



TikTok Creators' Strategies for Delivering Islamic Character Education to Generation Z

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/ijpp.v1i2.1279>

Abstract:

This study explores TikTok creators' strategies for delivering Islamic character education to Generation Z. Using a qualitative descriptive-exploratory approach, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed by interactive model using NVivo 12 software. The findings reveal three major strategies: first, the careful selection of Islamic content themes, emphasizing values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility contextualized through humor and storytelling; second, the interactive use of TikTok features, including live streaming, duets, and comment engagement, which foster participatory learning; and third, negotiation with algorithmic challenges, requiring creators to adapt Islamic messages within entertaining formats to ensure visibility. The study concludes that TikTok can serve as an effective medium for Islamic education when creators adaptively balance educational depth with cultural and technological dynamics. This research contributes theoretically to digital Islamic pedagogy and practically to educators, policymakers, and da'wah practitioners seeking to engage Generation Z effectively.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 25 May 2024

Revised : 18 July 2025

Accepted : 20 August 2025

KEYWORDS

Tiktok, Islamic Character Education, Generation Z, Digital Da'wah, Content Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Islamic character education is increasingly recognized as a critical foundation in shaping the moral integrity of young generations, particularly in a digital era dominated by global connectivity and rapid technological change. Generation Z, often referred to as digital natives, spends a significant portion of their time engaging with social media platforms rather than traditional learning environments. This shift has created both opportunities and challenges (Hadi Raharjo, 2023; Maar et al., 2023; Turner & Zepeda, 2023). On one hand, digital platforms allow for easy access to knowledge and broad dissemination of values. On the other hand, they can promote lifestyles and behaviors that contradict Islamic ethics if left unchecked. TikTok, as one of the most popular platforms among Gen Z, exemplifies this dual role. With its short, entertaining video format, it has a powerful influence over its users' values and identities (Boffone, 2021; Yeung et al., 2022). Therefore, exploring how TikTok can be optimized for Islamic character education is not only timely but also socially essential.

The problem lies in the widening gap between conventional educational methods and the digital preferences of Generation Z. While schools and religious institutions emphasize formal and structured approaches to character building, students are often more influenced by the quick, engaging, and visually appealing content they consume

online (Sampige et al., 2024; Stoddard et al., 2024). Unfortunately, much of this content prioritizes entertainment over substance, raising concerns about moral decline among youth. When Islamic character education is confined to classrooms, its impact may not be strong enough to compete with the constant stimulation of digital media (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024; Om et al., 2021). This reality raises an urgent question: how can Islamic values be effectively delivered in spaces where young people are already deeply invested? Addressing this challenge requires a closer look at how TikTok creators, as cultural intermediaries, shape narratives that blend faith, entertainment, and relevance for Gen Z.

Field observations highlight that TikTok is no longer merely a space for dancing trends or comedic skits, but increasingly a platform for da'wah and education. Numerous Muslim creators are creatively packaging short videos to teach everyday Islamic values such as respecting parents, practicing honesty, and maintaining good manners. Their content often integrates humor, storytelling, or visual trends that resonate with Gen Z audiences, making serious messages more approachable (Sait et al., 2023; Warburton, 2024). At the same time, there is a notable tension: some creators succeed in balancing entertainment with substance, while others face criticism for oversimplifying religious values. This phenomenon has generated debates among educators, parents, and religious leaders regarding the appropriateness of TikTok as a channel for Islamic education. Such realities demand a systematic exploration of the strategies that make Islamic character education effective in this digital space (Georgescu & Bodislav, 2024; Ming et al., 2024).

