The Role of Aqidah in Building Muslim Character in the Digital Era: A Theological and Psychological Perspective

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Abstract: This article explores the role of aqidah in shaping Muslim character in the digital era through the perspectives of theology and psychology. The study is motivated by a moral crisis amidst rapid technological advancements. Through a literature-based approach, the study highlights aqidah as the foundation of Islamic beliefs that shapes behavior aligned with the values of the Qur'an and Sunnah, both in relationships with Allah and with fellow humans. Aqidah reinforces values such as honesty, responsibility, and justice, including in the digital space, which is fraught with challenges like misinformation and hate speech.The study emphasizes the importance of integrating aqidah education with psychology, such as behaviorism theory, through three stages: understanding, loving, and practicing good values. Instilling aqidah from an early age is deemed critical for character development. This article offers an interdisciplinary solution to the moral challenges faced by younger generations, demonstrating that strong aqidah equips individuals to manage digital behavior, adhere to Islamic values, and become dignified, ethical, and responsible individuals. The study provides both practical and theoretical contributions to Islamic character education relevant to the modern era.

Keywords: Aqidah (Akidah), Character, Theology, Psychology

Introduction

In today's modern society, the issue of character and moral crises has become a prominent topic frequently discussed on both national and international levels. For Muslims, maintaining moral and spiritual integrity presents a significant challenge amidst rapid technological advancements and the ever-evolving era (Nafsaka, 2023; Rahmania, 2024). A fundamental aspect in shaping an individual's character is aqidah (aqidah), as strong aqidah enables a person to act and behave in accordance with the guidance of Islam, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah. Furthermore, robust aqidah serves as the foundation for building a solid personal integrity (Banna, 2019; Nasution Z., 2019).

One of the factors contributing to the decline in the character of Indonesia's younger generation today is the neglect of aqidah and aqidah-based values, which are foundational in character building, whether within families, schools, or society at large. The advancements in digital technology are not proportional to the development of character among the younger generation. In fact, if not utilized wisely, digital technology can become a hindrance to character development (Agnia, 2021; Lestari, 2018). Moreover, data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, as reported on its official website, revealed that 20,863 cases of violence were reported to the ministry from January to October 2024. This number continues to grow in real-time, providing evidence that the decline in character is a pressing issue (Lado, 2022). Alarmingly, incidents of violence have been increasing year after year, underscoring the urgent need for character improvement to reduce such occurrences in the country.

The theological theory proposed by Imam Ghazali aligns with the fundamental theory presented by the Ash'ari school, which strives to balance reason and aqidah based on divine revelation delivered through the Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Both acknowledge that reason has limitations in comprehending transcendent or unseen matters (Samad, 2019). In the modern era, understanding theology has become a highly sacred matter due to technological advancements. While technology and media simplify information dissemination and communication, they also pose significant risks. Many individuals develop a superficial understanding of theology without verifying the origins of the information they consume. This phenomenon is referred to as "post-truth" (Irama, 2022).

The formation of an individual's character, from a psychological perspective, is the result of a complex interaction between various factors such as biological traits, social experiences, environmental influences, as well as education and values acquired throughout life (Hermino, 2015). Character is not merely about innate traits at birth but is also shaped through learning, environmental influences, moral development, and self-control abilities. Family, educational, and social environments play crucial roles in fostering positive character development through healthy interactions, moral education, and the instillation of strong and consistent values. In psychology, one well-known theory often used across various disciplines is behaviorism, which is frequently linked to educational sciences. This theory addresses changes in human behavior. One of the prominent figures in behaviorism is John B. Watson, who emphasized the role of learning processes in explaining human behavior. Watson argued that human behavior is shaped by hereditary factors (genetics), environmental influences, and social conditions (Majid, 2020).

Although the importance of aqidah in shaping a person's character, behavior, and actions is undeniable, various other factors also influence an individual's attitudes, leading to either positive or negative character traits. Numerous studies have demonstrated that a person's character can change due to internal or external factors, such as social environments, family, or even education. In this study, the researcher refers to eight sources of literature, including research conducted by Dariyo (2023), which discusses the implementation of the fundamentals of theology, philosophy, psychology, and sociology to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Another study by Chamidi (2022) explores strategic planning from the perspectives of theology, philosophy, psychology, and educational sociology.

