Malaysian Muslims’ Critical Engagement
with the *Imam Muda*

Islamic Reality TV show as informal Islamic Education

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the
Department of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment, Institute of Education,
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Declaration

I, Mohamad Muhidin bin Patahol Wasli confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

The word count of this thesis, excluding reference list and appendices, is 88,668.

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Malaysian Muslims’ Critical Engagement with the *Imam Muda* 
Islamic Reality TV show as informal Islamic Education

Abstract

In 2010, Malaysia introduced an Islamic reality television show in search of Young Imams, entitled *Imam Muda* (IM), which aired on the Astro Oasis TV network. IM draws on Islamic content knowledge in a South-East Asian cultural context. The show raises hermeneutical and educational questions related to the representation of Muslim identities and practices in the modern world, due to the possibility of inauthentic viewer interpretations. This thesis argues that the show’s Islamic contents may function as a form of informal Islamic Education. Yet, not enough consideration has been made of *Imam Muda*’s impact on the spiritual judgmental rationality of its target audience — Malaysian Muslims — whose views are in themselves diverse due to different Islamic educational experiences. Spiritual judgmental rationality reveals the possibility of a transcendental understanding of the self in communication with the TV show and the religion of Islam. Therefore, this thesis seeks to examine Malaysian Muslims’ engagement with *Imam Muda*, season three, in an informal setting, using qualitative data collection methods such as participant observations, focus group discussions and viewing reflections. The participants’ reactions are described based on their responses to the manifested contents, and their reflections are thematised according to data gained from semi-structured discussions. The viewing reflections assist in explaining the behaviours recorded in the observations. The study suggests that under-labouring the framework of Islamic Critical Realism could be fruitful to better understand the nature of Islamic reality TV as a function of informal Islamic Education. More specifically, the findings suggest that Islamic reality TV can serve an educational function by providing beneficial entertainment via an informal learning experience. This learning takes place when participants critically engage with the content. The thesis also makes a novel contribution to knowledge by refining spiritual judgmental rationality in the Islamic Critical Realist framework through variation theory and transcendental realism, to understand the dialectical interplay between young Imams’ representations in Islamic reality television shows, and the interpretations of Malaysian Muslim viewers.
Impact statement

The aim of this study is to establish the function of Islamic reality TV programmes such as Imam Muda, and to examine how they can benefit Muslim viewers in Malaysia. Islamic television shows began to emerge in 2006, and their popularity peaked in 2011. Since then, the production of this genre of reality television has gone into decline, with only two productions in 2018 (see Islamic reality TV in Malaysia, Chapter 2.3.3, p. 58). However, other genres of Islamic television programmes such as Islamic Drama or Islamic Talk shows are still growing in popularity (Abdul Wahab, 2015). This research seeks to encourage consistency in the production of Islamic reality television in the future because this kind of entertainment provides a form of enrichment and informal Islamic Education for members of Islamic society. It is the nature of reality television to portray real people and real life, providing insights into the authenticity of the viewing experience. The representation of Muslims and Islam on television enriches the viewers’ experience, by contextualising Islamic practices in Malaysia.

This study applied multiple theories – namely Islamic Critical Realism (see Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a) – to unpack the informal learning process involved when subjects engage in the everyday act of television viewing. Thus, in the academic context, it is hoped that this will have a positive impact on the development of media for Islamic Education and Islamic media literacy. The media used for Islamic Education need to be current. Thus, there needs to be an emphasis on a critical and creative approach to appeal to different types of viewers. Utilising an Islamic Critical Realist framework to interpret the reception of Islamic creative contents in the media requires the development of Islamic media literacy.

Outside of academia, this study aims to inform the professional practice of writers, producers and television stations that focus on Islamic creative content. This is an important task, as Islamic entertainment goes beyond its function as entertainment. Rather, it functions as an informal learning resource, which can enrich Islamic Education. Relating to the Malaysian context, the Islamic reality television, Imam Muda, portrays Muslim culture from the perspective of different populations, and this representation will contribute to the harmony and quality of Islamic life. Bridging academic research and entertainment is the way forward to disseminating output that will benefit Islamic Education in Malaysia.
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<td>CBR</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of Islamic Education and charts the development of Islamic television programmes in Malaysia. It foregrounds the need to explore the interpretations and judgments of Malaysian Muslim viewers, as they negotiate Islamic Education within modernity, by focusing on the Imam Muda Islamic Reality TV programme, season three. I argue that the everyday nature of watching Islamic Reality TV provides an informal learning experience for viewers. The outline in this chapter includes the research aims, research questions, rationale, research significance, research frameworks and limitations of the study, as well as providing operational definitions as guidance for the reader.

1.1 Background to the study

Islamic Education is a medium involving comprehensive learning, which is simultaneously interconnected with Al-Quran and As-Sunnah (traditions of the prophet Muhammad), and offers the possibility of application in the context of modern Muslims’ lifestyles (Sudan, 2017; Waghid, 2014). It is a comprehensive form of learning that includes intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual elements, and enables Muslims to be informed about Islam and its teachings (Aminuddin et al., 2010; Khamis and Salleh, 2010). Hence, Islamic Education is a subject that provides theoretical and practical guidance for Muslims, enabling them to stay grounded at the same time as encouraging them to keep pace with modernity.

In Malaysia, Islamic Education is prioritised and emphasised in various circumstances, particularly in the teaching of Islam in schools and institutions. It is employed as a mechanism to safeguard Muslims from secular ideology (Ishak and Abdullah, 2013; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). Malaysian Muslim students study Islamic Education in formal educational settings from kindergartens to primary schools, secondary schools to tertiary institutions. Non-formal settings for Islamic Education are also available in the community to enhance their understanding of Islam in practice, for example, kuliah¹ and tazkirah², Islamic lectures and courses, religious camps and religious workshops (Sahad and Sa’ari, 2011; Tamuri et al., 2012). Muslims also experience Islamic educational

¹ Kuliah is an Arabic term referring to a religious lecture.
² Tazkirah is an Arabic term referring to a religious reminder.
influences through resources represented within informal settings, such as their family home, or social places such as playgrounds, marketplaces, social media sites and television (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Hamzah, 2007; Tengku Kasim and Che Husain, 2008). Thus, this study will highlight Islamic television programmes as a form of enrichment that scaffolds Islamic Education among Malaysian Muslims.

Most TV programmes designed for entertainment provide a wide range of genres and contents. One of the most popular genres is the reality television programme. This genre is often integrated with contents ranging from talent searches, game shows, dating shows, makeover shows, lifestyle shows, to religious and spiritual contributions (Abdul Wahab, 2010; Mohamed and Syed Mukhiar, 2010). The reality television programme genre is known for its non-scripted shows featuring ordinary people, real-life dramatic scenes, suspense and humour (Hill, 2005; Huff, 2006; Murray and Ouellette, 2009). In Malaysia, this genre is integrated explicitly with Islamic content knowledge from Al-Quran and Hadith, portraying Islamic figures, places, lifestyles, Islamic civilisations and Sirah Nabawiyah to produce Islamic Reality Television Programmes (IRTvP) (Ab Majid and Yusof, 2008; Kanaker and Abd Ghani, 2015; Suria Hani, 2012). Thus, Malaysian television channels such as RTM1, TV3, TV9, Astro Oasis and Al-Hijrah have taken steps to produce Akademi Al-Quran, Akademi Nasyid, Imam Muda, Ustazah Pilihan, Solehah, Famili Sarjana, Adik-Adikku, Qari Junior, Tahfiz Muda, Daie Millenia and Pencetus.

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3 Sirah Nabawiyah is an Arabic term referring to the story of the prophets.
4 Akademi Al-Quran (literal translation: Al-Quran Academy) is a reality TV programme that searches for the best Qari and Qariah. It is aired on TV9.
5 Akademi Nasyid (literal translation: Nasyid Academy) is a musical reality TV programme that searches for the best nasyid group. It is aired on TV9.
6 Imam Muda (literal translation: Young Imam) is a reality TV programme that searches for the best Young Imam. It is aired on Astro Oasis.
7 Ustazah Pilihan (literal translation: The Chosen Female Preacher/Teacher) extends the Search for The Pious Women Preacher/Teacher by adapting a similar concept to Imam Muda. It is a pioneer show from Astro Oasis.
8 Solehah (literal translation: The Pious Women) is a reality show that searches for the best pious woman preacher. It is aired on Malaysia’s first Islamic Television Station, TV Al-Hijrah.
9 Family Sarjana (literal translation: Family of Scholarship) is a reality game show featuring quizzes about Islamic content knowledge and its practices. It is targeted at families and is aired on Astro Oasis.
10 Adik-adikku (literal translation: My Brothers/Sisters) is a reality show that draws on the concept of religious public speaking. It is targeted at kids and is aired on the Malaysian National Channel, RTM 1.
11 Qari Junior (literal translation: Junior Reciter/Reader) is a reality show that tests kids’ memory of the verses from Al-Quran. It is aired on the private free-to-air channel, TV3.
12 Tahfiz Muda (literal translation: Junior Guardian of Al-Quran) is a reality show that tests kids’ memory of the verses from Al-Quran. It is aired on Astro Oasis.
13 Daie Millenia (literal translation: Millennium Preacher) is a reality show featuring young men and women competing against each other to become the winner. It is also aired on the private free-to-air channel, TV3.
Ummah\textsuperscript{14} (Abdul Manaf \textit{et al.}, 2013; Wok \textit{et al.}, 2012). \textit{Imam Muda} and \textit{Akademi Al-Quran} are the two most popular Islamic reality television programmes among the Malay Muslim community. They received positive feedback from audiences with regards to the Islamic content portrayed, which was seen as suitable within the Malaysian context. The content of \textit{Imam Muda} and \textit{Akademi Al-Quran} is perceived as educational and provides a positive learning experience to the viewers (Wok \textit{et al.}, 2012). \textit{Imam Muda} is a reality TV programme that searches for the best young Imam, while \textit{Akademi Al Quran} is a reality TV programme that searches for the best Qari and Qariah (male and female Al-Quran reciter) (\textit{ibid}). Therefore, this study focuses on \textit{Imam Muda} because the programme has the potential to portray Islam from an educational perspective, by exploring issues related to Muslim identity and practices. Specific themes it examines include leadership in prayer, preaching and community service, which builds the credibility of a young Imam or leader.

The emergence of Islamic TV programmes has created a platform to strengthen Islamic beliefs, highlighting Islamic culture and lifestyles (Abdul Majid \textit{et al.}, 2012). Through Islamic contents being displayed in the media, viewers are cultivating their own form of Islamic popular culture that integrates entertainment, values and religion from a contextual perspective, which they can then apply to their modern lifestyles (Ab Majid and Yusof, 2008; Abd Ghani, 2006, 2009). For example, nasyid, which is the contemporary singing medium through which to inculcate the foundation for Islamic Education (Abd Ghani, 2009; Barendregt, 2012; Samaniego and Pascual, 2007), portrays the Islamic values that play an essential role in humanising the community through contents, lyrics and language. Thus, da’wah\textsuperscript{15} in the twentieth century is portrayed in real recorded events, without sacrificing the truthfulness of its representation. In this way, through Islamic reality television, da’wah has the potential to educate viewers in informal settings (Abd Ghani, 2006; Buyong and Ismail, 2010; Wan Jusoh and Jusoff, 2009).

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Pencetus Ummah} (literal translation: Pioneer of society) is a reality show which consists only of male participants. It searches for the best preacher amongst them. It is aired on pay-to-view satellite television on the Astro Oasis channel.

\textsuperscript{15} Da’wah refers to inviting people to understand the correct way to worship Allah, as mentioned in the Quran and practised in Islam.
Nevertheless, reality television is known as a form of entertainment rather than a form of education because of its appealing content (Nabi et al., 2003). Some viewers watch reality television for entertainment purposes, while others perceive it as a form of escapism and social affiliation (Lundy et al., 2008). These different types of reality television viewing styles highlight that the way viewers engage in their perceptual process is essential in determining their loci of morality (Gaudin and Chaliès, 2015; McCoy and Scarborough, 2014). It also shows that the media influence from reality television covers all age groups at every level of the community (Borhan, 2011; Shafie, 2011). In sum, I argue that in the context of Islamic reality TV, viewers develop their social affiliations with and perceptions of the manifested contents, which acts as a type of informal education. Islamic reality television is only a medium to entertain and portray a representation of Islam. It depends on the viewers’ interpretations and judgments of the contents as to whether they gain benefits from the TV show (Hamid, 2011; Roberts and Foehr, 2008).

To summarise, Islamic Education is one of the compulsory subjects taught to Muslims in Malaysian schools. Yet, the knowledge it disseminates transcends the formal and nonformal setting of education. This study situates research on Islamic Education in an informal setting, mediated by television programmes for Malaysian viewers. It seeks to examine Malaysian Muslims’ judgment processes in interpreting the Islamic educational messages in Imam Muda, rather than attempting to judge or measure individual religious beliefs or determine the authenticity of religion (Krauss et al., 2005; Sahin, 2013). In seeking to unpack viewers’ judgment processes, communication and media studies are employed to study the audience. Communication studies refers to a social science field that draws on various empirical methods and critical analytical tools to explore communication both at the micro-level of individual conversations and the macro-level of social and cultural communication (see Calhoun, 2011). Meanwhile, media studies is a field that explores the history, content and effects of various media (see Downing et al., 2004). The approach of underlabouring Islamic Critical Realism as a social and educational theory (see Bhaskar, 2013, p. 11; Locke, 1690, p. 13) situates the study within the context of education, which is transdisciplinary in the field of media and cultural studies. For example, Hall (1989) studied representations of black people’s identities in the context of cinema, highlighting that these were culturally influenced by recurrent racial prejudices, across time and culture. This shows that media and culture can be utilised to indoctrinate viewers (Bazalgette and Buckingham, 2013; LoSasso, 2011). Thus, it is important to study the representation of Islam in media spaces in Malaysia, as a Muslim country that disseminates
vast amounts of information about popular Islam (Abd Ghani, 2010; Weintraub, 2011), cultural hybridity (Ishak, 2011; Ramle, 2012; Suria Hani, 2012) and issues regarding gender, Malayness and ummah (literal translation: community)(Martin, 2014; Suria Hani, 2012). Studying the interpretation of television content such as Imam Muda requires one to examine the knowledge generated from the broadcasted information. Therefore, the issues highlighted in the next subtopic will inform the interpretation and misinterpretation of popular culture within the context of Islamic entertainment, foregrounding the need to utilise entertainment TV shows as informal learning sources. It will also highlight the necessity to unpack the potential of Islamic Reality TV shows such as Imam Muda in informal learning settings.

1.2 Statement of the research problem

Television is an influential medium for educating and cultivating a culture in the community (Chiou and Lopez, 2010; Russo, 1980). The more time spent watching television, the more it is perceived as reality (Gerbner et al., 2002). According to Tamuri and Ismail (2001), media and entertainment centres provide negative portrayals that affect Malaysian teenagers’ Akhlaq (literal translation: behaviour, morality and manners according to Islamic principles). For example, Abdul Halim (2007, p. 387) asserted that Malaysian youths in rural contexts experience the negative effects of television, such as improper actions, behaviours, dress styles, attitudes and pictures, which frequently appeared in television programmes, internet websites, and magazines. These elements can have damaging effects on the Akhlaq of students, especially if they spend too much time watching horror, thriller and entertainment programmes. The emergence of entertainment reality TV shows in Malaysia such as Akademi Fantasia (2003),16 Malaysian Idol (2004),17 One in a Million (2006),18 and Gang Starz (2007),19 amongst others, raises questions about the adaptation of western genres and the development of Malaysia’s own ‘popular culture’ (Abd Ghani, 2010; Abdul Wahab, 2011; Rahayu, 2010). Shamshudeen and Brian (2014) point out that in Akademi Fantasia, features such as the fashions, mixing of males and females, and hugging on stage, disregard the cultural and moral boundaries of Malay

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16 Akademi Fantasia is Malaysia's first singing reality television show in which a number of contestants compete for the winning title and a chance to start their career in the entertainment industry.
17 Malaysian Idol is the Malaysian version of the Idol Series that started in UK, similar to shows such as UK's Pop Idol and American Idol in the franchise.
18 One in a Million (often abbreviated OIAM) is a Malaysian reality-competition show. It is the first reality singing competition to offer a RM 1 million prize to the winner.
19 Gang Starz is a Malaysian-based reality singing competition that searches for the best vocal group in Southeast Asia.
society. These un-Islamic representations explain the lack of content development in the Islamic entertainment industry, and display an inability to provide an alternative entertainment form without drawing on western cultural adaptation. This, in turn, has posed a significant problem for the Muslim community (Abd Ghani, 2009). Since these un-Islamic entertainment contents influence Akhlaq, we need to understand the interpretations of popular cultures within the context of Islamic entertainment, to contribute to better Akhlaq for the viewers.

As an alternative, educational content is increasingly being disseminated on television all over the world and has become one of the primary options for informal learning in a real-world context. The way that educational content is portrayed has an important influence on the extent to which viewers develop an interest in and engagement with TV programmes (Kassim, 2009; Kompare, 2011). In the Malaysian context, EDUWEB TV in Johor Baharu (one of the states in Malaysia) is acting as an informal teaching aid (Hassan and Sulaiman, 2010). It is being employed due to the lack of interest in and preparedness to use EDUWEB TV in active teaching and learning. Undeniably, contents with the primary function of entertainment are more appealing than educational contents (ibid). In Hassan and Yahya's (2010) study, most of the respondents preferred entertainment programmes rather than educational television programmes. Based on this contrast, my research attempts to reveal the benefits of entertainment programmes in terms of informal learning. Thus, it is essential to conduct a study on Islamic reality television as an accessible platform with integrated entertainment and educational elements in informal Islamic settings, within the context of modern practice.

Islamisation in various media spaces has emerged from the integration of entertainment and Islam (Abdullah and Mohamed Osman, 2018). Even though they are sometimes seen as controversial, Islamic TV programmes should be taken seriously by all parties. This is because the purpose of Islamisation is not to create a new media platform, but rather to refine or adapt Islamic Education by providing a formal organised mechanism (Ab Majid and Yusof, 2008). As Abd Ghani (2006) suggests, the dominance of Islamic popular culture acts as an alternative entertainment form in Muslim countries, which competes with other forms of amusement inspired more by Western culture. Nonetheless, various representations of Islam exist worldwide. For example, an Islamic reality television programme entitled ‘All-American Muslim’ featured the lifestyles of five families from the Shia Muslim Lebanese-American community in Dearborn, Michigan. This show was
broadcasted by TLC channel, starting from 13th November 2011 and continuing until 8th January 2012 (Allen, 2011; Wajahat Ali, 2011). Eight episodes of the programme emphasised their participants’ daily lifestyles and the way they negotiated their faith in various contexts. However, viewers raised concerns, for instance, with regard to the programme content as a form of propaganda for Muslims. The show participants believed that the contents were not intended to be educational (Goldberg, 2012; Khakpour, 2011; Nededog, 2011; Wajahat Ali, 2011). It created controversies that caused companies to remove their advertising from the show, and it was discontinued for the next season after the programme sponsors pulled out (Goldberg, 2012; Moraes, 2012). This incident indicates the importance of understanding viewers’ interpretations and judgments through the manifested contents of Islam, in the context of Islamic reality television. This is because the viewers are the focus of the supply and demand of television production, and their feedback contributes to content creation. I also argue that viewers gain new information, experiences and insights that might be interpreted misleadingly.

In contrast, previous studies relating to Islamic reality television (see Wok et al., 2012) highlighted the perceptions of the community in a survey of 460 valid respondents. The findings showed that Imam Muda was the preferred reality TV show, as it was perceived as educational. This is because the programme depicted Islam in practice and provided positive learning experiences. Furthermore, the results demonstrated a positive relationship between perceptions, attitudes, involvement and impact, with regards to the extent to which the programme changed the viewing habits of its viewers. From the perspective of manifested contents, verbal communication in Imam Muda depicted most messages of Akhlaq, which was further supported by behavioural representations. With regards to non-verbal communication, Imam Muda conveyed silent messages by portraying a role model in the form of an influential leader and exemplary behaviours as a religious practice, thus setting a good example for the younger generation (Mat Rahim et al., 2012; Patahol Wasli, 2014). However, these studies focused on a survey of the perceptions of Muslim viewers, and a content analysis of the show. Thus, it is essential to qualitatively describe the manifested content from the viewers’ perspective in order to understand their reception, interpretations and judgments of Islamic Education-oriented reality television.
As can be seen from the issues mentioned above, entertainment television focuses on hedonism and sometimes creates negative portrayals, which affect the behaviour or Akhlak of viewers (Abd Ghani, 2009; Tamuri, 2007). Yet, creating an alternative to educational television is an ineffective solution, due to a lack of preparedness to utilise TV programmes as part of teaching and learning. Therefore, there is a need to examine the role of entertainment-based TV shows as these might be influenced by certain values and may contain latent educational contents that may be useful for informal education (Hassan and Abd Aziz, 2010; Hassan and Sulaiman, 2010; Mustari and Jamaludin, 2010). The Islamisation of entertainment media has generated two points of view that have had both negative and positive impacts, from the perspective of viewers. This shows how important viewers’ feedback is, because it has shaped the way in which TV show contents have been produced (Ab Majid and Yusof, 2008; Dangor, 2005; Mat Rahim et al., 2012; Nededog, 2011; Wajahat Ali, 2011; Wok et al., 2012). However, this also raises the issue of viewers’ lack of literacy or critical engagement with the TV content they watch. When viewers critically engage with the contents of the show, they become active learners and may benefit from their learning. When I chose to study the Islamic reality TV show, Imam Muda, I saw the opportunity to address the issue of informal learning. Yet, a further explanation is needed as to why I chose to study Islamic reality TV, as I will now recount.

Reality TV is appealing to watch because of its manifestation of content, which encourages viewers’ participation in and engagement with the show. The typical format for reality television is that the viewers can participate by becoming a panel of juries onset or becoming judging viewers at home. For example, a public voting system is used in some of the most famous talent-based reality shows in Malaysia such as Akademi Fantasia (2003-2016), Malaysian Idol (2004 and 2005), One in a Million (2006-2009) and many others. Professionals select the contestants of the show during the auditions, and the public viewers select the winner. However, the Imam Muda (IM) judging format is different because it is inclusive of the faculty of Imam Muda, starting from the auditions to the main shows, and since it requires a specific area of expertise. The production team also engage in character assessment, and individuals or communities who interact directly with the contestants in the show are included as part of the full assessments. This is done to ensure that their assessments are fair, and that the winner is qualified for the title. However, the representation of an Imam in reality TV invites the viewers to make a commentary on his role within Islam.
The absence of home judges in *Imam Muda* invites multiple approaches to understand the viewers’ perceptions of Imam Muda. Studies have been conducted that seek to understand viewers’ perceptions of the show (see Wok et al., 2012) and its impact on Muslim viewers’ religious beliefs (see Abdul Karim, 2013). Stanton (2018) stated that Islamic Reality TV has become normalised and commodified, which has led to it becoming a normal, standard genre for Malay television viewers. She also asserted that this show may portray some sort of activism in the Arab Muslim World, as in the examples of shows such as Amr Khaled’s “Life Makers” and “Renewers” initiatives. However, there is a need to investigate how Malaysian Muslims understand the show, from an educational perspective. My study seeks to address this, by engaging in an in-depth study of the viewers’ receptions and interpretations of the show, and the informal learning process this involves.

Inauthentic and fallacious viewer interpretations of Islam can arise from the depiction of social illness and portrayal of harmful contents in the mass media (Ali et al., 2013; Getz, 1994). It is crucial that Malaysian Muslim viewers can negotiate Islamisation, westernisation and modernity in their TV viewing interpretations and judgments, since the process of rationalisation and interpretation depends on their previous learning experiences and knowledge about Islam. Therefore, a qualitative approach is taken in this study to elaborate on the process of viewers’ judgments. Three groups of Muslims were selected for this study, which consists of: a group of females only (Muslimah viewers), a group of males (Muslim viewers) and a nuclear family (A Muslim Family). The data collection process sought to record the participants’ reactions and reflections in order to understand the processes involved in their decision-making. The findings of this study offer insights into how Muslim viewers interpret the show, through their reflections and judgments. The study seeks to understand the dialectical interplay between the judgments of Malaysian Muslim viewers and the manifested contents while watching Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three.

The study suggests employing the theoretical framework of Islamic Critical Realism, which plays an under-labouring role. Bhaskar suggested the function of Critical Realism as ‘philosophical under-labouring’ for science and practices of human emancipation. The term ‘under-labouring’\(^\text{20}\) refers explicitly to clearing up any misconceptions and

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\(^{20}\) As Locke (1690, p. 13) stated in the Epistle to the reader: “The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose mighty designs, in advancing the sciences, will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity: but everyone must not hope to be a Boyle or a Sydenham; and in an age that produces such masters as the great Huygenius and the incomparable Mr. Newton, with some others of that strain, it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge…”
misunderstandings in the path of knowledge (Bhaskar, 2013, p. 11). It is therefore important to understand the nature of Islamic reality TV as a function of informal Islamic Education.

1.3 Research aims

Watching television is usually viewed as a leisure activity and as a means of obtaining information from a TV programme (Rahim et al., 2014; Samaniego and Pascual, 2007). It is rarely described as a process of learning. Learning in an informal or non-formal setting is different from learning in a formal setting, for example, in a school classroom. Informal learning, such as knowledge gained from watching TV programmes, is situated in a social context, actively initiated by the individual and experienced through contents such as objects, materials and surroundings. It is usually associated with public pedagogy and media literacy that uses the television or other media. This approach, which draws on the use of media, integrates classroom activities designed by a formal institution, with their application in the real world (Giroux, 2004; Livingstone, 2004). For example, the comparison between an entertainment TV programme and educational TV programme is key. Educational TV is less appealing to various levels of viewers since it is content-oriented and mostly used in school settings to support teaching and learning, as compared to entertainment TV programmes, which are more attractive to the masses due to their humorous nature (Lundy et al., 2008; Nabi et al., 2003). Since reality TV has become the most consumed form of TV show (Parmentier, 2009; Reiss and Wiltz, 2004; Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak, 2017), there is a need to investigate the entertainment-based reality TV show as a source of informal education. This study aims to investigate Malaysian Muslim viewers’ engagement with the Imam Muda Islamic reality TV, and to explore its role as a form of informal learning. This research aim is important because Islamic reality TV shows in Malaysia are becoming part of a trend that seeks to combine reality television with Islamic elements as a form of alternative entertainment that can be potentially educational for Muslims.

In 2013, as part of my Masters of Islamic Education at the University of Malaya, I defined Imam Muda as an Islamic Education-oriented reality TV programme in the Malaysian context. I conducted a directed content analysis of 10 episodes of Imam Muda season one (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2015), analysing the manifested contents using a researcher-developed instrument, the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix (literal translation: Education with Media Standard Matrix). This was adapted from
the Islamic Education Curriculum Standard, abbreviated as KSSM (literal translation: Standard Based Curriculum for Secondary Schools). The manifested contents of Imam Muda season one were identified as educational Islamic content, with most messages portrayed in the show being related to Adab and Akhlaq. With the prior understanding that Imam Muda seeks to convey educational messages, I sought to investigate the ways viewers perceived the contents. The hypothesis was that educational material in television shows has an educational impact on viewers. Since Imam Muda is a reality TV show with the aim to entertain and cater for Muslim viewers, learning from such a show would be a basic outcome.

Nevertheless, Islamic television should be about more than just the educational contents of their shows. Indeed, Islamic television shows should indirectly highlight the judgment process involved in an informal learning experience, which should lead to self-reflection, and the desire to be a good Muslim. This is because the young Imams in the show are a representation of the characteristics of a good Muslim. In his religious role, the Imam is a person who leads congregational prayers. In society, the Imam is the religious leader and the point of reference for any issues related to religion. On a smaller scale, each Muslim is an Imam to his/her family and the people around him/her. Hence, Islamic Education is more than just about acquiring an education with the knowledge of Islam. It is the ability to embrace an Islamic worldview and construct one’s identity as a Muslim in the modern world.

An activity like watching the Imam Muda Islamic reality TV show might influence viewers’ perceptions of Imams in their locality. Their existing Islamic Knowledge and experience could combine with this newly acquired knowledge to create a unique experience. As previous studies have shown with regards to Nasyid (see Abd Ghani, 2006; Barendregt, 2012) and the Da’wah TV programme (see Osama and Abd Ghani, 2006), viewers gained more than just enjoyment and entertainment experience from watching an Islamic TV show. Indeed, in my study, the integration of Islamic contents became a platform for information gathering of characteristics for an exemplary Imam, thus offering the participants the potential for self-development. I decided to approach the participants’ perceptions qualitatively to examine the educational moments they experienced when viewing Imam Muda. Academic research and theories in education, notably Islamic Critical

21 The Arabic word Adab refers to prescribed Islamic etiquette in the context of behaviours. Akhlaq is the practise of virtue, morality and manners in Islamic theology and falsafah.
Realism (Wilkinson, 2013, as influenced by Bhaskar, 2008a, 2008b) added a more multi-dimensional context to my investigation of the process of informal learning from Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three.

Working behind the scene as a scriptwriter for *Imam Muda* sparked my interest in an investigation of how the show might influence the minds of its viewers (see my positioning in the research, Chapter 3.1, p. 78). In the ordinary everyday setting of television watching, the research participants sometimes reacted during and after the viewing to express their feelings, and to discuss the contents of the show. They commented on and discussed the show with their friends, colleagues, or other people that had the same interests, either face-to-face or using an online platform. They sought confirmation of their own opinions within other resources such as academic journals, or academic blogs (if it was related to knowledge), news articles (if it was related to current affairs), or gossip on social media. Subsequently, they came to a new relative judgment of the show. This scenario happens in our daily lives when we consume media, whilst being aware that the viewing experience has contributed to the informal learning experience. Therefore, by imitating the scenarios in a research context, such as through observations and focus group discussions, and combining these with an under-labouring theoretical framework (see Bhaskar, 2013, p. 11; Locke, 1690, p. 13), I seek to break down the viewers’ judgments and rationalities with regards to their learning experience when watching *Imam Muda*.

