

## DIGITAL LITERACY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: PARENTAL MEDIATION OF TECHNOLOGY USE IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION FOR GENERATION ALPHA IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract** : This study examines parental mediation of technology use as an integrated strategy for transmitting Islamic religious identity to Generation Alpha children in rural Indonesia. Drawing on a qualitative case study conducted in Blajo Village, Kalitengah Sub-District, Lamongan, East Java, the research addresses three questions: the nature of the challenges parents face in sustaining Islamic education amid digital disruption; the strategies families employ to navigate those challenges; and how *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and *akhlak*-based Islamic education is operationalized as a digital character formation framework. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven parent informants and three child informants, twelve non-participant observation sessions, and document analysis, and analyzed using Miles et al.'s interactive model. Guided by Ulwan's *tarbiyah* framework, Livingstone and Helsper's parental mediation typology, and Potter's media literacy model, the findings identify three challenge dimensions—temporal disruption of Islamic educational rhythms, individualization of prayer practice, and the reflexive effect of parental digital modeling and four mediation strategy clusters: active temporal structuring, Islamic content facilitation, exemplary digital self-regulation, and communal religious socialization. Two original theoretical contributions are advanced: "Islamic digital parenting" as a culturally embedded mediation concept integrating *tarbiyah* with contemporary mediation theory, and "digital *akhlak*" as the extension of the classical *Aqidah ibadah akhlak* framework into the ethical terrain of digital life. The study's single-village scope is its primary limitation; multi-site comparative research is recommended.

**Keyword:** Digital literacy, Generation Alpha, Islamic education, Parental mediation, Religious identity

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## INTRODUCTION

The Quranic injunction to protect one's family from moral and spiritual harm (Q.S. Al-Tahrim [66]: 6) has historically constituted the foundational mandate for Islamic family education—a mandate Ulwan elaborates into a systematic tarbiyah framework encompassing aqidah formation, ibadah cultivation, moral development, and social education, all oriented toward the formation of the insan kamil who fulfills the human vocation as Allah's vicegerent on earth.<sup>4</sup> In the contemporary digital era, however, this mandate confronts a structural challenge of unprecedented scale: Generation Alpha children, born from 2010 onward, constitute the first cohort to grow up entirely within a digital ecosystem that McCrindle and Fell describe as making them "the most materially endowed, technologically literate, and globally connected generation in history."<sup>5</sup> Their cognitive development, identity formation, and moral socialization occur within what Valkenburg identifies as algorithmically engineered "media-saturated environments"<sup>6</sup> designed to maximize sustained attention through variable reward mechanisms—an architecture of experience that stands in direct structural tension with the Islamic educational project of forming attentive, worship-oriented, communally embedded Muslim subjects.

The challenge this tension poses exceeds the management of inappropriate content or excessive screen time, though both are empirically documented concerns<sup>7</sup>. The deeper challenge is ontological: digital media platforms are designed to reorient what children find meaningful, valuable, and worthy of sustained attention, in ways that systematically compete with the Islamic formation of tawhid-consciousness, ibadah discipline, and communal belonging. This competition operates not through explicit anti-religious content but through the structural orientation of attention, identity, and meaning-making toward consumption, entertainment, and peer comparison rather than worship, gratitude, and divine service.

<sup>4</sup> Abdullah Nashih Ulwan, *Tarbiyat Al-Awlad Fi Al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 1997). 37

<sup>5</sup> Mark McCrindle and Ashley Fell, *Generation Alpha* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2021). 12

<sup>6</sup> Patti M Valkenburg, "Social Media Use and Well-Being: A Methodological and Meta-Analytic Review," *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 44 (2022), 187–92 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.08.017>>.

<sup>7</sup> Fitri Aulia Rahman, Riska Cahyani, and Desy Putri Lestari, "Penurunan Moral Anak Akibat Perkembangan Teknologi Digital," *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 13.2 (2023), 188–201 <<https://doi.org/10.21831/jpk.v13i2.61234>>; Mau'idah, Kun Farida, and Sakinah, "Permasalahan Perkembangan Nilai Agama Dan Moral Generasi Alpha Untuk Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*, 5.1 (2022), 34–52.

The parental mediation literature provides a valuable but theoretically limited framework for this problem. Nathanson established the foundational typology of restrictive, co-viewing, and active mediation<sup>8</sup>; Livingstone and Helsper extended it to the internet context<sup>9</sup>; Carpentier advanced participatory mediation as its most sophisticated form<sup>10</sup>. Yet, as Tsabita et al. observe<sup>11</sup>, this scholarship operates within Western, secular, liberal-democratic frameworks oriented toward individual autonomy and civic participation—not toward the formation of a theocentric Muslim subjectivity organized around divine obedience, communal solidarity, and the cultivation of the soul. Fadhillah and Sulaiman confirm empirically that Indonesian Muslim parents' digital mediation practices cannot be adequately theorized within these secular typologies.<sup>12</sup> A theoretically integrated framework bridging Islamic pedagogical tradition and contemporary mediation scholarship is therefore both necessary and absent from existing literature.

Indonesia—home to the world's largest Muslim population—presents the ideal national context for developing such a framework. Widodo et al. document that digital technology penetration now reaches rural Muslim communities historically reliant on traditional Islamic socialization structures, creating contexts where classical Islamic pedagogical methods must coexist and contend with digital media environments<sup>13</sup>. The current study contributes to this discourse through empirical investigation in Blajo Village, Kalitengah Sub-District, Lamongan, East Java—a rural Muslim community representative of this nationally significant context.

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<sup>8</sup> Amy I Nathanson, "Identifying and Explaining the Relationship Between Parental Mediation and Children's Aggression," *Communication Research*, 26.2 (1999), 124–43 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/009365099026002002>>.

