

Ethically Bounded Expression on TikTok among Muslim Generation Z Students

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Received: 2026-04-06

Revised: 2026-04-25

Accepted: 2026-05-08

Published: 2026-06-30

Abstract

TikTok research often separates self-expression, religious identity, and problematic use. This qualitative descriptive study examined how eight Muslim Generation Z undergraduates in an Islamic Communication and Broadcasting program at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari, Indonesia, negotiated these concerns in everyday TikTok use. Six participants primarily created content and two were dominant viewers; creator roles sometimes overlapped with affiliate selling or product promotion. Preliminary observation occurred from August to October 2025, and interview records were produced from October 2025 to January 2026, supported by field notes and documentation. Iterative cross-case analysis identified four themes: expressive visibility, lightweight relationality, ethical boundary work, and ambivalent utility. Participants used trends, comments, shares, live streams, and short-form storytelling to express identity and sustain social ties. Ethical limits included careful language, nonjudgment, avoidance of hostile exchanges, source checking, and commercial honesty. Only one participant explicitly named Islamic adab; others described comparable limits in broader moral or practical terms. Creators reported confidence, portfolios, work opportunities, and income, while viewers emphasized entertainment and information. Across positions, useful academic content coexisted with compulsive scrolling, lost time, and postponed tasks. The study conceptualizes this pattern as ethically bounded expression: active platform participation constrained by situated ethical judgment, with Islamic adab providing an explicit frame for some participants rather than a uniform motive across the sample.

Keywords: TikTok; Muslim youth; digital self-expression; Islamic communication ethics; uses and gratifications

Abstrak

Penelitian tentang TikTok sering membahas ekspresi diri, identitas keagamaan, dan penggunaan bermasalah secara terpisah. Studi deskriptif kualitatif ini mengkaji cara delapan mahasiswa Muslim Generasi Z pada Program Studi Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam, Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari, Indonesia, menegosiasikan ketiga aspek tersebut dalam penggunaan TikTok sehari-hari. Enam partisipan terutama berperan sebagai kreator konten dan dua lainnya sebagai penonton dominan; peran kreator terkadang beririsan dengan afiliasi penjualan atau promosi produk. Observasi awal dilakukan pada Agustus–Oktober 2025, sedangkan data wawancara dihimpun pada Oktober 2025–Januari 2026 dengan dukungan catatan lapangan dan dokumentasi. Analisis lintas kasus secara iteratif menghasilkan empat tema: visibilitas ekspresif, relasionalitas ringan, pembentukan batas etis, dan kegunaan yang ambivalen. Partisipan memanfaatkan tren, komentar, fitur berbagi, siaran langsung, dan penceritaan singkat untuk mengekspresikan identitas serta mempertahankan hubungan sosial. Batas etis diwujudkan melalui penggunaan bahasa yang berhati-hati, sikap tidak menghakimi, penghindaran konflik, pemeriksaan sumber, dan kejujuran dalam aktivitas komersial. Hanya satu partisipan yang secara eksplisit menyebut adab Islam, sedangkan partisipan lainnya menggambarkan batas serupa dalam kerangka moral atau praktis yang lebih umum. Kreator memperoleh kepercayaan diri, portofolio, peluang kerja, dan penghasilan, sedangkan penonton lebih menekankan hiburan dan informasi. Pada kedua posisi tersebut, manfaat konten akademik berdampingan dengan kebiasaan menggulir secara kompulsif, kehilangan waktu, dan penundaan tugas. Studi ini mengonseptualisasikan pola tersebut sebagai ekspresi yang dibatasi secara etis, yaitu partisipasi aktif di platform yang dikendalikan oleh pertimbangan etis kontekstual, dengan

adab Islam menjadi kerangka eksplisit bagi sebagian partisipan, bukan motif yang seragam pada seluruh partisipan.

