

Sacrificed Privacy: Criticism of Child Exploitation on Social Media from the Perspective of *Maqasid al-Syariah*

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Abstract: The phenomenon of children being used as content on social media solely to pursue viewers has generated serious problems, as it neglects their fundamental rights. Based on this concern, this study aims to explain why children should not be exploited as content merely for social media viewers and to analyse it through the perspective of *maqasid al-Syariah*. The research employs a qualitative approach using the library study method. Data sources were obtained from books, journal articles, proceedings, research reports, and credible official websites, which were then analysed within the framework of *maqasid al-Syariah*. With its descriptive, analytical, and explorative character, this study does not only describe the practice of child exploitation on social media but also interprets its impact on the five fundamental principles of *maqasid al-Syariah*, namely religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. The findings reveal that turning children into digital content clearly harms their best interests. Such practices violate the right to protection, cause psychological trauma, erode privacy, and shift the meaning of the parent-child emotional bond into that of a producer-actor relationship. The analysis of *maqasid al-Syariah* confirms that this phenomenon contradicts *hifz al-nafs* as it endangers life, *hifz al-'aql* as it disrupts intellectual development, *hifz al-nasl* as it weakens the foundation of lineage, and *hifz al-māl* as financial motives cannot justify sacrificing a child's dignity. Therefore, the exploitation of children in digital media has neither moral nor religious legitimacy. This research contributes to strengthening the conceptual basis for parents, policymakers, and industry actors to be more sensitive in protecting children in the digital sphere, while also enriching academic literature with a robust and applicable normative-religious framework.

Kata kunci: Child Exploitation, Social Media, Privacy, Children's Rights, *Maqasid al-Syariah*.

Introduction

The digital world has revolutionised nearly every aspect of human life, from how we communicate and obtain information to how we participate in economic and cultural activities. Rapid advances in information technology have given rise to a dynamic, participatory, and borderless virtual space where anyone can be both a producer and a consumer of content. Social media, as one of the primary facets of today's digital era, has created a new ecosystem that not only shapes public opinion but also serves as a source of an attention-based economy. In this context, the involvement of children as active users and even content creators is an inevitable phenomenon.

Scholars have shown that children actively share their product consumption experiences through social media, which directly increases demand for certain products and encourages marketing strategies that target children as potential consumers.¹ Furthermore, the rise of child-generated content on platforms like YouTube demonstrates how children are not only viewers but also content producers, contributing to the shaping of a new media industry, with various ethical and commercial consequences that need to be considered.² Digital ethnographic methodologies have been used to better understand how adolescents interact on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, uncovering the dynamics of their identities, social relationships, and the risks of digital victimisation they face.³ The phenomenon of "kidfluencers" has also been highlighted, where children are not only the centre of digital attention but also part of the commodification mechanism of childhood that exploits children's visualisation and attractiveness for the benefit of the digital economy.⁴ Therefore, it is important to consider how children's motivations

¹ Teresa Treviño and Flor Morton, "Children on Social Media: An Exploratory Study of Their Habits, Online Content Consumption and Brand Experiences," *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing* 7, no. 1 (2019): 88–97, doi:10.69554/MWBW4195.

² Benjamin Burroughs and Gavin Feller, "The Emergence and Ethics of Child-Created Content as Media Industries," in *The Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children*, 1st ed. (Routledge: Routledge, 2020), 10.4324/9781351004107-20.

³ Antonio Silva Esquinas et al., *Researching Social Media with Children: #DigitalEthnography #Storytelling*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2024), 10.4324/9781003399315.

⁴ Liselot Hudders, Steffi De Jans, and Emma Beuckels, "Kidfluencers and the Commodification of Childhood: A Comprehensive Review and Research Agenda in Contemporary Entertainment," in *Advertising Literacy for Young Audiences in the Digital Age: A Critical Attitude to Embedded Formats*, ed. Beatriz Feijoo and Erika Fernández Gómez (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 65–83, doi:10.1007/978-3-031-55736-1_5.

to create and share content can be influenced by incentive systems designed by brands, which requires ethical review and adequate protection of children's rights in the digital realm.⁵

In relation to the research conducted by the scholars mentioned above, it can be said that the primary focus of these studies remains on the dynamics of children as users and producers of digital content, from the perspective of consumption behaviour and marketing strategies to the ethical and methodological aspects of social media research. However, none have explicitly addressed the normative reasons why children should not be used as content solely for the sake of gaining viewers, especially from the perspective of religious ethics or the *maqasid al-syariah* or objectives of Islamic law. Therefore, the focus of the issues raised in this study can serve as a complement and deepening of existing studies, particularly by incorporating a framework of religious values, which has been under-recognised in children's digital literature.

