

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
MODERN EDUCATION  
(IJMOE)[www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe](http://www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe)CHARACTERISING MORAL HABIT FORMATION IN THE  
DIGITAL AGE: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF IBN  
MISKAWAYH'S ETHICAL FRAMEWORK  
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## Abstract:

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has significantly reshaped behavioural patterns, raising critical concerns regarding moral development in contemporary society. Within Islamic education, repetitive digital engagement, particularly through social media and algorithm-driven content, has contributed to the formation of behavioural habits that may normalise unethical conduct. Despite growing scholarly attention to digital behaviour, the integration of classical Islamic ethical frameworks remains limited. This study aims to characterise moral habit formation in the digital age through a critical review of Ibn Miskawayh's ethical theory, with particular emphasis on the concept of *malakah* (habitual disposition). Employing a qualitative conceptual inquiry through an interpretive-thematic synthesis, the study analyses classical Islamic ethical texts alongside contemporary literature on digital behaviour and moral development. The findings generated six interrelated themes: digital behaviour and moral influence; repetition and habit formation; moral psychology and behavioural imbalance; limitations of current digital ethics education; integration of Islamic ethical philosophy; and educational implications for sustainable digital civilisation. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that repetitive digital actions can become internalised as stable moral dispositions and that maintaining equilibrium among the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties is essential for moral self-regulation in digital environments. Based on this synthesis, the study

proposes a conceptual framework of digital moral habit formation that connects digital environments, algorithmic reinforcement, repetitive engagement, behavioural conditioning, *malakah* formation, the equilibrium of the soul's faculties, and subsequent ethical or unethical behaviour. The study contributes a conceptually grounded Islamic perspective that bridges Ibn Miskawayh's classical ethical philosophy with contemporary digital realities and provides a foundation for strengthening digital moral education through the intentional cultivation of ethical habits.

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**Keyword:**

Digital Behaviour; Ethical Development; Ibn Miskawayh; Islamic Education; *Malakah*; Moral Habit Formation



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## Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology has significantly transformed human communication, behaviour, emotions, and moral values in contemporary society. Digital platforms such as social media, short-form video applications, and algorithm-driven systems no longer function merely as communication tools but increasingly shape behavioural tendencies through repetitive exposure, emotional stimulation, and personalised content (Avalle et al., 2024; Jaizul & Andrian, 2026; Tollon, 2024). As digital engagement becomes deeply embedded in everyday life, concerns regarding its influence on moral behaviour and psychological well-being continue to increase globally. Reports by UNESCO have highlighted growing concerns related to cyberbullying, emotional distress, online aggression, and psychological vulnerability among adolescents (Ogugua et al., 2024). Similarly, problematic social media use among adolescents has been associated with compulsive engagement and psychological difficulties (Shannon et al., 2022). These findings suggest that digital environments may influence behavioural patterns through continuous and repetitive engagement (Kanungo et al., 2022).

Within the Malaysian context, widespread internet penetration has intensified adolescents' exposure to digital environments and their associated behavioural challenges. Internet usage reached approximately 97.4% in 2024, involving more than 33 million users (Susilo, 2024). Rapid digital immersion has also been associated with concerns involving cyberbullying, online harassment, harmful content exposure, and digital addiction among adolescents (Nasuha et al., 2026). Such issues are particularly significant during adolescence, when moral identity, emotional regulation, and behavioural dispositions are still developing. Malaysian studies have further reported concerns regarding social media addiction, psychological distress, and problematic internet use among young people (Rahim et al., 2025; Lew et al., 2026). Cyberbullying has likewise been associated with emotional distress, anxiety, and other adverse psychological outcomes among youths (Safian & Sa'ari, 2025). These developments suggest

that contemporary digital challenges extend beyond technological competence and increasingly involve moral, behavioural, and educational dimensions.

From a behavioural perspective, repetitive digital engagement is particularly significant because repeated exposure and interaction may gradually shape habits, emotional responses, and behavioural tendencies. Algorithmic systems reinforce patterns of engagement through personalised recommendations, reward mechanisms, social validation, and emotionally stimulating content. Consequently, behaviours repeatedly performed within digital environments may gradually become normalised and internalised as habitual dispositions. Existing literature has associated excessive digital engagement with impulsivity, aggression, anxiety, emotional instability, reduced self-control, and other behavioural concerns (Ojha, 2026). Digital behaviour therefore warrants examination not only from technological and psychological perspectives but also through the lens of moral development and ethical habit formation.

Despite growing scholarly attention to digital behaviour, cyberbullying, internet addiction, and digital citizenship, existing studies provide limited explanation of how repetitive digital engagement may contribute to the gradual formation of adolescents' moral habits and ethical dispositions (Kanungo et al., 2022; Safian & Sa'ari, 2025). Digital citizenship frameworks commonly emphasise online safety, technological literacy, responsible participation, and appropriate internet use, while deeper processes of character formation, moral internalisation, and spiritual self-discipline receive comparatively less attention (Boiliu et al., 2025). Consequently, existing approaches may be effective in regulating behaviour without fully explaining how ethical behaviour becomes internalised as a relatively stable disposition. Similarly, discussions of Islamic digital ethics are often centred on behavioural guidance, legal compliance, and the avoidance of prohibited conduct rather than on a systematic explanation of long-term moral habituation within digital environments (Gillani & Khan, 2025; Syarifudin et al., 2026). Although scholarship increasingly examines the relationship between Islam and technology, classical Islamic moral philosophy remains comparatively underutilised as a conceptual lens for interpreting contemporary digital behavioural conditioning and ethical habit formation (Mujiburrohman et al., 2025).

Among classical Muslim scholars, Ibn Miskawayh offers a particularly relevant ethical framework through his concept of *malakah* (habitual disposition), in which character is understood as developing through repetition, habituation, discipline, and ethical cultivation. Rather than treating morality as a temporary behavioural response, Ibn Miskawayh's ethical thought emphasises the gradual development of stable moral dispositions through repeated practice. His moral psychology further highlights the importance of equilibrium among the rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-natiqah*), appetitive faculty (*al-quwwah al-shahwaniyyah*), and irascible faculty (*al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*) in sustaining moral integrity (Naja, 2025). Imbalance among these faculties may be manifested through uncontrolled desire, excessive emotional responses, aggression, and weakened self-discipline (Onay, 2025). From an interpretive perspective, contemporary behaviours such as compulsive scrolling, online aggression, excessive self-presentation, and addictive platform engagement may therefore be examined through Ibn Miskawayh's account of habituation and moral balance (Sukisno et al., 2024).

