



## WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A QUR'ANIC ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF GLOBAL BEAUTY CULTURE

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to critically review the global beauty culture towards women in the digital era from the perspective of Qur'anic ethics, representing several female figures in the Qur'an as role models who demonstrate that the value of humanity and the virtue of women are determined by moral integrity, social roles, and steadfast faith, not solely by standards of physical beauty. Although research on the representation of women's bodies in digital media is growing, there is still a lack of research that connects with ethical principles in the Qur'an, especially in the context of internalized beauty standards. This study uses a qualitative method with a comparative analysis approach. The study focuses on comparing the phenomenon of beauty construction that has developed on social media with the Qur'an's perspective on the position of humans. The results of this study show that the Qur'an gives an overview of beauty is not about the shape of the face or body, but the balance between inner and outer, ethics in appearance, and self-awareness before God. This is in stark contrast to digital culture that standardizes beauty narrowly, often reducing women to visual objects.*

*Keywords: Women, Digital Age, Qur'anic Ethical Critique, Global Beauty Culture*

## Introduction

In this era of digitalization, social media has a big influence in determining beauty standards. Social media users are often influenced by other people's opinions regarding beauty standards. This makes beauty standards flat, even though everyone should have their own beauty standards (Basir et al., 2022).. Currently, the standard of beauty in Indonesia must be white, they are influenced by the many brands that sell whitening drugs that make the wearer like porcelain. Because their benchmarks are foreigners who often become idols for those who have tall bodies, white skin, smooth faces without acne. Even because of this, there is now skincare for minors who are not supposed to use skincare (Chinta et al., 2023). In a digital environment full of filters, retouching and image curation techniques, many women feel pressured to conform for validation in the form of likes and positive comments. This phenomenon triggers ethical and spiritual issues related to the meaning of women's bodies, identity and self-worth in an increasingly homogenized global visual landscape.

Beauty is indeed very synonymous with women. Since long ago, beauty has been constructed by society and has become a social control for women. This social construction shapes women's perceptions of ideal beauty standards and is recognized in society. Moreover, people in this digital era cannot be separated from the presence of social media. Everyone has a social network, especially women. According to data from DataReportal, social media users in Indonesia reached 191.4 million in January 2022, with the majority of social media users being women with a percentage of 52.6%. The message conveyed about beautiful women with ideal bodies is attractively packaged on social media. This makes women make this view as a mecca of beauty. Social media seems to have an unfavorable effect and seems to provide its own beauty standards for women. However, this depends on who receives the message and how to react to it (Basir et al., 2022).

Based on research conducted by (Basir et al., 2022) as many as 60% of respondents said that Instagram is the media they often visit to just fill their free time and see beauty content. Followed by Tiktok social media with 44%. Instagram is indeed one of the media frequented by today's young people who are often called Digital Natives because they were born in the era of digitalization. By presenting many features such as Reels, Instagram Stories, and Live, it makes influencers more flexible in reaching users to follow the content they create.

However, these beauty standards are neither universal nor neutral. Research shows that today's dominant constructions of beauty are shaped by colonial legacies, global capitalism, and a cosmetics industry that profits from women's body dissatisfaction (Crenshaw, 1991; Gill, 2007). This standard not only ignores body diversity, skin color, and ethnic identity, but also marginalizes spiritual and ethical values that place people not on their outward appearance, but on their inner qualities and social contributions. However, when viewed from the context of Islam, there is no verse that explains this standard. Thus, there is a tension between Qur'anic values and the global beauty culture that dominates the digital space. Although many beauty brands have begun to realize this diversity, it is very difficult to change the human mainstream.

A number of studies have explored the relationship between media, women and the body

from a cultural and gender perspective, highlighting how Muslim women negotiate their identities and bodies in the tension between tradition and modernity. In Indonesia itself, there are several studies that try to examine this beauty culture, including (Alfikriyah & Suwandi, 2024), (Chinta et al., 2023), (Basir et al., 2022) and several other studies. However, there are still few studies that specifically examine how the digital beauty culture is criticized through the Qur'anic ethics approach, especially in viewing women's bodies not merely as aesthetic entities, but as spiritual and moral subjects.

