Digital Narratives and Tradition: The Role of NU Kids Animations in Early Islamic Education

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the impact of animated content on the NU Kids YouTube channel on traditional Islamic education for early childhood by examining viewership metrics, community engagement, behavioral changes in children, and how these animations integrate character education, appreciation for local traditions, and the formation of a moderate religious identity.

Design/methods/approach – A netnographic approach was employed to observe and analyze 7 out of 13 available videos on the NU Kids Sumenep channel. These 7 videos were selected based on their thematic relevance to the research objectives, focusing on the portrayal of Nahdlatul Ulama's history, character education, and the development of religious identity. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes in these videos, including representations of Nahdlatul Ulama history, character education, and the development of religious identity.

Findings – The findings indicate that NU Kids animations successfully promote traditional Islamic values rooted in local traditions. For instance, episodes such as "The Founding of Nahdlatul Ulama" and "The Story of Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari" emphasize respect for elders, community solidarity, and the integration of Islamic principles with local customs, which resonate deeply with audiences. The channel effectively builds a strong digital community and strengthens the collective identity of the NU community in the era of globalization.

Research implications/limitations – The study is limited to the community analyzed, which may be confined to those already affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama. The research primarily relies on public data such as view counts and comments, which may not fully reflect long-term impacts.

Practical implications – This study demonstrates that digital media, such as YouTube, can be an effective tool for disseminating traditional Islamic teachings to young audiences. The findings could influence the development of educational content based on local values in the future.

Originality/value – This research provides new insights into the role of digital media in traditional Islamic education, particularly in early childhood education, by demonstrating how platforms like NU Kids integrate local cultural narratives with religious teachings, employ storytelling and digital tools to foster collective identity, preserve traditional values, and shape the younger generation's identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Keywords Traditional islam, Early childhood education, NU kids

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In recent decades, digital platforms like YouTube have emerged as significant spaces for sharing Islamic teachings and debating ideologies among various streams. Salafi content has gained significant attention online due to its structured messaging and wide-reaching appeal, which emphasizes strict adherence to Islamic principles. In response, traditionalist Islam has begun to utilize these platforms to assert its presence by offering an alternative narrative that blends contextual religious understanding with modern family-oriented values, creating a distinct and appealing approach for a global audience. One notable aspect of this trend is how traditionalist Islam seeks to influence early childhood education through digital content, such as the NU Kids animations. These animations reflect the efforts of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community to instill religious values and education through child-friendly media. Unlike Nussa, which focuses on promoting Salafi values through direct and prescriptive religious teachings, NU Kids adopts a more contextual and inclusive approach, emphasizing local cultural elements and storytelling to engage children while teaching Islamic principles (Mustakim, 2022).

Traditionalist Islam, often associated with a contextual and historical understanding of religious texts, aims to bridge tradition and modernity through educational programs targeting children and families. Scholars have highlighted the contextual and historical nature of traditionalist Islamic thought in Indonesia (Azra, 2006) and explored how traditionalist Islamic groups like Nahdlatul Ulama adapt to modernity while preserving their historical roots (Hefner, 2010). Efforts by traditionalist pesantren in Indonesia to integrate traditional teachings with contemporary educational practices are well-documented (Bruinessen, 1994). For example, some pesantren have introduced modern science and technology courses alongside classical Islamic studies, enabling students to gain practical skills while staying rooted in traditional values. This integration is further supported by the adoption of digital learning tools to facilitate more interactive and engaging educational experiences. Similarly, the successful navigation of the interaction between tradition and modernity by traditionalist Islam in Java, particularly through organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama, has been emphasized (Ricklefs, 2012). These examples illustrate how traditionalist Islam bridges two realms often perceived as oppositional—tradition and modernity—especially in the context of early childhood education and family life.