The researcher also identified several studies relevant to this topic. Masmuri (2016) examined Sexual Deviations: An Interpretation from the Perspectives of Theology, Psychology, and Islamic Education. (Silaen 2023) explored A Literature Review on the Influence of Educational Psychology in Shaping Students' Character. (Mujib 2005) discussed The Development of Islamic Psychology through the Study of Islam. Further, (Hasibuan 2024) analyzed The Purpose of Human Creation: Perspectives from Islamic Theology (Ilmu Kalam), Sufism, Philosophy, and Their Implications for Islamic Education. (Ulum 2024) investigated Behaviorism Theory and Its Implications for Learning, while (Ramadhani 2024) delved into The Values of Islamic Aqidah in Imam Al-Ghazali's Work Ayyuhal Walad. These studies collectively provide comprehensive insights into the interplay between theology, psychology, and education in shaping individual character.

Among the studies mentioned above, this research differs in its approach, particularly in the perspective used to examine aqidah. This study combines the disciplines of theology and psychology, which are closely related. The integration of theological and psychological studies is intriguing because individuals with good psychological traits often incorporate theological concepts into their daily lives, such as gratitude, sincerity, and patience (Septia, 2023). This unique approach offers a deeper understanding of how theological principles can influence psychological well-being and character development.

This research contributes by providing knowledge and insight that effective learning of aqidah is not only based on existing theoretical approaches but can be more engaging when integrated with other relevant or practical disciplines in a comprehensive manner (Rohmatika, 2019). The study also emphasizes that mental peace and psychological well-being can be achieved through the correct process of submission and devotion to our Creator. It cannot be denied that theology examines the essence of human beings from a spiritual perspective, while psychology focuses on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Daryanto, 2024).

Method

The method used in this study is a qualitative approach to examine the role of aqidah in shaping the character of the younger generation amid the advancements of the digital era. The

qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to deeply understand the current phenomena from various perspectives, experiences, and insights found in the literature. In this study, the researcher will discuss, analyze, and interpret the relationship between aqidah and the character of Muslims in the digital age, reviewed through theological and psychological perspectives. The data collection technique employed in this study is library research (literature study), which involves reading and reviewing relevant literature, both published and unpublished, to support the research. Library research can also be understood as utilizing libraries to find sufficient data for a study (Fauziah, 2023).

The fields of theology and psychology are two interconnected and relevant disciplines. Theology addresses the spirituality of an individual and their belief in the One God, while psychology can be seen as an output of understanding theology. In essence, religion shapes a person to become a better individual with a peaceful and calm soul, helping them avoid psychological disturbances (Arifah, 2024).

Results and Discussion
Aqidah as the Foundation of Character in the Digital Era

Aqidah in Islam is a fundamental belief that encompasses aqidah in Allah, the angels, the books revealed by Allah, the prophets, the Day of Judgment, and divine predestination. The concept of belief in aqidah is not solely about building an individual's relationship with Allah, but it also fosters a harmonious relationship between individuals and others in society. This relationship is governed by the principles outlined in religious beliefs, ensuring that one's actions are in line with the ethical guidelines set by Islam (Lubis, 2021). Aqidah also serves as a source of core values in life, such as honesty, perseverance, justice, and compassion, all of which are highly relevant in the digital era. With the ease of access to information and the increasing use of media, the challenges related to character and morality become even

more complex (Ahmad, 2018). Essentially, the learning of aqidah is an obligation that cannot be denied due to its immense importance. If an individual makes a mistake in understanding aqidah, even if they perform acts of worship diligently and do many good deeds, their actions will not hold value in the eyes of Allah if their aqidah is flawed. Such deeds may only hold value in the eyes of humans. This illustrates the critical importance of aqidah in a Muslim's life (Ridha, 2023).

