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DIGITALLY CONNECTED, SPIRITUALLY ROOTED: *MUBADALAH* AND THE ETHICS OF COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM FAMILY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Amid the rapid digitalization of everyday life, urban Muslim families in selected Indonesian cities are experiencing a paradox in their communication practices. Digital technologies create new avenues for connection, yet they simultaneously risk weakening affective intimacy and reinforcing patriarchal

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authority within households. This study examines how digital family communication reflects and challenges traditional power relations through Islamic ethical perspectives, particularly Islamic communication ethics and gender-equitable theology, using the *mubadalah* approach, which emphasizes mutuality, justice, and compassion in familial relations. Employing a qualitative field research design, the study collected data from 18 informants representing eight Muslim families across Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Cirebon, Bandung, and Makasar through semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis reveals four interrelated dynamics: the shift from physical to digital interaction; the reassertion of patriarchal control through digital devices; the emergence of shared decision-making practices such as *shura*; and persistent ethical tensions between traditional norms and the transformative possibilities of digital media. The study argues that digital communication in Muslim families is never ethically neutral; it is shaped by spiritual, cultural, and gendered norms. When internalized and practiced in daily interactions, *mubadalah* values offer a powerful framework for cultivating just, spiritually grounded, and emotionally resilient family relationships in the digital age. These findings highlight the urgency of integrating *mubadalah*-based ethics into family education programs and gender-sensitive communication pedagogy.

Keywords: Digital communication; Muslim families; *mubadalah*; Islamic communication ethics.

Khulasah

Di tengah-tengah pendigitalan pesat dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, keluarga Muslim di Indonesia sedang berhadapan dengan satu paradoks dalam amalan komunikasi mereka. Teknologi digital membuka ruang baharu untuk berhubung, namun pada masa yang sama berisiko melemahkan keintiman afektif dan

mengukuhkan kembali otoriti patriarki dalam sesebuah rumah tangga. Kajian ini meneliti bagaimana komunikasi keluarga secara digital mencerminkan dan pada masa yang sama mencabar hubungan kuasa tradisional melalui perspektif etika Islam, khususnya etika komunikasi Islam dan teologi berasaskan kesetaraan gender dengan menggunakan pendekatan *mubadalah* yang menekankan prinsip kebersamaan, keadilan dan belas kasih dalam hubungan kekeluargaan. Menggunakan reka bentuk kajian lapangan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan daripada 18 orang informan yang mewakili lapan keluarga Muslim di Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Cirebon, Bandung dan Makasar melalui temu bual mendalam separa berstruktur serta perbincangan kumpulan berfokus. Analisis tematik mendedahkan empat dinamika yang saling berkaitan: peralihan daripada interaksi fizikal kepada interaksi digital; pengukuhan semula kawalan patriarki melalui peranti digital; kemunculan amalan membuat keputusan bersama seperti *shura*; serta ketegangan etika yang berterusan antara norma tradisional dan potensi transformatif media digital. Kajian ini berhujah bahawa komunikasi digital dalam keluarga Muslim tidak pernah bersifat neutral dari sudut etika; ia dibentuk oleh norma spiritual, budaya dan jantina. Apabila nilai-nilai *mubadalah* dihayati dan diamalkan dalam interaksi harian, ia menawarkan kerangka etika yang berkesan untuk membina hubungan kekeluargaan yang adil, berasaskan spiritual, dan berdaya tahan emosi dalam era digital. Penemuan ini menyerlahkan keperluan mendesak untuk mengintegrasikan etika berasaskan *mubadalah* ke dalam program pendidikan keluarga dan pedagogi komunikasi yang peka gender.

Kata kunci: Komunikasi digital; keluarga Muslim; *mubadalah*; etika komunikasi Islam.

Introduction

Amid the rapid currents of globalization and digital transformation, Muslim families in Indonesia are confronting significant changes in communication patterns and internal relationships. Smartphones, social media, and instant messaging applications have reshaped how affection is expressed, conflicts are negotiated, and domestic responsibilities are shared. However, behind the increased connectivity lies a deeper paradox: physical proximity is frequently replaced by fragile digital intimacy; communication becomes instantaneous yet often superficial; and togetherness is substituted by the experience of being "together but alone."¹

In the context of Muslim families, this transformation affects not only the technical modes of communication but also carries profound implications for spiritual values, relational ethics, and power configurations within the household. Communication in Muslim family life is not merely an exchange of information; it is a process through which meaning is constructed, religious values are reproduced, and certain social structures are maintained. When communication is dominative, hierarchical, and grounded in unequal power dynamics, digital disruption has the potential to reinforce existing asymmetries rather than mitigate them.²

Several studies have examined the dynamics of family communication in the digital era. Everri et al. (2022) and Daharis et al. (2023) highlight how digital media has altered parent-child interaction in urban Muslim families, particularly with regard to surveillance and religious

¹ Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 56.

² Wahyu Evendi and Masfufah, "Balance of Technology Use in Muslim Family Life," *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology* 4(1) (2023), 33.

transmission.³ Shah (2022) demonstrates how social media mediates marital conflicts, often intensifying disputes due to miscommunication through text.⁴ Ibtasam (2019) further notes the persistence of patriarchal tendencies within Muslim households, even as communication platforms have shifted to digital spaces.⁵ While these works offer valuable insights, they do not address how Islamic communication ethics, particularly those grounded in mutuality (*mubadalah*), may serve as an analytical or restorative framework for navigating digital disruptions in family relationships.

