

The Relevance of Imam Al-Ghazali's Moral Education Values in *Bidayatul Hidayah* to Social Media Ethics in the Digital Era

Fahmi Kafa Yudha Rahman & Ali Mutashom

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Al-Bahjah Cirebon, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Fahmi Kafa Yudha Rahman, e-mail: fahmizainalmusthofa@gmail.com

Abstract. The rapid growth of social media has expanded digital communication while simultaneously generating ethical challenges, including misinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying, and digital backbiting, which reflect the erosion of moral values in online interactions. This study aims to examine the moral educational values contained in Imam Al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah* and their relevance to social media ethics in the digital era. Employing a qualitative library research approach, the study uses *Bidayatul Hidayah* as the primary source and relevant scholarly literature as secondary sources. Data were analyzed through content analysis to identify key moral concepts and their applicability to contemporary digital communication practices. The findings reveal that the values of guarding one's gaze, hearing, speech, conduct, and social relations possess substantial relevance for fostering responsible and ethical social media behavior. This study concludes that Imam Al-Ghazali's moral teachings remain highly relevant to contemporary digital challenges and provide a conceptual foundation for strengthening character education and advancing digital ethics in educational, familial, and societal contexts.

Keyword: Bidayatul Hidayah; Digital Ethics; Imam Al-Ghazali; Moral Education; Social Media Ethics

Abstrak. Perkembangan media sosial telah memperluas ruang komunikasi digital, namun juga memunculkan berbagai persoalan etika, seperti penyebaran hoaks, ujaran kebencian, perundungan siber, dan ghibah digital yang menunjukkan melemahnya nilai-nilai moral dalam interaksi daring. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis nilai-nilai pendidikan akhlak dalam kitab *Bidayatul Hidayah* karya Imam Al-Ghazali serta relevansinya terhadap etika bermedia sosial di era digital. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian kepustakaan. Data primer bersumber dari kitab *Bidayatul Hidayah*, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari berbagai literatur yang relevan. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik content analysis untuk mengidentifikasi konsep-konsep akhlak dan keterkaitannya dengan praktik komunikasi digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai menjaga pandangan, pendengaran, lisan, perilaku, serta adab dalam pergaulan memiliki relevansi substantif dalam membangun etika bermedia sosial yang bertanggung jawab. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pemikiran akhlak Imam Al-Ghazali tetap kontekstual dalam menghadapi tantangan digital kontemporer serta berkontribusi sebagai landasan konseptual bagi penguatan pendidikan karakter dan pengembangan etika digital di masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Bidayatul Hidayah; Etika Digital; Etika Media Sosial; Imam Al-Ghazali; Pendidikan Akhlak

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Introduction

The rapid advancement of information technology and digital communication has fundamentally transformed the patterns of human interaction in contemporary society. Social media platforms have become integral components of daily life, facilitating communication, information exchange, entertainment, education, and social participation across geographical boundaries. The widespread adoption of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube has significantly influenced the ways individuals construct identities, develop relationships, and engage in public discourse. According to recent studies, social media has evolved beyond its original function as a communication tool and now serves as a powerful medium that shapes values, attitudes, behaviors, and social norms among users, particularly adolescents and young adults. Consequently, the digital sphere has emerged as a new social environment where ethical conduct is continuously negotiated and challenged.

Despite its numerous benefits, the expansion of social media usage has simultaneously generated various ethical and moral concerns. The increasing prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying, online harassment, privacy violations, digital backbiting, and character assassination demonstrates that technological progress is not always accompanied by moral development. Recent studies indicate that cyberbullying has become one of the most pressing challenges in digital society, especially among younger generations, resulting in psychological distress, emotional trauma, social isolation, and deteriorating well-being among victims. Furthermore, online anonymity and the absence of direct face-to-face interaction often encourage individuals to engage in behaviors that would be socially unacceptable in offline settings. These phenomena highlight the urgent need for ethical frameworks capable of guiding responsible digital citizenship and fostering moral awareness in virtual interactions.

The ethical challenges emerging from social media use have attracted increasing scholarly attention across various disciplines, including communication studies, education, psychology, sociology, and digital ethics. Research has shown that the digital environment frequently exposes users to moral dilemmas that differ from those encountered in traditional social settings. Adolescents, for example, often face complex ethical decisions concerning privacy, truthfulness, respect for others, and responsible participation in online communities. Such findings suggest that ethical literacy and moral education are indispensable components of digital competence in the twenty-first century. Digital technology, therefore, requires not only technical proficiency but also the cultivation of moral character capable of regulating individual behavior in online environments.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, ethical conduct occupies a central position in human life. Islam provides comprehensive guidance governing the relationship between human beings and God (*ḥabl min Allāh*) as well as relationships among fellow human beings (*ḥabl min al-nās*). Ethical communication, mutual respect, honesty, justice, and compassion are repeatedly emphasized in both the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions. One of the Qur'anic foundations concerning ethical social interaction is found in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 83, in which Allah commands believers to speak kindly to others. This verse underscores the importance of maintaining proper speech and behavior in all forms of social interaction, including contemporary digital communication. Although revealed in a pre-digital era, the moral principles embedded within the Qur'an remain highly relevant for addressing ethical challenges in modern technological contexts.