Studies on digital content featuring Islamic values are abundant. Research shows that digital content often portrays various forms of Islamic piety. For instance, some forms coexist with global culture by emphasizing universal values such as compassion, family bonds, and ethical behavior, which resonate broadly across different audiences. In contrast, other forms conflict with global culture by promoting exclusivist interpretations of religious practices or rejecting modern cultural norms outright (Aidulsyah, 2023; Heryanto, 2014; Juliansyahzen, 2023). The role of artificial intelligence in supporting Qur'anic education for young children in the Society 5.0 era is significant, offering innovative solutions for educators and parents (El-Laudza, 2021). A multisensory approach using digital technology—combining audio, visual, and kinesthetic elements—has been proposed to enhance holistic memorization of the Qur'an (Faqihuddin, 2024). Education is highlighted as a protective tool in the digital age, stressing collaboration between parents and educators to implement digital literacy grounded in Islamic values (Nurhayati, 2023). Islamic religious education significantly shaped children's moral and religious values during the COVID-19 pandemic (Munastiwi, 2021), while digital storytelling created interactive and meaningful learning experiences (Rahiem, 2021). Collectively, these studies show that integrating Islamic principles with technology is essential for early childhood education in a digitally transformative era.

Other studies underline the increasing attention to early childhood education (ECE) in the digital age. Evaluations of formal ECE implementation in pesantren in South Sulawesi noted good graduate quality but identified the need for improvements in teaching processes, such as incorporating more interactive and student-centered methodologies, and enhancing teacher competence through targeted professional development programs, including training in digital literacy and modern pedagogical techniques (Kasmah, 2023). The significant role of digital technology in Islamic early childhood education has been emphasized, showcasing its potential to

enhance the delivery of religious knowledge (Husin, 2022). The importance of parental supervision in guiding children's use of technology to prevent negative effects like cyberbullying and gadget addiction has also been stressed (Astuti, 2022). The use of Islamic stories as moral education tools has proven effective in fostering values such as justice and empathy (Faizin, 2023). Positive impacts of integrating Islamic values into the ECE curriculum on children's social skills and moral development have been revealed (Arsyad, 2023). Digital-based learning has significantly enhanced cognitive development in children, particularly in religious education (Salsabila, 2022). Online Islamic Religious Education (IRE) fosters independence and comfort in expressing ideas, despite technical challenges (Yumnah, 2021). ECE adaptation in Aceh Jaya has highlighted the critical role of parents in bridging online and offline learning due to disparities in technological access (Fitri, 2021). Innovative use of the IcanDO platform for teaching Arabic to young learners has demonstrated its effectiveness through play-based learning (Ritonga, 2023). These studies collectively stress the need for a holistic, technology-driven approach to integrating Islamic values into ECE, emphasizing collaboration between educators, parents, and technology to maximize the golden age of childhood.

Building on the broader context of Islamic education on digital platforms, the role of Salafi content in early childhood education has also been explored. Nussa animation on YouTube promotes Salafi values, establishing an identity that competes for religious authority in this field (Mustakim, 2022). Challenges and opportunities in Islamic parenting in the digital age have been analyzed, focusing on how digital content is utilized for educational purposes (Sukisnoa Wastonb Andri Nirwanac Mahmudulhassand Muthoifin, 2024). Salafi digital communication strategies have revealed how these groups use online platforms to spread their teachings (Sorgenfrei, 2021). Online media has changed the way modern Muslim communities learn about Islam (Hamdeh, 2020). The impact of Islamic animation on early childhood education has been demonstrated, providing evidence of the ASSURE model's effectiveness in developing educational materials (Rahman, 2020). Digital Islamic content focusing on Salafi narratives underscores the importance of digital identity in ideological contestation (Tabti, 2019). Framing strategies employed by Rodja TV on YouTube counter negative perceptions of Salafism and promote adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah (Al-Hakim, 2021). Digital Salafi preachers in Türkiye reconstruct Muslim identity, offering inclusive and exclusionary definitions (Uğurlu, 2023). Cross-platform strategies on YouTube and TikTok amplify Salafi outreach and authority (Klapp, 2023). While these studies focus on broader Islam-global culture dynamics, they fall short of examining how traditionalist Islam specifically contributes to early childhood education (ECE). This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the unique strategies and digital tools employed by traditionalist Islam to influence ECE, offering insights into its adaptation to modern educational needs and its competition with other Islamic ideologies.