Against this background, the present study positions Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy not merely as a classical moral discourse but as an interpretive framework for understanding moral habit formation within contemporary digital environments. In particular, the concept of *malakah* provides a conceptual lens through which repetitive digital engagement can be examined as a potential process of moral habituation whereby recurring online actions may gradually become internalised as relatively stable dispositions. Accordingly, this study aims to characterise moral habit formation in the digital age through a critical examination of Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework, particularly the concept of *malakah*, using a qualitative conceptual inquiry and interpretive-thematic synthesis.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in recontextualising Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *malakah* within algorithm-driven digital environments by establishing a conceptual relationship between repetitive digital engagement, behavioural habituation, the internalisation of moral dispositions, and the equilibrium of the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties. Rather than treating digital ethics primarily as a matter of technological competence or behavioural compliance, the study conceptualises digital engagement as a potential site of character formation in which repeated actions may contribute to either ethical or unethical dispositions. This synthesis provides the theoretical foundation for a conceptual framework of digital moral habit formation that bridges classical Islamic moral psychology with contemporary digital behavioural discourse.

Through this conceptual integration, the study contributes to Islamic education by shifting attention from the regulation of isolated online behaviours towards the intentional cultivation of enduring ethical dispositions. It argues that sustainable digital civilisation cannot rely solely on technological advancement, regulatory mechanisms, or digital literacy initiatives, but also requires the systematic cultivation of ethical habits, balanced character, and moral self-discipline through education.

## Literature Review

This literature review examines five interrelated areas concerning moral habit formation in the contemporary digital era: (1) digital technology and moral behaviour, (2) moral habit formation in digital environments, (3) Ibn Miskawayh's ethical theory and the concept of *malakah*, (4) Islamic ethics and contemporary digital education, and (5) the conceptual gap addressed by the study. Together, these areas establish a conceptual basis for understanding how repetitive digital engagement may influence moral development and how classical Islamic ethical philosophy can contribute to contemporary discussions of digital moral education.

Rather than approaching digital ethics solely from technological, regulatory, or behavioural perspectives, this review examines the relationship between repetitive digital engagement, behavioural conditioning, moral habituation, and ethical self-discipline within algorithm-driven environments. In this context, Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy provides a relevant conceptual lens for understanding how repeated actions may gradually become internalised as stable moral dispositions through habituation, moderation, and self-control (Naswa & Muthoifin, 2025; Siregar et al., 2026). The integration of classical Islamic virtue ethics with contemporary behavioural realities may therefore contribute to strengthening moral resilience and ethical consciousness within digital society (Hamed et al., 2025; Linawati et al., 2026). By connecting classical approaches to moral cultivation with contemporary digital behavioural discourse, this review moves beyond reactive regulation and foregrounds the importance of

long-term character formation within digital environments (Ghufron & Anam, 2026; Wanto, 2025).

### ***Digital Technology and Moral Behaviour***

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed human communication, behaviour, emotions, and moral values in contemporary society. Social media platforms, algorithm-driven applications, and personalised digital systems continuously influence users' behavioural tendencies through repetitive exposure and emotional stimulation (Shaikh, 2026). Adolescents may be particularly susceptible to these influences because prolonged digital engagement increases their exposure to behavioural reinforcement, social validation, and emotionally stimulating online interactions (Donadoni et al., 2025). Consequently, digital platforms no longer function merely as communication tools but increasingly constitute behavioural environments capable of shaping emotional responses, ethical awareness, and moral decision-making (Collins, 2024).

Existing studies associate excessive digital engagement with cyberbullying, internet addiction, emotional instability, impulsive behaviour, and moral desensitisation among young people (Amin et al., 2026). Repetitive exposure to online content may gradually normalise behaviours that were previously regarded as inappropriate or unethical, particularly when algorithmic systems repeatedly reinforce users' preferences through personalised recommendations, emotional stimulation, and reward mechanisms (Ádám & Bolatito, 2025; Stevie & Ammara, 2023). Within the Malaysian context, concerns regarding cyberbullying, harmful digital content, and social media addiction further demonstrate the ethical and behavioural challenges associated with adolescents' increasing engagement with digital environments (Chan & Yusuf, 2025).

These developments suggest that contemporary digital challenges cannot be understood exclusively as technological or psychological issues. They also raise questions concerning moral development, behavioural habituation, self-regulation, and the formation of character. This moral dimension becomes particularly important when digital behaviour is repeated over extended periods because recurring actions may progressively become normalised and integrated into an individual's behavioural disposition.

### ***Moral Habit Formation in the Digital Age***

Habit formation is closely associated with repetition, behavioural reinforcement, and the gradual internalisation of recurring actions. Contemporary behavioural studies indicate that continuous exposure to particular environments, emotional stimuli, and repeated interactions can progressively shape behavioural tendencies that eventually become habitual (Benkó, 2024). Within digital environments, users are repeatedly exposed to algorithmically curated content, emotional reactions, social validation mechanisms, and personalised recommendations that may influence attitudes, emotional responses, and decision-making patterns (Nazir, 2025). As repeated online engagement becomes embedded in everyday routines, behaviours performed consistently within digital spaces may gradually develop into relatively stable behavioural dispositions.

Studies have further associated excessive social media engagement with aggression, anxiety, impulsivity, reduced self-control, and declining ethical sensitivity among adolescents (Kanungo et al., 2022). From the perspective of moral development, repeated engagement with harmful or unethical digital practices may weaken moral awareness and contribute to the normalisation of problematic behaviour (Dennis, 2021). The significance of digital behaviour therefore extends beyond isolated online actions to the cumulative effects of repeated behavioural patterns over time.

Contemporary Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) provides an important response to these challenges by promoting responsible participation, digital literacy, online safety, appropriate conduct, and awareness of rights and responsibilities within digital environments. Such approaches are essential for enabling young people to participate safely and responsibly in digital society. Nevertheless, when digital ethics education is predominantly organised around competencies, behavioural expectations, safety procedures, and rules of appropriate conduct, it may provide comparatively less explanation of how ethical behaviour becomes internalised as an enduring moral disposition.

