

Children's Interpretations of Digital Islamic Narratives and Parents' Perceptions of Their Religious and Educational Credibility: A Qualitative Audience Reception Study

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Article information

Article History:

Received: 2026-05-31

Received in revised form:
2026-06-18

Accepted: 2026-06-30

Published Online: 2026-07-25

Keywords:

Digital Islamic Stories;
Children's Interpretation;
Parents' Perception;
Audience Reception Theory;
Religious Credibility;
Educational Credibility;
Islamic Education; The
Thematic Analysis; NVivo.

ABSTRACT

The present study is a descriptive qualitative research that examines the meaning making process of children comprehended from the digital Islamic narratives as well as parents' judgment of the religious and educational value of the meaningful parents. The study was based on Audience Reception Theory which involves semi-structured interviews with six children and five parents, using purposive sampling. Data from interviews were analyzed thematically according to the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke, with the assistance of NVivo software. The results reveal that children are not passive recipients of digital Islamic stories, but rather are actively involved and derive moral lessons from the storytelling, animation, and visual elements. The parents, in turn, feel these stories can be helpful for teaching Islamic values and for development of moral values and principles, provided they are accurate and in line with the Qur'an and Sunna. The findings of this study are valuable in outlining the significant role of digital media in the religious education of children, as well as explaining the importance of parental guidance and the presence of reliable Islamic media.



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Introduction

Digital technology has impacted on the way in which children access information, education and religious knowledge. In today's world, with the advent of smartphones, tablets and internet access, children are learning outside of the classroom and beyond the family home. Religious media is one of them, it is a way for children to learn about religion, morality and history in a format that is truly engaging.

Children convey their Islamic teachings, values, and history mainly through digital Islamic stories. These include animated videos, story videos, school-based Apps, and videos on YouTube and other platforms. Combining animation, story and sound with visual illustration, these stories engage a younger audience in religious education, making it more interactive and accessible. Therefore, many children now look to such material to gain knowledge about the Qur'an, the lives of the Prophets, Islamic history, morals and values (such as honesty, kindness, patience, respect etc.).

The media was once perceived as a passive medium of consumption and whatever message was being sent was received by the audience. A more recent media theory, however, posits that audiences actively construct meaning and interpretation from their own experiences, culture and social environment. This is well reflected in Audience Reception Theory, which suggests that audiences interpret media messages in varying ways based upon their prior attitudes and experiences. It is useful to use that focus on children's interactions with Islamic stories told digitally to understand how children understand the religious stories and what they learn from them.

Knowing this background, this study investigates children's interpretations of digital Islamic stories and parents' religious and educational assessment of their credibility in the context of Pakistan. The study seeks to delve into the intersection of children's experiences and parents' perspectives, in order to explore how children, learn about religion, their moral thinking and engagement

with media in this context and what parents expect from the authenticity and learning outcomes of digital Islamic content. Pakistan is a predominantly Muslim nation, in which religious education is at the core of the upbringing of the children. The traditional methods of children learning about Islam are from their parents, schools, mosques and madarasas. With the proliferation of smart phones and access to the internet, the children's access to digital Islamic content has expanded too. A large number of families are using YouTube channels, Islamic education applications, and animated stories to supplement what children are learning from their religious education elsewhere. While these are easy to use and enjoyable, they pose authentic questions regarding the validity, correctness and trustworthiness of the material being taught online. This leaves parents in a delicate situation, as they are responsible for ensuring that what children are exposed to is in line with true Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Research Questions

1. How do children understand the religious and moral messages given in the digital narratives they find in Islamic texts?
2. What is parents' perspective on the religious authenticity and educational value of digital Islamic narratives?
3. How do parents contribute to children's engagement and understanding of digital Islamic narratives?

Research Objectives

1. To discuss the children's understanding of Islamic stories in the digital format and the religious and moral messages these stories may contain.
2. To engage with parents' perceptions of religious authenticity and educational credibility of digital Islamic narratives.
3. To appreciate the importance of parental supervision in children's involvement with digital Islamic stories.