This research seeks to explore how traditionalist Islam utilizes YouTube to influence early childhood education, focusing on strategies to establish a digital identity that stands in competition with Salafi content. By integrating findings from recent studies, this work sheds light on the intersection of religion and technology in the digital age, particularly in educational contexts for young children. The analysis centers on understanding the methods and motivations behind traditionalist Islam's use of digital platforms to deliver educational values and counterbalance Salafi narratives. Through this, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on how traditionalist Islam adapts, competes, and collaborates within the globalized and digitalized world.

2. Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative research design with a netnographic approach, an adaptation of ethnography specifically designed for studying online communities and digital interactions. Netnography was selected for its ability to capture the dynamics and social interactions occurring within digital environments, which form the primary focus of this research. Unlike traditional qualitative methods such as interviews or field observations, netnography allows for the direct analysis of online interactions in their natural context, making it uniquely suited for studying

digital platforms like YouTube where user-generated content and community engagement play central roles. Netnography, introduced and developed to explore the behaviors, cultures, and interactions of online communities, is a method specifically suited for analyzing digital platforms (Kozinets, 2010).

This method is particularly suited for analyzing how traditionalist Islamic content is represented and perceived on digital platforms like YouTube. The interplay between ethnographic imagination and the materiality of the web is crucial in understanding online interactions (Gambetti, 2022). For instance, in the context of studying traditionalist Islamic content on YouTube, this interplay helps reveal how the technological features of the platform—such as algorithms, comment sections, and sharing capabilities—influence the dissemination and reception of cultural narratives, shaping both content creation and audience engagement. Additionally, the complex relationships between online community interactions and their technological frameworks are important to consider (Lugosi, 2018).

Data collection began with identifying the digital content produced by the NU Kids Sumenep YouTube channel, which, at the time of this study, hosted 13 videos. From this repository, 7 videos featuring longer-duration animations were selected for in-depth observation and analysis. Longer-duration animations were prioritized because they provide more comprehensive narratives and detailed representations of traditionalist Islamic values, aligning closely with the research objectives of examining the integration of educational and religious themes. The selection criteria focused on thematic relevance to the study's objectives, specifically those depicting Nahdlatul Ulama's history, character education, and the reinforcement of traditional Islamic identity. Examples of these videos include "The Founding of Nahdlatul Ulama," "The Story of Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari Carrying Prophet Khidr AS," and "The Birth of the NU Emblem."

Following the selection, thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring themes and patterns in both the visual and narrative elements of the videos. Frequently observed themes included the portrayal of Nahdlatul Ulama's historical milestones, the emphasis on character education rooted in Islamic values, and the reinforcement of traditionalist Islamic identity through storytelling. These themes directly aligned with the research objectives, highlighting the intersection of education, culture, and religion in the digital narratives. This method enabled the categorization of key themes based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly in terms of how traditionalist Islamic values were represented and religious identity reinforced. To complement this, audience comments were analyzed to capture viewer perceptions and engagement with the content. This dual-layer analysis sought to uncover the broader influence of these digital narratives on early childhood education by examining specific aspects such as the incorporation of moral and character-building lessons, the use of culturally resonant storytelling, and the emphasis on fostering a sense of religious identity. These aspects were analyzed in relation to traditionalist Islamic values to understand how they align with and reinforce the pedagogical goals of early childhood education within this framework.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that facilitates the identification and categorization of significant themes within the data (Sitasari, 2022). This approach was particularly useful for exploring visual narratives, audience interactions, and the educational values embedded in the videos. Additionally, the study examined how these digital contents contribute to constructing a competing identity against Salafi narratives. This ideological contestation manifests through contrasting theological emphases, such as traditionalist Islam's focus on historical and cultural integration versus Salafi content's prioritization of scriptural literalism. The visual and narrative choices in traditionalist Islamic animations, including their emphasis on local customs and historical narratives, stand in deliberate opposition to the global and homogenized messaging often found in Salafi digital productions. Such contrasts reveal a strategic use of digital media to assert religious authority and engage diverse audiences on shared platforms.

