

## Beyond Digital Distraction: Surah al-‘Aṣr as a Qur’anic Framework for Time Ethics and Family Relations

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of family communication, particularly through the phenomenon of phubbing, defined as the neglect of others' presence due to excessive smartphone use. Within Muslim family contexts, phubbing has been identified as a contributing factor to the weakening of emotional bonds, the deterioration of communication quality, and the disruption of core familial functions. Although this phenomenon has been widely examined from psychological and sociological perspectives, studies employing Qur'anic frameworks to construct contextually grounded family ethics remain limited. This article seeks to reconstruct Surah al-‘Aṣr (Q. 103:1-3) as a Qur'anic ethical paradigm for addressing phubbing and relational disruption within families in the digital age. Employing Abdullah Saeed's contextual tafsir methodology and a comprehensive literature review, this study integrates linguistic analysis, micro- and macro-contextual examinations, and comparative readings of classical, modern, and contemporary tafsir, which are subsequently situated within contemporary social realities. The findings demonstrate that Surah al-‘Aṣr can be recontextualized into three core ethical values: (1) the ethics of time management, which frames time and attention as moral and spiritual trusts; (2) the productive use of time through quality righteous deeds (*‘amal ṣālih*), manifested in relational presence and care within the family; and (3) the cultivation of a family communication culture grounded in *tawāṣī bi al-ḥaqq* and *tawāṣī bi al-ṣabr*, emphasizing empathetic dialogue and relational patience. Theoretically, this study contributes to Qur'anic scholarship by



proposing a model of ethical recontextualization that bridges the normative message of Surah al-‘Aṣr with contemporary ethical challenges arising from digital culture. Practically, the findings suggest that addressing phubbing requires strengthening ethical awareness and fostering family communication rooted in Qur’anic values, rather than relying solely on technological regulation.

*[Disrupsi teknologi digital telah mengubah pola komunikasi keluarga secara signifikan, salah satunya melalui fenomena phubbing, yaitu perilaku mengabaikan kehadiran orang lain akibat keterlibatan berlebihan dengan smartphone. Dalam konteks keluarga Muslim, phubbing berkontribusi pada melemahnya relasi emosional, menurunnya kualitas komunikasi, dan potensi disintegrasi fungsi keluarga. Meskipun fenomena ini telah banyak dikaji dari perspektif psikologi dan sosiologi, kajian Al-Qur’an yang merumuskan kerangka etika keluarga secara kontekstual masih relatif terbatas. Artikel ini bertujuan merekonstruksi Surah al-‘Aṣr sebagai kerangka etika Qur’ani dalam merespons phubbing dan disrupsi relasi keluarga di era digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan tafsir kontekstual Abdullah Saeed dengan metode kajian kepustakaan, meliputi analisis linguistik, telaah konteks mikro dan makro, serta analisis komparatif tafsir klasik, modern, dan kontemporer, yang kemudian dikontekstualisasikan dengan realitas sosial kekinian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Surah al-‘Aṣr dapat direkontekstualisasikan ke dalam tiga nilai etis utama: (1) etika pengelolaan waktu sebagai amanah moral dan spiritual, (2) pengisian waktu dengan amal ṣāliḥ berkualitas yang diwujudkan melalui kehadiran dan kepedulian relasional dalam keluarga, serta (3) pembangunan budaya komunikasi keluarga berbasis tawāṣī bi al-ḥaqq dan tawāṣī bi al-ṣabr yang menekankan dialog empatik dan kesabaran relasional. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan studi Al-Qur’an dengan menawarkan model rekontekstualisasi etika yang menjembatani pesan normatif Surah al-‘Aṣr dan tantangan etika digital kontemporer. Secara praktis, temuan ini menegaskan bahwa penanganan phubbing memerlukan penguatan kesadaran etis dan budaya komunikasi keluarga berbasis nilai-nilai Qur’ani, bukan sekadar pengaturan teknologis.]*

**Keywords:** Phubbing, Surah al-‘Aṣr, Qur’anic Ethics, Digital Communication, Family Disintegration

## Introduction

The digital revolution has significantly transformed modes of communication, particularly through the pervasive integration of smartphones into daily life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: Mark De Reuver, Shahrokh Nikou, and Harry Bouwman, “Domestication of Smartphones and Mobile Applications: A Quantitative Mixed-Method Study,” *Mobile Media & Communication* 4, no. 3 (September 2016): 347–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157916649989>; Chris Fullwood et al., “My Virtual Friend: A Qualitative Analysis of the Attitudes and Experiences of Smartphone Users: Implications for Smartphone Attachment,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 75 (October 2017): 347–55,

Although digital technologies accelerate the exchange of information and facilitate interaction, they concurrently affect the quality of interpersonal presence, notably within familial relationships.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is especially evident in Indonesia, where internet and social media usage have experienced rapid growth.<sup>3</sup> These developments not only reshape communication patterns but also generate novel relational challenges, including diminished emotional connection, reduced empathy, and a decline in the quality of face-to-face family interactions.<sup>4</sup> A salient manifestation of these challenges is *phubbing*, which may progressively erode social and spiritual bonds within families.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous studies have examined phubbing from an Islamic perspective employing diverse methodological approaches. Thematic exegesis of Indonesian *mufasssir* (Qur'anic commentators) indicates that phubbing is understood as a deviation from Islamic communication ethics, insofar as it undermines self-control and deteriorates the quality of social relationships.<sup>6</sup> Additional studies situate phubbing within the domains of organizational leadership and Islamic education, emphasizing its detrimental effects on communication effectiveness, character formation, and the imperative of internalizing moral values as a preventive strategy.<sup>7</sup> Literature reviews grounded in Islamic psychology further demonstrate a negative correlation between self-control and the propensity to engage in phubbing.<sup>8</sup> At the

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.05.029>; Christopher Campbell, "Pseudoreality and Technology: Smartphone-Related Factors Impacting Mental Health," *Psychodynamic Psychiatry* 52, no. 3 (September 2024): 345–57, <https://doi.org/10.1521/pdps.2024.52.3.345>; Bruno Zeller and Mirella Atherton, "Liberal Democracy, Society and the Digital Revolution," *Liverpool Law Review* 46, no. 1 (April 2025): 137–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10991-025-09380-6>.

