

Exploring Students' Learning Engagement in Edutainment-Based Islamic Education Learning: A Case Study on Social Media Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement is essential for meaningful Islamic Religious Education (PAI), yet limited research has examined how different dimensions of engagement emerge during edutainment-based learning. This study explored how edutainment-based activities encouraged student engagement in learning about social media ethics. A qualitative case study was conducted at SMAN 1 Barat involving one PAI teacher and ten purposively selected Grade XI students. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and were analysed using an interactive qualitative approach. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation and member checking.

The findings show that discussions, quizzes, simulations, role-playing, and video-based activities created a more interactive learning environment that fostered four interconnected forms of engagement: behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. Students participated more actively, demonstrated greater enthusiasm, reflected more critically on ethical issues in digital communication, and collaborated more effectively with their peers. However, engagement varied across participants, with some students preferring more structured and individual learning activities.

This study contributes qualitative evidence that multidimensional student engagement can emerge simultaneously during edutainment-based PAI learning and highlights the importance of designing interactive activities that accommodate diverse learner preferences while promoting ethical reflection in digital contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary education, teachers are increasingly encouraged to adopt student-centered learning approaches that create meaningful and engaging classroom experiences. One instructional approach that has gained considerable attention is edutainment, which integrates educational objectives with engaging, interactive learning activities to support students' active participation in the learning process ([Kharismatunisa, 2023](#); [Sriyanto et al., 2022](#)). By combining educational content with entertaining classroom experiences, edutainment creates learning environments that encourage students to participate more actively, confidently, and collaboratively in classroom interaction ([Hidayati, 2022](#); [Nasaruddin et al., 2023](#)). This approach is particularly relevant in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), where classroom instruction is still frequently dominated by lecture-based teaching and theoretical explanation that may reduce students' opportunities for meaningful classroom engagement ([Misra et al., 2022](#)).

Student engagement has become a central issue in contemporary education because it reflects how deeply students participate cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially

throughout the learning process rather than merely indicating academic performance ([Bergdahl et al., 2024](#); [Reeve et al., 2025](#); [Weich et al., 2024](#); [Wong et al., 2024](#); [Wong & Liem, 2022](#); [Zhou et al., 2021](#)). This multidimensional perspective suggests that meaningful learning occurs when students actively invest their actions, emotions, thinking, and social interactions during classroom activities ([Dimitropoulou et al., 2025](#); [Reeve et al., 2025](#); [W. Zhang et al., 2025](#); [Z. Zhang & Crawford, 2024](#); [Zheng et al., 2024](#)). In Islamic Religious Education (PAI), such engagement is particularly important because learning is expected not only to promote conceptual understanding but also to cultivate reflective awareness, ethical reasoning, and the internalization of Islamic values in everyday life. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, meaningful engagement develops when learning environments support students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, enabling them to become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge ([Annamalai et al., 2026](#); [Chiu, 2022](#); [Deci et al., 1991](#); [Kaya & Yildiz Durak, 2026](#)). Recent studies further demonstrate that learning environments characterized by meaningful choices, constructive guidance, and emotional support contribute significantly to stronger student engagement ([Chiu, 2022](#); [Gan et al., 2026](#); [Kassab et al., 2024](#); [Norozi, 2025](#); [Prananto et al., 2025](#); [Quan et al., 2025](#); [Yang et al., 2022](#)).

The importance of fostering meaningful engagement has become increasingly evident in discussions of social media ethics within PAI. ([Haq & Kwok, 2024](#); [Shabdan, 2026](#)). Digital platforms have become integral to adolescents' communication, identity formation, and social interaction, yet they also expose students to ethical challenges such as cyberbullying, hate speech, misinformation, online harassment, and irresponsible digital communication. ([Alismaiel, 2023](#); [Dedi Gunawan Saputra et al., 2025](#); [Kailani et al., 2024](#)). Contemporary digital citizenship education, therefore, extends beyond developing technical competencies to nurturing empathy, responsibility, respectful communication, and ethical decision-making in digital environments ([Alenezi & Alfaleh, 2024](#); [L. Li et al., 2025](#); [Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021](#); [Shi et al., 2023](#); [Tadlaoui-Brahmi et al., 2022](#); [Vallès-Peris & Domènech, 2024](#)). These principles align closely with Islamic teachings, which emphasize honesty, responsibility, politeness, and mutual respect in all forms of communication, including online interactions ([Bal & Akcil, 2024](#)). Consequently, teaching social media ethics in PAI should move beyond theoretical explanation toward learning experiences that encourage students to reflect critically on ethical issues encountered in their daily digital lives ([Scharer et al., 2013](#)).