The viewers’ judgments were vital as they indicated signs of learning. One of the study’s objectives was to investigate Muslim viewers’ judgments by under-labouring the framework of Islamic Critical Realism proposed by Wilkinson (2015a). From the observations and focus group discussions, the researcher explored the participants’ engagement at different levels. It is as a means to study the interaction between judgmental rationality (referring to the participants’ reactions and reflections), epistemic relativism (referring to the contents in Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three) and ontological realism (referring to the Islamic content knowledge that are Al-Quran and As-Sunnah), embedded in the process of informal learning. This research unpacked the viewers’ judgmental rationality through an analysis of reactions to and reflections on the show. This included a discussion of the breadth of their understandings and interpretations through the patterns of variation (referring to the process of learning from participants reactions and reflections) in variation theory (see Marton and Booth, 2000), followed by an analysis of the depth of their opinions through the domains of reality in transcendental realism (Bhaskar, 2008a;
Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a). In order to reveal how informal learning took place, the researcher needed to define judgmental rationality in an Islamic Critical Realist framework, since learning in this study highlighted the participants’ ability to discern the contents in Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three. This is because learning is about more than just answering questions correctly. Indeed, it involves the ability to evaluate knowledge in context.

1.4 Research questions

Guided by Islamic Critical Realism as a theoretical framework (see Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a), the researcher focused on judgmental rationality to unpack the participants’ perceptions and interpretations of the show’s contents (See theoretical framework, Chapter 1.7.2, p. 19). The research drew on the assumption that by under-labouring an educational framework such as Islamic Critical Realism, the data would expose the learning process involved in Islamic Education, emphasising the quality of learning the participants obtained from *Imam Muda*. However, as the analysis progressed, various issues were raised, such as the elusiveness of perception, the ambivalent nature of assessments as part of the learning process, and the difficulties wrought by educational research settings. The findings obtained from observations, focus group discussions, and viewing reflections in the pilot study, highlighted the judgment process involved, which generated meaning and knowledge (see Chapter 3.7.2, p. 93). On that basis, the researcher revised the research question. The revised research question is:

**To what extent can viewers’ critical engagement with Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three be seen as a form of informal Islamic Education?**

From the main research question, two sub-questions were generated to enrich the investigation. Since *Imam Muda* is an Islamic reality TV show, the need to investigate the viewers’ perceptions of *Imam Muda* as an educational platform was essential. The analysis of viewers’ perceptions obtained from their reactions to and reflections on the show allowed the researcher to investigate further the informal learning that took place through patterns of variation and domains of reality. Below are the sub research questions.

1. What were the viewer's perceptions of Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three?
2. How did learning take place while they were watching Kemuncak *Imam Muda*?
The findings from the research questions were essential as they had an impact on the theoretical framework. Interpretations of the findings within a bigger framework will show how this study could contribute to scholarly knowledge on the function of Islamic educational contents in an informal setting, such as watching an Islamic television programme. Thus, the rationale for and the significance of this study inform the fundamentals and the importance of investigating viewers’ perceptions of Islamic reality TV.

1.5 Rationale for the study

The use of entertainment television programmes as a source of informal education is necessary since there is a lack of viewership for educational television (Hassan and Abd Aziz, 2010). For example, the Imam Muda Islamic Reality TV is perceived as an educational television programme that endorses positive learning experiences (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013). Showcasing young Imams performing Islamic rituals and being assessed on stage, portrays Islamic Education using real events, and ordinary people, situated in the context of problematic conditions and behaviours (Nabi et al., 2006; Patahol Wasli, 2014). The visually stimulated sensory experiences of Islamic reality TV shows will assist in understanding the way viewers interpret the manifested Islamic Educational content in context (Nabi et al., 2003; Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2015). Therefore, the viewers’ descriptions of the contents in Imam Muda will indicate the function of the show as a source of informal Islamic Education. By applying theories of learning such as variation theory (see Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000) to an informal context, multiple perspectives are offered on the perceived Islamic educational contents. They will act as a form of enrichment to scaffold the understanding of Islam among Malaysian Muslims.

The Imam Muda Islamic reality TV programme was selected in this study to understand the way manifested Islamic educational content is interpreted and judged by Malaysian Muslims. The viewers engaged with their previous experiences and knowledge while watching Imam Muda and related it to themselves. This is because most Malaysian Muslims are educated in the Malaysian educational system. They studied Islamic Education in primary and secondary school, as an aspect of their formal education, supported by the cultural and moral boundaries set by Malay society (Shamshudeen and Morris, 2014; Wilkinson, 2014a). These graduates of the Malaysian educational system will later need to negotiate modernity in reality, integrating it with prior knowledge gained from their formal
and informal education. Therefore, this research has chosen to study the Islamic Education content of Imam Muda in order to explore how it develops the spiritual judgmental rationality (Wilkinson, 2015a, p. 63) of Malaysian Muslim viewers. Wilkinson (2015a, p. 59) defines spiritual judgmental rationality as:

... a process of deciding between the accuracy and validity of competing accounts of phenomena according to sets of religious, scientific and experiential criteria. Judgemental rationality is itself constellationally embedded in epistemological relativism in the same way that epistemological relativism is embedded in ontological realism. Judgemental rationality, like epistemological relativism, is, therefore, grounded in and bounded by our situatedness and our geohistoricity.

The purpose of this is to reveal the possibility of transcendental understanding both within the self and in communication with the TV show and with Islam (Allah, Al-Quran and As-Sunnah from prophet Muhammad PBUH) (ibid). This approach emphasises the importance of developing Islamic media literacy based on an Islamic Critical Realist framework.

By examining the variation of viewers’ descriptions of the show and framing the viewers’ understandings of their communication with the TV show and with Islam via an Islamic critical realist framework, I seek to break down the process of learning involved in engagement with the contents. The thesis thus seeks to unpack the effect of Islamic Education from formal and non-formal educational settings to informal settings. Hence, this study will show that learning in an informal setting involves more than the ability to replicate or analyse comments about the contents, which seek to evidence the learning. Rather, it seeks to uncover the dynamic process whereby viewers are constantly in a dialogical space between their judgments, their knowledge and the religion.

1.6 Significance of the study

Previous studies have shown that research seeking to explore the use of educational Islamic reality television programmes depicting Islamic practices in the modern world is still new and underdeveloped (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013; Mat Rahim et al., 2012; Patahol Wasli, 2014). Furthermore, most of these studies have been conducted in other areas such as non-verbal communication (Mat Rahim et al., 2012), explorations of the effects of Islamic reality TV on Muslims (Wok et al., 2012) and the negotiation of Muslim identities (Abdul Karim, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to analyse the show from an educational perspective. In response, in my Master’s dissertation, I conducted a directed content analysis of Imam Muda season one to unpack its Islamic educational messages using the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix, as described previously. My main reason for doing
so was that the contents of Islamic reality television combine a wide range of information and interpretations of Al-Quran\textsuperscript{22} and Hadith\textsuperscript{23} with the depth of situational practices. Thus, these programmes have the potential to be educational. This is paralleled by issues raised in the literature, which highlight that there is a lack of content development in Islamic entertainment (Abd Ghani, 2009; Dalia Fahmy, 2003). Therefore, this study will play an essential role in providing a content benchmark, thus adding to the body of knowledge that seeks to contribute to the content development of Islamic Education-oriented entertainment. In this context, the findings of this research will provide insights into television content production and local TV stations, and will also seek to enrich the function of media as an informal education source while embracing Malaysian cultural aspects.

Secondly, as mentioned above, this study will seek to investigate the dialogical process involved between the representation of young Imams in Kemuncak \textit{Imam Muda} and the judgments of Malaysian Muslim viewers. The viewers’ reactions and reflections are sources that reveal their understandings of the show. The judgments offered are beyond a conclusive statement of phenomena because they are a crucial part of the decision-making and discernment process. The results of this study sought to demonstrate the value of Islamic Education in Malaysia, emphasising the role of religious practices, attitudes and values in life to increase Muslims’ devotion to Allah in their daily lives. This results in the formation of their character, integrity and accountability. Therefore, it is essential to conduct this study to establish Islam and Malay values with the help of Islamic reality television programmes as aspects of informal education. Indeed, the analysis of existing entertainment based on Islamic nuances is beneficial to Muslim viewers. This process can guide Malaysian Muslims in their negotiation of Islamisation and modernity in their daily lives.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Al-Quran refers to the Words of Allah, which are revealed to Prophet Muhammad PBUH, via the medium of angel Jibrail. In the process, Mutawatir, which translates as successive narration, and originates from the word tawatur (literal meaning: repetition and constancy), is employed. Al-Quran contains 114 chapters.
  \item Hadith is the compilation of recordings of words, actions, and the silent approvals of prophet Muhammad PBUH.
\end{itemize}
1.7 Research frameworks

This research was developed, based on the theoretical research framework of Islamic Critical Realism, as developed by (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a). This approach underlabours the research as an interpretive framework to understand the dialectical processes involved in decision-making, embedded within the ordinariness of the television watching experience. The philosophy of Islamic Critical Realism will assist in understanding the participants’ engagement with the contents of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. In order to bring this discussion forward, I will describe the concepts developed for this study in more detail, based on the three types of engagement that Wilkinson (2015a, p. 51, 56, 59) develops in his research: judgmental rationality, ontological realism and epistemic relativism. I started by defining the participants’ judgments in Judgmental Rationality. It is assumed that the findings from the participants’ judgments will demonstrate how they reference religion in describing and interpreting the show. Al-Quran and As-Sunnah are the substance for Ontological Realism and drawing on the specific example of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three as Epistemic relativism (see figure 1.4). The following describes the process involved in the development of the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study.

1.7.1 Framing the research

This study was framed within audience studies, with the aim of unpacking the process of informal learning from media. When a researcher looks through the lens of education, to examine a specific activity such as watching television, he/she must apply various areas of study, such as media studies, cultural studies and education studies. This transdisciplinary research attempted to explore and relate several branches of knowledge to yield insights for the development of Islamic Education. Setting the context of the research in Islamic epistemology, I sought to apply and extend Islamic theories and frameworks from Muslim scholars in communication and education studies (see Abd Ghani and Mokhtar, 2010; Mowlana, 2007; Yusoff, 2016). The term ‘Islamic’ is important, as it highlights the faith-based and ethical criteria for carrying out this research, which I have further justified in the operational definitions (see Chapter 1.9, p. 26).

I formulated this research theoretically and conceptually, by focusing on the viewers’ engagements, which would reveal their spiritual judgmental rationality. The way viewers engage with TV can be seen as a form of informal education. TV is a medium of one-way communication, but the audience’s reactions to, reflections on and interaction with the
contents are constructive, dynamic and pragmatic. Theoretically, I selected an Islamic communication model as the bigger picture to explain the relationship between the variables involved. Since theory provides a generalised statement to explain a phenomenon, a model is a representation of reality. Employing an Islamic Critical Realist framework, I emphasised the need to examine only the viewers' judgments and engagements that would test the applicability of the framework and stimulate the research (see figure 1.5). The purpose of this was also to give authority to the participants to define the educational values in an informal setting, as evidenced while watching reality TV. Thus, this process sought to counter reductionism in how one should view Islam, which is often evidenced in the misuse of information obtained in the media. From this framework, I established the connection between theory, facts and data.

With regards to the conceptual framework, I utilised a logical sequential design that I adapted from Islamic Critical Realism (see figure 1.6). I harnessed a concept and proposition derived from empirical observation and a verbatim dataset. The development of the concept made the research findings meaningful and generalisable. It stimulated the research and the extension of knowledge by providing both direction and impetus. Employing Islamic Critical Realism encourages theoretical development that is useful for practice.

![Figure 1.1 The research framework onion](image-url)
Since this study is a piece of audience research, I chose an Islamic Communication Model inspired by Mowlana (2007), visualised by Yusoff (2016) (see figure 1.2) and refined by Abd Ghani and Mokhtar (2010) in their endeavour to unpack and provide a model of communications from Al-Quran (see figure 1.3). Focusing on the viewers’ interpretations and understanding of the final episode of *Imam Muda* season three, I decided to employ the Islamic Critical Realist framework developed by Wilkinson (2015), which he employed in his educational research in the British Muslim context. Intrigued by one of the principles of Islamic Critical Realism - judgmental rationality (see figure 1.4) - I explored and extended the principle and conceptualised it according to the nature of my research. In the following subtopic, I explain the theoretical framework for the research and later propose my conceptual framework for this study.

### 1.7.2 Theoretical framework

This study proposed a theoretical framework drawing on the combination of an Islamic Communication Model and an Islamic Critical Realist Model, to describe the judgmental rationality of a Muslim watching an Islamic TV show. During the everyday process of watching television, viewers not only receive the information as part of a one-way communication process, but also review their understanding of the contents, interpreting these in context. The researcher assumes that Islamic media literacy is more important to gaining a better understanding of Islam than what is portrayed in the media. This study explicitly chooses an Islamic Communication Model (Abd Ghani and Mokhtar, 2010; Mowlana, 2007; Yusoff, 2016) to provide a bigger picture of the theories involved in understanding viewers’ reception of Islamic television shows from an educational perspective. It is acknowledged there are a variety of theories in TV studies that focus on media reception, in particular in the fields of literary studies and cultural studies (Giroux, 2004; Hall, 1993; Holmes, 2005). For example, Users and Gratification theory (UGT) (Blumler, 1979) examines the reasons why people seek media to satisfy certain needs. Meanwhile, Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2008) explores how the long-term effects of messages transmitted through television have an influence in the real world. This can be understood from the cultural viewpoint in terms of Stuart Hall’s (Hall, 1973) encoding/decoding model, which highlights that viewers are active rather than passive consumers. Therefore, by grounding this research in the framework of an Islamic context, I sought to maintain the consistency of the ontology and to further develop the research.
a. Islamic Communication Model

A communication model is a conceptual model to describe the process of human communication, since it is an act or art for delivering the message (Gerbner, 1956; Quintas-Froufe and González-Neira, 2014; Yusoff, 2016). In the world of research, a variety of communication models have been created to understand and improve the process of communication. Bringing Islamic nuances to the study of communication models, Yusoff (2016, p. 14) visualised a one-way communication model based on the fundamental concepts of Islamic communication developed by Mowlana, (2007). This exists as an alternative as to the ‘western’ communication model, which is Robert and Shramm (1956). Below is an illustration of Yusoff’s (2016, p. 14) Islamic communication model.

![Diagram of Islamic Communication Model](image)

From this visualisation, we can understand that this model underpins the message of Tauhid (literal meaning: “exclusive servitude” to Allah SWT, which rejects any other forms of sovereignty except Allah SWT) and the doctrine of Al-Amr bi Al-Ma’ruf wa Al-Nayh ‘Anil Munkar (literal meaning: commanding the right and prohibiting wrongdoings) (Yusoff, 2016, p. 12). These theorisations inspired the researcher to enrich this model with another Islamic Communication Model, proposed by Abd Ghani and Mokhtar (2010), which was derived from the verses of Al-Quran.

Abd Ghani and Mokhtar (2010) proposed four Islamic communication models, based on interpretations and justifications from several verses of Al-Quran. These are: the Revelation communication model from verse 51, Surah Syura (ibid, p. 68), the Da’wah bil al-Nafs Communication model (Intrapersonal) from verse 56, Surah Dzariyat (ibid, p. 69), the
Da‘wah bil al-Fardiyyah communication model (Interpersonal) from verses 41-48, Surah Maryam (ibid, p. 72) and the Da‘wah bil al-Risalah communication model (Media) from verse 21, Surah Al-Anbia (ibid, p. 79). This study specifically chose the Da‘wah bil al-Risalah communication model because it was inspired by verse 107 of Surah al-Anbia, which shows that the transfer of knowledge in Islam is not only through the Da‘wah bil al-Nafs or Da‘wah bil al-Fardiyyah communication model. Rather, it is also open to interpretation through the medium of modern technology, which is the mass media. This is part of a one-way communication system because it occurs in a straight line from sender to receiver and serves to inform or to persuade; for example television, radio, newspapers (Schramm and Roberts, 1956). In the transactional communication model proposed by Barlund (1970, in Mortensen, 2008), viewers can give feedback to a broadcaster through any means, the most popular medium being social media. However, this study emphasises viewers’ interpretations and judgments while watching Imam Muda season three, as examined through their social interactions amongst themselves and their interactions with the representation of manifested Islamic Education contents. The viewers’ interactions using social media are proposed for a later study.

Figure 1.3 adapted the Da‘wah bil al-Risalah communication model by adding the medium of television (TV). On a theoretical level, when Muslims watch an Islamic TV programme they are being informed about Islam, which encourages them to learn or benefit from either the TV show or the Prophet (in this context referring to As-Sunnah), as well as the revealed text (Al-Quran). This shows that the process is repeated as and when viewers or users

24 The translation of the verse is: “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds”, Surah Al-Anbia [21:107].
receive mediated content through media such as the television, radio or social media. This became the interest of my study, which focuses on the way viewers make their assessments and judgments in an informal setting. The Ta’dib bil Al-Risalah Standard matrix developed in my previous study will assist in categorising the potential Islamic educational messages in Islamic TV programmes. Hence, unpacking the judgments, I seek insights into the viewers’ judgments, drawing on an Islamic Critical Realist framework, as it provides an educational perspective for Islam.

b. Islamic Critical Realism

Islamic Critical Realism is an interpretative tool developed by Wilkinson (2013, 2015a), in conversation with Roy Bhaskar (2008b). The emergence of Critical Realism from the perspective of Islam functions as a critical reflection for Muslim and non-Muslim students in humanities subjects, especially in the context of historical and religious education (Wilkinson, 2013). Even though this interpretative tool is implemented in the current study in the United Kingdom, it is possible to be applied in Malaysia because of the connective fabric of the Muslim religion. It provides a conceptual platform for the under-labouring of Islamic Critical Realism for Islamic Education in Malaysia. Islamic Education is taught from kindergarten to primary and secondary school, as a compulsory subject for Muslim students. It seeks to equip them with the knowledge and practise of the religion. The realities of Islam are philosophically real, but this interpretation should be based on critical engagement. Under-labouring (see Bhaskar, 2013, p. 11) Islamic Critical Realism assists in the vital meaning-making processes of Islamic Education in schools and relates educational experiences to real-life situations, with the aim of enabling individual emancipation and social unity (Wilkinson, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a). This under-labouring also requires a commitment to serious study, which translates beliefs into behaviours and practices that are coherent with Al-Quran and Hadith. The educational framework of Islamic Critical Realism mainly assists in interpreting the nuances of education in Islamic contexts, as discerned via the participants’ judgments, and demonstrates a reflective platform for Muslims (Sahin, 2016). Therefore, a core philosophical framework consisting of ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationalism (Wilkinson, 2015a, p. 50) will guide me to understand the dialectical process involved in their decision-making processes. The below diagram illustrates the 1M (Moment) for Islamic Critical Realism:
It is observable that dialectic ontological realism and epistemic relativism necessitate the judgmental rationality of Muslim reality TV viewers. Islamic TV viewing thus contributes to the religious experience and guides spiritual decision-making. These rationalisations are reactions to, reflections on and emotions negotiated between epistemic relativism as the beliefs, knowledge and interpretations of spiritual phenomena of religious traditions, and ontological realism as the holy texts and prophets’ teachings themselves, in this case, Allah and Al-Quran. It is vital to understand this framework because it assists in describing the process involved in defining the absence of critical media consumption and rationality while watching *Imam Muda*. Thus, it is suggested that Muslim viewers with an Islamic educational background in school, supported with Islamic media representations, have the potential to make a positive impact through four planes of social activity, as described in the philosophy of Critical Realism.

The emergence of Islamic Critical Realism proposed by Wilkinson (2013), and developed from Bhaskar's (2008b) earlier work, enables us to understand the critical reflection of Islam in the life of the believer. Drawing from the Islamic communication model and Islamic Critical Realism (see figure 1.3 and figure 1.4), I suggested the below figure to show the flow of the process.
Figure 1.5: Theoretical Framework

Figure 1.5 shows that Islamic content knowledge is derived from Al-Quran and As-Sunnah/Hadith (recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), as a prior reference to facilitate understanding of authentic Islam. The representation of Islam through the medium of reality television raises hermeneutical and educational questions concerning representation and interpretation, and the possibility of inauthentic and fallacious viewers’ interpretations. Hence, this theoretical framework attempts to show the bigger picture, to form the conceptual framework for the study.

1.7.3 Conceptual framework

This study aims to understand Malaysian Muslims viewers’ interpretations and judgments of Imam Muda. It does so by firstly describing the manifested Islamic Education content in Imam Muda through content analysis. It is essential to understand the representation of Islamic Education in context, as depicted in the TV show. This religious visual experience is explored by investigating the Muslim viewers’ reactions and rationalisations (JR) while watching Imam Muda IRTvP (ER). These led to a pattern for exploring Muslim viewers’ decision-making processes (JR) while watching Imam Muda IRTvP (ER). Therefore, the proposed conceptual framework is illustrated below:
To understand the viewers’ decision-making processes, observations and focus group discussions were conducted. Content analysis of the show provided the contents to which the participants responded. The observation of reactions and rationalisations made while watching *Imam Muda* indicated the viewers’ existing knowledge and experience of Islamic Education before their learning in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings in Malaysia. Meanwhile, focus group discussions were conducted to guide the stratification of viewers’ understandings, thus relating the content to the context. This study suggests employing the theoretical framework of Islamic Critical Realism (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a) in an under-labouring role to better understand Islamic reality TV as a function of Islamic Education. It seeks to understand the dialectical interplay between Islamic Education, epistemic relativism in Islamic reality television, and the judgmental rationality employed by the viewers.

**1.8 Limitations of the study**

This study is limited only to Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three, which is an Islamic reality television show that aired on the Astro Oasis TV network. It is the final episode of the season, in which the best young Imam is announced. This study conducted content analyses of the final episode to reveal the contents that the viewers responded to. This is crucial because it highlights the perspectives of the viewers and the processes involved in judging and determining the best young Imam in the show. The study only obtained qualitative data from observations and focus group discussions. The analysis of data in this
study is therefore limited to verbal statements from the participants, which is cross-referenced with their reactions during their viewing experiences and in their reflections after viewing. It is also limited to the researcher’s experience in Islamic content creation, which is relative to the researcher’s knowledge of Islamic Education.

Only Malaysian Muslims were selected in this study because this fulfilled the characteristic of study participants, which requires them to have undergone their schooling within the Malaysian Education system and to have studied Islamic Education in primary and secondary school. In addition to their prior knowledge of Islam, they also needed to have an understanding of Islamic lifestyles and its practices. The aim of this was to enable me as the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the participants’ formal and informal Islamic Education.

1.9 Operational definitions

In this study, the following definitions are used:

1. Islamic

In this thesis, the term Islamic is frequently used to provide clarity on which areas of study the researcher intended to situate the contribution of knowledge. It is also used to emphasise the way I view the perspectives of previous scholars that Islamise areas of ‘western’ knowledge, for example, the Islamic communication model, Islamic Critical Realism and Islamic Education. It is important to examine these areas because when knowledge was pioneered or ‘discovered’ by Western scholars, it became known as Western knowledge. In response, Muslim scholars began to refer to the process of looking at knowledge from the perspective of Islam as Islamisation (Ab Majid and Yusof, 2008; Dzilo, 2012; Furlow, 1996). As I studied the content of Imam Muda season one from the perspective of Islamic Education, it shifted my research from Islamic Reality TV to Islamic-education oriented reality TV, to expand my research. The following offers a brief description of the word ‘Islamic’, as utilised throughout this thesis.
a. **Islamic Communication Model**

From the linear communication model illustrated by Shannon and Weaver (1948, p. 2), we can see that basic communication is about the process of sending or transferring information from one to another. This model transformed the study of speech into the study of communication, and led to the development of a sender-message-channel-receiver (SMCR) model (Berlo, 1977) with the introduction of variables such as the transmitters, encoding, media, decoding and receivers (Schramm, 1955). Models of communication developed from linear to interactive, and continued progressing as human communication evolved through time. Mowlana (2007) suggested an Islamic nuance to communication in Islam, which was later modelled by Yusoff (2016). Abd Ghani and Mokhtar (2010) then modelled Islamic communication from verses derived from Al-Quran. My experience of creating media content and engaging with Islamic knowledge sparked the idea to unpack the way viewers interpreted Islamic messages. This thesis is the result of my effort to apply an Islamic communication model in the context of Islamic entertainment TV, which can be seen as my main contribution to the field.

b. **Islamic Critical Realist framework**

During the course of my PhD research, I discovered Critical Realism during one of the classes I attended. I was intrigued and began to consider that this may be an applicable framework for my study. Islamic Critical Realism was inspired by a discussion between Matthew Wilkinson and Roy Bhaskar, the originator of Critical Realism (see Bhaskar, 2008b). Islamising the Critical Realist framework, as outlined by Wilkinson (2013), has offered a different way of looking at modernity, as it affords educational value and meaning to the Qur’anic worldview. In a different context, Wright (2016) applies the lens of Christianity to Critical Realism, which offers a different take on how Critical Realism functions as a tool to interpret the understanding of the religion. Therefore, I view it as essential for this research to maintain its Islamic nuance. In response, Islamic Critical Realism has been drawn upon throughout.
c. **Islamic education**

Islamic Education refers to a discipline of knowledge incorporating the formalised principles of Al-Quran (Kalamullah), Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) and its moral codes and rituals (Ishak and Abdullah, 2013; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). Furthermore, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad also covers various sayings regarding knowledge and education. Thus, Islamic Education is a tool to create an ethical, moral, and spiritual being based on the understanding of Islam as a way of life (Al-Attas, 1980; Douglass and Shaikh, 2004; Hussain, 2004). Islamic Education is one of the subjects taught as part of formal Islamic Education in Malaysian schools and is integrated into the curriculum. By contrast, informal Islamic Education is conveyed through other media, for example television, radio, internet and social media (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mohd Nor et al., 2012). Therefore, Islamic Education in this study is limited to the existing knowledge gained during formal education in schools.

d. **Islamic Education-oriented Reality Television Programmes**

An Islamic Education-oriented Reality Television Programme is a reality TV show that integrates the reality TV genre with Islamic educational content (Patahol Wasli, 2014). It is categorised within this genre because the programme features ordinary people with Islamic backgrounds as the main characters (Abd Ghani and Mokhtar, 2010; Jamilin et al., 2011; Sawai et al., 2011; Wok et al., 2012). In addition, the content conveys non-scripted, dramatic or humorous situations as documented real-life events, thus establishing da’wah on a more relaxed platform (Abd Ghani, 2006). The main purpose of broadcasting Islamic programmes is to educate viewers about Islam and its traditions in practice. Therefore, this study selected *Imam Muda*, as it is an Islamic Education-oriented reality television programme produced by Astro Oasis. It acts as a platform to portray young Imams and Islam in a more modern presentation.
2. Imam Muda

*Imam Muda* is an Islamic Education-oriented reality television programme that aims to produce a competent young man with integrity and credibility to take responsibility, not only as an Imam but as a leader in the community (Vamburkar, 2010; Young, 2010a). Auditions were conducted for young men all over the states in Malaysia to find qualified participants who would be future role models. Each week, participants were tested on their religious knowledge and their performance in completing tasks on different themes. *Imam Muda* entered its third season from 2010 until 2012 (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013; Wok et al., 2012). However, *Imam Muda* season three was selected because it is the latest season of the show. Below is a picture of the contestants in *Imam Muda* season three.

![Contestants of Imam Muda Season Three](image)

3. Judgment

Judgment in this study refers to the viewers’ ability to make comments and decisions, and to come to conclusions about the contents of the *Imam Muda* Islamic Reality TV show. This is because *Imam Muda* is a competition-based reality TV show, which invites viewers to evaluate together with expert judges on the show, who are experienced and famous Imams. From the viewers’ judgments, the study analyses the science of judging that informed the learning that took place during the ordinary process of watching television.
4. Manifested contents and latent contents

Manifested contents in this study are the literal contents observable in the TV show. The term was borrowed from Kramer (1970), who derived it from Freud's (1900, 1920) discussion of manifested dream contents. They do not require any in-depth interpretations, and the media messages are apparent to the viewers’ senses, such as vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. These contents can be related to the viewers’ knowledge, experiences and emotions. In contrast, latent contents are hidden messages and require discussion or interpretation. The difference between these two concepts shows that media literacy is essential in order to read, access, evaluate and create media.

5. The Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix

The Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix is an instrument I developed during my previous Masters studies (see Patahol Wasli, 2014). The instrument is named ‘Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix’ because it was formulated from the Da’wah bil al-Risalah Communication Model (literal meaning: Preaching Using Media communication Model) (see Abd Ghani and Mokhtar, 2010) and the Islamic Education Standard-based curriculum for schools in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2017, 2018). The Arabic word Ta’dib (literal meaning: Education) was adapted from one of Al-Attas’25 concepts of Islamic Education: Ta’dib. This term refers to the instilling and inculcation of Adab in man. The contents of the matrix were developed, drawing on the Islamic Education Content Standard and Islamic Education Performance Standard as guidelines. The study analysed the contents of Imam Muda season one and identified the manifested content portrayed as part of its Islamic Education scope. This was used in the research to map the content onto the categories of the syllabus of Islamic Education (Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2015). However, the current study will use the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix to qualitatively describe the manifested content from the Imam Muda Islamic reality television programme as the ground of reference for the viewers’ interpretations and judgments. Ta’dib bil al-Risalah is used in the current study to guide observations by identifying the viewers’ reactions and reflections.