<sup>2</sup> Musiam Suci and Yusuf Sapari, "Analisis Perilaku Penggunaan Smartphone dengan Perubahan Budaya Pergaulan Mahasiswa," *Jurnal Signal* 8, no. 1 (2020): 62, <https://doi.org/10.33603/signal.v8i1.3120>.

<sup>3</sup> Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, *Laporan Survei Penetrasi Dan Perilaku Pengguna Internet Indonesia 2025* (2025), <https://survei.apjii.or.id/>.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Hafidz Miftahuddin et al., "Pendampingan Orang Tua dan Anak Dalam Mencegah Perilaku Phubbing," *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat* 5, no. 2 (2025): 31.

<sup>5</sup> Lorenza Feby Ayu Pratiwi Siregar et al., "Phubbing: Dampak Penggunaan Ponsel Terhadap Interaksi Sosial di Era Digital," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Dan Humaniora* 4, no. 1 (2025): 132.

<sup>6</sup> Alisa Aura Zanuba and Musolli, "Phubbing Behavior in the Qur'an," *MUSHAF* 4, no. 1 (2023): 27–49, <https://doi.org/10.33650/mushaf.v4i1.7382>.

<sup>7</sup> See: Fiza Fradesa, Pit Arzuna, and Faisal Ahmadi, "Perilaku Phubbing Dalam Kepemimpinan Organisasi Ditinjau Dari Perspektif Islam," *Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis Syariah* 4, no. 2 (2024): 110–21, <https://doi.org/10.31958/mabis.v4i2.13434>; Siti Aryanti, Al-Faiz Muhammad Rt, and Muriyanto, "Peran Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Mengatasi Perilaku Phubbing: Telaah Hermeneutis," *Jurnal Kepemimpinan & Pengurus Sekolah* 10, no. 3 (2025): 855–72, <https://doi.org/10.34125/jkps.v10i3.820>.

<sup>8</sup> Khairunnisa and Karimulloh, "Hubungan antara Kontrol Diri dengan Perilaku Phubbing Menurut Perspektif Islam," *Nathiqiyyah: Jurnal Psikologi Islam* 8, no. 1 (2025): 88–98, <https://doi.org/10.46781/nathiqiyyah.v8i1>.

global level, studies on digital religiosity and Islamic communication ethics predominantly focus on transformations in religious practices, online religious authority, and evolving moral frameworks within digital environments.<sup>9</sup> While these studies collectively affirm that phubbing contravenes Islamic ethical principles, research that explicitly develops Qur'anic ethical interpretation as a systematic and practical framework of spiritual ethics, particularly in relation to family disintegration, remains comparatively limited.

This study addresses this scholarly gap by positing that the Qur'ān, as the primary source of normative Islamic ethics, possesses the conceptual capacity to formulate an ethical framework concerning temporality and social relations that is directly relevant to contemporary digital challenges. Surah al-ʿAṣr (Q. 103:1–3) is identified as the central conceptual foundation due to its concise yet comprehensive articulation of human loss resulting from the neglect of time, weakened faith, the absence of righteous action, and fragile social solidarity (Andini et al., 2025). The ethical framework derived from Surah al-ʿAṣr—which emphasizes temporal consciousness, the integration of faith (*īmān*) and action (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*), and a collective commitment to truth and patience (*tawāṣī bi-l-ḥaqq wa-l-ṣabr*)—provides a Qur'anic paradigm that can be recontextualized to interpret phubbing as a form of moral and relational loss within digital family life. Accordingly, this study aims to recontextualize the ethical and spiritual values of Surah al-ʿAṣr as a Qur'anic foundation for addressing the phenomenon of phubbing and for strengthening family harmony in the digital age.

Methodologically, this study employs the contextual tafsir approach developed by Abdullah Saeed. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of Qur'anic verses through the integration of linguistic analysis of the text, examination of historical and social contexts at both micro and macro levels (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), comparative analysis of classical, modern, and contemporary exegeses, and an application phase focused on translating Qur'anic values into contemporary social realities.<sup>10</sup> Through this framework, the study seeks to produce a contextual, practical, and solution-oriented interpretation of the Qur'ān that

<sup>9</sup> See: Quan Gao et al., “Lived Religion in a Digital Age,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 25, no. 1 (2022): 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2022.2121979>; Johannes Froh and Matthew Ryan, “Digital Religious Communication and the Facilitation of Social Resilience,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 23, nos. 1–2 (2023): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2023.2232622>; Soleh Hasan Wahid, “Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 10 (2024): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085>.

<sup>10</sup> See: Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2014); Nabila Fajriyanti Muhyin, “The Concepts of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an Abdullah Saeed,” *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 6, no. 1 (2023): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v6i1.289>; Ihsan Nurmansyah and Nur Rahma Dana, “Dialektika Tafsir dan Kemajuan Pengetahuan Sidik Jari dalam Al-Qur'an,” *Al-Qudwah* 2, no. 2 (2024): 205–19, <https://doi.org/10.24014/alqudwah.v2i2.29662>.

responds to the ethical challenges faced by Muslim families in the context of digital disruption.