Edutainment-based learning provides one promising pedagogical approach to connecting ethical principles with authentic student experiences ([Shavinina, 1998](#); [Staneviciene & Žekienė, 2025](#)). By integrating collaborative discussions, role-playing, simulations, educational games, quizzes, and contextual problem-solving activities, edutainment transforms classrooms into interactive learning environments where students actively construct knowledge through meaningful participation ([Grijpma et al., 2024](#); [Kong, 2021](#); [Liu et al., 2024](#)). Such learning experiences encourage students to participate behaviorally, become emotionally involved, think critically, and collaborate socially while discussing ethical issues related to digital communication ([Al-Obaydi et al., 2023](#); [Joshi et al., 2022](#); [Reeve et al., 2025](#)). This approach is also consistent with constructivist and cooperative learning perspectives, which emphasize that meaningful understanding emerges through active participation, shared responsibility, and collaborative interaction ([Beimel et al., 2024](#); [Grijpma et al., 2024](#)).

Previous studies have consistently reported that edutainment, experiential learning, active learning, and gamified learning improve students' motivation, academic achievement, classroom participation, and overall learning experiences across diverse educational settings ([Al-Obaydi et al., 2023](#); [Hellín et al., 2023](#); [Kong, 2021](#); [Lavoué et al.,](#)

2021). Likewise, recent engagement research has established behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement as important dimensions influencing students' learning processes, academic achievement, persistence, and well-being (Bergdahl et al., 2024; Loyola-Carrillo et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2024; Wong & Liem, 2022). Despite these advances, several important gaps remain. First, previous studies have predominantly examined engagement as an outcome variable, providing limited explanation of how multiple engagement dimensions emerge and interact throughout classroom learning activities (Heikkinen et al., 2025; L. Wang et al., 2026). Second, most existing studies have been conducted in general education, science, mathematics, English language learning, online learning, or higher education contexts, whereas research situated in Islamic Religious Education remains limited despite its distinctive emphasis on cognitive understanding alongside moral and spiritual value internalization (Muhammad, 2025). Third, although social media ethics has become an increasingly important issue in adolescents' daily lives, few studies have investigated how edutainment-based learning facilitates multidimensional student engagement while discussing ethical behaviour in digital environments (Choi et al., 2025; Sivakumar et al., 2023). Consequently, empirical evidence explaining how behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement develop simultaneously within authentic edutainment-based PAI classrooms remains limited.

This study extends previous engagement research in several important ways. While earlier studies primarily demonstrated that interactive, experiential, active, and gamified learning approaches improve motivation, participation, engagement, or academic achievement (Hellín et al., 2023; Kong, 2021; M. Li et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Ratinho & Martins, 2023) They have paid limited attention to the dynamic process through which multiple engagement dimensions emerge simultaneously during classroom interaction. Unlike previous studies that focused mainly on learning outcomes, this study examines how behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement are fostered through edutainment-based Islamic Religious Education learning on social media ethics. Furthermore, by employing a qualitative case study, this research provides an in-depth understanding of students' classroom experiences and extends the application of multidimensional student engagement theory to the context of Islamic Religious Education. In doing so, the study contributes empirical evidence regarding how interactive and enjoyable learning experiences support holistic student engagement while promoting ethical awareness in digital environments.

This study focuses on how edutainment-based learning activities encourage students' learning engagement in PAI learning among Grade X.I students at SMAN 1 Barat. The study also explores the forms of students' learning engagement that emerge during edutainment-based PAI learning activities. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how edutainment-based learning activities encourage students' learning engagement in PAI learning among Grade X.I students at SMAN 1 Barat. In addition, this study aims to identify and analyze the forms of students' learning engagement that emerge during edutainment-based PAI learning activities. Through this study, edutainment is expected to provide broader insights into how interactive and enjoyable learning experiences can support students' engagement in Islamic Religious Education learning.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative case study to examine how edutainment-based learning fostered student engagement during Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because the study sought to understand students' experiences, classroom interactions, and learning processes from the

participants' perspectives within their natural learning environment (Creswell, 2019; Tisdell et al., 2025). Rather than measuring the effectiveness of an instructional model, the study aimed to explore how engagement developed as students participated in classroom activities.