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25 Al-Attas is the title for Syed Muhammad al Naqib bin Ali al-Attas (Arabic: سيد محمد نجيب العلي). He was born in Bogor, Java, Dutch East Indies (pre-independence Indonesia) on the 5th September 1931. He is known as a Malay-Muslim philosopher and is one of the few contemporary scholars in traditional Islamic sciences who is competent in theology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, and literature (Ahmed, 2016, pp. 2–5)
1.10 Conclusion

This study attempts to explore Malaysian Muslims’ interpretations and judgments of manifested Islamic Education, as represented in the Islamic reality TV show, *Imam Muda*, season three. The dialogical process, while watching *Imam Muda*, is analysed to model the way the viewers react and reflect upon the content. This dissertation has seven chapters. Chapter One set the context for the study by describing Islamic Education, Islamic entertainment focusing on Islamic Reality TV and the issues that are raised in exploring viewers’ interpretations and judgments of Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three. It also provides definitions of terms frequently used to provide clarity for readers. Chapter Two discusses important areas of literature such as Islamic Education in Malaysia (see Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mohd Nor, Ibrahim et al., 2012; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011) and the development of Islamic TV programmes in the country to enrich Muslims’ understanding of Islamic knowledge, including its lifestyle. This chapter later focuses on the manifested Islamic educational contents in the *Imam Muda* reality television show and audience research, drawing on the framework of Islamic Critical Realism. Chapter Three discusses the methodology, including the research design, research methods, sample and participants of the study, the researcher instruments employed, the pilot study, data collection procedures and data analysis.

After contextualising and designing the research, Chapters Four, Five and Six report on the findings of the study. Chapter Four provides the initial findings of the participants’ background analyses, and a content analysis of Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, season three. It further identifies themes that emerged from the participants’ reactions towards the show during the viewing experience. Chapter Five reports on the second set of findings regarding the Malaysian Muslim viewers’ reception and interpretation of the TV show, based on the way they described the Islamic contents and reflected on the representation of young Imams. The study identified the themes that emerged from the participants’ focus group discussions after watching the show. Chapter Six analyses the results of Chapters Four and Five dialectically, focusing on the informal learning process engaged in through the interaction between participants concerning Islamic content knowledge in the show. Finally, Chapter Seven discusses the learning that took place and its transformative value, drawing on an Islamic Critical Realist framework (Wilkinson, 2013), to understand the viewers’ critical engagement with media, in the context of informal Islamic Education.
Chapter 2 : Literature review

This chapter will discuss and critically evaluate the literature employed as part of this research. I will begin by providing an introduction to knowledge from the perspective of Islam, drawing on the development of Islamic Education from ancient times to the present. From this broad context, I will offer a timeline of Islamic Education in Malaysia and will extend this by examining the development of Islamic TV programmes in the country. The aim is to enrich our understanding of Islamic knowledge — including Islamic lifestyles — especially those of Muslim viewers. The discussion will later focus on manifested Islamic educational contents in the Imam Muda reality television show, and the topic of audience research within the framework of Islamic Critical Realism.

2.1 Introduction

Over 1400 years ago, the last prophet Muhammad PBUH (Peace Be Upon Him) revealed Islam as a monotheistic religion in Makkah. Islam is an Arabic word, meaning submission to the will of Allah. People become Muslims as they recite the Syahadah, which offers the meaning that there is only one true God, Allah and that Muhammad PBUH is the messenger of God. This has become the basis for all Islamic teachings and beliefs. Islam is considered to be the second largest religion in the world, with over 1.9 billion estimated followers, accounting for 24.6% of the world's population. Al-Quran — also known as Kalamullah in Arabic — refers to the words of Allah. The contents are as dictated by Prophet Muhammad PBUH, as the revelations were dictated to him by Angel Jibril. Al-Quran is Muslims’ holy book, which focuses on the miracle of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Prophet Muhammad is the last messenger of Allah and is considered to be an exemplary Muslim. The recorded verbal or silent approvals of Prophet Muhammad are referred to as the Sunnah. Al-Quran and As-Sunnah are the sources of reference for Muslims (Hussain, 2004). These sources later branched into various forms of knowledge and disciplines for understanding the religion, which were passed down from generation to generation through a process and system that we know today as Education (Sudan, 2017).

Education has three broad meanings. Firstly, its synthesised meaning according to the Merriam-Webster,\textsuperscript{27} Cambridge,\textsuperscript{28} and Oxford\textsuperscript{29} online dictionaries (2020) is the action or process of gaining knowledge and developing skills through teaching, training and learning, especially in schools, colleges or universities. Secondly, it refers to the field of study that institutes people involved in teaching and training and focuses on methods of teaching and learning, also known as pedagogy (Hamzah \textit{et al.}, 2009; Harris \textit{et al.}, 2009; Jasmi, 2013; Sabrin, 2010). Lastly, education refers to an interesting informal experience that teaches you something (Ali \textit{et al.}, 2013; Aown, 2011; Rockman \textit{et al.}, 2007). Throughout the empirical work for this thesis, I demonstrate the meaning-making activities involved in education on multiple formal, non-formal and informal platforms. In the process, I shed light on a form of active learning that occurs as part of the informal learning experience. With this prior understanding of the religion of Islam and education, in the following sections, I will describe Islamic epistemology, as well as different divisions in Islam and their perspectives on education. I will also discuss developments in Islamic Education. Finally, I will situate the literature review in the Malaysian context.

\textbf{2.1.1 Islamic epistemology}

Knowledge is acquired through a process of learning and gaining experience (Alavi, 2007; Hassan \textit{et al.}, 2010). It makes us aware of our surroundings and brings meaning to our understandings and interpretations. Focusing on the perspective of Islam, knowledge can be categorised into Ilm Naqli (knowledge revealed through revelation) and Ilm Aqli (knowledge revealed to humans through learning). This is also known as the division of knowledge into Fardhu Ain (knowledge related to the religion of Islam, such as praying and reading the Quran) and Fardhu Kifayah (knowledge about other forms of knowledge such as science) (\textit{ibid}). This division was introduced in the Abbasid era when knowledge progressed into a formalised and organised medium of delivery and when secularism started to influence the division of religion and science (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mat Saad \textit{et al.}, 2011; Tamuri \textit{et al.}, 2012a; Zarkasyi, 2018). Knowledge can be categorised into specific areas of Ilm that have various weightings depending on the discipline involved (Dzilo, 2012; Halstead, 2007; Hashim and Rossidy, 2000). However, this does not mean that knowledge of Islam and science are separated. The role of the diverse discipline of knowledge is to guide us with regards to what category the Ilm is grounded in, so that as

\textsuperscript{27} See \url{https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/education} [Accessed 18 May 2020]
\textsuperscript{28} See \url{https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/education} [Accessed 18 May 2020].
\textsuperscript{29} See \url{https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/education} [Accessed 18 May 2020].
scholars in different fields, we may find a common ground. To explore various approaches to understanding Islam, I will now discuss three terms that can contribute to understanding the theoretical grounding of this thesis: Islamic epistemology, Islamic thought and Islamisation.

Epistemology, or the science of knowledge, is a branch of philosophy that deals with the way knowledge is discovered, identified, acquired and disseminated (Hashim, 2014; Islam and Fawaz, 2017). According to Kasule (2017), Islam has a distinctive epistemology because it is based on three sources of knowledge. Two of these are primary sources — Wahyu (revelation), as embodied in Al-Quran, and As-Sunnah, which is the basis of human knowledge. From a secular perspective, knowledge cannot be derived from revelation or supernatural endeavours. Therefore, the second source of knowledge from the perspective of Islam is empirical knowledge. The knowledge obtained from observation of and experimentation on the objects around us is also known as Ilm Kaun, which refers to knowledge about our environment (Ahmed, 2012; Halstead, 2004; Kasule, 2017). The final source of knowledge, Aql, is a secondary source, which refers to the human mind or intellect that develops and creates new knowledge from primary sources, or through empirical discoveries derived from the rational reasoning of one’s Aql (Islam and Fawaz, 2017; Kasule, 2017; Zarkasyi, 2018). As human beings, we are constantly encountering new things that enrich our knowledge and experience. Thus, Aql drives us to develop civilisation, as a result of the process of thinking and learning.

Islamic thought can be viewed as the thought process involved in engaging with content or as an outcome of thinking from inferences and rationalisation (Dzilo, 2012; Kasule, 2017; Zarkasyi, 2018). Since the outcome of thinking may be different depending on the context or perspective, it is crucial to focus on the thought process behind it. When we understand this process, we can see its manifestation in ideas. For example, epistemology from the perspective of Islam is an emergent branch of knowledge that foregrounds the duality of knowledge and the education system (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Abubakar et al., 2016; Baba et al., 2018). As the traditional education system focuses on the kuliah, or lectures, and madrasas, in contrast to the modern education system that highlights pedagogies, approaches and techniques, the co-existence of these two approaches may confuse learners. This may affect the outcome of learning, leading students to insufficiently analyse the problem. With a clearer and deeper understanding of epistemology, especially from the
perspective of Islam, we can refine the education system so that it obeys the principles of the religion for the ummah (Wadad Kadi, 2006).30

The Islamisation of modern knowledge was conceptualised by Al-Attas (1993) and Al-Faruqi (1982), and has gained momentum among Muslim intellectuals since the 1980s. This work was a reaction to a global consciousness that sought the resurgence of Islam in the 1970s, especially in the aftermath of the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah in 1977 (Furlow, 1996; Hashim and Rossidy, 2000). In contrast, from a secular point of view, there is no need to Islamise knowledge. For example, Hoodbhoy (1991) argues that science is universal or neutral and that there is no such thing as Hindu science, or Jewish science, since the associated problems and modalities are international. Meanwhile, Rahman (2011) argues that knowledge does not need to be Islamised, as it is created by Allah. Other Muslim scholars prefer to use terms such as desecularisation, dewesternisation, desacralisation, resacralisation and the integration of holistic knowledge (Hashim and Rossidy, 2000, p. 23). Islamic scholars view knowledge in a different way to Western scholars, as they look at knowledge from a Muslim perspective. Thus, this thesis aims to make contemporary knowledge consistent with the tawhidic paradigm31 (Mhd Sarif, 2014).

When we look at knowledge that is based on Wahyu (literal translation: revelation) and empirical knowledge as the primary sources, we realise that our Aqli is the secondary source of knowledge. The whole process of transmitting knowledge within the framework of Islam is also known as Islamisation (Dangor, 2005). This is because approaches and pedagogical practices organically develop across time and civilisation. Islamic Education is a system of knowledge that focuses on educating Muslims. Labelling education as Islamic, therefore, places the knowledge grounds on the platforms of Islam. Where knowledge is derived from and how it is being derived and applied in modern contexts varies according to the educational setting. Education is a method of delivering approaches, techniques and pedagogies, for the purpose of disseminating knowledge (Diallo, 2012; Niyozov and Memon, 2011; Sabrin, 2010). Therefore, it is the fundamental beliefs and values of Islam that shaped education for Muslims.

30 Ummah – an Arabic word: literal meaning ‘community’.
31 Tawhidic paradigm is a system of beliefs or values originated from the core Islamic concept of tawhid which means the doctrine of God’s unity and incomparability. It requires to perform deeds in line with Aqidah, Ibadah and Akhlaq as servant and vicegerent of Allah.
2.1.2 Educating Muslims from the perspective of Sunnism, Shi’ism and Sufism

Sunní and Shi’ah Islamic identities began to emerge after the death of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH (Berkey, 2003; Saeed, 2018). Sunnî Muslims believe that authority should be granted to the community, while Shi’ah Muslims believe that authority should be maintained in the post-prophetic context (ibid). Sunnis’ identity depends on the degree to which they follow the Sunnah of the prophet, and Al-Quran. Thus, the community’s consensus on the role of political authority (known as Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah) is the guiding principle for understanding and following Quran and Sunnah. In contrast, Shi’ah Muslims believe that spiritual authority is passed down through prophets’ descendants.

From a Shi’ah point of view, the prophet Muhammad declared he was leaving two important things that together would prevent the Muslim community from going astray: the Quran and ‘Itrah’ – the prophet’s family (as represented by ‘Ali). This is different from a Sunni perspective, which, by contrast, reports that the Prophet Muhammad left the Muslim community with Al-Quran and As-Sunnah. These identities shaped the way branches of knowledge were conveyed and transmitted across generations.

The origins of Sunnism lie in the Arabic term Sunnah, which refers to the normative practices of the prophet, as in the phrase of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah (the people of the Sunnah and the community). It is the dominant expression of Islam and is followed by approximately 80-85% of Muslims around the world (Denny, 2016; Saeed, 2018). Four schools for Sunnis include Maliki, which is attributed to Malik bin Anas; Hanafi, which is attributed to Abu Hanifah; Shafi’i, which is attributed to Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafi’I; and Hambali, which is attributed to Ahmad bin Hanbal. Each school is dominant in different parts of the world. Maliki school is dominant in North, Central and West Africa and Hanafi school is dominant in the Arab Middle East and South Asia (Saeed, 2018; Takim, 2005). Shafi’i school is dominant in East Africa, South Arabia and South East Asia, while Hanbali school is dominant in Saudi Arabia (Takim, 2005).

Shi’ah comes from an Arabic term meaning ‘follower’. It also can take a short form — Shi’atu Ali — which translates as ‘followers of Ali’. The Shi’ah are those who believe in the succession of the prophet, belong solely to and follow his family (known as Ahli Bayt) as a source of inspiration for understanding the Quranic revelation brought by the prophet. Three trends can be identified within Shi’ism: Twelver Shi’ism (known as Imam or Ithna Ashari), Sevenener Shi’ism (Known as Ismailis) and Fiver Shi’ism (known as Zaydis).
Twelver Shi’ism is followed by people from Iraq, Lebanon, India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Zaydis are followed by a portion of Muslims in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Sunni and Shi’ah disagreements generally revolve around theology and politics (Berkey, 2003; Saeed, 2018). However, another way of understanding and approaching God in Islam is offered by the ascetic movement, which started in the first two centuries of Islam. This movement has gradually combined with mysticism and is now known as the Sufi movement, or Islamic Mysticism (Saeed, 2018; Thomson, 1945; Trimingham, 1971). Sufism focuses on experiential knowledge through the purification of the soul. Practices of asceticism are often referred to as a travelling path, as they seek to cultivate an inner spiritual life and enable followers to attain inner knowledge. Sufism is also defined as a form of direct communion with God and man (Saeed, 2006, 2018; Trimingham, 1971).

The purpose of this brief introduction to different Muslim identities was to provide a general understanding of variance in the Islamic world, or Islamdom. The diversity of ways of understanding Islam could be the topic of an extensive discussion, which is not the focus of this study. Nevertheless, to further contextualise my study, I will now summarise Islamic Education from the perspective of Sunni, Shi’ah and Sufi Muslims (Abdullah Saed, 2018).

a. Sunnism

Sunnism

Sunnism Education established the madrasah as the institution for studying Islam and the Ulama as the transmitter of knowledge (Leiser, 1986; Robinson, 1996; Saeed, 2018). These madrasahs sprung up in the Muslim world, notably in Al-Azhar, which is a famous mosque school that has become one of the greatest traditional Islamic seminaries in the Sunni world. Teaching methods such as study circles are employed by learned shaykhs. Students study legal and theological subjects in addition to medicine, poetry, mathematics, natural sciences, literary and artistic criticism and Hellenistic ‘rational’ sciences (Chamberlain, 1994; Saeed, 2018). Depending on schools, logic and philosophy are taught, while other schools avoid teaching those subjects. In madrasahs, scholars have established a system of certification known as Ijazah, which grants verbal consent that enables their students to pass on their bodies of knowledge.
b. Shi‘ism

Shi‘ah education established hawzahs, which are Shi‘ah seminaries. More specifically, these are centres of informal and flexible learning, which focus on the transmission of religious knowledge (Gleave, 2012; Saeed, 2018). They are overseen by an individual or a group of religious leaders. The hawzah curriculum has now progressed to a more structured format that attempts to train students in various Islamic disciplines, focusing on the sciences and principles of jurisprudence (Rasiah, 2007; Saeed, 2018). The formal curriculum focuses on religious texts that require students to go through the introductory, intermediate and advanced stages of study. Teaching methods employed in the hawzah are solitary or individual reading, group discussions, linguistic analysis of texts and analysis of textual structure and arguments (Rasiah, 2007; Saeed, 2018). Teachers play a central role but peer learning is also essential in advanced learning. Students are encouraged to question everything they learn in the classroom.

c. Sufism

In the early movement, Sufi education began informally in small groups and private venues, with focused on experiential knowledge of God, achieved by cultivating an inner spiritual life and attaining inner knowledge (Saeed, 2018; Trimingham, 1971). This then developed into a master-disciple learning experience, where Sufi shaykhs as the centre of the transmission of mystical knowledge co-ordinated with key Sufi figures to systemise concepts. Eventually, this practice grew into a community known as khanqah, which refers to communal residences established by private benefactors or donors (Malamud, 1994; Saeed, 2018).

As a conclusion, traditional Islamic teaching and learning methods have developed through time. Sunnism, Shi‘ism and Sufism have different identities, politics, and focuses but education plays a universal role in the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation, in each of these branches. As this transmission has become more systematic, the dissemination of knowledge related to the discipline of Islam has become known as Islamic Education (Khamis and Salleh, 2010). The phrase Islamic Education is inspired by Syed Muhammad Al-Qutb, who is quoted in Al-Attas’s (1992) book, in which he

32 Syed Muhammad Al-Qutb also known as Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) was one of the leading Islamist ideologues of the 20th century, and a contemporary Muslim thinker. He also served as an educator and literary
discusses the role of religion in Education. He defines education in Islam as a broad term that covers all aspect of life, such as Aqidah, Shariah, Ibadah, Akhlak, science, technology, sociology politics, the economy and more. It is seen as a holistic approach to developing human capital. Meanwhile, Al-Attas (1987) used the word Ta’dib to explain education, as it offers the nuances of knowledge, practice and Akhlak. Ta’dib in Arabic involves disciplining the soul and mind from wrongdoing that may cause dishonour. Hamka (1998) used the word Ta’lim and Tarbiyah to define Islamic Education. Ta’lim — literal meaning: education or instruction — is derived from surah Al-Baqarah verse 3. It describes education as a process of transferring knowledge from Allah to human (Adam). Tarbiyah — literal meaning: to nurture, to feed, to encourage growth, or to develop — has physical and spiritual dimensions. It is the educator’s effort to form the character of the child until they are independent and able to differentiate between good and bad. In Malaysia, the population is mostly Sunni and this has impacted the administration and development of Islamic Education on many levels, from formal, to non-formal and informal settings. Nevertheless, before I explore in more detail the development of Islamic Education in Malaysia, I would like to offer an overview of Islamic Education in general.

2.1.3 The development of Islamic Education

Al-Quran and As-Sunnah are the two main vehicles of knowledge and education for Muslims (Denny, 2016; Sabrin, 2010; Stapa et al., 2012). As discussed earlier, Al-Quran refers to the divine words of Allah, as revealed by Angel Jibril, while As-Sunnah refers to the recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. As Muslims, we believe that Allah is the All-knowing and the source of all knowledge. Al-Baqarah33 in verse 31-33 of Al-Quran tells us that Allah taught Adam various names, which stand for the knowledge needed in order for him to be God’s khalifah (Rahman, 2011, p. 446).34 When Adam presented to the Angels, his knowledge became visible to them. This shows that (wo)man has the potential to gain knowledge. As we praise or admire human inventions, we ought to praise Allah because we are given minds and have knowledge revealed to us, which allows us to create and innovate. The obligation to seek knowledge is a responsibility for every Muslim, as mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet. The Prophet played

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writer in Egypt. For further biographic information, see [https://www.iep.utm.edu/qutb/](https://www.iep.utm.edu/qutb/) [Accessed 31 May 2020].

33 Al-Baqarah is the second surah after Al-Fatihah. It is also the longest chapter of the Quran, which occurs between Juz 1-3. The surah, which means ‘The Cow’, consists of 286 verses, 6,201 words and 25,500 letters. It is a Medinan surah, which is believed to have been revealed in Medina, after the Hijrah.

34 Khalifah – an Arabic word, with a literal translation of vicegerent, successor or ruler.
an important role as a messenger of Allah and as an exemplary model for humankind. From the perspective of education, he is a teacher that taught the people through his words and actions (Baiza, 2018, pp. 78–79). Therefore, Rasulullah as Qudwah Hasanah (a good example) and his Sunnah are passed down from generation to generation through face-to-face contact and memorisation.

Islamic educational thought is a synthesis of views regarding education in an Islamic context. A variety of typologies, such as Education of Muslims, Education for Muslims, Education about Islam, Education in Islam, and Muslim Education carry different underpinning philosophies and educational aims (Douglass and Shaikh, 2004; Halstead, 1995). Panjwani (2004) suggested that the discourse focusing on the word ‘Islamic’ should be replaced with ‘Muslim’, as this urges us to highlight the historical agency of Muslims. From this perspective, later generations would be able to appreciate the way scholars across history have dealt with intellectual and educational issues (Ahmed, 2016; Niyozov and Memon, 2011; Panjwani, 2004). Nevertheless, Islamic educational philosophies have created an intellectual interest in the pursuit of a better life, through the combined efforts of academicians and practitioners (Ahmed, 2012; Niyozov and Memon, 2011; Sahin, 2013). We need to approach Islamic Education on its own terms, as an introduction to and a worldview of Islam, which includes knowledge of Fardhu Ain and Fardhu Kifayah (F. Ahmed, 2018; Halstead, 2004). This is because different branches of knowledge in Islam have specific areas of emphasis, such as Tafsir (Quran Exegesis), Fiqh (The Jurisprudence of Islam), Hadith (known as Mustalah Hadith or ‘Ilm Al-Hadith), Sirah (the Life Narrative of the Prophet PBUH), and Revelation-Based Politics (Al-Siyasah As-Shariyyah). The history of Islam has developed considerably, since its foundations were laid. Thus, education can be seen as a potential branch of Islamic knowledge, which derived and organically evolved from the Prophet Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah.

In the early preaching of Islam, the Prophet recited the Quran, providing answers to questions, and demonstrating exemplary manners and behaviours, in accordance with the Quran’s values (Ahmed, 2012; Ilias et al., 2017; Mohamed, 2009). Looking through the lens of modern education, when the prophet recites the Quran, his followers listen and memorise the verse, in addition to providing explanations and lectures related to the verse and observing the prophet’s way of life (Denny, 2016; Stapa et al., 2012; Tamuri et al., 2012b). Prophets can be viewed as active learners who keep notes to aid their revision and to teach in their communities. Their process of transferring knowledge emulates the way
they received it from the prophet, as they pass it down to their students. This process has developed, and become systematised and institutionalised in the mosque, kuttab and madrasah (Gent, 2014; Abu-Rabi, 1989; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). The emergence of institutions for Islamic knowledge dissemination flourished with different branches and schools of Islam, depending on the relativity of the context and country. This process has also been influenced by colonisation and even globalisation (Arjmand, 2018). As Western education has bloomed through the proliferation of educational philosophies and pedagogies such as those espoused by Vygotsky (1978) [zone of proximal development and scaffolding], Piaget (Falvell and Piaget, 1963) [theories of schema and constructivism], Skinner (1985) [behaviourism], Bruner (1977) [spiral curriculum], Bloom (Bloom et al., 1956) [Bloom's taxonomy], and Gardner (1983) [theory of multiple intelligence], it has modernised the way scholars look at Islamic Education (see Abubakar et al., 2016; Diallo, 2012; Halstead, 2004). It is a window to understand the basics of Islam as knowledge is suitable for laymen or new Muslims. Islamic Education taught in schools covers all knowledge in a basic and practical manner, to provide exposure to and an understanding of Islam. In the modern context, students are encouraged to explore knowledge and to construct further understandings, facilitated by a qualified teacher. However, it is advisable that the teacher is a Muslim and equipped to teach about pedagogical knowledge. By focusing on human agency, it is hoped that the student will gain an in-depth grasp of Islamic knowledge and the ability to apply it in various life contexts (Abubakar et al., 2016; Hashim, 2014; Panjwani, 2004).

Muslim scholars across time have defined the aims and objectives of Islamic Education (see Darusalam, 2001; Sudan, 2017; Zaman, 2018). Through their theories, we are able to identify the contemporary aims of Islamic Education for this era. Early understandings of Islamic Education, as offered by Imam Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Miskawaih highlighted that the main aim of Islamic Education is to produce good humans, through the study of the Quran and religious sciences (Hamid Reza Alavi, 2007; Khamis and Salleh, 2010). These aims include the desire to produce better human that possess praiseworthy Akhlak, devoted physically and spiritually to one’s responsibility to Allah and act kindly to people and be beneficial to the community (Al-Attas, 1987). He emphasized that a person who is Adil (literal translation fairness or justice) will be able to progress in every aspect of life to achieve Insan Adabi – which interpreted as a person that strives for the betterment in every aspect of life. As for Hamka (1998) in Abdullah et al. (2017), listed the aim for education in the perspective of Islam is to find and obtain Allah
mercy because with the knowledge one can learn about Allah, to develop good behaviour or Akhlak, to have good character and be useful to the community and with a lifetime learning. We can see the similarity is to strive in producing vicegerent or Khalifah in the world that can balance the spiritual and worldly matter.

Progressing to a modernised perspective, Islamic Education has been integrated with a Western philosophy of life (see Diallo, 2012; Islam and Fawaz, 2017). It is undeniable that the encounter between two different approaches to education with the same purpose of producing good humans requires clarification, through a set of moral values. This dualism, which is the result of postcolonial times, has highlighted the need to bring Islamic Education into the mainstream secular system of education (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Abubakar et al., 2016; Hashim, 1994). Islamic Education has thus become institutionalised and categorised into formal, non-formal, private and informal education, as a direct result of interaction with Western-style education. In 1977, Muslim educationists from around the world gathered at the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah to tackle the issues facing Muslims in the educational setting, and to identify aims, objectives and recommendations for the implementation of pedagogical practices. It was concluded that Islam is a way of life and that an integrated system of education is necessary to avoid the danger of duality (Al-Attas, 1980). Following this, a series of six conferences from 1982 to 1996 discussed the integration of the Islamic Education curriculum across subjects, textbooks for Muslim and Non-Muslim schools, as well as methods and guidelines for teaching from an Islamic stance (see Abdul Mabud, 2016; Hashim, 1994, 2014). Having offered a general understanding of Islamic Education, I will now focus on the Malaysian context, where the majority of the population practises Sunni Islam. I will also discuss the revival of Islamic Education in the postcolonial context, which is shaping Muslims in Malaysia in contemporary times.

2.2 A brief historiography of Islamic Education in Malaysia

Islamic Education is one of the key subjects in the Malaysian education system (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017, 2018). It is a mandatory subject for young Muslims in primary and secondary school. The subject also has a more significant function to instil Islamic morality (Akhlq) and virtues in its students, and to encourage them to practise proper manners (Adab) (Al-Attas, 1980). Some secondary schools offer specialised subjects such as Arabic Language, Syariah Islamiyah Education (Pendidikan Syariah
Islam has been practised and assimilated in the Malay world, as recorded during the Malaccan Sultanate (Abdul Hamid, 2018). The following is a brief explanation of the history of Islamic Education in Malaysia and the integration of Islamic Education into media culture. Keeping this in mind, we shall begin with a brief exploration of Islamic TV programmes in Malaysia, which led to the emergence of the Imam Muda Islamic reality TV show. This section will provide a brief history of Islamic Education in Malaysia, where Islam played an essential role in shaping the face of the Malay Archipelago (present-day Malaysia and Indonesia). The Malay Archipelago (also known as Nusantara) is situated geographically in the ancient Eastern and Western trading routes that bring together economic and civilizational influences from Arab, Persian, Chinese, Indian, and European cultures. The spread of Islam from the house of royalty into the interactions between indigenous Malays and foreign Muslims became the basis for the early development of Islam, since the end of the thirteenth century (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Al-Attas, 1980). The development of Islam Education in Malaysia had several phases, which slowed down during the period of Western colonisation (1511-1957) and gradually built up after Malaya’s independence was declared in 1957.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Development</th>
<th>After independence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Spread of Islam (1414 AD)</td>
<td>• Independence period (1957-1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Early Development Period (1459-1477)</td>
<td>• World Conference on Muslim Education (1977)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Western Colonisation**
- Beginning of Colonialism (1511)
- During the Imperial period (1854)
- The period immediately before Independence (1906-1907)

![Figure 2.1: Timeline of Islamic educational development in Malaysia](image)

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35 This subject is taught in upper secondary school as an elective subject that aims to disseminate knowledge of Syariah derived from Al-Quran and its application in life.

36 This subject is taught in upper secondary school as an elective subject that aims to teach about Al-Quran and As-Sunnah, which should be implemented in everyday life.

