Religious Character Formation in the Age of TikTok: Navigating Digital Disruption in Indonesian Islamic Elementary Schools

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The rapid pace of digitalization among elementary school children, particularly through social media such as TikTok, has raised concerns about the erosion of religious values instilled in madrasah environments. The emergence of the TikTok syndrome—characterized by dependence on short digital content—has the potential to shift children's focus away from religious practices and spiritual character development.

Methodology: The study employs a descriptive quantitative approach using a survey method. The research subjects were 60 fifth-grade students at an elementary madrasah located in Sumenep Regency, selected through random sampling. The instrument used was a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 25 statements, with two main variables: religious character and TikTok syndrome symptoms.

Main Findings: The results of the study indicate that students generally have good religious character, as evidenced by their practice of praying five times a day, honesty, and respect for teachers and parents. However, the level of TikTok consumption is quite high, with some students showing signs of disruption, such as forgetting to study and delaying prayers.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study is among the first to empirically examine the intersection between TikTok usage and religious character formation in early-grade Islamic education. It introduces the concept of "TikTok syndrome" in the context of spiritual development among children—a construct that remains underexplored in existing literature. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing scholarship on media-socialization and religious identity construction in digital contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the last two decades has created massive and comprehensive social transformations in various aspects of human life, including in the world of education and character building of students [1], [2]. One of the most striking impacts of this technological advancement is the penetration of the internet and social media into the daily lives of children [3], [4]. Whereas childhood used to be synonymous with physical activity and direct social interaction, this phenomenon has now shifted to a strong attachment to the digital world. Access to gadgets is increasingly easy and affordable, even in remote areas, allowing children to access various digital platforms from an early age [5], [6]. TikTok, as one of the most popular short-video-based social media apps, has gained significant popularity among elementary school-aged children, including those in elementary madrasahs. This app offers light, fast-paced, and visually appealing

content, easily forming new habits in children: passive viewing, imitating viral trends, and seeking social validation in the form of "likes" and comments [7]–[9].

This phenomenon has given rise to a new term known as "TikTok syndrome"—a social and psychological condition resulting from excessive exposure to TikTok content [10]. These symptoms include addictive behavior toward gadgets, decreased focus on learning, imitation of viral trends or challenges that are not in line with social norms or religious values, and changes in lifestyle preferences toward instant and sensational things [11]. Furthermore, this syndrome can influence the formation of values and identity in children during a crucial period of character development [12]. This becomes particularly problematic in madrasahs, where the primary goal of education is not only cognitive development but also the formation of students' moral and religious character [13], [14]. Madrasah ibtidaiyah education is actually aimed at instilling values of faith, obedience in worship, good character, and social responsibility based on Islamic teachings [15].

Ironically, despite the importance of religious character education in the madrasah curriculum, the reality on the ground reveals a disruption of values due to the unfiltered influence of digital culture [16]. Children who are exposed to TikTok content for extended periods often exhibit behavior that contradicts the values taught in formal education [17]. They become more easily influenced by symbols of popularity, visual consumption, and uncontrolled self-expression than by role models, spiritual introspection, and Islamic moral values [18], [19]. This condition creates a gap between the goals of religious education and the daily reality of students. Therefore, it is important to understand how the spiritual character of madrasah students is constructed in the context of their interaction with digital culture—especially TikTok—so that more relevant and contextual educational strategies can be developed [20].

Empirical data and phenomena further reinforce the urgency of this research. A report by [21] notes that Indonesia has over 99 million TikTok users, making it one of the countries with the highest number of users worldwide. Of this number, over 70% are Generation Z and Alpha, an age group that includes children from elementary school age to early adolescence. High internet penetration is also reported by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), which states that the national internet penetration rate has reached 78.19%, with the majority of usage coming from mobile devices. A study by UNICEF Indonesia (2022) indicates that children aged 8–12 spend an average of 5–6 hours per day in front of screens, with YouTube and TikTok being the most frequently accessed platforms. In this context, children are not only consumers of content but also producers and active participants in disseminating the values they acquire digitally. On the other hand, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, through various policies, continues to emphasize the importance of strengthening religious character education in madrasahs as the main defense against the challenges of globalization and moral degradation [22], [23]. However, the challenges faced are becoming increasingly complex because students' interaction spaces are no longer limited to classrooms and home environments but have expanded into highly fluid digital spaces that often lack value boundaries. This reality requires in-depth and contextual scientific research to understand how madrasah students internalize religious values in their lives, which are now heavily influenced by digital media [24].

