



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF MALAYSIAN MUSLIM MOTHERS IN MEDIATING THEIR CHILDREN'S YOUTUBE USAGE

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Abstract

In this digital era, YouTube has become prominent in children's lives as a source of entertainment and education. Nonetheless, parents face conundrum in controlling or monitoring their children activities on YouTube. This research explores the significant role that Malaysian Muslim mothers play in mediating their children's engagement with YouTube. We aim to gain insights into the mothers' mediation strategies through in-depth interviews with three informants. Using a purposive sampling technique, we selected three Malaysian Muslim mothers of children aged 3-8 years old who actively viewed YouTube. We conducted semi-structured interviews, which allowed the informants to share their strategies, challenges, and perspectives regarding their children's YouTube usage. A thematic analysis based on mediation strategies theories was conducted to extract critical insights, including - 1) rules and guidelines, 2) mothers' roles, and 3) Islamic influences. The findings of this study suggest the used of restrictive and instructive mediation strategies to manage children's media consumption. These strategies aim to strike a balance between allowing children some autonomy in their media choices and ensuring the content aligns with the family's values and educational goals. They actively set time limits, verify the content, recommend Islamic content and explain the significance of good and bad content. Their commitment reflects a dynamic relationship between religious faith and digital parenting practices within the Malaysian Muslim context.

Keywords: Children; Mediating; Muslim mothers; Parenting; YouTube

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INTRODUCTION

YouTube has become an essential edutainment platform for people of all ages, including children (Izci et al., 2019; Neumann, 2020a; Caldeiro-Pedreira, 2022). Although children still spend most of their daily media time watching television, their use of online media has skyrocketed in recent years (Rideout, 2017). Based on a report in 2017, kids under the age of eight watch television and newer digital media (tablets, smartphones, e-readers) on average for two hours and 19 minutes per day. According to a recent study that polled 3,154 households, 80% of kids aged 0-7 watch YouTube, and 59% of them watch YouTube Kids, which range in length from 1.39 hours per day on weekdays and 1.47 hours per day during weekends (Neumann & Herodotou, 2020b). However, the abundance of inappropriate online content makes it difficult for parents to control how their children use the internet in a way that upholds their moral, religious, and cultural beliefs. (Rahayu & Lim, 2016; Zhao et al. (2023). Within this context, Malaysian Muslim mothers play a significant role in supervising their children's YouTube consumption. This role is influenced not only by the natural parental desire to safeguard and teach children but also by the unique sociocultural and religious context of Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country.

In today's digital world, where children may easily access online content, parents' roles in monitoring and directing their children's internet use have grown in importance (Bin-Tahir, 2019; Heaselgrave, 2023). Ofcom (2023) reported that the most prevalent worries among parents related to children's media use were their child viewing improper information (75%) or pornographic materials (73%) and experiencing online bullying through social media (70%) or games (54%). This issue is significant in Malaysia, a predominately Muslim country with a strong sense of cultural and religious identity. Muslim mothers in Malaysia face a conundrum since they must balance between letting their kids enjoy YouTube's instructional features and shielding them from anything that goes against their cultural and religious beliefs.

The study employs a qualitative research method - interviews, to garner insights directly from Malaysian Muslim mothers. Through these interviews, the research aims to shed light on the mediation strategies these mothers apply and how their religious faith influences their decision-making when selecting and approving YouTube channels and content for their children. Additionally, it explores the precautions taken to protect their children in the digital realm, reflecting the relationship between faith and digital parenting practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Power of YouTube to children

YouTube provides an immense number of videos covering topics ranging from learning numbers and words to science experiments that suit children's learning activities (Yaqoob et al., 2021). The convenient and entertaining approach created for kids has made it a platform parents and teachers use to increase their understanding (Zarzycki, 2021). Due to the simplicity of online access, children can study educational resources at their own pace, making YouTube a helpful tool for learning both inside and outside the classroom (Kilaq et al., 2023; Caldeiro-Pedreira et al., 2022). Neumann and Heridotou (2020b) stated that YouTube supports intellectual growth in early infancy and helps enhance children's knowledge, as well as their creativity, language, interest, and concentration. According to Elias and Sulkin (2017), humorous content, such as challenges (e.g., tasting hot pepper) and funny shows or pranks may attract children to watch YouTube. Children may tune out the world and sit quietly for hours viewing online content. This is supported by studies, which demonstrate that most children

spend 1 to 2 hours each day watching YouTube. There have even been reports of children who can spend more than 4 hours each day viewing YouTube. (Pertiwi et al., 2022).