37 This subject is taught in upper secondary school as an elective subject that aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the content of Islamic teachings covering aspects of faith, morality and amaliyah.
2.2.1 Early development of Islamic Education

The year 1414 AD marked the spread of Islam from the preaching of the royal family to the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the Malay Archipelago. Some historians, such as Ibn Battuta, who have studied the writings of this period, have identified that Islam arrived in Kelantan in the twelfth century CE. The literature acknowledges the debate regarding the date of arrival of Islam to the Malay Archipelago at the same time as it seeks to focus on the developmental trajectory of Islamic Education (see Baba et al., 2018; Mohd Nor et al., 2012; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). Looking at this context retrospectively, informal and non-formal Islamic Education focused on Quranic Studies and basic Islamic teachings. For example, when the first king, Parameswara (or Iskandar Shah) of Melaka (1344-1414), embraced Islam, it was then adopted by the rest of the royal family. Sultan Muhammad Shah, the third sultan of Melaka (1424-1444), son of Sultan Megat Iskandar Shah (1414-1424), played an essential role in spreading Islam. He glorified the Ramadan month, especially on the twenty-seventh night when he performed congregation prayers (Tarawih) with the public at the Masjid. Inspired by the religious practices of Islam, he marked the beginning of the development of Islamic Education in the Malay Archipelago (Baba et al., 2018; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011; Mohd Nor et al., 2012).

Between the years 1459 and 1477, Islam became the formal religion of the kingdom. This led to Islamic Education becoming part of formal education under the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah, the sixth sultan of Melaka (son of Sultan Muzaffar Shah [1445-1459]; the fifth sultan of Melaka). Sultan Mansur Shah encouraged scholarship in Islamic theological studies and studied Tasawuf.38 He studied with Maulana Abu Bakar, who brought the Darul Mazlum scriptures (written by Maulana Abu Ishaq From Makkah) to Melaka. He sent the scriptures to Pasai to be translated into the classical Malay language. The sultan highlighted the importance of religious textbooks and knowledge of Islam. Consequently, he developed another part of Islamic civilisation, through the introduction of the JAWI alphabets. JAWI alphabets are an alternative script used by Malays in Malay-dominated areas in Indonesia (Mohd Nizah and Asran, 2015). It was a standard script in noting the knowledge, which was adapted from the Arabic language to suit classical, spoken Malay. It is written in a similar way to the Arabic and Persian alphabets, which is written right to left, and is also considered as the key form of writing used by Malay Muslims (Mohd Nizah and Asran,

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38 Tasawwuf is an Arabic term that refers to the science of inner purification of ethical and spiritual aspects in ‘becoming a Sufi’. Tasawwuf is generally translated as Sufism.
The recitation of the Quran became more accessible to the Malays with the Jawi alphabets. In the earlier stage, teachers in their homes conducted the study of the Quran. As the number of students increased, the classes transferred to the Masjid (Mohd Nor et al., 2012). This setting led to the development of other branches of Islamic teaching such as Fiqh, Tauhid, Tafsir, history, Tasawwuf, and others (Baba et al., 2018). Apart from Melaka, other lands in the Malay Archipelago such as Johor, Pahang, Jambi, Kampar, Bangkalis, and Bentan became the centre of development for Islam during the times of Sultan Mansur Shah (1459-1477).

### 2.2.2 Colonial and post-colonial experience

Muslims came to the Malay Archipelago with the mission of preaching Islam (Baba et al., 2018; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). The expansion of Islam before colonisation began in the royal family, and was subsequently adopted by the general population (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). It became well integrated into the people’s traditions and local lifestyles during this time. Institutions were developed and systems started to emerge from lectures given in castles and mosques (Ishak and Abdullah, 2013; Mohd Nor et al., 2012; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011) This led to the building of madrasahs and to parents sending their children to the Middle East to study Islam (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Tamuri et al., 2012a). The purpose of this was to educate local people about Islam, to enable them to gain a deeper understanding of their roots, and to adapt rulings to the local context (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mohd Nor, Ibrahim, Yusof, et al., 2012). However, the epistemology of Islamic Education in the Malay Land has also been influenced by the colonial and post-colonial experience, as I will now describe.

#### a. Islamic Education during Western colonisation

From the year 1511, which coincided with the beginning of Western colonisation in Melaka, a significant change occurred in the lives of the Malay people. This caused a regression in the Malay empire and civilisation, especially in the mentality of its people, and religious aspects, which led to a moral decline. The colonisation not only manipulated the resources in the Malay Archipelago but also facilitated the spread of Christianity (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Baba et al., 2018; Ishak and Abdullah, 2013; Mohd Nor et al., 2012). Muslim Malays had difficulties in practising Islamic teachings and this situation restricted the spread of Islam and its propagation. Before the establishment of Malay schools and subsequent colonisation by the Portuguese, Islamic Education existed in a traditional setting, whereby Islamic subjects were taught in Islamic schools. However, things changed...
after 1854 when the British East India Company took over Islamic schools (Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011; Sahad and Sa’ari, 2011). They offered resources, with the one condition that the school taught subjects such as reading and writing, and maths, apart from teaching about Islam and the Quran. Thus, they introduced and funded secular education, such as learning sciences in the morning school. Meanwhile, the study of religious education, including Islamic subjects, was community-funded in the context of afternoon schools (Baba et al., 2018; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011; Mohd Nor et al., 2012). The impact of colonisation was the emergence of two educational institutions, which shaped the face of education in Malay lands (Tanah Melayu). The first institution was introduced by the British, and was taught through the medium of English, with a Protestant missionary presence (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011). In contrast, Muslim Malays, who insisted on staying in more Islamic environments, sent their children to Pondok, which maintained the old system, where the student is sent to learn Islam in a traditional manner, reading from books with a teacher.

From 1906 to 1907, Malay Muslims established the madrasah system with the ‘Pondok’ curriculum, to ensure the survival of Islamic Education. Madrasah developed infrastructures such as school buildings, hostels and offices to facilitate the students. Successful students from the system continued their studies in the Middle East, in locations such as al-Azhar in Egypt. The graduate students gained a better understanding of Islam and came back to teach Islam in the Malaysian context. With the desire to make a change in the Malay Land, the students started an Islamic Education movement. For example, Syed Sheikh Al Hadi (1867-1934) made a significant contributions to modern Malay nationalism (Roff, 1965, pp. 85–90). He is part of the Middle East school of thought reform group called Kaum Muda, Malaya, which developed the Islamic reform journal Al-Imam (1906–08), modelled on Al-Manar of Cairo. From an educational perspective, he played an essential role in the transformation of the Pondok education system. In 1906, he established a madrasah in Bukit Mertajam, Sebarang Prai with the name Madrasah al Misriyah. Furthermore, he opened Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiyyah in Singapore in 1908. Between the years 1909 and 1915, he became a Syari lawyer in Johor but then decided to leave that career to come back to Melaka. He subsequently established Madrasah Al Hadi in Banda Kaba Melaka in 1917 (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Baba et al., 2018; Roff, 1965).
b. Islamic Education after independence

Islamic Education in the Malay Land thrived after independence in 1957. In the aftermath, the Ministry of Education appointed Islamic religious educators to teach Islamic subjects to Muslim students. The system guaranteed that Muslim students would be taught and would study Islamic Education for 11 years (six years of primary school and five years of secondary school). The students learnt from the syllabus of Islamic Education reviewed by the Council of Kings. The First World Conference on Muslim Education (1977) and The Malaysian National Education Philosophy (NEP) (1996) inspired Islamic Education reformation in Malaysia. In 1979, the Ministry established the integration of Islamic Education through the implementation of the New Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) in 1983 and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah) in 1988. The primary orientation of these curricula was the knowledge propagated in the spirit of Tauhid. In this way, the disciplines of knowledge should lead to the recognition of Allah. As Muslims, the knowledge should be utilised based on Allah’s will, as his servant and khalifah (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Baba et al., 2018; Mohd Nor and Wan Othman, 2011).

Following this came the formation of the Malaysian National Education Philosophy (NEP) (1996), which aimed to promote individual holistic development from the perspective of an integrated Islamic Education system. The curriculum encompassed the development of Akhlaq, through the combination of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects. The J-Qaf programme, introduced in 2005, also developed the characteristics and comprehension of Muslim students in Jawi alphabets, Al-Quran Recitation, the Arabic Language and Fardhu Ain. It was hoped that the implementation of this philosophy would give birth to knowledgeable and competent citizens with a high level of personal well-being, thus building a society equipped with high moral standards, which is resilient and able to contribute to the family, society and the nation at large (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Baba et al., 2018; Mohd Nor et al., 2012). The idea of integrated Islamic Education subsequently resurfaced with the reestablishment of Islamic educational institutions and educational technologies as a tool for teaching and learning. Since my previous study related to schools and technology application was conducted in a formal setting (see Patahol Wasli, 2014; Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2014), the current study intends to expand the parameters to the use of Islamic entertainment media to deliver messages about Islam in an informal setting.
2.2.3 The integrated Islamic educational system

Islam is a way of life, and knowledge of Islam covers many aspects of life as a Muslim. The primary source of Islam is Al-Quran and Sunnah, as recorded by Imam Malik in Muwatta’. As Malik, The Messenger of Allah, said: “I have left you with two matters which will never lead you astray, as long as you hold to them: The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of his Prophet” (al-Muwatta’, 1661). These are the sources of Islam and Islamic Education. Al-Quran is the word of Allah, as revealed to Prophet Muhammad PBUH, through Jibril. It contains the principles of Islamic thought. Sunnah is recorded speech, behaviours and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which explains and complements the principles from the Al-Quran. The below table, 2.1, contains the verses from Al-Quran and recorded sayings from Sunnah for use in the context of Islamic Education as quoted in Khamis and Salleh (2010, pp. 2-3).

Table 2.1: List of Al-Quran verses and recorded sayings from Sunnah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Al-Quran</th>
<th>Sunnah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Read! in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created. Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Read! and thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He who taught (the use of) the pen. Taught man that which he knew not” (Al-Alaq: 1-5).</td>
<td>“When a man dies, his works also stops except three things: acts of charity, knowledge by which (all) profit, and righteous children who pray for him” (Abu Hurairah, Abu Daud, Tarmizi and Nasaie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This verse (Al-Alaq: 1-5) was the first revealed to Prophet Muhammad PBUH in Hira’ Cave. The kalimah/word ‘Iqra’ refers to the instruction to read, which indicated the importance of education and the obligation of Man to seek knowledge.</td>
<td>“… Say: “are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receives admonition” (Az-Zumar: 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Who so walks in the path seeking for knowledge therein, God will thereby make easy to him the path of paradise” (Abu Hurairah and Muslim)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


• “It is He who has sent amongst the Unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom although they had been, before, in manifest error” (Al-Jum’ah: 2).

• “...And when ye are told to rise up, rise up, God will rise up to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted Knowledge…” (Al-Mujadilah: 11)

• “Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)” (At-Taubah: 122)

• “...but say, "O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge”. (Ta Ha: 114)

• “...ask of those who possess the message (knowledge)” (An-Nahl: 43).

As shown in table 2.1, the collective quotations from Al-Quran and Sunnah highlight the importance of seeking knowledge. In this way, education is about undergoing systematic training, as well as enlightening experiences. Islamic Education also encompasses educational theory from Al-Quran and Sunnah. Muslim intellectuals formulated an educational model, which had the main aim of development/growth of character, including the promotion of the moral and ethical qualities promoted by Imam Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina. Their ideas focused on the areas of intellectual, physical, and moral education, as suggested by Ibn Sina and Ibn Miskawyh. The development of character is obtained through the study of the Quran and religious sciences, as recommended by Ibn Khaldun (see Hashim and Langgulung, 2008; Khamis and Salleh, 2010). This displays similarities...
to the contemporary aim of national education for contemporary Muslims in Malaysia, which focuses on the balanced growth of a Muslim personality. The national educational philosophy corresponds to the acronym JERISAH, which has some key components: J - (Jasmani) - physical, E - (Emosi) - emotional, R - (Rohani) - spiritual, I - (Intelek) - intellectual, S - (Sosial) - social, A - (Alam) – environmental, and H - (Hamba Allah) - humbleness towards Allah SWT (Salleh, 2009). Muslim students in Malaysia study Islamic Education, while non-Muslims study moral education. Hence, the following will describe the scenarios facing Islamic Education in the present, past and future in Malaysia.

The present (The Now) refers to the most recent five years (2015-2019) of Islamic Education in Malaysia. This situation is more progressive than it has been in the past, as many religious scholars such as Al-Azhar and Madinah have graduated from universities in the Middle East and have come back to the country to teach members of the community. The assimilation of Islam in the country has become more visible, as society has become more conscious of the Syariah, including related issues such as halal and haram (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Mohammed, 2015). Islamic figures are becoming more accessible to members of the general public and are accepted in the media. For example, Dr Zulkifli Mohamad Al-Bakri is a major Islamic figure who is known as Mufti in Malaysia. He has become the point of reference for Malaysians to find out about the Syariah. He has twitter and social media spaces that allow him to communicate his knowledge and to disseminate information. Furthermore, alumni from Islamic reality TV shows such as Imam Muda, and Pencetus Ummah, such as IM Asyraf and PU Azman, are known Islamic reality TV figures in Malaysia (Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffdeen and Abdul Manaf, 2017). These three Islamic figures have gained increasing acceptance in Malaysian society and have become an example for Muslims.

The past (Back Then) reflects on Imams and muftis that exclusively taught in madrasas and mosques, as was popular in the years of early independence of the Malay Land (Tanah Melayu). As the education system developed in Malaysia, Islamic Education became a compulsory subject in school, with the aim of teaching Muslims core values. The Ministry of Education has put great efforts into developing KBSR and KBSM suitable for Muslims, which are being implemented in a holistic way to teach about religion (Abdul Hamid, 2018; Tengku Kasim and Che Husain, 2008). However, in 2018, a columnist on Utusan Online39

39 Utusan Online is an online platform for Utusan Malaysia, which is a Malay-language newspaper published in Malaysia.
Ismail (2018) highlighted the need to revise the Islamic Education curriculum. According to Ismail (ibid), revising the curriculum is important because the teaching and study of Islamic Education needs to be more than just cognitive, and should develop aspects such as social cohesion. This change in perspective was forged by a paradigm shift called ‘Islam in the New Era’ (Kassim and Mohd Hazmi, 2018, p. 7), which put forward by the new government in Malaysia. Three issues raised are: Islam in Malaysia, Hifz al-Din (literal translation: to guard or protect Islam) and religious tolerance and Tajassus (referring to the prevention of ma’siat (literal meaning: sinful act) and khalwat (literal meaning: seclusion from the opposite gender) in the Malaysian public sphere and personal space (Kassim and Mohd Hazmi, 2018, pp. 18–25). This scenario highlights the urge to educate society to be more Islamic literate. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia stated in a press release (see MoE, 2019) that a special force team for Islamic Education had taken the initiative to conduct research for the betterment of Islamic Education and society. This provides a strong rationale for my study, which seeks to contribute to the perspective of informal Islamic Education and Islamic media literacy.

Islamic Education for the future (Moving Forward) refers to the need to develop Islamic media literacy and spiritual judgment among Malaysian Muslims. In this modern era, information and knowledge about Islam are available on the internet without any restrictions or boundaries (Ahmed and Matthes, 2017; Jani, 2017). Muslims can therefore use and search for any information that is available on the internet, such as Islamic Ebooks, Online Fatawas and the E-Syariah, to build their knowledge and understanding of Islam. Knowledge of Islam has become simplified to self-help or self-study subjects (Aaron, 2008; Abdul Rahman et al., 2015; Bunt, 2003). This has caused young Muslims to become judgmental about issues that are happening in the world, as exemplified in the ‘viral’ culture among social media users in Malaysia. ‘Viral’ in this context means the act of spreading news or knowledge about Islam without checking the authenticity or authority of the contents. Akhrun Musa, a researcher in the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) states that the act of referring to ‘Ustaz Internet’ without confirming it with the authorities prior to dissemination will result in public exposure to contents that

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contradict Islam (see Bernama, 2016). This, in turn, might lead to liberalism and pluralism, which in certain contexts can challenge an Islamic worldview. Liberalism refers to understanding the Quran and Sunnah independently and freely, by not putting the text in context, thus defying Shariah and engaging in slander against Islamic institutions (Abd Razid, 2015; Hassan, 2012; Merry, 2004). It is seen as a movement to influence the Muslim community not to follow the Shariah because it restricts individual freedom. Meanwhile, pluralism argues that all religions are the same in relative terms (Merry, 2004; Tan, 2011). Liberalism and pluralism are not viewed in very positive terms by some Muslims, as these approaches offer only fragmentary understandings of Islam, which may lead to extremism or else an inactive stance. This issue may arise because people tend to give opinions about issues by referring to materials they discover or read online, without a proper understanding of the content, or appropriate media training (Aaron, 2008; Ali, 2018; Doucette, 2010). Therefore, it is urged that users need to be cautious of the contents they share or reflect upon online. They need to maintain the authenticity and authority of contents by referring to Islamic scholars before sharing or spreading it in media spaces.

In this spirit of openness, the current Islamic society in Malaysia is becoming more opinionated and open-minded about Islam in the media. They are curious and exposed to issues around the world about Islam from different countries and practices. Ahmed and Matthes' (2017, pp. 12–17) meta-analyses of media representations of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015 showed that the most frequent issues represented are terrorism in Islam, followed by Muslim women (Muslimah), war, migrants, public opinion and Islamophobia, mosques and event-specific issues such as the publication of a cartoon depicting Prophet Muhammad PBUH. There are possibilities that fellow Malaysians are affected by the ideologies in media spaces because terrorism happens when people take things into their own hands. Ahmed and Matthes' (ibid) report also suggests that acts of terrorism portrayed in the media became the trigger for Islamophobic activities, which were witnessed in the USA after the 9/11 attacks. It is also known that media can offer a platform to spread false information and understandings about Islam. Therefore, there are possibilities that fellow Malaysians are affected by false ideologies about Islam, promoted in media spaces, which might lead them to engage in terrorism acts (Aaron, 2008). If this is how people see the truth, their judgments are then influenced by a lack of understanding. Thus, they fail to accept the real knowledge of Islam. Interpretations and negotiations without boundaries, taken out of context, have become a serious matter.
Gaining knowledge of Islam needs to be guided by a teacher or a religious figure to avoid misinterpretations of texts such as Al-Quran or Hadith (Aaron, 2008; Bunt, 2003; Damir-Geilsdorf and Tramontini, 2015). This issue has raised concerns with regards to the false interpretation of religion, as this leads people to make poor judgments. By having a critical mindset when seeking to understand Islam, and by gaining guidance from Islamic scholars, Muslims will be able to judge and see the world from an Islamic worldview. Thus, by reviewing the Malaysian educational landscape, I choose to study Islamic TV programmes in order to understand how Muslim viewers engage with Islam. I focus on television because it is still a medium that improves the world, triggers viewers’ imaginations and curiosity, encourages the pursuit of educational goals, and gathers millions of people through common interests (Ali et al., 2013; Lefstein and Snell, 2011; Samaniego and Pascual, 2007). Starting from an understanding of the characteristics of Islamic TV programmes and the emergence of Islamic Reality TV shows, and continuing by analysing studies about audience research, I hope to contribute to the development of Islamic media literacy.

2.3 Communicating Islam in media spaces

Communicating Islam in media spaces has been a challenge since 9/11, which saw the Islamic terrorist group, al-Qaeda, deliver four co-ordinated attacks against the United States. These events have shaped the belief that the consumption of information in the media is skewed towards negativity and moulded by politics (see Ahmed and Matthes, 2017; Hefner, 2009; Ishak, 2010). However, there is also an effort being made to reveal the truth and make it available in the media, thus seeking justice and fair judgment (French, 2009; Mutz, 2007). For example, Judge Judy, Judge Rinder and Judge Georgie are court TV shows that portray knowledge about law and legal consciousness. The viewers are emotionally connected with humour and actively learning about problem-solving issues seeking justice that would be beneficial to be applied in life (Wood, 2018). Media spaces provide only a platform to broadcast or publicise information. Thus, they are available to the masses. However, information providers always have their own intentions and claims. The most important issue is the users’ consumption of information (Livingstone, 2004; Lundy et al., 2008; McCoy and Scarborough, 2014; Scarborough and McCoy, 2016). Through the processes of globalisation, users can actively search for what may interest them. The crucial element is to offer users the tools to assess information in this information era, where everything can be accessed easily online. Communication will be successful if
the communicator can communicate their ideas or messages clearly, and these can be interpreted adequately by the receiver. The question is, do we need Islamic communication, if basic communication is ensuring the message is being delivered successfully?

Yusoff (2016) asserts that it is important to develop an Islamic communication model. The whole communication process relies on the definition of characteristics of the communicator/sender, which can then offer guidance for interpreting information. Yusoff (ibid) modelled Islamic communication, based on Mowlana’s (2007) interpretation of Islamic communication. Abd Ghani and Mokhtar (2010) subsequently expanded this effort to contextualise Islamic communication. In their study, they interpreted the verses of al-Quran, which contains the story of the prophet communicating, and modelled them thematically. In my study, I adopt one of their communication models — Da’wah bil al-Risalah — which has been integrated with other frameworks, notably Islamic Critical Realism (see Chapter 1.7.2.b, p. 22). The Da’wah bil al-Risalah communication model, or translated communication, uses media related to the concept of the Prophet Muhammad as a blessing to the world (Abd Ghani and Mokhtar, 2010). The role of the prophet as a messenger and medium provides a living portrayal of his actions, as described in the Quran and as mentioned by his wife Aishah when asked about the correct behaviours of a prophet. The recorded tradition of the prophet, or As-Sunnah, plays an important role in understanding Islam as a way of life and interpreting the Quran. Therefore, in modern times, as media play an important function in the global Islamic community, it is crucial to examine Islamic TV in Malaysia and the characteristics of Islamic messages in media spaces. This study focuses on TV programmes as this foregrounds the importance of alternative entertainment formats, as developed in different genres. Specifically, the study focuses on Islamic reality TV in Malaysia, as a key case study.

2.3.1 A glance at Islamic TV in Malaysia

Islamic TV in Malaysia is inspired by Malay local customs and values, known as Adat, which provide guidance on cognitive, religious and cultural traditions (Martin, 2014; Md Syed, 2011; Rofil et al., 2015). Malay Adat or customs are rooted in both Islamic traditions and scientific inquiry (Abd Ghani, 2012; Othman et al., 2011; Ramle, 2012). The production of Islamic TV is seen as a way of honouring the quest for freedom from colonisation, which affected Malaysian people’s socio-economic status after independence (Ishak, 2011; Lim, 2009). The development of Malaysian TV in the post-independence era started with the establishment of Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), which consists of two
government-monitored channels: RTM 1 and RTM 2. This has led to the emergence of two separate types of TV: private TV and satellite TV. Four channels have bloomed in the private sector: TV3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9. Each of the channels has different target audiences. With regards to satellite TV, TV ASTRO introduced multi-channels that allow viewers to view a wider range of TV programmes. In 2010, Malaysia’s first Islamic TV station, TV al Hijrah, emerged as an Islamic entertainment initiative, with the aim of offering an Islamic perspective through a modern lens. Each of these TV channels broadcasts at least one Islamic programme: either a dedicated programme such as a talk show or forum, or a programme that coincides with a festive season, such as Ramadan, Aidilfitri or Aidiladha. Thus, this brings us to the main discussion regarding the characteristics of Islamic TV programmes.

2.3.2 Characteristics of Islamic TV programmes

Islamic television programming has become an alternative source of popular entertainment media in Malaysia. It represents Islamic virtues and Islamic creative content that serves the Malaysian Muslim community through the provision of Islamic knowledge, lifestyles and reflections on current issues in the Islamic world (Abd Ghani, 2012). Information about Islamic topics is mediated through the representation of Muslim characters, Islam-related stories or news, with the objectives of preaching to Allah (da’wah), to serve and defend Islam and to inspire Akhlaq development. Ahmad Kamil, Mohd Fauzi, and Mohd Shamsul (2011) suggest that the aims of Islamic television programmes are:

1. To deliver clear facts with legitimacy concerned to maslahah.\(^{42}\)
2. To stand against any media reporting and to disseminate information that insults and humiliates Muslims.
3. To reconcile conflicts in family institutions, communities and politics.
4. To stand independently and to promote openness in Islamic media, as bound by the Adab and Akhlaq Islamiyyah.\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) Maslahah is an Arabic term referring to public interest; the basis of law. The concept of public interest can be helpful in cases not regulated by the Quran, Sunnah, or Qiyas (analogy).

\(^{43}\) Adab refers to prescribed Islamic etiquette and Akhlaq Islamiyyah is an Arabic term referring to the practise of virtue, morality and manners in Islam.
5. To broadcast authentic Islamic content knowledge related to Tauhid, Aqidah, Shariah, Sirah Nabawiyyah, Adab, Akhlaq and everything related to the importance of the world and the hereafter.

6. To prioritise good message delivery methods in the form of display images, videos, speeches, or writing.

7. To block slander and prohibit denouncement of Islam or Islamic leaders.

These characteristics provide guidance for the creation of Islamic contents and representations of Islam in the media. By highlighting the universal values and teachings of Islam, it is hoped that non-Muslims will watch Islamic TV shows as a source of information about Islam. These sources are also an essential medium to advocate effective communication and dissemination of information about Islam (Buyong and Ismail, 2010; Ishak and Solihin, 2012). At the same time, the format of Islamic television programmes suggests the importance of them having artistic value, and offering indirect teaching and simple messages suitable for all levels of Muslim viewers in the Malaysian context. Therefore, Islamic TV programmes in Malaysia should reflect the image of pure Islam through distinctive Islamic features and contents produced with trust, and comprehensive moderation (Kanaker and Abd Ghani, 2015).

Television stations in Malaysia honour their multi-racial and multi-religion citizens, by providing a wide range of TV programming, including entertainment and game shows, based on educational and religious values. These programmes seek to cater to the local market (Abu Hassan et al., 2012). This shows that governments are serious about promoting social cohesion and harmony within the diverse Malaysian community. Focusing on Muslim viewers, TV programmes that deliver and portray the messages of Islam have progressed tremendously. Previously, only a few Islamic programmes were broadcasted on RTM 1, RTM 2, TV3 and TV9. Mustafa and Buyong (2011) identified that the main TV channel that broadcasted Islamic programmes in November 2008 was RTM 1, with 48.7 per cent more viewers than TV9 (30.9 per cent), TV3 (30.4 per cent) and RTM 2 (1.0 per cent). A later study by Tibek et al., (2012) showed an increase in the broadcast

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44 Tauhid is the indivisible oneness concept of monotheism in Islam. Tauhid is the religion's most fundamental concept and holds that God is One and Single.
45 Aqidah is an Islamic term meaning creed. Many schools of Islamic theology expressing different views on Aqidah exist. Any religious belief system, or creed, can be considered an example of Aqidah.
46 Shariah refers to Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of Al-Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith and as-Sunnah).
47 Sirah Nabawiyyah is the life story of the Prophets.
of Islamic TV programmes, with the establishment of an Islamic TV channel, ASTRO. This comprises Astro Oasis and TV9 from Media Prima and has led to the birth of Malaysia’s first Islamic television station, named Al-Hijrah. Another study by Buyong and Ismail (2010) stated that more Islamic TV programmes are broadcasted on RTM 1, RTM 2, TV3, TV9 and TV Al Hijrah than the two other channels, NTV7 and 8TV. Out of 128 hours and 30 minutes of transmission, TV Al-Hijrah has the most broadcasting hours for Islamic content, amounting to 67 per cent, followed by TV9 (23 per cent).

However, the Malaysian Muslim community is putting forward demands for an alternative to secularised and westernised influences on TV programmes. It is seen as a sign of modernity to embrace westernisation and to localise the content to suit the demand (Abdul Wahab, 2010; Lim, 2009; Shamshudeen, 2011). For example, *Jangan Lupa Lirik*, *Konsert Sure Heboh*, *Akademi Fantasia* and other entertainment-based TV programmes arguably contribute to bad influences and may corrupt the *Aqidah* (literal meaning: The Creed) of Muslims (Abd Ghani, 2009; Mustafa and Buyong, 2011). In order to counterbalance their effects, it is essential to establish Islamic entertainment forms such as nasyid songs and other Islamic contents, which can be integrated into entertainment that contributes to Islamic popular culture in Malaysia (Abd Ghani, 2006, 2009). Barendregt (2012) examined nasyid, a kind of religious musical performance in the Islamic entertainment industry. It is seen as a source of Islamic information or knowledge that provides a medium for understanding modern Muslim identity in the South East Asian context, with a particular focus on Malaysia. The contemporary nasyid performance has adapted modern music genres while integrating Islamic educational lyrics that successfully blend entertainment and education. Islamic entertainment is not only limited to nasyid or religious TV programmes but includes other genres of TV entertainment guided by Islamic doctrines (Mustafa and Buyong, 2011).

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48 *Jangan Lupa Lirik* is a Malaysian quiz show format of Don't Forget the Lyrics! with a jackpot of RM 1,000,000. It is aired on Astro RIA.
49 *Konsert Sure Heboh* is an event organised by Media Prima to promote their products and brands. The main events are live concerts from local artists, which are broadcasted on TV3.
50 *Akademi Fantasia* is Malaysia's first reality television show in which contestants compete for the winning title and a chance to start their career in the entertainment industry.
51 Nasyid is a form of singing and is usually related to Islamic content and singing styles.
The development of Islamic TV programmes has been slow. As compared to other entertainment programmes, it lacks the research and development of Islamic creative content (Abd Ghani, 2009; Othman et al., 2011). Nowadays, the trend of television programming is geared towards producing reality television, which is cost-effective and attracts more viewers (Hall, 2006, 2009; Hill, 2005). This scenario has drastically changed the mass media landscape in Malaysia. Advancing in the internet era, the interactive nature of the reality television programme has provided a vehicle for publicising and marketing content and ideas (Juliana Abdul Wahab, 2010; Moy Tow Yoon and Romana Garma, 2006). Hence, the emergence of Islamic reality television programmes such as Akademi Al-Quran, Akademi Nasyid, Imam Muda, Ustazah Pilihan, Solehah, Adik Adikku, Qari Junior, Daie Millenia and Pencetus Ummah on Malaysian television channels such as RTM, TV3, TV9, Astro Oasis and Al-Hijrah has proved that Islamic media are progressive and adaptive to modernity.

