, or normalized online. For adolescents, this ecology can influence how they communicate, manage emotions, express identity, and evaluate right and wrong.

In religious and moral education contexts, this ecology is significant because character formation depends on repeated habits and social modeling. If students repeatedly encounter disrespectful communication, impulsive sharing, excessive entertainment, or inappropriate content, such practices may become normalized. Conversely, if students encounter beneficial content, respectful dialogue, peer support, and religious reminders, social media may support positive moral development. Therefore, the educational problem is not merely whether students use social media, but how their use is morally guided and interpreted.

Online Islamic Knowledge and Digital Religious Authority

The expansion of online Islamic knowledge has changed how Muslim students access religious information. Ju'subaidi et al. (2025) found that Indonesian senior high school students use the internet and social media as resources for Islamic learning, including searching for materials and discussing them through digital groups. Askar et al. (2025) similarly showed that Indonesian Muslim university students recognize various online sources, including Islamic organization websites, scholars' pages, social media, and memes, as sources of Islamic knowledge. These findings indicate a shift from teacher-centered religious knowledge transmission toward more distributed and student-initiated digital exploration.

However, this expansion also raises concerns about credibility, authority, and interpretation. Rusli and Nurdin (2022) showed that online knowledge acquisition has influenced millennial ulama in fatwa-making practices, demonstrating that digital platforms reshape religious authority. For students, the challenge is not only accessing Islamic content, but also learning how to evaluate its accuracy, relevance, and ethical implications. The Islamic concept of tabayyun, or verification before accepting and sharing information,

becomes especially relevant in this environment. And social media-based teaching methods for learning Islamic studies as a research context require more attention (Qazi et al., 2021).

Islamic Character Values in Digital Life

Islamic education emphasizes character as an integration of belief, knowledge, action, and social responsibility. Values such as akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs provide practical moral principles for digital life. Akhlaq refers to ethical conduct and respectful behavior; in online environments, it can guide how students comment, disagree, joke, and respond to others. Amanah emphasizes responsibility and trustworthiness; in digital practice, it relates to responsible time use, content sharing, privacy, and accountability.

Tabayyun is essential for resisting misinformation and impulsive forwarding. Haya' relates to modesty and moral boundaries, including the avoidance of inappropriate content and self-presentation that conflicts with Islamic ethics. Ukhuwwah emphasizes brotherhood, solidarity, and social care, which can guide students to avoid cyberbullying, humiliation, and conflict escalation. Mujahadah al-nafs refers to self-struggle and control over desires; in social media use, it can support discipline, attention management, and resistance to addictive scrolling or harmful trends.

These values suggest that digital character education should be concrete and practice-oriented. It is not sufficient to tell students to be moral online. Educators and parents need to translate Islamic values into daily digital practices, such as verifying before sharing, limiting excessive use, responding respectfully, avoiding inappropriate content, protecting privacy, and reflecting on the consequences of online actions.

Digital Risks, Self-Control, and the Role of Guidance

Digital risk in social media is not limited to harmful content. It also includes imitation of problematic behavior, weak time management, reduced responsiveness to family, emotional reactivity, social comparison, and passive consumption. Saud et al. (2025) warned that Indonesian teenagers may be vulnerable to risky digital exposure when parental and school monitoring are limited. Hasyim et al. (2025) found that Islamic values and self-regulation can reduce problematic online behavior, while Chairiyati et al. (2026) suggested that religiosity alone may not always prevent digitally triggered impulsive behavior. These findings indicate that Islamic values need to be supported by self-regulation, dialogue, and practical guidance.

Parents and teachers are therefore central actors in Islamic digital character education. Waheed et al. (2025) showed that Muslim parents value religious digital content but remain concerned about commercial and algorithmic environments. This finding suggests that religious content alone does not automatically create safe or morally meaningful digital learning. Students need adult mediation that combines rules, discussion, reflection, and moral reasoning.

