
Hifz al-‘Aql and the Brain Rot Phenomenon in Digital Content Consumption

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Abstract

Brain rot caused by excessive digital content consumption from the perspective of *hifz al-‘aql* (preservation of intellect) within the framework of Maqasid al-Shariah. The rapid expansion of short-form digital media such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts has significantly transformed human cognitive behavior, attention patterns, emotional regulation, and consumption habits. While digital media provide educational, informational, and economic opportunities, excessive exposure to algorithm-driven entertainment content contributes to cognitive fatigue, declining concentration, emotional instability, shortened attention spans, procrastination, and digital addiction. This research employs a qualitative library research approach grounded in Islamic epistemology and Islamic behavioral economics by analyzing Qur’anic verses, Hadith, classical Islamic scholarship, and contemporary studies on digital addiction and attention economy. The findings indicate that brain rot contradicts the objective of *hifz al-‘aql* because it weakens critical thinking, self-control, intellectual productivity, and reflective consciousness while promoting impulsive, passive, and hedonic behavior. Furthermore, the research reveals that algorithmic digital culture commodifies human attention and encourages excessive entertainment consumption at the expense of intellectual and spiritual development. Islamic behavioral economics offers an ethical framework emphasizing moderation (*wasatiyyah*), self-discipline (*mujahadah al-nafs*), ethical consumption, time accountability, and spiritually guided digital engagement to preserve intellectual well-being in the digital era. The research also proposes a maqasid-based digital consumption framework integrating cognitive protection, ethical media use, and spiritual awareness as preventive strategies against digital addiction and cognitive degradation. This research contributes theoretically to the development of Islamic behavioral economics and Islamic digital ethics while practically offering guidance for ethical digital literacy and healthy technology consumption among Muslim societies.

Keywords: Hifz al-‘Aql; Brain Rot; Digital Addiction; Islamic Behavioral Economics; Maqasid al-Shariah

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of communication, entertainment, and information consumption in modern society. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts increasingly dominate daily human activities through algorithm-based short-form content designed to maximize user engagement and screen time. Although digital media provide educational, economic, and social benefits, excessive exposure to low-value entertainment content has generated a phenomenon widely described as “brain rot.”

Brain rot refers to cognitive decline caused by continuous consumption of hyperstimulating digital content characterized by fragmented attention, instant gratification, addictive scrolling behavior, and excessive dopamine stimulation. This phenomenon is associated with declining concentration, reduced critical thinking ability, emotional instability, procrastination, and dependency on digital entertainment. The normalization of excessive scrolling behavior has gradually transformed distraction into a lifestyle within contemporary digital culture.

The emergence of the attention economy intensifies this condition. Digital platforms compete to capture and monetize human attention through personalized algorithms that continuously deliver emotionally stimulating content. Consequently, users become trapped in repetitive cycles of passive consumption that prioritize entertainment over intellectual development. Such conditions contribute to weakened self-control, impulsive behavior, and declining cognitive quality.

Within Islamic thought, intellect (*‘aql*) occupies a central role in human civilization and moral responsibility. Islam considers reason as a divine trust enabling humans to seek knowledge, distinguish truth from falsehood, and fulfill ethical obligations. Therefore, Maqasid al-Shariah identifies *hifz al-‘aql* (preservation of intellect) as one of the fundamental objectives of Islamic law. Preservation of intellect includes protecting human cognition from anything that weakens rationality, awareness, and intellectual productivity.

The Qur’an repeatedly encourages reflection, contemplation, and intellectual development. Allah SWT states in Surah Az-Zumar [39:9]: “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” Similarly, Surah Al-‘Alaq [96:1–5] emphasizes reading and knowledge acquisition as the foundation of human excellence. Thus, excessive digital consumption that weakens concentration and critical thinking may contradict the objectives of *hifz al-‘aql*.

Previous studies on digital addiction primarily focus on psychological, neurological, and technological perspectives. However, limited research has examined brain rot through the framework of Islamic behavioral economics and Maqasid al-Shariah. This gap highlights the need for an ethical-spiritual perspective capable of addressing cognitive degradation in the digital era.