To answer these challenges, this study poses several key questions: (1) How is the religious character of madrasah ibtidaiyah students constructed in the context of their consumption and participation in TikTok? (2) What forms of *TikTok syndrome* emerge, and how do they influence the religious values taught? (3) What factors influence the success or failure of the internalization of religious values in students who actively use TikTok? These questions serve as the starting point for this study in exploring the religious and social reality of students in greater depth. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the construction of religious character among elementary madrasah students facing the phenomenon of TikTok syndrome. This study aims to describe how students interpret religious values in their daily lives influenced by social media, as well as to reveal the dynamics of interaction between formal religious character education and popular values absorbed through digital platforms. In addition, this study is expected to contribute to the development of contextual character education strategies that are based on student experiences and relevant to the challenges of the digital era.

Previous studies have addressed the issue of social media and religiosity, but most have focused on adolescents and young adults [25], [26], in their study in Pakistan, found that social media use can strengthen religious identity when used to access religious content and spiritual communities but can also lead to value ambivalence when users are exposed to content that contradicts religious norms. Meanwhile, a study by [27]–[29] in Indonesia revealed that digital platforms have become a new space for Muslim teenagers to explore their religious identity, but in a way that is heavily influenced by popular culture, such as fashion, music, and viral trends. These findings indicate a transformation in the way people practice religion, which is more performative and visual in nature and does not necessarily reflect a deep internalization of values. Another study by [30][31] highlights how social media use impacts the religious attitudes of students at Islamic religious universities. The study found that the intensity of social media use is negatively correlated with spiritual involvement if not balanced with value guidance. However, no studies have specifically examined the construction of religiosity among madrasah ibtidaiyah students in the context of TikTok use. This means that there is a significant gap in the literature on this age group, which is at a crucial stage in the formation of religious identity.

Despite increasing attention to the effects of social media on youth religiosity, existing studies have primarily focused on adolescents or young adults, particularly in secondary schools or higher education contexts. Limited research has explored how digital media, particularly TikTok, influences younger children's spiritual and moral development in Islamic elementary schools. Furthermore, prior studies tend to adopt normative or prescriptive approaches to character education without deeply engaging with children's lived digital experiences. There is a critical gap in understanding how early-grade students negotiate religious values amid immersive and algorithm-driven content consumption on platforms like TikTok.