This research is important because it offers a critical approach rooted in Qur'anic ethics in responding to the hegemony of global beauty culture in the digital era. In the context of rampant visual pressure on women, this research aims to (1) examine how digital beauty culture affects Muslim women's self-perception, (2) explore Qur'anic ethical values that are relevant in dealing with this phenomenon, and (3) formulate alternative values that can strengthen women's spiritual autonomy and self-awareness in the midst of body visualization. Thus, this study is expected to make theoretical and praxis contributions to the discourse on Islamic ethics, gender, and digital media.

## Literature Review

The word woman comes from the word *empuan*; this word is approached as *Puan*, which means a respectful greeting for women, as a pair of the word *tuan*. Meanwhile, the word woman in the Indonesian dictionary is a person or human being who has *puki*, can menstruate, become pregnant, give birth to children and breastfeed. In addition, women are powerful figures and behind the softness of their nature, there is extraordinary strength and potential. It is this strength and potential that ultimately makes women an independent figure. A figure who is able to get out of the constraints of poverty to be able to drive the family economy. Plato said that women are viewed in terms of physical and spiritual strength. Mentally women are weaker than men but this difference does not cause differences in their talents. Biologically from a physical point of view, women are distinguished from women who are smaller than men, smoother voices, women's body development occurs earlier, women's strength is not as strong as men and so on (Tindangen, 2020).

Digital Theory is a concept of understanding the development of the Age of Technology and Science, from all that is manual to automatic, and from all that is complicated to concise. Digital technology is a technology that no longer uses human labor, or manual. But it tends to be an automatic operating system with a computerized system or a format that can be read by a computer. Digital systems are a development of analog systems. A digital system uses a sequence of numbers to represent information. Unlike analog signals, digital signals are noncontinuous (Aji, 2016)

Everything that will be built in this world from the dimensions of the world to the dimensions of the hereafter will be more meaningful when the source of discipline is Allah Almighty (Imbali, 2018). Qur'anic ethics means providing limits to human freedom in fulfilling their desires. The perception of beauty is an interpretation in a society related to a standard in defining the meaning of beauty. Beauty will not be separated from one's conditions and environment in defining beauty (Permata & Nanda, 2017)

## Result and Discussion

### Women's Beauty Standards in the Digital Age

Women's beauty in the digital era can no longer be separated from the visual culture that shapes the way we see, value and represent the body. In the social media landscape, women's faces and bodies become visual objects that are constantly produced, edited and disseminated. The algorithms of digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play an active role in determining which images are considered attractive and worthy of being displayed in public spaces. Camera filters, lighting techniques, and facial editing apps create a uniform, artificial, and often unrealistic beauty aesthetic. This indicates that beauty has now become part of a digital visual logic, where visual performance is prioritized over personal uniqueness or body authenticity. This visual culture not only influences society's perception of beauty, but also creates psychological pressure for women to conform to an idealized image that is mass-produced and constantly replicated. Thus, it is important to examine beauty as a visual phenomenon that operates within a complex system of meaning, power and digital economy. There are several factors that influence beauty standards for women today, including:

#### 1. Beauty Standard on Social Media

Beauty is often considered a relativity. This means that everyone's view of the concept of beauty is different. However, in addition, beauty is also universal today. This is because there are standards and criteria that become the benchmark for being labeled beautiful. Although beauty criteria are constantly changing from time to time, in the last few decades the beauty criteria that are often displayed by the media tend to have similarities in the form of a slim thin body, tall, clean white skin, long hair, big eyes, and a sharp nose. People's views on the concept of beauty are the result of media exposure that takes place continuously every day. This is called pop culture. Popular culture is produced in large quantities, therefore it requires standardization that aims to neutralize mass tastes and satisfy all levels of society. The existence of this standardization causes certain groups to be marginalized, because they do not meet the standards set by the media (Aprilita & Listyani, 2016).