<sup>9</sup> Sonia Livingstone and Ellen Helsper, "Parental Mediation of Children's Internet Use," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 52.4 (2008), 581–99 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150802437396>>.

<sup>10</sup> Nico Carpentier, *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011). 67

<sup>11</sup> Dina Tsabita, Neng Gustini, and Ade Abdurrahman, "Parental Mediation Strategies and Children's Digital Media Use in Muslim Families," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 42.3 (2022), 415–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2022.2126148>>.

<sup>12</sup> Iman Fadhillah and Hamidah Sulaiman, "Digital Parenting Practices Among Muslim Parents in Indonesia," *International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies*, 9.3 (2022), 4 <<https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2022.9n3.551>>.

<sup>13</sup> Sahid Teguh Widodo, Wakit Abdullah Rais, and Dwi Purnanto, "Islamic Family Education in the Digital Era: Challenges and Strategies," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 13.2 (2022), 95 <<https://doi.org/10.17499/jsser.55609>>.

Three research questions organize this inquiry: (1) What challenges do parents in Blajo Village face in sustaining Islamic education for Generation Alpha amid digital disruption? (2) What mediation strategies do families employ to navigate these challenges? (3) How is aqidah, ibadah, and akhlak-based Islamic education implemented as a character formation framework responsive to digital-era conditions? The study advances two theoretical contributions: "Islamic digital parenting" as a culturally grounded mediation concept, and "digital akhlak" as the extension of the classical Islamic formation framework into the ethical domain of digital life.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Generation Alpha and the Structural Disruption of Islamic Formation

McCrindle and Fell characterize Generation Alpha through several defining features that carry direct implications for Islamic religious formation<sup>14</sup>: visual-digital learning preferences shaped by early and sustained multimodal media exposure; shortened tolerance for non-interactive content; primary social identity formation through digital platforms from early childhood; and pronounced individualism in leisure and learning choices. These characteristics are not incidental personality features but are, in significant part, artifacts of deliberate platform architecture. Valkenburg demonstrates that social media and gaming platforms engineer compulsive engagement through dopaminergic reward cycles, social comparison mechanisms, and personalized content algorithms that adapt to each user's behavioral patterns in real time<sup>15</sup>. The result is a media ecology specifically optimized for the capture and retention of children's attention—an ecology that stands in direct structural opposition to the conditions Islamic tarbiyah requires: the sustained, undivided attention necessary for *khushu'* (presence of heart) in prayer; the tolerance for unmediated silence and stillness required for *dhikr*; the deferred gratification necessary for Quranic memorization; and the communal orientation necessary for tarbiyah *ijtima'iyyah*.

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<sup>14</sup> McCrindle and Fell. 12

<sup>15</sup> Valkenburg.188

The Islamic theological concept of *fitrah* provides the deeper theoretical frame for understanding what is at stake. Chomaria (2014:55) argues that *fitrah*—the innate divine orientation with which every human child is born<sup>16</sup>—is not merely a predisposition but an active spiritual potentiality that requires nurturing environmental conditions to develop toward Islamic consciousness, and that is distorted by conditions redirecting natural inclinations toward other ultimate concerns. Contemporary digital media platforms constitute precisely such a *fitrah*-distorting architecture: their structural orientation of children's attention, social identity, and meaning-making toward consumption, entertainment, and peer comparison competes with the Islamic formation of *tawhid*-consciousness at the level of habituated experience rather than merely explicit belief. Indonesian empirical research confirms this dynamic: Mau'idah et al. document significantly lower scores on religious practice, empathy, and prosocial behavior among Generation Alpha children with high gadget dependency<sup>17</sup>, while Rahman et al. identify a systematic pattern of "moral erosion" attributable to unfiltered digital content exposure<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. Parental Mediation Theory: Three Generations and Their Islamic Critique

The parental mediation literature has developed across three generations of scholarship with progressively sophisticated conceptualizations of parenting in media-saturated environments. The first generation, exemplified by Nathanson's influential typology, distinguished restrictive mediation (rule-setting about content and time), co-viewing (shared media consumption without explicit evaluation), and active or evaluative mediation (critical discussion of media content and its values)<sup>19</sup>. This typology, developed primarily in the context of television, established the foundational vocabulary for subsequent work. The second generation, represented by Livingstone and Helsper's landmark study of internet use, demonstrated that digital media's interactive, personalized, and mobile nature creates mediation challenges qualitatively different from broadcast television, and that parental mediation effectiveness

<sup>16</sup> Nurul Chomaria, *Parenting Ala Rasulullah* (Solo: PT. Aqwam Media Profetika, 2014). 55

<sup>17</sup> Mau'idah, Farida, and Sakinah. 38

<sup>18</sup> Rahman, Cahyani, and Lestari. 193

<sup>19</sup> Nathanson.127

varies substantially with children's age, digital competence, and parent-child relationship quality<sup>20</sup>. The third, emergent generation, represented by Carpentier, advances "participatory mediation"<sup>21</sup> as the most efficacious form—one in which parents actively co-construct children's digital literacies rather than simply regulating consumption. Potter provides a complementary framework identifying cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral dimensions of media literacy, with the moral dimension being particularly significant for Islamic digital education.<sup>22</sup>

The critical limitation of this scholarship is its secular, Western, liberal-democratic assumption base. The mediation literature assumes a teleological endpoint—the formation of an autonomous, critically rational, civically engaged individual—that is incompatible with the Islamic formation objective of a Muslim subject whose primary orientation is toward Allah, whose identity is constituted through communal Islamic belonging and worship practice, and whose critical rationality is embedded within an Islamic moral and theological framework. Tsabita make this theoretical critique explicit, arguing that Islamic parental mediation constitutes a distinctive form of cultural practice requiring its own theorization<sup>23</sup>. Fadhilah and Sulaiman confirm empirically that Indonesian Muslim parents' mediation practices cannot be adequately captured within the existing typologies, as their mediation objectives, methods, and success criteria are oriented toward Islamic formation rather than secular digital literacy<sup>24</sup>. Hassan provide evidence that Islamic-specific digital mediation—including facilitation of Islamic digital content and Islamic digital literacy development—is more effective than purely restrictive or monitoring-based approaches in sustaining children's Islamic digital identity<sup>25</sup>.

