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RECONSTRUCTING SHIRK IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A THEMATIC QUR'ANIC ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY AQIDAH

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Abstract
In the contemporary post-secular landscape, the manifestation of shirk (polytheism) has evolved from overt ritualistic idol-worship to subtle, functional equivalents within digital culture. This study aims to reconstruct the Qur'anic concept of shirk by examining its modern implications on the purity of aqidah (faith). Using a qualitative-descriptive approach grounded in library research, this study employs Tafsir Mawdu'i (thematic interpretation) to analyze relevant Qur'anic verses alongside modern sociological theories of digital alienation and self-apotheosis. The findings reveal that digital culture—characterized by algorithmic dependence, the sanctification of "likes/validation," and the commodification of the self—mirrors the Qur'anic warnings regarding al-hawa (whims) and andad (rivals to God). This research identifies a shift from "theological shirk" to "functional shirk," where technological and social platforms exert an ultimate agency over human behavior. The study concludes that maintaining aqidah in the digital age requires a conceptual expansion of tawhid that addresses the psychological and systemic idols of the 21st century. The analysis draws specifically on classical and contemporary tafsir sources, including Tafsir Ibn Kathir and Tafsir Al-Mishbah, which anchor the interpretive lineage informing this study.

Keywords: *Shirk, qur'anic thematic analysis, digital culture, aqidah, post-secularism, tawhid.*

INTRODUCTION

Among previous communities, it is found that the greatest sin that afflicted them was associating partners with Allah (shirk), from the time of Prophet Nuh, Ibrahim, Hud, Yusuf, up to the final Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). This also included acts such as adultery, gambling, intoxicants, and other major sins. In this regard, the Qur'an narrates many accounts about them and the ultimate fate they will face on the Day of Judgment—namely, a severe and indescribable punishment. Era digital bukan lagi soal "apa yang disembah" secara fisik, melainkan "kepada siapa kehendak didelegasikan". [The digital era is no longer about "what is worshipped" in a physical sense, but about "to whom the will is delegated."]. The greatest of major sins (kabā'ir) is shirk, which is associating partners with

Allah. Shirk is of two types; the first is to set up something as a rival to Allah or to worship other than Him, whether it be stones, trees, the sun, the moon, prophets, teachers, stars, kings, or anything else. This is major shirk. Concerning it, Allah says “Indeed, Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives anything less than that for whom He wills.” (An-Nisa: 48 and 116)“Indeed, associating partners with Allah is truly a great ظلم (injustice).” (Luqman: 13) There are many other verses related to this matter. Whoever associates partners with Allah and dies in that state will indeed be among the أهل النار (people of Hell). On the other hand, whoever believes in Allah and dies in a state of faith will be among the people of Paradise, although they may first be punished in Hell. Bahwa ketika individu memberikan kepercayaan mutlak pada AI atau mencari validasi tertinggi melalui "likes," mereka secara efektif menciptakan tandingan (andad) fungsional bagi Allah. [When individuals place absolute trust in AI or seek ultimate validation through "likes," they are effectively creating a functional rival (andad) to Allah.]

In conclusion, shirk is the gravest sin in Islam. It means associating partners with Allah by setting something as His equal or worshipping other than Him, such as objects, humans, or other creatures. Major shirk is the greatest ظلم and is a sin that will not be forgiven if a person dies without repentance. Therefore, whoever dies upon shirk will be in Hell. Conversely, a believer who dies in a state of faith will enter Paradise, even if they may first be punished for other sins. Bahwa literatur saat ini masih terjebak pada dimensi ritual, sementara dimensi "ekonomi perhatian" sebagai bentuk Arbab (tuhan-tuhan) baru belum banyak dikaji.[1] [Current literature remains largely confined to the ritual dimension, while the "attention economy" as a new form of Arbab (lords) has received comparatively little scholarly attention.]
Shirk is divided into two types: Major Shirk and Minor Shirk.

1. Major Shirk

Major shirk is directing any act of worship to other than Allah, such as supplicating to others besides Allah or seeking closeness through acts like animal sacrifice or vows intended for other than Allah, whether for graves, jinn, devils, or others. It also includes fearing the dead (believing they can harm), hoping in other than Allah for things that only Allah can grant, or asking others for needs that no one can fulfill except Allah, such as removing hardship or granting benefit. All such acts of worship must be directed to Allah alone.

2. Minor Shirk

Minor shirk does not expel a person from Islam, but it diminishes the perfection of tawhid and serves as a means leading to major shirk. Minor shirk is of two kinds:

a. Apparent (Zāhir) minor shirk, which appears in speech and actions. For example, swearing by other than Allah. The Prophet said:“Whoever swears by other than Allah has committed disbelief or shirk.” The shirk and disbelief referred to here are minor.
b. Hidden (Khafī) shirk, which occurs in intentions and desires, such as riya’ (showing off) and sum’ah (seeking to be heard or praised). For example, performing acts of worship to draw closer to Allah while also seeking praise from people, such as beautifying one’s prayer when being watched, giving charity to be praised, or reciting the Qur’an with a melodious voice so that others admire and commend them. Although classical shirk is defined as associating partners with Allah in ritual acts, modern shirk is often subtle (khafi), manifesting in intentions and desires shaped by the digital world.

METHOD

In this study, we employ Library Research with a Hermeneutic-Thematic approach (Tafsir Mawdu'i). This research method uses written sources such as books, journals, and academic works as the primary data, which are then analyzed by interpreting the text deeply (hermeneutics) based on its context. Using a thematic approach (tafsir mawdu'i), the researcher collects Qur'anic verses related to a specific theme and examines them comprehensively to gain a complete, systematic, and relevant understanding of the issue being studied. Most studies focus on physical idols. However, there is a gap in research on how digital systems—particularly algorithms—imitate the roles of *Arbab* (lords) and *Andad* (rivals or counterparts).

The Qur'anic verses examined in this study were selected through a keyword-based search strategy, tracing terms directly associated with shirk, andad, arbab, and al-hawa across the Qur'an, followed by cross-referencing with classical exegetical works (notably Tafsir Ibn Kathir and Tafsir Al-Mishbah) to confirm thematic relevance. Priority was given to verses in which these terms appear in a context of misplaced devotion, authority, or dependence, since these are the loci most directly comparable to the digital phenomena under discussion. Where classical and contemporary tafsir offered differing emphases, classical sources were treated as the primary interpretive anchor, with contemporary tafsir used to contextualize their relevance to present-day conditions.