Virtue-based educational approaches provide a complementary perspective by shifting attention from the question of what individuals should do online towards what kind of person should guide those actions. Harrison and Polizzi (2022), for example, examined adolescents' moral decision-making in situations involving online incivility through deontological, utilitarian, and virtue-ethical perspectives. Their analysis demonstrated the significance of virtue-based moral reasoning and supported greater integration of character and virtue education within digital citizenship education. From this perspective, ethical digital participation involves not only understanding rules and consequences but also cultivating moral qualities capable of guiding judgement across changing and unpredictable digital situations.

The distinction between regulatory and virtue-oriented approaches is particularly relevant to moral habit formation. Whereas competency- and rule-oriented approaches primarily establish expectations for responsible conduct, virtue-based education emphasises the formation of the moral agent. Ethical behaviour is therefore understood not merely as compliance with external rules but as conduct arising from internalised character and practical moral judgement.

This orientation closely resonates with Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *malakah*, according to which repeated actions can gradually become internalised as stable moral dispositions. Moral habit formation consequently provides a conceptual bridge between contemporary virtue-oriented digital education and classical Islamic moral psychology. It enables repetitive digital behaviour to be examined not merely in terms of individual actions but as a potential process through which ethical or unethical dispositions may develop over time.

### **Ibn Miskawayh's Ethical Theory and the Concept of Malakah**

Among classical Muslim scholars, Ibn Miskawayh developed an influential ethical account of moral character formation. His ethical philosophy emphasises *malakah*, understood as a relatively stable disposition developed through repetition, habituation, discipline, and continuous ethical practice (Farida & Makbul, 2023). Moral character, from this perspective, is not formed instantaneously but develops progressively as repeated actions become

internalised within the individual (Mappaenre et al., 2023). Morality therefore extends beyond temporary behavioural compliance towards the continuous cultivation of character.

This understanding is particularly relevant to digital environments because digital behaviour is inherently repetitive. Actions such as scrolling, posting, commenting, sharing, responding emotionally, seeking social validation, and consuming algorithmically recommended content may be performed repeatedly and routinely. Viewed through the concept of *malakah*, the ethical significance of these behaviours lies not only in whether an individual action is right or wrong but also in how repeated patterns may contribute to the development of relatively stable behavioural and moral dispositions.

Ibn Miskawayh's moral psychology further emphasises equilibrium among three faculties of the soul: the rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-natiqah*), appetitive faculty (*al-quwwah al-shahwaniyyah*), and irascible faculty (*al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*) (Ridwan & Aisyah, 2022). Moral integrity requires these faculties to operate in an appropriate relationship, with rational judgement regulating appetitive desires and emotional impulses. Imbalance may contribute to uncontrolled desires, emotional instability, aggression, and unethical conduct (Xenophontos, 2023).

This framework provides an interpretive lens for examining contemporary digital behaviours. Compulsive scrolling and excessive pursuit of online gratification, for example, may be interpreted in relation to appetitive impulses, whereas online aggression and uncontrolled emotional reactions may be considered in relation to the irascible faculty. Rational judgement, by contrast, represents the capacity to regulate these tendencies through reflection, moderation, and ethical discernment. Contemporary behaviours such as compulsive scrolling, online aggression, emotional overreaction, and addictive digital engagement may therefore be examined through the forms of moral imbalance described within Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy (Shodiqoh, 2024).

However, this conceptual application should not be interpreted as suggesting that Ibn Miskawayh anticipated digital technologies or algorithmic systems. Rather, his ethical philosophy provides a classical moral-psychological framework through which contemporary behavioural patterns can be interpreted. The theoretical relevance of *malakah* lies in its explanation of how repetition, habituation, self-regulation, and balance contribute to character formation. These principles provide a conceptual basis for analysing how repetitive behaviour within contemporary digital environments may contribute to the gradual development of ethical or unethical dispositions.

### ***Islamic Ethics and Contemporary Digital Education***

Contemporary discussions of digital ethics and digital citizenship commonly emphasise online safety, technological literacy, responsible internet use, privacy, appropriate communication, and responsible participation (Nasir & Sunardi, 2025). These dimensions remain indispensable because young people require knowledge and competencies to navigate increasingly complex digital environments safely and responsibly. Nevertheless, competence in digital safety and responsible participation does not necessarily explain how responsible behaviour becomes internalised as enduring moral character.

Digital Citizenship Education represents one contemporary framework through which these concerns are addressed. It promotes knowledge, competencies, participation, and responsible conduct required for engagement in digital society. From an educational perspective, this provides an important foundation because students need to recognise risks, understand their responsibilities, evaluate information, communicate appropriately, and participate responsibly online. Its primary contribution therefore lies in equipping learners to function responsibly within digital environments.

Virtue-based education approaches the same problem from a different but complementary direction. Rather than beginning primarily with digital competencies or behavioural expectations, virtue ethics focuses on character and asks which enduring moral qualities enable individuals to make sound judgements across different circumstances. Harrison and Polizzi (2022) demonstrate the relevance of this perspective to digital citizenship by examining adolescents' moral responses to online incivility through different moral theories. Their work indicates that digital citizenship education can be strengthened when moral character and virtue are incorporated alongside competencies, rules, and responsible participation.

The comparison is therefore not between an entirely non-moral contemporary framework and a moral Islamic framework. Rather, contemporary digital citizenship education provides important competencies and norms for responsible digital participation, while virtue-oriented approaches deepen this orientation by focusing on the moral character of the digital citizen. This distinction is important because contemporary scholarship itself increasingly recognises the need to move digital citizenship education beyond technical competence towards moral and character education.

Within Islamic educational discourse, discussions of digital ethics may nevertheless remain fragmented or reactive when they focus primarily on behavioural prohibitions, legal compliance, and the avoidance of online misconduct rather than on systematic moral habituation and long-term character formation (Zahraini et al., 2025). Despite increasing scholarly attention to Islamic ethics and technology, the contribution of classical Islamic moral psychology to understanding the process through which digital behaviour becomes internalised remains comparatively underexplored (Nasir & Sunardi, 2025).

Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy contributes to this discussion through the concept of *malakah*. Whereas digital citizenship education establishes important competencies and expectations for responsible participation, and virtue-based approaches emphasise the development of good character, *malakah* provides a conceptual explanation of how repeated ethical practice may progressively become internalised as a stable disposition. His ethical framework further connects habituation with self-regulation and the equilibrium of the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties.

Accordingly, Ibn Miskawayh's framework should not be positioned as a replacement for contemporary Digital Citizenship Education or virtue-based approaches. Rather, it offers a complementary Islamic moral-psychological perspective that may deepen understanding of the internal process of character formation. The integration of digital competence, virtue cultivation, moral habituation, and self-regulation may therefore provide a more holistic foundation for digital moral education within Islamic educational contexts.

## Conceptual Gap of the Study

Existing literature demonstrates that digital technology increasingly influences adolescents' behaviour, emotions, social interactions, and moral experiences. Previous studies have extensively addressed cyberbullying, internet addiction, emotional instability, problematic social media use, and the psychological consequences of excessive digital engagement (Liebherr et al., 2025). Digital citizenship frameworks have likewise made significant contributions by promoting digital literacy, responsible participation, online safety, and appropriate digital behaviour. More recent virtue-oriented approaches have further strengthened this discourse by emphasising moral reasoning, character, and the virtues required for ethical participation in digital environments.

Nevertheless, an important conceptual gap remains. Existing approaches provide comparatively limited explanation of the process through which repetitive digital actions may become internalised as relatively stable moral dispositions. Digital citizenship education explains important competencies and norms for responsible participation, while virtue-based education clarifies the importance of good character and moral judgement. What remains less developed is an account of how repeated engagement within algorithmically structured digital environments may progressively contribute to the habituation and internalisation of ethical or unethical behaviour.

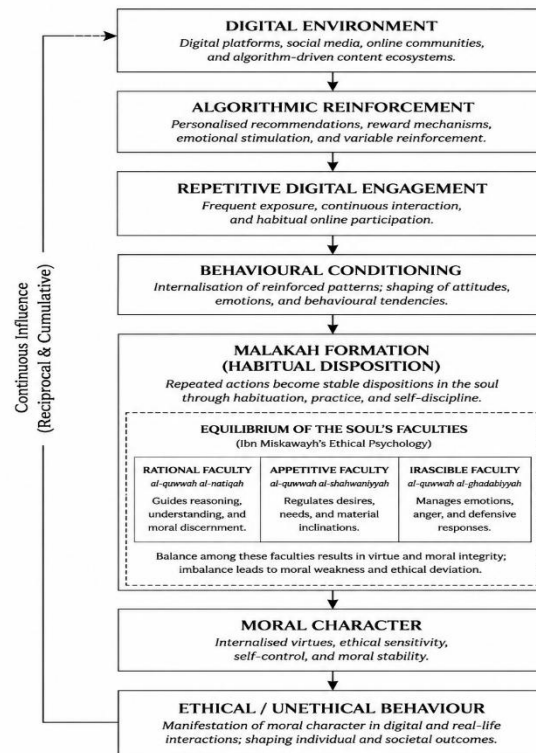
A second gap concerns the limited integration of classical Islamic moral psychology into contemporary digital behavioural discourse. Although several studies have explored Islamic ethics within technological contexts, comparatively limited scholarly attention has been given to Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *malakah* as a conceptual framework for understanding repetitive digital behavioural conditioning and moral habit formation (Adiyono et al., 2024). This represents an important theoretical opportunity because *malakah* provides an account of character formation centred on repetition, habituation, self-regulation, and the progressive internalisation of behaviour.

The present study therefore addresses this gap by conceptualising repetitive digital engagement as a potential process of moral habituation through the lens of Ibn Miskawayh's *malakah*. Rather than examining digital behaviour exclusively in terms of technological literacy, behavioural regulation, or isolated ethical decisions, the study investigates how recurring digital practices may contribute to the formation of relatively stable moral dispositions. It further interprets these processes through Ibn Miskawayh's account of equilibrium among the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties.

The theoretical contribution of this study consequently lies in connecting three conceptual dimensions that have not been sufficiently integrated in existing literature: the repetitive and reinforcing characteristics of contemporary digital environments, the virtue-oriented concern with character formation, and Ibn Miskawayh's account of moral habituation through *malakah*. Through this synthesis, the study develops a conceptual basis for understanding digital moral habit formation as a process involving repeated engagement, behavioural conditioning, internalisation, self-regulation, and character development.

Accordingly, this study seeks to bridge classical Islamic ethical philosophy and contemporary digital behavioural discourse by critically examining moral habit formation through Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework (Muslim, 2024). Its contribution extends beyond identifying

problematic digital behaviours by providing a conceptual explanation of how repeated digital practices may become morally significant over time. In doing so, the study contributes towards a more holistic understanding of digital moral education that integrates responsible digital participation with virtue cultivation, ethical habituation, balanced character development, and moral self-discipline.



**Diagram 1: A Classical Islamic Ethical Philosophy And Contemporary Digital Behavioural Discourse By Critically Examining Moral Habit Formation Through Ibn Miskawayh's Ethical Framework**

## Methodology

This study was designed as a conceptual paper employing a qualitative library-based approach supported by interpretive thematic synthesis to examine moral habit formation in the digital age through Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy, particularly the concept of *malakah* (habitual disposition). Rather than seeking to measure the prevalence of digital behavioural problems or quantify relationships between variables, the study was interpretive and conceptual in orientation. Its primary purpose was to synthesise classical Islamic ethical concepts with contemporary scholarship on digital behaviour in order to develop a conceptual understanding of how repetitive digital engagement may contribute to moral habituation within algorithm-driven environments.

Thematic synthesis was employed as the principal analytical strategy because it enables concepts and findings across a body of literature to be organised into descriptive patterns and subsequently developed into higher-order analytical interpretations. Thomas and Harden (2008) describe thematic synthesis as involving the coding of relevant textual material, the development of descriptive themes, and the generation of analytical themes that extend beyond

individual studies to produce broader interpretations. This approach was therefore appropriate for the present study because the objective was not merely to summarise previous scholarship but to identify and interpret conceptual relationships between repetitive digital engagement, behavioural conditioning, *malakah*, moral self-regulation, and character formation.