This study addresses this empirical and theoretical gap by focusing specifically on madrasah ibtidaiyah students—children in a formative stage of value internalization—within Indonesian Islamic education's unique sociocultural and religious environment. By doing so, the research seeks to provide novel insights into how religious character is constructed and contested in the face of digital disruption. The urgency of this study lies in the growing influence of social media in shaping children's moral frameworks, often without adequate mediation from educators or parents. Understanding this dynamic is vital for developing more contextually grounded, relevant, and future-oriented religious education strategies in the digital era.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap. This is not only a phenomenological documentation of madrasah students' experiences in facing the digital wave but also a theoretical effort to develop a new model of understanding religious character education in the context of the social media era. This study offers an approach that places children's digital experiences as the primary data in examining value dynamics, thus differing from the normative institutional approach that has dominated the discourse on religious character education. The novelty of this research lies in three things. First, it focuses on elementary madrasah students as subjects who have been marginalized in media and religiosity studies. Second, it uses a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore the construction of values in depth from the perspective of children's experiences. Third, the presentation of results is not only oriented toward academic findings but also aimed at providing practical recommendations for the development of a digital media-based religious character education curriculum. This research is also expected to expand the body of knowledge in the fields of Islamic education, media studies, and child development psychology, particularly in integrating spiritual perspectives with the rapidly evolving dynamics of digital culture.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design with a survey method, aiming to provide an empirical overview of the religious character of Islamic elementary school students regarding their TikTok usage behavior. The quantitative approach was selected for its ability to generate measurable and generalizable findings, particularly in identifying behavioral tendencies and patterns among students regarding religious practices and digital consumption [23]. The survey method is considered appropriate for the research objectives, which aim to identify and describe the construction of religious character among elementary madrasah students toward the TikTok syndrome phenomenon through numerical data based on perceptions. This approach also enables statistical analysis that can present general trends from the sample in a representative manner. By using standardized instruments in the form of questionnaires, the quantitative approach provides a systematic overview of students' attitudes and experiences in the context of social media exposure, particularly TikTok. The population in this study was all fifth-grade students at an Islamic elementary school (SDI) located in Sumenep Regency, East Java. There are 60 fifth-grade students, and all of them were selected as the research sample. The selection was conducted using simple random sampling because the population size was relatively small and homogeneous in terms of social characteristics and educational environment. Thus, the entire population was considered to have an equal chance of becoming respondents, and the research results are expected to reflect the actual conditions of students at that level. The population in this study consisted of all fifth-grade students at SDI Taufiqurrahman, an Islamic elementary school located in Sumenep Regency, East Java, Indonesia. A total of 60 students participated in the study. Given the relatively small and homogeneous population regarding educational and socio-cultural background, simple random sampling was employed to ensure that each student had an equal opportunity to be included as a respondent, while maintaining the sample's representativeness.

The research procedure was designed to consider the cognitive and psychosocial development levels of fifth-grade madrasah ibtidaiyah students, who are generally aged 10–11 years. The stages in the implementation of this study are as follows: Instrument Preparation: the researcher developed a questionnaire with simple, communicative, and contextual sentences so that elementary school students could understand it. The instruments were validated by two elementary education experts and one child psychologist. Permission and Coordination: The researcher submitted a letter of authorization to the school, accompanied by an explanation of the purpose, objectives, and technicalities of the questionnaire. The classroom teacher was involved as a facilitator to bridge communication between the researcher and the students. Questionnaire Administration: The questionnaire was administered in a classroom setting for approximately 30 minutes. Before the completion began, the researcher provided a brief explanation and examples of how to fill out the questionnaire. The

researcher also provided direct assistance to students who had difficulty understanding the statements in the questionnaire. Data Collection and Processing: After all questionnaires were collected, the researcher checked the completeness of the data, then coded and processed the data for descriptive quantitative analysis.

The main instrument in this study was a closed-ended questionnaire with a multiple-choice scale (yes/no or often/sometimes/never) tailored to the level of understanding of elementary school children. The questionnaire consisted of two main dimensions: (1) indicators of religious character and (2) indicators of TikTok syndrome symptoms. The following table shows the questionnaire indicators organized based on the research theme.

Table 1. Questionnaire Instrument Indicators

Variable	Indicator	Example Questionnaire Statement
Religious Character	a. Diligence in worship (prayer, daily supplications)	I perform the five daily prayers every day
	b. Honest and trustworthy behavior	I do not cheat during exams
	c. Respect toward parents and teachers	I always listen to my teacher's advice
	d. Gratefulness and moderation in attitude	I don't feel jealous when my friend has a new phone
TikTok Syndrome	a. Frequency of watching TikTok	I watch TikTok every day
	b. Dependency on short videos	I feel uneasy if I haven't opened TikTok
	c. Imitation of speech/movements from TikTok	I often imitate the way TikTok influencers talk
	d. Reduced study time due to TikTok	I often forget to study because I'm busy watching TikTok

The questionnaire consists of 22 items, each consisting of 5-6 items for each main indicator, and has been tested for content validity through expert judgment. The data were analyzed descriptively using quantitative techniques such as percentages. This technique was used because the characteristics of the data obtained were nominal and ordinal, with limited responses (simple choice scale). The use of percentage analysis allows for easy interpretation, particularly in describing the proportion of students' attitudes or behaviors toward each indicator. This technique is also appropriate for small populations with subjects of a young age, where the primary objective is to describe phenomena in aggregate rather than test causal or inferential relationships. The processed data are then mapped into high, moderate, or low categories based on specific score intervals for each indicator. This provides an overall picture of students' religious construction and the forms of syndromes associated with their daily use of TikTok.