The importance of ethical communication in digital environments has also been emphasized in recent studies. Mutiarani et al. (2024) argue that the implementation of communication ethics among university students is essential for fostering responsible social media engagement. Likewise, Hamama and Syifa (2024) highlight that the ethical challenges associated with social media require moral solutions capable of promoting responsible and beneficial digital behavior. Contemporary scholarship further suggests that educational institutions should play a strategic role in cultivating

digital ethics and moral responsibility among students to address the growing incidence of cyberbullying, misinformation, and online hostility.

Among the prominent Muslim scholars who devoted significant attention to moral education, Imam Al-Ghazali occupies a distinguished position. Widely recognized as one of the most influential thinkers in Islamic intellectual history, Al-Ghazali developed a comprehensive framework of moral education that integrates spiritual purification, self-discipline, ethical conduct, and social responsibility. His educational philosophy emphasizes the formation of virtuous character (*akhlak*) as the ultimate objective of human development. Unlike approaches that focus merely on external behavior, Al-Ghazali's moral education seeks to cultivate internal virtues that shape both personal and social conduct.

One of Al-Ghazali's most influential works concerning moral formation is *Bidayatul Hidayah*. This classical text provides practical guidance for cultivating ethical behavior in everyday life through the regulation of thoughts, senses, speech, actions, and social relationships. The book systematically addresses the ethics of worship, the avoidance of sinful behavior, and proper conduct toward others. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of guarding the eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and social associations as essential dimensions of moral discipline. These principles are intended not merely as legal prohibitions but as mechanisms for nurturing self-control, moral consciousness, and spiritual refinement.

Previous studies have explored the educational and moral dimensions of *Bidayatul Hidayah*. Akbar and Ilham (2023) found that the moral values contained in the text contribute significantly to character education and personal development. Similarly, Siregar and Aidul Arsyad (2024) demonstrated that Al-Ghazali's conception of moral education plays a crucial role in shaping ethical behavior and social responsibility. Other scholars have emphasized the universal and comprehensive nature of Al-Ghazali's moral teachings, highlighting their applicability across diverse social and cultural contexts. Research by Habibah et al. (2023) further indicates that the ethical principles presented in *Bidayatul Hidayah* remain relevant for addressing contemporary moral challenges.

However, despite the growing body of literature on Al-Ghazali's educational thought, several important limitations remain. Existing studies predominantly focus on the relevance of Al-Ghazali's moral education for character formation in general educational contexts. Most discussions examine personal morality, spiritual development, or conventional social interactions without specifically addressing the ethical implications of contemporary digital communication. Consequently, the application of Al-Ghazali's ethical framework to social media behavior remains insufficiently explored. This gap becomes increasingly significant given the rapid transformation of human interaction through digital technologies and the emergence of novel ethical challenges that were absent during Al-Ghazali's historical context.

Furthermore, current research on digital ethics tends to be dominated by secular theoretical perspectives derived from media literacy, communication ethics, psychology, and information technology. While these approaches provide valuable insights into digital behavior, they often overlook the potential contributions of classical Islamic ethical traditions in constructing normative frameworks for responsible social media use. As a result, there remains limited scholarly attention devoted to integrating Islamic moral philosophy with contemporary discussions on digital citizenship and social media ethics.

This study seeks to address these limitations by reconstructing the moral educational values contained in *Bidayatul Hidayah* and examining their relevance to social media ethics in the digital era. Unlike previous studies that primarily discuss Al-Ghazali's moral teachings within traditional educational settings, this research specifically investigates how the values of guarding one's gaze, hearing, speech, actions, and social relationships can function as ethical principles for navigating contemporary digital environments. By contextualizing classical Islamic moral teachings within modern communication practices, this study contributes to the development of an Islamic framework of digital ethics capable of responding to contemporary social media challenges.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to bridge classical Islamic moral philosophy and contemporary digital ethics through a systematic reconstruction of Al-Ghazali's moral educational values. Rather than merely describing the ethical teachings contained in *Bidayatul Hidayah*, this research interprets these values as conceptual foundations for addressing issues such as misinformation, cyberbullying, hate speech, digital backbiting, privacy violations, online hostility, and irresponsible content sharing. In doing so, the study extends the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought beyond conventional moral education and demonstrates its applicability to emerging ethical concerns in digital society.

Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the moral educational values contained in Imam Al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah* and to examine their relevance as a conceptual framework for social media ethics in the digital era. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study enriches the discourse on Islamic moral education by extending its application to digital ethics. Practically, it provides an ethical foundation that may inform character education programs, digital literacy initiatives, educational curricula, and community-based efforts aimed at fostering responsible, respectful, and morally grounded social media engagement in contemporary society.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a library research approach. Library research was selected because the study focuses on examining and interpreting textual sources related to moral education, Islamic ethics, and social media ethics from the perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali. Rather than collecting field data, this research investigates written documents to explore the moral educational values contained in *Bidayatul Hidayah* and analyze their relevance to contemporary social media ethics in the digital era. The study is situated within the context of increasing ethical challenges in digital communication, including misinformation, cyberbullying, hate speech, digital backbiting, and privacy violations, which necessitate a moral framework grounded in Islamic educational thought.

The primary subject of this research is Imam Al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah*, which serves as the principal source for identifying and analyzing moral educational values. The research context concerns the application of these values to contemporary social media practices and digital interactions. Primary data were obtained directly from *Bidayatul Hidayah*, while secondary data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, and previous studies related to moral education, Al-Ghazali's educational thought, digital ethics, and social media behavior. The sources were selected through purposive sampling, whereby documents were intentionally chosen based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives.

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation and literature review techniques. The documentation process involved identifying, collecting, classifying, and reviewing relevant textual materials. Subsequently, the literature review was carried out by critically reading and synthesizing scholarly works related to Islamic moral education and digital ethics. To ensure comprehensiveness, the researcher organized the collected documents according to thematic categories, including moral education, ethical communication, social media ethics, and Al-Ghazali's moral philosophy. Relevant passages, concepts, and arguments were then recorded, coded, and categorized to facilitate further analysis.

Data analysis employed qualitative content analysis combined with the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on information relevant to the study's objectives, particularly moral values discussed in *Bidayatul Hidayah*. The selected data were then coded and grouped into thematic categories, such as guarding the gaze, guarding hearing, guarding speech, guarding actions, and ethics of friendship and social

interaction. During the data display stage, the categorized data were organized systematically in descriptive and thematic forms to enable meaningful interpretation and comparison with contemporary social media phenomena. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the relationships between Al-Ghazali's moral educational values and current ethical issues in social media use. The conclusions were continuously verified through repeated examination of the data and comparison with relevant scholarly literature to ensure analytical consistency and conceptual accuracy.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied source triangulation. The moral concepts identified in *Bidayatul Hidayah* were compared and cross-checked with interpretations found in classical Islamic literature, contemporary academic publications, and recent studies on digital ethics. Trustworthiness was further strengthened through prolonged engagement with the literature, theoretical triangulation, and peer-reviewed scholarly sources. The researcher also maintained an audit trail by documenting the procedures of data collection, coding, categorization, and interpretation to ensure transparency and replicability. These strategies were employed to improve the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Imam Al-Ghazali's moral educational values can serve as a conceptual foundation for developing ethical social media behavior in contemporary digital society.

Results and Discussion

Moral Values Contained in the Book Bidayatul Hidayah

The book *Bidayatul Hidayah* is one of the scholarly works of Al-Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Ghazali (450–505 AH/1058–1111 CE), more widely known as Imam Al-Ghazali. This book is a practical work of Sufism that is rich in lessons on morality, etiquette, and guidance for pursuing the path toward the guidance of Allah SWT.

Imam Al-Ghazali named this book *Bidayah*, meaning “beginning,” and *Hidayah*, meaning “guidance from Allah SWT.” Thus, *Bidayatul Hidayah* may be understood as an introductory guide for anyone who seeks to follow the path leading to the guidance of Allah SWT.

The study conducted by Akbar and Ilham (2023) demonstrates that this book contains profound values of moral education that remain relevant to the formation of human character in every era. Imam Al-Ghazali composed *Bidayatul Hidayah* in a simple and accessible language, while still preserving a high degree of spiritual depth.

Broadly speaking, this book consists of three main areas of discussion. First, it discusses obedience (*ath-thā'āt*), which includes daily acts of worship. Second, it addresses the avoidance of sinful acts (*ijtināb al-ma'āṣi*), particularly sins committed by the bodily organs that must be avoided. Third, it discusses the ethics of companionship (*ādāb ash-shuḥbah*), which concerns proper conduct in social interaction with others (Siregar & Aidul Arsyad, 2024).

The first significant moral value emphasized in *Bidayatul Hidayah* is guarding the eyes or lowering one's gaze. Allah SWT says:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ (٣٠)

Meaning: “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their chastity; that is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is All-Aware of what they do.”(QS An-Nur [24]: 30).

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا (٣١)

Meaning: “And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze, guard their chastity, and not display their adornment, except what is ordinarily visible.” (Qur’an, An-Nur [24]: 31).