Social media also plays an active role in determining these beauty standards. With white skin as a symbol of cleanliness, a woman's ultimate beauty, purity, innocence, smoothness and purity. In relation to the issue of race, white skin is still considered the highest and best race in the hierarchy of existing skin colors. This results in many women competing to reach this level (Yuliastuti Sahan & Iswardani Witarti, 2021). The significant role of social media has also had a considerable impact on the results of interviews with several Gen Z teenagers and research conducted by the An-nisa forum in two districts, Payakumbuh and Tanah Datar, which found that being fair-skinned, tall, and having glowing skin are the standards of beauty for women.

Based on the author's direct observations of a number of female students regarding standards of female beauty, it appears that their understanding of beauty is still heavily influenced by social media narratives. The majority of respondents defined beauty through

characteristics that were almost uniform and template-like, such as fair skin, a slim body, and a pointed nose. In fact, when asked to provide concrete examples, they spontaneously mentioned a figure who is currently popular on social media, Dasha Taran, as the ideal representation of female beauty. These findings show the strong dominance of digital beauty standards in shaping the aesthetic perceptions and imaginations of today's female students.



Gambar 1. Dasha Taran

## 2. Beauty Mediated by Filters and Technology

Digital filter features are very attractive to social media users (Hunaifi, 2023), one of the studies conducted (Sari & Susilawati, 2022) states that the main reason for using social media filters is for self-imaging. Self-imaging is an attempt to accentuate a good image, state or situation of oneself to the public, due to the social construction that exists in society so that it puts pressure on individuals. Physical appearance is one of the indicators that is constructed in society, especially for women who have a physical appearance that is not in accordance with the expected and constructed standards. The obsession to look perfect in accordance with beauty standards is something that must be done by women on social media.



Gambar 2. Filter and Technology

### 3. Influencers as Beauty Commodification

Influencer can be said to be an activist, who has a good relationship, has an impact, is active in terms of expressing thoughts, opinions and is a benchmark for his followers (Ligariaty & Irwansyah, 2021). The main task of an influencer is to persuade the audience by using messages related to beauty concepts. Influencers are no longer just popular figures on social media, but have become cultural actors who play a central role in shaping and spreading beauty standards in the digital era. Through carefully curated visual content ranging from makeup, lighting, to the use of filters, they create a visual narrative of beauty that is both coveted and sold. In this landscape, influencers' bodies become storefronts that advertise certain lifestyles, products and aesthetics, making beauty a project of consumption and commodification. As visual culture scholars have noted, power is moving from traditional media institutions to personal figures who have an emotional affinity with their audiences.

Influencers not only influence the way people dress up or dress down, but also subtly shape the way women see, value and even love themselves. They operate as both producers and distributors of visual values, creating a powerful field of influence where beauty becomes a performance, an identity, and a social instrument that must be constantly updated in front of a digital public. Beauty vloggers are often used as the main reference in defining beauty, where every product they review and almost always appears successful slowly becomes a standard in itself. One of the most influential figures in this context is Tasya Farasya; what she recommends is not merely understood as a cosmetic review, but is used as the main reference in determining which products are suitable for many women to use. This phenomenon shows that social media is not only a space for sharing beauty experiences, but also plays an active role in creating and reinforcing new beauty standards that are widely followed.

### 4. Beauty and Religious Identity

Beauty and religiosity are two dimensions that are often considered contradictory, but in practice they are intertwined in the lives of modern women, especially in the digital era. For religious women, beauty is not just a visual issue, but also closely related to spiritual and ethical values. In the midst of popular culture that emphasizes body aesthetics and visual exposure, religious women negotiate their identity in unique ways by adopting modern aesthetic elements such as skincare and fashion, while still maintaining the principles of covering the aurat and piety. Thus, religious beauty becomes a form of synthesis between faith and self-expression, offering a counter-narrative to the dominance of secular beauty in digital culture.

As explained by Lajnef cited by (Aziza et al., 2024) for Muslim women, this social media opportunity should be utilized in the positive realm of religion. Because with followers who struggle in one interest, it will be easy to accept all ideas from their role models. With social media, Muslim women are encouraged to have a significant influence on the public. Because this can have an impact in several aspects, such as aspects of identity formation, promotion of Islamic fashion and lifestyle, influence on values and behavior, social pressure and beauty standards as well as empowerment and community.