A further gap in the literature concerns the absence of explicit connections between the changing landscape of digital family communication and key theological principles such as *mu'asharah bi al-ma'ruf, ba'duhum awliya' ba'd*, and *mithaqan ghalizan*, which underpin egalitarian marital relations in Islam.⁶ This article seeks to fill this gap by positioning the *mubadalah* approach as both an ethical paradigm and an analytical tool for understanding and critiquing the communication dynamics of

³ Michela Everri et al., "Parent-Child Relationships, Digital Media Use and Parents' Well-Being During COVID-19 Home Confinement: The Role of Family Resilience." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19(23) (2022), 15690; Ahmad Daharis et al., "Analysis of the Use of Technology from the Perspective of Islamic Family Law in Era 4.0," *Jurnal Elyakhshi* 1(1) (2023), 40.

⁴ Sarah Shah, "Black and White or Shades of Grey: Religious Approaches and Muslim Marital Conflict," *Social Compass* 69(1) (2022), 120.

⁵ Sana Ibtasam et al., "My Cousin Bought the Phone for Me. I Never Go to Mobile Shops: The Role of Family in Women's Technological Inclusion in Islamic Culture." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 3 (2019), 15.

⁶ Siti Rahmawati, "Mainstreaming of Gender Equality in Islamic Family Law: Opportunities and Challenges," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 4(2) (2020), 367; Shahino Mah Abdullah Begum, et al., "Gender Equity in Muslim Family Law: Modern and Contemporary 'Ulamā's View," *Al-Ahkam* 34(2) (2024), 235.

contemporary Muslim families in Indonesia, particularly those embedded in an increasingly digital ecosystem.

Against this background, the central problem addressed in this study is how digital communication simultaneously enables and disrupts relational ethics within Muslim families, often amplifying patriarchal control while also opening possibilities for mutuality and shared agency. To address this problem, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How are communication patterns within Indonesian Muslim families evolving in the digital era? (2) In what ways do digital tools reshape power relations, domination, and resistance within family interactions? (3) How are *mubadalah* values articulated, practiced, or contested in everyday digital communication among Muslim family members?

The aim of this study is to describe these evolving patterns of communication, with a focus on both spousal interactions and parent-child dynamics. Additionally, the research examines forms of domination, resistance, and adaptation that emerge within digital family interactions, which frequently reflect tensions between traditional values and the demands of modern technology. Through the *mubadalah* approach, the study proposes a more equitable, just, and spiritually grounded model of Muslim family communication that is responsive to digital disruption, which affects not only technological practices but also ethical and relational structures within households.⁷

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of an Islamic family communication framework grounded in mutuality, offering an alternative to normative and patriarchal perspectives that have long shaped family scholarship in Muslim contexts. By advancing the contextual and progressive insights of *tafsir mubadalah*, this research extends discussions on gender

⁷ Paula Dyess, "Family Communication Pattern and Power Theory," *Integrated Studies* 101 (2017), 6.

and relational ethics in Islam into the domain of everyday digital family communication. Beyond its specific theoretical contribution, the study also offers practical insights by providing a reflective space for reimagining digital communication practices among contemporary Muslim families in Indonesia. Through an interdisciplinary engagement with communication studies, Islamic scholarship, and gender studies, the article reframes digital technology not merely as a modern communication tool but as a potential platform for interpersonal and spiritual *da'wah* that promotes more adaptive, just, and egalitarian patterns of interaction within Muslim family life.

Method of Research

This study employs a qualitative approach with a field research design to examine in depth the communication practices of Indonesian Muslim families in the digital era. This approach was chosen because qualitative inquiry enables researchers to understand the meanings individuals construct and experience within their social and cultural contexts.⁸ The research focuses not only on observable forms of communication but also on the values, power relations, and spiritual practices that accompany these interactions.

The research sites were purposively selected from four regions representing different levels of cultural heterogeneity and digital development: Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Cirebon, Bandung, and Makasar. The study involved 18 informants from eight Muslim families, consisting of married couples and their adolescent children living in the same household. Informants were selected based on the criterion that they actively use digital media in

⁸ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 255.

their daily routines, both for internal family communication and for their engagement in online social activities.⁹

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The semi-structured format enabled the researchers to probe in depth into digital communication practices and the spiritual experiences that arise in everyday interactions. This technique facilitated the capturing of authentic voices, the uncovering of interpersonal complexities, and the exploration of symbolic meanings embedded in family communication patterns.¹⁰

To strengthen contextual interpretation, this study adopts a social exegesis framework grounded in the *mubadalah* approach, which emphasizes mutuality and reciprocity in understanding gender relations in Islam. In this study, *mubadalah* is employed as an interpretive and ethical framework guiding data analysis and interpretation, rather than as a prescriptive normative standard imposed upon participants' lived experiences. This approach enables participants' narratives to emerge organically from everyday digital interactions, while situating them within broader Islamic ethical principles of mutuality, justice, and relational responsibility. *Mubadalah* thus serves as an analytical lens for examining how principles such as *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *mu'asharah bi al-ma'ruf* (kind and respectful relations), and *mithaqan ghalizan* (a profound marital covenant) are translated into digital communication practices within families.¹¹ This

⁹ Van Dijk, J. A. G. M., "Digital Divide: Impact of Access," in Patrick Rössler, Lynn Hoffner, and Liesbet van Zoonen, *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 1: 7.

¹⁰ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 267.

¹¹ Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), 125.

framework supports an interpretation of relational dynamics that prioritizes equality, justice, and spiritual connection.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis, comprising transcription, open coding, theme categorization, and critical interpretation. Themes were developed inductively but guided by the theoretical foundation of *mubadalah* and the principles of Islamic communication ethics. The credibility of the findings was ensured through triangulation of sources (multiple informants within each family), triangulation of methods (interviews and FGDs), and member checking to confirm that the interpretations aligned with participants' intended meanings.¹²

To clarify the composition of participants, the following table summarizes the demographic distribution of the informants included in this study.