The importance of aqidah education as a moral foundation in the digital era plays a crucial role in teaching children that being academically smart is not enough. In Islam, morality or adab is considered more important than knowledge itself (Munawir, 2024). In the digital age, human characteristics tend to lean toward simplicity, preferring things that are easy and uncomplicated. Therefore, a simple approach to character development involves three key steps: first, knowing what is good (knowing the good), second, liking what is good (loving the good), and third, doing what is good (acting the good) (Sudrajat, 2011). This concept teaches us that character development must start with learning, based on knowledge, which influences children to appreciate good things, ultimately leading to good and praiseworthy behavior. This process shapes their character based on a foundation of positive actions (Makmudi, 2019). In modern education, the focus of educators, as key players in the intellectual development of the nation, should not only be on factual and empirical knowledge but also on the development of students' character, often referred to as character education (Wilujeng, 2013). In Indonesia, character education is already being delivered to students through religious lessons and in every subject, where teachers ensure the teaching of etiquette during the learning process. While students may have a good understanding of moral content, the issue today is that many students or the broader society only understand morality (moral knowing) without applying it in their actions (moral acting). This is a growing issue in Indonesia, where the nation's character is increasingly declining. The number of moral deviations is rising, bullying cases are spreading, and ultimately, if this character issue is not addressed, it will lead to the loss of Indonesia's identity as a dignified, moral, and courteous nation in speech and behavior (Faiz, 2021).

Aqidah education should begin at an early age, even from the moment a child is born. The first words a child hears are often related to the belief that Allah is the Greatest and that there is no god but Allah. This can be seen as a form of indirect teaching of aqidah through the adhan (call to prayer), which instills aqidah in the child from the start (Aryani, 2015). Early childhood, often referred to as the "golden age," is a crucial period for development. According to Benjamin S. Bloom, a researcher from the University of Chicago in the field of neurology, brain cell growth during the ages of 0 to 4 years reaches 50%. This means that if children do not receive optimal stimulation during this period, their brain development will not be maximized. Therefore, it is common for

Muslim parents to begin teaching their children about religious knowledge at this stage, which should start with aqidah (Susiba, 2019). Good character, moral values, and polite behavior are not formed overnight. Rather, they are the accumulation of traits, habits, and nature that are instilled from a young age. It is important for parents to choose a good environment, including a suitable place of residence and a quality school for their children's education. Encouraging children to associate with peers who exhibit positive behavior and values also plays a critical role in their moral development (Setiyowati, 2020).

The development of a child's character will grow better if the guidance from parents and teachers at school aligns with the child's interests and talents. The outcome of character development will be different if parents and teachers force children to be interested or talented in a particular field (Risnawati, 2021). Essentially, character education, as well as education in general, cannot be separated from psychological foundations. Therefore, in the process of character education and development, psychological aspects must be used as an approach to determine the steps and treatments that will be applied to uncover the child's potential, interests, and talents (Siregar, 2017). In psychology, there are two related terms that pertain to a person's character: personality and character. Personality does not evaluate the goodness or badness of an individual's behavior (devaluation), whereas the emphasis on character involves an evaluation of the goodness or badness of a person's actions (evaluation) (Ramadhan, 2023).

Aqidah as the foundation of life, also as the foundation of the nation, in the past this country was designed and structured on the basis of religious beliefs, we can see this in the 1945 Pancasila, namely the One Almighty God, the first point about divinity is the key to achieving the next points which means that there will be no creation of just and civilized humans, unity, a wise life and social justice, if society does not adhere to the belief in the One Almighty God, in essence in the context of Pancasila the concept of religious people is general not only Islam and it is certain that the teachings of each religion must support other points of Pancasila (Nata, 2021). It can be concluded how important religion is in this life, religion not only provides guidance to humans, more than that it will provide peace of mind, peace in socializing, behaving fairly in every decision and action, of course with strong religious education and the role of parents in providing this knowledge is very important and is a special concern in this digital era that children's character must be forged at an early age (golden age) (Rofiah, 2016).

Theology of Aqidah and Its Implications on Character in the Digital World

Theology of Aqidah is a branch of Islamic theology that focuses on the fundamental beliefs or pure principles of aqidah. This includes beliefs in the oneness of God (Tawhid), prophethood, the holy scriptures, angels, the Day of Judgment, and destiny (Nasution N. L., 2023). In the context of the digital world today, the understanding and application of the theology of Aqidah have profound implications on a person's character and behavior, particularly regarding ethics, integrity, and moral responsibility in digital spaces. In the digital world, the awareness that Allah is always present and All-Knowing of all our actions (both real and virtual) makes individuals more cautious in their actions, such as avoiding the spread of hoaxes, hate speech, or harmful content. Tawhid teaches that there is no place "free from Allah's surveillance," so the character of a Muslim who has a proper understanding of Tawhid will be more responsible in their actions. The spread of hoax news is quite troubling for societal and national life. The rapid growth of social media has made it difficult to filter hoaxes effectively. This is especially problematic when the content concerns issues of Aqidah, which is a crucial foundation for Muslims. If there is hoax content related to Aqidah, it becomes very dangerous for Muslims, particularly for those who are still unfamiliar with the teachings of Islam, especially concerning matters of Aqidah (Rahman, 2021).