### Qur'anic Ethical Critique of Global Beauty Culture

The Qur'an sets a fixed and transcendent standard for judging human beings, in contrast to the world's standards that are constantly changing with the times, and are now dictated by algorithms and social media aesthetics. The Quran formulates a number of standards of human value, including: QS. At-Tin: 4 :

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ

Meaning: *“Indeed, We have created man in the best possible form.”*

According to Wahbah al-Zuhaili, the word ahsani taqwim means balancing its shape by giving it the privilege of the right size, good shape and all the features of the universe are collected in it. The word taqwiim means making something in the most balanced and perfect form (Prof. Dr. Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, 2013). In this Surah, Allah swears by the three things mentioned, that We have created man in the best possible form and balanced stature & appropriate limbs, good structure, eating with his hands, which distinguishes him from other creatures with knowledge, thought, speech, contemplation, and wisdom. With that, humans deserve to be leaders on earth as intended by Allah (Prof. Dr. Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, 2013).

This verse conveys a profound message about human privilege as God's creation. Humans are not only created physically in the most perfect and proportional form, but are also equipped with spiritual and intellectual potential that makes them noble creatures among other creations. This perfection encompasses a balance between body, mind and spirit, indicating that every aspect of human existence is designed with wisdom. Nothing is wasted in this creation; every detail, whether visible or hidden, reflects divine wisdom and compassion. Therefore, this verse is also a reminder for humans to value themselves, maintain the nature that has been bestowed, and live life with an awareness of the honor inherent in their existence.

The Qur'an does not prescribe any particular physical criteria as a standard of female beauty. Nowhere in the Qur'anic texts is there a normative measure of body shape, skin color, or other outward features as a measure of beauty. Instead, the Qur'an affirms that human beings are created in the most perfect and balanced form (ahsani taqwim), reflecting an appreciation of physical diversity as part of divine wisdom. This concept implicitly rejects reductionist views that attribute beauty solely to visual aspects and opens up space for a more integral understanding of beauty, which is a harmony between physical, moral and spiritual dimensions. Thus, the standard of beauty in the Qur'anic perspective is inclusive and transcendent, not subject to temporary or narrow social constructions. QS. Al-Hujurat: 13:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Meaning: *“O people, indeed We have created you from a male and a female. Then, We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Absorbing.”*

Piety is the benchmark of excellence that distinguishes between people. The most noble

person for Allah SWT is the one who is most noble in His sight both in this world and in the hereafter, namely the most pious and pious both for oneself (personal piety) and for the general public (social piety). if you want to boast about each other, you should boast about piety, which means commitment to commands and avoiding prohibitions (Az-Zuhaili, 2013).

The Qur'an asserts that the only measure that distinguishes people before Allah is their level of piety, not their social status, gender, skin color, or physical appearance. Divine judgment transcends the boundaries of outward identity and penetrates into a person's moral and spiritual qualities. This is affirmed in QS. Al-Hujurāt verse 13, which states that humans were created in tribes and nations in order to know one another, and that the noblest in the sight of Allah is the most pious. Thus, the Qur'ān offers an inclusive and transcendent paradigm in viewing human differences—rejecting hierarchies based on worldly attributes and emphasizing the importance of inner integrity. This message not only frees people from superficial judgments, but also directs them towards building an identity based on ethical and spiritual values.

### **Women in the Qur'an**

In the Qur'an, although it does not explicitly emphasize the physical aspect as the main benchmark, there are several female figures depicted with features that are often associated with beauty and majesty. Maryam, for example, is praised not only for her purity and firmness of faith, but also for her noble position among women throughout the world (QS. Ali 'Imran: 42), which implicitly reflects the harmony between inner and outer beauty. Queen Saba (Balqis) emerges as an intelligent, graceful and authoritative female leader, showing that beauty in the Qur'ān can also manifest in leadership, wisdom and diplomatic skills (QS. An-Naml: 22-44). Aisyah, although not directly mentioned in the Qur'an but reflected in the narrations, is also often raised in classical discourse as an intellectually and personally attractive female figure. These three figures reflect that beauty in the Qur'anic perspective is not limited to physical aspects alone, but is broader: it includes morals, firmness of faith, intelligence, and social contribution.