3. RESULTS AND DICUSSION

This study aims to describe the construction of religious character among elementary madrasah students who are facing the phenomenon of TikTok syndrome. Data was collected by distributing questionnaires to all 60 fifth-grade students at SDI Taufiqurrahman in Sumenep Regency. The questionnaire consisted of 22 statements divided into two main variables, namely religious character (10 indicators) and symptoms of TikTok syndrome (12 indicators). Each indicator was analyzed descriptively using a quantitative approach with percentage techniques to obtain an overview of the student's attitudes and behaviors toward the two variables. Overall, the survey results indicate that students demonstrate a fairly strong religious character in their daily behavior. However, they also show significant exposure to content and habits associated with the TikTok platform. This finding serves as an important foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of character education in the madrasah environment and highlights the urgency of integrating digital literacy into the learning process.

Table 2. Percentage Results of Questionnaire Indicators

Variable	Indicator	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Religious Character	Performing five daily prayers	78.3	21.7
	Saying daily supplications	81.7	18.3
	Reading Qur'an regularly	65.0	35.0
	Not cheating during exams	90.0	10.0
	Completing tasks responsibly	85.0	15.0
	Telling the truth	88.3	11.7
	Being on time with assignments	73.3	26.7
	Avoiding play during study	61.7	38.3
	Keeping promises	75.0	25.0
	Greeting and respecting teachers and parents	93.3	6.7
	Expressing gratitude	80.0	20.0
	Not being jealous	68.3	31.7
TikTok Syndrome	Watching TikTok daily	71.7	28.3
	Watching TikTok > 1 hour/day	63.3	36.7
	Feeling anxious without TikTok	58.3	41.7
	Difficulty stopping TikTok	50.0	50.0
	Postponing prayer due to TikTok	40.0	60.0
	Skipping study time due to TikTok	46.7	53.3
	Imitating TikTok influencers	68.3	31.7
	Seeing inappropriate content	43.3	56.7
	Making TikTok videos	36.7	63.3
	Wanting to be famous on TikTok	45.0	55.0

The results of the study indicate that, in general, fifth-grade students at SDI Taufiqurrahman show a positive tendency in terms of religious character, although there are variations in the level of internalization. This is indicated by the high percentage of "agree" responses on most religious character indicators. For example, 78.3% of students stated that they perform the five daily prayers every day, a figure that indicates that this primary religious practice has become a main habit for most respondents. Even higher, 81.7% of students stated that they recite prayers before studying and sleeping. This shows that the habit of daily prayers has become deeply ingrained in the student's daily lives, supported by routines in the madrasah and family environments.

However, the indicator for regular Quran reading only reached 65%, meaning that one-third of students do not have a strong commitment to reading the Quran as part of their daily worship. This figure is significant enough to warrant attention, considering that reading the Quran is not only part of worship but also the foundation for learning Islamic values. Moral values also appear strong in students. As many as 90% of students stated that they did not cheat during exams, and 88.3% said that they always told the truth to teachers and parents. This is an achievement that deserves appreciation, as it reflects the success of character education in shaping basic morals. In addition, 85% of students stated that they did their schoolwork, and 73.3% said that they were able to complete their assignments on time. Although the time discipline score was slightly lower than other moral values, the majority of students demonstrated good academic responsibility. Interestingly, on the indicator "not playing during study time," only 61.7% of students answered "agree."