Based on this, this study aims to critically examine the phenomenon of children being used as content on social media for popularity and profit and to assess this phenomenon through the perspective of *maqasid al-syari'ah*, the fundamental objectives of Islamic law, which protect five fundamental principles: religion, life, intellect, posterity, and property. From the findings in this study, it is hoped that it can broaden the discourse on children's digital ethics by adding a normative-religious perspective as an evaluative framework, as well as providing a conceptual foundation for parents, policymakers, and media industry players to be more sensitive to child protection in digital media practices.

Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. This method was chosen based on the nature of the problem being studied, namely the exploitation of children as content on social media and its assessment through the perspective of *maqasid al-syari'ah*. Because this phenomenon is closely related to normative, ethical, and social dimensions that require in-depth explanations that differ from quantitative calculations, a qualitative approach is the appropriate choice. A literature review was chosen because the focus of the research is not on direct field data collection

⁵ Teresa Berenice Treviño Benavides and Flor Esthela Morton Rodríguez, "Children on Social Media: An Exploratory Study of Their Habits, Online Content Consumption and Brand Experiences," *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing*, 2019.

but rather on extracting knowledge from existing scientific literature and authoritative sources.

The research data sources come from books, journal articles, proceedings, research reports, and credible official websites. To ensure the quality of the references, a literature search was conducted through online databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, ResearchGate, and Garuda Ristekbrin, as well as other academic sources relevant to the themes of children's digitalisation, social media, and contemporary Islamic studies. From this search, a number of pieces of literature were found that discuss the phenomenon of children in the digital world, both as consumers and producers of content, as well as research that discusses the ethical and legal dimensions surrounding it. These sources then became the main foundation in building a normative analytical framework with *maqasid al-syari'ah*.

The literature search was conducted using keywords tailored to the research focus. Keywords used included child content on social media, kidfluencer, digital childhood commodification, ethics of child-created content, digital child protection, child exploitation on social media, and *maqasid al-syari'ah* (the principles of Islamic law). This combination of English and Indonesian keywords was used to broaden the search scope, encompassing both global and local literature. Each search result was then selected based on thematic relevance, publisher credibility, and research novelty, ensuring the data used had high academic credibility and validity.

This research is descriptive analytical exploratory in nature. The descriptive nature aims to systematically describe the phenomenon of child exploitation as social media content as described in the literature. Analytical means that each piece of data obtained is not only described but also critiqued and interpreted using the chosen theoretical framework. Meanwhile, the exploratory nature aims to open up new perspectives by incorporating a normative analysis of *maqasid al-syari'ah*, which has previously been overlooked in digital child studies. Thus, this research not only describes the phenomenon but also relates it to the basic principles of Islamic law.

Data analysis was conducted using the theoretical framework of the *maqasid al-syari'ah* (Islamic principles). Data collected from various literature sources were organized according to the research's overarching theme, namely the issue of child exploitation on social media. The data were then interpreted using the principle of protecting the five essential elements

(*al-darūriyyāt al-khams*): religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). This framework was used to assess whether the practice of using children for digital content aligns with or contradicts basic Islamic protection values.

With this approach, this research method ensures that the data obtained is not only descriptively rich but also possesses in-depth normative analysis. It is hoped that the combination of contemporary literature about children in digital media and the *maqasid al-syari'ah* framework can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons why children should not be used as content solely for the sake of viewers, as well as opening up new discussion space about digital ethics from an Islamic perspective.