Although the Qur'an itself never sets standards for human beauty, especially for women, it does provide descriptions in the stories of chosen individuals preserved in the Qur'an. Among them, only Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) is described as having extraordinary physical beauty—so captivating that it not only enchants the eyes but also shakes the consciousness. Even the women of Egypt lost control simply by seeing his face. This is the only explicit mention in the Qur'an of a person's physical beauty, indicating that beauty and handsomeness are merely gifts, not measures of nobility.

Here are some guidelines from the Qur'an for Muslim women regarding beauty standards in the digital age:

- a. Allah's judgment is not based on physical appearance  
In Surat al-Hujurat: 13, it is piety, not physical appearance, that distinguishes between people.
- b. There is a prohibition against *tabarruj* (excessively displaying adornments)  
Al-Ahzab: 33 criticizes not beauty itself, but the prohibition against displaying beauty for the purpose of social validation.

- c. Women should not make beauty the goal of their lives  
Al-Hadith: 20 illustrates that this world is deceptive, so do not be deceived by it. Physical beauty is not something eternal, but will fade in time, as standards of beauty will change with the times and demands of society, and are part of an illusion that will not last.
- d. The dignity of women lies in their ability to preserve themselves and uphold piety  
The Qur'an describes the ideal woman in Surat an-Nisa': 34, not by her physical beauty, but by how she upholds her piety toward Allah and preserves herself when her husband is not with her.
- e. Others' judgments cannot be used as one's identity  
In Surat Ali-Imran:173, Allah explains that one's identity is built through love for Allah, not through social image. Women do not need to pursue validation based on beauty standards created by their ever-changing social environment, which will ultimately harm themselves.

This research shows that the construction of global beauty in the digital era tends to standardize women's bodies based on narrow, commercial, visual values, and often reduces women's identity to physical aspects alone. Through a Qur'anic ethics approach, this research proposes a critique of the dominance of such narratives by emphasizing that the Qur'an does not set certain standards of physical beauty, but rather assesses human nobility based on piety, moral integrity, and spiritual qualities. Female figures in the Qur'an, such as Maryam and the Queen of Saba, demonstrate that true beauty lies in obedience, intelligence, and social contribution, not in appearances that follow the flow of popular culture. Thus, Qur'anic ethics provide an alternative foundation that liberates women from the pressures of digital aesthetics and encourages the redefinition of beauty as an expression of spiritual, ethical and human values. This research recommends the need for a Qur'anic value-based counter-narrative that is able to shape Muslim women's critical awareness of the hegemonic global body culture and encourage a more just and humane cultural transformation.

These differences are shown in the following table:

Aspect	Beauty Standards on Social Media	Beauty Standards in the Qur'an
Orientation	Physical and Visual	Moral and Spiritual
Main Criteria	Ideal Body and Facial Features	Piety and Moral Character
Source of Values	Trends and Popular Figures	Divine Revelation
Impact	Insecurity and Objectification	Human Dignity and Gratitude
Purpose	Social Validation	Divine Pleasure

This research opens space for the development of further studies that examine the dynamics of beauty construction in the digital context with an interdisciplinary approach, especially those that integrate tafsir, Islamic ethics, gender, and digital media studies. Future researchers are advised to explore more deeply the subjective experiences of Muslim women in responding to global beauty standards through qualitative studies, such as interviews or digital ethnography, in order to capture the personal and social dimensions more fully. In addition, it is important to

examine the role of social media as an agent of shaping body identity and how women use digital space as an arena for resistance, reinterpretation, or affirmation of Qur'anic values related to the body and beauty. Further research could also expand the focus to specific cultural contexts, such as urban and rural Muslim communities, to understand how interpretations of Qur'anic beauty interact with local and global values.

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