Significance of the Study

This paper is one in a line of research into digital religion, children's media and Islamic education that utilises Audience Reception Theory to understand children's reception of digital Islamic narratives. It has both theoretical and educational significance, as well as implications for educators, parents, Islamic content producers and policy-makers. The results emphasize the importance of creating age-appropriate and religiously appropriate digital Islamic resources that are engaging for children to ensure they have authentic and appropriate material to help develop their moral and religious lives. They might also be able to assist the families and educational institutions to make informed decisions on the effective use of digital media in Islamic education in Pakistan.

Research Gap

Previous studies have examined children's use of digital media, online religious education and the potential educational advantages of digital Islamic narratives, but few studies have explored children's own interpretations of digital Islamic narratives. The existing literature has focused on the content, learning outcomes, or technology, while children's experiences and meaning making have rarely been explored. Likewise, scant consideration has been afforded to parents' views on the religious authenticity and educational credentials of this content. Very few studies are available which combine the interpretation of children with the evaluations of parents in a single frame-- especially in Muslim societies. This study attempts to fill that void by examining both sides in detail.

Literature Review

Digital storytelling has become an innovative education approach which combines traditional storytelling with the use of animation, images, audio and video, and interactive education. Storytelling is an effective teaching method that has evolved with the advent of increased digital technology, utilizing visual, auditory, and narrative techniques to enhance children's learning. There

is no doubt that it is much more than just traditional storytelling, as it involves the active participation, critical thinking, creativity and emotional engagement of the audience; making it particularly effective for young learners in both formal and informal settings. Recent research indicated that digital storytelling was not only used as a tool to entertain and motivate children, but also to enhance their understanding, communication, and long-term memory.

Digital storytelling has proven to be a powerful teaching tool in educational environments, creating meaningful learning experiences around the narrative. It's a way of putting learning in an entertaining story with multimedia to make children recognize and apply what they know to what they are learning. This method is found to increase engagement, collaborative learning, and digital literacy and higher order thinking skills. Children who engage in digital storytelling activities are also found to be more enthusiastic in learning process than those who only learn with traditional learning.

Digital Storytelling differs from traditional storytelling in that it empowers the learner to be an active participant, not a passive receiver of information. Recent systematic reviews indicate that it has been proven to be an effective strategy in various educational contexts, in that it increases children's collaboration in learning, digital literacy, communication skills, and cognitive engagement (Mayer, 2021; Clark & Mayer, 2023; Chi et al., 2025).

In the Islamic educational field, digital storytelling has been increasingly gaining interest in teaching religious knowledge and moral values. The Qur'an is animated, interactive and presented in multimedia apps, allowing children to learn about the Qur'an, the lives of the Prophets, Islamic history and moral values in an accessible manner. The use of visual story-telling with Islamic themes enables children to relate to the content in an emotional way whilst providing them with a greater understanding of Islamic identity and character. Recent research has shown that digital storytelling can effectively enhance the

motivation, engagement, and knowledge of religious concepts in Islamic education, when compared to conventional methods.

Nevertheless, academics note that digital storytelling can be as successful as the content it represents is good, true and succinct. In religious education, in particular, stories should be true to Islamic teaching but age appropriate and captivating for young viewers. The impact of a digital narrative as an effective educational tool is important but the children's interpretation of it and the credibility assessment done by parents is also important. It is these concerns that inform the current study, which examines children's interpretations of digital narratives on Islam and the perceived religious and educational validity of these narratives by the parents in the Pakistani context.

Digital narratives in Islamic education have emerged as a new product of digital technology's integration with Islamic education, which uses animated video, educational apps, and internet platforms to provide the stories of the Prophets, Qur'anic events, Islamic history and moral teaching. These stories are intended to engage the students in the learning of religious education and at the same time, maintain Islamic values and identity. Research indicates Islamic digital storytelling, which combines interactive multimedia and religious content, enhances the motivation, moral awareness and emotional engagement of students in learning religious teachings. Meanwhile, researchers warn that digital Islamic stories should be careful not to distort the religious teachings and make them sound too simplistic, as inaccuracies can lead children to misunderstand Islam (Rahmayuni et al., 2025; Rohman & Nasiruddin, 2025).

According to the current theory of media, children actively, and when interpreting digital media, they filter it in regard to their developmental stage and previous knowledge, family atmosphere and culture. When children are exposed to digital stories, they construct meaning for themselves through the appreciation of the events in the stories by making these events a part of their own

experiences. The use of visual elements (animation, facial expression, sound effects, colorful graphics) enhances children's emotional involvement and helps them better understand the concepts. Digital storytelling has also been found to aid children's language development, creativity, critical thinking, and long-term retention by its active engagement with the narrative content (Hall, 1980; Chi et al., 2025; Mayer, 2021).