This research aims to analyze the phenomenon of brain rot in digital content consumption through the perspective of *hifz al-‘aql* and Islamic behavioral economics. The research contributes theoretically to the development of Islamic behavioral economics in digital society and practically to ethical digital literacy grounded in Islamic values.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hifz al-‘Aql in Maqasid al-Shariah

Maqasid al-Shariah represents the higher objectives of Islamic law intended to preserve human welfare and prevent harm. Classical Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Al-Shatibi classified Maqasid al-Shariah into five essential protections: religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-‘aql*), lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), and wealth (*hifz al-mal*).

Among these objectives, *hifz al-‘aql* functions as the foundation of human rationality and ethical awareness. Islam strictly prohibits anything that damages intellect, including intoxicants and destructive behavior. In the contemporary era, threats to intellect extend beyond physical substances toward digital overstimulation, misinformation, and addictive media consumption.

Brain Rot and Digital Addiction

Brain rot is associated with excessive digital stimulation and fragmented attention caused by social media algorithms. Short-form content encourages rapid information switching, passive consumption, and dopamine dependency. Excessive screen exposure contributes to cognitive fatigue, declining concentration, emotional instability, and reduced productivity.

The attention economy further intensifies digital addiction because social media companies monetize engagement through advertisements and algorithmic personalization. Consequently, users continuously consume emotionally stimulating content designed to prolong screen time.

Islamic Behavioral Economics

Islamic behavioral economics integrates economic behavior with moral values and spiritual accountability. Unlike conventional behavioral economics, Islamic behavioral economics provides ethical guidance rooted in Islamic teachings. Human desires (*nafs*) must be regulated through moderation (*wasatiyyah*), self-control, and accountability before Allah SWT.

Islam discourages excessive behavior in all forms of consumption. Allah SWT states in Surah Al-A‘raf [7:31]: “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess.” This principle applies not only to material consumption but also to digital consumption behavior.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research approach using a library research method grounded in Islamic epistemology and Islamic behavioral economics. The research focuses on analyzing the phenomenon of brain rot caused by excessive digital content consumption through the perspective of *hifz al-‘aql* within the framework of Maqasid al-Shariah. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to explore meanings, ethical values, and conceptual relationships between digital behavior, cognitive degradation, and Islamic intellectual principles in a contextual and interpretive manner. The data used in this research consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Qur’an, Hadith, classical Islamic literature on Maqasid al-Shariah, and scholarly works discussing *hifz al-‘aql*, Islamic ethics, and Islamic behavioral economics. Secondary sources consist of academic journal articles, books, conference papers, and contemporary studies related to digital addiction, brain rot, attention economy, cognitive psychology, social media behavior, and persuasive technology. The study also incorporates interdisciplinary literature from communication studies, behavioral

economics, media studies, and psychology to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and literature review techniques by systematically identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant scholarly materials. The collected data were subsequently categorized into major themes, including digital overstimulation, algorithmic manipulation, cognitive decline, dopamine dependency, hedonic consumption, self-control, and intellectual preservation. These themes were then interpreted using the conceptual framework of Maqasid al-Shariah, particularly *hifz al-'aql*, to examine the ethical implications of excessive digital consumption.

The analytical process employed thematic analysis and hermeneutic interpretation. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring concepts and behavioral patterns related to brain rot and digital addiction. Meanwhile, hermeneutic interpretation grounded in Islamic epistemology was applied to interpret Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and Islamic intellectual traditions in relation to contemporary digital realities. This approach enables the study to integrate revelation (*wahy*), rationality (*'aql*), and empirical social phenomena as interconnected sources of knowledge.