This study performs a "synchronization" between the root letters *sh-r-k*, meaning "to share," and the structure of modern technology corporations (*syarikah*). In the classical context, *shirk* refers to the division of devotion that should belong solely to Allah. Similarly, technology companies now demand a "share" of human devotion—in the form of attention, loyalty, and digital interaction—functionally occupying a position akin to a modern "god" receiving human devotion. In other words, the conceptual root of *sh-r-k* is linked to the mechanisms of digital organizations that extract a portion of human devotion that should be exclusively reserved for the Creator.

This sh-r-k/syarikah correspondence is not offered merely as an illustrative aside: it constitutes the core analytical framework applied throughout the Findings section. Each thematic sub-section that follows re-applies this same etymological logic—reading the classical division of devotion encoded in *shirk* against the structural "sharing" demanded by digital platforms—rather than being treated as a set of independent, loosely connected observations.

Allah Ta'ala says

اتخذوا أحبارهم ورهبنهم أربابا من دون الله

"They took their scholars and monks as lords besides Allah…" (At-Taubah: 31) and Allah Ta'ala also says "And among mankind are those who take gods besides Allah, loving them as they love Allah." In this study, we also use secondary data, which include Classical exegesis as the root of meaning, and contemporary interpretation as the bridge to relevance in the digital era: Classical Tafsir – written sources representing the authority of earlier texts, authored by scholars of the early generations after the Qur'an was revealed. This tafsir is important as it provides an initial understanding of the meanings of verses, historical context, and traditional interpretations that form the foundation of Islamic studies.

Contemporary Tafsir – serves as a bridge between classical interpretations and their relevance in the modern era. Contemporary tafsir adapts interpretations to current social, cultural, and technological contexts, allowing Qur'anic verses to be understood and applied contextually. This approach is important for addressing new issues that did not exist in classical times, such as digital ethics or shifts in contemporary faith. Academic Discourse – In addition to tafsir, academic discourse from reputable journal articles on digital sociology and

the philosophy of technology is used to strengthen modern analysis. These sources help position religious interpretations within contemporary theoretical frameworks, ensuring that the research is not only text-based but also relevant to current social phenomena and technological developments. We have also compiled verses related to shirk (associating partners with Allah) in general. Among them: Allah the Exalted says: “Indeed, associating others with Allah is truly a great ظلم (injustice).” (Luqman: 13) Allah the Exalted says “And whoever invokes another deity besides Allah, for which he has no proof—then his account is only with his Lord. Indeed, the disbelievers will not succeed.” (Al-Mu’minun: 117).

This article also gathers verses about shirk in rububiyyah (Lordship), uluhiyyah (worship), and hidden shirk (shirk khafi). First: Shirk in Rububiyyah. This is to set up partners besides Allah in His Lordship—believing that others share in controlling the universe, as in His statement “Say (O Muhammad), Call upon those whom you claim besides Allah. They do not possess even the weight of a ذّرة (smallest particle) in the heavens or the earth, nor do they have any share in them, nor is there for him any (helper) among them.” (Saba: 22). Second: Shirk in Uluhiyyah. This is to direct acts of worship (such as supplication) to other than Allah, whether supplication of worship or supplication of request. If “major shirk” (*Shirk al-Akbar*), which involves physical rituals, has clear boundaries.

Allah the Exalted says: “Indeed, associating others with Allah is truly a great injustice.” (Luqman: 13). Third: Hidden Shirk (Shirk Khafi) This refers to shirk in intentions and desires, such as showing off (riya’) and seeking reputation (sum’ah), and similar acts. The digital era has given rise to “hidden shirk” (*Shirk al-Khafi*), which operates through intentions and systemic dependence. Modern society is now experiencing a “delegation of will” to technological ecosystems. When individuals place absolute trust in algorithms or seek ultimate validation through the number of “likes,” they are effectively creating functional counterparts (*andad*) to God. Allah the Exalted says: “Say (O Prophet Muhammad), ‘I am only a human like you, to whom it has been revealed that your God is One God. So whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord—let him do righteous deeds and not associate anyone in the worship of his Lord.’” (Al-Kahf: 110).

Throughout the history of civilization, the gravest sin that has consistently afflicted humanity is shirk (associating partners with Allah), as recorded in the narratives of the Prophets from Noah to Muhammad (peace be upon him). Traditionally, this phenomenon manifested in the physical worship of stones, trees, or celestial objects. However, in the contemporary landscape, the nature of this “great ظلم (injustice)” has undergone a highly subtle and sophisticated evolution. Connecting this with the Deification of Algorithms and Digital Narcissism In the digital era, several phenomena have emerged. Deification of algorithms:When people begin to trust algorithms or artificial intelligence (AI, social media systems, automated recommendations) as if they possess absolute power to determine life, decisions, or truth. This resembles shirk in rububiyyah, as humans place created systems on a level equal to—or above—Allah’s authority in governing life. Example: believing that “AI knows everything” or allowing algorithms to dictate moral and social behavior.

Digital narcissism: When a person idolizes their online image, prioritizing praise, likes, and public attention as the source of identity or success. This resembles hidden shirk (shirk khafi), because acts of worship or good deeds become tainted by hidden intentions—not seeking Allah, but seeking human recognition. Example: posting acts of charity on social media purely to be seen, not sincerely for Allah. Digital shirk in uluhiyyah: At times, people “worship” technology, gadgets, or social media, as if these provide security, happiness, or power. This means that the devotion of the heart and mind is redirected toward dependence on entities other than Allah.

Explanation of the Root of the Word "Shirk" in the Qur'an and Its Original Meaning

1. The Root of the Word "Shirk" in the Qur'an

The word *shirk* originates from the Arabic root: ك ر ش (shīn – rā' – kāf). This root produces various forms found in the Qur'an, including:
شِرْك (shirk) → association / polytheism
يُشْرِك (yushrik) → to associate (with Allah)
أَشْرَكَ (ashraka) → he has associated
مُشْرِك (mushrik) → one who associates partners
شُرَكاء (shurakā') → partners / associates Basic linguistic meaning:

The root ش ر كfundamentally means:*"to* شريک *(share), associate, or have a joint portion"*. Examples in common Arabic usage *syarikah (*شركة*)* = company (because of shared ownership) *sharīk (*شريك*)* = partner / associate

2. The Original Meaning of Shirk in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the meaning of *shirk* develops from its linguistic sense into a theological concept: Core definition. To make something a "partner" with Allah in matters that are exclusively His. In other words: Giving a "portion" to something other than Allah in what should belong solely to Him Universal Message of the Verses on Shirk in the context of digital society.