The case study focused on a single bounded setting, namely a Grade XI PAI classroom at SMAN 1 Barat, where edutainment-based learning was implemented in a lesson on social media ethics. Examining one classroom in depth allowed the researchers to capture the complexity of classroom interaction and the contextual factors that shaped students' engagement during the learning process (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

2.2 Participants

The research involved one PAI teacher and ten Grade XI students from SMAN 1 Barat who participated in the learning unit on ethics in the use of social media.

Participants were selected purposively because they could provide information that was directly relevant to the research objectives (Creswell, 2019; Patton, 2015). The teacher was included because he or she was responsible for planning and facilitating the edutainment-based lessons. Student participants were chosen after the classroom activities had been completed to ensure that each interviewee had experienced every stage of the learning process and was able to reflect on those experiences.

Rather than selecting students with similar characteristics, the researchers intentionally included participants who demonstrated different patterns of classroom engagement. Some students were consistently active in leading discussions, volunteering for role-play activities, and expressing their opinions. Others participated mainly during collaborative tasks and classroom quizzes, while a few were initially reserved but became more engaged as the lesson progressed. Including students with varied participation patterns allowed the study to capture a broader range of perspectives on how edutainment influenced engagement. Such variation is recommended in qualitative case studies because it enriches data interpretation and strengthens the credibility of the findings (Hamilton & Finley, 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

2.3 Instruments and Procedures

As is common in qualitative inquiry, the researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation protocols (Creswell, 2019; Tisdell et al., 2025).

Observation focused on how students interacted with their peers and teacher during discussions, simulations, quizzes, role-playing, and other collaborative activities. Particular attention was given to behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement displayed throughout the lessons. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how both the teacher and students perceived the learning experience, while supporting documents, including lesson plans, teaching materials, students' worksheets, classroom photographs, and field notes, provided additional contextual evidence.

Data collection took place in four stages. The study began with classroom observations and an initial interview with the PAI teacher to identify existing learning conditions, patterns of student participation, and instructional challenges related to social media ethics. These findings informed discussions with the teacher regarding the design of the edutainment activities before classroom implementation. The learning sessions then incorporated collaborative discussions, educational quizzes, simulations, role-playing, and contextual problem-solving activities. Once the lessons had been completed, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation were brought together to build a comprehensive understanding of students' engagement during the learning process. Interview data from both the teacher and the selected students were used to complement

classroom observations, while documentary evidence supported data triangulation (Denzin, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documents were reviewed, coded, and organised according to themes related to student engagement. These themes were then displayed systematically to facilitate interpretation before conclusions were developed and continuously refined throughout the analysis.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Information gathered through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation was compared using source and method triangulation. Member checking was also undertaken by inviting participants to review the researchers' interpretations and confirm that their views had been represented accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, detailed field notes, interview transcripts, observation records, and analytic memos were maintained throughout the study to provide a transparent audit trail and strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research (Fusch et al., 2018; Noble & Smith, 2015).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Edutainment-Based Learning Activities Encouraging Students' Learning Engagement

The findings presented in this section were generated through the interactive analysis process. Evidence was drawn from classroom observations, interviews with one PAI teacher and ten purposively selected students, and supporting classroom documents. The convergence of these three data sources enabled the researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of how edutainment-based learning shaped students' engagement during PAI lessons on social media ethics.

Across the classroom observations, a clear shift in students' participation became apparent once edutainment-based activities were introduced. Compared with regular PAI lessons, the selected students appeared more willing to contribute to classroom interaction when learning began with short videos and authentic cases depicting ethical issues encountered on social media. These contextual learning materials encouraged students to connect the lesson with their own experiences, prompting many of them to respond spontaneously by sharing opinions, questioning inappropriate online behaviour, and discussing responsible ways of communicating in digital spaces.

The teacher described this change in classroom interaction as follows:

"Students tend to respond more quickly when the learning materials are connected to situations they encounter every day on social media. They become more willing to speak and express opinions during classroom discussion." (Teacher Interview/T1)

The students' accounts reflected a similar experience. One participant stated:

"Usually, PAI learning only focuses on explanation from the teacher, but this activity was different because we discussed real situations related to social media." (Student Interview/S3)

Another participant explained:

"The discussion activities made me more confident to speak because the examples were close to our daily experiences." (Student Interview/S6)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that connecting learning materials with students' everyday digital experiences encouraged greater participation during classroom discussions. Rather than simply receiving information from the teacher, many participants became actively involved in interpreting situations that they regularly encountered outside the classroom.