### 3. Tarbiyah as the Islamic Theoretical Foundation

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<sup>20</sup> Livingstone and Helsper. 583

<sup>21</sup> Carpentier. 67

<sup>22</sup> W James Potter, *Media Literacy*, 9th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2019). 22

<sup>23</sup> Tsabita, Gustini, and Abdurrahman. 418

<sup>24</sup> Fadhilah and Sulaiman. 4

<sup>25</sup> Norhaslina Hassan, Wan Asna Wan Mohd Nor, and Nor Aziah Alias, "Muslim Parents' Digital Literacy and Its Effect on Children's Online Islamic Education," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11.3 (2022), 1–18 <<https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i3/14215>>.

The classical Islamic concept of *tarbiyah*—from the Arabic root *r-b-w*, connoting growth, nurturing, and holistic upbringing—provides the theoretical foundation for Islamic digital parenting. Ulwan presents *tarbiyah* as a comprehensive formation framework<sup>26</sup> whose seven dimensions—religious (*al-tarbiyah al-imaniyyah*), moral (*al-tarbiyah al-khuluqiyyah*), intellectual (*al-tarbiyah al-'aqliyyah*), psychological (*al-tarbiyah al-nafsiyyah*), social (*al-tarbiyah al-ijtima'iyyah*), physical (*al-tarbiyah al-jasadiyyah*), and sexual (*al-tarbiyah al-jinsiyyah*)—are not parallel objectives but mutually constitutive dimensions of a single formation process. The tripartite focus of this study—*aqidah*, *ibadah*, and *akhlak*—corresponds respectively to the religious, social, and moral dimensions of Ulwan's framework, constituting what Indonesian Islamic educational practice has crystallized as the essential triad of Islamic family formation.

Ulwan identifies five pedagogical methods through which *tarbiyah* operates and which this study finds operationalized in informants' digital parenting practices<sup>27</sup>: *tarbiyah bi al-qudwah* (formation through exemplary conduct—*keteladanan*), *tarbiyah bi al-'adah* (formation through habit—*pembiasaan*), *tarbiyah bi al-maw'izah* (formation through moral counsel), *tarbiyah bi al-mulahazah* (formation through attentive supervision), and *tarbiyah bi al-'uqubah* (formation through consequence and discipline). In the digital era, each method acquires new complexity: *keteladanan* now requires parental digital self-regulation as much as explicit Islamic modeling; *pembiasaan* must contend with digital habits that compete with Islamic ones; *al-maw'izah* must be calibrated to a generation resistant to unilateral moral instruction; *al-mulahazah* must extend to the digital environment; and *al-'uqubah* must address digital over-use without alienating technologically fluent children.

Daradjat provides the empirical grounding for *tarbiyah* theory in the Indonesian context, establishing that parental exemplary practice is the strongest predictor of children's religious identity development—a finding that acquires reflexive significance in the digital era, where parents' own digital behavior constitutes a form of visible

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<sup>26</sup> Ulwan. 37

<sup>27</sup> Ulwan. 145

exemplary conduct<sup>28</sup>. Rohimin advances a digital-era recontextualization of the al-murabbi (nurturing educator) concept, arguing that effective Islamic family education in the digital age requires parents to develop Islamic digital literacy as a prerequisite for effective tarbiyah<sup>29</sup>. Ismail and Yusof draw on the prophetic pedagogical tradition of individualized instruction as an Islamic precedent for the differentiated, person-responsive mediation that effective digital parenting requires<sup>30</sup>.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative case study design. Yin's (2018:15) conceptualization of the case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context<sup>31</sup> makes this design particularly appropriate for Islamic digital parenting, whose meaning is inseparable from the specific cultural, religious, and material conditions of its occurrence.

The research site—Blajo Village (Desa Blajo), Kalitengah Sub-District, Lamongan, East Java—was purposively selected on four grounds: (1) it represents a rural Indonesian Muslim community with documented smartphone penetration, providing an analytically significant context underrepresented in existing research; (2) the village maintains an active structure of traditional Islamic socialization institutions—musholla, TPQ (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an), and regular community pengajian—creating conditions for observing the interaction between digital media and established Islamic formation practices; (3) its geographic and social boundedness supports the in-depth contextual analysis that case study methodology requires; and (4) access was facilitated through established community relationships and the endorsement of Village Head Bapak Supiadi, S.Sos.

Ten informants participated: seven parent informants—Ibu Y, Ibu U, Ibu S, Ibu W, Ibu L, Ibu E, and Ibu NH, all primary caregivers of Generation Alpha

<sup>28</sup> Zakiah Daradjat, *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2014). 72

<sup>29</sup> Rohimin, "Reposisi Pendidikan Keluarga Bagi Anak Generasi Alfa," *Nuansa: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Sosial Dan Keagamaan Islam*, 16.2 (2019), 72–89 <<https://doi.org/10.19105/nuansa.v16i2.2504>>.

<sup>30</sup> Nik Ahmad Hisham Ismail and Rorlinda Yusof, "Islamic Perspectives on Parenting in the Digital Age," *Journal of Islam in Asia*, 18.2 (2021), 211–34 <<https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v18i2.932>>.