### **Phubbing as a Relational Problem in Families in the Digital Era**

The progression of digital technology has fundamentally altered patterns of human social interaction. A notable illustration of this transformation is the emergence of the term phubbing, popularized by the *Macquarie Dictionary*, which denotes the act of ignoring a conversational partner during face-to-face interactions due to excessive smartphone use.<sup>11</sup> As smartphones have become increasingly integrated into daily life, behaviors such as checking social media, responding to instant messages, or browsing the internet frequently occur during in-person social encounters. Consequently, individuals' attention often shifts from their immediate social environment to the virtual realm, rendering phubbing a habitual practice that progressively undermines the quality of social relationships.<sup>12</sup>

At the interpersonal level, phubbing has been shown to adversely affect various forms of relationships, including familial bonds, friendships, and romantic partnerships. This behavior commonly occurs during moments that typically demand full attention, such as shared meals, family gatherings in domestic spaces, or significant interpersonal discussions. Rather than engaging in direct communication, individuals focus on their smartphone screens, thereby disrupting the flow of interaction and weakening emotional connection.<sup>13</sup> Numerous empirical studies further indicate that individuals who are subjected to phubbing—particularly within family contexts—frequently experience diminished psychological well-being, heightened social anxiety, and feelings of neglect in their domestic relationships.<sup>14</sup>

The phenomenon of phubbing does not emerge abruptly but is shaped by a range of psychosocial and cultural factors. These include social media addiction, fear of missing out (FOMO), the pursuit of digital validation, and nomophobia—the anxiety associated with the inability to access or use a smartphone. The interaction of these factors contributes to the normalization of phubbing in everyday life.<sup>15</sup> This condition is especially concerning within family settings, where virtual interactions

<sup>11</sup> *The Macquarie Dictionary*, Sixth edition. (Sydney, New South Wales: Macquarie Pty Ltd., 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Rafinitia Aditia, "Fenomena Phubbing: Suatu Degradasi Relasi Sosial Sebagai Dampak Media Sosial," *Keluwih: Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora* 2, no. 1 (2021): 10–13, <https://doi.org/10.24123/soshum.v2i1.4034>.

<sup>13</sup> Azzati Nur Irawati and Nurmina, "Perbedaan Perilaku Phubbing pada Dewasa Awal," *Proyeksi* 15, no. 2 (2020): 142, <https://doi.org/10.30659/jp.15.2.141-150>.

<sup>14</sup> Varoth Chotpitayasunondh and Karen M. Douglas, "How Phubbing Becomes the Norm: The Antecedents and Consequences of Snubbing via Smartphone," *Computers in Human Behavior* 63 (2016): 9–18, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.018>.

<sup>15</sup> Shinta Dwi Sarlini, Elni Yakub, and Siska Mardes, "Analisis Perilaku Phubbing dan Faktor Penyebabnya," *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 9, no. 21 (2023): 724, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10088872>.



increasingly take precedence over face-to-face engagement. As a result, phubbing is often perceived as normative behavior, despite its gradual yet profound detrimental effects on communication quality, relational warmth, and emotional bonds among family members.

From the normative perspective of the Qur'ān, the practice of phubbing contravenes fundamental principles of social interaction, particularly the ethical concept of *ta'āruf* (mutual recognition) articulated in Q. 49:13. The concept of *ta'āruf* extends beyond formal acquaintance, representing an ethical imperative to cultivate social relationships grounded in empathy, attentiveness, and respect for the presence of others. This principle constitutes the foundation for the realization of *ukhuwwah insāniyyah* (human brotherhood), which requires active engagement, moral awareness, and mutual responsibility in all forms of social communication.<sup>16</sup> Within this normative framework, phubbing signifies not merely a decline in communication ethics in the digital era but also a form of spiritual disorientation that undermines the human vocation as a relational, empathetic, and ethically responsible social being.

### Phubbing from the Normative Perspective of the Qur'an

Although the term *phubbing* is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān, the ethical principles embedded within Islamic teachings provide a relevant framework for understanding and evaluating this behavior. The Qur'ān consistently emphasizes the responsible management of time, attention, and the quality of social interactions, while cautioning against neglectful and purposeless activities. Within the context of the contemporary digital era, excessive smartphone use that results in the neglect of one's spouse, children, or parents may be regarded as a form of ethical negligence, insofar as it contradicts the spirit of Islamic teachings that prioritize family harmony and the fulfillment of relational responsibilities.<sup>17</sup>

The normative foundation for understanding this tendency is articulated in several Qur'anic passages, notably Q. 23:3 and Q. 57:20. Both verses emphasize the importance of refraining from activities that are devoid of meaningful value and that distract individuals from their ultimate purpose as well as from their social and spiritual obligations. Q. 23:3 characterizes the believers as *wa alladhīna hum 'ani al-laghwi mu'ridūn*—those who turn away from vain deeds and speech. Lexically, *al-laghw* derives from the root *laghā*, denoting invalidity, emptiness, or worthlessness. According to M. Quraish Shihab, *laghw* encompasses all actions that fail to generate

<sup>16</sup> Amelia Fajri and Komarudin Sassi, "Revitalisasi Eksistensi Taaruf dan Taqwa dalam Membangun Harmoni Sosial," *Jurnal Dinamika Pendidikan Nusantara* 6, no. 3 (2025): 189–90.