Kata kunci: TikTok; pemuda Muslim; ekspresi diri digital; etika komunikasi Islam; penggunaan dan kepuasan

I. INTRODUCTION

TikTok is not simply a channel through which young people distribute short videos. It is a platformed communication environment in which algorithmic recommendation, audiovisual imitation, and low-effort feedback organize what becomes visible and how users participate. The For You Page places personalized content at the center of everyday use, while sounds, templates, hashtags, duets, stitches, comments, likes, and shares make circulation and imitation easy. These arrangements blur familiar distinctions between audience and producer: a user may watch silently, forward a clip to a friend, reply in a comment thread, or become a creator within the same session (Kaye et al., 2021; Schellewald, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

Research grounded in uses and gratifications has shown that entertainment, escapism, information seeking, social interaction, self-presentation, and novelty are recurring motives for TikTok use (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Scherr & Wang, 2021; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2025). Indonesian evidence similarly identifies entertainment and communication as prominent motives among Generation Z university students (Adiarsi et al., 2024). These motives do not operate independently of the platform. Uses and gratifications 2.0 argues that technological affordances can generate or intensify gratifications rather than merely serving needs formed in advance (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). TikTok's endless personalized feed, short-form modality, and rapid feedback therefore shape both what users seek and what they come to experience as rewarding. The result is an algorithmized form of self-making in which personal expression is continually adjusted to platform cues, anticipated audiences, and circulating trends (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

This platformed quality also makes TikTok socially ambivalent. Young adults describe scrolling as convenient entertainment and relief, and sharing videos can become part of maintaining friendships and everyday conversation (Schellewald, 2023, 2024). Educational experiments likewise show that short-form video can support creativity, participation, and the communication of course knowledge (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Yet the same personalized flow can absorb time and weaken task control. Longitudinal evidence associates problematic TikTok use with academic procrastination among university students, while research with emerging adults links problematic use to procrastination and poorer psychological outcomes (Liu & Li, 2024; Rogowska & Cincio, 2024). The useful and disruptive sides of TikTok are thus not separate outcomes; they can emerge from the same habit of turning to the platform for relief, information, and connection.

For Muslim youth, digital participation also occurs within moral and religious fields. Digital religion research emphasizes that online and offline religious life are increasingly entangled, with technologies, institutions, communities, and personal practice shaping one another (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). In Indonesia, social media have supported Qur'anic movements, visual da'wa, Muslim women's public formation, digital proselytizing, and new negotiations of piety and authority (Beta, 2019; Husein & Slama, 2018; Kholili et al., 2024; Nisa, 2018a, 2018b). Recent TikTok

studies similarly show that Muslim creators combine lifestyle, self-representation, religious advocacy, and platform trends, making the platform a site of both visibility and vulnerability (El Sayed & Hotait, 2024; Hotait & El Sayed, 2025).

Most of this literature, however, examines explicit religious content, visible influencers, or organized religious publics. Less is known about how ordinary Muslim students articulate ethical limits in everyday TikTok practices that are not primarily devotional: following trends, sharing humor, presenting a portfolio, promoting goods, or passing time. Studies also commonly aggregate users under broad categories such as 'Generation Z' or 'TikTok users', even though watching, creating, affiliating, and selling entail different communicative expectations and benefits. Treating religious identity, self-expression, and problematic use as separate topics can therefore obscure the practical negotiations through which young Muslims participate in a highly expressive platform while retaining moral limits.

This study addresses that gap through a qualitative examination of students in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting program at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari, an institution situated within the educational and religious environment of Tebuireng, Jombang. The setting is analytically useful because participants were trained to think about communication and media within an Islamic academic milieu. Rather than asking whether TikTok is simply beneficial or harmful, the study examines how communicative possibilities, user positions, and situated ethical judgment intersect in everyday practice. It asks:

1. How do Muslim Generation Z students use TikTok's affordances for self-expression and social interaction?
2. How do they articulate and negotiate ethical limits, including those they associate with Islamic adab, in everyday TikTok practices?
3. How do creator, affiliate/seller, and viewer positions shape the benefits and tensions they experience?

The article develops ethically bounded expression as an interpretive concept for participation that remains active and visible but is deliberately limited through careful speech, nonjudgment, content selection, verification, and commercial honesty. In this study, some limits were explicitly linked to Islamic adab, while others were articulated as general caution, respect, verification, or trust. The concept therefore shifts attention from overtly religious content to everyday ethical work without presuming a uniform religious motive across participants.

II. METHOD

1. Research design and setting

The study used a qualitative descriptive design to examine participants' meanings, routines, and accounts of communication on TikTok. This design was appropriate because the questions concerned how students understood their practices and boundaries rather than the prevalence of particular behaviors. Fieldwork focused on undergraduates in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting program at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari, Tebuireng, Jombang, Indonesia. The program's emphasis on communication, broadcasting, and Islamic values provided a setting in which digital media practice and ethical communication were discussed within participants' everyday academic lives.