<sup>31</sup> R K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th edn (SAGE Publications, 2018). 15

children aged seven to fourteen—and three child informants—J (child of Ibu W, aged nine), A (child of Ibu U, aged nine), and N (child of Ibu E, aged twelve). All names are abbreviated to protect privacy. Informants were purposively selected to represent diversity in household income, parental educational background, household size, and degree of digital device access, enhancing the analytical breadth of the case. All seven parent informants owned Android smartphones with wifi access, confirming the digital embeddedness of the study context.

Data were collected over four months (October 2025–January 2026) through three complementary methods. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants in their homes, averaging 75 minutes per session; interview guides were developed from the research questions and theoretical framework and iteratively refined through two pilot interviews. Non-participant observation was conducted across twelve sessions, covering family prayer times, Quran recitation routines, gadget use patterns, and TPQ and community pengajian participation. Document analysis examined household Islamic education materials, daily schedule records produced by parents, and TPQ attendance documentation. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and relevant portions translated into English by the first author and verified by a bilingual Islamic education scholar for conceptual accuracy.

Data analysis followed Miles interactive model: data reduction through systematic open and focused coding using a framework derived from the tarbiyah and mediation typologies, supplemented by emergent codes; data display through thematic matrices cross-referencing challenge types, mediation strategies, and formation dimensions; and iterative conclusion drawing and verification<sup>32</sup>. Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation across parent interviews, child interviews, observations, and documents; member checking with six of seven parent informants; and prolonged engagement across four months of continuous fieldwork.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

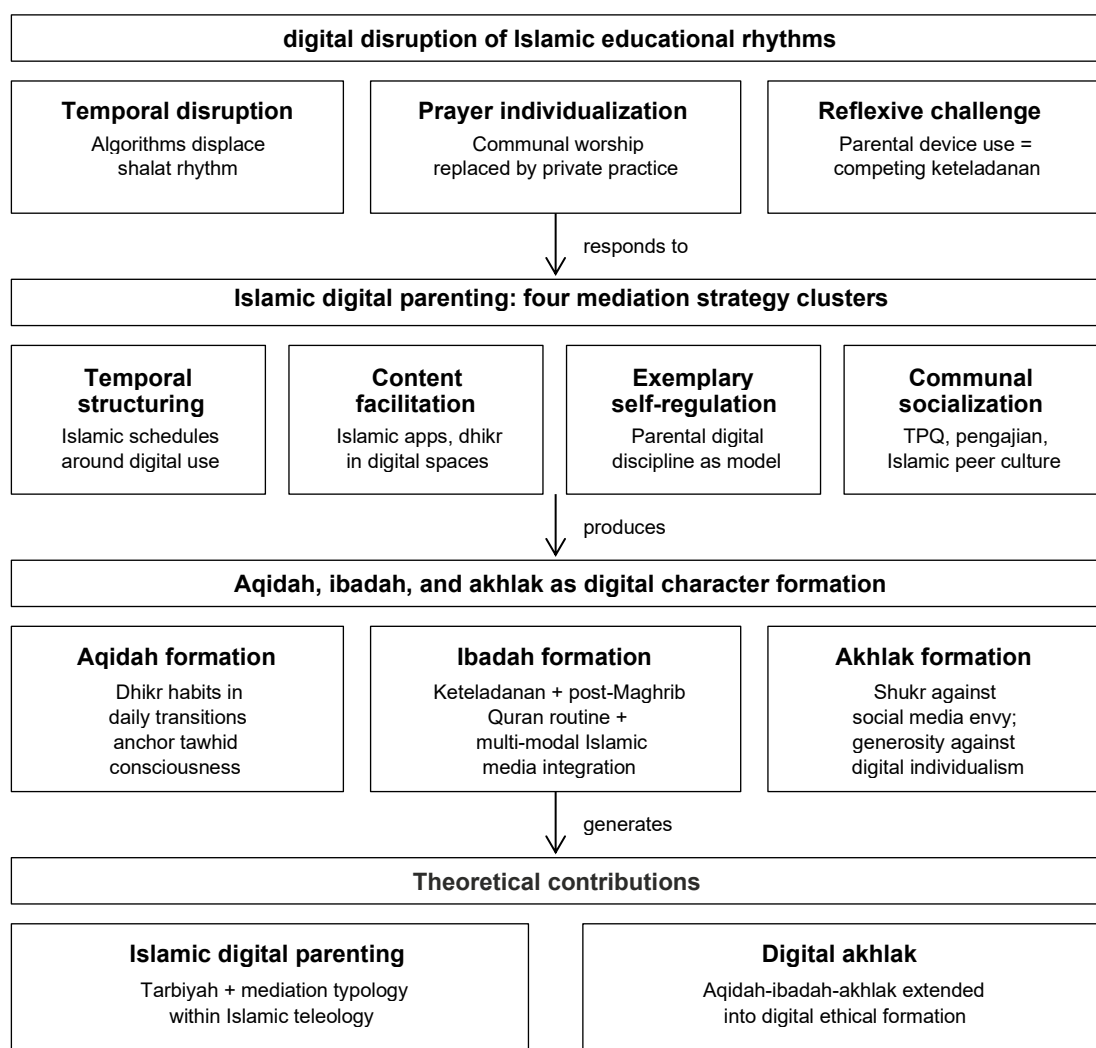
The analysis produced three thematic clusters, presented here through the integration of analytical argument and paraphrased empirical evidence from field

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<sup>32</sup> M B Miles, A M Huberman, and J Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd edn (SAGE Publications, 2014). 12

data, in accordance with the analytical paraphrase convention appropriate for this study's socio-cultural context and informant privacy considerations. Each theme is interpreted against the theoretical framework established in the literature review.