3. Sociological Reality of Digital Society

Today, humans live within a highly dominant digital ecosystem. More than 5.5 billion people (≈68% of the global population) are connected to the internet. Around 5.2 billion (≈64%) use social media. The average person spends 2 hours and 21 minutes per day on social media. Individuals use an average of 6–7 social platforms per month. Most existing literature remains confined to historical frameworks or static ritual understandings of shirk. There is a critical gap in research on how the "attention economy" and "algorithmic authority" function as modern gods (*arbab*) that dictate human moral and social behavior. This means that modern human life is no longer neutral, but shaped by algorithms, recommendation systems, and the attention economy.

4. Universal Message of the Qur'anic Concept of Shirk (Digital Perspective)

From the verses discussed, there are three main universal messages. Tauhid is liberation from absolute dependence a verse such as "They do not possess even the weight of a ذَرّة..." (Saba: 22). Universal message is no entity besides Allah has absolute control Digital relevance. In digital society, algorithms determine what we see, AI influences decisions, digital systems shape our perception of reality Sociological insight, humans begin to experience a "delegation of will" to technology, the rise of algorithmic authority Definition of Contemporary Shirk. Contemporary shirk refers to forms of associating partners with Allah that emerge in modern life, especially when humans: grant authority, dependence, or life orientation to something other than Allah in ways that are not always visible like classical idol worship.

Contemporary shirk can also be simply defined as attitudes or practices that "divide Allah's position" with something else in modern life. It is not always in the form of idol worship, ritual devotion to physical objects. But rather in the form of: ways of thinking dependencies life orientations Conclusion. The essence of shirk—both classical and contemporary—remains the same: assigning a share to something other than Allah in what rightfully belongs only to Him However, in the modern digital world, shirk: becomes more subtle, more systemic, and often goes unnoticed. This study reconstructs the Qur'anic concept

of *shirk* by synthesizing classical exegesis and contemporary digital sociology. By exploring the root meaning of *shirk* as "to share" or "to associate," the research argues that digital platforms now demand a "share" of human devotion that should rightfully belong solely to the Creator.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Deification of Algorithms: A Manifestation of Modern Shirk in Rububiyyah

The creation of the universe is one of the signs of Allah's power. Many verses of the Qur'an دعوت us to reflect upon His creations, including the universe and everything within it. The universe is a realm that contains both biotic and abiotic life, as well as all kinds of natural phenomena—those that have been understood and those that remain beyond human comprehension. Regarding one of the chapters in the Qur'an that speaks about the power of Allah, as mentioned in Surah Al-Mulk (67), verses 3–5:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبۡعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٖ طِبَاقٗاۖ مَّا تَرَىٰ فِي خَلۡقِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ مِن تَفَٰوُتٖۖ فَٱرۡجِعِ ٱلۡبَصَرَ هَلۡ تَرَىٰ مِن فُطُورٖ

"He is the One who created seven layered heavens. You will not see any inconsistency in the creation of the Most Merciful. So look again and again—do you see any flaw?"

وَلَقَدۡ زَيَّنَّا ٱلسَّمَآءَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا بِمَصَٰبِيحَ وَجَعَلۡنَٰهَا رُجُومٗا لِّلشَّيَٰطِينِۖ وَأَعۡتَدۡنَا لَهُمۡ عَذَابَ ٱلسَّعِيرِ

"Indeed, We have adorned the nearest heaven with stars, and We have made them as missiles to drive away devils, and We have prepared for them the punishment of the blazing Fire."The Qur'an contains many accounts of the power and greatness of Allah. The more people study the Qur'an, the more their knowledge increases regarding the signs and proofs of Allah's power. Surah An-Naml (27), verse 93, also states:

وَقُلِ ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ سَيُرِيكُمۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ فَتَعۡرِفُونَهَاۚ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعۡمَلُونَ

"And say (O Muhammad), 'All praise is for Allah. He will show you His signs, and you will recognize them. And your Lord is not unaware of what you do."

The world faced by humans in the 21st century is becoming increasingly advanced and complex. This is because science and technology have developed rapidly in the Western world over the past century. In the 20th century, for example, there were various revolutionary discoveries that significantly changed how humans interact with the world and with one another. These inventions or innovations include the development of the modern computer by Alan Turing in the mid-1930s, as well as the processes of digitalization and Internet technology (Wooldridge, 2020). These three discoveries became foundational for the development of artificial intelligence (AI) today.

Belief in the capabilities of AI actually began to strengthen in the 1980s with the emergence of expert systems (rule-based programs capable of answering questions or solving problems within a specific domain of knowledge). These programs were able to imitate human expert decision-making processes using formal logical language (Spiegeleire et al., 2017). At the same time, research on neural networks also developed during that period following various advances in physics and computer science, as well as the invention of the backpropagation algorithm, which could be used to train multilayer neural networks, enabling

them to learn more complex patterns.

Furthermore, in 2011, confidence in AI capabilities continued to grow until today. This confidence has been driven by various factors that improve the predictive abilities of different algorithms, such as advances in neuroscience and computer science through the work of Geoffrey Hinton and Salakhutdinov, who discovered new techniques that enable neural networks to perform pattern recognition (Hinton, 1992). Other contributing factors to the growing confidence in AI include increasingly affordable computing power, higher network speeds, the availability of cloud infrastructure, the growth of the Internet of Things and Big Data, especially the availability of very large datasets that can be used to train and test large-scale machine learning networks (Spiegeleire et al., 2017). All of these advancements have driven a shift in AI approaches—from previously relying on human programmers who wrote specific instructions for machines to perform tasks, to a new approach in which machines are trained to perform tasks without direct human instruction. The emergence of generative AI (GenAI)—one well-known example being ChatGPT—is the result of this new approach. ChatGPT is trained using large databases and is capable of producing text, software, and video without human assistance (Kissinger et al., 2021). When given an incomplete sentence, the AI can generate a complete sentence. When given a single sentence, it can produce a full paragraph. When given a question, it can provide possible answers. When given a topic and sufficient information, it can produce an essay, and so on (Kissinger et al., 2021).