The two verses above demonstrate the importance of guarding one’s sight for all human beings, both men and women, from matters prohibited in Islam. Imam Al-Ghazali explains in his book that the eyes were created to see in darkness, to assist human beings in fulfilling their needs, and to contemplate the universe as a sign of the greatness of Allah SWT. He further emphasizes the importance of guarding the eyes:

أَمَّا الْعَيْنُ: فَإِنَّمَا خُلِقَتْ لَكَ لِتَهْتَدِيَ بِهَا فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ، وَتَسْتَعِينَ بِهَا فِي الْحَاجَاتِ، وَتَنْظُرَ بِهَا إِلَى عَجَائِبِ مَلَكُوتِ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ، وَتَعْتَبِرَ بِمَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْآيَاتِ: فَاحْفَظْهَا عَنْ ثَلَاثَةٍ:

- أَنْ تَنْظُرَ بِهَا إِلَى غَيْرِ مَحْرَمٍ، وَإِلَى صُورَةٍ مَلِيحَةٍ بِشَهْوَةِ نَفْسٍ
- أَوْ تَنْظُرَ بِهَا إِلَى مُسْلِمٍ بِعَيْنِ الْإِحْتِقَارِ
- أَوْ تَطَّلِعَ بِهَا إِلَى عَيْبِ مُسْلِمٍ.

Meaning: “As for the eyes, they were created for you so that through them you may find guidance in darkness, receive assistance in fulfilling various needs, observe the wonders of the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and take lessons from the signs of Allah’s greatness contained therein. Therefore, protect the eyes from three matters:

1. Looking at someone who is not a mahram, or gazing at a beautiful appearance with lustful desire.
2. Looking at a Muslim with contempt.
3. Seeking out the faults of a Muslim” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Based on Imam Al-Ghazali’s explanation above, it is necessary for individuals to guard their sight at all times and in all places, particularly in the contemporary digital era. The rapid development of digital information, social media, and the internet has made it easier for individuals to access various sites and forms of content. The moral education taught by Imam Al-Ghazali concerning the importance of guarding one’s gaze remains highly relevant in the present age. By avoiding what is prohibited in Islam, individuals may become wiser in using social media, avoid negative content, and preserve the purity of the heart and morality in everyday life (Habibah et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Imam Al-Ghazali provides an important lesson regarding the necessity of guarding the ears or the sense of hearing. He states that the ear is an organ created by Allah SWT for the purpose of listening to the words of Allah SWT, the Sunnah taught by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as well as the wisdom and knowledge conveyed by scholars. Therefore, Imam Al-Ghazali teaches that one must protect one’s hearing from backbiting, harmful speech, and words that demean others. He states in his book:

وَأَمَّا الْأُذُنُ: فَاحْفَظْهَا عَنْ أَنْ تُصْغِيَ بِهَا إِلَى الْبِدْعَةِ أَوْ الْغَيْبَةِ أَوْ الْفُحْشِ، أَوْ الْحَوْضِ فِي الْبَاطِلِ، أَوْ ذِكْرِ مَسَاوِي
النَّاسِ؛ فَإِنَّمَا خُلِقَتْ لَكَ لِتَسْمَعَ بِهَا كَلَامَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى، وَسُنَّةَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، وَحِكْمَةَ أَوْلِيَائِهِ، وَتَتَوَصَّلَ
بِهَا إِلَى اسْتِفَادَةِ الْعِلْمِ؛ لِتَنَالَ بِهَا الْمُلْكَ الْمَقِيمَ وَالنَّعِيمَ الدَّائِمَ.

Meaning: “As for the ears, protect them from listening to religious innovation (*bid'ah*), backbiting (*ghibab*), obscene speech, false discourse, and the discussion of other people's faults. Indeed, the ears were created to listen to the words of Allah SWT, the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah SAW, and the wisdom of His righteous servants, as well as to serve as a means of acquiring knowledge, so that you may attain the everlasting kingdom and eternal bliss” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

From Imam Al-Ghazali's statement above, it can be understood that guarding the ears is highly important. By protecting the sense of hearing, individuals may avoid sins caused by listening to backbiting, slander, and other forms of wrongdoing, particularly in the present digital era.

Moreover, Imam Al-Ghazali teaches that Muslims must constantly guard the tongue, because the tongue was created by Allah SWT for the purpose of remembering Him (*dhikr*), reciting the Qur'an, and inviting people to the path of Allah SWT. If the tongue is not used properly, this may be regarded as a form of ingratitude toward the blessings that Allah has bestowed upon human beings.

Imam Al-Ghazali calls upon individuals to continually protect the tongue from several matters:

1. Lying

الأُولُ: الْكُذِبُ

فَاحْفَظْ لِسَانَكَ مِنْهُ فِي الْجِدِّ وَالْهَزْلِ، وَلَا تُعَوِّدْ نَفْسَكَ الْكُذِبَ هَزْلًا؛ فَيَتَدَاعَى إِلَى الْجِدِّ، فَالْكَذِبُ مِنْ أُمَّهَاتِ
الْكِبَائِرِ، ثُمَّ إِنَّكَ إِذَا عُرِفْتَ بِذَلِكَ سَقَطَتِ الثِّقَةُ بِقَوْلِكَ، وَتَزْدَرِيكَ الْأَعْيُنُ وَتَحْتَقِرُكَ.