The analysis yielded three thematic clusters whose internal structure and inter-relationships are summarized in Figure 1. The clusters are analytically sequential: the challenge dimensions identified in Theme 1 are the conditions that the mediation strategies of Theme 2 are designed to address, which in turn produce the character formation outcomes of Theme 3 and generate the two original theoretical contributions of this study.



**Figure 1.** Integrated findings framework: digital disruption, Islamic digital parenting strategies, and digital character formation in Blajo Village, Lamongan

## **1. Digital Disruption of Islamic Educational Rhythms: Three Challenge Dimensions**

### **a. Temporal Disruption: The Contest Between Algorithmic Continuity and Islamic Time**

The most pervasive challenge documented across all seven informant households concerned the disruption of Islamic temporal structure. Islamic family life in Blajo Village had historically been organized around a temporal rhythm anchored by the five daily shalat times, post-Maghrib Quran recitation, and communal musholla activities—a rhythm that Daradjat identifies as the primary mechanism of Islamic identity habituation. Analysis of observation data and informant accounts reveals that smartphone-mediated digital entertainment—particularly YouTube viewing and online multiplayer gaming—systematically displaced this rhythm by creating temporal demands experienced by children as more immediately rewarding than Islamic practice obligations.

Multiple parent informants independently reported that their children preferred digital entertainment over timely prayer performance, requiring persistent parental reminders to interrupt viewing or gaming for shalat (Ibu U; Ibu Y, personal interviews, January 2026). The temporal competition was not merely a matter of children choosing not to pray, but of the algorithmic architecture of digital platforms—specifically engineered to minimize disengagement by creating flow states (Valkenburg 2022:188)—actively working against the structured interruption of secular activity that Islamic prayer discipline requires. Observation data confirmed a consistent pattern: when children were engaged with mobile devices at prayer time, the transition to shalat required multiple parental interventions, typically spanning ten to fifteen minutes, representing what informants collectively described as a daily negotiation rather than a routine observance.

The most structurally acute temporal challenge was the nocturnal gaming pattern documented in five of seven informant households. Parent informants reported that children participated in late-night online gaming

sessions with peers—often extending past midnight—rendering them unable to wake for the Fajr prayer or to attend school in an adequately rested state (Ibu W; Ibu NH, personal interviews, January 2026). This pattern is theoretically significant because it exposes the peer-accountability structure of online multiplayer gaming—which coordinates simultaneous participation across social networks—as a direct competitor to the communal accountability structure of congregational Islamic prayer. Both structures involve social obligations, peer expectations, and identity investments; the evidence suggests that, for these Generation Alpha children, the peer accountability of gaming had become more experientially compelling than the religious accountability of congregational worship.

Ibu Y's account of her child's inability to manage time between prayer, homework, and gaming was mirrored by Ibu E and Ibu W, who described similar patterns of Islamic obligation displacement and inability to maintain focus during Quran recitation at TPQ (personal interviews, January 2026). Taken together, these accounts reveal that the challenge is not merely behavioral non-compliance but a structural reorganization of children's experienced temporality around digital media logic—a finding that resonates with Valkenburg theoretical argument that platform design actively reconfigures users' relationship with time, attention, and self-regulation<sup>33</sup>.

#### **b. Prayer Resistance and the Individualization of Islamic Religious Identity**

A second challenge dimension concerned children's active resistance to congregational Islamic worship—a pattern that analysis reveals as reflecting not merely behavioral preference but a deeper process of religious identity individualization consistent with the digital media sociology literature. Across four informant households, parent and child informants independently reported children preferring domestic individual prayer over congregational musholla attendance, citing discomfort with communal settings, fear of social judgment for incorrect movements, and the competing pull of digital entertainment (Ibu Y; A, child informant, personal

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<sup>33</sup> Valkenburg.188

interviews, January 2026). This preference pattern is analytically significant because it represents not simply a behavioral shortcut but a reconstitution of Islamic identity from a communal-participatory to a private-individual form.

Ulwan identifies *tarbiyah ijtima'iyah*—the formation of children's experience of themselves as embedded in the Muslim community with reciprocal obligations—as a foundational dimension of Islamic character<sup>34</sup>. The mosque and musholla in Islamic tradition function not merely as prayer venues but as the primary institutional sites of Islamic communal identity formation: spaces where children learn to experience themselves as part of a collective Muslim body with shared obligations, shared identity, and shared accountability. When children systematically avoid these spaces in favor of domestic individual worship, this communal dimension of Islamic formation is structurally impaired, regardless of whether the individual prayers performed are technically valid.<sup>35</sup>

Observation data provided important context for understanding this individualization dynamic. Children in the study site demonstrated high levels of comfort and social engagement in digital peer contexts—participating confidently in online multiplayer environments and social media interactions—while showing social anxiety in face-to-face communal religious settings. This asymmetry suggests that digital media environments had become children's primary domain of social comfort and identity formation, with physical communal religious spaces experienced as comparatively unfamiliar and anxiety-provoking. The digital preference for self-paced, low-stakes, individually controlled experience had, in other words, generalized to children's religious practice preferences—a form of platform-mediated religious individualization with implications for Islamic communal identity that extend well beyond screen time management.

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<sup>34</sup> Ulwan. 145

<sup>35</sup> Daradjat. 72

### **c. The Reflexive Challenge: Parental Digital Modeling as Competing Keteladanan**

The theoretically most significant and previously undertheorized challenge dimension concerned the reflexive relationship between parents' own digital behavior and children's gadget use. In four of seven informant households, cross-triangulated evidence from parent interviews, child interviews, and observation documented a consistent pattern: children's excessive gadget use was actively modeled on and legitimized by parental smartphone habits, creating a dynamic in which parents' intended Islamic formation was undermined by their own inadvertent digital modeling.