Despite its advantages, YouTube has substantial problems as a medium of children's entertainment. When Google created the YouTube Kids app, it announced it to be a secure and educational media platform for kids of all ages, complete with a safety mode for automated screening of inappropriate content (Elias & Sulkin, 2017). However, the outcome fell far short of the company's assurance, and YouTube Kids has been strongly criticised for its absence of a reputable curation and showing of advertisement content, neglecting the well-established promotional restrictions implemented by both mainstream and cable television (Golin et al., 2015). Concerns have been raised about video addiction, exposure to offensive material, and accuracy and quality difficulties. (Kilag et al., 2023). Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2016) as cited in James and Kur (2020) classify the dangers connected with children's usage of digital media into four categories: conduct, content, contact, and business risks. Bullying, 'sexing,' and abuse of personal information are examples of behaviour concerns. Pornography, violence, bigotry, and incorrect or misleading information are all examples of content dangers.

Parental mediation on children's digital media usage

Major players in child development have expressed an interest in reducing the dangers related to children's usage of digital media. Parents, as crucial child socialising agents, can play a significant role in mitigating these dangers (Tripp, 2011 as cited in James & Kur, 2020). Digital mediation is one method of implementing this new parenting function. Rudnova et al. (2023) further propose that, in the context of children's internet and digital media use, mediation strategies are determined by the ratio of two broad characteristics of parental behaviours - parental control and parental support. Rasmussen, Ortiz, and White (2015) discovered the power of active mediation of pornographic material which lowers the detrimental indirect effects of children's pornography exposure and discourages future pornography consumption. The parental mediation theory, which was developed in the context of children's television viewing, specifies three major mediation strategies: 1) Restrictive mediation – parents set certain rules, 2) Evaluative mediation - parents assist their child in evaluating the content, and 3) Unfocused mediation - general nature of the interactions (Bybee et al., 1982). The restrictive mediation approach was found to be more effective than the other strategies in controlling children's unsafe experiences with digital media. James and Kur (2020).

Restrictive mediation includes making rules for children's media use including the approval of content, the time limits and the suitable contexts in which this is permitted (Shin & Lwin, 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) advised daily screen time limitations of one hour for preschoolers, one and a half hours for elementary school children, and two hours for middle school students. While no clinically advised time restrictions exist, health practitioners emphasise the importance of balancing screen time with family time (Michelson et al., 2021). A study by Zhao et al. (2023) found that most parents use multiple mediation strategies to control their children's social media use, with nearly half using all four strategies (active mediation, restrictive mediation, authoritarian surveillance, and nonintrusive inspection). Active mediation is more common among authoritative parenting methods, while restrictive mediation is more common among parents with better digital skills. Restrictive and active mediation strategies are often driven by maternal duty to supervise children's media use and support digital literacy. These strategies are intense, constant, and unyielding, taking physical and emotional tolls on mothers, who are tethered to their children's digital activities (Heaselgrave, 2023).

Islamic education and YouTube

Islamic education is a process that attempts to develop a full human being who believes in God Almighty, is capable and self-sufficient, and is capable of realising his existence as a caliph on earth led by Islamic teachings (Khoiriyati et al., 2021, as cited in Islamoğlu et al., 2022). The formation of Islamic religious principles in early life is critical because it can serve as a foundation for children's growth in subsequent years (Nurhayati et al., 2022). Islamic content on YouTube Kidz comprises streams of a collection of Islamic children's songs and prayers, an Islamic narrative series, and stories (Huda & Diponegoro, 2023). Millennial parents have also been participating in the YouTube Kids programme to help their children internalise Islamic principles. This YouTube Kids programme is used to mould children's attitudes, knowledge, and abilities. Children's attitudes, knowledge, and skills are formed by inviting them to view good content on YouTube Kids. (Dasapong et al., 2022). In addition to Islamic ideals, the participants believed that their children learned about the Islamic religion, such as prayer, the Qur'an, and the attributes of the Prophet Muhammad through YouTube.