2. Participants and data generation

Purposive sampling was used to recruit eight active TikTok users from semesters 1, 3, 5, and 7, with two participants from each semester. The source study operationalized Generation Z as people born from 1997 to 2012; individual birth years are not reproduced to limit identifiability. Six participants were classified primarily as creators and two as dominant viewers. Within the creator group, affiliate, seller, or promotional functions sometimes overlapped with content creation. These positions were treated as fluid rather than mutually exclusive: viewers occasionally commented or shared, while creators also spent substantial time consuming content. The sample was designed for structured variation across semester and platform position; it was not intended to be statistically representative, and no formal saturation claim is made.

Table 1. Participant characteristics and dominant TikTok positions

Code	Semester	Gender	Primary position	Illustrative use
P01	1	Male	Creator	Daily-life posts, trends, news, comments
P02	1	Female	Creator / affiliate	Quotes, motivation, product promotion
P03	3	Female	Creator / affiliate	Storytelling, motivation, personal branding
P04	3	Male	Viewer	Entertainment, academic information, sharing
P05	5	Male	Creator	Photography, videography, portfolio, work leads
P06	5	Female	Creator / seller	Product videos and live-stream selling
P07	7	Female	Creator / promoter	Trends, practical tips, business promotion
P08	7	Male	Viewer	Gaming, entertainment, comments, sharing

The source study reports preliminary and sustained observation from August to October 2025; the available interview records are dated from October 2025 to January 2026. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or through WhatsApp according to participant availability. The guide addressed frequency and purpose of use, preferred content, commenting and sharing, content production, communication style, academic and social consequences, ethical decisions, and perceived Islamic values. Responses were documented in interview transcripts, while observation was recorded in field notes and documentation included selected screenshots and records of uploads, comments, live streams, and audience responses. These materials contextualized interview accounts rather than serving as engagement metrics. Interview duration and recording mode were not consistently logged in the source study; accordingly, this article does not claim a standardized interview length or universal audio recording.

3. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis followed an iterative process of data condensation, display, comparison, and conclusion verification (Miles et al., 2014). The field researcher repeatedly reviewed the interview transcripts, field notes, and documentation before assigning descriptive codes related to platform activities, purposes of use, perceived consequences, and ethical considerations. These codes were compared within and across participants and subsequently organized into four higher-order themes: expressive visibility, lightweight relationality, ethical boundary work, and ambivalent utility. Comparisons were also made among creators, affiliates or sellers, and viewers while recognizing that these roles could overlap rather than constitute fixed user categories. Negative or complicating cases were retained in the analysis, including a

creator who rarely sought audience feedback and viewers who participated actively through content sharing and comment threads.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation of interview, observation, and documentary data; peer debriefing with the academic supervisor and research peers; and member checking, through which participants were invited to confirm whether the interpretive summaries accurately represented their intended meanings. During preparation of the English manuscript, all translated quotations were checked against the original Indonesian transcripts to preserve their contextual meaning. The interpretations were also kept within the boundaries of this small, program-level sample, and no claims of broader representativeness were made.

3. Ethical considerations

Participants were informed about the study and gave consent before interviews and documentation were undertaken. Personal names and account identifiers were removed and replaced with participant codes (P01-P08). No usernames, identifiable screenshots, or private messages are reproduced. The source study did not report a separate institutional ethics approval identifier; this article therefore makes no claim of formal committee approval.

III. FINDINGS

The findings show that TikTok use was neither homogeneous nor adequately described as a simple transition from passive consumption to active production. Participants moved among watching, sharing, commenting, creating, and selling, but their dominant platform positions shaped the kinds of gratification and responsibility they described. Across these differences, four themes connected expression, relationality, ethics, and ambivalence.

Table 2. Cross-case themes and analytical interpretation

Theme	Empirical pattern	Analytical interpretation
Expressive visibility	Trends, everyday posts, storytelling, motivation, portfolios, and product promotion	Self-presentation was shaped by platform conventions and anticipated visibility.
Lightweight relationality	Comments, likes, shares, direct messages, and occasional long comment threads	Low-effort signals sustained connection and could shift viewing into reciprocal interaction.
Ethical boundary work	Careful wording, non-judgment, avoidance of hostile exchanges, source checking, and commercial honesty	Ethical restraint was situational: one participant explicitly invoked Islamic adab, while others used broader moral or practical language.
Ambivalent utility	Academic tips, information, confidence, work and income alongside time loss, compulsive scrolling, and postponed tasks	Benefits and costs were intertwined and varied with users' platform positions.