Results and Discussion

Rejecting Child Exploitation as Content on Social Media

Social media has become a new space for expression and economy, encouraging people to continuously produce content.⁶ One phenomenon that has garnered attention is the involvement of children in digital content, whether intentionally or unintentionally,⁷ initially, this may seem normal, even considered funny or adorable, as children possess a natural charm that can captivate public attention. However, when the primary reason for introducing children is simply to increase viewership, that's where serious problems arise. Children who should grow up with freedom and security are instead treated as a means to fulfil adult needs, whether for financial gain, popularity, or even parental psychological satisfaction.⁸

Upon closer examination, children have a universally recognised fundamental right: the right to protection from exploitation. When a child is consistently exposed to social media, especially in situations they don't fully understand or consent to, there is a significant potential for these rights

⁶ Ratih Frayunita Sari, "Menyoal Kebablasan Berpendapat: Malfungsi Media Sosial Sebagai Panggung Produsage Konten Negatif," *Jurnal Penelitian Pers Dan Komunikasi Pembangunan* 23, no. 1 (2019): 1-16, doi:10.46426/jp2kp.v23i1.86.

⁷ Citra Apik Lestari, Khairani Zikrinawati, and Ikhrom Ikhrom, "Dampak Overstimulasi Konten Digital Terhadap Pemusatan Perhatian Anak," *PAEDAGOGY: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Psikologi* 5, no. 1 (2025): 198-205, doi:10.51878/paedagogy.v5i1.4941.

⁸ Temuan penelitian dari Bárbara Morais Santiago Freitas dkk, menunjukkan bahwa ada pola di mana aktivitas anak lebih di atur atau dimanipulasi oleh orang dewasa, terutama dalam pemilihan tema, adegan, editing, dan interaksi penonton. Dengan kata lain, ada ketidakseimbangan antara ekspresi spontan anak dan tuntutan konten yang menjual. Baca: Bárbara Morais Santiago Freitas et al., "Between Play and Exploitation: What Is the Place of the Rights of Child YouTubers?," *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 14, no. 5 (May 1, 2024): 1197-1213, doi:10.3390/ejihpe14050079.

to be violated.⁹ Children don't yet have the capacity to fully understand the consequences of appearing in the digital public space, while parents perceive such exposure as harmless.¹⁰ However, the digital world holds not only opportunities but also serious threats such as data theft, online bullying, and identity theft.¹¹ Therefore, using children as content for viewers is not just a creative decision, but also involves deeper ethical and moral issues.

Furthermore, using children as content indirectly puts them under pressure to always appear "attractive".¹² Children who grow up with this type of parenting style may feel that their worth is only achieved through entertaining others or benefiting their families. In the long term, this can lead to a distorted self-perception, where self-worth depends on external validation in the form of likes, comments, or views.¹³ This clearly contradicts the principles of child development, which should emphasise unconditional acceptance, security, and affection.

It's important to note that using children as content isn't simply about "showing them in videos" but also about the framing or way the child is portrayed. There's a variety of content that depicts children crying, angry, or even humiliated, simply because those spontaneous expressions are considered funny or elicit laughter from viewers.¹⁴ Unfortunately, what's funny to adults can be a traumatic experience for children. Imagine a child who later realises that the most vulnerable moments of their life have been

⁹ Cucun Cundaya Fitria Sari and Yuda Pratama, "Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Eksploitasi Anak Melalui Platform Digital Tiktok," *Risalah Hukum* 20, no. 2 (2024): 91-101, doi:10.30872/risalah.v20i2.1592.

¹⁰ Deskia Renata Sitorus et al., "Kekosongan Regulasi Atas Sharenting Komersial: Urgensi Eksaminasi Sebagai Pengawasan Dalam Perlindungan Anak Di Era Digital," *Jurnal ISO: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik Dan Humaniora* 5, no. 1 (2025): 13-13, doi:10.53697/iso.v5i1.2463.

¹¹ H Uu Nurul Huda et al., *Data Pribadi, Hak Warga, Dan Negara Hukum: Menjaga Privasi Di Tengah Ancaman Digital* (Bandung: Penerbit Widina, 2024).

¹² Maulidya Ulfah, *DIGITAL PARENTING: Bagaimana Orang Tua Melindungi Anak-Anak Dari Bahaya Digital?* (Tasikmalaya: Edu Publisher, 2020).