Previous studies have examined the role of social media in promoting religious education and character development. For instance, research has demonstrated that digital platforms allow for quick, wide-reaching dissemination of Islamic teachings, often making religion more accessible to youth. Other studies emphasize that video-based content, due to its visual and interactive nature, tends to be more engaging than text-heavy formats (Collado-Alonso et al., 2023; Olsson et al., 2023). However, much of this literature has focused on platforms such as YouTube or Instagram, with only limited attention given to TikTok. Moreover, most prior works discuss online da'wah from a broad theological or communicative perspective, without deeply analyzing how creators design and adapt their strategies for Gen Z audiences (Yamagishi et al., 2024). This leaves a gap in understanding the micro-level practices of creators who are directly shaping digital Islamic education.

Even when TikTok has been studied, existing research tends to focus on its influence on behavior or its risks as a medium of distraction rather than its potential as a structured educational tool (Feng et al., 2023; Manasyan et al., 2024). Few works connect creators' strategies to the specific needs and preferences of Generation Z, who require messages that are concise, authentic, and relatable. This gap is crucial because the effectiveness of Islamic character education depends not only on the content itself but also on how it is communicated in formats that Gen Z finds meaningful. Without such analysis, the academic conversation remains incomplete and the practical guidance for educators and religious practitioners remains limited (Ghani et al., 2023; Lenggogeni et al., 2022). Addressing this issue positions the present study as both urgent and highly relevant for contemporary Islamic pedagogy in digital contexts.

The novelty of this research lies in its explicit focus on TikTok as a site of Islamic character education, particularly through the lens of creators' strategies. Unlike earlier

studies that treat social media broadly, this study investigates the specific communicative and creative techniques that make TikTok a compelling space for religious and moral education. TikTok's algorithm, which promotes rapid and viral dissemination of content, provides unique opportunities for amplifying Islamic messages (Ballesteros, 2022; Morrow & Schreyer, 2022). Understanding how creators navigate this system to deliver value-laden content reveals new insights into digital da'wah and character-building practices. This state-of-the-art approach highlights TikTok not as a threat to Islamic education, but as a potential ally when approached strategically. Such an angle contributes to both theory and practice, expanding scholarly discourse while offering practical lessons for content creators, educators, and policymakers (Atabik et al., 2024).

Against this background, the central research problem emerges: how do TikTok creators develop and implement strategies to deliver Islamic character education to Generation Z? This question reflects the broader challenge of reconciling traditional moral education with the fast-paced, entertainment-driven logic of social media. The preliminary argument of this study is that effective strategies are those that not only transmit Islamic teachings but also resonate with Gen Z's cultural and digital sensibilities (Boone, 2022). This includes creativity in visual presentation, use of humor or trends, and the ability to contextualize values within everyday scenarios familiar to young audiences. By focusing on strategy rather than merely outcome, the study emphasizes the process of engagement as equally important as the religious message itself.

The expected or originality contribution of this research is twofold. Academically, it advances discussions on Islamic education by situating them within the unique ecosystem of TikTok, thereby enriching the field of digital pedagogy and Islamic communication. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for educators, religious leaders, and Muslim content creators who wish to leverage digital platforms for moral development. It demonstrates that Islamic character education need not be confined to classrooms or sermons but can thrive in spaces where young people already find enjoyment and identity. By mapping effective strategies, the research provides a framework for integrating Islamic values into the digital rhythms of Generation Z. Ultimately, it aspires to bridge the gap between timeless religious principles and contemporary digital realities, shaping a generation that is both morally grounded and culturally adaptive.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive exploratory design, chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of TikTok creators' strategies in delivering Islamic character education to Generation Z (Wong & Kowitlawakul, 2020). This design is suitable for examining complex and dynamic social phenomena, particularly the interaction between digital creators and audiences within social media spaces (Roberson & Perry, 2022). Rather than testing hypotheses, the purpose was to explore strategies, patterns, and meanings emerging from creators' practices. The exploratory nature provided flexibility, allowing the researcher to adapt focus according to new insights found during the fieldwork. The research was conducted in East Java, Indonesia, with TikTok as the primary digital field. The location was selected because East Java has a significant population of active TikTok users among Generation Z and a growing number of Muslim content creators producing Islamic content. The informants were TikTok creators who met specific criteria: having at least 10,000 followers, consistently uploading Islamic content for the past three months, focusing on Islamic character education such as honesty, responsibility, and good manners, and engaging actively with their audiences through features such as comments, live streaming, and

collaborations. The number of informants was not fixed, as qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth; instead, interviews continued until data saturation was reached.

