Ethics, Morals, and Morality: Between Anonymity and Responsibility

¹Najwa Aidila Fitri, ²Faqih Hanan Zaidan, ³Lola Suci Mayrani, ⁴Juni Wahyu

1,2,3,4Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

E-mail: ¹*njwaaadilaa@gmail.com*, ²*zidan1706zidan@gmail.com*, ³*lolasucimeirani@gmail.com*,
⁴*wahyujuni45@gmail.com*

Info Articles	Abstract
	Anonymity in the digital space has blurred the boundaries between freedom of expression and moral responsibility. This paper examines how anonymity impacts ethical, moral, and ethical practices in digital life, particularly from the perspective of Islamic values. This research uses a qualitative literature review method. Based on literature from Indonesian scientific journals, it was found that neglect of responsibility is often triggered by the perception that anonymity frees individuals from social oversight. However, Islamic moral and ethical values emphasize the importance of inner awareness in acting, even without external oversight. Therefore, anonymity should not be a reason for the decline of ethics, but rather a challenge to strengthen internal moral values as the primary moral compass. Thus, this paper emphasizes the importance of strengthening individual ethics based on morality in facing the reality of anonymous digital communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the last two decades has brought about a major transformation in the way humans communicate, interact and form social networks.(Sinlae et al., 2024). Digital space not only creates speed and efficiency in the exchange of information, but also opens up the possibility for individuals to participate anonymously, without publicly revealing their identities. This phenomenon creates a new dynamic in social relations that previously relied on physical proximity and direct social control. On the one hand, anonymity can strengthen freedom of expression, protect identities from the risk of repression, and enable marginalized voices to emerge in the digital public sphere.(Eko Wahyuanto, 2025)However, on the other hand, anonymity also carries potential dangers such as ethical violations, the spread of hate speech, hoaxes, online bullying, and a loss of moral responsibility for actions taken in secret.

In a space with minimal social oversight and laws that tend to be slow to adapt, the issue of individual responsibility in the digital space becomes increasingly complex. Freedom without moral awareness can lead to a degradation of human values, including the loss of empathy, truth, and respect for others.(Hidayat & Subando, 2024)Therefore, it is important to re-examine the role and relevance of fundamental concepts such as ethics, morals, and ethics in the context of today's digital interactions.

Ethics, in general, is understood as a system of values or norms that apply in society to assess what is considered good and bad in a social action.(Magnis-Suseno, 1987)Morals are more internal in nature, namely personal principles embedded within an individual as a guide to behavior, while ethics have a spiritual and religious dimension that is manifested in real actions based on religious teachings, especially in Islam.(Magnis-Suseno, 1987)All three play a crucial role in ensuring that freedom of expression does not violate human boundaries and undermine the social order. In Islam, the concept of morality governs not only human relationships with others but also with God, so that moral responsibility is both vertical and horizontal.

However, in practice, digital spaces often free individuals from the influence of these values. When identities are hidden and actions lack direct social consequences, the potential for ethical and moral violations increases. Therefore, a more in-depth approach is needed to understand how the concepts of ethics, morals, and ethics remain relevant and can be internalized in this fast-paced, free, and anonymous digital ecosystem.

This study aims to examine the relationship between anonymity and moral responsibility from the perspective of Islamic values and a general social ethical framework. This study highlights the importance of strengthening moral awareness as a moral bulwark in facing the challenges of digital communication. In an increasingly digitalized modern society, self-awareness and self-regulation are key to ensuring that technology does not become a destructive tool, but rather a means of supporting the values of humanity, truth, and justice. By understanding more deeply the relationship between anonymous freedom and moral responsibility, it is hoped that a strong normative and spiritual foundation can be found for building a healthy, civilized, and responsible digital ecosystem.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with a library research method.(Muhadjir, 2000)A qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on the study of meaning, interpretation of values, and the conceptual relationships between ethics, morals, ethics, and anonymity in digital spaces. Meanwhile, a descriptive approach was used to systematically illustrate the relationships between ideas in the references used.