Parents are key to the mediation of children's relationships with digital Islamic stories. They are not only selecting the content suitably, but also determining whether the stories convey Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and authentic Hadith or not. Studies have shown that the internet offer parental access to Islamic stories and narratives that are easily available and engaging for children, however parents express concerns about the authenticity of religious content on the internet. Due to this, parents tend to prefer content that is respectful towards the Prophet (saws), includes legitimate sources, and presents the concepts of Islam in age-appropriate ways (Maylani et al., 2025; Rohman & Nasiruddin, 2025).

Parents appreciate digital Islamic stories as a valuable education tool as it helps them to make learning the Islamic faith enjoyable, interactive and accessible. Children learn Islamic history and moral values better through animation, narration and storytelling techniques than through traditional teaching. However, parents feel that digital stories should be used in addition to parental guidance. Discussing the stories with children after they view them enhances their understanding and ethical judgment and contributes to the educational impact of the content (Maylani et al., 2025; Pratiwi & Muthiah, 2025).

The study is based on Audience Reception Theory proposed by Hall (1980) which states that audience members interpret messages from the media texts based on their own worldview, not passively absorbing what the message is supposed to mean. According to Hall's encoding decoding model, media producers encode

meaning into media products, and audience members decode the meaning according to their experiences, beliefs, social and cultural backgrounds. This means that a media text can be seen differently by people. When it comes to digital narratives, children identify Islamic stories based on their own life experience and parents assess those stories within their religious beliefs and educational goals. Thus, the Audience Reception Theory is an appropriate theory to analyse the interpretations of children and perceptions of parents concerning Islamic digital stories.

While previous studies have demonstrated the educational benefits of digital storytelling and have identified the increasing significance of Islamic digital media, there are still a number of gaps. First, most of the studies are conducted in the context of digital storytelling in general education programs and not specifically about digital Islamic narratives for children. Second, research on children's experiences and research on parents' perceptions are more likely to be treated separately, with little interest in how children and parents are interacting. Thirdly, there is a lack of empirical research that explores parents' perceptions of the religious and educational credibility of digital Islamic narratives. Finally, qualitative studies conducted in Pakistan to explore children's interpretation in addition to parents' perceptions using ART are limited. The purpose of this study is to fill these gaps by providing a detailed qualitative analysis of the interpretation of children and their perception of digital Islamic narratives with parents in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design based on the interpretivist research paradigm to understand how children interpret the digital Islamic narratives and parents' perceptions of the credibility of the Islamic narratives in their religious and educational context. Because the purpose of the study was not to measure variables or test a hypothesis, a qualitative approach was

appropriate. Qualitative inquiry enabled rich detailed data that were context specific to be obtained through in-depth conversation with participants, as the research focused on understanding how children understand digital Islamic content and how parents judge the authenticity and educational value of the digital Islamic content.

The study adhered to the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that individuals construct meaning within their own experiences, culture and social interaction. It was a good fit because the interpretations of digital Islamic stories and the evaluation of their authenticity by children are influenced by their beliefs, religious values, family environment, and lived experience. The researcher found that an interpretivist approach enabled him to move closer to the participants' point of view and to be able to extract meaning for the growing experience and interpretation of digital Islamic narratives in the Pakistani context.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in the Pakistani context where digital technology has been increasing in its availability and influence on access to religious and educational content for children. Children have access to the stories of the Prophets, Qur'anic teaching and moral lessons through engaging online learning experiences, particularly through platforms like YouTube, mobile apps and other digital media. With their wide use in religious education today, the context of Pakistan provided an ideal platform for examining children's understandings of Islamic narratives on the internet and parents' understandings of the credibility of these.

Eleven participants joined (six children aged 6-12, and five parents) through purposive sampling. Children were selected for the study because they were consistent in their engagement with digital Islamic tales, and were able to communicate their experience and interpretation of these stories during the interviews. Parents were included as they are a pivotal group in the process of guiding,

supervising and reviewing digital religious content their children engage with. The researcher had the opportunity to present both groups in the study and thus enabled the researcher to explore the combined view of children's interactions with Islamic digital narratives and the parent's perceptions of their authenticity and instructional value in the Pakistani context.