As the lesson progressed, collaborative discussions, role-playing, and simulation activities emerged as the learning experiences that generated the richest classroom interaction. Observation notes showed that students frequently exchanged opinions, responded to one another's ideas, and worked together to analyse ethical dilemmas presented through simulated social media scenarios. These activities encouraged students to negotiate ideas collectively instead of relying solely on teacher explanations.

Students consistently highlighted the value of these interactive activities during the interviews. One participant explained:

"Role play made the lesson easier to understand because we directly practiced how to respond politely on social media." (Student Interview/S1)

Another student stated:

"The activities were enjoyable because we were not only listening but also participating directly during learning." (Student Interview/S5)

This pattern was also evident in supporting classroom documents. Students' worksheets, presentation materials, quiz responses, and classroom activity records demonstrated that learning tasks were designed to promote discussion, collaboration, and active participation rather than passive knowledge acquisition.

Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that students did not respond to the edutainment approach in identical ways. Although many participants expressed positive experiences, two students indicated that they remained more comfortable with conventional teacher explanations and individual learning activities. One participant commented:

"I still prefer ordinary explanation from the teacher because sometimes games and discussions make the classroom too noisy." (Student Interview/S8)

Another participant stated:

"The activities were interesting, but I felt more comfortable learning independently rather than participating in group activities." (Student Interview/S9)

These interview responses were consistent with classroom observations, where both students participated less frequently during collaborative discussions and role-playing than several of their classmates. Rather than contradicting the overall pattern, these responses illustrate the diversity of learning preferences within the classroom. While the edutainment approach created meaningful opportunities for participation, individual students engaged with those opportunities in different ways.

Overall, evidence gathered from classroom observations, interviews, and supporting documents suggests that, within this case study, edutainment-based learning fostered a more interactive and participatory classroom environment. Contextual discussions, role-playing, quizzes, simulations, and video-based activities encouraged many of the selected students to become more actively involved in learning while relating ethical concepts to their own experiences of social media use. At the same time, the findings indicate that engagement remained shaped by individual learning preferences, reminding us that interactive learning approaches may not be experienced uniformly by every student even within the same classroom context.

3.1.2 Forms of Students' Learning Engagement Emerging During Edutainment-Based PAI Learning Activities

Observation, interview, and classroom records indicated several forms of students' learning engagement during edutainment-based PAI learning activities related to ethics in using social media. The findings demonstrated that students showed behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement throughout collaborative discussions, simulations, quizzes, role play, and video-based learning activities, although the level of participation varied among participants.

3.1.3 Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement was reflected in the ways the selected students participated directly in classroom activities throughout the edutainment-based PAI lessons. Classroom observations indicated that many of the observed students became actively involved in collaborative discussions, quizzes, simulations, and role-playing activities. During these sessions, students answered questions, expressed opinions, exchanged ideas with their peers, and contributed to group tasks focused on ethical issues surrounding social media use. Compared with participation patterns typically observed in regular PAI lessons, the selected participants appeared more willing to engage in classroom interaction when learning activities required active involvement rather than passive listening.

Students' interview accounts were consistent with these classroom observations. One participant explained:

"The activities made the class more active because almost all students participated during discussion and games." (Student Interview/S2)

Another participant stated:

"I became more confident in answering questions because the learning activities were more interactive." (Student Interview/S6)

The teacher also described a similar pattern of participation:

"Students who usually remained silent during ordinary lessons started participating during discussions and quizzes." (Teacher Interview/T1)

These accounts suggest that the interactive nature of the learning activities encouraged students to move beyond simply receiving information from the teacher. Instead, many participants became more willing to respond to questions, share opinions, and contribute during collaborative learning tasks.

Supporting evidence from students' worksheets and classroom activity records reinforced this interpretation. The documents indicated that the selected participants completed discussion tasks, participated in classroom quizzes, and engaged in simulation activities designed to examine ethical behaviour in digital communication. Collectively, these records demonstrate that students' participation was evident not only during verbal classroom interaction but also through their involvement in structured learning tasks.

Nevertheless, behavioral engagement varied across participants. Classroom observations showed that while several students participated frequently by initiating responses and contributing throughout discussions, others tended to become involved only after receiving prompts or direct questions from the teacher. These differences were also reflected in the classroom records, suggesting that students engaged with the same learning activities at different levels of intensity.