1. Expressive visibility: performing an algorithmically legible self

For participants who created content, TikTok provided a readily available stage for presenting everyday life, humor, opinions, hobbies, motivation, and commercial activity. Their expression was personal, but it was rarely detached from platform conventions. Viral sounds, familiar genres, casual language, and short visual formats were used to make posts recognizable to an anticipated audience. P01 described uploading everyday activities or following a viral trend partly to invite interaction

with friends. P03 similarly connected 'random' and humorous posts with the freedom to show a less formal self:

"Sometimes I make random or funny videos because, for me, TikTok is also a place for self-expression." (P03, creator/affiliate)

Expression therefore involved both disclosure and adaptation. Participants spoke more casually on TikTok than in formal campus communication, borrowed slang and point-of-view formats, and selected popular music or formats to avoid content appearing 'flat'. P07 explained that a message was more likely to attract an audience when it used a currently recognizable format or soundtrack. This did not mean that participants simply copied trends. They appropriated trends for personal stories, motivational messages, practical information, product promotion, and professional portfolios.

The clearest role differentiation appeared in what visibility was expected to accomplish. For P01 and P03, visibility supported interaction and self-expression. P05 used photography and videography content as a portfolio that could generate work inquiries. P02 and P03 had experimented with affiliate content, while P06 used videos and live streams to promote an online plush-toy business. For these participants, identity work, creativity, and economic activity overlapped. By contrast, P04 and P08 did not seek sustained public visibility; their self-expression appeared mainly through selections, likes, shares, and occasional comments.

2. Lightweight relationality: from linear viewing to circular interaction

TikTok communication operated through small signals that participants considered socially meaningful. A like could mark appreciation, a share could indicate that a clip was relevant to a friendship, and a brief comment could open a longer exchange. P01 described replying to comments as a way of reducing distance between creator and audience:

"I often comment on friends' or other creators' videos. I also reply to comments on my own videos because that makes the communication feel closer." (P01, creator)

Sharing was especially important because it connected the algorithmic feed to existing relationships. Participants forwarded videos through TikTok direct messages or group chats, then discussed them later online, by telephone, or face to face. P07 described regularly exchanging relatable or locally viral clips with a friend who lived in another province; the clips supplied common topics when they later talked. In this sense, participants did not need to create public content to become communicatively active.

Linear and circular communication coexisted. P03 sometimes uploaded a video as documentation without expecting any response, while P06 often watched without commenting. These practices approximated one-way communication. At other times, a comment and reply produced an ongoing exchange. P04 described this change in scale:

"When someone comments, I usually reply, and sometimes it turns into a long conversation in the comment thread." (P04, viewer)

The distinction between 'active creator' and 'passive viewer' was therefore too rigid. Viewers were less publicly visible, but they still participated as selectors, circulators, and occasional interlocutors. Communication became circular when users

treated platform signals as invitations to respond; it remained linear when content was consumed or posted without an expectation of further exchange.

3. Ethical restraint as everyday digital boundary work

Participants did not use a single vocabulary for ethical restraint. Most described practical or moral limits choosing words carefully, avoiding judgmental comments, withdrawing from hostile exchanges, checking information, or protecting buyer trust without explicitly naming those decisions as religious. P02 and P03 emphasized careful wording and nonjudgment; P05 preferred not to join negative comment threads; and P08 ended interactions when discussion became unproductive.

P07 was the only participant who explicitly connected platform etiquette to Islamic adab. For her, the two were not separate rule systems:

"Using social media has its own etiquette and rules. To me, these resemble adab in Islam: we should not insult others or use harsh language." (P07, creator/promoter)

Ethical restraint was selective rather than silent. Participants remained willing to express opinions, follow trends, or promote their work, but they described boundaries around humiliation, harsh speech, unsupported information, and escalation. P01 said that he checked other sources before believing rapidly circulating information and avoided commenting impulsively. P03 described filtering negative claims rather than joining collective judgment. These practices combined self-protection, respect for others, and concern for the consequences of a public response.