<sup>17</sup> Arif Unggul Prasetyo and Labib Sajawandi, "Analisis Perubahan Perilaku pada Anak Usia Dini Yang Kecanduan Gawai," *Jurnal Cerlang PG PAUD* 1, no. 2 (2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.37640/jcpaud.v1i2.2077>.

genuine benefit in either worldly or eschatological terms, including acts that may initially be permissible but lose their ethical value when they distract individuals from more essential purposes.<sup>18</sup>

Within this conceptual framework, phubbing may be interpreted as a form of *laghw* when smartphone use exceeds functional necessity and adversely affects the quality of social relationships—particularly those within the family that require attentiveness, emotional presence, and moral responsibility. Phubbing does not inherently constitute an ethical violation in every instance of digital device use; rather, it becomes ethically problematic when attention and psychological presence are diverted away from direct interpersonal relationships that demand meaningful engagement. In parent–child relationships, for example, phubbing may foster feelings of neglect, diminish a sense of being valued, and weaken the emotional bonds essential for value transmission and ethical role modeling.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the normative injunction of Q. 23:3 serves as an ethical reminder that time and attention should not be consumed by activities that undermine relational significance.

A comparable moral warning is articulated in Q. 57:20, which characterizes worldly life through concepts such as *la'ib* (play), *lahw* (distraction), *zīnah* (adornment), *tafākhur* (mutual boasting), and *takāthur* (rivalry in accumulation). These terms depict forms of worldly engagement that, while outwardly appealing, are transient and possess the potential to divert individuals from fundamental ethical and spiritual objectives. Wahbah al-Zuhaylī underscores that this verse functions as a caution against being deceived by the allure of the ephemeral world, warning that prioritizing worldly pursuits as ultimate ends rather than instrumental means leads to existential emptiness and moral decline.<sup>20</sup> In the digital context, the attraction of smartphones and social media may be understood as contemporary manifestations of *lahw* and *la'ib*, insofar as they absorb attention, delay responsibilities, and obscure relational priorities.

Within contemporary family dynamics, phubbing disrupts social interaction by creating a disjunction between physical presence and psychological as well as ethical engagement. Excessive attachment to digital devices impedes emotional communication, diminishes the quality of shared time, and weakens the family's role as the primary arena for value internalization and character formation. When left unaddressed, this behavior may foster apathy, individualism, and a deficit of empathy—particularly among children, for whom parents function as primary moral

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 15:149–51.

<sup>19</sup> Idhza Wira Yudha, Rahmah Hastuti, and Jessica, “Pengaruh Kualitas Attachment Remaja dengan Orang Tua terhadap Perilaku Phubbing pada Keluarga di Kalimantan Barat,” *Paedagogy: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Psikologi* 4, no. 4 (2024): 343, <https://doi.org/10.51878/paedagogy.v4i4.3797>.

<sup>20</sup> Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, ed. Abdul Hayyie Al-Kattani (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013), 15:351–53.

exemplars.<sup>21</sup> Such tendencies stand in tension with Qur’anic teachings that advocate balance between worldly life and the hereafter and emphasize the nurturing of human relationships as a spiritual responsibility.

Thematically, Q. 23:3 and Q. 57:20 articulate a coherent ethical principle: time, attention, and social relationships constitute entrusted responsibilities that should not be squandered on trivial pursuits. Both verses caution against absorption in pleasurable yet ultimately hollow activities that degrade the quality of life, weaken social bonds, and divert individuals from spiritual consciousness. Within this framework, phubbing is conceptualized not merely as an issue of digital etiquette but as a contemporary manifestation of *laghw* and *lahw*—forms of meaningless distraction that consume time and undermine familial relational obligations.

This normative foundation serves as a conceptual bridge to the central message of Surah al-‘Asr (Q. 103:1–3). Whereas Q. 23:3 and Q. 57:20 warn against futility and negligence, Surah al-‘Asr offers a more comprehensive ethical framework for the governance of time and social relations. The surah asserts that humanity remains in a state of loss when time is not utilized meaningfully, except through faith (*īmān*), righteous action (*‘amal ṣāliḥ*), and constructive social engagement characterized by mutual exhortation to truth (*tawāṣī bi-l-ḥaqq*) and patience (*tawāṣī bi-l-ṣabr*). Collectively, these verses establish a robust Qur’anic foundation for an ethic of time, attention, and relational presence, which will be further elaborated through a focused analysis of Surah al-‘Asr.

### **Surah al-‘Asr as a Framework for the Ethics of Time and Social Relations in Contemporary Muslim Families**

In the digital era, characterized by ubiquitous distractions, the quality of emotional relationships within families—particularly between parents and children—faces substantial challenges due to shifting patterns of attention and communication. A salient manifestation of this condition is the phenomenon of phubbing.<sup>22</sup> Phubbing not only diminishes the depth of communication but also erodes psychological presence and empathy within familial relationships. Addressing this phenomenon, therefore, requires more than acknowledging its negative effects; it necessitates the articulation of a normative ethical framework capable of guiding the responsible management of time and attention. In this regard, Surah al-‘Asr (Q. 103:1–3) offers essential Qur’anic guidance concerning temporality, moral responsibility, and the quality of social relationships.

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<sup>21</sup> Miftahuddin et al., “Pendampingan Orang Tua dan Anak dalam Mencegah Perilaku Phubbing,” 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ainul Fadilah, Nindia Pratitis, and Amanda Pasca Rini, “Perilaku Phubbing pada Remaja: Menguji Peranan Kontrol Diri dan Interaksi Sosial,” *INNER: Journal of Psychological Research* 2, no. 2 (2022): 150–59.



Surah al-‘Aṣr declares that humanity as a whole exists in a state of existential loss, except for those who fulfill four interrelated conditions: faith (*īmān*), righteous action (*‘amal ṣāliḥ*), mutual exhortation to truth (*tawāṣī bi-l-ḥaqq*), and mutual exhortation to patience (*tawāṣī bi-l-ṣabr*). The structure of this message indicates that human flourishing is contingent not solely upon individual spirituality but also upon active engagement in morally grounded social relationships. Accordingly, Surah al-‘Aṣr underscores from the outset that the ethical management of time and the quality of social interaction constitute fundamental dimensions of human piety.