Viewed collectively, evidence from classroom observations, interviews, and supporting documents suggests that the edutainment-based learning approach created meaningful opportunities for behavioral engagement within this classroom. Many of the selected students demonstrated active participation during discussions, quizzes, simulations, and role-playing activities, whereas a smaller number remained relatively reserved during collaborative tasks. Rather than indicating inconsistent implementation, these variations illustrate the diversity of participation patterns that naturally emerged among students experiencing the same learning environment.

3.1.4 Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement was reflected in the ways students responded to the classroom atmosphere created through the edutainment-based learning activities. Throughout the lesson, many of the interviewed students appeared enthusiastic and emotionally involved during discussions, quizzes, simulations, and role-playing activities. Classroom observations suggested that the interactive nature of these activities contributed to a more

relaxed learning environment, encouraging students to participate with greater confidence and sustained interest than was typically observed during regular PAI lessons.

Students described these positive experiences during the interviews. One participant stated:

"The learning activities were enjoyable because we could discuss, play games, and share opinions with friends." (Student Interview/S5)

Another participant explained:

"I did not feel bored during the lesson because the activities were different from ordinary classroom learning." (Student Interview/S4)

The teacher also noted a noticeable change in the classroom atmosphere:

"Students looked more enthusiastic because the classroom atmosphere became less tense during learning activities." (Teacher Interview/T1)

These accounts suggest that students' emotional responses were influenced not only by the learning content but also by the way the lesson was organised. Opportunities to interact with classmates, exchange ideas, and participate in varied learning activities appeared to create a classroom environment in which many participants felt more comfortable, interested, and emotionally connected to the learning process.

Classroom observations further indicated that positive emotional engagement was expressed in different ways. Several students remained attentive throughout the lesson, responded enthusiastically during quizzes, and showed visible enjoyment while participating in collaborative activities. Others gradually became more confident as discussions progressed, suggesting that a supportive classroom atmosphere encouraged sustained emotional involvement rather than brief moments of excitement.

Nevertheless, emotional responses varied across participants. A small number of students expressed greater comfort with conventional teacher explanations and individual learning activities. One participant explained:

"Sometimes the classroom became too crowded during games and discussion activities, so I preferred normal explanation from the teacher." (Student Interview/S8)

Another student stated:

"The activities were interesting, but I felt more comfortable learning independently rather than participating in group activities." (Student Interview/S9)

These perspectives were consistent with classroom observations, which showed that both participants contributed less frequently during collaborative activities and were generally more comfortable listening than engaging in group interaction. Rather than indicating negative perceptions of the lesson, these responses illustrate that students differed in the types of classroom environments in which they felt most at ease.

Viewed collectively, evidence from classroom observations, interviews, and supporting classroom records suggests that the edutainment-based learning approach fostered positive emotional engagement among many of the interviewed students within this classroom. A more relaxed and interactive learning atmosphere appeared to encourage enthusiasm, enjoyment, and sustained interest throughout the lesson, although individual preferences continued to shape how students experienced collaborative learning activities.

3.1.5 Cognitive Engagement and Critical Thinking

Cognitive engagement was reflected in how students analysed, interpreted, and reflected on ethical issues discussed throughout the edutainment-based PAI lessons. Classroom observations indicated that many of the interviewed students engaged actively with authentic cases related to social media use rather than simply recalling theoretical concepts. During discussions and simulation activities, participants examined issues such as cyberbullying, offensive comments, misinformation, and irresponsible online communication. Many of these discussions extended beyond identifying ethical problems,

as several students connected the cases to situations they had personally encountered while using social media.

The interview data further illustrated this pattern of reflective thinking. One participant stated:

“I realized that some communication habits on social media can hurt other people even if we think they are only jokes.” (Student Interview/S1)

Another participant explained:

“*The discussion activities made me think more carefully before commenting on social media.*” (Student Interview/S3)

The teacher also observed a similar development during classroom discussions:

“*Students were not only answering questions, but they also started discussing whether certain online behavior was appropriate or harmful for other people.*” (Teacher Interview/T1)

These accounts suggest that the learning activities encouraged students to engage in reflective thinking rather than merely providing correct answers. By discussing authentic situations drawn from everyday digital interactions, many participants began considering the potential consequences of their online behaviour and evaluating those situations through the ethical values introduced during the lesson.

Classroom observations further indicated that several students reconsidered their own communication practices while participating in discussions and simulations. Participants frequently referred to values such as politeness, honesty, responsibility, and self-control when explaining how individuals should communicate on social media. Students' written discussion responses and reflection notes also showed that many participants related classroom conversations to their own experiences, suggesting that they were actively connecting new knowledge with familiar contexts.