To strengthen analytical validity, the study applied source triangulation by comparing classical Islamic perspectives, contemporary academic findings, and current digital behavioral trends. Through this approach, the research does not merely describe brain rot as a technological or psychological issue but positions it as a moral, intellectual, and civilizational challenge requiring ethical responses grounded in Islamic values. The research framework ultimately aims to formulate a maqasid-based model of ethical digital consumption that emphasizes cognitive protection, moderation, spiritual consciousness, and responsible technology engagement as strategies to preserve intellectual well-being in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Algorithms and Cognitive Degradation

Modern digital platforms utilize algorithmic systems designed to maximize engagement through continuous content personalization. These systems stimulate dopamine release and encourage addictive scrolling behavior. Users gradually become accustomed to fragmented information and instant gratification, reducing their ability to engage in deep thinking and sustained reflection.

From the perspective of *hifz al-'aql*, such conditions threaten intellectual well-being because they weaken concentration, critical reasoning, and self-control. Islam encourages contemplation (*tafakkur*) and intellectual discipline, whereas excessive digital entertainment promotes passive cognitive behavior.

Brain Rot as a Threat to Hifz al-'Aql

Brain rot represents a contemporary threat to the preservation of intellect in Muslim society. Excessive exposure to low-value entertainment content contributes to declining productivity, disrupted focus, emotional instability, and procrastination. This phenomenon undermines the Islamic intellectual tradition emphasizing learning, reflection, and meaningful knowledge acquisition.

The Qur'an consistently encourages believers to use intellect responsibly. Excessive digital distraction reduces human capacity for contemplation and spiritual awareness, contradicting the objectives of *hifz al-'aql*.

Hedonic Consumption and the Attention Economy

The attention economy transforms human attention into an economic commodity. Digital platforms profit by maximizing user engagement through emotionally stimulating content. Consequently, individuals increasingly prioritize entertainment and instant gratification over intellectual development.

Within Islamic behavioral economics, such behavior reflects imbalance between rationality and desire. Islam permits entertainment within ethical limits but discourages excessive behavior that harms intellectual and spiritual well-being.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW stated: “Among the signs of a person’s good Islam is leaving what does not concern him” (Hadith narrated by Tirmidhi). This teaching emphasizes selective engagement and disciplined use of time.

Islamic Behavioral Economics as a Solution

Islamic behavioral economics offers several ethical principles relevant to overcoming brain rot and digital addiction:

1. Moderation (*Wasatiyyah*)

Digital consumption should remain balanced and controlled.

2. Self-Control (*Mujahadah al-Nafs*)

Muslims are encouraged to regulate screen time and avoid addictive behavior.

3. Ethical Consumption

Digital media should prioritize beneficial and educational content.

4. Time Accountability

Islam views time as a divine trust that must be used productively.

5. Spiritual Consciousness

Strengthening worship and Qur’anic reflection reduces excessive attachment to digital entertainment.

These principles demonstrate that Islamic behavioral economics provides a comprehensive ethical framework for healthy digital engagement.

Digital Hyperstimulation and the Crisis of Human Attention

One of the most significant consequences of excessive digital content consumption is the transformation of human attention into a fragmented and unstable cognitive state. Short-form platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts continuously expose users to rapidly changing audiovisual stimuli. This hyperstimulation conditions the brain to prefer instant gratification and fast emotional responses rather than deep contemplation and sustained concentration.

From the perspective of *hifz al-‘aql*, attention is not merely a psychological mechanism but a spiritual and intellectual resource entrusted by Allah SWT. Islam consistently encourages believers to engage in *tafakkur* (deep reflection), *tadabbur* (contemplation), and *ta‘aqqul* (rational thinking). The Qur’an repeatedly criticizes individuals who fail to use their intellect properly.

Dopamine Dependency and Behavioral Manipulation

Modern digital platforms operate using persuasive technology specifically designed to manipulate user behavior. Algorithms track user preferences, emotional reactions, watch duration, and scrolling habits to maximize engagement. Consequently, users become trapped within continuous dopamine-reward cycles that reinforce compulsive consumption patterns.