Meaning: “First: lying. Guard your tongue against lying, whether in serious matters or in jest. Do not accustom yourself to lying in jokes, because this may eventually lead to actual lying. Lying is among the roots of major sins. When a person is known as a liar, trust in his speech will disappear, people will look down upon him, and they will humiliate him” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Imam Al-Ghazali teaches that individuals must always avoid lying, whether in serious situations or in joking. Even when done in jest, lying may gradually lead a person toward actual dishonesty.

This teaching is particularly relevant in the contemporary digital era. Today, the tongue is not limited merely to spoken words; rather, there is another form of expression that may be even more harmful, namely written communication, such as chats, comments, and other digital interactions. If such communication is not properly controlled, it may lead to serious sins, such as exposing others' faults on social media, insulting others, posting offensive comments, slandering others, spreading false information, and many other forms of misconduct.

2. Breaking Promises

الثَّانِي: الخُلْفُ فِي الوُعْدِ.

فَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَعِدَ بِشَيْءٍ إِلَّا وَتَفِي بِهِ، بَلْ يَنْبَغِي أَنْ يَكُونَ إِحْسَانُكَ لِلنَّاسِ فِعْلاً بِلَا قَوْلٍ.

Meaning: “The second is breaking promises. Therefore, be cautious when you promise something, unless you are able to fulfill it. Indeed, it is more appropriate that your kindness toward others be manifested through action, rather than through excessive speech” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Breaking promises is a blameworthy act, as it may reduce the trust of others. Moreover, breaking promises is considered among the characteristics of hypocrites. Imam Al-Ghazali states in his book that the Prophet Muhammad SAW classified those who lie and break their promises among the hypocrites, because among the signs of a hypocrite are that when he speaks, he lies, and when he makes a promise, he breaks it:

قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: ثَلَاثٌ مَنْ كُنَّ فِيهِ فَهُوَ مُنَافِقٌ وَإِنْ صَامَ وَصَلَّى: مَنْ إِذَا حَدَّثَ كَذَبَ، وَإِذَا وَعَدَ أَخْلَفَ، وَإِذَا أُؤْتِمِنَ خَانَ. (رواه أحمد)

Meaning: The Prophet ﷺ said: “There are three characteristics which, if found in a person, make him among the hypocrites, even if he fasts and performs prayer: when he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is entrusted with something, he betrays the trust.” (Narrated by Ahmad).

3. Backbiting (*Ghibab*)

الثَّالِثُ: الغَيْبَةُ.

إِحْفَظْ لِسَانَكَ مِنَ الغَيْبَةِ، فَالغَيْبَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنْ ثَلَاثِينَ زَنِيَةً فِي الإِسْلَامِ، كَذَلِكَ الخَبْرُ. وَمَعْنَى الغَيْبَةِ: أَنْ تَذْكَرَ إِنْسَانًا بِمَا يَكْرَهُهُ لَوْ سَمِعَهُ، فَأَنْتَ مُغْتَابٌ ظَالِمٌ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ صَادِقًا.

Meaning: “The third is backbiting (*ghibab*). Guard your tongue against backbiting, for backbiting is more severe in Islam than thirty acts of fornication, as mentioned in a hadith. The meaning of backbiting is that you mention something about a person which he would dislike if he heard it. Thus, you are considered a backbiter and an oppressor, even if what you say is true” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Allah SWT says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ (١٢)

Meaning: “O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed, some suspicion is sinful. And do not spy on one another, nor should any of you backbite another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely, you would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is the Acceptor of repentance, the Most Merciful.” (Qur’an, Al-Hujurat [49]: 12).

Based on the words of Allah SWT and the statement of Imam Al-Ghazali above, it can be concluded that backbiting (*ghibab*) is an act prohibited in Islam. This is because the person being

spoken about would feel displeased upon hearing such remarks, and such behavior may lead to hatred and social division.

Likewise, in the digital era, backbiting has become increasingly easy to commit, particularly through social media. A person can easily send messages to others containing the shortcomings or faults of another individual. The prohibition of backbiting (*ghibab*) and tale-bearing (*namimah*) is therefore highly crucial in the context of social media, considering that both practices constitute the root of various ethical problems in contemporary digital spaces (Musdalifah & Andi, 2025). Therefore, it is necessary for individuals to use social media wisely in order to avoid falling into the sin of backbiting.