Aqidah and Divine Surveillance in Digital Activities (Aspect of Tawhid) — Belief in the oneness of God forms the foundation for the understanding that Allah is All-Knowing and All-Seeing of all actions, including digital activities. According to research by the Yaqeen Institute, this aqidah is not only intellectual but also emotional and spiritual, which fosters a sense of moral responsibility in every online activity (Aulia, 2021). When a servant has strong Tawhid, they will always feel under the surveillance of Allah (*Muraqabah*) in every activity, especially when they are alone, with no one else to see or know what they are doing (Abdul Aziz, 2020). In the digital context, Tawhid encourages individuals to be more cautious when using social media, such as avoiding the spread of fake news or harmful content that can hurt others. A person with a strong understanding of Tawhid will be wiser in deciding which information is worth sharing and will not easily be tempted to engage in "hate speech" or disseminate content that is unhelpful.

Honesty, which in Arabic is called *shiddq*, refers to actions and words that align with truth and

reality. Honesty is a manifestation of a person's level of piety towards Allah and His Messenger (Puspitasari, 2023). Justice, derived from the Arabic word *adl*, means behaving in a balanced manner between rights and obligations, as well as harmony with others who share the same status in the eyes of Allah (Rangkuti, 2017). Honesty and justice are traits exemplified in Islamic belief, urging each individual to act justly, including in the virtual world. Recent studies show that this concept of aqidah fosters moral awareness, guiding individuals to act with honesty and transparency. This attitude is crucial in the digital world, especially in online transactions or managing other people's personal information (Sultan, 2021). For instance, in online selling, the character formed by values of honesty and justice ensures that users do not lie about the condition of products or mislead consumers for personal gain.

According to the concept of prophethood in Islamic belief, Muslims are taught to emulate the morals of Prophet Muhammad SAW, which reflect compassion, honesty, and tolerance. In the digital context, this example influences how individuals interact with others online. A study conducted in 2020 showed that learning the ethics of the Prophet could reduce cyberbullying and increase awareness of the importance of maintaining digital courtesy (Ali, 2020). A person who practices the Prophet's ethics tends to be more patient and refrain from using harsh words when commenting or debating online, reflecting a polite character that values others' perspectives.

Belief in the afterlife and accountability influences individuals to be more cautious in their digital activities. Studies linking awareness of the afterlife responsibility with moral behavior indicate that this belief makes individuals reflect more before acting (Nasir, 2019). In the digital world, this awareness helps individuals avoid actions that could harm or disadvantage others. When sharing information on social media, people with an understanding of their responsibility in the afterlife will carefully consider the truthfulness of the information and its potential impact on others before sharing it. In terms of aqidah, belief in fate or qadar teaches patience and self-control. Research has shown that understanding destiny helps individuals remain calm and not easily provoked when facing criticism or difficult situations online (Rahman, 2021). Therefore, a social media user with an understanding of fate will not react emotionally to negative comments but will be patient and disregard unnecessary matters.

Aqidah as a Psychological Foundation in the Formation of Muslim Character in the Digital Era

In Islam the relationship between religion and psychology is inseparable, because, in essence, peace of mind, security, and comfort come from a strong belief in religion, fulfilling one's duties as a Muslim to God and others, and adhering to the limits and rules set by God for His servants (Septia, 2023). This view contrasts with that of Western thinkers such as Julian Effroy De Lammetrie (1709-1751), who argued that the soul is a product of biological growth and that humans are machines. It is too narrow to view psychology or the soul only through physical or observable aspects while neglecting non-physical (metaphysical) elements. In Islamic thought, the behavior and actions of a person are more influenced by the soul rather than the body, even though both body and soul are interdependent and require each other (Arroisi, 2020). In today's digital era, the behaviorist approach is frequently used in psychology, as it focuses on human behavior rather than the physical aspects of the body. This makes the approach highly relevant for analyzing character, as data can be easily obtained depending on the cases and events within a targeted database (Amalia, 2016).