Table 1. Summary of Informants

Informant Code	City	Gender	Age	Family Role	Data Collection Technique
INF-01	Yogyakarta	F	40	Wife / Mother	Interview/FGD
INF-02	Yogyakarta	F	18	Daughter	Interview
INF-03	Cirebon	F	38	Wife / Mother	Interview/FGD
INF-04	Jakarta	M	45	Husband / Father	Interview/FGD
INF-05	Makasar	F	35	Wife / Mother	Interview
INF-06	Jakarta	F	42	Wife / Mother	Interview/FGD
INF-07	Jakarta	M	17	Son	Interview

¹²Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 38.

Informant Code	City	Gender	Age	Family Role	Data Collection Technique
INF-08	Cirebon	M	41	Husband / Father	Interview/FGD
INF-09	Cirebon	M	13	Son	Interview
INF-10	Makasar	M	39	Husband / Father	Interview
INF-11	Makasar	F	16	Daughter	Interview
INF-12	Makasar	F	14	Daughter	Interview
INF-13	Bandung	M	47	Husband / Father	Interview/FGD
INF-14	Bandung	F	43	Wife / Mother	Interview/FGD
INF-15	Bandung	F	18	Daughter	Interview
INF-16	Yogyakarta	M	44	Husband / Father	Interview
INF-17	Yogyakarta	M	48	Husband / Father	FGD/Interview
INF-18	Jakarta	F	36	Wife / Mother	Interview

Result and Discussion

Table 2. Thematic Table Based on Research Objectives

Research Objective	Theme	Number & Profile of Informants	Direct Quotes from Interviews
Transformation of Communication Patterns	Shift from Physical to Virtual Interaction	5 informants (INF-01 (Mrs. Siti, mother, Yogyakarta) INF-02 (Fadhil, son, Yogyakarta) INF-16 (unnamed,	"We can sit together in the living room, but both of us are busy on our phones" (INF-01) "I feel more comfortable expressing my feelings through WhatsApp than

		Jakarta) +2 others)	face-to-face because it's safer from spontaneous reactions." (INF-02). "Misunderstandings in chats prompted face-to-face clarification" (INF-16)
	Use of Technology for Digital Intimacy	4 informants (INF-03 (Mrs. Nursiah, Cirebon) INF-14 (unnamed, Bandung) +2 others)	"Previously, household finances were very sensitive, but now it's become more open because we use a system. There are records, and we discuss them every week." (INF-03) "Collaborative calendars reduced conflict, increased transparency" (INF-14)
Power Relations in Digital Communication	Control over Information and Digital Decision-Making	6 informants (INF-04 (Mr. Haris, Jakarta) INF-08 (father, Cirebon) 18yo informant (Yogyakarta)) +3 others)	"I'm responsible, so I need to know everything." (INF-04) "Check wife's WhatsApp 'for protection'" (INF-08) "I want to be trusted too" (18yo, Yogyakarta)
	Mutual Agreement and Shared Digital Governance	5 informants (INF-05 (Mrs. Laila, Makasar) INF-15	"We use the principle of <i>syura</i> for technology decisions." (INF-05).

		(family, Bandung) +3 others)	"Negotiate screen time, gadget-free zones collectively" (INF-15)
	Adolescent Resistance	INF-03 (youth, Jakarta) +1 other	"Delete messages to avoid parental misinterpretation" (INF-03)
Implementation of <i>Mubadalah</i> Values	Role Sharing and Egalitarian Practices	5 informants (INF-06 (Mrs. Asma, Jakarta) INF-13 (couple, Bandung) +3 others)	"WhatsApp group coordinates domestic tasks and parenting" (INF-06) "We share roles, there's no counting." (INF-13)
	Patriarchal Religious Interpretations	3 informants (INF-07, 2 others)	"We are open, but the head of the family is still the husband." (INF-07)

Source: Authors' own interview data

The table above summarizes three major themes emerging from 18 in-depth interviews conducted across five Indonesian cities: (1) the transformation of communication patterns in Muslim families due to digitalization, (2) the shifting dynamics of power relations in digital family interactions, and (3) the practical, yet partial, application of *mubadalah* values in daily communication. These themes are closely interconnected and reflect enduring tensions between traditional Islamic family norms and contemporary digital practices. The *mubadalah* framework thus functions not only as an analytical lens but also as an ethical pathway for navigating these tensions.

Transformation of Communication Patterns: From Physical Intimacy to Virtual Interaction

As summarized in Table 2, nine informants described two main patterns of change in family communication: a shift from physical to virtual interaction (five informants: INF-01, INF-02, INF-16, plus two others) and the use of technology for digital intimacy (four informants: INF-03, INF-14, plus two others). These patterns show that digitalization does not simply replace offline interaction but reorganizes how emotional expression and coordination are managed within Muslim families.

This study found that communication patterns in Muslim families have undergone a significant transformation due to digitalization. A striking example can be seen in the family of Mrs. Siti (INF-01, Yogyakarta), where face-to-face communication is often replaced by instant messaging, even when both individuals are in the same room. "We can sit together in the living room, but both of us are busy on our phones. We chat, even though we are just two meters apart." – Mrs. Siti (INF-01, Yogyakarta). Their 16-year-old son, Fadhil (INF-02), also prefers expressing his feelings via WhatsApp because he feels safer from emotional reactions: "I feel more comfortable expressing my feelings through WhatsApp than face-to-face because it's safer from spontaneous reactions."