This means that nearly 4 out of 10 students still show distractions during study time, which may stem from various factors, one of which is exposure to digital media such as TikTok. On the other hand, 93.3% of students stated that they respect teachers and parents, making it the highest indicator among all aspects measured. This reaffirms that values of etiquette and politeness remain the cornerstone in the character development of madrasah students. Additionally, 80% of students stated that they are always grateful, and 68.3% do not envy friends who have new items. These two indicators reflect the dimensions of spirituality and self-control in a social context that is fairly good, although further strengthening is still needed. Moving on to the second variable, TikTok syndrome, a pattern contrasting with the religious values instilled formally was found. As many as 71.7% of students admitted to watching TikTok every day, and 63.3% spent more than an hour a day watching the platform. This indicates that TikTok has become a routine part of student's daily activities. In fact,

58.3% of students stated that they feel anxious if they do not open TikTok, an early indication of dependence. Furthermore, 50% of students find it difficult to stop watching, indicating that TikTok is not just a form of entertainment but has influenced children's behavior patterns and self-control. The most worrying aspect is when these digital activities begin to interfere with primary obligations.

Forty percent of students admitted to delaying prayers because of TikTok, and 46.7% stated they forgot to study because they were too engrossed in watching. Although not a majority, these figures are significant as they indicate that TikTok usage has reached a point where it is affecting religious practices and academic responsibilities. This highlights a direct clash between the spiritual values taught and the instant-hedonistic values offered by social media. On the other hand, 68.3% of students admitted to imitating speech patterns or movements from TikTok videos, indicating that the visual influence and trends from TikTok are strong enough to shape students' expressions and identities. Meanwhile, 43.3% admitted to having seen inappropriate content, meaning nearly half of the students were exposed to material unsuitable for their age. Furthermore, only 36.7% of students have ever created a TikTok video, yet 45% expressed a desire to become famous through TikTok. This aspiration indicates that despite limited content production, the dream of digital fame is beginning to take root in students' minds, which is in line with high consumption patterns.

Overall, this pattern shows that religious character education in madrasahs has successfully instilled core values such as honesty, respect, gratitude, and daily worship. However, the influence of digital culture, particularly from platforms such as TikTok, is slowly but surely shaping another dimension of students' daily lives, which in many ways conflicts with the religious values taught. If this clash of values is not immediately managed with a holistic and contextual approach, it could blur the orientation of character education that has been designed. Thus, these results serve as an important reflection for all stakeholders in Islamic teaching, demonstrating that character education cannot stand alone without the integration of digital literacy. Religious curricula must be able to address the media realities that children consume daily, not merely through prohibitions, but by reinforcing values through the same media, active guidance, and open dialogue that foster children's critical awareness of what they consume.
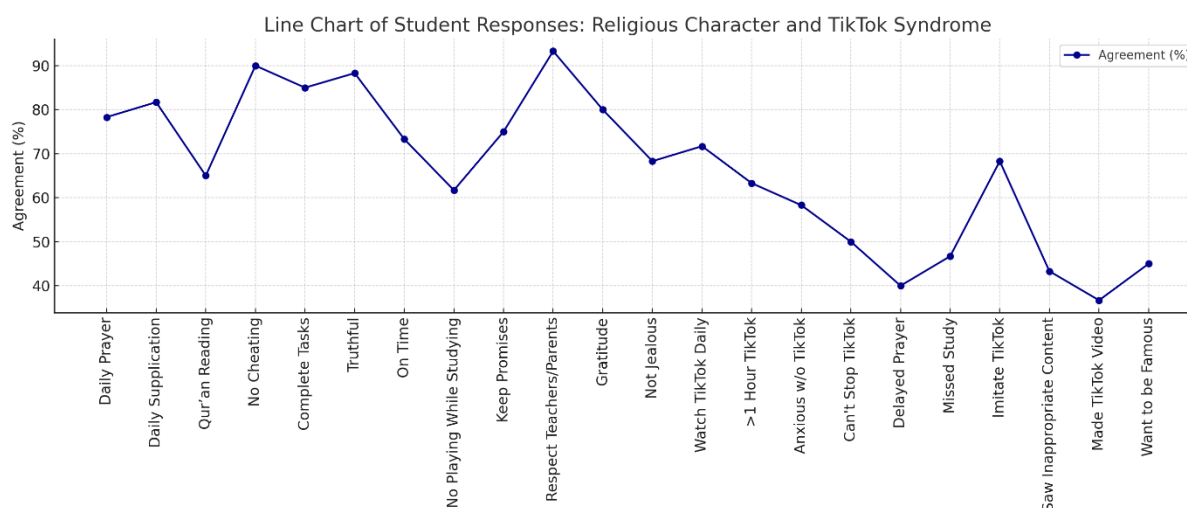