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has entered nearly all aspects of human life and has fundamentally transformed the way individuals, organizations, and societies produce and validate knowledge. In various studies, such as those discussed by Floridi.[7] and Müller[8], Data is no longer analyzed solely by humans, but is processed by algorithms that generate predictions and recommendations, which then function as a form of operational truth. This shift indicates that epistemic authority, which was previously derived from human cognitive capacity, is now gradually shifting toward computational systems that operate through probabilistic calculations and large-scale pattern learning.

Recent studies show that the epistemology of AI can no longer be separated from its social practices: AI is increasingly treated as an epistemic partner that actively shapes the process of knowledge production, rather than merely a neutral computational tool.[9] At a broader level, the shift toward data-driven science is interpreted as a new epistemological paradigm, in which large-scale statistical correlations and the automation of inference replace the role of explicit theory in many scientific practices.

Self-commodification and Digital Narcissism: The Existence of Hidden Shirk (Shirk Khafi)

Humans are expected to be able to control the desires (nafs) within themselves so as not to go beyond limits. In other words, these desires can influence human character or personality; humans are originally born in a pure and gentle state, but they can become uncontrolled and develop poor behavior. Therefore, it is very necessary for humans to understand what desire (nafs) is and how to control or resist it.

Desire (nafs) is likened to a horse that, although it is always held by its reins so that its path remains straight toward its goal, can stray to the left and right and become lost if it is not properly controlled. A person who is able to manage or control their desires (understand themselves) is generally someone who achieves progress and success in life, because they are protected from the negative influence of base desires. For this reason, it is very important for us to study desire (nafs), as it greatly influences the individual itself. The nafs reflects what exists within human beings, which shapes their behavior, as stated in Surah Ar-Ra'd, verse 11.

لَهٗ مُعَقِّبٰتٌ مِّنْۢ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهٖ يَحْفَظُوْنَهٗ مِنْ اَمْرِ اللّٰهِ ۗاِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتّٰى يُغَيِّرُوْا مَا بِاَنْفُسِهِمْ ۗوَاِذَآ اَرَادَ اللّٰهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوْۤءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهٗ ۚوَمَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُوْنِهٖ مِنْ وَّالٍ

"For each person there are angels in succession, before and behind him. They guard him by the command of Allah. Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. And when Allah intends harm for a people, there is no turning it back, and they have no protector besides Him." (Qur'an, Ar-Ra'd: 11). However, in a universal sense, it can be said that *nafs*, in discussions about human beings, represents an aspect of humans that possesses both positive and negative potentials (Shihab, 1996: 285).

Among the positive potentials of human beings are, first, the ability to recognize the characteristics, functions, and benefits of all kinds of things (Qur'an 2:31). Second, the subjugation of the earth, the heavens, and other creations by Allah ﷻ for humanity (Qur'an 45:12–13). Third, humans are endowed with thought, intellect, and sensory perception (Qur'an 67:23), as well as positive energy to transform the form of life. These abilities play an important role in making humans honored beings and in their role as leaders on earth. Based on the above discussion, it is understood that the concept of *hawa nafsu* in the Qur'an has many variations of meaning. Therefore, this study seeks to explore it more deeply due to the variety of meanings of the term *al-hawa* itself in its original usage, as reflected in various verses of the Qur'an. *Hawa nafsu* in the Qur'an comes from the word *al-hawa* (plural: *ahwa'*), which carries a negative (salbiyah) meaning. Al-Sha'bi (may Allah have mercy on him) said, "It is called *al-hawa* because it can lead its possessor into Hell" (Al-Jauziyyah, 2016): 3).

Al-hawa (desire) is always associated with *al-nafs*. It carries meanings such as lowliness, falling, causing downfall, desire, and pleasure. It can also be understood as base desires or worldly passions. *Al-hawa* refers to desires that tend toward matters contrary to the guidance of Allah ﷻ.

This shows that humans are constantly tempted by Satan to commit wrongdoing. If a person is not aware of their role as Allah's vicegerent (khalifah) on earth, they will fall into disgrace and disobedience. However, if a person is able to direct their desires, purify them, and align them with positive paths toward the pleasure of Allah ﷻ, then their desires will become pure and in accordance with a clean and natural disposition (fitrah) (Shaleh, 2013: 194).

In the Qur'an, *al-nafs* is generally divided into three categories or levels:

1. Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah

This soul is the source of all evil and blameworthy behavior (Aqib, p. 41). Allah ﷻ created this *nafs* in a state of ignorance and injustice. Without mercy and true guidance, it will remain in a state of wrongdoing and ignorance. Except by the grace of Allah ﷻ upon the believers, no one would possess a pure soul. If Allah ﷻ wills goodness for a person or a good soul, He will purify and organize everything within them. Conversely, if Allah ﷻ does not will the purification of a soul, it is left in its original state of ignorance and injustice (Al-Jauziyah, 2018: 55).

The Qur'an explains the nature and condition of *al-nafs al-ammarah* in Surah Yusuf, verse 53:

وما أبرئ نفسي إن النفس لأمارة بالسوء إلا ما رحم ربي إن ربي غفور رحيم

"And I do not absolve myself (from fault), for indeed the soul (nafs) is ever inclined to evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful."

2. Al-Nafs Al-Lawwamah

According to M. Quraish Shihab's understanding, lawwamah (لَوَّامَة) is derived from an ancient word meaning "to reproach" or "to warn," originally referring to regret followed by self-reproach. The soul characterized as al-nafs al-lawwamah lies between al-nafs al-muṭma'innah (the tranquil soul that is always submissive to the guidance of Allah ﷻ) and al-nafs al-ammārah (the soul that constantly opposes and follows desires, urging its owner to deviate from the guidance of Allah ﷻ).