¹³ Miriam Schirmer, Angelina Voggenreiter, and Jürgen Pfeffer, "More Skin, More Likes! Measuring Child Exposure and User Engagement on Tiktok," *arXiv*, 2024, doi:10.48550/arXiv.2408.05622.

¹⁴ Dalam salah satu contoh, disebut bahwa konten sering memuat "emotional distress" anak agar menarik perhatian penonton, dan bahwa publikasi momen tersebut tidak jarang kontroversial karena menyangkut privasi dan eksploitasi publik terhadap penderitaan emosional anak. Baca: Irena Zervas, "Profit Without Privacy: Family Content Creators and Child Influencers," *Northeastern University Political Review*, March 19, 2024, <https://nupoliticalreview.org/2024/03/19/profit-without-privacy-family-content-creators-and-child-influencers/>.

publicised for others to laugh at. The feelings of shame and disrespect can linger in their long-term memory, leaving lasting psychological scars.¹⁵

From a parent-child perspective, turning children into content for viewers also has the potential to shift the meaning of what should be a genuine emotional bond. Instead of interacting naturally, parents can fall into the trap of constantly directing their children to fit the content's script.¹⁶ This situation creates a subtle but real distance, as children are treated more as "bit actors" than as growing individuals. Interactions that should be full of spontaneity and family warmth can lose their meaning, turning into mere content productions orchestrated for public consumption.

In the long term, there are serious risks to consider. Children who are accustomed to exposure from an early age can lose their sense of personal privacy. When every aspect of their lives, from daily activities and emotional expressions to sensitive moments, is made into a public spectacle, they grow up without a secure personal space.¹⁷ Privacy is crucial for the formation of a healthy self-identity. Without it, children can feel a lack of control over their own lives, ultimately leading to low self-esteem and fragile mental health.¹⁸

From a legal and social perspective, some countries have emphasised the importance of protecting children from all forms of exploitation, including digital exploitation. While most legal regulations still lag behind the rapid development of technology, the principle is clear that the best interests of children must be the top priority.¹⁹ Therefore, parents who decide to continue using their children as content for viewers are potentially

¹⁵ Gaëlle Ouvrein and Karen Verswijvel, "Sharenting: Parental Adoration or Public Humiliation? A Focus Group Study on Adolescents' Experiences with Sharenting against the Background of Their Own Impression Management," *Children and Youth Services Review* 99 (April 1, 2019): 319-27, doi:10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.02.011.

¹⁶ Alicia Blum-Ross and Sonia Livingstone, "'Sharenting,' Parent Blogging, and the Boundaries of the Digital Self," in *Self-(Re) Presentation Now* (London: Routledge, 2020), 70-85.

¹⁷ Stacey B Steinberg, "Sharenting: Children's Privacy in the Age of Social Media," *Emory Lj* 66, no. 2 (2016): 839, <https://scholarlycommons.law.emory.edu/elj/vol66/iss4/2/>.

¹⁸ Alexis Hiniker, Sarita Y Schoenebeck, and Julie A Kientz, "Not at the Dinner Table: Parents' and Children's Perspectives on Family Technology Rules," 2016, 1376-89, doi:10.1145/2818048.2819940.

¹⁹ Sebagai contoh, pada tahun 2020, Prancis mengesahkan undang-undang yang menekankan perlindungan anak dari eksploitasi digital, khususnya oleh orang tua yang membagikan foto/video anak di media sosial (*sharenting*). Lihat: France. *Law No. 2020-1266 of 19 October 2020 on the Regulation of the Commercial Exploitation of the Image of Children under Sixteen on Online Platforms*, Official Journal of the French Republic, October 20, 2020.

neglecting their moral and legal responsibility to protect them. A critical question that needs to be asked is, are the material benefits or popularity truly worth the potential long-term harm to the child's development.

From an ethical perspective, using children as content for viewers creates a sharp imbalance in power relations. Children are not in an equal position to refuse or approve their involvement in content, as they are completely dependent on their parents. A unilateral adult decision in this case could be considered a form of abuse of power, even if disguised as "for the sake of the child's future" or "for their future savings". However, such claims only serve as justification, while in reality, children have no real say in how they are presented to the public.²⁰

It is also important to recognise that social media is semi-permanent. Once content is uploaded, its digital footprint is difficult to completely erase.²¹ A child who didn't understand anything during their childhood will one day grow up and discover that their entire childhood has been documented for the public, perhaps even in a less than proud way.²² The psychological impact can be potentially severe, as they were never given a choice in the first place. Therefore, using children as content for viewers is essentially taking control of their future.