Figure 1. Percentage Comparison per Indicator

The line diagram shows a clear difference between the religious character indicators and the TikTok syndrome indicators. At the beginning of the graph, namely in the religious indicators, the line appears stable and high, indicating that the majority of students have good religious character. This is evident from the high percentage of students who pray five times a day, recite prayers, behave honestly, and respect teachers and parents. However, as the graph moves into the TikTok syndrome indicators, it begins to drop sharply. Although most students do watch TikTok daily, the lower part of the graph shows that fewer students admit they cannot stop watching, feel anxious without TikTok, or even delay prayers or forget to study because of TikTok. This indicates that TikTok's influence exists, but not everyone experiences serious disruption. One interesting aspect of this graph is the "imitating TikTok style" indicator, which rises back to 68.3%, meaning that while not all students create videos or aspire to fame, many still mimic TikTok's speech patterns or movements. This highlights the powerful influence of social media on children's behavior, even when done subconsciously. In general, the lines on the graph show a "clash of values" between the character education they receive at school and their digital habits at home. Although religious values are still strong, the impact of TikTok is beginning to be felt and is entering students' daily lives, especially in the form of distraction and imitation of behavior.

The results of this study indicate that fifth-grade students at SDI Taufiqurrahman have a relatively high level of religious character, although there is a significant tendency toward the TikTok syndrome phenomenon.

These findings reveal a duality in the behavior of madrasah ibtidaiyah students: on the one hand, they demonstrate commitment to religious values such as prayer, honesty, and respect for teachers, while on the other hand, they are exposed to and even actively involved in the consumption and imitation of TikTok content. The interpretation of these results can be explained within the context of character construction theory, particularly in the behaviorist and cognitive-social approaches. Moral habituation theory states that behaviors performed repeatedly will form consistent value patterns within an individual [32]. Students who are accustomed to praying and reciting prayers every day demonstrate the results of religious values instilled from an early age through family and madrasah environments. However, from a social-cognitive theory perspective, the character is not only shaped by external reinforcement but also by observation and imitation of social models in the surrounding environment [33]. In this context, social media, such as TikTok, provides a very strong, fast, and visually appealing model of behavior [34]. This explains why most students imitate the speech patterns or movements from TikTok videos even though they also engage in religious practices regularly [35].

The convergence of these two poles—the religious values taught and the popular culture consumed—creates a "value tension zone". On the one hand, students have emotional and spiritual attachments to Islamic teachings, but on the other hand, they also have symbolic and social attachments to the digital world that provide them with entertainment, self-expression, and even virtual identities. This aligns with the findings of [36], which show that Indonesian Muslim adolescents form a dual identity through religious practices and the consumption of popular culture simultaneously. The study by [37]–[39] also reinforces that social media use can foster religious value ambivalence, depending on the content and the user's social environment. Thus, the findings of this study confirm that religious values do not automatically eliminate the influence of digital culture, and conversely, social media use does not always eradicate religious values. Rather, both coexist in a complex dynamic that requires a more contextual and integrative educational approach [40]–[42].

These findings provide an important contribution to the development of religious character theory in the digital age. Previous research has tended to separate the digital world as a threat and character education as a solution without seeing both as part of a single ecosystem of children's experiences [43]. This study shows that children's religious character is not only shaped by teachers and families but also by social media algorithms, TikTok influencers, and online communities. This means that character construction is no longer linear from teacher to student but is interactive and multi-sourced [11], [44]. From an educational practice perspective, these findings emphasize the need for integration between character education and digital literacy [45]–[48]. Teachers are not only expected to teach values such as honesty and responsibility within the context of religious education but also to guide students in critically analyzing social media content [30]. For example, students can be encouraged to discuss TikTok content that contradicts Islamic values or given projects to create simple religious outreach content as part of media-based learning [7], [49], [50]. This is in line with the 21st-century character education approach, which focuses not only on individual morality but also on critical thinking skills, creativity, and media literacy [15].