3. Al-Nafs Al-Muṭma'innah

Al-muṭma'innah is the peaceful and tranquil soul, a soul illuminated by inner light and the depths of the heart. This soul is pure from evil behavior and remains stable in its wholeness. A person who has reached this level has entered a spiritual rank on the path of ṭarīqah, moving toward a higher spiritual station. Such a person is able to interact with others outwardly, while inwardly their heart is in communion (in harmony) with Allah ﷻ. Riya, according to Ibn al-Qayyim, is the act of arranging one's actions in order to be seen by others or to show off. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, in his book *Al-Fath al-Rabbani*, explains that a person who commits riya is one who wears clean clothing but has a dirty heart. It can be understood that riya is prohibited (haram), and its doer is subject to the displeasure of Allah ﷻ. This is indicated in His words in Surah Al-Ma'un (107), verses 5–6, which state:

الَّذِيْنَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُوْنَۙ الَّذِيْنَ هُمْ يُرَاۤءُوْنَۙ

(5) "(They are) those who are heedless of their prayer, and those who show off (in their deeds). (6) "If a person is affected by riya (showing off), it may come either after or before he performs an act of worship." If, after completing the act of worship, a person feels happiness without displaying it to others, then this feeling does not invalidate his deed, because he has already fulfilled the condition of sincerity (ikhlas), and thus he is not affected by what comes afterward.

This is especially so if he does not force himself to show it or speak about it. Allah ﷻ will say on the Day of Judgment when recompensing people for their deeds: "Go to those for whom you used to show off in the world. See whether you find any reward from them." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "I convey to you something that, if you preserve it, it will benefit you; but if you neglect it and do not guard it, then your proof before Allah on the Day of Judgment will be cut off."

A person who has the trait of riya constantly experiences anxiety, because the deeds he performs are based on seeking the praise of others. Such a person will always suffer—before performing the deed, during it, and after it. He feels distress whether he is praised or not praised. Before acting, he is anxious about what deed to perform and how to perform it so that he will be praised by people. He fears that if his action is wrong or not good, he will be blamed, not praised, and not respected or appreciated by others.

A person who commits riya indeed attains the praise and admiration he seeks from society, and his name may become well-known among people. Therefore, it is not surprising that people with the trait of riya are often praised and admired within society.[11]

In the context of religiosity, Sulaeman et al. (2024) found that many Muslim adolescents access spiritual experiences through short, visual, and motivational religious content. This phenomenon reflects what is called *hyperspirituality*, namely a pattern of religiosity that is fast, instant, and based on digital content consumption. On one hand, this pattern is able to increase adolescents' interest in religion and bring them closer to Islamic symbols. However, on the other hand, there is a risk of the superficialization of the meaning of worship and the reduction of spirituality into merely a visual display.

Within the framework of Islamic ethics, this condition has the potential to give rise to *digital riya'*, namely the practice of displaying religious activities not purely out of faith, but to build a religious image in the eyes of the public. Achfandhy and Rohmatulloh (2024) show that urban Muslim adolescents often find themselves in a dilemma between maintaining sincerity in worship and meeting digital social expectations. Religious posts that were initially intended as expressions of faith can turn into tools of self-image when their orientation shifts toward audience response. This phenomenon is also evident in Hefner's (2022) study on Muslim adolescent girls, which shows how they must negotiate moral values, religious authority, and the pressures of popular culture in digital spaces. Social media provides freedom of expression, but at the same time creates new social standards that demand certain forms of religious performance. In this situation, the authenticity of worship becomes increasingly difficult to maintain.

The idea of "online self-sacralization as a psychological idol of the 21st century" is not a standardized term within a single established theory, but it can be understood as a synthesis of several fields: psychology (particularly narcissism), digital sociology, and religious studies. In essence, digital space provides opportunities for individuals to position themselves as the center of meaning, attention, and validation—functions that, in classical terms, were once associated with what is considered "sacred."

1) What is meant by "online self-sacralization"?

This refers to the tendency to elevate one's identity (image, opinions, personal experiences) into something that is "exalted" and not to be questioned or disturbed. On social media, platforms such as Instagram or TikTok, this can be seen in: highly selective curation of self-image (highlighting an idealized life), dependence on "likes," views, and comments as sources of self-worth, and defensive or aggressive reactions to criticism (because criticism feels like a "desecration" of the self). In simple terms: the self becomes an "object of worship."

2) Why is it called a "psychological idol"?

Within a religious framework, an "idol" is something given absolute meaning even though it is not God. In a modern psychological context: individuals may "worship" their own self-image (the ego ideal), self-worth becomes dependent on external recognition (followers, engagement), and inner life becomes distorted because of an emphasis on performance rather than authenticity.[13]

3) Systematic Dependence on Technology: A Shift in Shirk al-Uluhiyyah

In this life, as human beings, we will inevitably experience difficulties and hardships, all of which are tests and trials from Allah ﷻ. Indeed, when difficulties come, Allah ﷻ is the best helper, and it is to Him that we depend. No matter how severe the trials and hardships we face may be, we should not be tempted to seek help through acts of shirk (associating partners with Allah).

4) Trials and Difficulties Come from Allah ﷻ

Disasters and hardships that befall us are, in essence, decrees of Allah and occur by His permission. In fact, every calamity and difficulty we experience—or will experience—has already been recorded in the Preserved Tablet (Lauhul Mahfuzh). As their very nature indicates, trials are a means by which Allah will make manifest before His creation who is truly sincere in faith and who is not. When calamities occur, this reality becomes evident.
Among the signs of a person's sincere faith is that when trials come, they seek only the help

of Allah ﷻ. They rely upon Him and submit themselves fully to Him. It is known that calamities and trials are decreed by Allah ﷻ. Therefore, it must also be understood that only Allah ﷻ has the power to remove them. If, in reality, only Allah can remove harm and hardship, then a sound and rational person will certainly seek help from Allah ﷻ in all difficulties and depend upon Him. As for those who seek help from false deities other than Allah when afflicted by calamity, they are disobedient to Allah ﷻ, because their hearts have become heedless of remembering Him.

Interpretation of Surah An-Nahl Verses 53–55
(Analysis based on Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Tafsir Al-Azhar, and Tafsir Ibn Kathir)

بِمِنْكُمْ يَرْجَرُونَ، ثُمَّ إِذَا كَشَفَ الضُّرَّ عَنْكُمْ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِنْكُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ لِيَكْفُرُوا بِمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَتَمَتَّعُوا فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ

"And all blessings that you have are from Allah. Then when harm touches you, it is to Him that you cry for help. Yet when He removes the harm from you, a group among you then associate partners with their Lord. They deny the blessings We have bestowed upon them. So enjoy yourselves; soon you will come to know (the consequences)." (Qur'an, An-Nahl 16:53–55)

M. Quraish Shihab explains that *ni'mah* (blessing) refers to the pleasures and comforts of life that are in harmony with human nature. A blessing itself produces a pleasant condition and does not lead to harm, whether material or immaterial. The term *ni'mah* encompasses both worldly and spiritual goodness. All creatures, especially human beings, have certainly experienced something they perceive as pleasant, and that is what is meant by a blessing.