Conceptual Framework: Islamic Values-Based Guided Social Media Learning

This study proposes Islamic Values-Based Guided Social Media Learning (IV-GSML) as a conceptual framework for interpreting and guiding students' social media practices.

IV-GSML conceptualizes social media as a conditional moral-learning ecology shaped by four interrelated dimensions: digital exposure, social interaction, reflective self-control, and Islamic ethical mediation. Digital exposure refers to the platforms, content, and frequency of students' engagement. Social interaction refers to communication, peer relationships, imitation, and social influence. Reflective self-control refers to students' ability to monitor time, attention, emotion, and behavior. Islamic ethical mediation refers to the role of Islamic values, parents, teachers, and schools in guiding digital conduct.

The framework assumes that social media outcomes are not determined by technology alone. The same platform may support learning, friendship, and moral awareness when guided by Islamic values, but it may also encourage distraction, imitation, disrespect, and weak self-control when engagement is unguided. IV-GSML therefore shifts the focus from prohibition alone toward guided, reflective, and values-based participation.

Method

This study used a convergent mixed-methods design. Quantitative data from students were used to identify patterns of social media use and perceived social effects, while qualitative written responses from parents and teachers were used to understand adult interpretations of students' digital behavior, moral influence, and guidance needs. The two strands were analyzed separately and then integrated to produce a values-based interpretation of social media as a moral-learning ecology.

This article forms part of a broader mixed-methods research project on Indonesian students' social media use. A related manuscript from the same broader dataset has been submitted to a journal in the field of open and distance learning, focusing on social media as a guided open learning environment. The present article has a distinct scholarly purpose: it interprets the data through Islamic values, youth character formation, and Islamic digital ethics. The research questions, theoretical framing, analytical emphasis, and contribution are therefore different from the related educational technology manuscript.

The quantitative strand involved 163 Indonesian students aged 15 to 21 years ($M = 16.32$, $SD = 1.20$). The coded gender distribution was 102 students as male and 61 students as female. The school distribution included four educational settings: School 1 ($n = 55$), School 2 ($n = 33$), School 3 ($n = 54$), and School 4 ($n = 21$). The qualitative strand involved 38 adult respondents, consisting of parents, teachers, and respondents with dual parent-teacher roles. These respondents provided written answers about students' social media use, behavioral changes, moral influence, family and school responses, and recommended forms of guidance.

The student questionnaire included demographic items, platform-use indicators, and Likert-type items measuring frequency of social media use, daily duration, perceived influence on behavior, anxiety, self-perception, social sensitivity, online interaction, conflict, relationship-building, decision-making, and perceived positive and negative impacts. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement, frequency, or perceived intensity based on the cleaned coded dataset.

The written interview protocol contained ten open-ended questions for parents and teachers. The questions addressed commonly used platforms, duration of use, positive and negative effects, influence on behavior and values, conflict experiences, adult concerns, school and parental responses, and recommendations for reducing negative

effects. The written format allowed respondents to provide contextually grounded observations about students' digital practices and character-related changes.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, high-response percentages, and platform-use frequencies. These results were interpreted as indicators of students' digital exposure and perceived social or character-related effects. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Initial codes focused on learning and information access, social connection, excessive use, reduced responsiveness, imitation, conflict, guidance, and ethical responsibility. Codes were then grouped into broader themes related to Islamic digital character formation.

The integration stage compared students' self-reports with parent and teacher observations. The analysis focused on convergence, complementarity, and divergence between the two strands. Finally, the findings were mapped onto Islamic values to identify how akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs can function as interpretive and pedagogical principles for responsible digital participation.

Results

Students' Social Media Practices and Character-Related Perceptions

The survey findings show that social media was deeply embedded in students' daily lives. Students reported very frequent social media use (M = 3.80, SD = 0.70), with 94.5% reporting high use. Daily time spent on social media was also moderate to high (M = 2.78, SD = 0.94), with 58.9% reporting high levels. The most commonly used platforms were WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, indicating that students' digital lives were centered on communication, visual sharing, and short-video content.