### **Rationale for the Methodological Approach**

A qualitative library-based approach was selected because the study addresses a philosophical and conceptual research problem requiring interpretation, comparison, and theoretical integration. The study seeks specifically to examine the contemporary relevance of Ibn Miskawayh's ethical thought and to establish conceptual connections between his account of moral habituation and current patterns of digital behaviour. Such an objective requires close engagement with both classical ethical concepts and contemporary scholarly discourse rather than statistical aggregation of empirical findings.

This approach was considered more appropriate than other forms of literature review for the specific objective of the study. A conventional narrative review can provide a broad description of existing scholarship but may offer a less explicit analytical procedure for demonstrating how recurring concepts are identified, compared, and synthesised. A systematic review, by contrast, is particularly suitable when the objective requires comprehensive and reproducible identification of evidence addressing a narrowly defined question, while meta-analysis is appropriate when sufficiently comparable quantitative findings are available for statistical aggregation. Neither approach corresponds directly to the present objective, which is to critically recontextualise a classical Islamic ethical framework within contemporary digital behavioural discourse.

Accordingly, a qualitative library-based approach supported by interpretive thematic synthesis was considered suitable because it permits close philosophical interpretation while providing a structured analytical process for identifying recurring patterns and developing conceptual relationships across heterogeneous sources. This combination enables the study to preserve the philosophical meaning of Ibn Miskawayh's *malakah* and moral psychology while systematically examining their relevance to repetitive digital engagement, behavioural reinforcement, moral internalisation, self-regulation, and character formation.

### **Sources and Selection Criteria**

The conceptual corpus consisted of two categories of literature. The first category comprised classical and scholarly sources concerning Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy, particularly *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, *malakah*, moral habituation, ethical self-discipline, character formation, and the equilibrium of the faculties of the soul. These sources provided the philosophical foundation for interpreting moral habit formation from Ibn Miskawayh's ethical perspective.

The second category consisted of contemporary scholarly literature published primarily between 2021 and 2026 concerning digital ethics, digital behaviour, and adolescent moral development. Contemporary sources were purposively selected when they addressed at least one of the following areas: (1) repetitive digital engagement or behavioural reinforcement; (2) social media or algorithmic influence on behaviour; (3) digital addiction or compulsive digital engagement; (4) cyberbullying or online aggression; (5) emotional regulation, moral

desensitisation, or self-control; (6) digital citizenship or digital ethics education; and (7) moral or character development within digital environments.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed scholarly publications that provided theoretical, conceptual, or empirical insights directly relevant to the relationship between digital behavioural patterns and moral habit formation. Sources were excluded when they focused exclusively on technical aspects of digital technologies without substantive relevance to human behaviour, ethics, moral development, character formation, or education. Publications in which digital technology was only incidentally mentioned without contributing conceptually to the study objective were also excluded.

Because this study was designed as a conceptual paper rather than a systematic review, source selection was guided primarily by conceptual relevance and analytical contribution rather than exhaustive coverage of all publications within the specified period. The contemporary literature was therefore used to establish recurring patterns of digital behavioural reinforcement and ethical challenges that could subsequently be interpreted in relation to Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy.

Contemporary scholarly sources that met the predefined inclusion criteria were purposively selected and retained for the final thematic synthesis based on their conceptual relevance to digital behaviour, moral habit formation, and adolescent moral development.

### Analytical Procedure

The selected literature was analysed through an interpretive thematic synthesis informed by the analytical principles outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008). The process involved four interrelated stages designed to move systematically from recurring concepts in the literature towards higher-order conceptual interpretation.

In the first stage, relevant textual material from classical and contemporary sources was examined to identify recurring ethical and behavioural concepts. Particular attention was given to repetition, habituation, behavioural reinforcement, emotional responses, self-control, moral sensitivity, ethical formation, and character development. Classical sources were examined concurrently for concepts related to *malakah*, moral habituation, self-discipline, and the regulation of the faculties of the soul.

In the second stage, recurring concepts were organised into descriptive categories representing patterns across the reviewed literature. These categories included the moral influence of digital environments, repetitive behavioural engagement, algorithmic and social reinforcement, internalisation of behavioural patterns, emotional and behavioural imbalance, moral self-regulation, and limitations within existing approaches to digital ethics education. This stage enabled conceptually related findings from heterogeneous sources to be grouped without assuming that all studies employed identical theoretical perspectives or methodologies.

In the third stage, conceptual mapping was undertaken between the descriptive categories derived from contemporary digital literature and the principal components of Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework. Repetitive digital behaviour and behavioural reinforcement were examined in relation to *malakah*, while patterns involving desire, emotional reactivity, and rational self-control were interpreted through Ibn Miskawayh's account of the rational (*al-quwwah al-*

*natiqah*), appetitive (*al-quwwah al-shahwaniyyah*), and irascible (*al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*) faculties. This stage did not assume direct equivalence between classical ethical concepts and contemporary digital phenomena. Rather, Ibn Miskawayh's concepts were employed as interpretive lenses through which recurring behavioural patterns could be conceptually examined.

In the fourth stage, the descriptive categories and conceptual mappings were synthesised into higher-order analytical themes. A theme was retained when it fulfilled three conditions: it appeared recurrently across relevant literature, was directly related to the objective of explaining moral habit formation in digital environments and could be meaningfully interpreted through Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework. Through this process, six interrelated themes were generated: Digital Behaviour and Moral Influence; Repetition and Habit Formation; Moral Psychology and Behavioural Imbalance; Limitations of Current Digital Ethics Education; Integration of Islamic Ethical Philosophy; and Educational Implications for Sustainable Digital Civilisation.

These themes formed the analytical foundation for the subsequent conceptual framework of digital moral habit formation. The analytical process therefore moved from source-level concepts to descriptive categories, followed by conceptual mapping and higher-order thematic interpretation. This progression enabled the study to move beyond descriptive literature review towards a theoretically informed synthesis of classical Islamic virtue ethics and contemporary digital behavioural discourse.