Nevertheless, the depth of cognitive engagement differed across participants. While some students developed their arguments by responding to classmates' ideas and explaining the reasoning behind their opinions, others contributed only brief comments or preferred to observe the discussion without elaborating on their views. These variations indicate that although students participated in the same learning activities, the extent to which they engaged in critical reflection varied from one participant to another.

Viewed collectively, evidence from classroom observations, interviews, students' written reflections, and supporting classroom documents suggests that the edutainment-based learning approach fostered meaningful cognitive engagement within this classroom. Many of the interviewed students demonstrated reflective thinking by analysing ethical dilemmas, relating classroom discussions to their own digital experiences, and reconsidering everyday communication practices in light of Islamic ethical values. At the same time, the findings indicate that the depth of reflection differed among participants, illustrating individual variation in how students interpreted and internalised the ethical issues explored during the learning process.

3.1.6 Social Engagement, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity

Social engagement was reflected in the ways students interacted, communicated, and collaborated throughout the edutainment-based PAI learning activities. Classroom observations showed that many of the interviewed students actively exchanged ideas during group discussions, quizzes, simulations, and role-playing activities. Rather than working individually, participants responded to their classmates' opinions, negotiated different viewpoints, and cooperated to complete learning tasks related to ethics in social media use. Compared with previous classroom situations, peer interaction appeared more frequent and more evenly distributed during the interactive learning sessions.

Students described similar experiences during the interviews. One participant explained:

"Group discussions made the lesson more interesting because we could share opinions and learn from each other." (Student Interview/S2)

Another student stated:

"I became more comfortable participating because my friends were also actively involved during the activities." (Student Interview/S5)

The teacher also observed stronger collaboration among students:

"During role play and group discussion, students communicated more actively with classmates and worked together during the activities." (Teacher Interview/T1)

These accounts indicate that collaborative activities encouraged students to learn through interaction rather than individual participation alone. Classroom discussions created opportunities for participants to exchange perspectives, respond to differing opinions, and build shared understanding while exploring ethical issues encountered in digital communication.

Beyond communication and collaboration, classroom observations also revealed creative participation during simulations and role-playing activities. Several groups adapted dialogue, developed their own communication scenarios, and presented different examples of ethical and unethical behaviour on social media based on situations that reflected their everyday experiences.

The teacher described this creative process as follows:

"Some groups created their own dialogue and scenarios based on situations they usually encounter on social media." (Teacher Interview/T1)

Students' worksheets and presentation materials further supported these observations by showing that participants collaboratively organised ideas, completed group tasks, and prepared presentations before sharing their work with the class. These documents suggest that collaboration extended beyond verbal discussion and was also reflected in students' joint learning products.

Nevertheless, social engagement varied across participants. Classroom observations indicated that while many students contributed actively throughout group discussions and role-playing activities, a small number participated more selectively and preferred observing rather than taking a leading role during collaborative tasks.

Three participants also described their personal experiences during the interviews. One participant stated:

"Sometimes I preferred listening to my friends during group discussion because too many people speaking at the same time made me less comfortable." (Student Interview/S8)

Another participant explained:

"I was more comfortable completing tasks individually rather than participating in role play." (Student Interview/S9)

Reflecting a similar experience, another participant added:

"I found it difficult to catch up with the group's speed during the quiz, so I chose to let my friends handle most of the answers." (Student Interview/S10)

These perspectives were consistent with classroom observations, which showed that some participants engaged less actively because they preferred individual learning, felt less comfortable in highly interactive settings, or required more time to process information before contributing to group discussions.

Viewed collectively, evidence from classroom observations, interviews, students' worksheets, and classroom activity records suggests that the edutainment-based learning approach created rich opportunities for social engagement within this classroom. Many of the interviewed students demonstrated active communication, collaboration, and creative participation during group-based learning activities, while individual differences in participation remained evident across the observed learning sessions.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Edutainment-Based Learning Activities Encouraging Students' Learning Engagement

The findings of this study suggest that edutainment-based learning encouraged student engagement by creating learning experiences that were both contextually meaningful and socially interactive. Rather than simply making classroom activities more enjoyable, discussions, simulations, role-playing, quizzes, and video-based learning enabled students to relate Islamic ethical principles to situations they regularly encountered on social media (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2024). This contextual connection appears to have reduced the distance between abstract religious concepts and students' everyday digital experiences, encouraging them to participate more actively in classroom learning (Assalihee et al., 2024; Lin & Wang, 2024; Romero-Saritama et al., 2025). These findings support the multidimensional perspective of student engagement, while also highlighting the importance of contextual relevance in fostering meaningful participation (Assefa et al., 2025; Bozbiyik et al., 2025; Reeve et al., 2025).