Sampling Technique

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to provide rich and relevant information relevant to the aims of the study. This is a non-probability approach, and is frequently used in qualitative research to allow the researcher to intentionally choose individuals who have first-hand knowledge and experience with the phenomenon being examined. In this context, children that have been selected due to their regular access to digital Islamic stories on online platforms like YouTube and mobile apps, and parents that are active in monitoring and guiding their children's digital media consumption and religious education.

The final number of children and parents involved in the sample was six children and five parents, a number appropriate for an in-depth qualitative study of this type. The research did not seek to be statistically representative but rather to provide in-depth and meaningful information regarding the experiences and perspectives of participants. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, which occurred when additional interviews did not contribute significantly in terms of additional data or themes. This allowed for sufficient data to be obtained to fulfill the research goals and to enable a detailed theme analysis.

Data Collection

Semi-structured conversations were conducted one-on-one with children and parents. This format was selected because it provides a flexible yet systematic approach to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, while allowing for follow-up questions, if

necessary. An interview guide was created for consistency of the interviews. Questions focused on the children's experience of watching digital Islamic stories; what they liked best; how the stories made sense; and the effect of story, animation and visuals on their learning. Parents were invited to discuss their perceptions of the religious authenticity and educational credibility of digital Islamic stories, the positive and negative aspects of this type of material, and their supervision and guidance over their children's digital media consumption.

The interviews were conducted in a comfortable and familiar environment which allowed the participants to express themselves freely. Informed consent was obtained from all parents prior to the beginning of the interviews and assent from the children. The interviews were audio recorded with consent of the participants to ensure that the information was accurate. These recordings were subsequently verbatim transcribed and the richness of data retained for thematic analysis while allowing for the researcher to retain the participant's original response.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report on themes in the interview data, a method that is widely used and accepted in the field of qualitative data analysis. This method was chosen for its flexibility and its fit with exploring participants' experiences and perceptions. The analysis process was carried out in six phases: familiarization (re-reading transcripts), initial coding, identifying themes, revisiting and refining themes, naming and defining themes, and writing the analysis report. This systematic approach enabled the researcher to identify patterns that were linked to the interpretations children had of digital Islamic stories and what parents thought of the credibility of the religious and educational content within the stories.

To facilitate the organisation, coding and management of interview data, NVivo qualitative

data analysis software was used. It facilitated the systematic classification of the codes, it facilitated the retrieval of relevant text segments and it facilitated the mapping of the relations between themes, giving transparency and efficiency to the analysis. The software was used as an aid in data management, but the analysis and development of themes continued to be the responsibility of the researcher, which would allow the results to be participants' views and remain within the qualitative data.

Trustworthiness

In order to make the findings credible and trustworthy, the study adhered to the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability. The following are criteria widely accepted for qualitative research to determine the rigor and reliability of findings. To ensure that the participants' views were accurately understood and interpreted, their statements were accurately transcribed verbatim and read back to them. This allowed the researcher to develop themes that were true to participant's experiences and views.

A detailed record of the research process was maintained, from participant selection through to data collection, coding and theme development, ensuring there is a transparent audit trail of how the research has progressed on to ensure dependability. Confirmability was achieved by presenting findings from the participants' responses and not the researcher's opinion or assumption. The transferability was enhanced by providing a detailed description of the research setting, participant characteristics and methodological procedures, thus enabling the reader or future researcher to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings to research settings and populations similar to the one in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were considered throughout the research process to ensure that all participants' dignity and wellbeing were maintained. Informed consent was obtained with all parents involved in

the study, and assent was obtained with the children after explaining the purpose and procedures of the study in an age appropriate manner prior to data collection. Each participant was assured that there was no reason for them to participate that they could not withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation or suffering any consequences. They also were assured that what they shared would be kept strictly confidential and would be used only for academic research.

In order to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the participants, their information was anonymized during transcription, analysis and reporting by using pseudonyms. All interview tapes, the transcriptions and related materials were securely preserved and only the researcher could access them. The following measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality of participants, to ensure the integrity of the research and in compliance with accepted ethical standards of qualitative research with adults and children.