### **Derivation and Interpretation of the Themes**

The themes reported in this study were derived from recurring conceptual patterns identified during the thematic synthesis rather than from predetermined assumptions regarding digital behaviour or Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy. For example, the theme Digital Behaviour and Moral Influence emerged from literature repeatedly describing the influence of digital platforms, algorithmic systems, social interaction, and emotionally stimulating content on attitudes and behavioural tendencies. The theme Repetition and Habit Formation was developed from recurring discussions of repeated exposure, behavioural reinforcement, habitual engagement, and the progressive normalisation of online behaviour.

Similarly, Moral Psychology and Behavioural Imbalance emerged when recurring patterns involving impulsivity, emotional reactivity, excessive desire, aggression, and reduced self-control were conceptually mapped against Ibn Miskawayh's account of equilibrium among the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties. The theme Integration of Islamic Ethical Philosophy arose from the limited but recurring literature connecting classical Islamic moral thought with contemporary digital ethical challenges.

The theme Limitations of Current Digital Ethics Education was derived through a comparative reading of literature concerning digital citizenship, digital literacy, digital ethics, and moral education. Across the reviewed literature, contemporary approaches frequently emphasised online safety, responsible internet use, technological competence, appropriate participation, rights and responsibilities, and behavioural regulation. In comparison, fewer sources explicitly addressed how repeated ethical practices become internalised as stable moral dispositions or how moral habituation, spiritual self-discipline, and character formation sustain ethical behaviour over time.

The identification of this theme therefore does not imply that existing digital citizenship or digital ethics frameworks lack ethical value. Rather, the thematic synthesis indicates a difference in analytical emphasis: existing approaches provide important guidance concerning responsible digital participation, whereas the present study focuses specifically on the deeper process through which repeated behaviour may become internalised as moral character. When interpreted through Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *malakah*, this distinction reveals an opportunity to complement digital competence and behavioural guidance with moral habituation, self-regulation, and sustained character formation.

Finally, Educational Implications for Sustainable Digital Civilisation emerged through the integration of themes concerning habituation, moral self-regulation, character development, and limitations in predominantly regulatory approaches to digital behaviour. Rather than being treated as an independent normative assumption, this theme represents the higher-order interpretation generated from the preceding thematic relationships. Collectively, the six themes provide the conceptual pathway through which the study explains how repetitive engagement within digital environments may become morally significant over time.

### Interpretive Orientation

The study adopted an interpretive philosophical orientation in recontextualising Ibn Miskawayh's ethical theory within contemporary digital environments. This approach does not suggest that Ibn Miskawayh anticipated social media, algorithms, digital platforms, or contemporary technological systems. Instead, concepts derived from his moral psychology were employed as interpretive lenses through which contemporary patterns of repetition, habituation, desire, emotional reactivity, rational regulation, and character formation could be examined.

Within this interpretation, *malakah* provides a conceptual basis for understanding how repeated actions may progressively become habitual dispositions. Similarly, the equilibrium among the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties provides a moral-psychological lens for interpreting self-regulation, desire, emotional responses, and moral judgement within contemporary digital engagement. The relationship proposed between these concepts and digital behaviour should therefore be understood as a conceptual and interpretive relationship rather than an empirically established causal relationship.

This methodological orientation allows classical Islamic ethical philosophy to engage contemporary digital behavioural discourse while preserving the historical and philosophical integrity of Ibn Miskawayh's framework. It also enables the study to generate a conceptual framework explaining the potential progression from repetitive digital engagement and behavioural conditioning towards habitual disposition, moral character, and subsequent ethical or unethical behaviour.

### Methodological Scope and Limitations

As a conceptual, qualitative library-based study, the findings should be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of the research design. The thematic synthesis identifies conceptual relationships across classical ethical thought and contemporary digital scholarship; it does not empirically demonstrate that repetitive digital engagement directly causes the formation of *malakah* or particular moral dispositions among adolescents. The proposed relationships

therefore represent theoretically derived interpretations requiring further empirical investigation.

Furthermore, because the contemporary literature was purposively selected according to conceptual relevance rather than through an exhaustive systematic-review protocol, the synthesis should not be interpreted as representing all scholarship on digital behaviour or digital ethics. Its contribution instead lies in developing a theoretically coherent interpretation of recurring patterns relevant to the research objective.

Future empirical research may test and refine the proposed conceptual relationships through qualitative studies involving adolescents and educators, quantitative examination of digital habits and moral dispositions, or educational interventions designed to cultivate ethical digital habits. Such research would enable the conceptual propositions developed in this study to be evaluated within actual educational and digital contexts.

### **Critical Thematic Synthesis**

The findings of this study reveal that repetitive digital engagement significantly influences the formation of moral behaviour among adolescents in contemporary society. The thematic analysis demonstrates that digital platforms, particularly social media and algorithm-driven applications, continuously shape behavioural tendencies through repetitive exposure, emotional stimulation, and personalised content reinforcement. Such environments contribute to the gradual normalisation of behaviours that may initially be perceived as unethical, including online aggression, impulsive reactions, excessive self-exposure, and compulsive digital dependency. This indicates that digital environments function not only as communication platforms but also as behavioural ecosystems capable of influencing moral consciousness and ethical orientation. The findings further indicate that the concept of repetition plays a central role in moral habit formation. Contemporary digital behaviour reflects a pattern where repeated online actions gradually become internalised as habitual practices (Pérez-Verdugo & Barandiaran, 2023). Continuous exposure to algorithmic content, social validation mechanisms, and emotional interactions encourages users to repeatedly engage in similar behavioural patterns (Pérez-Verdugo & Barandiaran, 2023). Over time, these repeated actions contribute to the formation of stable behavioural dispositions that shape an individual's moral character and worldview. This finding aligns closely with the ethical theory of Ibn Miskawayh, particularly his concept of *malakah*, which explains that moral character develops progressively through repetition, discipline, and habituation (Surbakti et al., 2024). In addition, the study found that Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework remains highly relevant in understanding contemporary digital behavioural realities. His emphasis on the cultivation of ethical habits through continuous practice corresponds strongly with the repetitive nature of digital engagement in modern society (Shodiqoh, 2024). The analysis reveals that behaviours reinforced repeatedly within digital environments gradually influence emotional responses, ethical sensitivity, and self-control. Consequently, moral behaviour within digital spaces cannot be understood as isolated actions, but rather as cumulative outcomes of repetitive behavioural conditioning. Another important finding concerns the imbalance of the soul's faculties as discussed by Ibn Miskawayh. The study identified that many contemporary digital behavioural issues, including compulsive scrolling, emotional overreaction, digital narcissism, cyber aggression, and addictive online engagement, reflect an imbalance between the rational (*al-quwwah al-natiqah*), appetitive (*al-quwwah al-shahwaniyyah*), and irascible (*al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*) faculties of the soul. Excessive exposure to emotionally stimulating digital