On the other hand, there are families who use technology productively to enhance digital intimacy. In Mrs. Nursiah's family in Cirebon (INF-03), digital tools are used to manage household schedules and finances openly and transparently. "In the past, household finances were very sensitive, but now it's more open because we use a system. There are records, and we discuss them every week." – Mrs. Nursiah (INF-03, Cirebon). A similar pattern appears in Bandung (INF-14), where collaborative digital

calendars are used to reduce conflict and increase transparency about domestic responsibilities.

The transformation of communication patterns observed in this study aligns with findings from previous research. Wijayanti et al. (2023) highlighted that in Javanese families, digital communication has led to a shift where physical proximity no longer guarantees emotional closeness.¹³ This change is evident in the case of Mrs. Siti's family in Yogyakarta, where family members, despite being in the same room, prefer to communicate via instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp.

This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of asynchronous communication, which offers practicality and emotional safety. Hertlein & Twist (2019), Hertlein & Blumer (2013), and Reblin et al. (2018) found that many couples prefer digital communication methods as they allow for more controlled and less emotionally charged interactions, reducing the likelihood of conflicts that might arise in face-to-face conversations.¹⁴

However, the use of technology in family communication also introduces a paradox. While it facilitates easier expression of emotions, it may also lead to emotional distancing. Satia et al. (2023) noted that digital communication, while flexible, often lacks the non-verbal

¹³Austuna Tri Wijayanti, Siti Irene Astuti Diwiningrum, and Saliman, "Communication Patterns in Javanese Families to Build Family Resilience in the Digital Era," *Informasi* 54(1) (2023), 25.

¹⁴Katherine M. Hertlein and Mark L. Twist, *The Internet Family: Technology in Couple and Family Relationships* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 52; Katherine M. Hertlein and Mark L. Blumer, *The Couple and Family Technology Framework: Intimate Relationships in a Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 85; Maija Reblin et al., "Every day Couples' Communication Research: Overcoming Methodological Barriers with Technology," *Patient Education and Counseling* 101(3) (2018), 554.

cues essential for conveying empathy and emotional depth, potentially weakening familial bonds.¹⁵

Conversely, some families effectively integrate technology to enhance communication and household management. In Mrs. Nursiah's family, the use of applications like Google Calendar and shared financial tools has improved transparency and efficiency. Anisti et al. (2023) observed that when used wisely, technology can strengthen family relationships by facilitating better coordination and understanding among members.¹⁶

Thus, while digital technologies may create emotional gaps, they can also serve as a medium to strengthen relationships when used with awareness and shared values. Nevertheless, a critical tension remains: the shift from synchronous, emotionally rich conversations to asynchronous, task-oriented exchanges may weaken the affective and spiritual dimensions of communication in Muslim households. Satia et al. (2023), Suter and Norwood (2017) emphasized the need to preserve empathetic communication amidst growing digitalization to maintain emotional bonds within the family.¹⁷

Power Relations in Digital Communication: Between Control and Equality

As shown in Table 2, power relations in digital family communication in this study take three main forms:

¹⁵Rahmawati L. Satia et al., "The Dynamics of Family Communication among Working Mothers in the Digital Era," *Mediator: Jurnal Komunikasi* 17(2) (2024), 250.

¹⁶ Anisti et al., "Family Communication Patterns in The Era Digital Technology," *ARRUS: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3(6) (2023), 753.

¹⁷ Elizabeth A. Suter and Kristen M. Norwood, "Critical Theorizing in Family Communication Studies: (Re) Reading Relational Dialectics Theory 2.0.," *Communication Theory* 27(3) (2017), 299; Rahmawati L. Satia et al., "The Dynamics of Family Communication among Working Mothers in the Digital Era," *Mediator: Jurnal Komunikasi* 17(2) (2024), 252.

centralized control over information and digital decision-making (six informants: INF-04, INF-08, the 18-year-old girl in Yogyakarta, and three others), mutual agreement and shared digital governance (five informants: INF-05, INF-15, and three others), and adolescent resistance to surveillance (two informants: INF-03 and one additional youth). These three patterns show how the same digital tools can either reproduce patriarchal hierarchies or open space for more egalitarian and dialogic family practices.

In some households, technology becomes a tool that reinforces existing hierarchies. In Mr. Haris's family in Jakarta (INF-04), control over digital access, such as Wi-Fi passwords, Netflix subscriptions, and surveillance of children's devices is centralized in the hands of the husband. He justifies this role by saying, "I am responsible, so I have to know everything." The wife in this family expresses feelings of being "not trusted" and merely "positioned as a complement," illustrating how digital control can reflect and reproduce patriarchal structures within the household. A similar arrangement appears in a Cirebon household (INF-08), where the father explicitly states that he needs to "check [my] wife's WhatsApp for protection," normalizing surveillance of his spouse as a form of moral obligation rather than as a mutually agreed practice. Another example is seen in the family of an 18-year-old girl in Yogyakarta, who is frequently asked to share screenshots of her private messages, leading her to feel mistrusted; "I want to be trusted too. I don't act recklessly," she insists. Together, these cases show how centralized digital control tends to diminish women's and children's sense of agency and trust.

In contrast, other families emphasize mutual agreement and shared digital governance grounded in Islamic ethical principles. In Mrs. Laila's family in Makasar (INF-05), digital use is managed through *syura* (consultation). Family members collectively decide on

rules for screen time, appropriate content, and the creation of "gadget-free zones" during meals and bedtime. In Bandung, another family (INF-15) describes a similar model in which parents and children negotiate screen-time limits and privacy boundaries together, including agreements about when phones should be turned off and how much access parents have to children's devices. Rather than a single authority imposing unilateral rules, these families treat technology as a shared responsibility, aligning digital governance with values of *amanah* (trust), mutual respect, and co-responsibility. This pattern suggests that when Islamic concepts like *shura* and *mubadalah* (reciprocity) are translated into everyday digital practices, power becomes more distributed and relationships more dialogic.