Omar and Hana, a Malaysian cartoon that initially aired during Ramadan 2017, is popular among kids, particularly those aged 4 to 6. Islamic education and entertainment elements, such as Islamic children's songs and prayers, are featured in the animation (Nurani & Helmanto, 2021). Nussa and Rara relate the story of everyday life in the family and the community. It teaches and informs kids on how to act correctly in accordance with Islamic beliefs. This cartoon animation might alleviate parents' concerns about poor quality films (Islamoğlu et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences and perspectives of Muslim parents in Malaysia regarding their involvement in supervising children's YouTube usage. An interview protocol was designed to address the research objectives.

Subjects

The study used a purposive sampling technique in which we selected three Malaysian (Malay) Muslim mothers of children aged 3-8 years old who actively viewed YouTube as the informants in this study. Two of them are currently working as educators (holding Ph.D. degrees) while another informant is a stay-at-home mother (holding a master's degree).

Data collection

The data collection involved semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives. Prior to the interview sessions, we formulated interview protocols consisting of eight main questions along with several supplementary sub-questions. During the interview, we posed follow-up questions to gain deeper insights into the mothers including their experiences, strategies, and challenges in selecting or approving YouTube content for their children.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using a detailed process of thematic analysis. The interviews were audio-recorded and

transcribed verbatim. The themes are divided into three categories: 1) mothers' rules and guidelines, 2) mothers' roles and involvement, and 3) Islamic influences.

Research ethics

We had gained consent from all informants before they participated in this research through consent forms. We explained the research purpose, procedure, benefits, risk, as well as the confidentiality of their information.

Limitations of study

Since qualitative research relies on informants' perspectives which can be subjective, there may be variations in how different individuals within the same demographic navigate digital parenting. The reliance on memory and perception in informant responses may recall bias as it could be challenging to remember every detail of their experiences and practices with digital parenting. Next, informants may give answers that conform to social standards or expectations, potentially concealing particular behaviours or difficulties they encounter in their responsibilities as digital parents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained from interview sessions were presented based on the themes and mediation theory by Bybee et al., 1982) related to the objectives of this study. The data outlines the mediation strategies practised by three informants related to their children's media consumption. These strategies are discussed based on Bybee et al.'s (1982) mediation theory, which involves restrictive, and instructive mediation. Based on the data collated, there are three essential themes for the qualitative method: 1) Rules and Guidelines, 2) Mothers' Roles and Involvement, 3) Islamic Influences. The tables below depict the data following the research methods conducted.

Table 1: Theme 1 (Rules and guidelines set by mothers)

Objectives/ Themes & Mediation Strategy	Objective 1: To explore Malaysian Muslim mothers' mediation strategies
Rules & Guidelines - Restrictive mediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time limits: Informant 1 & 2 - one to two hours every day / Up to 4 hours during weekends Informant 3 - Strictly 30 minutes per child • Content Approval: Informant 1: <i>"I normally approve the content selected by my kids because I know what they will choose, but sometimes I will choose for them"</i> Informant 2: <i>"Not generally agree, not all videos on YouTube or YouTube Kids are suitable for children eventhough it is meant for children - the content is not too educational and does not fit our cultures esp Asian/muslim culture"</i>

Informant 3

“My kids choose their own channel with my supervision. There were channels that we disagree and we asked them to change”

Restrictive mediation

All three informants set time limits for their children's media consumption. Informants 1 and 2 allow their children to watch YouTube for one to two hours every day, with extended time up to four hours during weekends. This strategy reflects restrictive mediation by setting limits on the amount of time their children spend with media. However, Informant 3 adopts a stricter rule by imposing a stricter time limit of 30 minutes per child for media consumption. This represents a more stringent form of restrictive mediation, with a strong emphasis on limiting screen time.