4. Debate and Dispute

الرَّابِعُ: الْمِرَاءُ وَالْجِدَالُ وَمُنَاقَشَةُ النَّاسِ فِي الْكَلَامِ.
فَدَلِكْ فِيهِ إِيدَاءٌ لِلْمُخَاطَبِ، وَتَجْهِيلٌ لَهُ، وَطَعْنٌ فِيهِ، وَفِيهِ تَنَاءٌ عَلَى النَّفْسِ وَتَزْكِيَةٌ لَهَا بِمَزِيدِ الْفِطْنَةِ وَالْعِلْمِ.

Meaning: “The fourth is debate, dispute, and arguing with others in conversation. Indeed, such behavior may hurt the interlocutor, imply that he is ignorant, degrade him, and insult him. In addition, it also contains self-praise and a sense of being more intelligent and knowledgeable” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

In the contemporary digital era, debates and disputes have become widespread among people, whether directly or through digital platforms. Examples include insulting one another in comment sections, engaging in debates accompanied by hate speech, and undermining other people’s opinions in order to appear the most correct. Such actions may generate hostility and foster arrogance, as individuals begin to feel that they are the most correct and knowledgeable. Therefore, in *Bidayatul Hidayah*, Imam Al-Ghazali teaches that individuals must guard their tongues from unbeneficial debates, including in their interactions on social media.

In addition to the tongue, Imam Al-Ghazali also gives a warning regarding the need to protect both hands from everything prohibited in Islam. Imam Al-Ghazali explains that the hand is one of the two tongues; therefore, one should not write anything that would be inappropriate to say:

وَأَمَّا الْيَدَانِ: فَاحْفَظْهُمَا عَنْ أَنْ تَضْرِبَ بِهِمَا مُسْلِمًا، أَوْ تَتَنَاوَلَ بِهِمَا مَالًا حَرَامًا، أَوْ تُؤْذِيَ بِهِمَا أَحَدًا مِنْ خَلْقِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى، أَوْ تَخُونَ بِهِمَا مُسْلِمًا فِي أَمَانَةٍ أَوْ وَدِيعَةٍ، أَوْ تَكْتُبَ بِهِمَا مَا لَا يَجُوزُ النُّطْقُ بِهِ؛ فَإِنَّ الْقَلَمَ أَحَدُ اللِّسَانَيْنِ، فَاحْفَظِ الْقَلَمَ عَمَّا يَجِبُ حِفْظُ اللِّسَانِ عَنْهُ.

Meaning: “As for the two hands, protect them from striking a Muslim, taking unlawful property, harming any of Allah the Exalted’s creatures, betraying a trust or deposit, and writing anything that is inappropriate to say. Indeed, the pen is one of the two tongues; therefore, protect the pen from everything from which the tongue must be protected” (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Furthermore, in the third section of *Bidayatul Hidayah*, Imam Al-Ghazali explains the morals and etiquette of friendship and social interaction. He cites the saying of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, which explains that a person’s religion depends on whom he takes as his companion:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: الْمَرْءُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ، فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدُكُمْ مَنْ يُخَالِلُ (رواه أبو داود).

Meaning: A person follows the religion of his close companion (*khaliq*); therefore, each of you should carefully consider whom he takes as his close companion. (Narrated by Abu Dawud)

From the hadith above, it can be concluded that, in the digital era, the concept of choosing companions is highly relevant to phenomena such as echo chambers and the influence of the accounts one follows on social media. Whoever one follows, whatever content one consumes, and the nature of one's digital social circle can significantly influence one's morality and worldview.

The Ethical Problems of Social Media and the Urgency of Digital Moral Formation

Social media has fundamentally transformed patterns of communication. On the one hand, it has created spaces for expression and information exchange that did not previously exist. On the other hand, it has also opened opportunities for various ethical problems in the contemporary digital era. A study reveals that social media use among the younger generation is often marked by a lack of ethical communication practices, resulting in the dissemination of information on social media without adequate moral filtering (Mutiarani et al., 2024). This phenomenon includes various ethical issues, such as the spread of false information or hoaxes, hate speech, cyberbullying, digital backbiting, and provocative content that may affect social harmony.

Hamama and Syifa (2024) explain that the greatest challenges in implementing communication ethics on social media stem from three main factors. First, user anonymity encourages individuals to speak boldly without responsibility. Second, the rapid spread of information often exceeds users' ability to verify its accuracy. Third, there is a lack of awareness regarding the social impact of every post or comment on social media. These three factors require comprehensive solutions involving individuals, communities, and the platforms themselves. The Prophet Muhammad SAW provided guidance for us through his saying narrated by Imam Bukhari and Muslim:

{ مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ } . وفي مسلم: { أَوْ لِيَسْكُتْ } . (رواه البخاري ومسلم).

Meaning: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good words or remain silent." (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim)

The hadith above contains a universal principle of communication ethics. Every utterance, whether spoken orally or written on social media, must first be weighed according to the standard of goodness before it is conveyed. Zulfikar emphasizes that the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW constitute a rich source of social ethics in contemporary Islamic education, including in responding to the continuously developing challenges of digital ethics (Zulfikar, 2024).