Lexically, the term *al-‘aṣr* derives from the root *‘aṣara*, which fundamentally signifies “to squeeze” or “to extract the essence of something.” According to Ibn Fāris and al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, this root encompasses both the notion of time (*al-dahr*) and the act of extracting value through pressure and effort.<sup>23</sup> This semantic field suggests that time should not be understood merely as a neutral chronological interval, but rather as an existential resource that demands intentional and meaningful engagement. The value or loss of time does not arise from its inherent nature, but from the manner in which individuals “extract” its essence through choices, attentional focus, and life orientation. Within the context of digital family life, the failure to manage time and attention—manifested in behaviors such as phubbing—may thus be construed as a failure to fulfill the ethical responsibility embedded in temporality itself.

The majority of *mufasssirūn* interpret Allah’s oath by *al-‘aṣr* as an affirmation of the paramount significance of time in human existence. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that Allah swears by time to remind humanity that time serves as a witness to the quality of human deeds and moral commitments.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the loss (*khu sr*) mentioned in Surah al-‘Aṣr is not attributed to the mere passage of time, but to human negligence in utilizing time for faith-based action and constructive social engagement. This interpretation provides a compelling framework for understanding phubbing as a contemporary form of negligence that dissipates time and attention without fostering meaningful relational value.

Although Surah al-‘Aṣr lacks specific micro-level *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the broader contextual narrative presented by Wahbah al-Zuhaylī—concerning the encounter between ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ and Musaylimah al-Kadhdhāb—offers an important symbolic dimension.<sup>25</sup> This account illustrates how truth can be undermined through the fabrication of texts that mimic the form of revelation while lacking ethical substance. Such a phenomenon resonates strongly with the contemporary digital environment,

<sup>23</sup> See: Al-Raghib Al-Ashfahani, *Kamus Al-Qur’an*, ed. Ahmad Zaini Dahlan (Depok: Pustaka Khazanah Fawa'id, 2017), 1:742; Muhammad Quraish Shihab, Nasaruddin Umar, and Muchlis M Hanafi, *Ensiklopedi Al-Quran: Kajian Kosa Kata* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2007), 34–37.

<sup>24</sup> Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, 15:497.

<sup>25</sup> Az-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, 15:660–61.

in which information is frequently engineered to appear authentic and compelling despite being ethically hollow. Within this interpretive frame, Surah al-‘Aṣr not only warns against loss arising from the neglect of time, but also calls for critical discernment in determining how attention and engagement are allocated amid pervasive digital distractions.

The social dimension of Surah al-‘Aṣr is further reflected in reports indicating that the Prophet’s companions would recite this surah to one another before parting, suggesting that it functioned as a shared ethical reminder emphasizing time consciousness and social responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Imam al-Shāfi‘ī’s assertion that Surah al-‘Aṣr alone suffices as a comprehensive guide for human life further underscores the surah’s expansive ethical scope, encompassing belief, action, and interpersonal relations.<sup>27</sup>

Hamka’s interpretation—drawing on Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s observation of pre-Islamic Arabian gatherings in the afternoon that often degenerated into trivial discourse—reinforces the notion that loss arises not from the passage of time itself, but from how time is utilized.<sup>28</sup> This insight remains acutely relevant in contemporary family life, where moments of potential intimacy and cohesion are frequently displaced by smartphone engagement and virtual interactions that lack emotional depth and ethical presence.

From this perspective, phubbing may be understood as an ethical failure in the governance of time and relational presence. Beyond individual neglect, this behavior contributes to the erosion of empathetic communication, moral exemplarity, and emotional cohesion within the family unit. Surah al-‘Aṣr provides a normative framework for addressing this challenge by emphasizing that time must be oriented toward faith that cultivates awareness, actions that yield meaningful outcomes, and social relationships grounded in mutual encouragement toward truth and patience.

Interpreting Surah al-‘Aṣr as an ethical framework for contemporary family life thus transcends purely theological readings. It offers a Qur’anic paradigm for regulating time, attention, and relational presence, while simultaneously critiquing the pervasive phenomenon of phubbing in the digital age. Rooted in the rich exegetical tradition of Surah al-‘Aṣr, this ethical framework reflects an evolution from primarily doctrinal interpretations toward socially engaged and human-centered ethical readings. Accordingly, the following section examines classical to

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<sup>26</sup> Imam Asy-Syaukani, *Tafsir Fathul Qadir*, ed. Sayyid Ibrahim (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2013), 11:542–43.

<sup>27</sup> See: Muhammad Rasyid Ridha, *Tafsir Al-Fatihah Wa Sittu Suwar Min Khawatim Al-Quran* (Kairo: Dar al-Manar, 1367), 5–6; Muhammad Basiuni Imran, *Tafsir Tujuh Surah* (Sambas, Kalimantan Barat, 1935), 5–6; Ihsan Nurmansyah and Adib Sofia, “Paralel, Transformi, dan Haplologi Tafsir Tujuh Surah Karya Muhammad Basiuni Imran dengan Karya Tafsir Muhammad Rasyid Ridha: Kajian Intertekstualitas,” *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Tafsir* 6, no. 2 (March 2022), <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v6i2.14685>.

<sup>28</sup> Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 2007), 8101.

contemporary interpretations of Surah al-‘Aṣr in order to demonstrate the continuity and epistemological development underlying Qur’anic ethics of time and social relations.

### **The Dynamics of Interpreting Surah al-‘Aṣr: From Normative-Theological to Socio-Ethical Approaches**

The interpretation of Surah al-‘Aṣr exemplifies an intellectual trajectory that reflects the epistemological development of Islamic tafsir from the classical period to the modern era. Each generation of *mufasssīrūn* (Qur’anic exegetes) has engaged with this surah through distinct intellectual paradigms and socio-historical contexts; nevertheless, they consistently affirm its core ethical message concerning the value of time, faith, righteous action, and social responsibility. This interpretive continuity underscores Surah al-‘Aṣr’s function as a normative yet adaptable Qur’anic text, capable of accommodating contextualized readings while preserving its theological foundation.