In addition, the results imply that Informant 1 follows a relatively permissive approach regarding content approval. She mentioned that she normally approves the content selected by their children, indicating trust in their choices. Nevertheless, Informant 2 has a more critical attitude towards content approval and does not generally agree with all her kids’ selections. She emphasised that not all content, although intended for children, is appropriate especially to Asian or Muslim families. This approach involves a form of restrictive mediation by analysing content and withholding approval for material that does not align with her cultural and religious values. Informant 3 takes a balanced approach to content approval by allowing her kids to choose their own channels but supervises their choices. This strategy reflects restrictive mediation by supervising and intervening when necessary.

Table 2: Theme 2 (Mothers’ Roles)

Objectives/ Themes & Type of mediation	Objective 1: To explore Malaysian Muslim mothers’ mediation strategies
Mothers’ Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and Provide Justifications
- Combination of Restrictive and Instructive Mediation	<p>Informant 1 – <i>“I will go and look once in a while and ask them to change if I find out that they are watching inappropriate videos”</i></p> <p>Informant 2 – <i>“I have never let them watch TV (YouTube) without asking my permission. I think my husband has blocked certain videos that uum..we don’t really like, uum so my...my children will only watch what we feel safe and appropriate”</i></p> <p>Informant 3 – <i>“We place the TV at a location where we can easily monitor. The first step, every time they want to watch, they have to ask permission. The second step, I monitor the content (you can watch this kind of thing) It's not limited to learning videos, they can still watch relaxing videos like songs.. we have no objection as long as the song has no harsh words/sexual lyrics. The children are already aware of all the rules and they usually follow”.</i></p>

Combination of restrictive and instructive mediation

Informant 1 mentioned that she occasionally checks on her children's media consumption and asks them to change the content if she finds it inappropriate. This approach reflects both restrictive and instructive mediation. The act of checking on the children is a form of restrictive mediation, as it involves monitoring and control to ensure that the content is suitable. Asking the children to change inappropriate videos adds an instructive element. It allows for a discussion about why certain content is not suitable, helping children understand the reasons behind the restrictions.

Informant 2 and Informant 3 employ a more comprehensive approach to media management, combining both restrictive and instructive mediation strategies. Requiring the children to ask for permission before watching YouTube, and filtering the content are the aspects of restrictive mediation applied by Informant 2. In addition, she will advise her children if she finds that the content is unsuitable, which introduces an instructive mediation component. She also stated the act of her husband blocking certain videos which reflects the collaborative nature of media parenting and the importance of a shared approach to media management within the family. Informant 3 placed the TV at a location for easy monitoring, which is a form of restrictive mediation as it ensures visibility of what the children are watching. The insistence that children ask for permission before watching reflects parental control and restrictive mediation. Informant 3 also engages in content filtering by allowing specific types of content, ensuring that it is educational and free from harsh or sexual lyrics. This is a form of both restrictive and instructive mediation. The informant guides her children to understand what types of content are suitable and educates them about the potential negative influences, reflecting instructive mediation. The requirement for approval before watching a particular video ensures that children actively seek parental guidance, reinforcing instructive mediation.

Table 3: Theme 3 (Islamic influences)

Objectives/ Themes & Type of mediation	Objective 2: To Understand the Influence of Religion in their decision making
<p>Islamic influences</p> <p>- Instructive mediation</p>	<p>Islamic Videos Recommendations</p> <p>Informant 1: <i>“I sometimes suggest my kids to watch Omar hana. Their songs have lots of islamic values that are explained in a simple way..sometimes we feel it’s quite hard to explain good values to kids, but when we listen to omar hana, it seems easy and they also enjoyed watching and learned the values”</i></p> <p>Informant 2: <i>“I do actively seek for those content, but it’s not practically easy. But when they were still below 2, I can still select channel like didi & friends/ omar & hana. Omar & Hana is a really good - teaches good values - being reponsible to others/ helping others/ respecting parents/ learning arabic alphabets/ reciting Quran. But as they grow, they will independently select their own channel”</i></p> <p>Informant 3: <i>“Yes, I also suggest them to watch Islamic channels such as Umar Hana,</i></p>

<p><i>Nusa Rara/ the stories of the prophets, but the vidoes must also be filtered - make sure the source is reliable (sahih). We also recommend them to watch videos involving lessons – Fiqh & tauhid – as they can learn easily through videos”</i></p>
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Instructive mediation