Faizin et al. (2022) remind us that, amid technological development and the widespread use of social media, moral education faces extraordinary challenges. The moral crisis in the digital era has become a distinct challenge that requires an adaptive educational approach while remaining rooted in Islamic values. Furthermore, Hartati et al. state that Islamic education has a strategic role in shaping students' digital ethics in the age of social media. Although ethical theory and religious teachings already exist, the challenges of the digital era and contemporary social dynamics demand a more concrete and applicable actualization. This is what makes the values contained in *Bidayatul Hidayah* highly urgent to examine in terms of their relevance (Hartati et al., 2025).

The Relevance of Moral Education Values in *Bidayatul Hidayah* to the Formation of Social Media Ethics

The philosophy of moral education in Imam Al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah* is highly relevant to the development of social media ethics. Although this book was written in the eleventh century CE, its teachings address moral issues that human beings continue to face in the modern era. A study underlines that Al-Ghazali's concept of moral education in *Bidayatul Hidayah* is universal and comprehensive, encompassing all aspects of human life, including human interaction with God, oneself, and others (Siregar & Aidul Arsyad, 2024).

First, the value of guarding one's gaze, as taught by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Bidayatul Hidayah*, has a very strong relevance to contemporary social media ethics. The three prohibitions he emphasizes, looking at what is forbidden with lustful desire, viewing fellow Muslims with contempt, and seeking out the faults of others, are directly related to negative behaviors on social media, such as accessing harmful or pornographic content, engaging in body shaming and digital discrimination, as well as stalking and doxxing in order to expose the faults of others.

Imam Al-Ghazali does not merely prohibit such actions; rather, he educates individuals to build the awareness that the eyes were created for guidance and reflection upon the greatness of Allah SWT, not for satisfying desire, degrading others, or seeking out the faults of other people. This awareness becomes a fundamental foundation for social media users to become wiser and more selective in consuming content, to protect the dignity of others, and to use technology as a means of goodness rather than harm.

Second, guarding the sense of hearing, as taught by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Bidayatul Hidayah*, also has strong relevance to social media ethics. The prohibition against listening to backbiting, religious innovation, obscene speech, false discourse, and the faults of others contextually includes all forms of audiovisual content consumed by social media users on a daily basis. These include circulating hoaxes, videos of backbiting disguised as entertainment, content or music containing vulgar language, and live streams filled with insults and unproductive debates. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the ear is not merely a passive organ for receiving information, but also an active means of acquiring knowledge that leads to eternal happiness.

Third, guarding the tongue in Imam Al-Ghazali's theory is also relevant to social media ethics in the contemporary digital era. The four prohibitions he presents, lying, breaking promises, backbiting, and futile debate, clearly reflect some of the most dominant negative behaviors in today's digital space. Lying no longer appears only in the form of spoken words; it has transformed into hoaxes, fake news, and false comments that spread across social media. Breaking promises in the digital era appears in the form of false promises delivered publicly through posts or commitments made in digital spaces but never fulfilled, which ultimately damages a person's trustworthiness and credibility in the eyes of others.

Meanwhile, backbiting, which in the past occurred mainly in private conversations, can now reach thousands or even millions of people within seconds through comment sections, instant messaging groups, and video content, making it far more destructive and difficult to control. Similarly, futile debate has become increasingly common on social media in the form of comment wars, mutual insults, and fruitless arguments filled with hate speech and humiliation merely to appear superior or most correct. Such behavior produces hostility, arrogance, and division within society.

Imam Al-Ghazali reminds us that the tongue was created for remembering Allah, reciting the words of Allah, and inviting people toward goodness—not merely for satisfying ego and desire.

This principle serves as one of the most fundamental foundations for building responsible social media ethics in the digital era.

Fourth, Imam Al-Ghazali teaches individuals to guard both hands, because the hand is considered one of the two tongues. This teaching has a strong relevance to the contemporary digital context, since the main activities of social media users, typing comments, statuses, messages, and uploading content, are all carried out by the hands. Everything that should not be spoken by the tongue should likewise not be typed by the hand. Therefore, all forms of etiquette related to the tongue, such as the prohibition of lying, backbiting, dispute, and other harmful speech, automatically apply to everything typed and disseminated through social media.

Moreover, the prohibition against betrayal is also highly relevant in the digital context. Acts such as spreading another person’s private information without permission, doxxing, leaking the contents of private conversations, and misusing the trust given by someone in digital spaces are strongly connected to Imam Al-Ghazali’s moral education in *Bidayatul Hidayah* and its relevance to contemporary social media ethics.