Data Analysis and Findings

Theme 1: Child's Perceptions of Digital Islamic Stories

The interview results indicated that children were active interpreters of digital Islamic narratives instead of passive viewers. Each participant was able to describe the moral and religious lessons that were given in the stories in their own words. The majority of children talked about learning values like honesty, kindness, patience, forgiveness, respecting others and obeying Allah and how the stories made them know right from wrong and helped them to use these values in their daily lives. They also claimed that watching digital Islamic narrations had raised their interest to learn about Islam and to have more knowledge of religious teaching.

Child 1 (9 years): "I like the stories because they inspire me to tell the truth like the Prophet Mohammad (SWS): I don't like to lie after seeing these videos.

Child 3 (8 years): "I learnt from the story of Prophet Yusuf (AS) we must forgive people even when they hurt us.

The children have also learnt about the Prophets as positive role models whose behaviour and character encouraged them to develop positive habits that they would also like to emulate. They valued the attributes of the Prophets for example – truthfulness, compassion, courage, patience, etc – and wished to demonstrate those attributes in their own lives. Participants related the events and moral lessons in the stories and related how they did so in their own lives at home and school, indicating that they actively related digital stories to real life situations. The overall results indicate that digital Islamic narratives have significant contribution in developing children's moral reasoning, religious understanding, and their character development.

Theme 2: Children's engagement with Digital Islamic Narratives

It was clear that children were attracted to the interactive, visually stimulating digital Islamic stories. The stories were most successful for most participants thanks to colorful animation, attractive characters, clear narration, background music and visual effects. The use of stories and multimedia helped to engage and motivate children to continue watching, unlike more traditional religious instruction. Most indicated that they would like to read animated Islamic stories because of their entertainment value, ease of understanding, and simplicity in explaining religion. When asked if they find the animation to be funny and colorful,

Child 2 (7 years) responds, "No, I do not get bored, I want to see more Islamic stories.

Child 4 (10 years): "Child 4 has told me the stories – they stay in his/her mind because of the pictures and voices."

The interviews also revealed the benefits of these engaging features in the children's understanding and recall of religious instruction. Participants reported that they remembered stories about the

Prophets and Qur'anic events better and remembered moral lessons better after the animated digital content. Some children spoke about how the pictures and the story reminded them of the values they had to practise every day, including honesty, being kind, being patient and respectful. This indicates that animation, narration and visual stories not only engage children's interest, but also enhance children's understanding, retention and application of religious and moral messages.

Theme 3: Parents' Perceptions of Religious Credibility

Overall, parents perceived the digital Islamic stories as beneficial for religious education of their children provided they were authentic and consistent with Islamic principles. Religious information in digital stories should be based on the Qur'an, the authentic Hadiths and should reflect Islamic beliefs, values and historical events with accuracy – the majority of participants emphasized this point. Some online content contained inaccurate interpretations and unverified information that could affect children's religious understandings in a negative way, parents were concerned. As a result, they viewed authenticity as the most crucial element to consider when evaluating the veracity of digital Islamic stories.

Parent 1: "I make sure that the story being watched is based on the Qur'an and authentic hadiths before I let my child watch it.

Parent 3: "There are misleading information in some online videos so parents must check the source.

The interviews also revealed that parents were quite active in selecting and overseeing the digital Islamic material children consumed. Many indicated that they like videos and apps made by trusted Islamic scholars, recognised Islamic educational institutions or reputable Islamic organisations. Some watched with their children and discussed the religious messages with them following the viewing to ensure that they had grasped the message. Overall, the results indicated

that parents are not just passively exposing their children to whatever digital Islamic content is available, but carefully consider the religious credibility of digital content before allowing their children to access it, suggesting that parental supervision plays a key role in shaping children's digital religious learning.

Theme 4: Parents' Perceptions of the Educational Credibility

Parent participants considered digital Islamic stories as educational tools which assisted children in learning their religion and developing their morals. The participants believed that the animated stories, the visual illustration and engaging storytelling helped children to understand and retain Islamic concepts easily. Several reported seeing their children engage in the lives of the Prophets, the history of Islam and moral values after watching digital Islamic material. They also highlighted the effectiveness of using both visual and audio media to focus children's attention, understanding and retention of religious knowledge, thus adding value to more traditional pedagogy.

Parent 2: "My child enjoys learning through animated Islamic stories, and he retains the lessons longer than if he reads them.