The parents actively seek content that aligns with Islamic values for their children. This aligns with instructive mediation as they take an active role in selecting content. They recommend specific shows like "Omar & Hana" as a good choice for teaching values related to Islam such as being responsible to others, helping others, respecting parents, learning the Arabic alphabets, as well as reciting the Quran. Informant 1 mentioned the "Omar Hana," show has songs that convey Islamic values in a simpler way. This recommendation indicates instructive mediation as they actively point out that the content helps in explaining good values to their kids. Informant 2 stated that as children grow, they will independently select their own channels. This awareness indicates an understanding of the changing media needs of their children and the need for them to apply what they have learned independently. Informant 3 emphasised the importance of ensuring that the content sources are reliable (*sahih*) when recommending Islamic content. This guidance ensures that children are exposed to accurate and authentic Islamic teachings, which align with instructive mediation. This parent also suggests that children watch videos that involve lessons on topics like *Fiqh* and *Tauhid* (Islamic study). This is a direct example of instructive mediation, as it involves actively promoting educational content that aligns with Islamic teachings.

The findings of this study suggest the use of Bybee et al. (1982) restrictive and instructive mediation strategies to manage children's media consumption. These strategies aim to strike a balance between allowing children some autonomy in their media choices and ensuring the content aligns with the family's values and educational goals. Based on the findings, a group of Malaysian Muslim mothers actively set time limits, verified the content, recommended Islamic content and explained the significance of good and bad content. All of the informants set specific time limits on their children's media consumption. They allow their children to watch for 30 minutes to two hours every day and up to four hours during weekends, which is a clear example of restrictive mediation. This approach helps in managing screen time and preventing excessive media use, which can have negative effects on children's development, including their physical and social well-being (Heaselgrave, 2023).

Informant 2 takes restrictive mediation a step further by actively supervising their children while they watch YouTube. This approach not only restricts access but also explains why certain content is not appropriate, encouraging media literacy and critical thinking. This level of active supervision aligns with restrictive mediation strategies to maintain control over the media environment and ensure content appropriateness (Zhao et al., 2023).

It is important to note that Informant 2 conceded that as their children grow, they will eventually select their own channels and content. This recognition demonstrates an understanding of the evolving media habits of children and the gradual transition from restrictive to more independent media choices. This finding can be related to a study by Michelson et al. (2021) who mentioned that it is essential for adapting parental mediation strategies over time. Informant 2 goes beyond just setting time limits and actively engages in instructive mediation by filtering content and requiring their children to ask for permission before watching videos. By doing so, Informant 2 not only restricts access to potentially inappropriate content but also uses this as an opportunity to explain why certain content is inappropriate. This adds an instructive element to the mediation strategy, helping children

understand the reasoning behind content choices and fostering media literacy.

Both Informant 2 and Informant 3 provide explanations regarding inappropriate content. Informant 2 explains why certain content is inappropriate, which aligns with instructive mediation by providing context and guidance to the children. Informant 3 takes a similar approach by suggesting that content should be filtered and justifying the inappropriateness of certain content. This instructive aspect helps children develop a deeper understanding of media content and its alignment with family values.

In summary, the data shows that the parents employ both restrictive and instructive mediation strategies to manage their children's media consumption. Restrictive mediation involves setting time limits and, active supervision to control the media environment and ensure age-appropriate content while instructive mediation is evident when they filter content, require permission, and explain why certain content is inappropriate.

CONCLUSION

This study seeks to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of parental involvement in the digital age, focusing on Malaysian Muslim mothers' approaches to monitoring and controlling their children's YouTube consumption. By investigating their practices and perspectives, this research aims to unravel the strategies employed by these mothers to ensure that their children's online experiences align with their Islamic faith. It delves into the balance they strike between allowing their children access to the digital world for educational and recreational purposes and safeguarding them from inappropriate or harmful content.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that all three informants employ a combination of restrictive and instructive mediation strategies to manage their children's media consumption effectively. These strategies aim to maintain control over the content and time spent on media while also fostering media literacy and an understanding of appropriate content choices related to their Islamic perspectives.

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