In today's digital era, many problems have arisen due to the decline in morals and character. Free association has spread widely, sexual violence continues to rise every year, gambling has become commonplace, and the online gambling market in Indonesia currently reaches 600 trillion IDR. Robberies occur everywhere due to economic pressures and laziness, drug abuse is rampant in every corner of the country, the spread of fake news or hoaxes has become easier due to increasing digitalization, and the growing number of corrupt officials in positions of power, people who are supposed to be educated, accomplished, and wise, shows that there is something wrong with their character. This leads them to engage in inappropriate behaviors and present them to the public (Sopian, 2018). It is crucial to have religious education that teaches the fundamentals of aqidah, ethics, and morals as a foundation for behavior. This education should be instilled in children from a young age because early childhood is the beginning of psychological growth. At this stage, children are vulnerable if they are not nurtured with good religion, social values, and knowledge, which could negatively affect their psychological development (Jannah, 2023). In reality, Islamic education already provides a comprehensive approach to teaching morals and character. However, the education is mostly cognitive and lacks emphasis on habitual practice, which means the knowledge stays limited to understanding without actual implementation. Therefore, education in Indonesia

today needs to focus on applying this knowledge and practicing it so that students are trained to consistently carry out virtuous actions that are beneficial to themselves and society (Anwar, 2017).

Psychological and emotional factors have a significant impact on a person's character. Criminal actions, such as murder, are often committed by individuals who suffer from mental disorders, those who are unable to control their emotions. These individuals may have experienced childhood trauma that leads to excessive anxiety. People with these factors are more prone to engage in reckless and dangerous actions. Poverty and economic limitations also influence the formation of character, as the high demands and needs drive individuals to take desperate measures, resorting to any means to achieve their goals (Fairuzzen, 2024). According to Thomas Lickona, a professor at Cortland University, a nation will face decay and destruction if ten signs appear. These include: 1) youth violence, 2) widespread use of inappropriate and rude language, 3) the influence of violent groups, 4) the prevalence of drug use, 5) declining morals and character, 6) a decrease in work ethic, 7) loss of respect for parents and teachers, 8) low sense of responsibility, 9) lack of honesty, and 10) increasing hatred among individuals (Sapitri, 2022).

There are two factors that cause a person to carry out actions that are not in accordance with existing norms and ethical standards, the first factor is a factor from within oneself or the individual (internal). This includes something that is the potential that exists in a person when he is born, factors secondly, social or environmental, this has a big influence on a person's psychology, a good environment will lead a person to good behavior and habits, on the other hand, if you live in a bad environment, this means that in that environment there are many events that are not in accordance with the norms and norms. ethics, drug abuse and the number of criminals, then this environment will affect a person's psychology, if they cannot be strong enough to maintain a good personality, the potential for being contaminated by such actions is greater (Hetharia, 2023). The theory of why crime occurs from a psychological perspective when viewed from Yochelson (psychiatrist) and Samenow (psychologist) as outlined in their book The Criminal Personality, he rejects the opinion of psychoanalysts who state that criminal acts occur due to internal conflict, the two figures above are of the opinion that the perpetrator evil is a person who is angry, feels a sense of superiority who thinks that he is above and superior to other people and feels irresponsible and free for the behavior he makes, this kind of person, if he feels he has received an attack or threat, will not think for a long time and act recklessly, namely by means of violence and crime (Mamluchah, 2020).

According to data covered by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, there were 23,667 cases of violence that occurred throughout 2024, 20,947 cases of violence occurred against women, 5,197 cases of violence occurred against men, 15,518 cases of violence occurred in the household, this indicates that almost 75% of cases of violence occur in a small scope, domestic violence also indicates that the character and morals of this nation have declined greatly, lack of understanding of religion and science are the biggest factors in violence in life. All events and behaviors will refer to education in the family, parents are required to create a comfortable, peaceful and happy family environment, in every life we will definitely not be free from a problem, so the role of the family in this case must teach children how to solve a problem with a calm mind, full consideration and careful to take a stance (Setiawan, 2023).

Conclusion

This research underscores the crucial role of akidah in shaping a strong Muslim character, particularly in the digital era characterized by moral challenges. A deep understanding of theology, combined with a psychological approach, can provide practical guidance in addressing issues of character and moral decline among the younger generation. Education that instills the values of akidah from an early age, supported by family, school, and community environments, has proven effective in building good personal traits. The article also highlights that technology can serve as a supportive tool in character development when used properly, but it can become a threat if misused. Therefore, relevant akidah education aligned with contemporary developments is essential to create individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally upright according to Islamic teachings.

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