Equally important, society as viewers also needs to change their perspective. Viewers who readily pay attention to child exploitation content without considering its impact are actually perpetuating this practice. Demand always creates supply, so as long as there are viewers who enjoy children's content, creators will continue to feel compelled to create it.²³

²⁰ Hasil penelitian dari Tama Leaver menunjukkan bagaimana bagaimana orang tua sering mengontrol penuh representasi anak di dunia digital, sementara anak berada dalam posisi tanpa suara dan tanpa pilihan. Dalam konteks sharenting dan konten keluarga, anak tidak memiliki kapasitas untuk menyetujui atau menolak. Alasan orang tua seperti "demi tabungan masa depan" justru memperlihatkan bagaimana kekuasaan orang dewasa membungkam kepentingan dan hak anak. Baca: Tama Leaver, "Intimate Surveillance: Normalizing Parental Monitoring and Mediation of Infants Online," *Social Media + Society* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 2056305117707192, doi:10.1177/2056305117707192.

²¹ Zul Khaidir Kadir, "Dari Privasi Ke Eksploitasi: Memetakan Jejak Kriminalisasi Revenge Porn Dalam Era Media Sosial," *Dewantara: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Humaniora* 4, no. 1 (2025): 133–52, doi:10.30640/dewantara.v4i1.3812.

²² Steinberg, "Sharenting: Children's Privacy in the Age of Social Media."

²³ Studi dari Grace Yiseul Choi dan Jennifer Lewallen yang meneliti bagaimana orang tua mengekspos anak di Instagram dan bagaimana respon audiens (viewer/penonton) berperan dalam melanggengkan praktik tersebut, di mana temuannya adalah perhatian (likes, komentar, views) dari publik memberi reinforcement kepada orang tua untuk terus memproduksi konten anak. Dengan kata lain, viewer secara tidak langsung ikut

Therefore, a collective awareness needs to be raised that a momentary laugh or a moment of amusement is not worth the long-term risks a child must endure.

Ultimately, the most fundamental reason why children should not be used as content for viewers is that they have the right to a safe, free, and loving childhood. Children should not be burdened with the responsibility of being public entertainers or profit-makers for their families. They are individuals with the same dignity and rights as adults, and they are even more in need of protection because they lack the capacity to defend themselves. Protecting children from overexposure means ensuring they can grow up without trauma, without the burden of false popularity, and without the early loss of privacy.

Critical Analysis of Child Exploitation as Content on Social Media from the Perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*

A Critical Analysis of Child Exploitation as Content on Social Media from the *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah* Perspective. The phenomenon of using children as content on social media presents a complex ethical dilemma. On the one hand, social media does open up new creative spaces and economic opportunities for many.²⁴ However, on the other hand, children's involvement in content production does not stem from a conscious choice but rather from the decisions of their parents or the adults around them.²⁵ The findings of this study indicate that the primary reason identified for featuring children in content is often simply for viewership, even though children are individuals who still need full protection. When the harsh digital space becomes a stage they are forced to enter, the fundamental values of freedom, security, and affection that should be inherent in childhood are slowly being neglected.

When examined critically, this situation clearly contradicts the fundamental principles upheld by the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Islam views children as a trust, not an instrument of entertainment. Allah's Word in Q.S.

mendukung sharenting. Baca: Grace Yiseul Choi and Jennifer Lewallen, "Say Instagram, Kids!': Examining Sharenting and Children's Digital Representations on Instagram," *Howard Journal of Communications* 29, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 144-64, doi:10.1080/10646175.2017.1327380.

²⁴ Sefthian and Asbari, "Peran Media Sosial Dalam Komunikasi Bisnis Di Era Ekonomi Digital."

