

Zuhd as an Ethical Critique of Digital Hedonism: A Literature-Based Study from the Perspective of Islamic Economic Ethics

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Abstract: *Digital hedonism, which has intensified through social media, platform-based economies, and instant consumption culture, has fostered behavioral patterns oriented toward pleasure-seeking, excessive self-presentation, and self-commodification. These developments have generated significant ethical tensions in the consumption practices of Muslim communities. This article examines the concept of zuhd as an ethical critique of digital hedonism using a qualitative library research approach. Data were drawn from classical and contemporary Islamic literature as well as empirical studies on digital consumption and Islamic economic ethics. The analysis reveals that zuhd should not be understood as hostility toward pleasure or technology, but as a value-oriented framework that regulates consumption motives in accordance with spiritual objectives (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah). In the digital context, zuhd functions as an ethical compass that mitigates consumptive pressure, strengthens self-awareness, and reorients the moral use of technology. This study offers a conceptual contribution to the development of digital consumption ethics within Islamic economic thought.*

Keywords: *zuhd, digital hedonism, consumption ethics, Islamic economics, spiritual ethics.*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped patterns of social interaction, consumption, and lifestyle in contemporary society. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, online marketplaces, and creator-based ecosystems do not merely mediate social relations; they actively construct a visual and algorithm-driven culture that prioritizes pleasure, visibility, and intensified self-expression. This transformation has given rise to what is commonly described as digital hedonism – a lifestyle orientation centered on the pursuit of instant gratification through virtual experiences and display-oriented consumption (Belk, 2013; Hidayat & Pratama, 2021; Suryani, 2022).

From the perspective of Islamic economics, digitally mediated lifestyles pose serious ethical implications. Existing studies indicate that digital environments amplify materialistic tendencies, fear of missing out (FOMO), impulsive buying behavior, and self-commodification, thereby eroding consumers' capacity for self-regulation (Przybylski et al., 2013; Djalil, 2020; Rahman & Al-Kandari, 2022). Despite these concerns, scholarly engagement that integrates Islamic ethical concepts—particularly *zuhd*—with the phenomenon of digital hedonism remains limited. Most studies address *zuhd* primarily within theological or Sufi discourses, without sufficiently contextualizing it within contemporary digital consumption shaped by visual stimulation and monetization mechanisms.

This gap in the literature highlights the absence of a coherent conceptual framework explaining how *zuhd* may function as an ethical response to excessive digital consumption. Meanwhile, recent research demonstrates the growing prevalence of hedonic browsing, image-based consumption, and performative self-presentation, all of which shape social identity through visual validation (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2020; Nugroho, 2023). The disconnect between Islamic ethical discourse and digital consumption practices underscores the need for a renewed theoretical engagement.

Accordingly, this article proposes a conceptual framework that positions *zuhd* as an ethical critique of digital hedonism. The study aims to reaffirm the role of spirituality in guiding consumption behavior toward moderation, responsibility, and moral consciousness within Islamic economics. By examining classical Islamic texts, contemporary ethical discussions, and empirical studies on digital consumption, this article seeks to extend Islamic economic ethics into the digital domain and offer normative guidance for ethically responsible digital consumption.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive library research design. Its primary objective is to construct a theoretical understanding of *zuhd* as an ethical critique of digital hedonism through systematic analysis of relevant literature.

The data sources consist of three main categories:

- (1) classical Islamic texts addressing *zuhd*, moral conduct, and *tazkiyat al-nafs*, including works by al-Ghazālī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and al-Nawawī;
- (2) contemporary literature on Islamic spirituality, consumption ethics, and Islamic economics; and
- (3) recent empirical studies examining digital hedonism, online consumption behavior, and digital lifestyles.

Literature was collected through systematic searches of academic books, reputable international journals (Scopus and DOAJ indexed), and nationally accredited journals. Inclusion criteria required thematic relevance, academic credibility, and, for empirical studies, publication within the past ten years. Thematic analysis was employed through concept identification, coding, and synthesis to construct a coherent ethical framework. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation across classical, contemporary, and empirical sources.

Results and Discussion

Digital Hedonism in Contemporary Economic Life

Digital hedonism represents a transformation of classical pleasure-oriented consumption into virtual spaces, where gratification is derived from algorithm-driven activities such as scrolling, liking, streaming, and virtual interaction. Platform architectures designed around instant gratification intensify impulsive behavior and weaken reflective decision-making (Chan et al., 2022). Empirical studies further demonstrate that social media consumption reinforces materialism through social comparison and emotional reinforcement, encouraging repetitive and unreflective consumption (Dhir et al., 2021).

From an economic perspective, digital hedonism has generated new consumption markets—such as digital goods, micro-entertainment, and in-app purchases—thereby reinforcing consumptive cycles that, while intangible, produce tangible behavioral and economic consequences.

Zuhd in Islamic Ethical Tradition

Within classical Islamic scholarship, *zuhd* is not understood as withdrawal from worldly life but as the ethical discipline of detaching the heart from excessive attachment to material pleasure. Al-Ghazālī conceptualizes *zuhd* as an inner orientation that treats worldly possessions as means rather than ends. Ibn Qayyim emphasizes that true *zuhd* lies in controlling desire, not in abandoning productive engagement with the world.

In contemporary Islamic economic thought, *zuhd* is increasingly recognized as an internal ethical mechanism that promotes moderation, responsibility, and value-oriented consumption. Rather than rejecting technology, *zuhd* provides moral guidance for navigating modern economic life.

Zuhd as an Ethical Response to Digital Hedonism

As an ethical counterweight to digital hedonism, zuhd functions on several levels. First, it reorients consumption motives from pleasure maximization toward purpose and benefit. Second, it challenges excessive digital self-presentation, which mirrors a contemporary form of *riyā'* amplified by algorithmic validation. Third, zuhd encourages digital mindfulness, fostering conscious use of time and attention in digital environments.

A Zuhd-Based Ethical Framework for Digital Consumption

Synthesizing the literature, this study proposes a zuhd-based ethical framework comprising five interrelated elements: intention, moderation, self-control, prioritization of *maṣlaḥah*, and spiritual reflection (*muḥāsabah*). Together, these elements provide practical ethical guidance for Muslim engagement with digital technologies.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital hedonism constitutes a contemporary form of consumption behavior shaped by algorithmic systems, visual culture, and psychological impulses toward instant gratification. In response, Islamic economics requires ethical frameworks capable of guiding digital consumption in morally meaningful ways. The concept of zuhd offers a relevant and adaptive ethical critique by reorienting consumption toward moderation, self-discipline, and value-based decision-making.

By articulating a zuhd-based ethical framework, this article contributes to the expanding discourse on Islamic economic ethics in the digital age. Future empirical research is needed to examine how these ethical principles operate in lived digital consumption practices.

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