A third pattern, captured under the theme of adolescent resistance, emerges from the narratives of two young informants who develop subtle strategies to reclaim agency under conditions of surveillance. The 18-year-old girl in Yogyakarta responds to repeated monitoring requests by asserting her moral reliability, "I want to be trusted too," highlighting how excessive control can damage dignity and self-confidence. Meanwhile, a youth in Jakarta (INF-03) reports that he sometimes deletes messages not because of wrongdoing but to avoid his parents misinterpreting his chats, explaining that "it's easier than explaining every little thing." These accounts illustrate that surveillance often encourages concealment rather than openness and can push adolescents to create hidden spaces in their digital lives to defend their autonomy.

The empirical patterns observed here resonate with a growing body of literature on digital power dynamics within families. Studies in Muslim and broader contexts show that, despite its communicative potential, technology is frequently centralized and controlled by a single authority figure, most commonly the husband or father,

thus reinforcing pre-existing gendered hierarchies and limiting equitable access to digital resources. Other research highlights that families practicing mutual consultation tend to develop healthier communication patterns, distribute authority more fairly, and foster stronger emotional bonds, while overcontrol in the name of protection tends to erode trust and transform children into objects of surveillance rather than respected subjects. Indonesian research on family communication in the digital era similarly finds that excessive digital surveillance often creates relational rifts, particularly when monitoring is carried out without transparent, dialogic communication about trust, responsibility, and boundaries.¹⁸

In contrast, the implementation of *shura* in Mrs. Laila's family exemplifies an alternative model grounded in Islamic ethics. Farmawati (2024) found that families who practice mutual consultation tend to develop healthier communication patterns, distribute authority more equitably, and foster stronger emotional bonds.¹⁹ This approach reflects the *mubadalah* (reciprocity) ethos, which promotes shared leadership and ethical cooperation within Muslim households. A study by Syahril et al. (2024) also observed that shared decision-making is associated with greater harmony in family relations, indicating a more collaborative approach to managing digital practices.²⁰

However, these egalitarian practices remain limited and informal. The case from Yogyakarta underscores the

¹⁸ Agus Munjirin Mukhotib Lathif et al., "Protecting Family Integrity from Digital Fraud: Islamic Family Law and ITE Law in WhatsApp Groups," *Jurnal Munakahat: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 1(1) (2024), 49.

¹⁹ Cintami Farmawati et al., "Gender Aware Therapy Based on Mubadalah for Family Resilience Post Domestic Violence," *JOUSIP: Journal of Sufism and Psychotherapy* 4(2) (2024), 140.

²⁰ Romi Syahril et al., "The Impact of Technology on Family Communication," *Golden Ratio of Data in Summary* 4(2) (2024): 1005.

risks of excessive surveillance in parent-child relationships. Everri et al. (2022) argued that over-control in the name of parental protection can erode trust, transforming children into objects of surveillance rather than respected subjects.²¹ Such practices often lead to resistance, emotional detachment, and breakdowns in communication. This is supported by research from Junaidi et al. (2022), who found that excessive digital surveillance within families often creates rifts and erodes the bond between parents and children, particularly when surveillance is carried out without transparent communication.²²

Digital communication, therefore, is not a neutral medium. It mirrors and reproduces power relations that are deeply embedded in cultural and religious contexts. In patriarchal family structures, technology becomes a tool of domination, while in more egalitarian families, it can serve as a platform for ethical engagement, dialogue, and mutual empowerment. According to Onyeator & Okpara (2019) and Hertlein & Blumer (2013), the pervasive nature of technology amplifies existing power structures, particularly within family dynamics, and the influence of cultural norms can either foster or hinder egalitarian communication within the household.²³

²¹ Michela Everri et al., "Parent-Child Relationships, Digital Media Use and Parents' Well-Being During COVID-19 Home Confinement: The Role of Family Resilience." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19(23) (2022), 15690.

²² Randi D. Junaidi et al., "Komunikasi Keluarga Dalam Menghadapi Disrupsi Teknologi Pada Generasi Digital Native (Studi Kasus 3 Keluarga Tokoh Agama Islam di Kota Solo)," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling (JPDK)* 4(4) (2022), 5540.

²³ Ijoema N. Onyeator and Aloysius C. Okpara, "Human Communication in a Digital Age: Perspectives on Interpersonal Communication in the Family." *New Media and Mass Communication* 78 (2019), 40; Katherine M. Hertlein and Mark L. Blumer, *The Couple and Family Technology Framework: Intimate Relationships in a Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 82.

These findings invite more profound reflection on how Islamic ethical frameworks, particularly *mubadalah* can inform digital communication practices that balance care, control, and autonomy. The challenge lies in translating religious values into everyday digital interactions that respect each member's dignity, agency, and emotional well-being. Recent work on Islamic family law and technological change underscores the need for ethical frameworks that guide the use of technology in ways consistent with principles of justice, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.²⁴ In this study, families that explicitly or implicitly drew on *shura*, *amanah*, and *rahmah* were better able to negotiate rules about devices, privacy, and monitoring in ways that maintained trust. In contrast, families rooted in more rigid patriarchal interpretations tended to reproduce inequality and conflict in their digital practices.

These findings also point to the presence of what may be termed "silent patriarchy," wherein control is exerted subtly, through routine monitoring, managing financial applications alone, or framing unilateral decision-making as a moral duty. *Mubadalah* critiques such hidden power structures because they erode trust and reduce the spouse or child to an object of oversight rather than a partner in an ethical relationship. Addressing these forms of digital patriarchy requires not only technological literacy but also theological literacy, ensuring that families understand how Islamic values of *ma'ruf*, *rahmah*, and justice apply within digital ecosystems.