²⁵ Steinberg, "Sharenting: Children's Privacy in the Age of Social Media."

al-Taḥrīm [66]: 6 emphasises the obligation to protect oneself and one's family from things that could lead to destruction,²⁶ while the Prophet's hadith emphasises that every parent is a leader who will be held accountable for their children. Constantly exposing children to social media without their capacity to understand or consent has serious implications, both for their safety and for their human dignity.²⁷ Within the framework of maqāṣid, this clearly undermines the protection that should be given to children, from the safety of the soul (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), the preservation of reason (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), and the protection of offspring (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) to the preservation of wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*).

The aspect of mental safety is the most obvious. Children exposed to social media are vulnerable to various risks, such as online bullying, data theft, and identity theft.²⁸ It's not uncommon for children to be subjected to content when they're crying or being humiliated, simply because they're perceived as entertaining the public.²⁹ However, what adults consider humorous can be deeply psychologically damaging to a child. This impact isn't just temporary; it can also cause long-term trauma that becomes embedded in their personality.³⁰ The principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* demands comprehensive protection of the human soul, and in this context, children are clearly placed in a precarious position.

Furthermore, excessive exposure to the logic of digital popularity has the potential to disrupt children's intellectual development. External validation in the form of likes, comments, or viewership creates the perception that their self-worth depends on their ability to entertain others.³¹ This contradicts the principle of *ḥifẓ al-'aql*, because children's minds, which should develop through education, healthy experiences, and affection, are instead directed toward false shortcuts that prioritise digital

²⁶ Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an Tajwid Dan Terjemahnya* (Bandung: PT. Syaamil Cipta Media, 2006).

²⁷ Sari and Pratama, "Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Eksploitasi Anak Melalui Platform Digital Tiktok."

²⁸ Huda et al., *Data Pribadi, Hak Warga, Dan Negara Hukum: Menjaga Privasi Di Tengah Ancaman Digital*.

²⁹ Irena Zervas, "Profit Without Privacy: Family Content Creators and Child Influencers."

³⁰ Ouvrein and Verswijvel, "Sharenting: Parental Adoration or Public Humiliation? A Focus Group Study on Adolescents' Experiences with Sharenting against the Background of Their Own Impression Management."

³¹ Schirmer, Voggenreiter, and Pfeffer, "More Skin, More Likes! Measuring Child Exposure and User Engagement on Tiktok."

fame. As a result, children lose the opportunity to develop healthy and critical thinking, because their lives are framed within the logic of audience consumption that they never chose.

Another equally serious impact is on the realm of offspring and the continuity of generations. The emotional bond between parents and children can be distorted when interactions that should be full of spontaneity and intimacy are transformed into scripted content designed for the audience.³² Children are treated as minor actors, rather than as growing individuals. In the long term, this undermines the foundation of offspring, which is one of the essential *maqāṣid* (protection of the child), namely, *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (protection of the child). Children who grow up without privacy, without safe spaces, and without self-control are at great risk of becoming a generation that is emotionally fragile and easily loses control of their lives.

The argument that children's content is created for financial gain is also unjustified from a *maqāṣid* perspective. While it is true that some parents argue that the income from content will be used to fund their children's savings, material gain obtained at the expense of a child's dignity, safety, and intellectual development is in fact contrary to the principle of *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of the child),³³ Islam teaches that wealth should not be acquired at the expense of other principles of protection. The Prophet's hadith, narrated by Ahmad, emphasises that a Muslim's wealth is not lawful except with voluntary consent, while a child who does not yet have the capacity to consent clearly cannot be considered to have given consent. Therefore, the material gain in this practice loses its moral legitimacy.

Thus, the phenomenon of child exploitation in digital content, when viewed through the lens of the *maqāṣid al-Shari'ah* (the principles of Islamic law), demonstrates a fundamental violation of the principle of protecting life, intellect, and offspring, even the moral legitimacy of wealth. This analysis demonstrates that children are deprived of a safe space to grow, forced to accept the logic of digital popularity, and alienated from healthy

³² Blum-Ross and Livingstone, "'Sharenting,' Parent Blogging, and the Boundaries of the Digital Self."