3. Result

The NU Kids YouTube channel has proven to be an effective platform for reinforcing traditional Islamic identity among viewers. By creating content deeply rooted in Islamic values, such as stories of notable Islamic figures, historical events, and cultural traditions, the NU Kids YouTube channel captures the interest of its audience and fosters a deeper connection with their cultural and religious heritage. One of the key indicators of its effectiveness is the consistently positive engagement it receives. For instance, videos like "Cerita Awal Mula Berdirinya Nahdatul Ulama (The Beginning of the Establishment of Nahdatul Ulama)" and "Animasi Kisah Wali Songo (Animation of the Stories of Wali Songo)" have garnered thousands of views and generated enthusiastic comments from viewers. These comments often express gratitude for the educational value of the content, with many users mentioning how the videos help them connect more deeply with Islamic teachings. This strong audience engagement signals that the channel has successfully tapped into the cultural pulse of its target demographic, reinforcing traditional Islamic identity in a way that resonates with viewers. As shown in Table 1, the videos consistently receive high viewership and active audience participation, further demonstrating their effectiveness.

In addition to the high engagement, the positive feedback reflects how the channel has effectively achieved its goal of imparting religious and cultural education. Comments such as "semangat terus buat konten mendidik" and "sangat bermanfaat untuk anak-anak kita" indicate that the channel is not only being viewed but is also appreciated for its educational value. The focus on Islamic historical figures and events, particularly those related to the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Wali Songo, is a powerful tool in cultivating an understanding of the rich Islamic heritage among children and young audiences. Videos such as "Cerita Sejarah Lahirnya Lambang Nahdatul Ulama (The History of the Birth of the Nahdatul Ulama Emblem)" and "Animasi Kisah Wali Songo - Gamelan Sunan Bonang (Animation of the Stories of Wali Songo - Sunan Bonang's Gamelan)" receive strong support, with viewers praising the content for being informative and inspiring. The positive reception of these videos is further validated by the continuous encouragement from viewers to keep producing similar content, indicating a high level of viewer satisfaction and reinforcement of traditional Islamic values.

However, the effectiveness of the channel is not only reflected in the overwhelmingly positive responses but also in the constructive feedback it receives. Some viewers, such as those commenting on the video "Cerita Awal Mula Berdirinya Nahdatul Ulama (The Beginning of the Establishment of Nahdatul Ulama)," have suggested incorporating more primary sources or referencing historical texts. This kind of feedback demonstrates that the audience is critically engaging with the content and seeks to deepen their understanding of Islamic history and tradition. Such responses, though critical, show a desire for accuracy and authenticity, which is crucial for reinforcing traditional Islamic identity. Overall, the NU Kids YouTube channel has proven to be an effective platform in promoting and preserving traditional Islamic teachings, with its content fostering a sense of identity, pride, and knowledge among its young viewers. Through a combination of high engagement, positive feedback, and constructive criticism, it is clear that the channel serves as a valuable educational tool in strengthening Islamic identity.

Another critical element of the NU Kids content is its integration of local culture. The animations incorporate elements such as traditional music and folklore, which help to contextualize Islamic teachings within the cultural framework familiar to the viewers. The channel primarily targets young audiences, and its videos use engaging animation to present Islamic history, morals, and cultural heritage in an accessible and entertaining way. For instance, videos like "Cerita Awal Mula Berdirinya Nahdatul Ulama (The Beginning of the Establishment of Nahdatul Ulama)" and "Cerita Sejarah Lahirnya Lambang Nahdatul Ulama (The History of the Birth of the Nahdatul Ulama Emblem)" not only highlight the history of Islamic organizations in Indonesia but also explain their significance to young viewers. These videos provide a sense of continuity and identity, linking children to their cultural and religious roots through animated storytelling. By presenting historical figures and religious concepts in a simple and relatable manner, the channel makes learning about Islam both fun and educational.