Through the lens of *mubadalah*, digital family communication is not merely a technological shift but an ethical arena in which reciprocity must be enacted. Every family member (spouses, parents, and children alike) is

²⁴ Abdul Rahman Ramadhan, "The Dynamics of Islamic Family Law in the Face of Technological Advancements and Social Changes in the Era of Society 5.0.," *KnE Social Sciences* (2024), 272.

positioned as a full relational subject with equal moral agency. This framing challenges hierarchical interpretations of authority that legitimize unilateral digital control. Instead, communication should be assessed by the extent to which it affirms *ba'duhum awliya' ba'd* (mutual guardianship), a Qur'anic concept that underlines the reciprocal responsibilities of men and women in sustaining just, compassionate family relationships. From this point of view, the digital practices documented in this study reveal not only shifting communication patterns but deeper ethical tensions between patriarchal traditions and the egalitarian relational ethos promoted by *mubadalah*.

Implementing the Principle of *Mubadalah*: Mutuality that is Still Partial

A closer look at these dynamics invites a reinterpretation of *qiwamah* in the digital sphere. While many fathers frame digital supervision, such as controlling passwords, monitoring WhatsApp messages, or regulating device access, as a form of protection, *mubadalah* redefines *qiwamah* as shared responsibility rather than unilateral authority. According to this principle, decision-making regarding digital tools should be grounded in *shura* (consultation) and *amanah* (trust), ensuring that no family member becomes an object of surveillance while remaining an equal participant in relational governance. This reorientation highlights that the ethical use of technology in Muslim households cannot be separated from theological commitments to justice, compassion, and mutual care.

As shown in Table 2, the implementation of *mubadalah* in this study appears in two main patterns: role sharing and egalitarian practices (five informants, including INF-06 and INF-13) and patriarchal religious interpretations (three informants, including INF-07). Together, these patterns suggest that *mubadalah* values are present in many families, but remain incomplete and unevenly internalized.

This study reveals that although most informants did not explicitly reference *mubadalah* as a conceptual framework, many families implicitly practiced its core values, particularly in role sharing, emotional reciprocity, and joint decision making. For instance, in the household of Mrs. Asma and Mr. Farid in Jakarta (INF-06), there is a flexible division of parenting and domestic duties facilitated through a family WhatsApp group that not only coordinates tasks but also nurtures emotional closeness; technology, in this context, becomes a medium for spiritual and affective intimacy. A similar pattern appears in a Bandung family (INF-13), where both spouses describe their domestic arrangement as "we share roles, there's no counting," indicating a taken-for-granted sense of reciprocity rather than a calculated exchange.

Another dimension illuminated by the *mubadalah* perspective is the importance of emotional reciprocity in digital interaction. Digital communication, whether expressed through voice notes, emoticons, shared prayers, or late-night check-ins, can embody *rahmah* (compassion) when practiced consciously. For adolescents who prefer WhatsApp to avoid emotionally charged face-to-face conversations, these choices can be understood not as distancing but as attempts to preserve harmony and regulate risks within relational space. Seen through this ethical lens, technology becomes a medium not only for logistical coordination but for sustaining affection, empathy, and emotional safety within the household.

This incomplete adoption of *mubadalah* points to deeper structural constraints: entrenched classical interpretations of gender roles, limited literacy on gender justice within Islamic frameworks, and the absence of dialogical religious education in family life. While values such as *shura* (consultation), *ma'ruf* (good conduct), and emotional openness appear in family practices, they often coexist with dominant narratives that position men as the

ultimate decision-makers. This ambivalence not only illustrates internal contradictions but also raises critical questions: Why has *mubadalah* not been fully internalized? Are these barriers rooted in theological illiteracy, sociocultural rigidity, or digital power asymmetries?

More broadly, this theme surfaces an ethical tension between traditional values and modern technological practices. Some families embrace digital tools to facilitate shared responsibilities and transparent coordination, as evidenced by the use of WhatsApp groups, shared calendars, and financial apps. Others use the same technologies to reinforce surveillance and control, for example, through unilateral monitoring of spouses' and children's devices. In several households, parental monitoring occurred without prior conversations about *amanah* (trust) or *rahmah* (compassion), creating a gap between digital literacy and spiritual literacy.

These dynamics underscore the necessity of positioning *mubadalah* not merely as a normative theology but as a transformative ethic capable of challenging the digital manifestation of patriarchal authority. As Ansori and Juliansyahzen (2022) argue, digital patriarchy is increasingly present in Muslim households, with technologies co-opted to reinforce male-centric control under the guise of family protection.²⁵

A comparative analysis across families further illuminates how the application of *mubadalah* differs based on communicative practices, local culture, and social location. In Jakarta, where urbanization and educational attainment are relatively high, families like that of Asma and Farid tend to display more adaptive, dialogic approaches rooted in mutual care; digital tools are

²⁵ Ahmad Zainul Ansori and Yayah Khisbiyah Juliansyahzen, "The Contestation of the Family Law Discourse in the Digital Age: Islam, State, and Gender," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 6(2) (2022), 12.

integrated into a relational ethic that leans toward equality. In contrast, in families situated in more traditionally religious environments, such as those in Cirebon and Makasar, digital tools are more often used to entrench patriarchal hierarchies, for instance, through unilateral decision-making and intensive surveillance of wives or children. Comparing households that practice *shura* with those that maintain strict patriarchal norms reveals significant differences in relational resilience: in consultative families, children express higher emotional security and parents navigate digital disruptions more collaboratively, whereas patriarchal households show higher levels of tension and intergenerational conflict, with youth resisting surveillance and control but lacking the theological vocabulary to challenge it meaningfully.