The data used in this study is secondary data, namely scientific journal articles, academic books, and other scientific publications relevant to the topic. The criteria for selecting literature include: (1) published in the last 5–10 years, (2) relevant to issues of ethics, anonymity, and moral responsibility, (3) originating from trusted sources such as accredited national journals. Some of the journals used as references include Al-Fikra, Komunika, and JRMDK.

The analysis stages are carried out in three steps:
1. Reference compilation: Collecting and classifying library sources based on themes.
2. Data reduction: Filtering important information from each reference related to key variables.
3. Thematic synthesis: Combining the results of the analysis into a conceptual narrative that explains the relationship between anonymity, responsibility, and moral values in digital communication.

Through this approach, the research aims to build theoretical arguments and critical reflections on how morals and moral responsibility can still be upheld even though individuals are in an anonymous condition.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
A. Anonymity and the Erosion of Moral Responsibility

The development of digital technology has given birth to a new communication space that no longer depends on physical presence or real identity.(Aziz, 2025)In this space, anyone can interact, express their opinions, and even develop a persona without having to be held accountable for their true identity. This phenomenon is particularly prominent among the younger generation, particularly Generation Z, who grew up in a fluid and fast-paced digital ecosystem.(Mahmudah, 2020)This generation utilizes the anonymity of social media as a medium for self-expression free from direct social pressure, allowing for the courage to voice opinions, criticism, or even dissatisfaction. However, this freedom is often not accompanied by ethical awareness, leading to a decline in moral responsibility in communication.(Pramesti & Dewi, 2022).

In an anonymous context, the existence of social control mechanisms that have been the guardians of societal norms becomes weak.(Pramesti & Dewi, 2022). Hidden identities make individuals feel safe from the social and legal consequences of their actions, thus opening up space for deviant behavior such as the spread of hoaxes, hate speech, slander, and even

cyberbullying. Anonymity makes individuals appear beyond the reach of social norms that apply in real life, and this creates a subversive space for moral values that were previously considered universal. Herein lies the fundamental problem: when communication takes place without clear identities, responsibility for words and actions is also reduced.

Furthermore, the weak internalization of ethical values in the digital world causes netiquette or internet ethics to become flexible, even relatively(Putri, 2025). In many cases, the ethical standards a person uses on one platform can differ when moving to another, depending on the culture of the digital community, the app's features, or even emerging trends. This makes digital ethics highly situational, and often completely disconnected from higher, universal moral values, such as honesty, empathy, or respect for others.

This moral relativism is dangerous because it allows someone to justify unethical behavior simply because it feels "common practice" in a particular digital space.(Hadi, 2019)In the long term, this can erode moral sensitivity and create a permissive character toward verbal abuse, information manipulation, and other irresponsible behavior. If left unchecked, the digital space, which should be a vehicle for empowerment and social education, will transform into a space rife with conflict, disinformation, and ethical chaos.

Therefore, it is crucial to re-examine how anonymity in digital spaces is not merely a technical issue but also involves profound ethical and moral dimensions. The need for freedom of expression must not compromise fundamental humanitarian principles. This is where Islamic moral and ethical values become relevant, elevating them as a normative foundation that can balance freedom and responsibility in anonymous digital spaces.

B. Morality and Ethics as Pillars of Awareness in a Multicultural Digital Space

Morality is truly a reflection of human inner consciousness which originates from reason and conscience.(Munir, 2024)Moral values cannot be separated from free will and the demands of conscience which guide humans to act in accordance with the values they believe to be true.(Dewantara & SS, 2017)When someone violates these values, guilt arises as a manifestation of inner morality. However, in the context of anonymous communication in digital spaces, this guilt is often dulled or even absent altogether due to the lack of social feedback or direct sanctions from the surrounding environment. When no one knows who the perpetrator is, internal control is weakened, and the individual feels free from moral responsibility.

In this context, morality should not be understood solely as external social rules, but rather as an inner consciousness rooted in the integrity of the human soul.(Lutfi, 2022)In Islam, this concept is embodied in moral teachings that emphasize that humans are always under the supervision of Allah SWT, even when no one else is watching. This belief in divine supervision should be a strong foundation for building self-control, especially in the absence of social oversight. Islamic moral values teach the importance of ihsan, which is acting as if one sees Allah, or if not, realizing that Allah sees one. This principle can be a highly relevant moral bulwark for maintaining behavior in the open yet anonymous digital world.