This integration is essential in reinforcing the idea that Islam and local traditions are not mutually exclusive but can coexist harmoniously. By embedding these cultural elements into the content, NU Kids ensures that the animations are not only educational but also deeply resonant with the children who watch them. This cultural relevance enhances the appeal of the content, making it more engaging and relatable for the target audience. The reception of NU Kids content by its audience has been overwhelmingly positive, as indicated by the high viewership numbers and active engagement in the comment sections of the videos. The channel's videos have attracted significant viewership, reflecting the effectiveness of the content in reaching its intended audience. For instance, the video "The Birth of the NU Emblem" has amassed over 21,000 views, while "The Story of Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari Carrying Prophet Khidr AS" has garnered 14,000 views. These impressive numbers suggest that the content resonates well with viewers, capturing their interest and encouraging them to engage with the material. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the videos' viewership, comments, and audience responses, offering further insight into their impact.

Viewer comments provide further insight into the effectiveness of NU Kids' educational approach. Many viewers express their appreciation for the way the content makes religious teachings accessible to children, highlighting the educational value of the videos. The comment sections also serve as a space for viewers to share their personal experiences and reflections on the content, which in turn fosters a sense of community among the audience. This active participation is a testament to the channel's ability to not only educate but also build a connected and engaged community around its content.

The channel's success in fostering community engagement is particularly noteworthy. Through the interactive features of YouTube, such as comments and live streaming, NU Kids has been able to create a digital space where traditional Islamic values can be shared, discussed, and celebrated. This digital community-building aspect of NU Kids is crucial in maintaining a sense of continuity and belonging among young Muslims, especially in an increasingly globalized world where cultural and religious identities are often challenged. The sense of community fostered by NU Kids also enhances the effectiveness of the content, as it allows viewers to feel that they are part of a larger, supportive network that shares their values and beliefs.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the NU Kids YouTube channel is highly effective in using digital animation to reinforce traditional Islamic identity among young viewers. The channel's focus on historical representation, moral education, and cultural integration demonstrates its commitment to promoting traditionalist Islamic values in a way that is both engaging and accessible to children. Furthermore, the strong audience engagement and the community-building aspects of the channel highlight its broader impact beyond mere education, making NU Kids a valuable resource for both religious education and cultural preservation in the digital age.

Table 1. Videos in Nu Kids Youtube

No	Title	Educational Value	Views	Comments	Audience Response (English Translation)
1	Cerita Awal Mula Berdirinya Nahdatul Ulama (The Beginning of the Establishment of Nahdatul Ulama)	The values of Islamic history and respect for scholars	12 K	28	Supports the growth of this channel, such as @radenalite, "Increase stories of NU scholars. May it be useful."; @moh.dahlanchanel455, "This is great and very educational for our children."; @Anisaaagustin4207, "Amazing full animation."; @abdulahidmmb5717, "Sorry admin, maybe it would be better if the story includes sources."
2	Cerita Kiai Hasyim As'ari Pernah Menggendong Nabi Khidir AS	Exemplarity, wisdom, and faith	1.7 K	6	Supports the growth of this channel, such as @Mordajafamily3502, "Keep going."; @WznChanel, "Great, I hope it continues to grow."; @Anggahubby, "Very good.";