Parent 4: "These videos are helpful but should be used to complement, not supplant, what kids are learning at home and school.

Despite appreciating the pedagogical advantages, parents also made it abundantly clear that digital Islamic narratives should not supplant the traditional religious education which was offered by the families, schools, mosques and madarasas. Many participants emphasized the role of parents in educating children about religious messages in the right way and its implementation into everyday life. Shared stories, parent answering kids' questions, and parent supervision of their digital media use helped to strengthen the educational impact and minimize misinterpretation or exposure to inappropriate media content, parents said. The findings indicated that the educational credibility of the

digital Islamic stories has increased if the parents are involved in the learning process of their children and the parents use digital media in combination with other traditional Islamic education.

Discussion

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that digital Islamic stories are an important medium in helping children learn about Islam from a religious perspective, morally, and for their character formation. This finding is aligned with Audience Reception Theory (Hall, 1980) that indicates children are active interpreters of digital media and not passive recipients. In the analyses of this study, the children were found to understand and interpret the moral and religious messages that are conveyed by digital Islamic stories by relating them to their experiences and everyday life. They selected values as honesty, kindness, patience, forgiveness and respect, and observed the behaviour of the Prophets as positive role models and examples for them to emulate. The results also revealed that the use of multimedia elements such as animation, narration, colorful pictures and storytelling enhances children's engagement, understanding, and memorization of the Islamic teachings. Overall, this indicates that digital Islamic narratives can be entertaining, informative, and meaningful for young audiences to learn from and enjoy.

Parents also felt that digital Islamic narratives can be valuable educational resources, with the requirement that they be religiously authentic and based on Qur'an and authentic Hadith. The majority highlighted the need for children to select quality online content and to be actively involved in their children's use of media in order to ensure that religious messages are properly interpreted. They felt that parents' guidance was very significant for their children to understand the Islamic teachings correctly and use moral values in their daily lives. This further corroborates Audience Reception Theory suggesting that the interpretation of digital Islamic narratives is not only dependent on the children's interpretation

but also on the children's parents' mediation and family discussions. The overall results of the study suggest that the production of interesting, age-appropriate and religiously authentic digital Islamic learning resources is useful, and that parents' active involvement is needed to maximize the benefit of their children's religious learning and moral development.

Conclusion

In this study, the interpretation of digital Islamic narratives and their religious and educational credibility among children in the Pakistani context and their parents applied qualitative audience reception approach. The results indicated that digital Islamic narratives are one of the media that can support children's religious learning, moral values, and understanding of Islamic values. Children engaged with the moral messages in digital stories and demonstrated their ability to link values to their lives and experiences, including honesty, kindness, a willingness to wait, forgiveness and respect. The use of multimedia, such as animation, storytelling and narration, further enhanced children's interest, understanding and retention of religious knowledge.

The study also emphasizes the pivotal role of the central parent in assessing and intervening in the child's participation in digital Islamic content. Parents emphasized that this content have to be based on the Qur'ān and authentic hadīth, and complement rather than supplant the traditional Islamic education they receive from their families, schools, mosques, and madarasas. Active parental supervision and discussion were found to be a key to ensuring accurate understanding of religious teaching and children are not being exposed to misleading or inauthentic information.

The findings indicated digital Islamic narratives' supporting effect on children's religious learning, moral development, and understanding of Islamic values in accordance with Audience Reception Theory (Hall, 1980) which children were active in interpreting the moral messages and link values of honesty, kindness, patience, and respect to their

daily lives. This is in line with Clark and Mayer (2023), which indicated that an effective use of visual and verbal information in multimedia learning environments improve learners' engagement and comprehension. It is also consistent with Mayer (2021), who proposed the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML), which describes how animation, narration, and visual narration can enhance learners' understanding, retention, and meaningful learning. The study also confirms the view of Livingstone and Helsper (2008) that parental mediation is a key determinant on how children are using digital media and the learning that they gain from it. In this study, parents viewed the use of digital Islamic stories as an effective teaching tool, but were distinct that the narratives must be genuine, be based on the Qur'ān and Hadith, and supported by the parents' involvement. The results support the importance of having parents to informally engage in supporting their children's religious and moral development when they are using engaging digital media. This study takes a multi-layered approach by using children's interpretation and parents' perception respectively in the context of Pakistan, as well as it extends the scope of Audience Reception Theory to Islamic education in the digital era and contributes to the emerging field of research on children's interaction with the digital educational media.