In the classical period, interpretations of Surah al-‘Aṣr were predominantly shaped by a normative-theological orientation that emphasized the sanctity of time as the object of God’s oath and directed human consciousness toward eschatological accountability. Al-Qurṭubī, for instance, cited a symbolic narration attributed to Ubayy b. Ka’b, which associated the principal elements of the surah with exemplary figures among the Prophet’s companions, each embodying faith, righteous action, truth, and patience.<sup>29</sup> This interpretive strategy was not intended to delimit the semantic scope of the verses, but rather to function pedagogically by highlighting the moral exemplarity of the early Islamic community. Within a broader cosmological framework, al-Shawkānī argued that God’s oath by time signifies the order of the universe and serves as evidence of divine unity and omnipotence.<sup>30</sup> In this phase, time was primarily conceptualized as a theological medium guiding humanity toward monotheistic awareness and ritual obedience.

With the emergence of the modern period, a discernible shift occurred toward a more systematic and pragmatic engagement with ethics and social life. Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, in *Tafsīr al-Munīr*, identified Surah al-‘Aṣr as articulating four foundational pillars of human salvation: faith, righteous deeds, mutual exhortation to truth, and mutual exhortation to patience. These principles were framed not merely as components of individual piety but as ethical foundations for social responsibility and communal success.<sup>31</sup> This approach marks a significant transition from a predominantly cosmological interpretation toward an integrated understanding of ethics, law, and social reality.

<sup>29</sup> Imam Al-Qurṭhubī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurṭhubī*, ed. Fathurrahman, Ahmad Hotib, and Nashirul Haq (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2007), 19:715.

<sup>30</sup> Asy-Syaukani, *Tafsīr Fathul Qadir*, 11:543.

<sup>31</sup> Az-Zuhailī, *Tafsīr Al-Munir*, 15:663–64.

In the early twentieth century within the Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago), interpretations of Surah al-‘Aṣr increasingly reflected a social-reformist orientation. Muḥammad Basiuni Imran emphasized that human loss arises primarily from moral and social negligence rather than from deficiencies in ritual observance alone. Faith and righteous deeds were construed as collective practices aimed at social transformation, while exhortations to truth and patience were understood as communal responsibilities essential to sustaining moral integrity.<sup>32</sup> This reading illustrates how Surah al-‘Aṣr was mobilized as a socio-ethical text responsive to the challenges of modern society.

The socio-ethical orientation gained further prominence in the works of Indonesian *mufasssirūn* such as Aḥmad Hassan, Maḥmūd Yunus, Zainuddin Hamidy, and Fachruddin HS. These scholars conceptualized time as a vital life resource that must be managed productively and responsibly, thereby broadening the scope of righteous deeds to encompass education, family development, and active participation in social life.<sup>33</sup> Within this interpretive framework, piety is understood as an ethical commitment with direct implications for the quality of social and familial relationships.

A more explicitly humanistic-social interpretation is articulated in Hamka’s *Tafsīr al-Azhar*. Hamka challenges the cultural perception of the period of ‘Aṣr as inherently inauspicious, arguing instead that loss derives not from time itself but from how it is utilized. Time is thus conceptualized as a space of potential for reflection, the cultivation of social bonds, and the internalization of moral values. Accordingly, Surah al-‘Aṣr is interpreted as an ethical framework emphasizing conscious presence and relational responsibility.<sup>34</sup>

M. Quraish Shihab, in *Tafsīr al-Mishbāḥ*, advances an integrative approach that highlights the dynamic interrelation between faith, action, and knowledge. He critiques the dichotomy often posited between belief and practice, asserting that genuine piety must be grounded in intellectual awareness, receptivity to guidance, and moral perseverance.<sup>35</sup> This integrative vision is reinforced through the principle of *munāsabah* (textual coherence), particularly in relation to Surah al-‘Alaḥ, which

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<sup>32</sup> See: Imran, *Tafsir Tujuh Surah*, 5–6; Saifuddin Herlambang et al., “The Translation of the Qur’an in Sambas Script,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (2023): 331, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v21i2.1117>.

<sup>33</sup> See: Ahmad Hassan, *Tafsir Al-Furqan* (Surabaya: Al-Ikhwan, 1956), 1229; Zainuddin Hamidy and HS Fachruddin, *Tafsir Quran* (Selangor: Klang Book Centre, 1979), 929; Mahmud Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim* (Selangor: Klang Book Centre, 2003), 7:917.

<sup>34</sup> Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, 8101.

<sup>35</sup> Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, 15:594–95.

connects the activation of reason (*iqra`*) with embodied devotion (*wasjud*), thereby fostering an ethically and intellectually cultivated individual.<sup>36</sup>

The institutional interpretation presented in *al-Qur`ān dan Tafsirnya*, published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, represents an effort to synthesize classical and contemporary perspectives. This tafsir frames God's oath by time as a warning concerning the moral trust embedded in human civilization, which demands conscious and effective stewardship. Neglecting the ethical management of time leads to moral and social deterioration, whereas its responsible utilization directs humanity toward well-being in both worldly and eschatological terms.<sup>37</sup>

To clarify patterns of continuity and epistemological transformation in the interpretation of Surah al-`Aṣr, and to facilitate systematic comparison across historical periods and exegetical traditions, the foregoing discussion is synthesized in the following analytical table:

**Table 1**  
**Exegetical Approaches to Sūrat al-`Aṣr and Their Ethical-Social Implications**

<b>Exegetical Axis</b>	<b>Exegetes</b>	<b>Primary Focus of Interpretation</b>	<b>Ethical-Social Relevance</b>
Normative-Theological	Al-Qurṭubī; al-Shawkānī; al-Zuhaylī	Time as a divine oath; faith ( <i>īmān</i> ), righteous deeds ( <i>`amal ṣāliḥ</i> ), and truth as the foundation of ultimate salvation; the four pillars of human salvation	Reinforces <i>tawḥīd</i> -centered consciousness and the <i>ta`abbudī</i> (devotional) dimension in time management and moral obedience
Contextual Socio-Ethical	Basiuni Imran; A. Hassan; Mahmud Yunus; Hamka; Shihab; Kemenag RI	Time as a moral trust ( <i>amānah</i> ); integration of faith, action, and knowledge; social responsibility and character education	Positions Sūrat al-`Aṣr as an ethical framework for time consciousness, social relations, and family responsibility in the modern context

Source: Author's synthesis from classical and modern Qur'anic commentaries.

<sup>36</sup> Ihsan Nurmansyah and Sherli Kurnia Oktaviana, "Urgensi Belajar Dan Bersujud Dalam QS Al-Alaq Ayat 1-19," *Al-Fahmu* 2, no. 1 (2023): 82-90, <https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v2i1.27>.

<sup>37</sup> Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Quran Dan Tafsirnya* (Jakarta: Widya Cahaya, 2011), 767.



The table serves as an analytical instrument to highlight the differences in epistemological orientations, interpretative focuses, as well as the ethical-social implications of each interpretative approach. Through this comparative presentation, it becomes evident that Surah al-‘Aṣr is not confined to a single interpretative horizon; rather, it demonstrates the continuity of Qur’anic values alongside its adaptive capacity to respond to social changes, including issues related to time management and family relationships in a contemporary context.

### **Recontextualization of the Values of Surah al-‘Aṣr as a Family Ethical Framework in Facing Digital Disruption**

The phenomenon of *phubbing* constitutes a significant form of relational disruption within contemporary Muslim family life. Occurring primarily within the domestic sphere, this behavior weakens emotional bonds between parents and children, diminishes the quality of interpersonal communication, and erodes values such as empathy, affection, and psychological presence. Over time, these patterns may contribute to the fragmentation of the modern family by undermining its role as the primary context for the cultivation of affection, the internalization of moral values, and character formation.<sup>38</sup>

Surah al-‘Aṣr (Q. 103:1–3), despite its brevity, encapsulates foundational normative principles for evaluating human existential success and failure. Classical *mufasssīrūn*, including al-Qurṭubī, interpret the phrase *wa-l-‘aṣr* as a divine oath underscoring the strategic significance of time in determining the quality of human life. Al-Shawkānī further argues that human loss is universal, except for those who manage time responsibly through faith, righteous deeds, and constructive social engagement, as reflected in *tawāṣī bi-l-ḥaqq* (mutual exhortation to truth) and *tawāṣī bi-l-ṣabr* (mutual exhortation to patience). This ethical reading is elaborated by Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, who regards Surah al-‘Aṣr as a foundational text of social ethics that rejects negligence, excessive individualism, and unproductive modes of living.

Within the Nusantara tafsir tradition, the social dimension of Surah al-‘Aṣr is particularly emphasized. Scholars such as Muḥammad Basiuni Imran and Maḥmūd Yunus interpret the surah as an exhortation to engage in actions that generate *maṣlaḥah* (benefit) for both individuals and society. Similarly, Hamka, Aḥmad Hassan, M. Quraish Shihab, Zainuddin Hamidy, Fachruddin HS, and the institutional tafsir issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs associate Surah al-‘Aṣr with social ethics, moral interaction, and collective responsibility. Nevertheless, neither classical nor modern-contemporary exegetical works explicitly address *phubbing* as a distinct relational phenomenon emerging from digital culture. This gap underscores the necessity of recontextualization, namely the extension of the

<sup>38</sup> Herfin Fahri, “Nifaq dalam Keluarga Muslim: Kajian Teologis terhadap Disintegrasi Rumah Tangga,” *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 2 (2025): 1–17.

ethical values embedded in Surah al-‘Aṣr to contemporary family realities shaped by digital technologies, while preserving the normative integrity of the Qur’anic text.

A structural analysis of Surah al-‘Aṣr reveals at least three interrelated ethical elements that can be recontextualized to develop a normative framework for addressing phubbing and preventing family disintegration in the digital age.

First, the ethical imperative of time management is articulated in the opening declaration of Surah al-‘Aṣr, which asserts that humanity exists in a state of loss except those who employ time purposefully. According to al-Qurṭubī and al-Shawkānī, time constitutes an irreplaceable form of life capital; its mismanagement results in both spiritual and social disorientation. Within the contemporary digital context, phubbing may thus be understood as a modern manifestation of time-wasting, whereby attention is fragmented by digital devices, reducing opportunities for meaningful family interaction.<sup>39</sup> Practices such as establishing smartphone-free periods—particularly during meals, prayer, or before bedtime—may be conceptualized as forms of ethical-social ijtihād grounded in the Qur’anic principle of the sanctity of time, rather than merely technical strategies for regulating technology use.<sup>40</sup>

Second, the realization of *‘amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous deeds) constitutes a central ethical demand. Wahbah al-Zuhaylī defines righteous deeds as all actions that contribute positively to spiritual, moral, and social well-being. Within the Nusantara tafsir tradition, particularly in the works of Hamka and Maḥmūd Yunus, this concept is extended to encompass family relations, including affection, responsibility, cooperation, and mutual care. In the context of phubbing, *‘amal ṣāliḥ* may be reinterpreted as the practice of full attentiveness, empathetic listening, and undivided presence during family interactions. Such practices represent forms of righteous action that are frequently neglected in a digitally saturated culture.<sup>41</sup>