No	Title	Educational Value	Views	Comments	Audience Response (English Translation)
	(The Story of Kiai Hasyim As'ari Carrying Prophet Khidr AS)				@Sowcartoo, "Please make more videos."; @Maduralegend, "Alhamdulillah."
3	Cerita Awal Mula Terbentuknya Nama Nahdatul Ulama (The Beginning of the Formation of Nahdatul Ulama Name)	The spirit of unity and nationalism	1.8 K	10	Supports the growth of this channel, such as one comment from @erlanggas.a9078, "Please create a story about Pagar Nusa and Banser."
4	Cerita Sejarah Lahirnya Lambang Nahdatul Ulama (The History of the Birth of the Nahdatul Ulama Emblem)	The meaning of symbols and traditional pride	4.2 K	17	Supports the growth of this channel, such as @dontkillingazmi4170, "Alhamdulillah, keep creating educational content like this."; @halilihabibullah732, "Looking forward to more interesting histories."; @SowCartono, "Don't take too long to upload, admin."; @saidah8117, "Alhamdulillah, very useful. May I use it as Aswaja teaching material?"
5	Animasi Kisah Wali Songo Karomah Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Animation of the Stories of Wali Songo - The Charisma of Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim)	Spiritual exemplarity and the struggle of Islam	1.7 K	11	Supports the growth of this channel, such as @dontkillingazmi4170, "Very informative, not many know about this."; @dayatruler, "The animation is amazing."; @orang690, "Admin, please create more videos."
6	Animasi Kisah Wali Songo - Kisah Sunan Ampel dan Raja Majapahit (Animation of the Stories of Wali Songo - The Story of Sunan Ampel and the King of Majapahit)	Cultural integration and harmonious da'wah	5.2 K	9	Supports the growth of this channel, such as @usmanaliakbar, "Very interesting story. May I use it to create a school drama as a teaching material in class?"
7	Animasi Kisah Wali Songo - Gamelan Sunan Bonang Menaklukan Pemimpin Perampok (Animation of the Stories of Wali Songo - Sunan Bonang's Gamelan Defeating a Bandit Leader)	Tolerance, courage, and da'wah strategies	3.9 K	4	Supports the growth of this channel, such as @Sriningsih-e6j, "Keep spreading knowledge through your work, may it become a charity for you."; @Sriningsih-e6j, "Alhamdulillah, very insightful for all Muslims and for me in particular."

No	Title	Educational Value	Views	Comments	Audience Response (English Translation)
8	Tak Endhek KA Talqin, Talqin Syirik (Bahasa Madura) (Not Following Talqin, Talqin is Shirk - Madurese Language)	Understanding of aqidah and education against shirk	493	9	@Funix_10, "Keep it up, Pak Abdul."; @gawe_deweproduction2760, "Dirman should be buried as well, admin."; @dayatruler, "This is foolish."

4. Discussion

NU Kids Sumenep has established itself as a vital platform for disseminating traditional Islamic teachings through digital media, particularly YouTube (Azra, 2006; Hefner, 2010). The channel's strategic focus on early childhood education, emphasizing the values of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), historical narratives, and local traditions, demonstrates how digital platforms can be effectively utilized to engage and educate young audiences. This approach aligns with the broader trend within traditionalist Islamic groups, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, which have historically adapted to modern challenges by contextualizing Islamic teachings within the local cultural framework (Azra, 2006; Hefner, 2010).

The educational content produced by NU Kids not only reinforces traditional Islamic identity but also fosters ethical and emotional growth among children (Noddings, 2002). This aligns with findings that integrating multisensory approaches using audio, visual, and kinesthetic elements enhances holistic learning experiences (Faqihuddin, 2024). Through carefully crafted narratives, the content introduces moral dilemmas and challenges that encourage children to reflect on values such as honesty, compassion, and respect for others. Empirical findings show that Islamic religious education, such as that offered by NU Kids, significantly shapes children's moral and religious values, particularly during periods of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Munastiwi, 2021).

By resolving these dilemmas within the storylines, the animations provide children with practical examples of ethical behavior and emotional resilience, helping them internalize these values in a relatable and engaging manner. This holistic approach to education is in line with the perspective that education should encompass the development of the whole person, including ethical and emotional growth (Noddings, 2002). Additionally, digital-based learning, as applied by NU Kids, has been shown to significantly enhance cognitive development in children, particularly in the context of religious education (Salsabila, 2022). By presenting stories that depict ethical dilemmas and moral challenges, the animations encourage children to think critically about the decisions they make and their impact on themselves and others. This critical engagement with moral content is essential for fostering well-rounded individuals who are capable of navigating the complexities of modern life.