2.3.3 Islamic reality TV in Malaysia

The birth of Islamic Reality TV programmes demonstrates the assimilation of Islamic content knowledge such as Al-Quran and Hadith, the representation of Islamic figures or scholars, Islamic-influenced places and lifestyles, Islamic civilisation, and entertainment values (Abd Ghani, 2010; Suria Hani, 2012). It was created to cater to the niche market of Malaysian Muslims and as an alternative that offers a fresh approach to portraying Islam in the media. There are three categories of Islamic Reality TV in Malaysia. The first category is the talent-based reality TV show. Examples include Akademi Nasyid and Akademi Al-Quran (TV9), Qari Junior (TV3) and Tahfiz Muda (Astro Oasis), which test the contestants’ Al-Quran recitation or memorisation skills, and their knowledge of Ulumul Quran. The second category is the character development-based reality TV show, which include Imam Muda, Ustazah Pilihan and Pencetus Ummah (Astro Oasis), Muslimah (TV Al-Hijrah) and Daie Pendakwah Millenia (TV3). These shows test the contestants’ skills and intelligence in disseminating knowledge of Islam with exemplary Akhlaq. The third category is the Gameshow reality TV, such as Family Sarjana (Astro Oasis), which tests Muslim family knowledge about Islam. Thus, the emergence of these TV programmes raises issues regarding audience reception of Islamic contents in Islamic Reality TV shows. The following figure illustrates trends related to Islamic Reality TV in Malaysia by year.
From 2006 to 2019, 34 Islamic reality television programmes were produced. The number of programmes increased rapidly in 2011, compared to five years before the genre of Islamic reality TV became popular. The year 2011 produced the most Islamic reality television programmes, with a total of six programmes. The below table, 2.2, provides a simple analysis, extended from my Masters research in 2014 (see Patahol Wasli, 2014), which I conducted through the gathering of online news excerpts, blogs, Facebook content, Wikipedia content, and internet search engines.

Table 2.2: Islamic Reality Shows by year and channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Islamic Reality TV show</th>
<th>Channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Akademi Al-Quran 1</td>
<td>TV9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Akademi Al-Quran 2</td>
<td>TV9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Akademi Al-Quran 3</td>
<td>TV9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akademi Nasyid</td>
<td>TV9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adik-Adikku 1</td>
<td>RTM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Imam Muda 1</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akademi Al-Quran 4</td>
<td>TV9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akademi Al-Quran 5</td>
<td>TV9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adik-Adikku 2</td>
<td>RTM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Imam Muda 2</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ustazah Pilihan</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Famili Sarjana</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solehah</td>
<td>TV Al-Hijrah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Programmes</td>
<td>Channels</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Adik-Adikku 3</td>
<td>RTM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 1</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imam Muda 3</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Daie Millenia</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adik-Adikku 4</td>
<td>RTM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 2</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pencetus Ummah 1</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Adik-Adikku 5</td>
<td>RTM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daie Millenia 2</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 3</td>
<td>TV3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pencetus Ummah 2</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Daie Millenia 3</td>
<td>TV3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 4</td>
<td>TV3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pencetus Ummah 3</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Daie Millenia 4</td>
<td>TV3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 5</td>
<td>TV3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tahfiz Muda 1</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pencetus Ummah 4</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Daie Millenia 5</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 6</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tahfiz Muda 2</td>
<td>Astro Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Daie Millenia 6</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qari Junior 7</td>
<td>TV3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 illustrates the variety of Islamic reality television programmes produced in Malaysia between 2006 and 2018. During this period, 11 Islamic reality TV programmes were produced by several TV channels. TV9 is considered to be the first TV Channel that produced Islamic reality television programmes, such as Akademi Al-Quran. Akademi Al-Quran broadcasted until the programme entered its third season in 2008 and was produced by Akademi Nasyid in the same year. In 2009, not one Islamic reality programme was produced or made available on the internet. The year 2010 kickstarted the first Islamic Reality TV programme for kids, which was introduced by JAKIM, followed by the first season of Imam Muda and Akademi Al-Quran, which at the time in its fourth season. The most Islamic reality television programmes were produced in 2011, amounting to six programmes. Astro Oasis introduced Ustazah Pilihan and TV Al-Hijrah introduced 60
Solehah, both of which were reality TV programmes in search of pious women in Malaysia. The purpose of these programmes was to provide alternative topics of interest and to highlight the Muslimah as an exemplary character. Furthermore, in 2012 and 2013, TV3 produced Qari Junior and Daie Millenia. Astro Oasis also introduced Pencetus Ummah in the year 2013. Therefore, the trend of Islamic reality television in Malaysia has focused more on the development of human capital based on Islamic values than on materialistic achievements.

These Islamic Reality TV shows were produced as a form of family entertainment and sought to target particular viewers. Akademi Al-Quran and Akademi Nasyid are types of Islamic reality television programmes that integrate Islamic content with the talent search reality TV genre, with the purpose of finding creative young Muslims, to develop their talents and careers. This, in turn, could contribute to contemporary da’wah in the 21st century. Akademi Al-Quran was the first Islamic reality television programme. Aired on TV9, it encouraged youngsters to get involved in the art of recitation of Al-Quran and Tarannum. The participants were judged based on their talents in recitation and mastery of Tarannum. Akademi Nasyid focused more on the art of delivering da’wah through lyrics and music to produce a universal nasyid group. The contestants were judged on their creativity in delivering da’wah lyrics and performances. Through this programme, the nasyid genre was indirectly moved forward, by becoming integrated with other genres of music such as pop, ballads, R&B, rock, jazz and hip hop. Hence, these types of reality television shows encouraged the development of Islamic Entertainment (Abd Ghani, 2006).

Imam Muda, Ustazah Pilihan, Famili Sarjana, Solehah, Daie Millenia and Pencetus Ummah are types of Islamic reality television programme that emphasise more the development of leadership, knowledge of Islam and communication skills. Undeniably, the roles of young Islamic leaders are essential to mould future generations. Imam Muda and Pencetus Ummah are more likely to have all-male participants and focus more on the development of active and progressive young male leaders. Meanwhile, Solehah and Ustazah Pilihan are composed of all female participants. These programmes aim to bring woman preachers into the spotlight so that they can become role models for other women. Daie Millenia features mixed participants with the supervision of Ikhtilat between genders, showing that da’wah can be delivered creatively through several media and

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52 Tarannum is an Arabic word. The literal translation is intonation, modulation, singing or recital of the Al-Quran.
approaches. Famili Sarjana is a family quiz show that encourages the mastery of Islamic knowledge in the family.

*Adik-Adikku, Qari Junior* and *Tahfiz Muda* are entertainment-based Islamic reality television programmes, which draw on interesting, vibrant and cheerful concepts, designed especially for young viewers. The programme is designed initially to inculcate younger generations with an Islamic conscience and Islamic knowledge. *Adik-Adikku* encourages children to have confidence in public speaking and to learn in more creative ways to deliver da’wah and to preach. Meanwhile, *Qari Junior* and *Tahfiz Muda* focus more on the remembrance of verses and surah, to instil the importance of preserving Al-Quran from an early age in the viewers. These Islamic reality television programmes are broadcasted with the main objective to spread knowledge about Islam through informal education media. Each programme integrates different genres, which cater to all levels of society. Thus, this draws attention in a sense to conveying da’wah (the call to Islam) in a modern and contemporary style, which aims to find talented and skilled youth and to spread Islam. Every Islamic reality television programme should create a good impression of Islam, without using force or pressure, but rather by harnessing the wise and gentle styles of language to spread the messages of Islam (Abd Ghani, 2010; Abdul Manaf et al., 2013; Tibek et al., 2012). The Islamic reality television programme uses Islam as the pillar of entertainment television programming. Based on these features, the two most popular Islamic reality programmes in Malaysia have emerged: *Imam Muda* and *Akademi Al-Quran*. Malay viewers have a positive perception of these programmes, and they perceive changes in themselves in the way they view Islamic beliefs, practices, understandings, spirituality, teachings, and skills (Wok et al., 2012). Thus, this study selected *Imam Muda* to investigate its potential as a type of informal Islamic Education, as it would benefit the community.

### 2.4 The emergence of Imam Muda

*Imam Muda* is an Islamic reality television programme produced by ASTRO, in collaboration with the Federal Territory Religious Department (JAWI). It is broadcasted on ASTRO Oasis. The programme was designed to find the best *Imam* among Malaysian youths and aired in three seasons from 2010 until 2012. Adapting the format of an existing reality television programme, integrated with Islamic content knowledge, it seeks to provide Malaysian youths with an attractive platform for proving that religion remains relevant despite the influence of Western popular culture (Vamburkar, 2010; Young,
10 participants aged between 19 to 27 years old were selected through auditions held in selected venues all around Malaysia. They were gathered in a hostel for three months to learn and develop their understanding regarding religious matters and Islamic leadership. In the academy, they were given weekly assignments designed to include aspects of Imams’ responsibilities to the community, as well as to enable them to become leaders for Malaysian Muslim youths. A Mudir and two Mursyids are assigned from the well-known and established local Imam community in the country to supervise and evaluate the participants’ performances through their written exams, which amount to 50 percent of the total grade, and practical exams, which amount to 50 percent (Abe, 2010; Hartenstein, 2010). The purpose of these assessments is to groom the Imam Muda to become a competent and progressive young man, of integrity and credibility, to take responsibility not only as a preacher but also as a leader in the community. The programme also aims to uphold the status of Imam Muda and to educate the public about the responsibility of an Imam in this modern lifestyle. Imam Muda only broadcasted for three years, from 2010 to 2012. Below is a list of Imam Muda contestants and winners for each season.

Table 2.3: List of Imam Muda contestants Season 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad Syakir bin Zamri</td>
<td>Kelantan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Khairul Azhar bin Ghazali</td>
<td>Kedah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nik Muhammad Adib bin Md Amin</td>
<td>Kelantan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amiril bin Md Banin</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuri Ali bin Arbain</td>
<td>Pahang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Asyraf bin Mohd Ridzuan</td>
<td>Pulau Pinang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad Hazran bin Ahmad Kamal</td>
<td>Negeri Sembilan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharafuddin bin Suaut</td>
<td>Sarawak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hizbur Rahman bin Omar Zuhdi</td>
<td>Kedah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohd Taufek bin Mohd Noh</td>
<td>Johor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The winner of the first season was Muhammad Asyraf Mohd Ridzuan from Pulau Pinang. For the second and third season, Astro Oasis expanded their search for a Young Imam to the broader South-East Asian context, including countries that used the same language and

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53 Mudir is an Arabic word meaning Principle.
54 Muryids is an Arabic word meaning ‘supervisors’.
medium of communication. These countries included Brunei, Singapore and Indonesia. In table 2.4 and table 2.5, we can see the levels of participation from foreign candidates.

Table 2.4: List of Imam Muda contestants Season 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali Khairudin bin Haji Abdul Marif</td>
<td>Sabah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammar bin Wan Harun</td>
<td>Kedah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohd Azlan bin Zulkarnain</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulfiadli bin Haji Awang</td>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohd Fakhrurazi bin Hussin</td>
<td>Terengganu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Fattah bin Riddzwan</td>
<td>Negeri Sembilan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohd Hassan Adli bin Yahaya @ Yahuza</td>
<td>Perak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujahid bin Suhaimi</td>
<td>Singapura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazrul Izwan bin Zolkiflee</td>
<td>Johor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wan Najdi bin Wan Mohd Noh</td>
<td>Selangor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5: List of Imam Muda contestants Season 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Ramadhan Subky</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fakhrulrazi bin Ibrahim</td>
<td>Pulau Pinang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syed Mohd Faris bin Syed Roslan</td>
<td>Perak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad Hafiz bin Abdul Kadir</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Jabbar bin Mohammed Kahar</td>
<td>Selangor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megat Mohd Zaid bin Megat Azmuddin</td>
<td>Perak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad Azri Naim bin Mohd Kamal</td>
<td>Johor Bharu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Nasir bin M.Yakub Ismail</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Rahman Naual bin Mohd Hatta</td>
<td>Johor Bharu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar bin Mohd Mokhtar</td>
<td>Pahang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The winner of Imam Muda season 2 was Mohd Hassan Adli Bin Yahaya @ Yahuza from Perak. The winner of Imam Muda season 3 was Abdul Jabbar B. Mohammed Kahar from Selangor. The winners of each season were offered a scholarship to further their study of Islam. The show portrayed the importance of learning as a continuous process in Muslim life. The graduates from the academy of Imam Muda were certified by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) (literal translation: The Department of Islamic Advancement of Malaysia) to be Imams in masjid/mosques in Malaysia. They became Islamic celebrities,
having their TV show or staging appearances on talk shows as religious figures. Therefore, the products of *Imam Muda* set the example for Malaysian Muslim youth and society, with regards to the message of Islam.

2.4.1 *Imam Muda* as an Islamic Education-oriented reality television show

Islamic reality television has become a medium to educate viewers about Islam (Abdul Manaf *et al*., 2013; Patahol Wasli, 2014; Wok *et al*., 2012). Wok *et al*. (2012) examined the effects of Islamic reality TV programmes in terms of viewers’ perceptions of and satisfaction obtained from the viewing experience. The findings show that *Imam Muda* is one of the popular Islamic reality shows that has had a positive impact on the Muslim Malay community, in terms of their perceptions and attitudes. The participants of the show play an essential role in delivering Islamic educational content. Non-Verbal communication analysis of Ashraf, the winner of *Imam Muda* first season (see Mat Rahim *et al*., 2012), shows that he has influential leadership in the field of da’wah. Mat Rahim *et al*. (*ibid*) studied the silent messages displayed in *Imam Muda* season one through Mehrabian’s 7%-38%-55% Rule.55 She selected five episodes of *Imam Muda* and five elements of non-verbal communication: kinesics,56 paralanguage,57 haptics,58 appearance and proxemics.59 The study showed that Ashraf’s prominent verbal communication strengths, notably his facial expression and body language during his sermons, won the hearts of the audience. This credibility and competency provided added value, enabling him to win the final competition in *Imam Muda* Hizbur (Mat Rahim *et al*., 2012).

Many scholars have suggested that *Imam Muda* is educational, as it has allowed Muslim viewers to gain positive learning experiences while improving their understanding and knowledge of Islam and its practices (Abdul Manaf *et al*., 2013). This perspective led Patahol Wasli and Hussin (2014) to examine the Islamic educational content of *Imam Muda* season one. Content analysis of the programme highlighted that messages of ‘Akhlaq’ can be depicted using a researcher-developed instrument - the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard

55 According to Mat Rahim (2012: 6899), Mehrabian rules derived from a study by Albert Mehrabian (1971), where he revealed the total impact of a message is only 7 percent related to the words used, 38 percent related to the tone of voice and other forms of body language, and 55 percent related to facial expressions.

56 Kinesics is the interpretation of bodily motion communication, such as facial expressions and gestures, and non-verbal behaviours related to the movement of any part of the body, or the body as a whole.

57 Paralanguage is the non-lexical component of communication through speech, for example intonation, pitch and speed of speech, hesitation noises, gestures, and facial expressions.

58 Haptics is a form of non-verbal communication and a way by which people and animals communicate via touch.

59 Proxemics is a theory of non-verbal communication that explains how people perceive and use space to achieve communication goals.
Matrix - to identify and classify Islamic educational contents (See Chapter 1.9.5, p. 30). These studies show that *Imam Muda* is a popular Islamic Education-oriented reality television programme that seeks to represent and explore modern Malay Muslim identity. However, this raises hermeneutical and educational questions with regards to representation and interpretation, and the possibility of inauthentic and fallacious viewer interpretations. With this in mind, I have selected only the final episode of *Imam Muda* season three because the focus of the study is the viewers’ critical engagement. In order to provide an overview of *Imam Muda* season three, the below table, 2.6, summarises the weekly assignments in the relevant episodes.

Table 2.6: Weekly assignments for *Imam Muda* season three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1       | Introduction of the contestants | • Introduction of 10 contestants’ backgrounds in *Imam Muda* season three.  
• Description of the assessment procedure and criteria |
| 2       | The persecution of the parents | • To handle prayers: ‘tahlil’ (remembrance of death) for Sudirman (Malaysian singer)  
• To approach the homeless and listen to their stories  
• The weekly task: to handle parents that have been left homeless or without care. |
| 3       | The runaway child | • To handle a programme in the local Masjid, by delivering Khutbah and Tazkirah.  
• The weekly task: to meet and consult with families whose children ran away from home. |
| 4       | The divorce | • To assist in a matrimonial ceremony in the mosque  
• The weekly task: to meet and consult with couples with marital problems. |
| 5       | The superstition ‘Khurafat’ | • To assist in cleaning the cemetery and discuss superstitious deaths.  
• The weekly task: to meet a healer/Islamic healer to study further and investigate the criticality of the issues facing modern society. |
| 6       | The physical abuse/psychology problem | • To assist in ‘tahnik’ (An Islamic ceremony of touching the lips of a newborn baby with honey, sweet juice, or pressed dates. Initially, the date was softened through mastication by the pious person and rubbed on the infant's palate) and ‘doa selamat’ (prayer).  
• The weekly task: to meet with and study people who have reported physical or psychological abuse. |
7 The ‘soft’ and ‘hard’

- To assist in the management of the Masjid that covers ‘gotong-royong’ (spring cleaning activity), designing a mosque’s landscape and decoration.
- The weekly task: to meet and consult with people that have attitudes or behaviours that go against cultural stereotypes, such as men who enjoy creative activities and women who prefer labour jobs.

8 The case of incest

- To handle a programme in the local Masjid, such as delivering Khutbah and Tazkirah.
- The weekly task: to meet with people who have experienced incest, to study incest cases, as well as how to provide sex education for children.

9 The Drug Abuse

- To visit two mosques in Kuala Lumpur, to assist in handling drug addicts.
- The weekly task: to meet with and study people who are drug addicts.

10 Comeback to the community

- To plan an activity to execute in the finalist’s hometown.
- Syafawi assessment on stage to determine the winner.

The final episode: Kemuncak Imam Muda

2.4.2 Teaching Islam education using media

The study of religion has always been a priority across cultures (Hashim and Langgulung, 2008). In the world of Islamic Education, any method or technology applied in pedagogical approaches must be based on the philosophy of Islamic Education (Hashim and Langgulung, 2008; Suyurno et al., 2004). The evolution of Islamic Education in Malaysia started with the teaching of the Quran and Fardhu Ain at home, as a type of non-formal education, which then evolved into study through halaqah, classes and Sheikhs in the masjid and surau. As the community grew, independent religion teaching institutions built up under the administration of madrasah. These systems developed gradually from the years after independence, coinciding with a transition from the non-formal transfer of knowledge system to the formal education system (Md Din, 2012; Mohd Nor et al., 2012). As the teaching and learning process became more formal, the tradition of lecturing and passing of knowledge evolved into a modern practice or pedagogy that is suitable for disseminating knowledge in a modern context.
Furthermore, the evolution of Islamic Education from traditional pedagogy to a more systematic modern learning style is evidenced in the transformation from KBSR (primary)/KBSM\textsuperscript{60} (Secondary) to KSSR/KSSM.\textsuperscript{61} In the case of KSSR/KSSM, a school-based assessment was introduced to thoroughly evaluate the student. The curriculum transformation also implemented 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Learning Skills, which consisted of three main categories, including Learning and Innovation Skills, Information, Media and Technology skills, and Life and Career skills (Sabar and Mustari, 2012; Shaw, 2009). Thus, for Islamic Education, the implementation of higher-order thinking skills is depicted through the portrayal of good behaviours or \textit{Akhlaq} with \textit{Adab} in daily life (Ismail and Ali, 2011; Suhid, 2007). Laws have been enacted to improve Islamic Education, starting from the Education Act of 1961, Education Act of 1991 and Education Act of 1996. Chapter 10 - Religious Teaching in educational Institutions (Education Act of 1996, Act 550, p. 38) - stated that:

50. (1) Where in an educational institution there are five or more pupils professing the Islamic religion, such pupils shall be given religious teaching in Islam by teachers approved by the State Authority.

(2) The teaching required in an educational institution under subsection (1) shall be for a period of at least two hours a week within the period of general teaching of the educational institution, or within such other period as the Minister may, in the case of any particular educational institution, appoint.

(3) The governors or other persons responsible for the management of an educational institution required to provide teaching under this section shall make such arrangements as may be necessary for that purpose.

(4) The governors or other persons responsible for the management of two or more educational institutions may, with the approval of the Registrar, make arrangements for teaching under this section to be given to the pupils professing the Islamic religion in the educational institutions jointly.

In addition to the National Education Philosophy, the Ministry of Education established the Islamic Philosophy of Education (FPI: Falsafah Pendidikan Islam), which reads as follows:

Islamic Education is a continuous effort to deliver knowledge, skill and emotional experience based on al-Qur’ān and as-Sunnah in order to build behaviour, skill, personality, and a view of life as the servant of Allāh, responsible for self-development, the community, the environment and the nation for the sake of prosperity and salvation in this world and the hereafter

(Quoted in Tamuri, 2007, p. 373).

\textsuperscript{60} KBSM is short form for Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah.

\textsuperscript{61} KSSM is short form for Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah.
Thus, these statements show that the government is focusing on matters related to Islam, and is promoting the teaching of these materials in schools and higher institutions to instil values and Adab. Undeniably, Islamic Education is a platform to develop the Malay community, which covers all aspects of life (Abdul Majid et al., 2012). This research will therefore aim to show its effects in schools and everyday life.

2.4.3 Formal, non-formal and informal use of media in Islamic Education

The use of media in teaching and learning in an informal Islamic educational setting is still underrated (Hassan and Abd Aziz, 2010; Hassan and Sulaiman, 2010). This is because the support system for Islamic Education focuses more on formal and non-formal learning. Media consist of complex information that contains both knowledge and representations (Silverblatt et al., 2014; Zhang, 2008). The current understanding is that the teaching of Islam using media must be oriented and intentional learning towards the subject in the curriculum (Marsick and Watkins, 2001). Therefore, the content must demonstrate a practical application of a particular topic. Thus, this study focuses on television, especially Islamic entertainment-based TV programmes as a form of enrichment within the context of intentional or incidental informal Islamic Education.

Malaysian Muslims are taught within the context of Islamic Education in primary and secondary school. In addition, in primary school they have KAFA (Kelas Al Quran dan Fardhu Ain), which refers to classes for learning Quran and religious obligations that need to be known, understood, practised and appreciated by each student adequately based on the teaching of Islam. The students are assessed using PAFA (Perkara Asas Fardhu Ain) when they are in primary 6, with PMR from form 1 to form three, and with SPM from form four to form five. Those who attend a religious school gain further in-depth learning experiences of Islamic content knowledge, such as the Arabic Language, Shariah Islamiyah Education, Al-Quran, Sunnah Education and Tasawwur Islam. In general, Muslim students learn about Islam formally through Islamic Education in school. The time for them to learn in school is limited and bound by the standard school curriculum. With regards to the usage of media for the intention to learn, it is seen as largely ineffective due to the lack of teacher interest in using educational TV channels such as EDUWEB TV (Hassan and Abd Aziz, 2010; Hassan and Sulaiman, 2010).
In non-formal settings, Muslims are offered an alternative method of obtaining Islamic knowledge, for example, attending classes in the Masjid or Religious camp in order to gain specific knowledge. The use of media relies on the creativity and intention of the organiser to enrich the learner experience. Meanwhile, in the informal setting, students learn from their surroundings, as well as the practices and customs of their parents, extended families, neighbourhood, school, media and new media. These two settings are much dependant on the individual as an active learner. The use of media to learn as part of Islamic Education is limited, as Muslims are usually unaware of learning within the informal setting unless they engage in daily reflections., as in the case of Muhasabah (literal meaning: retrospection or self-inventory). All Muslims are encouraged to engage in Muhasabah every day so that they can improve in the future. From the reflection, they will be able to assess their behaviours and their actions, which require attention and improvement. For an active learner of Islam, the ability to look at things in retrospective is essential for his/her improvement because media only act as a mediator to Islamic knowledge (Tengku Kasim and Che Husain, 2008; Wan Jusoh and Jusoff, 2009).

2.5 What do you do while watching reality television?

Individuals do not decide what constitutes good and bad reality TV in the Islamic context, due to the role of community values. Reality TV viewers in Malaysia watch the programme based on certain motives: suspense, personal identity, social interaction, engagement/entertainment, romance or the attractiveness of the contestants, and sensation seeking (Lundy et al., 2008; Moy and Romana, 2006). Consequently, popular reality TV programmes lack Islamic values and Malays because most of the TV programmes are adapted from Western entertainment-based TV programmes, which are seen as a bad influence that may corrupt the Aqidah of Muslims (Mustafa and Buyong, 2011). Malay Muslim viewers interpret modern cultural meaning by negotiating local cultural norms and global popular culture. Their interpretations tend to focus on fashion and taste, the behaviours of the official judges, voyeurism and conflict in ‘backstage’ coverage, and emotional intimacy onstage in the public performance component of the programme (Shamshudeen and Morris, 2014) These motives and interpretations lead to the need for Islamic reality TV shows that scaffold modern Malaysian Muslim identity.
2.5.1 Reality TV in Malaysia

The main Malaysian television channels are RTM1, RTM2 (sister channels operated by Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), owned by the Malaysian government), TV3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9 (sister channels owned by Media Prima), ASTRO (satellite channel) and TV Al-Hijrah (the first Malaysian Islamic TV station). These channels produce a variety of television programmes to cater for Malaysian multiracial, multicultural and multi-religion society by assimilating their local customs and values with international or Western TV formats (Andrejevic, 2004; Hill, 2005). In 2011, a study conducted by Buyong and Ismail (2010) showed that two free-to-air channels (NTV7 and 8TV) did not have any Islamic content. Furthermore, the study highlighted that Al Hijrah was the most significant contributor and TV9 was the second highest contributor of Islamic programmes (ibid). This is because 8TV designs its contents for Chinese audiences and NTV7 offers contents for English-speaking audiences. Interpreting local content in an international TV format requires adaptation to westernised representations. Through these hybrid representations on television, the viewers perceive the popular culture shown as the real culture, depending on their level of exposure to television (Gerbner, 1998). Thus, this study focusses on the development of reality TV in Malaysia and the emergence of Islamic Reality TV in 2011.

In 1948, Allan Funt produced a TV show called 'Candid Camera’, which employs the 'hidden video' method to capture viewers' spontaneous reactions in their daily lives. This show became the basis of reality TV (Abdul Wahab, 2010; Andrejevic, 2004; Hill, 2005). Using the same technique, one of America’s most popular TV shows, ‘America's Funniest Home Videos’ (1990), was produced, which greatly contributed to the subsequent development of reality TV (Abdul Wahab, 2010; Hill, 2005).

Reality television portrays unscripted real-life situations, which are faced by normal individuals (Hill, 2005). Individuals who participate in a reality TV show allow the TV production to access aspects of their personal lives in accordance with the guidelines or themes of the programme, which seeks to display the contents of unscripted ‘real’ life events. Depending on the concept of the reality show, aspects such as the contestants’ talents, emotions, intimate moments, conflicts or even their heart-breaking moments, are captured on camera. All of these moments are recorded until the programme ends (Shamshudeen, 2011). Reality TV is also known as a ‘hybrid genre’ because the nature of the show blurs the boundaries between the genre itself and the phenomenon of reality (Baltruschat, 2009; Hill, 2005). The genre became eminent in the late 1990s and the early
2000s, with the global success of the series ‘Survivor’, ‘Idols’, and ‘Big Brother’, all of which became global franchises (Hill, 2005). In the Malaysian context, these reality TV shows became a sensation. Survivor first appeared in Malaysia in 2000, which inspired the invention of Malaysia’s first reality TV show, *Explorace*, by TV3 in 2003 (Abdul Wahab, 2010, p. 25). Malaysian broadcast channels have taken steps to expand the genre following the ‘heat’ of *Explorace*, by importing different formats in thematic areas such as singing competitions (*Akademi Fantasia, Mentor, and One in a Million*), docu-reality (*Bersamamu, Misi Suara Hati*), love and relationships (*Mencari Cinta, Mencari Menantu*), cooking (*Master Chef*), dancing (*Showdown, Sehati Berdansa*), acting (*Pilih Kasih*), personality idols (*Gadis Melayu, Malaysian Top Host, On-Air*), amongst others (Abdul Wahab, 2010, p. 26). Nevertheless, the westernisation of entertainment highlights the need to incorporate Islamic values and Malay cultural values into television programmes (Mustafa and Buyong, 2011; Suria Hani, 2012; Zawawi and Ibrahim, 2014).

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a significant growth in popularity of Islamic TV programmes. Islamic TV programmes progressed from talk shows that are mostly in the form of forums, questions and answers and preaching or da’wah, to entertainment platforms such as drama. This was evidenced in 2009 when a serial drama titled *Nur Kasih*, produced by TV3, became a phenomenal success, gaining around 19 million viewers per episode (Abdul Wahab, 2015). In 2010, TV Al-Hijrah emerged as Malaysia’s first Islamic TV Station, providing alternatives to broadcast Islamic knowledge to the community (Mustafa and Buyong, 2011; Shafie, 2011). Moving forward, this encouraged the Malaysian TV industry to produce more Islamic content, including dramas and reality TV, which could reinforce Islamic beliefs, spread their teachings, instil Islamic culture and act as observers of bad values that influence the development of society.