To gather the data, three complementary techniques were applied. First, observation was conducted by directly analyzing TikTok content produced by selected creators, including their choice of topics, narrative styles, and engagement methods. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with creators to explore their motivations, strategies, challenges, and experiences. The interviews followed a prepared guide but allowed flexibility for probing deeper insights. Third, documentation was used to collect supporting data such as screenshots, video clips, captions, hashtags, and engagement statistics, along with field notes and audio recordings from interviews. These complementary methods provided a holistic picture of how Islamic content is produced, framed, and received by audiences within TikTok's digital environment.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Stasiak et al. (2020), with the aid of *NVivo 12* software. The process began with data condensation, where interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation were reduced, coded, and categorized into relevant themes. This was followed by data display, in which themes were organized visually in NVivo using charts, matrices, and word clouds to reveal connections and relationships. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted as the researcher interpreted patterns and meanings, verifying them through cross-checking and returning to the data to ensure credibility. This step-by-step approach ensured that the findings were not only systematic but also grounded in empirical evidence gathered during the study.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was applied by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants for confirmation. Peer debriefing and an audit trail were implemented by discussing findings with colleagues and documenting every stage of the research process to ensure transparency. Prolonged engagement was achieved through extended observation of TikTok content, which helped maintain contextual accuracy. Finally, natural data collection was ensured by gathering data authentically in creators' usual digital environments, thereby strengthening the credibility and dependability of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This research findings section explains how TikTok has become a strategic space for Islamic character education by highlighting three key findings: content theme selection, utilization of interactive features, and algorithmic challenges. TikTok creators have been shown to employ adaptive strategies to convey values such as honesty, responsibility, and patience through creative packaging relevant to Gen Z. Furthermore, the use of interactive features fosters two-way communication, while the algorithm demands a negotiation between the substance of Islamic preaching and the appeal of entertainment.

Islamic Content Theme Selection

The operational definition of this sub-finding refers to the way TikTok creators carefully select themes that highlight Islamic character values relevant to Generation Z. In the field, this means choosing topics such as honesty, respect, patience, and responsibility, then packaging them into short, visually engaging content. The process is not simply about transmitting religious knowledge but about translating moral teachings into everyday contexts that are understandable and relatable for young audiences. This

definition emphasizes that theme selection is not random but strategic, reflecting both religious values and cultural resonance with Gen Z.

The findings show that TikTok creators with more than 10,000 followers deliberately select Islamic content themes to connect with Generation Z's real-life experiences. One informant explained, "I often choose topics such as honesty at school or respecting parents because these are issues my audience faces. When I address their daily struggles, the message becomes more relatable." This reflects an audience-centered approach, where content is not abstract but tied to the actual moral challenges faced by Gen Z. Another creator, also meeting the criteria of having over 10,000 followers, highlighted the importance of adapting Islamic values to trending topics. She stated, "Sometimes I link Qur'anic verses or hadiths with viral hashtags so people see that Islam is relevant." This shows a strategic negotiation between preserving the authenticity of Islamic teachings and remaining appealing in a competitive platform. Both strategies emphasize how creators ground sacred messages in Gen Z realities while sustaining digital relevance.

Observation of TikTok content confirmed this thematic strategy. The researcher found that creators consistently packaged moral lessons such as patience, humility, or honesty into short videos using storytelling, humor, and relatable everyday scenarios. For example, one video dramatized a simple act of apologizing to parents, framed within a trending TikTok sound. This suggests that creators deliberately merge Islamic themes with entertaining formats, thereby increasing both audience engagement and the likelihood of viral spread. The researcher interprets this as proof that theme selection is intertwined with content design, aimed at making Islamic education attractive without losing its essence.