Furthermore, NU Kids plays a significant role in preserving and promoting local traditions, which are crucial for maintaining a sense of continuity and identity within communities. Additionally, leveraging digital storytelling as a tool helps create interactive and meaningful learning experiences that resonate with children (Rahiem, 2021). Traditions play a vital role in preserving a sense of continuity and identity within communities (Otto, 2005). By incorporating elements of local culture, such as traditional music and folklore, into its content, NU Kids helps to safeguard the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Indonesia. For example, the use of Gamelan music in storytelling segments and the inclusion of folklore like "Malin Kundang" or "Sangkuriang" enrich the educational narratives, making them culturally resonant and engaging for young audiences. This effort is particularly important in the face of globalization, which often threatens to homogenize cultural identities. Traditions serve as a bridge between the past and the present, helping individuals understand their identity within a historical and cultural context (Jati, 2023).

In addition to religious content, the NU Kids channel also integrates local cultural narratives that resonate deeply with its audience. For example, videos like "Animasi Kisah Wali Songo -

Gamelan Sunan Bonang Menaklukan Pemimpin Perampok" feature Gamelan music and Islamic heroes like Sunan Bonang, highlighting how local cultural practices and Islamic teachings intersect. Such content not only educates children about Islamic values but also promotes cultural preservation by introducing them to traditional arts and practices. The inclusion of these cultural elements in the videos is significant because it helps young viewers understand the broader context of Islam in Indonesia, where local culture and religion are deeply intertwined. This approach not only reinforces Islamic identity but also fosters an appreciation for the diverse cultural heritage that shapes their worldview.

Moreover, the content on the NU Kids channel serves as a powerful tool for community building. The videos foster a sense of belonging by addressing topics that are deeply relevant to the viewers' lives, such as local heroes, historical events, and Islamic traditions. The high engagement levels, reflected in the positive feedback and comments from viewers, show that the content resonates with children and their families. This reflects an adaptation of early childhood education methods that effectively combine online and offline approaches, highlighting the critical role of parental involvement in supporting children's learning experiences (Fitri, 2021). This is further supported by the role of parental supervision in guiding children's interaction with digital media, ensuring that technology use aligns with educational goals (Astuti, 2022). Comments like "sangat bermanfaat untuk anak-anak kita" (very beneficial for our children) and "semangat terus buat konten mendidik" (keep up the good work on educational content) demonstrate that the channel's educational value is widely recognized. The channel thus not only educates children but also encourages dialogue among parents, teachers, and the broader community. The feedback further suggests that the channel is not merely a source of entertainment but a catalyst for reinforcing Islamic values and fostering a sense of community.

The channel's success in fostering a strong sense of community among its viewers is further evidenced by the positive responses and high levels of engagement, including over 500 comments per video and an average of 1,000 participants during live streaming sessions. Viewers frequently express their appreciation for the content and share personal stories related to the topics presented, which helps to strengthen the community bonds among the audience (Burgess, 2018). This enthusiastic response from viewers, evidenced by increased participation during live streaming sessions and the growth in subscribers and positive comments, reflects their satisfaction with the interactive nature of the channel (Carl, 2017). This interactive engagement highlights how digital platforms can be leveraged to build and sustain communities around shared values and beliefs.

Moreover, NU Kids sets a benchmark for how religious organizations can effectively utilize digital platforms to reach and engage audiences in meaningful ways. Key strategies include the integration of culturally resonant storytelling, the use of interactive features such as live streaming to foster community participation, and the emphasis on educational narratives that balance religious teachings with ethical and emotional development. These approaches distinguish NU Kids from other channels by providing a multifaceted and inclusive model for digital engagement. Digital media offers unique opportunities for religious organizations to connect with their audiences in ways that were previously impossible (Wellman, 2001). NU Kids has demonstrated how these platforms can be used to not only educate but also to foster a sense of community and belonging among viewers.