Hamka interprets these verses by stating that many people rely on hope and good expectations. This is permissible and even good, as long as such hopes are based on reason and accompanied by sincere effort. However, relying solely on mercy or assistance without effort is nothing but empty wishful thinking. Persisting in sin while depending on Allah's mercy is also empty hope. The peak of negligence is found among disbelievers who assume that Allah favors them through wealth and children, leading them to live in this world with false hopes and empty aspirations. This is one of the ways Satan misleads humans, as he said: "I will surely mislead them and arouse in them false hopes," as stated in Surah An-Nisa (4:119).

Therefore, it is very appropriate when Sayyidina Ali said, "I fear for you two things: following desires and having excessive hope." The Qur'an contains many verses that mention devotion in various contexts. One of the Qur'anic verses referring to devotion is taken from Surah Adz-Dzariyat [51]: 56, which expresses the highest form of human servitude to Allah ﷻ. The following is its interpretation in a contextual sense, using the *Tafsir An-Nur* by Teuku Muhammad Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

"I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me." Why, O Muhammad, are you commanded to warn mankind? You are commanded to warn them that jinn and humans were not created except to worship Me.

Jinn and humans were created by Allah in order to worship Him. In other words, Allah made both of these beings as creatures who are meant to worship, and He granted them intellect and senses that lead them to worship Allah. Their purpose of creation is to worship. Therefore, this verse does not contradict the statement of Allah that many humans and jinn

will enter Hell. There are narrations that explain that the meaning of this verse is: I (Allah) did not create jinn and humans except that I command them to perform certain obligations and avoid certain prohibitions.

يُشْرِكُوْنَۙ ١٥ لِيَكْفُرُوْا بِمَآ اٰتَيْنٰهُمْۗ فَتَمَتَّعُوْا فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُوْنَ

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In the interpretation above, the word “worship” is understood as a form of devotion that is the consequence for humans and jinn as creatures created by Allah to follow His commands. More deeply, Allah commands humans and jinn to carry out His orders and avoid

His prohibitions. This is what should be done by all rational beings. Over the past two decades, the development of digital technology has brought profound transformations to the social, cultural, and spiritual lives of Muslims. These changes have not only affected how Muslims interact and access information, but have also reconstructed religious spaces in virtual form. The presence of social media, online platforms, religious applications, as well the emergence of the metaverse and artificial intelligence (AI), indicates that digital reality has become a new arena for contemporary Islamic expression. For urban Muslim communities, digitalization has made it easier to access lectures, read the Qur'an online, participate in live religious studies, and form transnational virtual communities based on shared values and beliefs.

However, behind these opportunities lie complex challenges: the spread of religiously based hate speech, defamation of Islamic scholars, digital radicalism, religious misinformation, and the exploitation of Islamic symbols for economic and identity-based political interests. In Indonesia, the digital space has become a fluid arena for contesting religious meaning. The spirit of da'wah (Islamic preaching) and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) often clashes with provocative practices, personal attacks, or the dissemination of manipulative content that contradicts Islamic ethical values. This phenomenon is highlighted in the study by Abdul Fatah and Khusniyah (2022), which observes that Muslim interactions on social media—although initially driven by intentions of da'wah and spiritual solidarity—often end in digital conflict due to the absence of proper etiquette in media use.

Within this framework, Qur'anic ethics such as gentleness, truthfulness, and accuracy of information face serious challenges in the algorithm-driven era that prioritizes sensation and engagement. Social media, which ideally should serve as a medium for da'wah and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), instead has the potential to produce distortions of religious meaning and ethical conduct in interaction. The urgency of re-establishing digital ethics from an Islamic perspective has become increasingly important. In Islam, ethics are not merely social rules, but an embodiment of the principle of *tawhid* (monotheism) in daily life, including in virtual spaces. Values such as *tabayyun* (verification/clarification), *husnuzan* (good assumptions), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *'adalah* (justice) are moral principles that must be applied in the digital realm. Salsabila and Rafi'i (2025) emphasize the importance of an ethical approach in social media interaction so that Muslim social relations remain peaceful, respectful, and productive. This ethics is not only essential in personal communication, but also in digital da'wah, educational content, and participation in online public discourse.

Digital ethics challenges do not only arise in interpersonal relations, but also extend to deeper spiritual dimensions. One of them is social media addiction and the resulting life imbalance. In many cases, excessive attachment to the digital world erodes the quality of relationships with Allah, family, and surrounding society. Muslims who were once active in religious activities may become passive because their time and energy are consumed by the virtual world. This phenomenon also weakens the values of *qana'ah* (contentment) and *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), while strengthening feelings of envy and consumerism due to constant self-comparison with others on social media (Elvandari & Karimulloh, 2023). In Islam, maintaining balance between worldly life and the hereafter is a strong foundation of life.

When time for worship decreases due to digital exposure, spiritual ethics are also eroded. Another important challenge is the emergence of virtual worship practices, such as online congregational prayer (*salat berjamaah daring*), which became popular during the pandemic. The emergence of this technology raises theological and jurisprudential questions regarding the validity and essence of worship in digital form. Some scholars argue that congregational prayer requires physical and spatial connection, so performing it online does

not fulfill the conditions of validity. Meanwhile, some Muslims view it as a legitimate form of adaptation in emergency situations. Nevertheless, the main concern is not only legal validity, but also the potential reduction of spiritual concentration (*khushu'*) and inner experience due to overreliance on technological devices (Kabir, Islam, & Kabir, 2024). Beyond legal aspects, there is also the issue of spiritual disruption caused by digital distraction in daily worship. The habit of checking notifications, being tempted to open applications while reading the Qur'an, or finding it difficult to focus during الصلاة (prayer) because the mind is still attached to digital activities, represents a new reality for modern Muslims. In this context, scattered attention or mental fragmentation becomes a threat to *khushu'* and *muraqabah* (spiritual awareness of Allah) in worship.