Furthermore, the results of this study provide empirical grounds for the development of an elementary madrasah curriculum that is more responsive to the times. The curriculum needs to provide students with space to explore and build religious character through real experiences, including through digital media [25]. This can be done by adding a module on "Digital Ethics in Islam" or by integrating extracurricular activities such as Islamic vlogging, digital da'wah storytelling, and collaborative value-based projects. Although it provides meaningful findings, this study has several limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the results. First, the study was conducted at only one educational institution, namely SDI Taufiqurrahman, with a homogeneous population limited to fifth-grade students. This limits the generalizability of the results to other madrasahs with different socio-cultural backgrounds or institutional characteristics. Second, the method used was a closed-ended questionnaire, which, although effective in obtaining quantitative data from elementary school students, has limitations in exploring subjective aspects or personal experiences of students regarding TikTok usage. Additionally, children at this age may tend to provide answers that are considered "socially acceptable" rather than based on actual behavior. This raises the potential for social bias in questionnaire responses. Third, the absence of data triangulation from teachers or parents makes the analysis one-sided from the student's perspective. The perspectives of teachers or parents could enrich the results by comparing students' perceptions with the reality of their behavior at home and school [1], [51]. These limitations do not diminish the validity of the research, but they are important considerations for interpreting the results within the appropriate framework and as a foundation for more comprehensive future studies.

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future research be conducted on a larger scale involving several madrasahs from various regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is important to understand how religious character and interaction with social media are influenced by geographical and local cultural contexts. In addition, a mixed-method approach is highly recommended. A combination of quantitative questionnaires and in-depth interviews will provide a more complete understanding of children's experiences in managing religious values in the midst of digital culture. Interviews can reveal the reasons why students watch TikTok, their feelings toward certain content, and how they balance studying, worship, and digital consumption.

Experimental research is also highly relevant to test character education interventions integrated with digital literacy. For example, can a module on "Islamic Ethics and Social Media" increase students' awareness and self-control in healthily using TikTok? Longitudinal studies are also needed to see the extent to which religious values persist or change with age and intensity of media use.

The findings of this research have significant social and ethical implications. In the digital age, children are not merely passive users of media but also shapers of their own digital identities. The desire to mimic TikTok trends, go viral, and gain recognition is no longer uncommon, even among elementary school-aged children. This indicates a shift in value orientation: from worship as a goal to social recognition as a source of pride. This poses a major challenge for the world of education and families. Socially, closer collaboration is needed between schools, parents, and the community to guide children's development. Character education cannot stop in the classroom. Teachers and parents need to actively engage with children about their digital world, not simply ban it without guidance. Otherwise, children will develop a dual identity: one in the real world that is obedient and one in the virtual world that is value-free. Ethically, exposure to inappropriate content and child-unfriendly social media algorithms creates a collective responsibility. Policy advocacy is needed to strengthen digital monitoring systems for children, both through state regulations and public awareness. Schools are also challenged to not only teach religion as a subject but as a guide for life in the rapidly changing digital reality.

4. CONCLUSION

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This study aims to explore the construction of religious character among elementary madrasah students facing the TikTok syndrome phenomenon. The results show the coexistence of strong religious values and high digital media consumption habits, particularly through the TikTok platform. Most students exhibit positive religious behavior, such as praying five times a day, telling the truth, and respecting teachers and parents. However, on the other hand, some of them also experience symptoms of TikTok syndrome, such as excessive viewing, experiencing anxiety without access, and postponing worship and studying due to distractions from social media. This phenomenon shows that children's religious character is not formed in a vacuum but in an ecosystem that now also includes the digital world. Religious character education, which has been instilled through madrasahs and families, interacts complexly with popular culture present through social media. This interaction is not always destructive but can create areas of value tension that need to be managed wisely. This study underscores the importance of redefining character education in the digital age. Character cannot be built solely through a normative-conventional approach but must be integrated with media literacy and a critical understanding of the virtual reality that students consume daily. There needs to be an awareness that social media platforms like TikTok are not merely entertainment but cultural spaces that shape how children perceive, evaluate, and respond to the world around them—including religious values.

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