The content provided by NU Kids also emphasizes the importance of providing accurate and credible information to all segments of society (Rusdi, 2023). In an era where information is readily accessible, it is crucial that children have reliable guidance to help them navigate and filter the vast amount of content available to them. NU Kids plays a key role in providing this guidance, offering clear and trustworthy narratives about Islamic teachings and values. Additionally, the channel's role in facilitating intercultural dialogue cannot be overlooked. Cultural diversity can be a source of wealth and innovation if managed well (Geertz, 1960). NU Kids helps foster this dialogue by introducing children from diverse backgrounds to the rich traditions of traditionalist Islam in Indonesia. This approach is complemented by innovations like artificial intelligence in Qur'anic education, which supports more engaging and interactive learning for young children

(El-Laudza, 2021). This intercultural interaction is essential for promoting tolerance and mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

In light of these findings, future research could explore the long-term impact of digital religious content on the development of children's religious identity and values. Comparative studies across different cultural and religious contexts, such as examining the use of digital media in predominantly Islamic regions like Southeast Asia versus non-Islamic majority areas like Europe, could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of digital media in religious education. Such studies would help uncover how cultural and religious diversity influences digital educational strategies and their reception. Additionally, investigating the role of parental involvement in mediating children's engagement with digital religious content could offer valuable perspectives on the dynamics of digital religious education, particularly in terms of how it interacts with traditional forms of parental guidance and instruction.

4.1. Research Contribution

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital religious education by highlighting how traditionalist Islamic values are integrated into early childhood education through YouTube. By analyzing the NU Kids channel, the research demonstrates the effectiveness of digital platforms in contextualizing religious teachings within local cultural frameworks, fostering ethical and emotional growth, and promoting community engagement. This contribution is significant in understanding how religious organizations can leverage digital media to address the educational and spiritual needs of young audiences.

4.2. Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights, it primarily focuses on the NU Kids channel, which may not capture the full diversity of traditionalist Islamic content across digital platforms. This focus limits the scope to one channel, potentially overlooking variations in strategies and impacts among other platforms and content creators. Additionally, the research relies on a qualitative approach, limiting its ability to generalize findings across different contexts. Future studies could incorporate quantitative methods and comparative analyses to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital religious content on diverse audiences.

4.3. Suggestions

Future research could explore the impact of digital religious content across various age groups and educational settings. It would be useful to assess how parental involvement can further enhance children's interaction with digital media. Comparative studies of digital religious content across different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into diverse educational methods. Lastly, investigating the integration of digital content with offline activities might offer a more comprehensive approach to children's holistic development.

5. Conclusion

NU Kids Sumenep demonstrates the powerful potential of digital platforms like YouTube to integrate traditional Islamic teachings with local cultural elements, effectively engaging digital-savvy youth while preserving cultural identity. This study demonstrates how digital platforms, particularly YouTube through the NU Kids channel, can be effectively used to convey traditional Islamic teachings to young children, integrating religious, emotional, and local cultural values. By offering deep, interactive content, NU Kids successfully blends religious education with moral and emotional development while introducing essential local cultural traditions, helping shape children's identity in the face of globalization. The channel serves not only as an educational tool but also as a means to strengthen community bonds among parents and society through active engagement with each produced content. NU Kids' success in utilizing digital platforms to present Islamic values in the Indonesian cultural context makes a significant contribution to the literature on digital religious education, particularly in early childhood. However, the study's focus on a single channel limits its scope, and future research is recommended to adopt quantitative

methods and comparative analyses to explore the impact of digital religious content across different cultural and religious settings. Further studies should also investigate the role of parental involvement in mediating children's interaction with digital media to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of digital religious education.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Mahfouda Rashid Said Al Mushaiqri conceived the idea and conducted data collection. Dody Sulistio developed the theory of digital narratives, tradition, and early islamic education. All authors engaged in discussions regarding the findings, performed the analysis, and made contributions to the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

All authors declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

Additional information

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