Munir and Taufiq (2023) identify that doomscrolling—endless scrolling of negative content—can erode spiritual motivation and make worship feel emotionally empty. Islam emphasizes the importance of self-control (*mujahadah al-nafs*) and inner presence in all acts of worship. Therefore, without strong ethical discipline, technology can shift from being a helpful tool into a barrier that hinders the continuity of the human relationship with God.

DISCUSSION

Whereas the preceding Findings section was concerned with the thematic extraction of relevant terms and verses directly from the Qur'an and tafsir literature, the discussion that follows shifts register: it synthesizes those extracted themes with sociological theory—drawing on frameworks such as digital alienation, the attention economy, and self-apotheosis—in order to situate the Qur'anic material within contemporary social-scientific debate. Overlap in surface content between the two sections is therefore intentional to a degree, since the same phenomena (algorithmic dependence, digital narcissism, technological reliance) are revisited; the distinguishing contribution of this section lies in the sociological synthesis rather than in the identification of the themes themselves "The Evolution of the Meaning of Shirk: An Etymological Respective of "Ash-Shirka".

Shirk, according to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)*, is the act of associating partners with Allah. Linguistically, the word *shirk* is derived from the root *sharika, yashraku, shirkan*, which means to associate or to share in partnership with someone. Terminologically, shirk refers to the act of associating Allah with others. A person who commits shirk is called a *mushrik*. Such a person directs actions toward created beings (whether humans or objects) that should be directed only to Allah—such as worship, seeking help, obedience, or other acts that are exclusively reserved for Allah سبحانه وتعالى.

In *Tafsir An-Nur*, M. Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy explains that shirk encompasses all forms of disbelief in which one believes that something other than Allah can exercise will over the universe, prevent harm, or bring benefit. It also includes establishing what is lawful (halal) and unlawful (haram) in religious matters without any basis from the revealed Book of Allah, as was done by certain groups among the Jews and Christians. A person who commits shirk believes that stones, inanimate objects, or even human beings possess influence over the universe and worships them as a means of drawing closer to Allah. Allah does not forgive the sin of shirk, distinguishing it from other sins and acts of disobedience.

Shirk originates from a root word in Arabic, *sharika*, which means "to become a partner or associate." It is then augmented with a hamzah, giving the meaning of associating or making something (that is one) into two (*ja'alahu syarkiyan*). In Islam, shirk is understood as the belief in multiple gods (*i'tiqādan ta'dīdu al-ilāhati*). Within the concept of *tawhid* (monotheism), shirk is interpreted as the belief that there exists another power alongside Allah in the execution of destiny and the governance of the universe (Harahap, 2003). According to Shaykh Muhammad bin Abdullah At-Tuwaijiri, shirk is associating partners with Allah the

Exalted in His *rububiyyah* (lordship), *uluhiyyah* (divinity/worship), and His *asma wa sifat* (names and attributes), or in any one of these aspects. If a servant believes that there is a creator or helper other than Allah, then he has committed shirk. If he believes that there is a deity besides Allah who deserves to be worshipped, then he has committed shirk. And if he believes that there is anything comparable to Allah in His names and attributes, then he has committed shirk.

Modern digital platforms such as Meta Platforms, Google, and TikTok operate within the framework of the *attention economy*, a system that treats human attention as a source of economic value. From an Islamic perspective, time and attention are a trust (*amanah*) that should be fully directed toward devotion to Allah (Qur'an, Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56). However, through addictive designs such as infinite scroll, constant notifications, and personalization algorithms that exploit the mechanism of the Dopamine Loop, these platforms unconsciously "draw" people into continuous engagement, causing much of their time and focus to be absorbed into digital activity.

This condition leads to a decline in the quality of worship, a weakening of spiritual concentration, and a shift in life orientation from the transcendent toward the consumptive and worldly. Furthermore, as explained by Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, digital companies do not merely monetize attention but also shape user behavior to ensure they keep returning and remain attached to the platforms. From a spiritual perspective, this situation can be understood as a subtle form in which part of human "devotional energy"—in the form of time, attention, and the orientation of the heart—is indirectly diverted from Allah toward digital systems created by humans.[19]

Delegation of Will: A Threat to the Purity of Faith

It is almost certain that, amid the "euphoria" of its mainstreaming, the negative impacts of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 have practically gone unnoticed, drowned out by the noise and massive promotion surrounding it. They are buried under the camouflage of modernity and the creations of capitalism, vigorously publicized by political entities, media, and markets. Ironically, the negative implications of advanced technology have long been experienced by various countries and have been published in journals and media. These negative effects have gradually damaged the mentality and behavior of generations. In fact, anecdotal reports suggest that some parents in Australia and other Western countries have begun favoring humanities-oriented education over an exclusive focus on science and technology, reportedly as a response to concerns about the erosion of human social relationships among the digital generation; this trend is illustrative rather than established by systematic empirical data, and further verification is warranted.

Various negative impacts of smart technology on the behavior of the digital generation (deviant behavior of cyber generation) have emerged, ranging from the growing tendency to no longer respect parents (as well as teachers and family), to becoming asocial, addicted to games, dependent on intelligent machines, and the rise of illicit businesses and dehumanization. Other social issues that have surfaced include the massive use of mobile phones while driving, working, and studying. Meanwhile, the most frequently complained-about negative behaviors in media usage are bullying, violence, the spread of false information (hoaxes), and pornography. There is a tendency for the public's reading rate to increase, yet their comprehension remains weak due to social media bias (WhatsApp, Instagram, Line, Facebook). Access to digital references among the younger generation is increasing, but their productivity and reading capacity remain very low.

The relationship between humans and technology has become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, technology drives humans toward experiences that ultimately turn them into technical beings, often unaware that there is an ideological layer gripping them at a

metaphysical level. On the other hand, technology acts as a mediating instrument thatconnects humans with the world they experience, shaping perception. In this context, the human subject is an agent, and therefore the positive or negative impact of technology depends on the subject itself. The reciprocal relationship between humans and technology affects human experience. This can become negative when technology serves as a system that justifies consumerism and hyperreality, pushing humans toward dissatisfaction and distancing them from their natural values—that humans are merely biological beings. Instead, everything is manipulated, leading humans to believe more in illusions. In any case, the world is largely driven by capitalism, which emphasizes consumption and dependency, encouraging people to keep buying. This makes the relationship between humans and technology tend to play an antagonistic role, as it maintains and legitimizes the status quo of the ideology behind technology.