content weakens rational control and strengthens impulsive desires, resulting in reduced moral self-discipline and ethical awareness (Shanmugasundaram & Tamilarasu, 2023). This finding demonstrates that contemporary digital ethical problems are not solely technological issues, but deeply connected to moral psychology and character formation. The findings also reveal that current educational approaches toward digital ethics remain largely insufficient in addressing the deeper processes of moral habit formation. Existing digital citizenship and digital literacy frameworks mainly focus on online safety, technical skills, and responsible internet usage, while paying limited attention to ethical cultivation and spiritual self-discipline (Reijers, 2023). Within Islamic educational contexts, discussions surrounding digital ethics are often instructional and fragmented, focusing more on behavioural prohibitions rather than the systematic development of moral habits capable of sustaining ethical behaviour within digital environments.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights a significant conceptual gap within existing scholarship. Although discussions on digital behaviour, cyberbullying, internet addiction, and social media influence continue to expand, limited studies integrate classical Islamic ethical philosophy into contemporary digital behavioural discourse. The ethical contributions of Ibn Miskawayh, particularly the concept of *malakah*, remain underexplored despite their strong relevance to understanding repetitive behavioural conditioning within digital environments. This gap demonstrates the need for a more holistic framework that integrates moral, spiritual, emotional, and behavioural dimensions in addressing digital ethical challenges among adolescents (Liebherr et al., 2025). To address this, educators must shift from purely technical interventions toward a model of Islamic digital literacy that emphasizes moral resilience and the intentional cultivation of virtue-based emotional regulation (Putra et al., 2025). Overall, this study contributes a conceptual synthesis that bridges classical Islamic ethics and contemporary digital realities. The findings suggest that sustainable digital civilisation cannot rely solely on technological regulation, legal enforcement, or digital literacy initiatives. Instead, long-term ethical sustainability depends on the intentional cultivation of moral habits, ethical self-discipline, and balanced character development through education. By integrating Ibn Miskawayh’s ethical philosophy with contemporary digital behavioural analysis, this study offers a meaningful conceptual foundation for strengthening digital moral education and promoting ethical consciousness among youth in the digital era.

**Table 2: Thematic Synthesis of Findings on Moral Habit Formation in the Digital Age Based on Ibn Miskawayh’s Ethical Theory**

| Themes                                | Main Findings                                                                                                                                                               | Ibn Miskawayh’s Ethical Perspective                                         | Contribution to Study Objective                                                               |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Digital Behaviour and Moral Influence | Digital platforms and social media significantly influence adolescents’ emotions, attitudes, and moral behaviour through repetitive exposure and algorithmic reinforcement. | Repeated actions gradually shape moral character and ethical consciousness. | Explains how digital engagement contributes to moral habit formation in contemporary society. |

| Themes                                                               | Main Findings                                                                                                                                   | Ibn Miskawayh's Ethical Perspective                                                                                                                                                                        | Contribution to Study Objective                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Repetition and Habit Formation</b>                                | Repetitive online behaviour becomes internalised and develops into stable behavioural habits.                                                   | The concept of <i>malakah</i> emphasises that moral character is formed through repetition, discipline, and habituation.                                                                                   | Characterises the process of moral habit formation in the digital age.                     |
| <b>Moral Psychology and Behavioural Imbalance</b>                    | Digital addiction, cyber aggression, impulsive reactions, and emotional instability weaken ethical self-control.                                | Imbalance between the rational ( <i>al-quwwah al-natiqah</i> ), appetitive ( <i>al-quwwah al-shahwaniyyah</i> ), and irascible ( <i>al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah</i> ) faculties leads to unethical behaviour. | Explains contemporary digital ethical issues through Islamic moral psychology.             |
| <b>Limitations of Current Digital Ethics Education</b>               | Existing digital ethics approaches focus mainly on technological literacy, online safety, and behavioural regulation.                           | Ethical cultivation and spiritual self-discipline are essential for sustainable moral development.                                                                                                         | Highlights the limitations of current digital citizenship and digital literacy frameworks. |
| <b>Integration of Islamic Ethical Philosophy</b>                     | Classical Islamic ethical perspectives remain underexplored in digital behavioural studies.                                                     | Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework offers a holistic approach toward moral and character development.                                                                                                       | Bridges the gap between Islamic ethics and contemporary digital behavioural discourse.     |
| <b>Educational Implications for Sustainable Digital Civilisation</b> | Ethical digital behaviour requires moral self-discipline, balanced character development, and continuous ethical cultivation through education. | Sustainable moral integrity depends on the continuous cultivation of ethical habits ( <i>malakah</i> ).                                                                                                    | Supports the development of holistic digital moral education for adolescents.              |

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that repetitive digital engagement significantly influences moral behaviour and character formation among adolescents. Contemporary digital environments continuously expose users to personalised content, emotional stimulation, and

repetitive interactions that gradually shape behavioural tendencies and ethical awareness. This situation supports previous studies which argue that digital platforms no longer function solely as communication tools but also act as behavioural ecosystems capable of influencing emotions, attitudes, and moral decision-making.

The study further confirms that repeated online behaviour contributes directly to the formation of moral habits. Through continuous exposure and behavioural reinforcement, actions performed repeatedly within digital spaces eventually become normalised and internalised as stable dispositions. This finding strongly aligns with Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *malakah*, which explains that moral character develops progressively through repetition, discipline, and habituation. In the context of the digital age, repeated engagement with harmful online content, impulsive reactions, and excessive social media usage may gradually weaken moral sensitivity and ethical self-control.