Geographical context also shapes internal family dynamics through local cultural traditions that influence the construction of gender relations. In metropolitan cities such as Jakarta, there is a stronger tendency toward negotiation of roles and the adoption of the *syura*-based approach, especially among younger families exposed to gender equality values through higher education and digital media. In contrast, in regions with more deeply rooted religious cultures, such as Cirebon and Makasar, the findings show that patriarchal patterns of gender relations remain dominant. In these contexts, resistance to *mubadalah*-based values is more pronounced, as they are often perceived to diverge from the established religious traditions and mainstream interpretations deeply embedded in both familial and communal religious life.²⁶

Within Indonesia's broader socio-religious landscape, the *mubadalah* framework contributes to a shift in interpretive orientation by offering relational and gender-

²⁶ Ahmad Arif Junaidi, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) and Mubadalah Approach in Interpreting the Gender Biased-Qur'anic Verses," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 18(1) (2023), 8.

aware readings of Islamic teachings. Rather than simply repeating classical hierarchies, it encourages a hermeneutic that foregrounds reciprocity, shared responsibility, and ethical partnership in family life. Through this orientation, *mubadalah* expands the spaces in which Muslim families can understand their digital interactions not only as technical behaviors but as reflections of deeper theological commitments. The potential of *mubadalah* within the digital *dakwah* ecosystem is particularly promising, as the rise of social media-based platforms enables access to non-mainstream religious discourses. However, for *mubadalah* to effectively influence the digital public sphere, strategic efforts are needed, particularly in gender literacy, theological accompaniment, and collaboration with progressive *dakwah* actors, so that the message of reciprocity can reach broader segments of society in a sustainable and impactful manner.²⁷

These findings situate *mubadalah* as a potential counter-hegemonic approach within Indonesia's broader socio-religious landscape. As a theological framework grounded in Qur'anic mutuality (*ba'duhum awliya' ba'd*), *mubadalah* challenges dominant patriarchal *tafsir* by offering a spiritually rooted ethic of relational justice. Yet, the success of *mubadalah* depends on its ability to be contextualized and popularized, particularly in the digital age, where family life is increasingly mediated by apps, chats, and screen time negotiations.

Toward a Holistic and Spiritually Grounded Model of Digital Family Communication: Reimagining *Mubadalah* in Practice

²⁷ Muhammad Iqbal Juliansyahzen, "Ideologization of Gender in Social Media: The Digital Activism of *Mubadalah*," *Proceeding of Saizu International Conference on Transdisciplinary Religious Studies* (2021), 12.

Building on the findings presented above, this study proposes an integrative model of digital family communication that unites the technological, relational, and ethical-spiritual dimensions of contemporary Muslim life. Although digital platforms such as WhatsApp, shared calendars, online banking systems, and household management applications have been widely adopted, their use often occurs without critical ethical reflection. Decisions regarding who sets Wi-Fi rules, who controls access to financial apps, or who monitors children's online activities are frequently made unilaterally, often by fathers, mirroring offline gender hierarchies in digital spaces. This pattern reflects the broader persistence of patriarchal norms that continue to shape family digital practices in many Muslim households.²⁸

This ethical inconsistency reveals a central paradox: families have rapidly adapted to technological tools, yet the values that guide their use remain anchored in traditional and unequal power structures. Such fragmented adaptation underscores the need for a more intentional translation of Islamic relational ethics, *amanah*, *mawaddah* and *rahmah*, into digital practices. In this regard, *mubadalah* offers a theological and ethical framework capable of reconciling Islamic principles with the everyday realities of digital family life.²⁹

²⁸Alina Bărbuță et al., "Digital Technology and Family Dynamics: The 3Rs Conceptual Model Regarding the Acceptance and Use of Digital Technology in Everyday Family Routines," *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 9(1) (2023), 130; Ahmad Zainul Ansori and Yayah Khisbiyah Juliansyahzen, "The Contestation of the Family Law Discourse in the Digital Age: Islam, State, and Gender," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 6(2) (2022), 15.

²⁹Wahyu Evendi and Masfufah, "Balance of Technology Use in Muslim Family Life," *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology* 4(1) (2023), 33; Nafi and Rohman, "Digitalization in Islamic Family Law: An Opportunity or a

Data from this study illustrates this contrast. In households such as that of Asma and Farid, digital intimacy and co-parenting were expressed through shared decision-making, reciprocal emotional check-ins, and collaborative management of daily responsibilities. These practices, though not explicitly named as *mubadalah*, embody its core values. Conversely, in families such as Mr. Haris's, unilateral paternal control over digital tools and information signals a missed opportunity to realize Islamic principles of consultation (*shura*) and shared responsibility (*ta'awun*).³⁰

A holistic *mubadalah* approach also highlights the potential of digital communication to cultivate spiritual reciprocity within families. When spouses or children share Qur'anic verses, religious reflections, or online study circles, they engage in a form of mutual spiritual care that reinforces the ethical foundation of family life. These practices demonstrate that digital platforms can become spaces for nurturing *sakinah* (tranquility) and *mawaddah* (affection), not merely for logistical coordination. Thus, digital engagement, when guided by *mubadalah*, supports families in embodying relational ethics that are emotionally sustaining and spiritually grounded.

In line with Faqihuddin's formulation, *mubadalah* requires that every digital interaction maintain the full subjecthood of all family members. A spouse, child, or parent cannot be positioned merely as a recipient of rules or an object of supervision; they must remain active moral agents whose well-being becomes the basis for reciprocal decision-making. This relational subjecthood is central to

Threat?" *International Journal of Religion and Social Community* 2(2) (2024), 40.