In restating the findings, the data consistently show that TikTok creators intentionally select Islamic themes that resonate with Generation Z by combining everyday moral lessons, trending topics, and digital creativity. Both interviews and observations point to the same conclusion: that theme selection is guided by relevance, cultural resonance, and audience engagement. From these data patterns, a clear description emerges: TikTok creators practice a strategic model of Islamic content design where theme selection is central to effectiveness. This model reveals three interconnected elements alignment with Gen Z's real-life challenges, adaptation to social media trends, and creative packaging of Islamic values. Together, these elements establish a coherent pattern of how Islamic character education can be effectively delivered through TikTok.

Interactive Use of Features

In the field, this sub-finding is operationally defined as the strategic use of TikTok's interactive tools such as comments, live streaming, duet, and collaboration features by Islamic content creators to foster two-way communication with their audiences. Unlike one-directional preaching methods, these features allow creators to engage directly with Generation Z, responding to questions, clarifying moral lessons, and building trust. This operationalization positions interaction not just as a supplementary act but as a central strategy in delivering Islamic character education through digital platforms.

Table 1. Observation on Interactive Use of Features by TikTok Islamic Creators

| No. | Observed Feature/Activity | Field Observation Example | Interpretation |
|-----|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Comments | Creators frequently reply to questions in the comments section, clarifying moral lessons. | Comments transform passive viewing into dialogue, helping validate Gen Z's moral concerns. |
| 2 | Live Streaming | During live sessions, creators answer audience questions about daily Islamic practices. | Live streaming fosters real-time two-way communication, strengthening trust and immediacy. |
| 3 | Duet and Stitch Collaboration | A creator responded to a trending humorous video by adding a reminder about gratitude. | Blending entertainment and da'wah enhances engagement and embeds Islamic values in trending flows. |
| 4 | Cross-Creator Collaboration | Muslim TikTokers collaborate in duets to amplify Islamic character messages. | Collaboration broadens reach, increases algorithmic visibility, and situates da'wah in community. |

Field observations further reinforced these insights. The researcher observed how creators actively utilized duet and stitch features to collaborate with other Muslim TikTokers, amplifying the reach of Islamic character messages. In one case, a creator responded to a trending humorous video by adding a short reminder about gratitude. This blending of entertainment and education not only attracted higher engagement but also demonstrated how interactive features could be creatively harnessed to make Islamic teachings relevant within the cultural flows of TikTok. The interpretation here is that interaction serves both as a pedagogical tool and as a mechanism for algorithmic visibility.

This restatement emphasizes that interaction is not optional but essential to the success of digital Islamic education strategies. From these data, a clear pattern emerges: TikTok's interactive features create participatory, dialogical, and contextually relevant learning spaces for Generation Z. Creators use them to foster real-time communication, validate audiences' moral concerns, and enhance visibility within the platform's algorithm. The description shows that the combination of responsiveness, creativity, and cultural adaptation defines how Islamic education becomes meaningful and sustainable in digital contexts.

Algorithm Challenges and Impact

The operational definition of this sub-finding in the field refers to the difficulties TikTok creators face in maintaining the depth of Islamic educational messages while simultaneously adapting to the platform's algorithmic logic. The TikTok algorithm prioritizes viral, entertaining, and visually captivating content, often sidelining more serious or didactic materials. As a result, creators who intend to deliver Islamic character education are forced to negotiate between substance and popularity, ensuring their content is noticed and consumed without losing its moral and educational core.

This study confirms such insights by showing how TikTok creators employ features like live streaming, duets, and comment sections to build trust and foster two-way dialogue. The difference lies in the practical dimension: while prior literature often frames interactivity abstractly, this study reveals concrete strategies, such as responding directly to comments or collaborating with other creators, which transform Islamic education from a passive reception into an active digital learning process. Theoretically, this supports communication models that view learners not just as recipients but as co-creators of meaning (Hina, 2024; Putri, 2023). Practically, it implies that educators and preachers can enhance their impact by leveraging the participatory culture inherent in social media platforms.