Commercial participation produced another form of boundary work. P06 adjusted her communication to buyers of different ages and used a relaxed conversational style in live streams, yet she connected trust with truthful product description:

"I remain transparent and honest about the condition of the product, communicate politely, and do not exaggerate what I sell." (P06, creator/seller)

This finding locates ethical reflection within ordinary platform practice rather than only in da'wa messages. Because the explicit religious link came from one participant, the theme is interpreted as adab-informed ethical restraint within an Islamic academic setting, not as evidence that all participants' decisions arose from a uniform religious motivation. TikTok's expressive culture remained present; ethical language supplied practical limits for staying visible without treating visibility as permission to say or do anything.

4. Productive use and distraction across platform positions

Participants consistently described TikTok as useful, but usefulness differed by platform position. Viewers valued rapid access to entertainment, current information, recipes, academic explanations, and practical advice. P07 noted that short videos could make tips about presentations, examinations, and preparation feel accessible and relevant. P04 also encountered academic content through a feed shaped by prior searches. These accounts positioned TikTok as an informal supplement, not a replacement for formal sources.

Creators identified additional benefits. Making content increased confidence and comfort with speaking to an audience. P05 used tutorials and visual references to develop photography and videography skills, while his own posts supported personal branding and work opportunities. Affiliates and sellers treated the platform as an economic infrastructure. For P06, live streaming widened reach, enabled direct

interaction with prospective buyers, and supported customer loyalty. The gratification of TikTok was therefore not limited to entertainment; it included competence, recognition, professional identity, and income.

The same participants also described loss of control. Several reported opening TikTok automatically when holding a phone, extending a short break into a much longer session, or continuing through a series of videos because the feed remained personally relevant. P06 captured the temporal problem succinctly:

"Sometimes I do not realize that the time has passed just by scrolling through TikTok."
(P06, creator/seller)

P08 acknowledged that use could postpone work, while P03 and P07 referred to addiction, wasted time, and the influence of undesirable trends. Importantly, distraction was not confined to viewers. Creating, promoting, replying, and monitoring engagement could also demand time and attention. Nor did participants present themselves as helpless. They described ignoring negative comments, filtering content, verifying information, and attempting to regulate use. The resulting pattern was ambivalent: the features that made TikTok efficient for discovery, connection, and promotion also made disengagement difficult.

IV. DISCUSSION

1. Ethically bounded expression

The central contribution of this study is the concept of ethically bounded expression. Participants were active media users in the classic uses-and-gratifications sense: they selected TikTok for entertainment, information, social interaction, expression, confidence, and economic opportunity (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). These gratifications were inseparable from TikTok's modality, interactivity, personalization, and navigability, supporting the uses-and-gratifications 2.0 proposition that affordances help produce the satisfactions associated with them (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Participants learned to express themselves in platform-legible ways through trends, short visual narratives, casual speech, and audience feedback.

This finding aligns with accounts of the algorithmized self and imitation publics, where visibility depends partly on users' capacity to render identity through repeatable platform forms (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Yet participants did not equate platform-legible expression with unrestricted expression. They negotiated visibility through careful wording, refusal to judge, withdrawal from hostile exchanges, information verification, and honest selling. 'Bounded' therefore does not mean marginal or inactive. It describes deliberate participation in which users accept some platform conventions while refusing others that conflict with their understanding of proper conduct.

The finding extends digital religion scholarship by shifting attention from explicit religious content to everyday ethical practice. Digital and religious lives can be mutually embedded rather than separate domains (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020), while Indonesian research shows how social media facilitate da'wa, pious identities, Islamic movements, and new religious influencers (Beta, 2019; Husein & Slama, 2018; Nisa, 2018a, 2018b). In this study, however, the degree of explicit religious framing varied. P07 named Islamic adab directly; other participants described similar limits as politeness, caution, verification, nonjudgment, or commercial trust. Ethically bounded

expression is therefore an interpretive synthesis of situated practices, not a claim of uniform religious causation.

2. Role-conditioned gratifications and relational participation

The findings also show why users' platform positions must be treated analytically. Prior work distinguishes watching, sharing, and creating as different practices associated with different motivations (Omar & Dequan, 2020). In this study, creators sought visibility, confidence, portfolios, personal branding, work, and audience response. Affiliates and sellers added reach, buyer trust, and income. Viewers more often foregrounded entertainment and information. These differences were not merely demographic; they emerged from what users were trying to accomplish and the responsibilities attached to their positions.