The results align with Audience Reception Theory since the findings reveal that children's understandings of digital Islamic stories are formed when the media messages, their experiences, and parental guidance intersect. The study thus extends the theory in the context of digital religious education and contributes to a growing body of literature on children's engagement with religious education in the digital context.

Overall, the study indicates that high-quality Islamic stories or narratives presented in the digital media format, with the inclusion of authentic Islamic content and active involvement of parents, can be valuable education resources for children to develop their moral values, Islamic

understanding, and character. The findings also have implications for educators, parents, digital content creators and policymakers who are designing digital learning resources that are engaging, age appropriate, and religiously authentic. Further studies might consider a wider range of population groups and a mixed method and/or longitudinal design, with a view to gaining a clearer understanding of the long-term effects of digital Islamic stories on children's religious and moral development.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable understanding into how children interpret digital Islamic narratives and the perceptions of their religious and educational credibility by parents, certain limitations are highlighted. First, the study was based on a rather small qualitative sample of children and parents from Pakistan. The sample size was appropriate for in-depth qualitative exploration and there was data saturation, but the results are context-specific and are not mobile across populations or different cultural, religious or geographical contexts.

Secondly, the study only used semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection. Therefore, the results are based on self-reported experiences and perceptions of the participants, which may be influenced by recall bias and/or social desirability bias, especially when participants are discussing religious beliefs and parenting practices. The use of other qualitative techniques (e.g., observation, focus group discussion and digital media usage diary) may have added rich data and enhanced the validity of the results based on triangulation.

Third, the study employed a cross sectional qualitative design and thus it is only a snapshot of what people actually think at one moment in time. It therefore does not explore the possibility of changes in children's understandings of digital Islamic texts or their parents' understandings over time, considering increased levels of digital exposure, and changing family and educational environments. A longitudinal approach would

provide greater insight into what digital Islamic stories might look like long term when it comes to children's religious learning and their moral growth.

Lastly, this study was limited to the study of the digital Islamic narratives in the context of Pakistan. The results of these studies may not reflect the experiences of children and parents in other Muslim communities where cultural traditions, education and digital media consumption might be different. Further studies need to expand on these limitations by employing larger and more varied samples, mixed methods or repeated studies, and cross-cultural comparisons to develop a more comprehensive body of knowledge about the role of digital Islamic stories in children's religious learning.

Recommendations

As a result of this, a number of recommendations are made for researchers, educators, parents, digital content creators and policymakers. The study findings could be extended to larger and more diverse samples across different regions of Pakistan, and other Muslim communities, to enhance transferability and applicability of the results. Longitudinal designs should also be taken into account to monitor the shifting interpretations of digital Islamic stories, as well as the children's moral and religious attitudes over time. Combining qualitative and quantitative research (mixed methods studies) may provide a more complete understanding of the ways children access digital Islamic content and its educational outcomes.

To make Islamic stories come to life on digital platforms, a synergy is necessary between Islamic scholars, teachers, psychologists, curriculum experts and digital media experts. Such interdisciplinary efforts can contribute to the religious authenticity, developmentally appropriate, pedagogically sound and child-friendly nature of digital content. Content development should be based on the Qur'an and authentic Hadith and be interactive, engaging, and

designed using good animation and language appropriate for the child to enhance learning.

Parents and teachers should continue to play a vibrant role in children's digital media consumption, selecting trustworthy Islamic media and monitoring children's consumption of media, and facilitating language, discussion, and reflection on the religious and moral lessons embedded in digital narratives. These interactions can enhance children's understanding of Islamic teachings and help them live with positive values. Educational institutions could also explore the use of carefully selected digital Islamic stories in the classroom

and religious education curriculum, to supplement the traditional methods of instruction.

Lastly, policies and educational authorities should promote the creation of quality standards and frameworks to assess children's digital Islamic material, to protect its educational value and religious authenticity. Collaborations between educational institutions, religious scholars and digital media developers can help in creating authentic, engaging and culturally relevant digital Islamic materials that can aid children's religious learning, moral development and character building throughout their lives.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research.

Funding Statement

No funding is received for this project.