³⁰ Nafi and Rohman, "Digitalization in Islamic Family Law: An Opportunity or a Threat?" *International Journal of Religion and Social Community* 2(2) (2024), 42; Kamaruddin Hasan, "Islamic Communication Ethics: Concepts and Applications in the Digital Era," *Jurnal Al-Fikrah* 3(1) (2024), 102.

ensuring that digital communication does not replicate hierarchical patterns, but instead becomes a medium for shared ethical flourishing.

Such differences reveal that *mubadalah* cannot remain an abstract theological construct; rather, it must be operationalized through concrete, everyday practices. These include deliberate family discussions on:

- Ethical parameters for sharing passwords and device access
- Balancing privacy with trust in digital communication
- Expressing care, accountability, and emotional presence through digital means
- Establishing consultative processes for digital decision-making.³¹

In line with the principle of *ma'ruf*, these discussions must be grounded in norms of fairness, kindness, and ethical consideration, ensuring that digital decision-making protects the dignity and emotional well-being of every family member. By embedding *ma'ruf* into everyday digital practices, families can cultivate a culture of reciprocity that aligns technological habits with Islamic moral commitments.

Furthermore, digital spaces present an opportunity for transformative *da'wah*. Gender-just religious education, delivered through webinars, social media campaigns, virtual *halaqah*, and online counselling, can disseminate *mubadalah* principles in ways that resonate with the lived experiences of contemporary Muslim families. Islamic institutions, *da'wah* movements, and family counseling services are therefore encouraged to integrate *mubadalah*

³¹ Wahyu Evendi and Masfufah, "Balance of Technology Use in Muslim Family Life," *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology* 4(1) (2023), 34.

into their pedagogical frameworks to cultivate gender-inclusive theological literacy aligned with digital realities.³²

As a counter-hegemonic ethical framework, *mubadalah* moves beyond theoretical critique by offering concrete guidance for reimagining everyday digital practices within Muslim families. Central to this guidance is the Qur'anic mandate of *ma'ruf*, which Faqihuddin posits as the ethical core of *mubadalah*, calling families to act justly, compassionately, and mutually beneficially, including in their digital interactions. Its emphasis on mutual care, shared governance, and spiritual accountability provides a practical roadmap for transforming digital communication from a site of control into a space of ethical collaboration. In this way, *mubadalah* articulates a forward-looking vision for family life, one that remains faithful to Islamic values while adapting responsively to the realities of digital interaction. Its future growth within Indonesia's *da'wah* ecosystem will depend on its ability to speak simultaneously to tradition and transformation, upholding enduring Islamic values while reimagining their expression for contemporary contexts.³³

Ultimately, this study confirms that digital family communication is not merely a technical or behavioral concern; it is profoundly ethical, spiritual, and political. When internalized and practiced in daily interactions, *mubadalah* provides a holistic pathway for Muslim families

³² Dini Amalia, "Empowering Equality: Mubadalah as a Catalyst for Peace, Justice, and Harmony Among Humanity," *Equality: Journal of Gender, Child and Humanity Studies* 2(1) (2024), 5.

³³ Septi Gumiandari and Iman Nafi'a, "Mubadalah as an Islamic Moderating Perspective between Gender and Patriarchal Regimes in Building Family Resilience," *Jurnal Penelitian* 17(2) (2020), 8; Septi Gumiandari et al., "Heading to Reciprocity in Islamic Psychology: Coping Adaptive Strategy for Family Resilience During the Pandemic," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 26(1) (2024), 360.

to navigate digital disruption, not as a threat but as an opportunity to cultivate justice, compassion, and sacred partnership in their relational lives.³⁴

Conclusion

This study identifies four interrelated dynamics shaping digital communication among urban Muslim families in selected Indonesian cities. First, digitalization has significantly altered family interaction patterns, as physical presence is increasingly replaced by screen-mediated exchanges that generate both new forms of intimacy and emotional distance. Second, digital technologies are embedded within existing power relations that often reproduce patriarchal control. Within the families examined, fathers or husbands frequently exercise authority over digital access and decision-making, while mothers and children experience constrained autonomy and heightened forms of surveillance.

At the same time, these patterns are not uniform. The third dynamic reveals that some urban Muslim families are beginning to cultivate more egalitarian relational practices through shared decision-making and collaborative digital engagement. These practices signal a partial yet meaningful internalization of *mubadalah* principles, including mutual consultation (*shura*), compassion (*rahmah*), and trust (*amanah*). The fourth dynamic highlights a persistent ethical tension: while digital technologies offer possibilities for relational transformation, they remain entangled with long-standing cultural values and power hierarchies that can either inhibit or inspire change. In this context, *mubadalah* functions simultaneously as a critical analytical lens and an aspirational ethical orientation, unevenly realized, yet essential for fostering relational justice,

³⁴ Aniroh Reni Nur, et al., "The Bilateral Inheritance System in Islamic Family Law: Fairness, Equality, and Mutual Exchange Perspectives," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 8(2) (2024), 900.

emotional resilience, and spiritual depth within digitally mediated family life.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The findings are derived from a qualitative inquiry involving urban Muslim families in selected cities and do not claim to represent the full socio-economic, cultural, or geographical diversity of Muslim families in Indonesia. Future research should therefore engage families from rural areas, diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and varying cultural settings to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how *mubadalah* principles are negotiated and enacted across different digital environments.

Overall, this study underscores that digital family communication within urban Muslim contexts is not merely a technical or instrumental matter, but a deeply ethical, spiritual, and relational process. When *mubadalah* principles are more fully internalized, digital communication holds the potential not only to enable families to navigate technological disruption but also to cultivate more just, compassionate, and inclusive forms of Muslim family life grounded in reciprocal Islamic values.

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