Table 1. Student Social Media Platform Use

Platform	N	% of students
WhatsApp	140	85.9
Instagram	125	76.7
TikTok	120	73.6
YouTube	67	41.1
Other platforms	21	12.9
Twitter	12	7.4
Facebook	9	5.5

Note. N = 163. Percentages indicate students who reported using each platform

Beyond frequency and platform use, students perceived social media as influential in their social behavior. They reported that social media made interaction easier, increased sensitivity to social issues, and produced positive social effects. However, they also acknowledged that social media influenced real-life behavior, self-perception, relationships, and decision-making. These results indicate that students' social media experiences are not morally neutral; they shape how students see themselves, respond to others, and make social choices.

Table 2. Character-Related Interpretation of Student Survey Findings

Survey dimension	M	SD	High response (%)	Character-related meaning
Frequency of social media use	3.80	0.70	94.5	Digital exposure and habit formation
Daily time spent on social media	2.78	0.94	58.9	Discipline and time responsibility
Influence on real-life behavior	2.87	0.83	66.9	Behavioral imitation and moral habit
Influence on self-perception	2.53	0.86	52.8	Identity and self-evaluation
Sensitivity to social issues	2.94	0.71	74.2	Social awareness and empathy
Ease of online interaction	3.25	0.84	80.4	Communication and relationship building
Conflict with friends/family	1.26	0.47	1.2	Relational tension
Influence on real-world relationships	2.72	0.72	65.6	Social responsibility
Influence on social decisions/group action	2.56	0.85	53.4	Peer influence and judgment
Positive impact on social life	3.08	0.62	88.3	Constructive digital participation
Negative impact on social life	2.65	0.84	58.9	Moral and behavioral risk

Note. Scale = 1-4. High response refers to scores of 3 or 4. The final column provides the Islamic character-oriented interpretation used in this manuscript.

Parent and Teacher Perspectives on Moral Influence

Parents and teachers described social media as both useful and concerning. They recognized its benefits for information access, creativity, communication, and learning resources. However, their strongest concerns related to excessive use, weak time management, imitation of online behavior, reduced responsiveness, exposure to inappropriate content, and the need for stronger guidance. These adult perspectives add moral depth to students' self-reports by showing how social media may gradually influence discipline, respect, responsiveness, and moral sensitivity.

Table 3. Parent and Teacher Themes on Social Media and Youth Character

Theme	Frequency	Description	Islamic character relevance
Learning and information access	31	Using social media to obtain knowledge and learning resources	Potentially positive when connected with beneficial knowledge

Social connection and communication	19	Making friends, communicating, and observing social examples	Can support ukhuwwah when interaction is respectful
Excessive use and weak time management	21	Overuse, game/social media absorption, difficulty limiting use	Amanah and mujahadah al-nafs are needed
Reduced responsiveness and passivity	8	Becoming slow to respond, indifferent, or resistant when interrupted	Akhlaq and family responsibility are weakened
Imitation and moral influence	20	Copying behavior, language, or trends seen online	Digital modeling affects character formation
Conflict and relational tension	12	Tension with family or peers related to social media use	Ukhuwwah and adab are needed
Parental/school guidance and monitoring	29	Rules, scheduling, discussion, supervision, and digital education	Adult mediation supports Islamic character education
Islamic/ethical digital responsibility	11	Being wise online and recognizing consequences of digital expression	Amanah, tabayyun, and akhlaq guide online conduct

Note. Frequencies represent thematic coding of written responses. A single response could be assigned to more than one theme.

Mapping Findings to Islamic Values

To strengthen the Islamic education contribution, the integrated findings were mapped onto six Islamic values. This mapping shows how the empirical findings can be translated into practical digital character education. Rather than treating Islamic values as abstract moral ideals, the analysis connects each value with specific social media issues and educational guidance.