Parent informants in these households candidly acknowledged that they were themselves frequent smartphone users in domestic spaces—checking devices, watching videos, and engaging in social media—in full view of their children (Ibu E, personal interview, January 2026). Child informants from these households independently confirmed that they regarded parental device use as normative authorization for their own—reasoning, in effect, that if parents could use devices whenever they wished, there was no principled basis for restricting children's use (N; J, child informants, personal interviews, January 2026). This reasoning pattern reveals a child-level understanding of the *keteladanan* principle that is logically coherent: if *tarbiyah bi al-qudwah* operates through the child's observation and internalization of parental exemplary conduct, then parents' visible digital behavior constitutes an unintended but functionally operative form of exemplary modeling.

Daradjat establishes parental exemplary practice as the strongest predictor of children's religious identity development<sup>36</sup>, and Ulwan places *tarbiyah bi al-qudwah* as the first and most foundational of the five *tarbiyah* methods<sup>37</sup>. The reflexive finding from this study—that parental digital behavior inadvertently constitutes a competing form of *keteladanan*—represents an original empirical and theoretical contribution to the Islamic

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<sup>36</sup> Daradjat. 72

<sup>37</sup> Ulwan. 37

digital parenting literature. It establishes that effective Islamic digital parenting is logically prior to parental digital self-regulation: parents cannot effectively form children's Islamic temporal discipline, prayer practice, and digital content discernment if their own digital behavior models the opposite of what they seek to form. This implication has direct consequences for how Islamic family education programs should be designed, prioritizing parental digital self-regulation alongside—and as a prerequisite to—child-directed digital mediation strategies.

## **2. Islamic Digital Parenting: Four Mediation Strategy Clusters**

Against the three challenge dimensions, informant families had developed—through practical experimentation rather than formal instruction—a set of mediation strategies constituting what this study theorizes as "Islamic digital parenting." Four analytically distinct strategy clusters were identified, each integrating classical tarbiyah methods with contemporary digital parenting practices.

### **a. Active Temporal Structuring: Embedding Islamic Practice in the Digital Day**

The most consistently documented strategy involved the deliberate construction of daily household schedules that positioned Islamic educational activities—prayer, Quran recitation, TPQ attendance, and Islamic reflection—as temporal priorities within a structured day that also allocated defined periods for digital use. This approach was employed systematically by Ibu S and Ibu W, and in modified forms by Ibu U and Ibu Y (personal interviews, January 2026). Rather than restricting digital use reactively in response to Islamic obligation violations, these parents proactively designed temporal architectures in which Islamic formation activities and digital entertainment each occupied defined, bounded slots within the household day.

This strategy integrates Livingstone and Helsper's concept of active mediation<sup>38</sup> with Ulwan's tarbiyah methods of al-mulahazah (attentive supervision) and al-'adah (habit formation) in a specifically Islamic temporal

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<sup>38</sup> Livingstone and Helsper. 583

framework<sup>39</sup>. Critically, these parents did not merely set screen time limits—the form of restrictive mediation most commonly documented in the secular parental mediation literature—but constructed Islamic temporal architectures in which digital use was positioned as a bounded activity within a day whose primary structure remained Islamic. The analytical significance of this distinction is considerable: temporal structuring treats digital media as one element within an Islamic household order, rather than as a competing system that must be periodically interrupted by Islamic practice. Ibu S additionally practiced active mediation in Potter's sense, regularly engaging her child in discussion of digital content encountered—a practice that extended Islamic epistemological values ('ilm as purposive, morally situated knowledge) into the child's digital experience rather than simply regulating its quantity<sup>40</sup>.

#### **b. Islamic Content Facilitation: Reconstituting the Digital Environment**

A second strategy cluster involved the active reconstitution of children's digital content environment to normalize Islamic educational content—Quranic recitation, Islamic instructional videos, digital Islamic story applications, and live-streamed religious lectures—as a normal and engaging presence alongside secular entertainment content. This strategy was documented across five of seven informant households, representing the most widely shared mediation approach in the sample.

Informants in this cluster reported introducing children to Islamic educational applications providing Quranic recitation with tajweed guidance, directing children toward YouTube content covering wudu procedures and Islamic moral formation, and facilitating attendance at community pengajian through both physical presence and digital live-streaming (Ibu S; Ibu U; Ibu W; Ibu NH; Ibu Y, personal interviews, January 2026). Several parents also described habituating Islamic recitation—Bismillah, Salawat, selected Quranic verses—in transitional daily moments that would otherwise be occupied by device use, such as morning school departures and pre-meal

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<sup>39</sup> Ulwan. 145

<sup>40</sup> Potter. 22

periods. This practice constitutes a form of tarbiyah bi al-'adah applied to aqidah formation: the habitualization of tawhid-affirming verbal practices in daily transitions progressively inscribes divine consciousness into children's routine experience.

Schrock's framework of digital media "communicative affordances"—portability, availability, locatability, and multimodality—is analytically productive here: this strategy cluster mobilizes precisely the affordances that make digital media disruptive to Islamic formation and redirects them in service of Islamic educational objectives<sup>41</sup>. Hassan provide empirical confirmation that positive Islamic digital content facilitation is more effective than purely restrictive mediation in sustaining children's Islamic digital identity, because it positions Islamic content as engaging and culturally contemporary rather than as a burdensome obligation conflicting with technological modernity<sup>42</sup>.

### c. Exemplary Digital Self-Regulation: Reconfiguring Keteladanan

In direct response to the reflexive challenge identified in Finding 1c, a subset of informants—most notably Ibu W and Ibu U—described deliberate efforts to reconfigure their own digital behavior as a form of positive keteladanan, recognizing that children's observational learning makes parental digital self-regulation a prerequisite for effective tarbiyah. These efforts included establishing personal digital curfews in the household, refraining from device use during family prayer and meal times, and demonstrating deliberate disengagement from devices in favor of family interaction and Islamic practice (Ibu W; Ibu U, personal interviews, January 2026).