The emergence of alternative reality TV programmes with integrated Islamic content knowledge has led to the development of a platform to bring Islam to viewers, with a more modern outlook. The *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV show is characterised as a good programme that promotes positive values and Islamic content knowledge using a modern approach (Mat Rahim *et al*., 2012; Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2015; Wok *et al*., 2012). It is an educational alternative for Muslim youth to emulate good Akhlaq in their daily lives. Surveying the previous literature, it is clear that an in-depth study of viewers' reflections related to Islamic contents is needed (Buyong and Ismail, 2010; Mustafa and Buyong, 2011). Viewers’ characterisation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reality TV and motives that influence
their decision-making processes, perceptions of reality, and reactions toward the programme content requires further exploration. This is significant because of the contribution of these notions to how viewers receive, interpret, and consume cultural texts (Lundy et al., 2008).

**2.5.2 Viewers’ loci of morality**

Viewers watch reality TV with various motives (Hall, 2006; Hill et al., 2005). This engagement exists because of the genre of the programme, which portrays content in real settings, documenting real people and their unpredictable behaviours when put under pressure (Hill, 2007; Murray, 2004). Apart from that, viewers watch reality TV as a habitual way of passing time, whilst addressing their voyeuristic and companionship needs (Hall, 2006; Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007). However, their interpretation of the programmes may differ depending on their status quo and background (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004). This relates to how viewers characterise ‘good’ or ‘bad’ reality TV. For example, ‘good’ reality TV programmes provide useful ideas and advice, improve appearances and self-esteem, and enable people to feel more positive in their lives. On the other hand, ‘bad’ reality TV portrays deception, ridicule, contempt, physical and emotional harm (Lundy et al., 2008).

Even though there are ‘bad’ reality TV programmes, McCoy and Scarborough (2014, p. 48) highlight that viewers can negotiate this by drawing on three viewing styles:

1. **Ironic consumption**: Viewers’ reactions deal with the contradiction between consuming and condemning ‘bad’ reality TV. They watch the programme by maintaining a boundary between themselves and the show.

2. **Camp sensibility**: Viewers seek to admire ‘bad’ reality TV as a cultural object and consume it amorally. They value the cultural object on its own terms.

3. **Guilty pleasure**: Viewers’ experience the tension between both consuming and condemning ‘bad’ reality TV. They overcome this tension by allowing their viewing to be mindless, harmless, fun, and beyond their control, as a means to resist watching.

Viewers also express their concern regarding morality when watching reality TV. In this way, the reactions of television viewers can be divided into exogenous and endogenous moral reactions, and moral rationality towards ‘bad’ reality TV (McCoy and Scarborough, 2014; Scarborough and McCoy, 2016). The negativity that arises from the manipulation of the situation, exploitation of people, the moral reprehensibility, and waste of time and
money, impacts viewers’ reactions and rationality (Lundy et al., 2008; Scarborough and McCoy, 2016). Endogenous viewers perceive reality TV as not real and the actions of the viewers as the basis of morality or immorality. It is immoral to waste people’s time and to exploit people on reality TV; therefore, they avoid watching it. This moral reaction characterises consumers as the burden of morality. Endogenous moral rationality allows viewers to maintain a social distance from the programme. Such viewers define their consumption as a guilty pleasure to avoid moral viewing, and thus need to be equipped with critical thinking skills to evaluate ‘bad’ reality TV shows and to learn life lessons from them. By contrast, exogenous viewers perceive reality TV as portraying the reality and action of producers or characters, asserting that the programmes matter. Reality TV is characterised as bad because of the immorality of the characters. This moral reaction highlights the problems involved in the production of the shows. Exogenous moral rationality allows viewers to acquire an amoral viewing of ‘bad’ reality TV. Exogenous viewers frame reality TV as a scripted television programme and the characters as fictional. Hence, reality TV is harmless, without social consequences, and thus a type of morality tale (Scarborough and McCoy, 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Endogenous</th>
<th>Exogenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actions of viewers as basis of morality or immorality</td>
<td>Action of producer/characters matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immoral waste of time</td>
<td>Immorality of characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immoral exploit of people</td>
<td>Immorality of reality television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers as burden of morality</td>
<td>The problem is the production</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3 Type of Reality TV viewers

Nevertheless, ‘good’ reality TV is consumed and engaged with in various ways, by drawing on educational approaches derived from the content and concepts of the reality TV programme. This includes, for example, obesity lessons from reality TV, so that students can engage with their reality by enquiring critically about their bodies, health and weight (McLachlan, 2009), learning about politics via alliance behaviours and strategic voting (Dreyer, 2011) and developing strategies to overcome dilemmas (Salter, 2014). Likewise,
when applied, the concept of reality TV enables students to gain enhanced learning outcomes, such as exam reviews, through active student participation (Kaupins, 2005; Lefstein and Snell, 2011). In the process, students can assess applied learning theories through practical experience based on popular reality TV formats (Abdul Rahman, Alias, and Siraj, 2012). These studies show that viewers can consciously and unconsciously learn, adapt, react and rationalise from a reality TV programme.

2.5.3 Islamic Critical Realism as a contemporary meaning-making tool

Islamic Critical Realism is an educational framework developed by Wilkinson (2013, 2014b), with the aim of helping young Muslims in the West to understand Islam from a modern perspective. I chose this framework as it was suitable for me to interpret the meaning-making process involved in watching Imam Muda (see Chapter 1.7.2 and Chapter 1.9). Imam Muda broadcasted various manifested perspectives and angles on Islamic Education, to fit the theme of each week. Yet, the viewers’ consumption of the material allowed them to interpret the manifested content differently, depending on their contexts. Employing a Islamic Critical Realist framework as a meaning-making tool requires the following four commitments (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 428):

1. A shared commitment to under-labouring, which refers to the role of clearing the path of knowledge.
2. A shared commitment to seriousness, which refers to making a behaviour consistent with a belief. For example, seriousness in obeying two Islamic primary sources related to Al-Quran by making sure that the beliefs and practices of Muslims are related to the revealed text, and As-Sunnah by ensuring the tradition of the prophet replete the relationship between action and belief with Quran.
3. A shared commitment to a core philosophical framework: Islamic Critical Realism. This framework provides guidance on how to interpret the Islamic faith, both via traditional Islamic practices and beliefs, and in terms of critical reflexivity, which was a critical component for Muslims in the past, and still is, in a multifaith world.
4. A critical realist understanding of a Quranic worldview through creatively understanding Al-Quran as a transcendentally critical realist document.
Under-labouring Islamic Critical Realism as a contemporary educational theory assists in clarifying and deepening the understanding of Islamic messages portrayed in the show, from the perspective of Muslim viewers. The purpose of this is to generate Muslims with a Qur’anic worldview that transcends their daily experience of reality (Wilkinson, 2013, 2014b). Bhaskar (2013, p. 11) uses the term ‘under-labouring’ to explain Critical Realism, drawing on Locke’s (1690, p. 13) definition of clearing the path of knowledge. Under-labouring refers to a critical lens that leads to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and to the acquisition of knowledge (ibid), which can be applied to the context of Islamic Education. As critical realists, we need to be able to gain knowledge without disambiguating. However, this study does not aim to reduce knowledge of Islam or to fit Islam into a certain framework, but rather aims to provide reflective guidance to learn about, from and for Islam (Sahin, 2016, pp. 11–12).

Imam Muda portrayed a modern approach to manifested Islamic educational content to focus on Islamic lifestyles and to open up the spiritual dimension of young Malaysian Muslims. This is exemplified in the four stages of the acronym MELD, which was developed by Bhaskar (2008b), and later extended by Norrie (2010) and Alderson (2016). The four letters refer to 1M – Moment, 2E – Edge, 3L – Level and 4D – Dimension from Dialectical Critical Realism. Schudel (2017, p. 170) summarises the MELD schema of Bhaskar (2008b) as follows:

1M (Non-identity): Drawing on Marx’s materialism and replacing the Hegelian notion of identity with the notion of non-identity to describe the world into which we are ‘thrown’ – a world into which we come to be.

2E (Negativity): Radically changing Hegel’s notion of negativity from a negative critique of identity to a notion highlighting a process of absenting absences in which multiple as-yet-unrealised possibilities might become possible.

3E (Totality): Radically changing Hegel’s notion of totality from one of idealised completeness after rationally negating contradictions to one that views totality as a complex of intra- and inter-relationships.

4D (Transformative agency): Focusing on the capacity for practical human agency to change the world.

Thus, as we see in this context, Malaysian Muslims need to know who they are as students of Islamic Education (1M), and to grasp the Muslim community’s scepticism in Malaysia (2E). The application of Islamic Critical Realism will guide Malaysian Muslims to embrace challenging issues and to enable them to explore transcendence in Islamic Education (3L). It will transform the way Islamic Education is being taught and studied in formal, informal and non-formal educational settings (4D). In sum, the Imam Muda Islamic Education-
oriented reality television show is an alternative to the return to the formal study of Islam, which may be out of touch with the needs of younger generations in an increasingly globalised world. This is because the manifested Islamic educational contents referring to the Qur’an present a vision of reality that is coherent with ontological realism, as well as the knowledge that we know and learn — epistemic relativism. Together, these two forms of knowledge necessitate the spiritual judgmental rationality of a Muslim (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a). Thus, my study attempts to define engagement with Imam Muda, demonstrate the variation of judgments and map the embeddedness of judgmental rationality during the process of watching the Imam Muda Islamic reality TV show.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined the critical areas of this study, such as Islamic Education in Malaysia, and described the development of Islamic educational media to provide the context for this study. Previous research regarding the Imam Muda Islamic reality television show engaged in content analysis and reception analysis of the programme based on gratification theory and cultivation theory (see Abdul Karim, 2013; Abdul Manaf et al., 2013; Mat Rahim et al., 2012; Patahol Wasli, 2014; Wok et al., 2012). Imam Muda is a cultural product that can be analysed through differences in the loci of morality and can be divided into exogenous and endogenous morality and rationality. However, where religious viewing is concerned, it is a process of spiritual judgmental rationality that assists in understanding the self and communication with other people and with God. Therefore, under-labouring Islamic Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 2013, p. 11; Locke, 1690, p. 13; Wilkinson, 2015a) can contribute to critical reflection on Islamic Education in Islamic reality TV, thus helping Muslim viewers to relate the TV content to their experiences. The next chapter will discuss the methodology for this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology of the thesis, which seeks to answer research questions about Malaysian Muslim viewers’ interpretations and judgments of the manifested Islamic Education content in *Imam Muda* season three. This chapter will describe how the methods will be used to answer each sub-question adequately, in order to have a web of referential data to answer the main research questions. Phenomenographic research, a form of educational research that seeks to identify variations in participants’ responses to a phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2008; Bussey *et al*., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012), is seen as suitable to investigate the qualitatively different ways the participants experienced watching the show. This chapter goes into detail about the research design, research methods, sample and participants, researcher instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis methods. However, beforehand, I will state the positioning of this research and will offer an account of my engagement with reflexivity.

3.1 Positioning the research

This study showcases Malaysian Muslims’ learning experiences in an informal setting. The informal setting chosen is the practice of watching television. It focuses on the viewers' engagement with media messages from the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV programme. This can be considered to be a transdisciplinary area, as it involves Islamic Education as a subject, and television as a creative representation of Islamic educational messages within a Malaysian cultural context. Examining the study of Islam in an informal context such as watching television is rather challenging since it is seen more as an act of entertainment. Through these complex layers, I analysed the viewers’ engagements, by interpreting their variations of understanding with regards to the content of *Imam Muda*. I then modelled their judgments through the guidance of an Islamic Critical Realist framework. Hence, this study is positioned in audience research, drawing on a social and educational framework.

Informal settings inform Muslim communities, in particular Muslim homeschooling communities and even a wider audience, notably the non-Muslim community in Malaysia. Therefore, the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV show or other Islamic content-oriented TV programmes are potentially beneficial as a source of informal education. This is because of their representation of akhlaq and knowledge, which can widen the perspective of the viewers, as they can relate to their surroundings or previous knowledge about Islam generally, and in the Malaysian context specifically. Since this study, which seeks to
unpack Malaysian Muslims’ learning experiences, transcends formal, non-formal and informal settings, it is crucial for the researcher to state his reflexivity.

3.2 Reflexivity

I am a Sunni Malaysian Muslim and attended primary and secondary school in Malaysia. I grew up in the Malaysian education system, studied the subjects in the curriculum and humanities subjects in school, including Islamic Education. Being enrolled in a religious secondary school strengthened my understanding of Islam in theory and practice. Later, I did my Bachelors and Masters of Education in Islamic Education. At the same time, the opportunity to become a creative TV scriptwriter for the Imam Muda Islamic reality TV programme arose in 2010. This sparked my interest in the integration of Islamic content with mainstream television. It was a valuable experience for me. I learnt to create and develop Islamic educational content in Imam Muda based on the themes of the episodes. In sum, having a background in Islamic Education and Media is an advantage for conducting this in-depth study.

Situating myself intellectually, socially and emotionally as an insider-outsider researcher in the study is an integral part of my reflexivity (Attia and Edge, 2017). Three specific contexts require me to be aware of my position while conducting the research. Firstly, I am a graduate of the Malaysian education system. As a student, I studied Islamic Education during primary and secondary school, with additional classes in Islamic subjects such as Arabic, Shariah Islamiyah education and Al-Quran and Sunnah education. I also have an understanding of the philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy employed for teaching and studying Islamic Education in Malaysia since I am trained as a teacher of the subject. Being part of the system allows me to evaluate the integration of Islamic Education into media such as the Imam Muda Islamic reality television show. Keeping this in mind allows me to recognise when my assumptions and views might affect the respondents’ words, or later when I report my findings.

Secondly, being one of the scriptwriters of Imam Muda is an advantage for evaluating my group work. My analysis seeks to provide insights into the manifested Islamic educational content, from the perspective of Malaysian Muslim viewers. In 2013, I conducted a directed content analysis of 10 episodes of Imam Muda season One, using a researcher-developed instrument called the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix. This is an instrument to identify the Islamic educational contents in Imam Muda and to predict the performance that
can be achieved based on the content portrayed. The instrument consists of two parts: the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Standard and the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standard (see Appendix B and Appendix C). The research was inspired by Trunfio (2005), who used directed content analysis to examine health messages in the American comedy show, Seinfeld. I developed my instrument Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix to read the Islamic educational messages in Imam Muda, season one. I adapted the Islamic educational content standard and performance standard obtained from the Ministry of Education (2011, 2012), translated the objectives with a qualified translator, and rearranged the contents using my instrument. I then tested my instrument with three co-investigators in order to increase the validity and reliability of my research. The findings demonstrate that the most portrayed messages in the show are Akhlaq. I realise that my team and I developed the contents, and I analysed the contents from an educational perspective. Bringing this research to another level, my PhD research seeks to investigate audience perceptions in order to understand the whole process involved in producing Islamic contents, for the benefit of the viewers. It will provide guidelines and insights for the future production of Islamic creative contents. Therefore, I need to understand my role as an insider evaluating the TV programme and to offer a critical reflection based on the rationale of the viewers. This research is positioned in the Malaysian Muslim context, objectively focusing on Malaysians who graduated from the Malaysian education system and studied Islamic Education as part of their primary and secondary schooling. Designing the research and using the appropriate methods is vital in ensuring that the data obtained offers adequate depth to answer the research question.

Thirdly, it is important to reflect on the process of becoming a researcher in the field of Islamic Education, who is able to contribute as an insider and outsider. Experiencing the different phases of formal and non-formal Islamic Education made me see the potential of informal settings such as media spaces, which have unlimited sources. However, it also made me aware of how it might be detrimental to users/viewers without media literacy. Vast amounts of information are available on various media platforms, which requires us to be literate to filter, select and critically engage with the material. This process may result in a new form of understanding or new knowledge. It is a learning experience that exists in informal settings, which I intend to harness to model the viewers’ judgments through an Islamic Critical Realist framework. Therefore, this research gathered phenomenographical qualitative data from watching the Imam Muda Islamic Reality TV programme season three, as this would inform the learning experience in an informal setting.
3.3 Research design

Qualitative research is relevant to different disciplines and professions. For example, it has been employed in anthropological and sociological research and was later adapted in psychological and educational research (Flick, 2009; Wallace and Atkins, 2012). According to Creswell (2007, p. 15), “the research design process in qualitative research begins with the philosophical assumption that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study”. I chose to design my research by underlabouring my research with an Islamic Critical Realist framework. Five common types of qualitative research are grounded theory, ethnography, narrative research, case studies, and phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research employs the naturalistic research paradigm, which is according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) inspired by multiple realities, which are constructed and holistic. In this account, the knower and the known exist in an interactive relationship. Thus, in a context-bound working hypothesis, all entities are engaged in a process of mutual simultaneous shaping, in such a way that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects. Thus, inquiry is value-bound and is influenced by research paradigms. A paradigm is essentially a worldview, a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place (Kuhn, 1970).

The data collected in qualitative research is rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Qualitative researchers approach their research with a broad question that focuses on understanding behaviour from the subject’s frame of reference. The multiple ways of interpreting experiences that are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that offer meaning for our experiences, constitute reality. For example, this study collected data through sustained contact with people in the settings where they normally spend their time watching television. Participant observations and focus group discussions were the main ways of collecting data. By getting to know the participants during ice-breaking sessions, and watching television and moderating focus group discussions, I increased their level of openness in their reflections. Data in the context of this study was a systematically detailed written record of what was heard and observed. This material was supplemented by other data such as content analysis of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. I used purposive sampling to select the participants for the study. Subjects were selected because of who they were and what they knew, rather than by chance. I started my focus group discussion with a broad question. It was an open-ended question that allowed the participants to
interact with each other and set the direction of the interview. I then followed the directions of their reflections and I always returned to my preplanned semi-structured questions after the leads had been followed. As a qualitative researcher, I collected data until I reached the point of data saturation. This was achieved when I started to hear repetitive information or no new information. I also analysed my data from the beginning, when I first met the participants, through to the period I was researching with them and obtaining data from the recordings of their interactions with the TV show and reflections on the contents.

Rather than test theories, qualitative researchers often inductively analyse their data and develop theories. In reporting the data, qualitative researchers use thick description (see Geertz, 1973), so that the reader will be able to determine the situation described in the study and substantiate its trustworthiness. For example, when reporting on the data in this study (see Chapter 4), I detailed the description of each segment and the participants’ comments during the commercial break. The data is presented in a descriptive bigger picture that shows how a researcher would observe a television viewing. In Chapter 5, I report on the emergent themes from the focus group discussions, such as how the participants perceive the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV show and its contents. In Chapter 6, I analyse and describe the observed patterns and levels of discernment during and after watching the show. Finally, in Chapter 7, I put everything in the context of the study, with the aim of unpacking the judgmental rationality, as per an Islamic Critical Realist framework. This chapter also seeks to contribute to further descriptions of a spiritual judgmental rationality when watching Islamic TV programmes.

This study seeks to explain the presented phenomena from the perspective of the manifested representations, which can be claimed as the impact of the TV programme from the viewers’ perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). Viewers’ understandings of and critical engagement with Islamic reality TV requires strategic analysis, which consists of an element of media literacy. This is because the genre of reality TV requires a broad understanding of and ability to read messages in fictional and non-fictional programming on broadcast television. Thus, this thesis showcases scenarios of manifested Islamic Education content in Kemuncak Imam as intermediate agents to critical judgments. Viewers’ interpretations are always associated with good understanding of or critical engagement with the TV programme (Hill, 2007; Livingstone, 2004). Therefore, this study articulates data from Malaysian Muslims’ interpretations and judgments. The development of this qualitative study will examine the different types of
judgments and engagements between the Malaysian Muslim viewers and Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three.

In the previous directed content analysis, I conducted in 2014, (Patahol Wasli, 2014), I identified the manifested Islamic educational content of *Imam Muda* season One, focusing on the viewers’ verbal communications during the show. The anecdotal data also represented the Young Imams’ Akhlaq, which provided the viewers with an example of good behaviour. The findings reported the percentages of Islamic educational messages that featured, through categorisation using the Ta’did bil al-Risalah Content Standards and Ta’did bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, with a minimal presentation of qualitative data as evidence. After identifying the contents using the Ta’did bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix, I came to the conclusion that *Imam Muda* is an Islamic Education oriented reality television show (Long-Sutiehall et al., 2011; Patahol Wasli, 2014). The quantification of Islamic educational messages from the show only identified what sort of contents were being represented. Therefore, this led to a qualitative content analysis of the show in order to describe the content presented. This study uses the same instrument to guide me in identifying and categorising, which later resulted in a summative description of each segment of the show, since it only focuses on one final episode in season three. The qualitative description of Islamic educational content from Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three will guide me in analysing the viewers’ interpretations and judgments within the contents they responded to.

The final episode of *Imam Muda* season three was selected for this study. The episode is the final of the journey of the participants before one of them will be crowned as the winner of the season. As part of this study, I analysed the observations that took place in the participants’ selected settings. I also showed the participants the final episode of Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three on television, obtained from YouTube, with prior permission from the producers. The participants watched the final episode for one session lasting at least 50 minutes. The aim was to capture their reactions in an everyday setting and to monitor their engagement with the show. They were encouraged to be as they would naturally be watching the programme, while they were being recorded. However, since the participants were placed in an observed setting, they may have controlled their actions, crafted their answers or withheld their real reflections, to please the researcher. Thus, they were allowed to discuss during a commercial break, and I paused the video to allow the participants to react and reflect. After the viewing, a focus group discussion was conducted.
to investigate the participants’ interpretations and judgments (Dobry, 2011). The study was conducted in two phases, allowing me to gain data related to the participants’ representations, to cross-reference with their reactions and reflections. I later analysed the data through the framework of Islamic Critical Realism to explain the Muslim viewers’ engagement with Kemuncak Imam Muda season three.

3.4 Research methods

This study utilised the phenomenographic research method (Åkerlind, 2008; Bussey et al., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012) to investigate the experiences of others. This is a qualitative approach to educational research, which seeks to investigate the variations in an individual’s understanding of a phenomenon, which might indicate learning. Qualitative data describes problems, behaviours, opinions, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. The data is non-numerical and can come from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaires, field notes, or personal logs or journals (Creswell, 2012; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). For example, in this study, the participants were Malaysian Muslims situated in an observed setting watching Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. Their reactions during the observations and reflections in the focus group were analysed to identify their experiences of watching the show. The emphasis on the reactions and reflections of the viewers assisted in clarifying their understanding and interpretation of the show (Bussey et al., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012). The focus of a phenomenographic study is the relationship between the participants and the show (Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Tsui, 2004). By contrast, quantitative studies are primarily number-based and the results are precise, easy to analyse, repeatable and generalisable (Cohen et al., 2007; Jensen, 2002). This is because quantitative studies are usually conducted on a bigger scale. However, for this study, quantitative methods would have limited the answers, since words were crucial to explaining the phenomena. Thus, more detail and unprompted feedback encouraged the participants’ creativity in generating ideas or reflections (Åkerlind, 2008; Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000). This study utilises phenomenography rather than phenomenology because phenomenology aims to study the structures of experience and consciousness while phenomenography looks at the variance of experience (Cibangu and Hepworth, 2016; Hasselgren and Beach, 1997). Larsson and Holmström (2007) reported in their studies using phenomenographic or phenomenological analysis on anaesthesiologist work. The contrast between them is, phenomenology showed the essence of being an anaesthesiologist and phenomenography showed different ways of understanding or
making sense of the work. Even though these analyses are related, they have a different focus and methods that produce different results. Therefore, this study selected qualitative content analysis, participant observations and focus group discussions to understand the television watching habits, interpretations and judgments of the viewers.

3.4.1 Content analysis

Content analysis was conducted to reveal the manifested Islamic educational content in Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. A qualitative approach was utilised because the research utilised a previous researcher-developed instrument - the Ta’dib bil Al-Risalah Standard Matrix (see Patahol Wasli, 2014; Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2015) - to guide the analysis of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. The data comprised qualitative descriptions of each segment, guided by pictures and timestamps in order to provide a visual timeline for reporting the findings. It provided a good source of background information that yielded detailed insights into the programme. Such insights may not have been directly observable during the TV viewing process. However, a number of concerns arose during the data collection. First, the information may have been out of date since the show was broadcasted in 2012. Another concern was that the data could be seen as biased because of the selection of information to report in the study (Long-Sutehall et al., 2011). Therefore, the use of the same instrument guided my qualitative content analysis and thus avoided biases and inaccuracy. The data obtained became the underpinning comparison point for the viewers’ interpretations and judgments.

3.4.2 Video-based participant observations

Video-based participant observations were conducted to collect data and capture the reactions of the viewers while watching Imam Muda. Their reactions, interpretations and judgments were noted in the observation sheet. The notes were then compared to a researcher-developed instrument called the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix (see Appendix C). The reason for this was because the data collection needed to show where and when the activity occurred. Besides this, it showed directly what people did, rather than relying on what they said they would do. This method is susceptible to observer bias, as according to the Hawthorne effect, people usually perform better when they know they are being observed (Shamshudeen, 2011). If one depends on observations only, this does not increase our understanding of why people behave the way they do. Thus, focus group discussions were needed to explain the interpretations and rationalisations.
3.4.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were utilised in this research to support the interpretations and judgments observed. They were useful for gaining insights and context regarding the participants’ reactions and reflections. Focus group discussions allow participants to engage in dialogue with one another, whilst capturing a wider range of views than in an individual interview (Berg and Lune, 2001; Neuman, 2014). However, they are still susceptible to the power dynamics of the group, and may seem intrusive to the respondents because of their time-consuming nature. Therefore, the focus group discussions in this study were semi-structured, and were guided by the anecdotal data after the observation period. The below figure shows the flow of methods used in this research according to the sections.

![Figure 3.1: Flow of methods](image)

Figure 3.1 illustrates the methods used to obtain the required data. For the manifested content of Islamic Education, the content analysis provided the total view of the content in context. The data obtained became the ground of reference for the reactions and reflection obtained through observation. Since some of the reactions and reflections were indistinct, focus group discussions with the participants provided insights into the way the viewers behaved and reacted to the show. Therefore, it is essential to identify and clarify the sample, participants and instruments to maintain the precision of data.

3.5 Sampling

This study utilised qualitative data sampling because it provided an in-depth understanding of a specific group or person, occurrence or process. The data was obtained from content analysis, observations, and focus group discussions, based on a criterion sampling technique to target the appropriate group. The study selected purposeful sampling because the subjects were selected based on the criteria of the research question. I decided to use
only Kemuncak Imam Muda season three as a focal point of the discussion and Malaysian Muslims as the participants because these aspects would provide me with a context for Malaysian Muslim TV viewing settings. Thus, it is vital to justify the episode selection and specific participant sampling.

3.5.1 Episode selection

This study selected the Imam Muda Islamic reality television programme because it portrayed Islamic manifested content that appealed to the subject of informal Islamic Education (Patahol Wasli and Hussin, 2015; Wok et al., 2012). Imam Muda aired on Astro Oasis from 2010 to 2012, and was among one of the most popular Islamic reality shows that year. As stated by Wok et al. (2012, p. 4), in her survey of Islamic reality shows, the Malay community in Malaysia is based on a hierarchy of effects model. This model is based on the assumption that learning takes place as a result of perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in sequence (see Zajonc, 1980, in Wok et al., 2012). Wok et al.’s (2012) survey also studied attention levels, perceptions, attitudes, involvement, satisfaction and the impact of Islamic reality shows on Malay respondents, aged 13 years and above. The two most popular Islamic reality shows among the Malay community in Malaysia are Imam Muda and Akademi Al-Quran because they generate positive perceptions and attitudes among viewers towards Islamic reality shows, based on a cyclical model. In another study, Mat Rahim et al. (2012) examined the non-verbal communication skills of an influential leader, particularly in the field of da’wah. The winner, Imam Muda Asyraf, used non-verbal communication in an interpersonal or mass setting that promoted him as the most eligible young Imam. Therefore, the manifested content analyses and survey highlighted the need to understand the audience’s reception of manifested Islamic Education and the way they make judgments surrounding it.

I selected purposive sampling of the final episode of Imam Muda, season three, because it would have been overbearing to have an extensive sample. Furthermore, the template of the programme is fundamentally similar to the first season. Imam Muda, season three, developed format and content for a wider audience, which covers Singapore and Indonesia. Each season has 13 episodes, consisting of 10 episodes for the main programme, Medan Imam Muda, and three episodes of auditions, which are titled Ujibakat. Imam Muda. The first episode to the ninth episode are about the process of selecting the candidates that have

62 Ujibakat is defined as an audition.
the commercial values of being a social influencer and exemplar for the modern young Muslim leader or Imam Muda (Young Imam). Throughout the process, the candidates were challenged with different themes which portrayed the manifested Islamic educational content to groom a young Imam (see Chapter 2.4, p. 62). The final episode of the season was crucial because the judges announce the winner of the programme and award the winner with cash and a scholarship to continue their Islamic Studies. Therefore, the selection of the final episode as the independent variable was vital so that the audience reactions and reflections were focused suitably on the objective of this study.

The Imam Muda Islamic reality show assembled 10 young Imams, showcasing their knowledge and ability in an academy, who were assessed weekly with written, verbal and character development tasks. All activities and class updates were broadcasted in the daily Kapsul Imam Muda (KIM), and the weekly practical and oral assessments were shown in Medan Imam Muda (MIM). Medan Imam Muda consists of five segments, which start by introducing the contestants in the show and their accumulated marks in segment one, followed by the second and third segments, which provide a recap of the contestants completing their weekly task. In segment four, the contestants are assessed on their communication skills on stage. With regards to segment five, the contestants are commented on by the faculty of Imam Muda and an elimination process ensues.