The present findings also extend previous studies that have primarily linked edutainment with improvements in motivation, classroom participation, or academic achievement (Hellín et al., 2023; Kong, 2021; Liu et al., 2024). Earlier research has generally demonstrated that interactive learning environments increase students' willingness to participate (Koç & Kanadlı, 2025). However, this study suggests that participation was not driven solely by the enjoyable nature of the activities. Instead, students appeared to become more engaged because the learning tasks reflected authentic ethical dilemmas drawn from their own digital lives (Garcia et al., 2024; Mebert et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2024). This finding contributes to the student engagement literature by showing that contextual authenticity may be as important as instructional interactivity in encouraging active participation, particularly in Islamic Religious Education, where learning aims extend beyond knowledge acquisition to include moral reflection and value internalisation.

These findings can be further interpreted through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). The learning activities provided opportunities for students to express their own perspectives when analysing social media cases, thereby supporting their sense of autonomy (Maden et al., 2026; West et al., 2025). Collaborative discussions and role-playing fostered interaction among classmates, strengthening students' sense of relatedness, while quizzes and simulations allowed students to demonstrate understanding through active participation, reinforcing perceptions of competence (Anna & Spyros, 2025; Parmar et al., 2025). The combination of these three psychological needs may explain why students became more actively involved than during conventional teacher-centred instruction. Rather than functioning merely as entertaining classroom activities, the edutainment strategies created conditions that supported meaningful psychological engagement (Shavinina, 1998).

Another important contribution of this study concerns the variation in students' responses to the same instructional approach. While many participants responded positively to collaborative learning, several students consistently preferred teacher explanations or individual learning activities. Unlike much of the existing literature, which tends to present interactive and gamified learning as broadly beneficial (Grijpma et al., 2024; Johnson & Johnson, 2009), the present findings illustrate that engagement remains influenced by individual differences in learning preferences and perceptions of classroom comfort. This suggests that the effectiveness of edutainment should not be understood as universal but as dependent on how students experience and respond to collaborative learning environments.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, these differences may reflect variation in the extent to which individual psychological needs were supported during

classroom interaction. Students who preferred more structured instruction or additional time to process ideas appeared to experience collaborative activities differently from their peers. Highly interactive discussions, simulations, and games may have reduced opportunities for these students to participate in ways that matched their preferred learning styles (Pacheco-Velázquez et al., 2025; Rashad Sayed et al., 2024). Consequently, lower participation should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of motivation or interest. Instead, it may reflect a mismatch between the instructional design and the conditions under which particular students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and engaging with others (Ebadi et al., 2024; Matteson & Grant, 2024).

These findings carry important implications for teaching practice. Rather than implementing edutainment as a single instructional format for all learners, teachers may need to design flexible participation opportunities that accommodate diverse learner characteristics. Combining collaborative activities with structured individual reflection, assigning clear discussion roles, or providing additional preparation time before group interaction may enable a broader range of students to participate meaningfully (Elmoazen et al., 2025; Eskiyurt & Özkan, 2024). Within the context of Islamic Religious Education, such flexibility is particularly important because meaningful engagement involves not only active classroom participation but also opportunities for personal reflection and the internalisation of ethical values that students are expected to apply in their everyday digital interactions.

3.2.2 Forms of Students' Learning Engagement Emerging During Edutainment-Based PAI Learning Activities

The findings of this study indicate that student engagement during edutainment-based PAI learning was inherently multidimensional. Rather than emerging as separate constructs, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement developed through continuous interaction during classroom activities. Students who actively participated in discussions and role-playing activities also tended to express greater enthusiasm, engage more deeply in ethical reflection, and interact more confidently with their peers (Ngoc Tuong Nguyen & Thi Kim Oanh, 2025; Rezai et al., 2025). These findings complement the multidimensional engagement framework proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004) by illustrating how different dimensions of engagement mutually reinforced one another within an authentic Islamic Religious Education classroom.