³³ Steinberg menyoroti bahwa meskipun banyak orang tua beralasan bahwa konten digital yang menampilkan anak dibuat "demi kebaikan anak" atau untuk masa depan finansialnya, praktik tersebut tetap menimbulkan risiko serius terhadap martabat, keselamatan, dan hak anak atas perkembangan diri. Baca: Steinberg, "Sharenting: Children's Privacy in the Age of Social Media."

emotional relationships with their parents. All of this demonstrates the seriousness of the threat posed not only to individual children but also to the future of generations. However, to understand this issue more fully, it is not enough to proceed solely from normative arguments. It is also necessary to examine how other scientific studies describe children's involvement in the digital world, as outlined in the introduction, to obtain a more complete picture and a strong empirical basis.

Teresa Treviño and Flor Morton, for example, show that children are now actively sharing their product consumption experiences on social media, which in turn drives digital marketing strategies that target them as potential consumers.³⁴ This pattern demonstrates how childhood is gradually being absorbed into broader economic mechanisms while also confirming that violations of the principle of protecting life and reason are not only ethical but also have a structural dimension. Benjamin Burroughs and Gavin Feller add that the phenomenon of children as content producers on platforms like YouTube marks the birth of a new media industry, which carries with it ethical and commercial consequences.³⁵ While the Maqāṣid framework demonstrates damage to the *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and *ḥifẓ al-'aql*, in their study, this damage is evident in the commodification of children's creativity.

The study by Antonio Silva Esquinas and his colleagues, using digital ethnography methodology on the platforms TikTok and Instagram, also shows how children construct identities and establish social relationships while simultaneously facing the risk of digital victimisation.³⁶ These findings align with the maqāṣid analysis, which emphasises the loss of privacy and potential psychological trauma, as children are placed in situations they do not yet fully understand. Meanwhile, Liselot Hudders, along with Steffi De Jans and Emma Beuckels, highlighted the phenomenon of “kidfluencers” as the most obvious form of childhood commodification. Children are not merely cute or adorable but have become the centre of attention, positioned to drive the digital economy.³⁷ Within the maqāṣid

³⁴ Teresa Treviño and Flor Morton, “Children on Social Media: An Exploratory Study of Their Habits, Online Content Consumption and Brand Experiences.”

³⁵ Benjamin Burroughs and Gavin Feller, “The Emergence and Ethics of Child-Created Content as Media Industries.”

³⁶ Antonio Silva Esquinas et al., *Researching Social Media with Children: #DigitalEthnography #Storytelling*.

³⁷ Hudders, De Jans, and Beuckels, “Kidfluencers and the Commodification of Childhood:

framework, this condition violates the basic principles of human rights, as a generation that should grow up in love is instead instilled in the logic of commodification from the outset. Ultimately, both from the normative perspective of the *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* and from the empirical findings of scholars, the conclusion is that children are in a vulnerable position, faced with exploitation disguised as digital entertainment. One speaks in religious language, the other in academic language, but both complement each other.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that children should not be used as content on social media solely for the sake of viewers, as this practice violates children's fundamental rights, particularly the right to protection, privacy, and healthy growth and development. Children's involvement in digital content has been shown to risk psychological trauma, loss of privacy boundaries, and the formation of a false self-identity, where self-worth is measured based on external validation in the form of views or comments. Furthermore, this phenomenon shifts the meaning of the emotional bond between parents and children, as what should be a sincere and loving interaction becomes merely a content scenario. Therefore, using children as content for the sake of viewers is essentially a form of exploitation that ignores the child's best interests.

From the perspective of the *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* (the principles of Islamic law), the phenomenon of exploiting children as digital content contradicts the primary objectives of sharia, as it undermines the protection of the soul (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), descendants (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). Children's excessive exposure to digital spaces puts them at risk of losing their lives due to online bullying and identity abuse, disrupting their intellectual development due to being trapped in the logic of false popularity, and weakening the foundation of their lineage because the parent-child relationship is reduced to a relationship between content producers and actors. Even financial reasons cannot be justified, as material gains obtained at the expense of children's dignity contradict the principles of sharia. Therefore, from the framework of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, the exploitation of children in digital content has no moral or religious legitimacy. However, this study certainly has shortcomings that need to be

addressed, as this study does not present direct empirical data from children or parents as involved parties, so the analysis still relies more on literature reviews and normative perspectives.

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