Furthermore, in a multicultural society like Indonesia, which has a diversity of religions, cultures and social values, ethics functions as a guardian of social balance.(Gunadi, 2017)In complex societies, religion and ethics serve not only as spiritual norms but also as mechanisms of collective moral control that help maintain social harmony. However, as society moves into the digital space, particularly under conditions of anonymity, the structure of social norms that are typically effective in the physical world becomes looser. This is where ethical values and religiosity become crucial in guiding individuals so they don't lose their moral compass.(Ardiningrum, 2025).

In a digital world filled with interactions across identities, ethnicities, religions and cultures, contextualization of ethics is a necessity.(Sri et al., 2021). Ethics cannot be understood solely within

a classical normative framework, but must be transformed into applicable behavioral guidelines for online life.(Satria et al., 2023)This means that even though someone can hide their identity on social media, values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for others must still be upheld. In the digital public space, every individual must possess moral awareness as a form of social responsibility that cannot be abdicated simply because of anonymity.(Pramesti & Dewi, 2022).

Thus, morality and ethics must be viewed as two primary pillars supporting personal integrity while maintaining social order in a digital society. Reason and conscience, as sources of moral awareness, along with religious values and social ethics as normative frameworks, need to be continuously strengthened to ensure that human behavior in the digital space remains civilized, responsible, and reflects noble human values.

C. Reflective Ethics and Morality as the Foundation of Morality in the Digital Age

In the face of moral complexity in the digital age, rigid and imperative ethical approaches that emphasize compliance with external commands or prohibitions are increasingly inadequate.(Widayanthi & Wulandari, 2025)Reflective ethics is a more relevant and adaptive alternative in the modern context. Reflective ethics encourages individuals to engage in introspection, deeply consider the consequences of their actions, and make morally responsible decisions without relying on external pressure or social oversight. This is a form of ethical maturity, where individuals act well not only out of fear of punishment but also out of genuine moral awareness.(Putri, 2025).

This approach aligns with Islamic values, which emphasize the importance of intention, awareness of divine oversight, and personal responsibility for every deed. Islam teaches that human deeds are judged not only by fellow humans, but more importantly by the All-Knowing God. In the often anonymous and unrelated digital space, this principle becomes particularly relevant. Reflective ethics provides a strong moral foundation for individuals to

continue acting ethically, even in a space without social oversight.(Abidin & Harahap, 2025).

Furthermore, morality, in the Islamic perspective, is not only part of a spiritual value system but also a highly effective instrument of self-control. Morality possesses an internal force capable of guiding human behavior even when it is outside the bounds of social or legal oversight. Unlike external laws or norms that demand compliance through sanctions, morality is innate and functions as a moral compass embedded within a person. It does not depend on the presence or absence of witnesses, but rather grows from an awareness of moral responsibility to God and others.(Alkhadafi, 2024).

In a digital world that offers the convenience of anonymity and often separates actions from immediate consequences, morality is a key bulwark for maintaining moral integrity. A person with morality will consider the impact of their actions, even if no one is watching or reprimanding them. Thus, reflective ethics and morality not only complement each other but also serve as mutually reinforcing foundations for building an ethical, responsible, and spiritually-driven digital society.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS
A. Conclusion

The phenomenon of anonymous communication in digital spaces presents new challenges to the implementation of ethical, moral, and ethical values. Based on an analysis of various scientific literature, it can be concluded that anonymity often leads to a neglect of moral responsibility due to the lack of direct social oversight. However, from the perspective of Islamic values and a reflective ethical approach, moral responsibility must still be internalized as part of human spiritual awareness and reason.

The moral values of Islam provide a solid foundation for guiding human behavior, even in the face of anonymity. The realization that every action is accountable not only to society but also to God serves as an important reminder that ethics is not merely a matter of external rules, but rather an expression of one's inner qualities.