This condition aligns with the concept of *nafs al-shabwaniyyah* (desire-driven impulses) in Islamic psychology. Excessive dependence on digital stimulation weakens *mujahadah al-*

nafs (self-discipline against desires) and diminishes human capacity for delayed gratification. In Islamic behavioral economics, such behavior reflects irrational consumption patterns driven by emotional impulses rather than ethical rationality.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW warned against excessive indulgence in worldly distractions. Although entertainment itself is permissible, addiction to stimulation may lead individuals toward *ghaflah* (heedlessness), a spiritual condition characterized by loss of awareness toward Allah SWT and neglect of beneficial activities.

Brain Rot and the Decline of Knowledge Civilization

Islamic civilization historically developed through intellectual discipline, literacy culture, scientific inquiry, and scholarly tradition. Classical Muslim scholars spent years mastering language, philosophy, jurisprudence, and theology through deep reading and sustained contemplation. However, digital entertainment culture increasingly normalizes superficial engagement with information.

The dominance of short-form content reduces reading endurance and discourages analytical thinking. Individuals become more accustomed to consuming summarized, emotionally stimulating, and visually entertaining information rather than engaging with comprehensive intellectual discourse. As a result, knowledge gradually shifts from being a process of reflection into merely a form of entertainment consumption.

Social Comparison, Identity Crisis, and Emotional Instability

Another dimension of brain rot relates to emotional and psychological instability caused by constant exposure to idealized digital lifestyles. Social media algorithms prioritize sensational, attractive, and emotionally provocative content, encouraging users to compare themselves continuously with others.

This culture of comparison contributes to anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem, and emotional exhaustion. Individuals increasingly define self-worth based on digital validation through likes, comments, and online popularity. Consequently, identity formation becomes externally dependent rather than spiritually grounded.

Time Waste and the Ethics of Productivity

One of the most concerning aspects of brain rot is the normalization of excessive time consumption through endless scrolling behavior. Many individuals spend several hours daily consuming low-value entertainment without meaningful intellectual or spiritual benefit.

In Islam, time is considered one of the most valuable blessings entrusted to humanity. Surah Al-‘Asr emphasizes that humans are in loss except those who utilize time productively through faith, righteous action, truth, and patience. Excessive digital entertainment therefore represents not merely inefficient behavior but also an ethical misuse of divine trust.

The Commodification of Human Consciousness

The attention economy transforms human consciousness into a commercial commodity. Social media corporations generate profit by maximizing user engagement and collecting behavioral data for advertising purposes. Consequently, human attention is continuously extracted and monetized.

From an Islamic ethical perspective, this phenomenon raises concerns regarding exploitation and manipulation. Humans are treated not as intellectual beings deserving cognitive protection but as economic objects whose attention can be sold to advertisers.

Hifz al-‘Aql as Digital Spiritual Resistance

In the contemporary digital era, *hifz al-‘aql* should not be understood narrowly as protection from intoxicating substances alone. Instead, it must be expanded toward protection against cognitive manipulation, addictive technologies, misinformation, algorithmic dependency, and digital overstimulation.

Preserving intellect today requires intentional spiritual resistance against excessive digital distraction. This includes:

1. Limiting screen time and addictive applications
2. Prioritizing beneficial knowledge consumption
3. Developing reflective reading habits
4. Strengthening worship and spiritual routines
5. Practicing digital minimalism
6. Encouraging mindful and purposeful technology use

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of brain rot caused by excessive digital content consumption represents a serious cognitive and ethical challenge in the digital era. Algorithm-driven entertainment platforms contribute to declining concentration, weakened self-control, cognitive fatigue, and addictive behavior. From the perspective of Maqasid al-Shariah, these conditions threaten the objective of *hifz al-‘aql* because they undermine intellectual integrity and critical reasoning.

Islamic behavioral economics offers an ethical framework emphasizing moderation, self-discipline, ethical consumption, and spiritual consciousness. These principles encourage balanced and productive digital engagement capable of preserving intellectual well-being.