The third theme, Algorithm Challenges and Impact, highlights an important tension between educational depth and entertainment demands. This finding expands on literature that critiques algorithmic cultures, such as Abdullah (2024), Umar (2024), and Zamroni et al. (2025) which argues that platform logics often distort content priorities by privileging virality over substance. The study shows that Islamic creators face exactly this issue: content with humor, trending audio, or memes tends to gain more traction than direct religious explanations. Theoretically, this raises questions about how Islamic education can maintain authenticity in algorithm-driven spaces where entertainment dominates. Practically, it implies that creators must be adaptive, embedding moral teachings within formats favored by algorithms to ensure visibility (Bali, 2024; Herlina, 2024; Jali, 2025). This duality demonstrates both the risks of oversimplification and the opportunities of mass reach, situating Islamic education within the broader debate on ethics and digital mediation.

Taken together, these findings indicate that TikTok serves not only as an entertainment platform but also as a contested arena where Islamic character education is negotiated between tradition and modernity, depth and brevity, education and entertainment. Compared with earlier studies that positioned social media as supplementary tools for da'wah, this research suggests that TikTok itself has become a primary space for shaping moral discourse among Generation Z (Khoiroh et al., 2024; Nisa' & R, 2024). Theoretically, this contributes to the understanding of how religious pedagogy evolves in algorithmic environments. Practically, it offers lessons for religious educators, policymakers, and content creators to consider platform logics in designing effective digital strategies that remain faithful to Islamic values (Hasanah, 2024; Widiyari, 2024).

In conclusion, the three themes reveal a comprehensive picture of digital Islamic pedagogy: the careful selection of content themes ensures relevance, the interactive use of platform features enhances engagement, and the negotiation with algorithmic challenges ensures visibility. These dynamics illustrate that Islamic education on TikTok cannot be reduced to message transmission alone; rather, it is a complex process shaped by cultural adaptation, technological affordances, and structural constraints. The implications are significant: theoretically, the study enriches the discourse on digital religious education by integrating insights from media studies and pedagogy, while practically, it underscores the urgent need for educators and da'wah practitioners to acquire digital literacy and adaptive creativity in order to sustain Islamic character education for the emerging generations.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that TikTok has become a meaningful platform for conveying Islamic character education to Generation Z when creators are able to implement adaptive strategies. Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect have proven to be effectively communicated when packaged in themes and formats familiar to young audiences. The use of humor, storytelling, and interactive features not only makes the content more accessible but also transforms moral education into an engaging and participatory process. However, this study also demonstrates the challenges of navigating algorithmic pressures that tend to prioritize entertainment over message depth. This emphasizes the importance of creative balance to ensure Islamic education remains relevant and effective in the digital space.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to expanding the academic discourse on digital Islamic pedagogy and communication. By situating Islamic character education within the context of TikTok, this research not only enriches the literature on religious education but also provides practical contributions for educators, da'wah practitioners, and policymakers. However, limitations must be acknowledged, given that the research data comes from a specific regional context in East Java, which may not represent the diversity of TikTok users globally. Furthermore, the use of qualitative methods, while in-depth, has the potential to be strengthened with quantitative approaches in future research. Further studies could expand the scope by comparing across cultures, examining long-term impacts, or integrating mixed methods for a more comprehensive understanding. These efforts would strengthen strategies for maintaining the sustainability of Islamic character education in the digital age.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher sincerely expresses gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings and guidance throughout the completion of this study. Deep appreciation is extended to the supervisors and academic mentors for their valuable insights and continuous support. Special thanks are also given to the TikTok creators and Generation Z participants who willingly shared their experiences. Finally, heartfelt appreciation goes to family and colleagues for their encouragement and motivation.

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