The relationship between behavioral and emotional engagement was particularly evident throughout the learning process. Interactive activities encouraged students to move beyond passive listening and participate directly in analysing real-life situations related to social media ethics. Interview data further suggest that students' willingness to contribute was closely associated with their perception that the classroom atmosphere was enjoyable, relevant, and supportive. Rather than indicating that enjoyment alone drives participation, these findings suggest that positive emotional experiences may create conditions that encourage students to participate more confidently in collaborative learning activities (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2025; X. Zhang et al., 2023).

The findings also demonstrate that emotional engagement created opportunities for deeper cognitive engagement. Students were not merely involved in games or simulations; they were encouraged to examine ethical dilemmas that reflected situations they had experienced in their own digital lives. For example, classroom discussions prompted students to reconsider whether behaviours often perceived as harmless jokes could instead constitute cyberbullying or disrespectful online communication. This process represents a deeper form of cognitive engagement in which students critically examined their own digital behaviour rather than simply recalling Islamic ethical principles. In this respect, edutainment supported moral reflection by connecting religious values with authentic

experiences, allowing students to interpret ethical concepts within meaningful social contexts rather than treating them as abstract rules (Snieder & Zhu, 2020; M. Wang et al., 2026).

Social engagement likewise emerged as an important mechanism through which learning occurred. Collaborative discussions and role-playing created opportunities for students to exchange perspectives, negotiate different interpretations, and construct shared understanding of ethical behaviour in digital communication (Eskiyurt & Özkan, 2024). However, participation within these collaborative settings was not evenly distributed. While many students contributed actively throughout discussions and simulations, several participants preferred to observe, contribute only when invited, or work more independently (Long & Koehler, 2021; Rosen & Kelly, 2023). These findings suggest that collaborative learning does not automatically generate equal levels of social engagement. Instead, students' participation appeared to depend on their confidence in group interaction, previous learning experiences, and individual preferences for engaging with classroom activities.

Taken together, these findings provide a more nuanced understanding of student engagement in edutainment-based PAI learning. Rather than functioning as a universally effective instructional approach, edutainment appears to create rich opportunities for behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement while simultaneously revealing meaningful individual differences in how students participate (Bergdahl et al., 2024; Yuan, 2024). Consequently, designing effective edutainment-based learning requires not only interactive and collaborative activities but also flexible opportunities for individual reflection and varied forms of classroom participation that accommodate diverse learner characteristics (Goyibova et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that edutainment-based learning can create meaningful opportunities for student engagement in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly when learning activities are connected to ethical issues that students encounter in their everyday digital lives. Contextual discussions, quizzes, simulations, role-playing, and video-based activities encouraged students to participate more actively, exchange ideas with their peers, and reflect on responsible behaviour in social media. Rather than appearing as separate dimensions, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement developed together throughout the learning process and reinforced one another as students interacted with authentic learning tasks. At the same time, the findings also reveal that students did not experience these activities in the same way. While most students responded positively to collaborative learning, some preferred quieter and more structured learning environments, suggesting that engagement is shaped not only by instructional strategies but also by individual learning preferences and classroom comfort.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on student engagement by offering a qualitative perspective from the context of Islamic Religious Education, an area that has received relatively limited attention in engagement research. The findings illustrate how edutainment-based learning can support not only active participation but also ethical reflection and collaborative meaning-making when students explore issues related to social media ethics. In doing so, the study adds contextual evidence that engagement in value-oriented learning extends beyond observable participation and includes opportunities for students to interpret, discuss, and internalise moral values through authentic classroom experiences.

The findings also offer several practical insights for teachers. Edutainment should not be viewed simply as a way to make lessons more enjoyable, but as an instructional

approach that needs to be carefully designed to support different learners. Interactive activities are likely to be more inclusive when teachers assign clear roles during group work, combine collaborative tasks with short periods of individual reflection, and create classroom norms that encourage respectful participation without placing unnecessary pressure on quieter students. Designing learning experiences in this way allows teachers to maintain the benefits of interaction while recognising that students engage in different ways.

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. This study was conducted as a qualitative case study involving one teacher and ten interviewed students in a single senior high school. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within this particular context rather than generalised to all Islamic Religious Education classrooms. Future research could examine edutainment-based learning across different schools and educational settings using comparative, mixed-methods, or longitudinal designs. Further studies may also explore how classroom climate, teacher facilitation, and individual learner characteristics shape the development of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement over time.

5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting and publishing this research. This study contributes to the development of interactive, contextual, and value-based Islamic Religious Education learning by positioning edutainment as a pedagogical strategy for improving students' active participation and moral value internalization.

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