Third, the cultivation of a family communication culture grounded in *tawāṣī* is indispensable. The concluding elements of Surah al-‘Aṣr emphasize *tawāṣī bi-l-ḥaqq* and *tawāṣī bi-l-ṣabr*. Al-Qurṭubī understands *tawāṣī bi-l-ḥaqq* as a collective ethical responsibility to uphold truth through honest and accountable communication, while *tawāṣī bi-l-ṣabr* denotes perseverance in responding to relational challenges. In the context of phubbing, *tawāṣī* may be conceptualized as an Islamic communication ethic grounded in *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness),

<sup>39</sup> Irfan Fajar Ramadhan, “Relasi Suami dan Istri: Pemikiran Amina Wadud terhadap QS An-Nisa [4]: 34,” *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur’an* 4, no. 1 (2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v4i1.171>.

<sup>40</sup> Endin Mujahidin et al., “Konsep Manajemen Waktu dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam,” *Edukasi Islami* 11, no. 1 (2022): 136–39, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.2203>.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Roni, M Anzaikhan, and Arafit Hasan, “Pembentukan Keluarga Shaleh dalam Komunikasi Islam: Studi Komparasi Penafsiran Al-Qur’an,” *Al-Hikmah: Media Dakwah, Komunikasi, Sosial Dan Kebudayaan* 12, no. 1 (2021): 58–59, <https://doi.org/10.32505/hikmah.v12i1.2825>.

and *ḥuḍūr al-naḥs* (full psychological presence). Gentle reminders by family members when digital device use begins to disrupt relationships exemplify *amr bi-l-ma'rūf* enacted through dialogical engagement rather than unilateral control. As emphasized by M. Quraish Shihab, *tawāṣī* presupposes relationships characterized by equality and empathy.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, *tawāṣī bi-l-ṣabr* aligns with restorative models of family communication that prioritize relational repair over confrontation, enabling families to respond to digital attachment in reflective and constructive ways.<sup>43</sup>

Through this recontextualization approach, Surah al-ʿAṣr emerges as an ethical-spiritual guide relevant to facing digital disruption. The emphasis on time, deeds, and social communication in the surah finds its actual form in the values of attention, empathy, and dialogue that maintain the quality of family relationships. Thus, the Qur'anic message not only serves as a warning against spiritual loss but also as a social ethical framework applicable to building the resilience of Muslim family relationships amid the dominance of digital technology.

## Conclusion

This article argues that the phenomenon of *phubbing* within Muslim families should not be understood merely as a technical issue related to digital technology use. Rather, it constitutes an ethical problem that directly affects the quality of social relationships, human presence, and moral responsibility within the familial sphere. Employing Abdullah Saeed's contextual interpretive approach, this study analyzes and reinterprets Surah al-ʿAṣr (Q. 103:1–3) as a Qur'anic ethical framework for addressing relational disruptions in the digital age, while remaining faithful to the normative foundations of the text and the broader Islamic exegetical tradition.

Based on an analysis of the normative structure of Surah al-ʿAṣr and a comparative review of classical, modern, and contemporary tafsir, this study identifies three principal ethical values as its conceptual outcomes. First, the ethics of time management, which conceptualizes time and attention as moral and spiritual trusts (*amānah*). Within the digital context, *phubbing* is interpreted as a form of existential loss resulting from the misallocation of time and the neglect of interpersonal relationships, thereby necessitating conscious, purposeful, and responsible time management within family life. Second, the imperative to fill time with quality righteous deeds (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*) is reinterpreted not merely as ritual observance or individual productivity, but as relational presence manifested

<sup>42</sup> Mas Odi, "Etika Digital dan Kehidupan Rumah Tangga Muslim: Telaah Hukum Islam terhadap Pelanggaran Privasi Pasangan," *Litaskunu: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 1, no. 2 (2025): 36–45.

<sup>43</sup> Margaretha Tri Astuti Yulianti and Laras Triayunda, "Komunikasi Keluarga sebagai Sarana Keharmonisan Keluarga," *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 3, no. 2 (2023): 4609–17.

through care, attentiveness, and emotional engagement within family relationships. Third, the cultivation of a family communication culture grounded in *tawāṣī* (mutual ethical exhortation) is emphasized, highlighting empathetic dialogue, participatory moral counsel, and relational patience as foundational elements for restoring family communication disrupted by digital technologies.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of Qur'anic studies by proposing a model of ethical recontextualization that bridges the normative message of Surah al-‘Aṣr with contemporary ethical challenges arising from digital culture, while avoiding ahistorical or purely prescriptive readings of the Qur'an. By positioning the Qur'an as a foundational source for a socially engaged ethical paradigm, this study expands the scope of Qur'anic interpretation beyond ritual and doctrinal concerns toward relational and communicative ethics relevant to modern life. Practically, the findings suggest that addressing phenomena such as phubbing and preventing family disintegration requires strengthening ethical awareness, cultivating meaningful time management, and fostering family communication grounded in empathy and full psychological presence, rather than relying solely on technological restrictions or regulatory measures.

This study is limited to textual analysis and literature review. Consequently, further research employing empirical and interdisciplinary approaches—particularly within family psychology, communication studies, and digital sociology—is necessary to assess the practical effectiveness of applying the ethical principles of Surah al-‘Aṣr in the lived experiences of Muslim families across diverse social contexts. Such research would help ensure that Surah al-‘Aṣr continues to function as a dynamic, relevant, and transformative source of Qur'anic ethics in responding to the ethical challenges posed by digital disruption.

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