Table 4. Islamic Values Mapping for Digital Character Education

Islamic value	Related digital issue	Digital character meaning	Educational guidance
Akhlaq	Disrespectful communication, imitation of negative behavior, reduced responsiveness	Online manners, respectful interaction, and ethical expression	Teach adab in commenting, replying, joking, disagreeing, and sharing
Amanah	Excessive use, wasting time, careless content sharing	Responsible use of time, attention, privacy, and technology	Use time agreements, reflective checklists, and responsibility contracts
Tabayyun	Hoaxes, misinformation, viral content, unverified religious or social claims	Verification before believing or forwarding information	Practice source-checking, cross-checking, and "pause before sharing" activities

Haya'	Exposure to inappropriate content and uncontrolled self-presentation	Modesty, moral boundaries, and content filtering	Guide students to evaluate content, accounts, captions, and images according to Islamic ethics
Ukhuwwah	Conflict, peer pressure, online comparison, and insensitive communication	Positive relationships, empathy, and social care	Use digital empathy tasks, respectful dialogue, and conflict-resolution scenarios
Mujahadah al-nafs	Addictive scrolling, impulsive response, weak self-control	Self-discipline over desire, attention, and habit	Use self-monitoring, reflection journals, and scheduled digital fasting

Note. The table translates the integrated findings into Islamic digital character education practices.

Integrated Findings

The integrated findings show that students and adults agree that social media has both positive and negative roles. Students emphasized ease of interaction, social awareness, and positive social effects, while parents and teachers recognized information access and learning benefits. However, adult responses revealed subtler moral concerns that were less visible in students' self-reports, including reduced responsiveness, imitation of online behavior, weak time management, and dependence on external monitoring.

This divergence suggests that social media's moral influence may not always appear as direct conflict or anxiety. Instead, it may appear gradually through changes in habits, language, attention, modesty, responsiveness, and self-control. From an Islamic education perspective, these are character issues because they relate to akhlaq, amanah, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs. Therefore, the central educational challenge is not only reducing social media use, but guiding students to use digital environments responsibly and reflectively.

Discussion

Social Media as a Conditional Moral-Learning Ecology

The findings support the argument that social media should be understood as a conditional moral-learning ecology. Students' high use of WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube shows that social media is deeply embedded in their daily social environment. Students also reported positive benefits for interaction and social awareness, suggesting that social media can support communication and informal learning. However, the qualitative findings show that parents and teachers are concerned about excessive use, imitation, reduced responsiveness, and moral influence. This confirms that social media cannot be framed only as a threat or only as a learning opportunity.

The moral significance of social media lies in its everyday repetition. Students repeatedly see, copy, respond to, and emotionally engage with digital content. Over time, these practices may shape habits and character. Therefore, Islamic education needs to address social media as part of students lived moral environment. The question is not only whether students should access social media, but how they can participate in it with responsibility, self-control, and ethical awareness.

Islamic Values as Digital Character Mediators

The findings suggest that Islamic values can function as mediators between digital exposure and character formation. Akhlaq can guide respectful online communication. Amanah can guide responsible time use, content sharing, and privacy. Tabayyun can guide verification before sharing information. Haya' can guide modesty, content selection, and self-presentation. Ukhuwwah can guide positive peer relationships and reduce conflict. Mujahadah al-nafs can guide students to control impulsive scrolling, emotional reactions, and excessive use.

This interpretation extends previous studies on Islamic values and digital behavior by showing how values can be operationalized as concrete digital practices. Hasyim et al. (2025) showed that Islamic values and self-regulation may reduce problematic online behavior, while Chairiyati et al. (2026) warned that religiosity alone may not prevent impulsive digital consumption. The present study supports both insights: Islamic values are important, but they must be supported by guided reflection, family involvement, school policy, and practical digital literacy.

The Role of Parents and Teachers in Islamic Digital Guidance

Parents and teachers were central to the findings because they observed moral and behavioral changes that students may not fully recognize. Their responses emphasized scheduling, monitoring, discussion, discipline, and digital education. These strategies should not be interpreted as simple restriction. Rather, they represent value-based mediation, where adults help students interpret the meaning and consequences of digital behavior.