The format changed in Kemuncak Imam Muda, season three. The first segment introduced the finalist and provided a recap of their final task in their hometown. The preparation task shown in Kapsul Imam Muda led to the final show. The evaluation continued in the second segment until the fourth segment on stage, which was the Syafawi Assessment. Nevertheless, the contestants were assessed continuously in the academy, in the class, within the community, and on or off set. This inclusive judgment process was designed to avoid any biases in the programme assessment due to the need for field experts to evaluate the young Imams' Islamic content knowledge and their performance in weekly task assessments. Hence, in the absence of home judges or a panel in the form of a public jury, the engagement of the participants in this study provided an insight into the home judges’ reflections and judgments on Kemuncak Imam Muda season three.
3.5.2 Participant sampling

This study focused on Malaysian Muslims because the show aims to portray modern Muslim leaders to the younger generation, by representing young Imams. Thus, the production team and the faculty of *Imam Muda* developed themes that related to the current social problems surrounding Muslims and Islamic content knowledge suitable for the viewers within context. Even though *Imam Muda* season three was aired in 2012, the manifested Islamic educational contents are still relevant because they portray morals and the identity of Malaysian Muslims (Patahol Wasli, 2014). The aim of the current study was to understand the viewers’ reflections through the educational focus of *Imam Muda*, which portrays manifested Islamic educational content that reflects the thought of Malaysian Muslims in context. This research aims to explore the way young Muslims are applying their morality to the world and adapting it to their lifestyles. Below is the sampling frame of the participants for this research:

1. A group of five Malaysian Muslim male viewers aged 18 and above, ranging from undergraduates, to postgraduates and working personnel.
2. A group of five Malaysian Muslim female viewers aged 18 and above, ranging from undergraduates, to postgraduates and working personnel.
3. A nuclear Malaysian Muslim family. The parents must have gone through the Malaysian education system.

The backgrounds of the participants involved in the study will be reported at the beginning of Chapter 4. The purpose of this is to provide an Islamic educational background for the participants, which was obtained through the ice-breaking session with the participants. The background will assist in understanding the participants’ reactions and reflections, to minimise the misinterpretation of the participants’ voices and judgments.

3.6 Research protocol

The research protocol describes the phases of this study. It includes the objectives drawn upon to acquire the data and the intended process utilised to collect appropriate data for the study. The following are the two phases involved in this study.
3.6.1 Phase 1: Content analysis

In a previous study, Patahol Wasli (2014) developed an instrument to identify manifested Islamic educational content in *Imam Muda* season one. The instrument was adapted and back-translated from the Islamic educational content standard and Islamic Education performance standard, issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2017, 2018). As described previously, the researcher developed-instrument was called *Ta’ dib bil al-Risalah* Standard Matrix (Patahol Wasl, 2014). *Ta’ dib* means Educate, *bil* means with, and *al-Risalah* means medium or Media. The selection of the phrase ‘Standard Matrix’ relates to the contents of the matrix, which are obtained from the Islamic Educational Standards (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017, 2018). The instrument consists of two parts, which are the *Ta’ dib bil al-Risalah* Content Standard and the *Ta’ dib bil al-Risalah* Performance Standard. Each instrument has different functions. The first one classifies the content from verbal communications in *Imam Muda* into Islamic Education content standards such as *Al-Quran*, *Hadis*, *Ibadah*, *Sirah* and *Akhlāq*. The second instrument is used to measure the probable performance that can be achieved by students (Patahol Wasli, 2014). By adopting the same instrument in this study, I seek to increase the validity and reliability of the instruments to measure the reactions and reflections of Malaysian Muslim viewers while watching *Imam Muda*. The data is collected in two sections, one section for the video descriptions and the other section for comments on the visual analysis (see Appendix A).

3.6.2 Phase 2: Video-based observations and focus group discussions

The study involved four observation sessions. Every observation consisted of one hour of watching *Imam Muda*. Each episode was roughly about 45 minutes, without any commercial break. The participants were placed in their preferred settings in order to imitate the natural surroundings in which students watch television. The reactions were observed using an Observation form (see Appendix D) and compared to the *Ta’ dib bil Al-Risalah* Performance Standard (see Appendix C). The description in the codebook guided an in-depth explanation for the observed reactions. The focus group discussions were semi-structured, and the questions were designed based on anecdotal data obtained from the observations and the *Ta’ dib bil Al-Risalah* Performance Standard.

In this study, focus groups involving semi-structured discussions between groups of 3-5 people, aimed to explore their interpretations and judgments of *Imam Muda*. I began the focus group discussion by asking broad questions about the topic of interest before asking the focal questions. Although participants gave their opinions individually, they were
encouraged to respond to others’ opinions and to interact with each other. This technique clarified both individual and shared viewpoints. The focus group discussions were recorded using one camera in the same place. The discussions started with open questions and were guided by the responses observed while watching *Imam Muda*. The moderator (researcher) briefed the participants about the aim of the research, purpose of the discussion, recording of the focus group discussion, and the transcription of the discussion, which included issues of privacy and anonymity as per the focus group discussion guide (see Appendix E). Example of the open questions are:

1. What did you think of the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV programme?
2. How did you feel about the content of the show? Is it educational?
3. Where do you get educational information from?
4. What do you like best about the proposed programme?

### 3.7 Data collection procedures

This study is an extended version of my previous study (Patahol Wasli, 2014), which was a content analysis of the *Imam Muda* Islamic Education-oriented reality television show. Consequently, this study focuses on viewers’ interpretations and judgments while watching *Imam Muda*. It is a selective case study because this study involves only Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three and Malaysian Muslim participants. A pilot study was conducted to examine the designated procedures to ensure the quality flow of the research.

#### 3.7.1 Pilot study

One pilot study was conducted before the research began. This was essential for refining the procedures so that the instrument provided could elicit the data needed. The trial was conducted once. Three Malaysian undergraduates were selected for the pilot study. The data collected from the pilot study was analysed based on the participants’ responses, and the instrument modified before implementing the research. The participants were briefed about the data collection procedures. To answer the research questions, this study was developed in two settings.

For the first phase, the data collection procedures began with content analysis by describing the manifested Islamic Education content in *Imam Muda* (see Appendix A). It was important to have the empirical data of the manifested content in order to reference and explain the viewers’ interpretations and judgments. The codebook of the Ta’dib bil al-
Risalah Standard Matrix is provided for guidance (see Appendix B and Appendix C). It is important for filling the situation description, to better understand the context in which Islamic Education is portrayed. The following are the procedures involved in content analysis:

1. Fill in the theme of the episodes being viewed (for example Khurafat [literal translation: Superstition]).
2. Fill in the matching episode number and date on which the episode was analysed (Episode 5#: Khurafat, DD/MM/YYYY).
3. Fill in the video descriptions section with the description of the observed manifested Islamic Education content portrayed.
4. Fill in the commentaries section with the details of the situation, description of actions and suitability of content portrayed.

In the second phase, I engaged in video observations of three participants (P1, P2 and P3) in a room in which it was comfortable for them to watch television (TV), and where they could be free to be themselves. Two cameras (C1 and C2) were placed beside the television to capture their reactions and reflections. The participants were observed, and each reaction or rationalisation was noted for further inquiry in the discussion sessions (see Appendix D). The following were the procedures involved in the observation session:

1. Fill in the theme of the episodes being viewed (for example: Khurafat).
2. Fill in the matching episode number and date on which the episode was analysed (Episode 5#: Khurafat, DD/MM/YYYY).
3. Timeline: the segments of the manifested contents responded to by the viewers.
4. Manifested Islamic Education Content: referring to the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptor for example: Al-Quran/Hadith/Akidah/Ibadah/Sirah and Adab and Akhlak.
5. Audience Reaction: this section was filled with the description of the observed reactions from the manifested Islamic educational content portrayed.
6. Comments: this section was filled with the details of the situation, description of actions and suitability of content portrayed.

The participants spent one hour watching one episode in the session. The below figure illustrates the floor plan setup:
Figure 3.2 illustrates the function of two cameras situated on each side to cover the recording of behaviour and reactions during observation. It is important to cover these angles as it allows the researcher to cross-check the reactions from both recordings. The focus group discussion conducted after the viewing session was recorded using one camera in the same place. The researcher sat next to the camera for the discussion to control it in case the participants did not want their reflections to be recorded. It was important to plan the position as it provided the researcher with data. Hence, getting a clear video involves more than directing the camera at the participants. It is the positioning that enables the researcher to gain clear images of the participants and provides an accurate presentation of the settings.

### 3.7.2 Findings of the pilot study

The aim of the pilot study was to understand the nature of my research, so that I could refine the procedures for the main study. I sought to ensure that the methods and form of analysis chosen provided relevant data for the study. I conducted a content analysis for the first phase, and observations and interviews for the second phase. In this section, I will discuss the challenges that I faced and the solutions implemented for the main study. I will start by justifying the methods employed, before providing an analysis.

The content analysis was satisfactory because it provided the description of each segment, which assisted me in understanding the context of the participants’ responses. Thus, I decided to maintain the content analysis for the main research, as listed in Chapter 3.6.1,
p. 90), to provide a qualitative description of each segment for the final episode and context for the analysis.

With regards to the observation, I realised that by using three cameras I was able to capture the participants' gestures and reactions from three angles. This allowed me to cross-check if I had missed any facial expressions or body language that might inform my interpretation of the participants’ understanding of the show. However, since I only used a camera to record the participants' behaviour and it did not capture the sound clearly, for the main study, I bought a microphone to increase the quality of the sound to capture the participants' responses while watching the show.

I had mixed feelings about using interviews to investigate the richness of my participants’ interpretations. This is because I found that the process was lengthy, and it caused my participants to lose focus and wait a long time. This was because each participant had an interview of at least an hour, where they reflected on the show that they had watched. I decided to change the interview to a focus group discussion, so that I could capture the dynamics of discussion in the participants' interpretations and understandings of the show. This also gave me confidence in my decision to choose group viewing instead of a single person viewing, because it yielded more interactions and more interesting dynamics in the discussion.

In relation to the analysis, I decided to utilise the description of the participants’ background so that the context was clear. I wanted to provide an analysis of each segment and the reactions. Therefore, I used Thematic analysis for focus group discussions. I introduced variation theory (see Åkerlind, 2008; Marton and Booth, 2000), which will be explained in detail in Chapter 6.2. This research initially sought to investigate how Malaysian Muslims reacted to and described Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three. Three research questions developed, which sought to understand how the viewers perceived the show. These were the initial questions for the study:

1. How do Malaysian Muslim viewers describe and associate with the manifested Islamic Education content in *Imam Muda*?
2. What is the dialectical process involved in the interaction between audience judgments and manifested Islamic Education in *Imam Muda*?

Following the results, I decided to revise the research question as per Chapter 1 (see Chapter 1.4, p. 13).
3.7.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish the overall validity and credibility of the information obtained (Heath, 2001; Meijer et al., 2002). Denzin (1978) identified four basic types of triangulation: data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. This study attempts to explain the complexity of Malaysian Muslim viewers’ reactions and reflections from several standpoints (Cohen et al., 2007). Subsequently, the research questions are analysed from multiple perspectives until consistency is realised across data sources or approaches. The emergence of inconsistencies provides an opportunity to reveal the deeper meaning of the data (Begley, 1996; Denzin, 1989). Therefore, this study selected data and theoretical triangulation because it involves using multiple data sources and more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon. The process of identifying datasets that complement one another is accomplished by using multiple types of sources, through visual confirmation and verbatim datasets. With regards to the theories involved, Islamic Critical Realism (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a), transcendental realism (Bhaskar, 2008a, 2017) and variation theory (Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000) were employed.

3.8 Data analysis and reporting

Several forms of analysis were involved in this study, which were adopted according to the phases (see Appendix F). For the first phase, I used qualitative content analysis to describe the manifested Islamic educational content in Imam Muda season three from the researcher’s standpoint. I analysed and described the content according to the guidelines in the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix. The data described the manifested Islamic educational content to support the reactions and reflections of the participants. During the second phase, when I analysed data from the video-based participant observations, I focused my attention on the social interactions or reactions portrayed, as well as interactions among the participants and with the show. This was because viewers make meaning in ways beyond language, such as through speech, gesture, gaze, image or writing. The viewers’ reactions and reflections while watching Imam Muda were noted down in the observation form (see Appendix D and Appendix F).

Moreover, the data from the focus group discussions was also analysed using thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006) and a phenomenographic process (see Marton, 1986). Analysis conducted using a phenomenographic process seeks to bracket
preconceived ideas in the selected transcription (ibid). The researcher then needs to identify the relationship between the data obtained from discussions and the categories for describing how people experience viewing (data from the observations). As part of this process, I described similarities and differences that should be supported by the data from the transcriptions. The categories were separated and exclusive. The data provided insights into how the participants made connections and judgments when they watched Imam Muda. Later, to understand the Malaysian Muslim viewers’ spiritual judgmental rationality, the elaboration will be reported upon using the Islamic Critical Realist framework (Wilkinson, 2013) to understand their critical reflections on Imam Muda.

The perceptions of the show derived from the participants’ reactions and reflections. The participants selected in this study received their primary and secondary education in Malaysia and had studied Islamic Education as part of their formal education. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds, which provided a dynamic perspective for the study. They were divided into three groups: a Muslimah group (B1), a Muslim group (B2) and a Muslim Family (B3). The methods chosen to obtain the participants’ perceptions were participants’ observation of their viewing experiences, focus group discussions and viewing reflections. The purpose of the observations was to collect instant reactions while viewing the contents. Meanwhile, the discussion sought to collect information after the viewing session, and the viewing reflections aimed to clarify any anecdotal behaviours or utterances from the participants that required clarification.

The reporting of the perceptions started with an analysis of the participants’ backgrounds (see Chapter Four). The purpose of this was to provide an overview of the participants’ Islamic Education knowledge and background as Muslims. I conducted a content analysis of the show using the Ta’dib bi al-Risalah Matrix, developed as part of my previous Master’s research (see Patahol Wasli, 2014), to identify Islamic educational messages in Imam Muda season one. In the current research, I used the same instrument to identify Islamic educational content in Kemuncak Imam Muda season three, through a descriptive approach to each segment. The aim of this was to provide details of the segment and type of content that the participants might react to in the viewing sessions. A content analysis followed by the reporting of the participants’ reactions to each segment was carried out. According to the perceptual process, the participants selected the contents that appealed to them and their reactions brought meaning to their understandings.
Assessing informal learning requires objectivity as a guidance tool for evaluating a personal learning experience. This study started by understanding the participants’ background through a brief ice-breaking session, and content analysis of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. It also sought to identify the manifested contents using the Ta’dib bil al Risalah Matrix (literal meaning: educate using media matrix), which guided me in assessing the participants’ judgments. From the participants’ reactions and reflections, I analysed the process involved in the participants’ perspectives on the selected contents (see Chapter Five). The researcher broke down the judgment process in terms of patterns of variation, form variation theory (Bussey et al., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000). Patterns of variation demonstrate the spectrum of understanding of the show and variety of participants’ experiences, which indicates that learning took place. Subsequently, the various understandings are analysed with reference to guidance from the domains of reality from Critical Realism, to reveal the depth of the participants’ understandings about the show (see Chapter Six).

Variation theory (Bussey et al., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000) was selected to explain the participants’ reactions to and reflections on Kemuncak Imam Muda season three because it shows how the viewers as learners understand and experience the viewing experience. The viewers’ verbal comments on the contents of the show indicated their ability to discern the critical aspects of the phenomenon they observed and experienced in terms of the variation of the dimension that related to that aspect. Since this study was conducted in an informal setting, it is essential to address the key features of Variation theory (Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000). Firstly, the object of learning is Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. More specifically, I drew on the contents of the final episode, which consisted of five segments and three competing finalists. Content analysis was conducted to guide the researcher in identifying possible critical aspects that the participant could discern. The researcher focused on participants’ reactions to each segment, to understand which contents the participants were aware of in the viewing sessions. In the focus group discussions, the researcher analysed the participants’ discernments and variations in their understandings and interpretations of the contents, using the patterns of variation.

The data obtained from the participants encapsulated their judgments about the show. From the participants’ judgments, interactions with the manifested contents, and my content analysis of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three, insights have been yielded into what
extent the participants learnt from the show. I started with an explanation of the viewers’ perceptions, during which the participants selected, organised, interpreted and negotiated their understandings of the contents. These perceptual processes led to judgments about the show. As the analysis developed, I investigated learning from the perspective of the participants’ judgments by adopting a theory of learning: Variation theory (Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000). The Variation theory of learning developed from phenomenographic research (Åkerlind, 2008; Bussey et al., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012), which focuses on mapping the experiential description of different ways to understand a phenomenon. Variations in discernment indicates learning, but some forms of discernment are more valid than others. I analysed the participants’ judgments in light of the domain of reality in Transcendental Realism (see Bhaskar, 2008a, 2017, p. 17) as this offered an opportunity to identify the viewers’ level of engagement with the contents. However, judgments make sense only when evaluated in conjunction with interactions concerning the contents. Hence, in this chapter, the interplay between participants’ judgments and the contents of the show will be analysed through an Islamic Critical Realist framework (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015b).

I selected an Islamic Critical Realist framework as an interpretive tool for engagement with the Malaysian Muslim viewers’ perspectives on Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. Data from the reactions and reflections revealed processes of meaning-making, which assisted in explaining the participants’ judgments and rationalities. I used three terms to explain participants’ conclusions about the show. The first term was discernment, which refers to the participants’ abilities to judge the contents. This is obtained from the participants’ spontaneous reactions to and reflections on the television content. The second term is rationalisation, which refers to the participants’ processing of existing and new information and experiences. This involved reasoning in evaluating the contents or generally commenting about the show. The third term is judgment, which refers to the participants’ abilities and capacities, to take consideration of a decision and new understanding (see figure 3.3). This is drawn from the participants’ ability to come to a sensible conclusion from a perception and distinguished relationship, and to contextualise their understandings and formulation of opinions. These mark different phases that the participants faced before coming to their conclusions, and carry a transformative value. Putting this in the context of learning, the participants experienced informal learning, as it changed their perspective during their interpretation of the show. Therefore, Islamic entertainment TV programmes
such as *Imam Muda* provide potential educational content for the viewers to experience informal learning.

![Diagram of decision-making process](image)

**Figure 3.3: The decision-making process**

The findings from the research questions are essential as they had an impact on the theoretical framework, namely the process of Judgmental rationality involved in Islamic Critical Realism. Placing the interpretation of the findings within a bigger picture shows how this study could contribute to a body of knowledge, especially in the field of informal Islamic Education. The researcher situated the participants’ judgments as forms of judgmental rationality in the context of an Islamic Critical Realist framework.

With regards to the software involved in the research process, the recorded observations and focus group discussion videos were transferred to iMovie for video trimming. The purpose of this was to select the intended part for further observation and analysis. The chosen parts for analysis were then transferred to Atlas.ti for transcription. The data was exported in images and storyboards to be organised according to the findings. Participant validation was obtained through the focus group discussions. This was an appropriate setting because the researcher sought to show the participants recordings by segments and to let the participants explain their reactions, interpretations and judgments while watching the programme. By doing this, feedback from the participants in relation to the recorded data added validity to my interpretations. This also avoided any potential biases that existed from within my experience and knowledge, thus ensuring that the participants’ meanings and perspectives were authentically represented.
### 3.9 Matrix of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the viewers’ perceptions of Kemuncak <em>Imam Muda</em> season three?</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent did the participants learn from watching Kemuncak <em>Imam Muda</em>?</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
<td>(Patahol Wasli, 2014) Semi-structured interview protocol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Research Design

1. Research design: Qualitative
2. Research method: Phenomenography
   - Content Analysis: to describe the manifested Islamic educational contents in *Imam Muda*.
   - Observation: to explain the viewers’ reactions to and reflections on the content portrayed.
   - Focus Group Discussion: to evaluate and cross-check how viewers make judgments.
   - Viewing Reflection: to justify anecdotal data such as body language or behaviours during observation.
3. Participants: Malaysian Muslims
4. Sample: Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three

### Contribution

1. Informal learning from integrated Islamic educational media
2. Defining spiritual judgmental rationality
3. Islamic media literacy
4. Guidelines for Islamic TV content production
3.10 Ethical considerations

Informed consent

Malaysian Muslims were identified as the participants for the research project. The potential participants must have undertaken their studies within the Malaysian education system. The information sheet was attached for their review prior to them indicating an interest in participating in the study. Potential participants were then offered an opportunity to ask further questions about the study in a face-to-face meeting before they decided whether or not they chose to take part. The consent forms were also reviewed with the participants as part of the face-to-face meeting, and they were given ample time to read the forms before signing them (if they agreed to participate).

With regards to the younger participants (age group five to 15 years old), the information sheet and consent forms were sent to their parents. The first consent form was concerned with the child(ren) participating in the observations. If consent was obtained from both the parents and the child(ren), the children were invited to fill in the form to participate in the study. The second consent form was related to the procedures involved in conducting the focus group discussions. The parents and the students were informed about the procedures of the focus group discussions. Notes were taken on the child(ren) who had obtained consent from both the parents and the child(ren). Lastly, all the participants, both the parents and child(ren) could opt in or opt out at any stage of the research, and the procedures for doing so were stated clearly on the consent form.

Public Domain Data

One of the ethical issues involved in this study relates to consent for using Kemuncak Imam Muda season three as a key tool. As the material is available on the Astro Oasis YouTube Channel. I emailed the producer/channel manager to seek permission to use Imam Muda season three in my research. Written consent was provided.

Risks to the participant and/or researcher

This research posed some minor potential risks to participants and/or the researcher. One of the risks was that the content portrayed might not have been suitable for every participant. To eliminate this risk, I told the participants that they were entitled to stop at any point, and any problematic subjects would be handled carefully. Another risk was
maintaining the attention and focus of the participants while watching *Imam Muda*. They might have become bored or have lost focus while watching the TV programme. It was therefore important to monitor the participants’ engagement levels while watching *Imam Muda*.

An additional concern was that the participants might feel uncomfortable about being observed. I used videotaping in the observation sessions. However, permissions were obtained before doing any videotaping. The camera was placed in a location that did not affect the participants’ interactions with the researcher. If the participant showed any sign that indicated that ‘I do not want to be videotaped’, the researcher explained that it was only a reminder for the researcher, and it would be destroyed later. If the participant still expressed unhappiness about the camera, it was removed directly, and responses were taken during sessions, as I was using video recording for sessions to observe behaviours. A consent form, which each participant signed prior to the commencement of the study, disclosed the use of video recording, and sought to ensure the security and privacy of video data.

**Confidentiality and anonymity**

The data collected was treated with the strictest confidentiality. Participants are not named in the report, and it is impossible to identify them. The reporting of the findings in the study will only refer to the unique identifier assigned to the participants. If screenshots of reactions or behaviours are employed, or any parts in the video are used in the report, separate permission will be sought from the participants. The participants will be provided with all levels of consent and the researcher will keep the name linked to the identifier. Participants can request to read the results once the analysis and reporting are completed.

**Data Management**

The data will remain password protected safely with the researcher and his supervisor. The documented data will be destroyed after the whole writing process is finished. However, digital data will be encrypted to only the researcher and supervisor for future reference. All participants will be informed about the data archiving and sharing process, and their written informed consent will be sought for the sharing of data.
3.11 Conclusion

Content analysis, video-based observations and focus group discussions were used in this study to investigate the interpretation and judgments of Malaysian Muslim viewers towards Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three, as a representation of manifested Islamic educational content. Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three was analysed based on the Ta’ dib il al-Risalah Standard Matrix, while the interpretations and judgments of the participants were discussed in the framework of Islamic Critical Realism. This study will highlight Malaysian Muslims’ critical reflections surrounding the *Imam Muda* Islamic Education-oriented reality television. Therefore, the findings of this research will describe the manifested Islamic educational content, thus explaining the reactions and evaluating the rationales for Malaysian Muslims watching *Imam Muda*. 
Chapter 4: Analysing Malaysian Muslims’ ‘Gogglebox’

4.1 Introduction

The following three chapters discuss the findings of this study. Chapter Four examines the participants’ observational settings, drawing on relevant information about the participants’ background, obtained from the ice-breaking session. Subsequently, I relate this to how it shaped the dynamic of the group discussions. This chapter also engages in a content analysis of Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda, season three, and identifies themes that emerged from the participants’ reactions towards the show. Chapter Five investigates the reception and interpretation of the TV show among Malaysian Muslims, based on the way they described the Islamic contents and reflected on the representation of young Imams. Indeed, the relation between the participants’ reactions and their interpretations of each segment shaped their understanding of the characteristics of a successful Imam, and the show as an alternative form of entertainment. Chapter Six analyses the results of chapters Four and Five dialectically, mapping the negotiation of the participants’ perceptions of the show that might indicate informal learning process engaged in through the interaction between participants in relation to Islamic content knowledge in the show.

The results show that the participants became home judges, as demonstrated through their reactions to the finalists’ backgrounds and their performances, and through comments in the Commercial Break Reactions (CBR) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). All the sessions were moderated by the researcher, who acted as an ethnographic observer. The participants based their reactions around questions related to who the finalists were, how the finalists prepared for the task, who performed better and what the key characteristics of the winner were. Since the participants were only watching the final episode, the finalists became the focal point of their judgments. The participants' discussions revolved around the finalists’ performances and skills, as they positioned themselves as public judges, and engaged with the context of the show. The recording of their reactions and reflections resembles the concept of the Gogglebox reality TV show or reaction videos on YouTube. Therefore, the analysis of the participants’ responses in Chapter 4 will become the point of

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63 I was inspired by the show Gogglebox. The programme features families and groups of friends from different parts of the United Kingdom, who are placed in recorded settings. The show documents their reactions to British television programmes from the comfort of their own homes. I decided to recreate the same situation, which influenced how I conducted my observations. A detailed description is available at https://www.channel4.com/programmes/gogglebox and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gogglebox [Accessed on 20 August 2019].
reference in Chapter Five, as a means of exploring the ways in which Malaysian Muslims receive and interpret the contents of Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, season three (see Chapter 2.4.1, p. 65).

This chapter will begin by reporting on the Malaysian Muslim participants’ viewing session and their particular viewing positions in their analysis of ‘Gogglebox’. It will explain the composition and context of each group, the way the members identified themselves, and the particular contents they responded to. Following this, their reactions to the manifested Islamic educational contents in *Imam Muda* will be explained in two sections, which will be based around segments of Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, season three. Firstly, a content analysis will be provided, which will examine the storyline of each segment and descriptions of events identified by the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix (see Chapter 1.9.5, p. 30). Secondly, the viewers’ retrospective judgment of the contents, in conversation with the researcher, will be described. This process invited the participants to evaluate the competencies of the finalists and the show simultaneously.

4.2 An analysis of Malaysian Muslims’ ‘Gogglebox’

This section begins by describing the observations of each participant group during the TV viewings. The observation is referred to as ‘Malaysian Muslims’ ‘Gogglebox’’ because the session adopts a similar approach to the original Gogglebox show, developed initially by Channel 4 in the United Kingdom, which seeks to record the participants’ reactions in their homes, while watching television. Watching television in a group is considered a social time that creates a space for viewers to interact, exchange opinions and offer reflections (Jonassen, Campbell, and Davidson, 1994; Livingstone, 2000). Therefore, in this study, the participants were encouraged to be expressive and to create a homely feeling during the TV viewing. The description of the observation will begin with a brief exploration of the participants' backgrounds and their reactions during the TV viewing. It is essential for this chapter to explain who the participants are, to provide context for the study. The participants are Malaysian Muslims that have undertaken their primary and secondary school in Malaysia, have learnt about Islamic Education, have experienced Islamic environments and Islamic entertainment. When the participants react to contents, this indicates that they are negotiating judgments of their previous understandings of an Imam, and about practising Islam (Borhan, 2011; Hamid, 2011; Sakr, 2013).
Watching television has always been a social time for friends and family. It allows instant gratification and reflections relating to people’s interests. It was essential to inform the participants that this was a participatory observation, so that they were aware that they were being placed in an observed condition together with the researcher while watching the Imam Muda Islamic reality TV show. The presence of the researcher assisted reflection on the show. As well as describing the backgrounds of the participants according to their answers in the introductory session and descriptions of their activities, their actions during the observation were also noted. Since the observations took place in different situations, it is crucial to state each set-up to provide an in-depth context for the study.

10 individuals participated in this study, who were further categorised into three groups for recorded observations and recorded focus group discussions. These were Muslimah Viewers (Batch 1), which were all female viewers; Muslim Viewers (Batch 2), which were all male viewers; and a Muslim Family (Batch 3), which consisted of a nuclear family - a husband, a wife and a child. These groups were selected to create a social atmosphere for them to express their thoughts on Malaysian Muslims’ ‘Gogglebox’. The participants were briefed about the content of the programme so that they would have a general idea about the content of the show. The participants reacted to and reflected upon each commercial break. They reacted to the finalists' actions and related such actions to their experience and knowledge. These participatory behaviours enabled them to become home judges, which provided a sign of active engagement. However, the participants did not comment on the finalists' content knowledge because not all the participants were experts in the field. Thus, most of the participants engaged in judging the finalists' performances and the organisation of assessments. The viewing of the final of Medan Imam Muda, season three, took place in different venues and settings. Below are the descriptions of each group’s observations and reactions.

4.2.1 Batch 1 (B1): A group of Muslimah Viewers

This group consisted of five Muslimah. In the observation, all of them wore hijabs and were modestly dressed, to offer a sign that they were practising Muslimah. Maria and Wahida described themselves as moderately exposed to Islamic knowledge and its application because they received only formal Islamic Education in school, and they learnt how to practise the religion from their families and their social environments. As for the other three, Aisha, Amina and Huda had more exposure to Islam throughout their lives, which included being enrolled in religious school, learning extended subjects about Islam,
rather than only Islamic Education subjects such as Arabic Language, Syariah Islamiyah, and Al-Quran and As-Sunnah, and participating in Islamic volunteering activities. In this group, Maria, Aisha and Amina were married. The group had a reasonable level of communication, since they knew each other through circles of friends (FGD.BG.B1).