Another important discussion highlighted in this study concerns the imbalance of the soul's faculties. Ibn Miskawayh emphasised the importance of maintaining balance between the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties in preserving moral integrity. However, contemporary digital behaviour often reflects an imbalance among these faculties. Excessive exposure to emotionally stimulating content strengthens impulsive desires and emotional reactions while weakening rational judgment and self-discipline. Consequently, issues such as cyber aggression, compulsive scrolling, online addiction, and emotional instability increasingly emerge among adolescents within digital environments.

The findings also indicate that existing digital ethics and digital citizenship approaches remain insufficient in addressing the deeper moral dimensions of digital behaviour. Most contemporary educational frameworks focus mainly on online safety, technological literacy, and responsible internet usage. While these elements are important, they provide limited emphasis on ethical cultivation, spiritual development, and long-term moral self-discipline. Within Islamic educational discourse specifically, discussions on digital ethics are often fragmented and centred on behavioural prohibitions rather than sustainable moral habit formation.

This study therefore highlights the importance of integrating classical Islamic ethical philosophy into contemporary digital moral education. Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework offers a holistic understanding of moral development by combining intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and behavioural dimensions of human character. The concept of *malakah* provides a meaningful foundation for understanding how moral habits are formed and how ethical self-discipline can be strengthened within digital environments. Such integration is particularly important in addressing contemporary digital challenges faced by adolescents, whose moral identity continues to develop through constant online engagement.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that sustainable digital civilisation cannot rely solely on technological regulations or digital literacy initiatives. Instead, ethical sustainability depends greatly on the intentional cultivation of moral habits, balanced character development, and spiritual self-discipline through education. By reconnecting classical Islamic ethics with contemporary digital realities, this study contributes towards strengthening digital moral education and promoting ethical consciousness among youth in the modern digital era.

The findings of this study show that digital ethical issues among adolescents cannot be solved through online safety awareness alone. More attention should be given to building good digital habits, self-control, and moral discipline through continuous education and guidance. From Ibn Miskawayh's perspective, good character is formed through repeated positive actions and balanced behaviour. Therefore, parents, teachers, and schools should help adolescents practise healthy digital habits, control their emotions online, and use digital platforms responsibly. In this way, digital ethics education can help strengthen moral character and encourage more ethical behaviour in everyday digital life.

### **Toward an Islamic Framework of Digital Moral Habit Formation**

Contemporary digital environments significantly shape adolescent behaviour through repetitive exposure, algorithmic reinforcement, emotional stimulation, and instant gratification. Excessive engagement with social media and digital platforms gradually influences moral consciousness, emotional regulation, and ethical behaviour, leading to issues such as cyber aggression, impulsive behaviour, digital addiction, and moral desensitisation. Despite growing concerns regarding digital ethics, most existing frameworks focus mainly on technological literacy, online safety, and behavioural regulation while neglecting deeper processes of moral habituation and spiritual self-discipline. Therefore, this study proposes an Islamic framework of digital moral habit formation grounded in Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *malakah* (habitual disposition). According to Ibn Miskawayh, repeated actions gradually become internalised and form stable moral character through continuous habituation and ethical practice. The framework further emphasises the balance between the rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-natiqah*), appetitive faculty (*al-quwwah al-shahwaniyyah*), and irascible faculty (*al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*) in preserving moral integrity. Contemporary digital environments often stimulate excessive desires and emotional reactions while weakening rational judgement and ethical self-control, resulting in moral imbalance among adolescents. Accordingly, this study argues that sustainable digital civilisation cannot rely solely on technological regulation or digital literacy initiatives. Instead, ethical sustainability depends upon the intentional cultivation of virtuous habits, spiritual consciousness, emotional regulation, and balanced character development through education. By integrating Ibn Miskawayh's ethical philosophy with contemporary digital realities, this framework contributes a holistic approach toward strengthening digital moral education and ethical consciousness among adolescents in the digital age.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study highlights that repetitive digital engagement significantly influences moral behaviour and character formation among adolescents in the contemporary digital era. Digital platforms and algorithm-driven environments continuously shape behavioural tendencies through repetitive exposure, emotional stimulation, and habitual interaction. As a result, online behaviours gradually become internalised and contribute to the formation of stable moral dispositions (RICHARDS, 2024). By synthesizing these habitual processes with the ethical framework of Ibn Miskawayh, educators can move beyond simple digital literacy to foster core virtues like *adab* and *ihsan*, which are essential for navigating complex online ethical dilemmas (Ahmad et al., 2025; Hermawan et al., 2023). The findings demonstrate that Ibn Miskawayh's ethical theory, particularly the concept of *malakah*, remains highly relevant in explaining how moral habits are developed through repetition, discipline, and continuous practice (Elmahjub, 2023). The study also emphasises the importance of maintaining balance between the rational, appetitive, and irascible faculties of the soul in preserving moral integrity

and ethical self-discipline within digital environments. Furthermore, this study identifies that current digital ethics, and digital citizenship approaches remain limited because they mainly focus on technological literacy, online safety, and behavioural regulations while giving insufficient attention to spiritual development, moral cultivation, and ethical habit formation. Therefore, the integration of classical Islamic ethical philosophy into contemporary digital moral education is essential in addressing current digital ethical challenges among adolescents.

Overall, this study contributes toward bridging the gap between classical Islamic ethics and contemporary digital behavioural discourse. The study argues that sustainable digital civilisation cannot rely solely on technological advancement or regulatory frameworks but fundamentally depends on the intentional cultivation of ethical habits, balanced character development, and moral self-discipline through education (Zhai et al., 2024). By integrating Ibn Miskawayh's ethical framework with contemporary digital realities, this study offers a meaningful conceptual foundation for strengthening digital moral education and promoting ethical consciousness among youth in the digital age. Future research should focus on operationalizing these classical concepts into practical, digital-based pedagogies that prioritize spiritual self-regulation and moral vigilance, such as *muraqabah* and *muhasabah*, to counter the atomizing effects of modern algorithmic consumption (Hairani & Conermann, 2025; Ramadhan et al., 2026). Thus, this research establishes a critical paradigm for evolving digital citizenship education from mere technical proficiency toward the systemic internalisation of virtue ethics (Harrison & Polizzi, 2021; Pranoto & Haryanto, 2024).

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