The theoretical significance of this strategy extends beyond its immediate behavioral effects. Daradjat establishes that children learn religious practice primarily through observation of parental behavior rather than through explicit instruction<sup>43</sup>, and Ulwan identifies tarbiyah bi al-

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Schrock, "Communicative Affordances of Mobile Media: Portability, Availability, Locatability, and Multimodality," *International Journal of Communication*, 9 (2015), 1229–46 <<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2317426>>.

<sup>42</sup> Hassan, Wan Mohd Nor, and Alias. 6

<sup>43</sup> Daradjat. 72

qudwah as the foundational tarbiyah method precisely because children's primary developmental orientation is toward imitation of significant adults<sup>44</sup>. When parents deliberately model restrained, purposeful, and Islamic-practice-prioritizing digital behavior, they instantiate the same observational learning mechanism that had been producing negative formation outcomes in households where parental device use was unregulated. Observation data confirmed that households in which parents had established consistent digital self-regulation practices showed markedly lower levels of child-parent conflict over device use and higher consistency of Islamic routine observance—suggesting that the reflexive dimension of Islamic digital parenting is not merely theoretically significant but practically consequential for formation outcomes.

**d. Communal Religious Socialization: Islamic Peer Accountability as Counter-Architecture**

The fourth strategy cluster involved the deliberate construction and maintenance of Islamic peer social contexts that create communal accountability for Islamic practice—a strategy that directly addresses the peer-driven temporal displacement documented in Finding 1a. Multiple informants described actively facilitating children's participation in TPQ, community pengajian, and musholla-based youth activities, not merely as supplemental Islamic education but as the construction of a positive Islamic peer culture that could compete with gaming peer culture as a source of social identity and belonging (Ibu Y; Ibu W; Ibu S; Ibu NH, personal interviews, January 2026).

This strategy reflects an implicit sociological understanding that peer accountability structures are among the most powerful behavioral regulators for children and adolescents—more powerful, in many cases, than parental instruction or restriction. By investing in children's Islamic social relationships, these parents were leveraging the same social motivational architecture that digital platforms exploit through online multiplayer gaming and social media—but redirecting it toward Islamic community formation

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<sup>44</sup> Ulwan. 37

rather than platform engagement. The analytical resonance with Tsabita argument for "Islamic social context" construction as a dimension of effective parental mediation is direct and empirically grounded<sup>45</sup>: the evidence from this study demonstrates that communal religious socialization is not merely a supplemental formation activity but a strategically essential counter-architecture to the digital peer accountability structures that otherwise displace Islamic practice.

### **3. Aqidah, Ibadah, and Akhlak as a Digital Character Formation Framework**

#### **a. Aqidah Formation: Habituating Divine Consciousness as Temporal Counter-Practice**

Aqidah formation in the digital era was operationalized by informants primarily through the habitualization of Islamic recitation and dhikr (remembrance of God) in transitional daily moments—morning departures, prayer completions, meal boundaries, and pre-sleep routines—that constitute the natural temporal interstices of Generation Alpha children's digitally saturated days. This approach represents a sophisticated application of *tarbiyah bi al-'adah* to aqidah formation: rather than confronting digital media use as the primary site of Islamic formation intervention, these parents focused on embedding Islamic consciousness in the temporal moments before and after digital engagement, progressively habituating a divine orientation that frames rather than competes with children's digital experience.

Observation data documented consistent patterns of Islamic verbal practice—Bismillah recitation before daily activities, Alhamdulillah after meals, brief Quranic verses during transitions—across three of seven informant households, suggesting that habitual Islamic verbal practices were functioning as structural anchors of tawhid-consciousness in households where they were consistently maintained (Ibu S; Ibu W; Ibu U, personal interviews and observations, January 2026). The theoretical significance of this finding lies in its reversal of the dominant framing of Islamic digital parenting as primarily concerned with restricting digital

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<sup>45</sup> Tsabita, Gustini, and Abdurrahman. 418

media: from an *aqidah* formation perspective, the more fundamental intervention is the habitualization of divine consciousness in the interstices of digital life, not merely the reduction of digital exposure.

**b. Ibadah Formation: Multi-Modal Practice and the Renewal of Keteladanan**

Ibadah formation in the study households was operationalized through three interconnected practice streams: *shalat* habituation through parental *keteladanan* and structured scheduling; Quranic recitation and memorization as a daily post-Maghrib family practice; and Ramadan fasting as an annual embodied formation experience. The integration of these streams with digital media was a consistent feature of informants' approaches, with most parents combining traditional ibadah formation methods with deliberate use of digital Islamic resources—Quranic memorization applications, Islamic instructional video content, and digital live-streaming of religious lectures—as supplements to, rather than replacements for, embodied communal practice.

The most analytically significant finding within this theme concerned the relationship between parental *shalat keteladanan* and children's prayer practice development. Across informant households, observation data and informant accounts consistently revealed that children's prayer practice was more consistent in households where parents performed *shalat* visibly and regularly in domestic spaces than in households where parents' own prayer practice was irregular or privatized (Ibu W; Ibu S; Ibu U, personal interviews and observations, January 2026). This finding provides direct empirical support for Daradjat theoretical claim that parental exemplary practice is the strongest predictor of children's religious development—and adds a digital-era dimension<sup>46</sup>: in households where parents had established digital curfews and demonstrated deliberate Islamic practice prioritization, children's *shalat* consistency was observably higher than in households where parents' digital use remained unregulated.