At the same time, the findings complicate the creator-viewer binary. Sharing a relatable clip maintained friendship, while a viewer's comment could initiate a small discussion. Such activity supports Walther's (1996) observation that relational meaning can develop through technologically mediated cues and Schellewald (2024) account of sharing as part of everyday social life. Likes, shares, emojis, and short comments did not reproduce face-to-face interaction, but participants treated them as adequate signals of attention, affiliation, and availability. The communicative significance of an action depended on the relationship and situation, not on the technical feature alone.

3. Ambivalent utility and self-regulation

TikTok's educational and disruptive qualities formed a single experiential field. The concise, visual, and personalized format made explanations and practical tips accessible; related higher-education studies have found that TikTok can support creativity and engagement when integrated purposefully (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Yet personalization and endless scrolling also turned brief use into habitual use. This pattern resembles Schellewald (2023) account of scrolling becoming embedded in everyday routines and Scherr and Wang (2021) identification of escapist gratification alongside self-presentation, trendiness, and novelty.

Participants' reports of lost time and postponed work should not be converted into causal claims from a small qualitative study. They nevertheless resonate with psychological research on habitual and potentially problematic TikTok use (Montag et al., 2021), evidence connecting problematic use and academic procrastination (Liu & Li, 2024), and findings that problematic use can mediate the relationship between procrastination and depression among emerging adults (Rogowska & Cincio, 2024). The qualitative contribution is to show how this tension is understood from within use: the same feed that offers relief and relevant information makes stopping difficult. Ethical self-regulation and time self-regulation were related but not identical. Participants could communicate politely and verify content while still struggling to control duration.

4. Implications for Islamic higher education

For Islamic communication programs, the findings suggest that digital ethics should be taught as observable practice rather than a list of abstract prohibitions. Students need opportunities to examine how ethical and adab-based reasoning can

inform comments, remixing, source verification, audience targeting, commercial claims, and responses to provocation. Because creator and seller positions introduce public and economic responsibilities, curricula should also address transparent promotion, disclosure, privacy, and the ethics of algorithmic visibility. These topics connect Islamic values with the professional skills expected of communication graduates.

Digital literacy should also include critical understanding of the For You Page and practical strategies for attention management. Encouraging educational content alone does not resolve the problem of distraction, because useful and distracting material arrive through the same interface. Reflective activity logs, source-checking exercises, time boundaries, and critique of platform incentives could help students recognize when purposeful use turns into habitual scrolling. Such instruction would preserve TikTok's creative and professional possibilities while making self-regulation a core communicative competence.

5. Limitations and future research

This study is limited by its small sample from one program and one Islamic university setting. The findings identify patterns and conceptual possibilities; they do not represent all Muslim students or Indonesian Generation Z users. Most evidence came from interviews supported by limited observation and documentation, and the source study did not consistently log interview duration or recording mode. Participants may also have presented ethically desirable accounts of their conduct. The explicit link to Islamic adab came from one participant, so the concept should be tested rather than assumed in other settings. Future research could compare Islamic and non-Islamic programs, follow participants longitudinally, include systematic digital ethnography or content analysis, and examine how gender, class, residential pesantren experience, and commercial participation shape ethical boundary work.

V. CONCLUSION

TikTok practices among these Muslim Generation Z students were shaped by a three-way negotiation among platform affordances, user positions, and situated ethical judgment. Trends, personalized feeds, comments, shares, and live streams enabled expression and social connection, but participants did not treat these affordances as permission for unbounded visibility. One participant explicitly related these limits to Islamic adab; others described careful language, nonjudgment, withdrawal from hostile exchanges, verification, and commercial honesty in broader moral or practical terms. This pattern is best understood as ethically bounded expression: active and platform-aware communication constrained by contextually articulated limits.

The study also shows that TikTok's benefits and costs depend partly on platform position. Creators and affiliates gained confidence, portfolios, reach, work opportunities, and income; viewers foregrounded entertainment and information; all positions could participate relationally through sharing and comments. Across positions, academic tips and rapid discovery coexisted with lost time and postponed tasks. The contribution is therefore not a claim that TikTok is inherently productive or harmful. It is an account of how ordinary Muslim students inhabit an expressive

algorithmic platform by combining role-specific gratifications with moral boundary work, while continuing to struggle with the platform's demands on attention.

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