Through a literature study approach, this paper has compiled a conceptual reflection that shows that morals, social ethics, and awareness of responsibility remain relevant and even increasingly important in the digital era full of anonymity.

B. Suggestion

Based on the discussion and conclusions presented, several important recommendations warrant attention to strengthen ethics in the digital space. Moral-based character education should be strengthened through both formal and informal channels, with an emphasis on personal responsibility in the context of often anonymous online communication. Furthermore, digital literacy should not only focus on technical aspects but also encompass ethical and moral dimensions, such as the ability to sort information, express opinions responsibly, and maintain communication integrity. Social media platforms and digital technologies are also encouraged to design systems that support the development of positive values and limit the space for anonymous hate speech. To enrich this study, further empirical research through surveys, interviews, or social media content analysis is also highly recommended. Through these steps, it is hoped that a collective awareness of moral responsibility in the digital space will grow, thereby creating a culture of healthy, polite, and ethical communication.

REFERENCE LISTAN

Abidin, Z., & Harahap, RA (2025). Academic Ethics in the Perspective of Islamic Education. MUDABBIR Journal Research and Education Studies, Vol.5(No.1), 435–440.

Alkhadafi, R. (2024). Understanding Ethics from an Islamic Philosophical Perspective. Journal of Islamic Theology Research, Vol. 4 (No. 3), 179–192.

Ardiningrum, TD (2025). Instilling the Value of Adab before Knowledge in Learning: Efforts to Form Students' Character and Ethics. Karakter: Journal of Islamic Education Research, Vol. 2 (No. 3), 44–55.

Aziz, B. (2025). Cultural Identity in the Digital Era. In Tri Edukasi Ilmiah Foundation.

Dewantara, AW, & SS, M. (2017). Moral philosophy: The ethical struggles of everyday human life. PT Kanisius.

Eko Wahyuanto, MM (2025). Digital Communication Management. CV. State Education Partners.

Gunadi, I. (2017). The Concept of Ethics According to Franz Magnis-Suseno. UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

Hadi, L. (2019). ETHICAL BUSINESS GUIDELINES AND MORAL RELATIVISM. Journal of Business Administration (JABis), 17(1), 67–74.

Hidayat, M., & Subando, J. (2024). Strategy for Instilling Character Values to Prevent Moral Degradation in Students in the Digital Era. Didaktika: Journal of Education, 13(001 Dec), 523–534.

Lutfi, R. (2022). Sufi Thoughts on Amin Syukur and Their Relevance to Social Morality. Uin Raden Intan Lampung.

Magnis-Suseno, F. (1987). Basic Ethics. Main Problems of Moral Philosophy. Publisher PT Kanisius.

Mahmudah, D. (2020). Efforts to empower ICT and protect generation Z in the digital era. Popular Semi-Scientific Journal of Mass Communication, 1(01).

Muhadjir, N. (2000). Qualitative Research Methods, Fourth Edition. Yogyakarta: Rake Sarasin.

Munir, B. (2024). Conception of Morality and Values Education in Islamic Education. IQRO: Journal of Islamic Education, 7(2), 321–335.

Pramesti, CSL, & Dewi, DK (2022). The Effect of Anonymity on Self-Disclosure in Generation Z on Twitter. Character Journal of Psychological Research, 9(5), 51–64.

Putri, AA (2025). Analysis of Digital Ethics of Pancasila and Citizenship Education Students, Jambi University Class of 2023.

Satria, C., Herawati, BC, Soraya, S., & Suhendra, E. (2023). Textbook of Professional Ethics. PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

Sinlae, F., Rosyad, FS, Nurhidayat, F., & Jannah, W. (2024). The Evolution of Web Technology and Its Impact on Digital Society. Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, 3(2), 146–154.

Sri, B., Hendar, E., & Veronika, P. (2021). Developing intercultural communication competencies based on local wisdom to build harmonious relations between ethnicities and religions. BuatBuku.com.

Widayanthi, DGC, & Wulandari, CIAS (2025). Communication Ethics: Modern

Communication Ethics in the Digital Era. Deepublish.