Fifth, the value of friendship taught by Imam Al-Ghazali also has strong relevance to the phenomenon of digital association today. The statement of the Prophet Muhammad SAW that “a person follows the religion of his close companion” does not only apply to physical social interaction, but also includes digital interaction. The phenomenon of echo chambers on social media is clear evidence of the truth of this prophetic teaching. A person who continuously consumes content from a particular circle will increasingly become trapped in a single perspective and influenced by the values disseminated by the accounts he or she follows, whether toward goodness or toward harm.

Table 1. The Values of Imam Al-Ghazali’s Moral Education in *Bidayatul Hidayah* and Their Relevance to Social Media Ethics

No	Moral Values	Imam Al-Ghazali’s Prohibitions	Relevance to Social Media Ethics
1	Guarding One’s Gaze	Looking at non- <i>mabram</i> individuals with lustful desire; looking down upon fellow Muslims with contempt; seeking out the faults of others.	Avoiding pornographic and vulgar content; opposing body shaming and digital discrimination; preventing stalking and doxxing.
2	Guarding One’s Hearing	Listening to religious innovation (<i>bid’ah</i>), backbiting (<i>ghibab</i>), obscene speech, false discourse, and the faults of others.	Being selective in consuming content; avoiding hoax content, backbiting videos, vulgar music, and provocative live streaming.
		Lying; breaking promises; backbiting (<i>ghibab</i>);	Rejecting hoaxes and fake news; avoiding false promises in public digital

3	Guarding One's Tongue	engaging in futile debates and disputes.	spaces; preventing digital backbiting; avoiding comment wars and hate speech.
4	Guarding One's Hands	Striking a fellow Muslim; taking unlawful property; harming Allah's creatures; betraying a trust; writing what is inappropriate to say.	Refraining from typing harmful comments; avoiding the dissemination of unlawful content; not leaking private conversations or engaging in doxxing; taking responsibility for every post.
5	The Etiquette of Friendship	Being careless in choosing friends; being influenced by a harmful social environment	Being selective in choosing accounts to follow; avoiding negative echo chambers; building digital communities that promote goodness

Source: Al-Ghazali, *Bidayatul Hidayah* (2004).

As presented in Table 1, there are five main values of moral education in *Bidayatul Hidayah* that have direct relevance to the formation of social media ethics in the digital era.

Therefore, the principles of moral education taught by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Bidayatul Hidayah* are highly relevant to the development of social media ethics in the modern era. The value of guarding one's gaze teaches social media users to be critical of information and to avoid content containing hoaxes, backbiting, and obscene speech. The value of guarding one's hearing teaches users to be selective in consuming content and to protect the dignity of others. The value of guarding one's tongue teaches users to avoid lying, breaking promises, backbiting, and engaging in unbeneficial debates. The value of guarding one's hands reminds users that every written statement, comment, and post in the digital space carries moral consequences similar to those of spoken words. Meanwhile, the value of friendship teaches the importance of choosing a digital social environment that leads toward goodness.

Essentially, the internalization of these moral principles can help reduce various problems of digital ethics, including the spread of hoaxes, cyberbullying, hate speech, doxxing, digital backbiting, the culture of flexing, and conflicts on social media. Therefore, one possible solution is to use Imam Al-Ghazali's moral teachings as a foundation for digital ethics education within families, educational institutions, and society as a whole. Thus, social media will not merely function as a tool for communication and information sharing, but also as a space that reflects the values of public benefit, responsibility, and civility in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the moral educational values contained in Imam Al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah* have conceptual significance in formulating social media ethics in the digital era. The main findings indicate that the teachings on regulating the gaze, hearing, tongue, hands, and social relations function not only as guidelines for individual morality but can also be contextualized as ethical principles for digital interaction. Thus, this study extends the scope of Islamic moral education from conventional social spaces to the increasingly complex sphere of digital communication. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its attempt to connect Imam Al-Ghazali's classical moral thought with contemporary issues in digital ethics. The study demonstrates that *Bidayatul Hidayah* can be read as a normative foundation for developing social media ethics, particularly in responding to problems such as hoaxes, hate speech, cyberbullying, doxxing, digital backbiting, and the misuse of online communication. Through this approach, moral education is not merely understood as part of the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, but also as a conceptual framework relevant to the development of value-based digital literacy. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. It is a library-based study that focuses on a conceptual analysis of *Bidayatul Hidayah* and supporting literature; therefore, it does not empirically examine how these values are internalized by social media users in real-life digital practices. In addition, this study has not explored in depth the psychological, algorithmic, and structural factors that also influence users' ethical behavior in digital spaces. The implications of this study highlight the need to integrate Islamic moral values into digital ethics education within families, educational institutions, and society. Practically, the findings may serve as a basis for developing character education curricula, Islamic digital literacy materials, social media guidelines, and moral development programs for younger generations. Accordingly, Imam Al-Ghazali's thought can be actualized as an important reference in shaping Muslim generations who are critical, courteous, responsible, and morally grounded in their use of social media.

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