Quranic formation was operationalized through the establishment of

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<sup>46</sup> Daradjat. 72

post-Maghrib family recitation and memorization routines, which several informants described as the most consistently maintained Islamic formation practice in their households—partly because the post-Maghrib window, following the evening prayer, represented a natural temporal slot insulated from the morning-to-afternoon digital activity peak (Ibu W; Ibu NH; Ibu S, personal interviews, January 2026). Adhim concept of "Islamic narrative formation"—the cultivation of a sacred imagination through sustained engagement with Quranic stories<sup>47</sup>—was practically instantiated in several informants' descriptions of bedtime Quranic storytelling as a routine family practice, suggesting that the Quranic moral universe was being embedded in children's imaginative experience through a modality—narrative—that operates at a level of subjective experience more fundamental than explicit doctrinal instruction.

**c. Akhlak Formation: Digital Akhlak as an Emergent Indigenous Framework**

The akhlak formation dimension of informants' practices produced this study's second original theoretical contribution: "digital akhlak"—the extension of classical Islamic ethical formation to encompass the specific moral challenges and opportunities of the digital environment. The concept emerged inductively from cross-case analysis revealing that parents in Blajo Village had developed, without scholarly theorization, an integrated approach to Islamic virtue cultivation that explicitly counteracted the moral distortions associated with digital media use. Two virtue clusters were particularly prominent: *shukr* (gratitude) as a counter-practice to social media's comparison-and-deprivation logic, and social generosity as a counter-practice to digital individualism.

Multiple informants reported habituating gratitude practices—verbal expression of thanks, daily reflection on positive experiences, and framing of sufficiency as a virtue—as deliberate responses to children's tendency toward dissatisfaction and complaint, which parents attributed to social media exposure (Ibu W; Ibu Y; Ibu S, personal interviews, January 2026).

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<sup>47</sup> Mohammad Fauzil Adhim, *Mendidik Anak Menuju Taklif* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2018). 42

Hasanah provides the theoretical grounding: shukr is of particular strategic significance in the digital context because social media platforms are specifically engineered to cultivate a chronic sense of relative deprivation through constant exposure to curated images of others' superior possessions, experiences, and social statuses<sup>48</sup>. The parents who cultivated shukr as a household practice were, in effect, implementing an Islamic counter-formation strategy against the most psychologically potent mechanism of social media's attention-capture architecture.

Social generosity cultivation—encouraging children to share resources, assist neighbors, and participate in community charitable activities—was described by Ibu Y and observed in Ibu W's household as a consistent parenting practice oriented toward countering the individualism and passive consumption orientation that informants associated with children's digital media use (personal interviews and observations, January 2026). The observation that child informant J had internalized Islamic formation objectives to the degree of independently socializing younger siblings toward Islamic practice—reminding them of prayer obligations and modeling religious routines—represents the most compelling evidence of successful tarbiyah ijtimai'iyah in the study: the transition from formation recipient to formation agent that Ulwan identifies as the defining marker of successful Islamic social education<sup>49</sup>.

The concept of digital akhlak, as synthesized from these empirical patterns, encompasses the cultivation of Islamic virtues—shukr, generosity, honesty, social concern—as explicit counter-practices to the dispositions systematically cultivated by digital media platforms, alongside the development of specifically digital ethical competencies grounded in Islamic moral principles: critical evaluation of digital content against Islamic values, responsible and purposive technology use, and the maintenance of Islamic social obligations in digitally mediated social contexts. Digital akhlak thus represents not merely the application of traditional Islamic ethics

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<sup>48</sup> Uswatun Hasanah, "Pendidikan Akhlak Dalam Keluarga Muslim Di Era Digital," *Al-Tarbawi Al-Hadithah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 7.1 (2022), 45–62 <<https://doi.org/10.24235/tarbawi.v7i1.10287>>.

<sup>49</sup> Ulwan. 145

to digital situations, but the emergence of a new domain of Islamic moral formation that is specific to the conditions of digitally saturated childhood

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated three questions concerning Islamic education for Generation Alpha in Blajo Village, Lamongan: the challenges parents face in sustaining Islamic education amid digital disruption, the mediation strategies families employ, and how *aqidah-ibadah-akhlak*-based formation operates as a digital character framework.

Regarding the first question, parents face three interconnected challenges. Digital media platforms structurally displace Islamic temporal rhythms by competing with *shalat* obligations through algorithmically sustained attention capture. Children increasingly individualize religious practice, withdrawing from communal worship in favor of private, comfort-driven observance. Most significantly, unregulated parental smartphone behavior constitutes a competing form of *keteladanan* that inadvertently legitimizes children's excessive device use — a reflexive dynamic previously untheorized in the Islamic digital parenting literature.

Regarding the second question, families employ four mediation strategy clusters: active temporal structuring that embeds Islamic obligations within bounded daily schedules; Islamic content facilitation that redirects digital affordances toward Quranic and religious learning resources; exemplary digital self-regulation by parents that restores *keteladanan* as *tarbiyah*'s foundational method; and communal religious socialization through *TPQ* and *pengajian* that constructs Islamic peer accountability as a counter-architecture to gaming culture.

Regarding the third question, Islamic character formation operates through a digitally recontextualized *aqidah-ibadah-akhlak* framework. *Aqidah* formation habituates *tawhid*-consciousness through daily *dhikr* routines. *Ibadah* formation integrates *keteladanan*, post-Maghrib Quran recitation, and Islamic digital content. *Akhlak* formation cultivates *shukr* and generosity as deliberate counter-practices to digital comparison culture — a formation dimension this study terms digital *akhlak*.

Two original theoretical contributions emerge: Islamic digital parenting, which integrates Ulwan's tarbiyah methods with contemporary mediation theory within an Islamic teleological orientation; and digital akhlak, which extends the classical tripartite framework into digital ethical formation. Both concepts address the theoretical gap left by secular mediation frameworks. The study's single-village scope warrants multi-site comparative research as a future direction.

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