The phenomenon of brain rot reflects a profound transformation in contemporary human cognition caused by excessive exposure to algorithm-driven digital content. The widespread consumption of short-form entertainment media has gradually altered patterns of attention, emotional regulation, intellectual engagement, and social interaction. While digital technology offers significant educational and economic opportunities, uncontrolled consumption simultaneously creates cognitive vulnerability characterized by declining concentration, fragmented thinking, compulsive scrolling behavior, emotional instability, and dependency on instant stimulation.

From the perspective of Maqasid al-Shariah, this phenomenon constitutes a contemporary threat to *hifz al-‘aql* because it weakens intellectual integrity and diminishes humanity’s capacity for critical reasoning, reflection, and ethical awareness. Islam places intellect at the center of human responsibility and civilization. Therefore, any social structure or technological environment that systematically undermines reflective consciousness and self-control requires ethical evaluation and preventive intervention.

This research demonstrates that brain rot should not be understood solely as a technological or psychological issue, but also as a moral, spiritual, and civilizational challenge. The attention economy has transformed human focus into an economic commodity, encouraging excessive digital engagement through persuasive algorithms designed to maximize emotional stimulation and screen dependency. Such conditions contribute to the normalization of distraction, superficiality, and passive consumption behavior within modern society.

Islamic behavioral economics provides an alternative framework capable of addressing these challenges through ethical and spiritually grounded principles. Concepts such as *wasatiyyah* (moderation), *mujahadah al-nafs* (self-discipline), time accountability, ethical consumption, and spiritual consciousness offer a comprehensive approach toward healthier digital engagement. These principles emphasize that technology should function as a means for intellectual growth, productivity, and social benefit rather than becoming a source of cognitive degradation and spiritual negligence.

Furthermore, this research highlights the necessity of reconstructing digital literacy from an Islamic ethical perspective. Digital literacy should not merely focus on technical skills or information access but must also include cognitive protection, emotional regulation, ethical awareness, and spiritual resilience. Muslim societies, educational institutions, families, and policymakers therefore have an important role in cultivating responsible digital habits that preserve intellectual well-being and moral balance.

This research also contributes theoretically to the expansion of Islamic behavioral economics into the domain of digital society and cognitive ethics. The integration of *hifz al-'aql* with contemporary discussions on digital addiction demonstrates the relevance of Islamic intellectual tradition in responding to modern technological challenges. Maqasid al-Shariah offers not only legal guidance but also a civilizational framework capable of protecting human dignity in rapidly evolving digital environments.

In practical terms, several recommendations may be proposed. First, individuals should develop conscious digital consumption patterns by limiting screen time, reducing exposure to addictive content, and prioritizing beneficial knowledge-oriented media. Second, educational institutions should integrate ethical digital literacy and cognitive well-being into learning curricula, particularly for younger generations highly exposed to social media culture. Third, families should strengthen supervision and encourage balanced interaction between digital activities, intellectual development, and spiritual practices. Fourth, governments and digital platform providers should consider policies promoting digital well-being, algorithmic transparency, and protection against exploitative attention-based systems.

Finally, future studies are encouraged to employ empirical and interdisciplinary approaches examining the relationship between digital addiction, spirituality, productivity, mental health, and educational performance among Muslim communities. For Muslim families, the findings emphasize the importance of strengthening supervision, communication, and healthy digital habits at home. Parents should encourage balanced lifestyles involving reading culture, reflective learning, social interaction, and spiritual activities to reduce dependency on digital entertainment.

For individuals, the research encourages the implementation of conscious digital consumption practices, including limiting screen time, reducing algorithmic overexposure, and prioritizing beneficial content that supports intellectual and spiritual growth. This research also implies the need for broader policy discussions concerning digital well-being and ethical technology governance. Governments and digital platform providers should consider regulations and technological designs that reduce addictive engagement mechanisms, particularly among children and adolescents.

Digital platforms may also be encouraged to develop features promoting healthier consumption behavior, such as screen-time reminders, algorithm transparency, and educational-content prioritization. From an Islamic social perspective, protecting public

intellect (*hifẓ al-‘aql*) can be viewed as part of collective social responsibility in the digital era.

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