For Islamic education, guidance should be dialogic and reflective. Parents and teachers can use real digital scenarios, such as viral trends, online gossip, misinformation, cyberbullying, excessive scrolling, inappropriate content, and disrespectful comments, as opportunities for moral discussion. Students can be invited to ask: What does akhlaq look like in this situation? Is this content amanah to share? Have I practiced tabayyun before forwarding it? Does this behavior reflect haya'? Does it protect ukhuwwah? Am I practicing mujahadah al-nafs? Such questions translate Islamic values into everyday digital decision-making.

IV-GSML as a Framework for Islamic Digital Character Education

The proposed IV-GSML framework provides a practical model for Islamic digital character education. It consists of four connected processes: recognizing students' digital exposure, guiding social interaction, developing reflective self-control, and mediating online behavior through Islamic values. The framework is not designed to reject social media completely. Instead, it helps families and schools transform social media use into a guided moral-learning process.

IV-GSML also provides a clear distinction between general digital literacy and Islamic digital character education. Digital literacy teaches students how to access, evaluate, and create digital content. IV-GSML adds a values-based layer by asking whether digital participation reflects akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and self-control. In this way, the framework contributes to Islamic education by connecting character values with contemporary digital life.

Implications

Islamic education should update character education for digital realities. Values should be taught through concrete online scenarios, not only through abstract moral instruction. For example, tabayyun can be taught through misinformation-checking activities, akhlaq through respectful-comment exercises, haya' through content-selection reflection, amanah through time-use monitoring, and mujahadah al-nafs through self-control plans.

Parents should combine monitoring with dialogue. Family guidance may include shared rules, co-viewing, scheduled use, open discussion about online trends, and reflection on moral consequences. Prohibition alone may not be effective because social media is already embedded in students' social lives. Value-based conversation can help students develop internal moral judgment rather than relying only on external control.

Schools should develop balanced digital policies that reduce risk while recognizing students' digital realities. Islamic schools and general schools with Islamic character programs can integrate digital ethics modules into religious education, citizenship education, and counseling programs. Such modules should address misinformation, online manners, excessive use, privacy, peer pressure, and respectful communication through Islamic values-based reflection.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the quantitative analysis was descriptive and based on a cleaned coded dataset; future research could apply regression, factor analysis, or structural equation modeling to examine relationships among social media use, self-regulation, Islamic values, and character outcomes. Second, the qualitative strand used written responses rather than in-depth interviews, limiting opportunities for follow-up probing. Third, Islamic values were used as an interpretive framework rather than measured through a validated Islamic digital character scale.

Future research should develop and validate instruments for Islamic digital character, including akhlaq, amanah, tabayyun, haya', ukhuwwah, and mujahadah al-nafs. Longitudinal research is also needed to examine how guided social media practices influence students' character over time. Intervention studies could test whether IV-GSML-based lessons improve students' verification behavior, respectful communication, time discipline, and self-control. Finally, future studies may compare Islamic schools, public schools, and university contexts to understand how value-based digital guidance differs across educational settings.

Because this article uses data from a broader project, future publications from the same dataset should continue to disclose the relationship among manuscripts and clearly differentiate their theoretical framing, research questions, analysis focus, and contribution.

Conclusion

This study examined Indonesian students' social media experiences and interpreted them through Islamic values and youth character formation. The findings show that social media is deeply embedded in students' daily lives and provides opportunities for communication, social awareness, and information access. However, parent and teacher perspectives reveal important character-related concerns, including excessive use, weak

time management, imitation of online behavior, reduced responsiveness, exposure to negative content, and moral influence. The integrated findings suggest that social media is neither automatically harmful nor automatically educational. It is a conditional moral-learning ecology whose outcomes depend on guidance, reflective self-control, and Islamic ethical mediation. By proposing Islamic Values-Based Guided Social Media Learning, this study offers a framework for aligning digital participation with Islamic character education. In the Indonesian context, youth digital development should move beyond restriction alone toward guided, reflective, and values-based engagement.

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