Today, humans cannot be separated from the use of technology—from waking up to even activities during sleep, technology is always involved. Technological development has permeated all aspects of human life. It reveals an impersonal phenomenon in society, which has become increasingly technical. The technical phenomenon in society, as explained by Sastrapratedja (Dwiningrum, 2012: 154), includes the following:

a. Rationality: actions guided by technology are measured in advance before being carried out.
b. Artificiality: creating things that are not natural but man-made.
c. Monism: all techniques are interdependent and interconnected, forming a unified system.
d. In culture, technique continues to develop and expand.
e. Automatism: everything operates automatically in methods, organizations, and systems; technique can also transform previously non-technical activities into technical ones.
f. Universalism: technology becomes universal, transcending geography, ethnicity, ideology, and national boundaries.
g. Autonomy: technology becomes independent and develops on its own.

The comprehensive spread of technology across the world has transformed civilization into a highly technical society. Human behavior, often unconsciously, is driven by a uniform system. At this point, technology becomes an instrument functioning as an extension of capitalism. The cultural system produced through technological techniques logically results in a consumer society. Ultimately, in the struggle for profit and influence over human life, industrialists use technology as a means to legitimize and entrench their power.

Power in this sense refers to the widespread influence on society to purchase industrial products and become dependent on them. According to Capra, the ecological crisis is caused by the worldview of modernity (Capra, 2001: 32). The modern human perspective seeks to eliminate the supernatural and myths, moving toward humanism but ultimately becoming trapped in anthropocentrism—the belief that everything must be measured by human standards. The logical consequence is that humans become trapped in building a civilization that leads to environmental destruction, as development is measured solely from a human-centered perspective, disrupting natural cycles. Innovation is no longer a tool for genuine progress toward a better civilization, but instead leads to a utopia of progress accompanied by environmental degradation.

Shirk in the modern context does not always take the form of physical idol worship, but can emerge as a way of thinking and a life orientation that subtly divides the position of Allah with other things, including digital entities. In the technological era, a person may place social media, algorithms, or digital figures as the primary source of validation, truth, and even inner peace. When the heart depends more on “likes,” trends, or virtual recognition than on

divine guidance and the decrees of Allah, there is an unconscious shift in theological orientation. In Islamic theological studies, this condition is often associated with *shirk khafi* (hidden shirk), where inner reliance and loyalty are no longer purely directed to Allah, but are mixed with worldly elements that are excessively glorified.

Reconstruction of Tawhid in the Post-Secular Era

Efforts to preserve the purity of aqidah can begin by deepening one's understanding of Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an and authentic hadith. In the Qur'an, the affirmation of monotheism (tawhid) and the prohibition of shirk can be found, for example, in Surah Al-Ikhlas (112:1–4) [23], dan Surah An-Nisa (4:48), which affirms that Allah does not forgive the sin of shirk. By studying these verses in depth, a person will have a strong foundation to preserve the purity of their belief.

Furthermore, maintaining the purity of aqidah is carried out by practicing acts of worship sincerely and avoiding all forms of deviation such as superstition and beliefs that are not in accordance with Islamic teachings. This is also reinforced by following the guidance of the Prophet as recorded in *Shahih Muslim*, for example in the hadith about the importance of sincerity of intention (Hadith No. 1907 in Imam Muslim's numbering). Worship performed with the correct intention will keep the heart upright and protected from showing off (riya) and deviations in aqidah.

In addition, a Muslim needs to continually engage in self-reflection (muhasabah), choose a good environment, and remain cautious of influences and ideologies that may harm their aqidah. In *Shahih Muslim*, there is also encouragement to constantly pray for steadfastness in faith, such as the supplication asking that the heart be kept firm upon the religion (Hadith No. 2654). With consistent effort supported by prayer, the purity of aqidah can be maintained amid the various challenges of the times. The importance of expanding the conceptual understanding of tawhid in the 21st century lies in the need to comprehend the oneness of God not only in a theological dimension, but also within increasingly complex social, economic, and cultural contexts. Tawhid can no longer be understood merely as an individual belief; rather, it must be actualized in addressing systemic challenges such as secularism, materialism, environmental crises, and social inequality. By broadening the meaning of tawhid, muslims can use it as an ethical foundation to build justice, maintain ecological balance, and develop systems of life that are aligned with divine values. This demonstrates that tawhid has strong relevance in responding to modern global dynamics.

Moreover, the conceptual expansion of tawhid is also important for strengthening the integration between faith and knowledge amid rapid technological development and the flow of information. Tawhid can serve as a fundamental principle in guiding the use of science and technology so that they remain within moral and humanitarian boundaries. In this context, the thought of figures such as Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi emphasizes the importance of the Islamization of knowledge based on tawhid as a solution to the dualism between religion and science. Thus, expanding the understanding of tawhid not only preserves the purity of aqidah, but also transforms it into a dynamic force in addressing the systemic challenges of the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that shirk in the digital era should not be understood only as a residual, individual sin, but also as a systemic phenomenon, in which technological and social platforms come to occupy the functional position of arbab and andad through the sh-r-k/syarikah correspondence developed throughout this analysis. By tracing this correspondence across Qur'anic verses on al-hawa, andad, and Arbab, alongside sociological

accounts of digital alienation, self-apotheosis, and the attention economy, the study has proposed a shift in vocabulary from "theological shirk" to "functional shirk" as a way of naming this systemic dimension of contemporary devotion.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. As a conceptual, library-based study, the analysis does not draw on interviews, surveys, or other primary data regarding how Muslims actually experience or resist functional shirk in digital spaces; its claims describe a textual and theoretical correspondence rather than a documented empirical pattern. The etymological argument linking sh-r-k and syarikah, while suggestive, rests on a semantic parallel rather than a philologically exhaustive derivation, and alternative readings remain possible. In addition, the sociological literature drawn upon is illustrative rather than systematically reviewed, and some claims noted in the Discussion would benefit from more rigorous empirical support in future work.

For da'wah and Islamic education practice, these findings suggest that guidance on tawhid and shirk in the digital age may need to move beyond warnings against overtly ritualistic idolatry toward cultivating critical awareness of algorithmic dependence, validation-seeking, and self-commodification as sites where devotion can be quietly misdirected. Future research combining this conceptual framework with empirical study of Muslim digital practices—through surveys, interviews, or platform-use analysis—would help test and refine the functional-shirk framework proposed here, and extend it beyond the illustrative cases discussed in this article.

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