Maria hosted the viewings and was joined by the other four Muslimah. During the observation, Maria’s children unexpectedly joined the group in the middle of Segment One, until the end. Most of the time, the children were playing with their mother (Maria), which caused distractions for the other participants. However, the group were able to maintain their focus. The researcher decided not to remove the children from viewings and reflections to preserve the natural setting of the TV viewing. Maria stated that she did not feel disrupted and it was normal for her to watch television and to attend to her children at the same time. The remaining participants in the group also felt that it was normal to have children playing while the adults were watching television (VRef.B1). The participants were focused on the content in the viewing sessions, with active engagement such as questioning, reflecting and commenting on the commercial breaks (CBR.B1). Even though Amina intermittently attended to her phone in Segment Two and Segment Four, she justified this action by saying that she had an urgent call to answer during Segment Two. She regained her focus by following up with the group (CBR.S2). Meanwhile, in Segment Four, Amina was on her phone to check the finalist’s recitation of the Surah Ibrahim (Vref.Amina.AA).  

4.2.2 Batch 2 (B2): A group of Muslim Viewers

This group consisted of three Muslim. The members of this group were chosen as they were practising Muslims, who prayed five times a day and fasted. Faisal and Fahad had had a lot of exposure to Islam throughout their lives. This is because Faisal attended a religious school and international Islamic university and studied extended subjects related to Islam, such as Arabic, Syariah Islamiyah, and Islamic Civilization. Meanwhile, Fahad was brought up in a religious family and had religious experience growing up. He was also an active participant in Islamic volunteering activities. He had a different background to Faruq because he came from an inter-religion family and he described himself as moderately

64 Surah Ibrahim (Arabic: إبراهيم, "Abraham") is the 14th chapter (surah) of Al-Quran, containing 52 verses.
exposed to Islamic knowledge and its application. Faruq attended national school and studied Islamic Education as a subject in primary and secondary school. He considers himself as a moderate practising Muslim (FGD.BG.B2).

Faisal hosted the viewing and was joined by Fahad and Faruq. Faisal and Faruq were friends, while Fahad was their junior in an extended circle of friends. In the observation, Fahad was sleepy during the second segment and intermittently yawned until the end of the show. He showed signs of tiredness and a lack of attention. In another circumstance, Fahad took a piece of tissue and drew on it. Thus, he was not paying full attention to the show. The researcher also learnt from Faisal, that his gesture of folding hands while watching television was a sign of relaxation and focus. Faisal justified his action of drawing in segment two by saying that it was a means of focusing his attention on the content delivered by the finalists in ‘Questions and Answers with Mystery Guest’. There was a good dynamic in the group, even though there was about a ten year age gap between Fahad and the rest of the group. They were open and willing to share their ideas and suggestions.

4.2.3 Batch 3 (B3): A Muslim Family

This Muslim nuclear family consisted of a husband (Abdullah), a wife (Amal), and a child (Aliya). This married couple had been together for three years. From the observation, the family showed signs of being a practising Muslim family, as the wife was properly dressed in a hijab, and they prayed together. Abdullah showed an interest in gaining Islamic knowledge and actively joined in Islamic volunteering activities, while Amal preferred to attend Islamic activities, classes or workshops (FGD.BG.B3). Both Abdullah and Amal had previous experience of watching Imam Muda, season one, in 2010. For them, watching Imam Muda, season three, was exciting, since they could observe the progress of the show.

In the observation, Aliya was playing around the house, and Amal kept on monitoring her. Abdullah intermittently drew his attention to Amal and Aliya (OBS.B3), focusing on the show, while Amal attended to Aliya. When parents and their children watch TV together, it is natural for children to begin playing around in the same space. It was noticeable that Abdullah tried to focus on the show, and he acknowledged that he was under observation. Amal explained that she was not focused on some parts of the show because she needed to attend to her child (OBS.S1.Amal and Aliya). The researcher decided not to intervene in the situation and allowed the TV viewing session to flow naturally. After the focus group discussion, Abdullah and Amal reflected that they were getting used to the position and
they were worried if their child was not visible. However, they were still able to engage with and focus on the show (Vref.B3).

All of the groups were conducted in comfortable settings to emulate the nature of TV viewings. The purpose of the introductory session was to make the participants feel more comfortable with the other participants and to enable the researcher to express their reflections and judgments within a recorded setting. The explanation within each observation serves to highlight the events that happened, and to assist in contextualising the participants’ comments. With diverse professional and family backgrounds, the participants shared the same educational background in Islamic Education, with a different application in diverse contexts. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the participants reacted to the content, and how their viewing position formed their views.

4.2.4 Viewers as home judges

Reality television invites viewers to judge the contestants or finalists in the show. From the quotation below, it can be seen that the ability to vote in support of their favourite contestant was seen as an exciting part of the participatory action for the viewers. For example, after Segment One, the following conversation ensued:

_Amina:_ Who do you think will win? (looking to the group)

_Huda:_ Please be patient Amina, we will know the winner of the show later.

_Maria:_ Who is the winner? (looking at the researcher)

_Amina:_ Yes, I want to know who the winner is … (looking at the researcher)

_Huda:_ Maria and Amina, please be patient.

_Researcher:_ I can’t tell you...but you can watch the show till the end to know who the winner is. (teasing the participants)

_Amina:_ I wanted to know who the winner is. I am about to vote now…(laughing)

_Huda:_ I want to vote too. Which one do you want to win? (looking at Amina)

_Amina:_ I can’t tell you. It’s a secret!

_Maria:_ Hey! If you vote, your vote will not be counted!

_Amina:_ That why I asked if there is already a winner ... (she did not finish the sentence)

_Aisha:_ Look! The show (pointing to the television). Is it in 2012?!

_Amina:_ Oh! 2012... (low-tone of voice)

_Huda:_ That’s in 2012, Amina!

(CBR.S1P1B1.15:38-16:02)
Amina announced to her group that she wanted to vote right after the show break for a commercial. The group responded to her by stating their intention to vote for their favourite finalists. In the other two groups, B2 and B3 also had their favourite finalists in mind, and they predicted the winner of the show. They did not state their judgment after the first segment, but they kept it until the fourth segment. Their favouring and judging were influenced by the format of the show (Hill, 2005; Livingstone, 1998, 2000). The format of the reality show, portrayed as a competition that tests the finalists’ abilities in each segment, encouraged the viewers to share their reflections and judgments (Bagdasarov et al., 2010; Hill, 2005). As individuals, the tendency to compliment, criticise and reflect on one’s action is part of the rational process related to knowledge acquisition and experience. Thus, involvement in the processes of reality TV indicated that the participants were positioning themselves as home judges.

Becoming a home judge requires one gaining familiarity with programme contents and contexts. This is because the judgments made by TV viewers are based on their references to the contents in context. Due to their similar educational background, the participants would equally reflect their rational judgments on the contestants/finalists in the reality show. As Malaysian Muslims watching Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda, season three, it came to the viewers’ attention that they should evaluate the finalists’ readiness to face the real world. They wanted to see if the finalists from the show were competent to carry their responsibility as an Imam after the show. The expectation is that the finalists or the alumni of Imam Muda should be good on television as well as in real life as they are the model for Islamic leaders within society. The participants judged the finalists based on their ability to effectively deliver and disseminate knowledge about Islam. These skills are essential for young Imams in the era of technology as a platform for providing da’wah (inviting people to worship Allah and understand the Quran and Sunnah, of the prophet Muhammad). This is not limited to just Islamic forums, kuliah or classes in the mosque. Broadcast media and social media are becoming mainstream, and the young Imam should be able to adapt. Therefore, the analysis of participants’ reactions, responses and reflections can be categorised into value reasoning and emotional responses. The findings from this chapter will explain the way the participants critically engaged with Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda, season three.
4.3 Analysis of reactions to each segment

Kemuncak *Imam Muda*, season three, has five segments. As explained in Chapter Three, the final episode was selected because it is the final assessment of the finalist to crown the winner of the show, and since it is too extensive to analyse 10 episodes of Medan *Imam Muda*. The focus of this study was the viewers. Therefore, the purpose of the content analysis of the show is to provide points of reference for the viewers’ responses and reflections. The show is analysed using Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix; a researcher-developed instrument used in a previous study (see Patahol Wasli, 2014), to examine the contents of 10 episodes of *Imam Muda*, season one. The instrument was adapted from a combination of Islamic Education content descriptors and standard performance indicators. Islamic Education content descriptors were used to categorise the areas of the manifested content into Al-Quran, Hadith, Aqidah, Sirah Nabawiyah, Ibadah, Adab and Akhlaq, and the Islamic Education performance standards were used to focus on the learning outcomes and to predict potential achievements. Three investigators tested the instrument to establish the trustworthiness of its items. Therefore, the instrument was utilised in the study to provide a reference point for understanding how the three groups of Malaysian Muslim viewers described the manifested content (the literal content) of the show.

The content analysis emphasised the educational aspects of the show according to the Tadib bil al-Risalah Standard Matrix (Patahol Wasli, 2014). Indeed, this educational perspective on the contents helped to guide an explanation of the participants’ understandings, since watching reality TV is a form of entertainment whereby the viewers are unaware that they are being educated or informally learning from what they have watched. The contents portrayed in Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, season three, intended to test the finalists’ abilities, but the viewers also learnt from the assessment. The depth of learning was dependent upon the viewers’ readiness to watch the show with an open mind. Since the participants only watched the final episode, it was essential to understand how the viewers described the show according to the content that they had reflected upon and reacted to. They were unaware that they were positioning themselves as home judges for the show, since reality TV portrays a false reality clouded by judgments and emotions (Andrejevic, 2004; Hughes, 2012). Therefore, it is vital to explain the participants' responses and reflections that revolve around the finalists, together with the content that indicates the viewers' interpretation of the show.
The following provides the results of the content analysis, which comprises the descriptions and aims of each segment. The reports illustrated the contents or the context that the viewers had watched, thus providing the storyline, as the participants quoted the content. The aim of each segment is justified throughout the analysis, by using the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah [teaching using media] Standard Matrix, to highlight the expected behavioural outcomes of or responses to the intended messages. Each segment is followed by the participants’ reactions during the observations and Commercial Break Reactions (CBR).

4.3.1 Manifested contents in Segment One (CA.S1)

The show started with an opening nasyid performance by three finalists, which was a song seeking forgiveness from Allah, entitled *Astaghfirullah* (CA.S1.02:46). The host introduced the three finalists and established that the song to be performed was going to be on an album later that year, in 2012. The finalists were *Imam Muda* (IM) Jabar, *Imam Muda* (IM) Hafiz, and *Imam Muda* (IM) Naufal. The host thanked the sponsors and explained the assessment structure, which consisted of Tahriri [a written examination], Syafawi [an oral examination], a practical assessment and Sahsiah [character] assessment. For Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, the initial assessment was Syafawi, which consisted of a segment called ‘Questions and Answers with Mystery Guests’, Tazkirah and Syafawi Ulumul Quran (CA.S1.03:03). The shot then transitioned from the stage to the VT Playback of gotong-royong [collective spring cleaning], organised and executed by the finalists in their hometown as their final practical assessment.
1. Task performed by IM Hafiz

CA.S1.04:24  CA.S1.04:49  CA.S1.05:21

CA.S1.06:05  CA.S1.06:10  CA.S1.06:21

CA.S1.IMH: The VT playback started with IM Hafiz visiting a masjid (literal translation: mosque) in Subang Jaya, where he used to be an Imam, and where he subsequently became a member of a panel in a forum. These shots were intercut with content from an interview with his parents, where they acknowledged their support for him (CA.S1.04:24- CA.S1.04:49). From the forum, the VT Playback transitioned to the gotong-royong in Bukit Malawati, with one of the sponsors of the show, Bank Islam. This was an outreach activity that Bank Islam engaged in with the community. Rohana Kasim, the Bank Islam Branch Manager (Sungai Besar) stated her opinion that the role of a young Imam should be expanded into the community, rather than being limited to the masjid (CA.S1.05:21- CA.S1.06:05). IM Hafiz continued his final task by visiting PERKIM [Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (Malay: the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization)] to meet Muallaf and to have a friendly discussion with them about the challenges they faced in becoming new Muslims. He provided a summary of the issues and his concerns related to supporting them (CA.S1.06:10 - CA.S1.06:21).
2. Task performed by IM Naufal

CA.S1.07:18  CA.S1.07:45  CA.S1.08:11

CA.S1.08:57  CA.S1.09:20  CA.S1.09:20

CA.S1.IMN: The second VT playback features IM Naufal, the youngest contestant among the finalists and an undergraduate student. He started his finalist task by giving Tazkirah [a mini sermon/reminder] in his local masjid in Sungai Ramal. This scene was intercut with his parents’ interview (CA.S1.07:18- CA.S1.07:45). From the Tazkirah, the VT Playback transitioned to his visit to Orang Asli village in Ulu Melaka, Serendah, to learn about the local community and to show his support for them. In IM Naufal’s interview, he described the realities of life for new Muslims, and stated that he was there to share more knowledge about Islam. IM Naufal's statement was reinforced by an interview with the Bank Islam Customer Business Manager (Kawasan Tengah), Muhammad Rizal Mohamed Rosly, who stated that they were coming to the village to do gotong-royong and were going to send the contributions to the villagers (CA.S1.08:11- CA.S1.08:57). IM Naufal continued his final task by distributing donations to the less fortunate in his neighbourhood together with Islamic Relief. Mariha Suhaimi, a trustee and one of the representatives of Islamic Relief, stated that this activity [Ramadan Relief] aimed to help more Muslim families in need (CA.S1.09:20- CA.S1.09:20).
3. Task performed by IM Jabar

CA.S1.09:30

CA.S1.10:04

CA.S1.10:28

CA.S1.10:54

CA.S1.11:08

CA.S1.11:25

CA.S1.IMJ: The last VT Playback showed *Imam Muda* Jabar visiting Kolej Islam Darul Ridzuan, where he worked as an assistant lecturer. In the footage, he is welcomed by his students and faculty members, which is intercut with an interview from Anas Md Yusof, Deputy president of administration and finance in his college. IM Jabar proceeded to give a talk to the students and to share his experience with the *Imam Muda* academy (CA.S1.09:30- CA.S1.10:04). The VT playback then transitioned to IM Jabar going to his alma mater in Malim Nawar to engage in gotong-royong. Mohd Noor Jab, the Bank Islam Customer Business Manager (Perak) stated in his interview that this was an outreach initiative instigated by Bank Islam, which involved going into schools and contributing to society. IM Jabar thanked his former school for allowing him to give something back (CA.S1.10:28- CA.S1.10:24). IM Jabar completed his final task in his village. He met a poor single 70-year-old lady in his community who was living in a small dilapidated house, and sought to send donations and to distribute food. He ended his visit by reciting prayers for the old lady (CA.S1.11:08- CA.S1.11:25).
Segment One portrayed the practical assessments of the young Imams, focusing on their ability to plan and execute tasks. It is essential to show the parts of the assessment that highlighted their involvement in the community. In Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors, the representation of the manifested contents in Segment One was categorised under Adab and Akhlaq. This means the content portrayed the manners of the finalists in the masjid and in the community. The result correlated with Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, which posit that viewers will be able to show them their understanding of the contents, reflect on the behaviour of the Imams, analyse the task execution and cast judgments on the comments made about the young Imams.

a. Reactions to Segment One

Segment One consists of two main contents, which introduce the finalists and show their final task assessment in their hometowns. The final task is the practical assessment. Meanwhile, the character assessment is integrated with the Syafawi (on-stage) assessment in segments two, three and four, before the winner of the season is announced. During observations, the participants focused on familiarising themselves with the finalists and then responded to the finalists’ activities. They mainly discussed the tasks executed by the finalists. They were intrigued by how the mission was being planned and executed. They were also interested in how the finalists evaluated the practical assessment, learnt about the finalists’ backgrounds, and started to predict their favourite finalists to win the show. However, in the Commercial Break Reaction, the participants elaborated on the finalists’ tasks from a different perspective. B3 commented on segment one, arguing that it needed a recap of the finalists’ backgrounds, since the brief about the finalists in the VT playback was not enough. Abdullah stated that it was important for the viewers to have an association with the finalists.

*Abdullah*: For me, who did not follow this Imam Muda (referring to the third season), I would not know who the finalists are, and their backgrounds. So, to the viewers who watch the show for the first time, they would not be able to see the Imam in detail right? For example, if you are reading a newspaper about a case in court, and it is in the fourth session; usually, the reporters gave some catch-up information and explained to the readers about the case backgrounds. So, in this show, I did not see any... I do not know what the young Imam works as before, their age and that to state a few. If it said while establishing the finalist, written (on lower third) or explained by the host, at least, “oh... that young Imam is at this age, from here” ... then it would be great!

*Researcher*: So, meaning in the final show, they (Imam Muda, season three) need to show more about the finalists’ background?

*Abdullah*: Yes!
Researcher: For each finalist?

Abdullah: Yes, because we need to take note that not everyone follows the show from the first episode. Also, people usually watch the final episode because of the media attention (concerning the promotion of the final). So, people would switch on to the programme and watch it. However, if they do not know who they are (the finalist/contestant in the show) in some detail, it would be like: “Who is this?”

Researcher: Oh, but they (the show) have daily updates towards the final. Like daily capsules (the show diaries)

Abdullah: Yes! Capsule! Yes! Yes!

Researcher: It is there (referring to the final of Imam Muda, season three) but maybe needs to have more recap.

Abdullah: Yes! Just a little. As I said before, not everyone watched the show from the first episode...people who watched the show for the first time and it is the final.

(CBR.S1P1B3.13:37-14:35)

Abdullah highlighted that the final show needed a recap of the finalists’ background because he felt that the first segment did not provide enough background information. When the researcher mentioned that the show provided daily updates about the young Imams and the finalists in Kapsul Imam Muda, he realised that most of the backstories and behaviours had been revealed. Abdullah remembered Kapsul Imam Muda because he had watched some episodes from Imam Muda, season one. Kapsul Imam Muda was a diary programme that portrayed the young Imam’s life in the academy, in a similar way to the Big Brother show65. In B3, the members also mentioned that the content of the presentation of the finalists’ task in the VT playback was choppy (CA.S1.IMH, CA.S1.IMN and CA.S1.IMJ). They were unable to understand the chronology of the task execution.

Amal: Looks like the show has too many shortcuts and the shortcuts are too simple. It does not deliver what is intended to be shown. For example, in the mosque (referring to IM Hafiz, who conducted a forum in the mosque), it (the final of Imam Muda) should explain what he (IM Hafiz) does in the mosque...

Abdullah: One more thing, for example like the Kedahan (people from a state named Kedah, Malaysia), “it is too scattered”...scattered like, some went to the school (IM Jabar school) because of what? Like he (IM Jabar) went to his university, right? (confirmed with the researcher and the researcher nodded), Forum? Like, “the forum is about what?” like that, like visiting the Orang Asli village. The one (IM Naufal) who visited the Orang Asli village is good. For example, what he did is good; he mentioned a little bit about what he is currently doing. For example, “Look inside the building, Ustaz is explaining”, or whatever he had said.

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65 Big Brother is a reality TV show originating from the Netherlands, which was created by producer John De Mol in 1997. The genealogy of the term ‘Big Brother’, as it actually originated in Orwell’s prophetic novel, 1984 (Orwell, 1982). The show portrays a group of contestants living together in a custom built ‘house’ under constant video and audio surveillance. The contestants are isolated from the outside world. They are given tasks to complete and individually share their experience in the diary room. Big Brother is seen as a social experiment, portraying individual behavior interacting as housemates with other people with differing ideals, beliefs, and prejudices (Bignell, 2005).
Researcher: Yes.

Abdullah: Yes (nodded)

Amal: Yes, I received the message (referring to IM Naufal’s task).

Abdullah: Yes, that part I received (meaning that he understood the message of da’wah). Others I am not sure what they are doing.

During the Commercial Break Reactions in B3, the viewers focused on their evaluation of the finalists and the contents. They were unable to easily grasp the content in the first segment properly. They watched Imam Muda, season one, and it assumed that they might think that Imam Muda, season three, would offer the same treatment. This is because in Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda, season one, only two finalists were competing and there were dedicated segments for them to undertake their practical assessments, followed by oral assessments on stage, involving a Quran recitation and Tazkirah. In contrast, Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda, season three, started with a recap of the practical and character assessment, which was supplemented by the Syafawi or oral assessment on stage through ‘Questions and Answers with a mystery guest’, Tazkirah, Syafawi Ulum Quran. A different scenario was evidenced in the other two groups. B1 and B2 had not watched the Imam Muda reality TV show previously, but they were familiar with the winners of the show from season one, and were aware of other Islamic reality TV shows such as Pencetus Ummah (Astro) and Daie Millenia (TV3). B1 reflected on and identified the similarities in the contents. For example, Aisha highlighted a connection between IM Hafiz’s and IM Naufal’s visit to the Muallaf (CA.S1.06:21 and CA.S1.08:11)

Aisha: I think some of the Imams do the same activities in the show, for example visiting the Muallaf? (she assumed that the task was determined by the production team). So, each finalist needs to visit Muallaf? Or, is it individually planned by the finalist?

Researcher: Oh, it is the finalists’ plan.

Maria: That means when announced that they are the three finalists. They started to plan what to do for their final task, right?

Researcher: Yes. They started to plan what they needed to do as they already knew the requirement for the practical assessment since episode two.

Aisha asked about the similarity because she found it a bit clichéd and thought that the production team had planned the task. The researcher subsequently explained that the finalists executed their final tasks independently from the production team, as these were part of their assessment. B1 nodded and understood that the task was planned and executed.
solely by the finalists. They later realised that VT playback was a throwback and that they were watching the rest of the evaluation on stage. B2 reflected in-depth about the finalists' task, as it would impact society and the viewers. Faruq discussed the latent contents in Segment One through his reflections on IM Jabar’s task execution.

**Faruq:** It is good to see the finalists (referring to IM Jabar) choose to do activities in their alma mater. At least the juniors in the school, like religious school, have a path to follow.

**Fahad:** Um. (nodded his head). Yes, they were inspired by their alumni, and they have a role model too!

**Faisal:** Yes (nodded)

**Fahad:** They (the juniors in the school) will know whom to model.

**Faruq:** Yes, they (the finalists) made a good choice.

(CBR.S1P1B2.17:15-17:28)

The reactions from B1, B2 and B3 in Segment One showed that they understood the contents and discussed the latent contents in the practical and character assessment. For the main contents, they reacted to the task and investigated how the task was prepared and executed. They also reacted to the way the contents were presented and suggested elements that could be improved. Meanwhile, for the latent contents, they displayed the ability to analyse the themes presented and discussed the impact of the contents on society. Hence, the participants indirectly understood the Adab and Akhlaq of an Imam, and reflected upon the importance and impact of community service. This shows that the participants were reflective about the young Imams’ behaviours and engaged with the way young Imams should function in the real world.

4.3.2 Manifested contents in Segment Two (CA.S2)
The show resumed with the host establishing the second segment [Q&A with a mystery guest] and revealing the third placing announced at the end of the segment (CA.S2.13:18). The assessment on stage started with the host inviting Professor Dato Dr Sidek bin Baba as the mystery guest for the questions and answers session (CA.S2.13:18). Professor Sidek
Baba is a professor in the Faculty of Education of the International Islamic University, Malaysia. With his experience and credibility, he moderated the session, focusing on facing 'social illnesses' among youths in Malaysia. The first round started with IM Jabar, followed by IM Hafiz and IM Naufal (CA.S2.14:22), while the second round was an open discussion where each finalist could interrupt if they wished to point out their ideas or arguments (CA.S2.19:10). After the Q&A session, Mudir took to the stage and announced the third placing (CA.S2.20:48-CA.S2.21:08). IM Naufal was announced as the contestant who had come in third place (CA.S2.21:43), as only two finalists could make it through to the next assessment (CA.S2.21:54).

Segment Two portrayed the Syafawi assessment, which sought to challenge the credibility and knowledge of the young Imams in the Question and Answers assessment. The purpose of this was to demonstrate how a young Imam provides answers to the community, drawing on reliable references and addressing appropriate current issues. Drawing on Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors, the representation of the selected contents in Segment Two were categorised under Al-Quran, Hadith, Aqidah, Ibadah, Sirah Nabawiyah, Adab and Akhlak, referring to the answers composed by the young Imams, which suggested solutions for the 'social illness' faced by the younger generation. This showed the ways in which the young Imams generated their arguments based on references to Islamic Content Knowledge, and signified the art of honouring scholars by providing trustworthy references (verses from al-Quran and quotation from Hadith) to the viewers. With regards to the analysis through Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, the viewers were able to react to the Quran and Hadith quotations, and were able to understand the application of knowledge surrounding Tauhid, Aqidah, Ibadah and Sirah Nabawiyah, through the representation of Adab and Akhlaq. This means that the finalists’ answers covered topics including the concept of Oneness in Islam (Tauhid), the creed (Aqidah), the concept of worship (Ibadah) and the story of the prophets in Sirah Nabawiyah. The viewers were, therefore, able to evaluate the way the young Imams delivered their arguments and justifications as they competed.
a. Reactions to Segment Two

Segment Two formed the first part of the Syafawi Assessment. It started with Questions and Answers with the mystery guest. The mystery guest began by asking questions to each finalist and later introduced an open issue for them to respond to. After that, the third placing was announced by Mudir, since only two finalists would go through to the second and third assessments. When the show established the second segment, 2 out of 10 participants knew the mystery guest because he was a professor at their university (CA.S2.13:24). Huda (B1) and Faisal (B2) studied in the same university and recognised the scholar. The participants focused on and listened to the answers provided by the finalists and started to evaluate their responses. When the third placing was announced at the end of the segment, the participants had instant reactions to the results (CA.S2.21:43). B1 expressed their emotions immediately when IM Naufal was announced as the contestant in third place. Amina and Huda clapped because their favourite candidate had made it through to the next assessment.

_Amina:_ This is what I expected... (IM Naufal coming in third place)

_Huda:_ Yes, we can see from the performance.

_Amina:_ I think he (IM Naufal) is still young...

(All participants in B1 agreed to the statement that IM Naufal is young)

_Aisha:_ He has little experience...

_Amina:_ The person in the middle (IM Hafiz) looks mature.

_Maria:_ In the middle (IM Hafiz) looks more confident.

_Aisha:_ Do you (Maria) favourite him? (Maria nodded)

_Huda:_ My favourite, Jabar!

(OLS.S2P2B1.09:53-10:11)

Amina and Huda reacted to IM Naufal coming in third place, since they expected underperformance due to his young age and lack of experience. Aisha agreed with them. Amina subsequently started to compare IM Hafiz and IM Naufal, assuming that IM Hafiz was mature. Maria added that he looked confident in answering the questions. B2 and B3 also noted the age gap between the contestants and added different perspectives on him being placed third. B2 anticipated that IM Naufal would come in third place because of his lack of references and scholarly arguments.
Researcher: Interesting?

Fahad: Expected...

(Faisal and Faruq smiled and nodded)

Researcher: Why?

Faruq: It is obvious... (looked at Fahad)

Fahad: it is obvious when IM Naufal mentioned about the heart... the one that, "close to the heart" ..." at hand with heart” (Quoting IM Naufal) ... feels like he keeps repeating the points and the arguments are not clear. I can see that he is trying to make a valid point but is not convincing.

Faruq: More obvious, there are no references to his statements, if compared to the young Imam lecturer... um... Jabar eh? (confirming with the researcher)...and with IM Hafiz, when they speak, they immediately provide the references and sources... according to... referring to... but the young Imam Muda Naufal (Faruq shook his head)... nothing...we can expect... and the next thing is when we listen to the Islamic scholars, for example, the Imam, the language style plays a critical role too.. the two (referring to IM Jabar and IM Hafiz) are not too formal and have the Arabic sounds (looked at Faisal and Fahad for confirmation) but as for Imam Muda Naufal is suitable for the youth and his age...

Faisal: Yes...

Fahad: Mmm... (nodded as a sign of agreement)

Faruq: But he (IM Naufal) must... how? (seeking confirmation from Faisal and Fahad). the language style (referring to his last point).

Faisal: Maybe he (IM Naufal) is okay, but the juries might want some who have the same fikrah (way of thinking) and that type of language style, so the other two finalists win the segment!

Fahad: For example, it (questions and answers) is more academic, maybe...

Faisal: Aaa (nodded as a sign of agreement)

Fahad: The other two look more academic (confirming his suggestion and referring to the explanation provided by Faisal)

(B2 reacted to IM Naufal’s answers by stating that they were not supported by reliable references, for example, the verses from Al-Quran, quotations from Hadith or Sirah Nabawiyah, which would have increased his chances of being a rival to the other two experienced young Imams. B2 added that IM Naufal did not address the questioner appropriately since the guest was an academic, and the way IM Naufal provided his answers was less critical. B3 added that IM Naufal not only had a lack of references but less confidence in his answers.}

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Abdullah: I can see some differences.

Researcher: What are the differences?

Abdullah: From the way he (IM Naufal) stated his points which distinguish the difference with other finalists.

Researcher: Can you explain more?

Abdullah: It is like... from the way he talks, he is not confident.

Amal: His tone... (she added)

Abdullah: His tone that...

Amal: That is a bit different. For example, provide Hadith or verses from Al-Quran in the answers. However, he (IM Naufal) did not. That caused a difference!

(CBR.S2P2B3.09:56-10:42)

From these quotations, it can be seen that the participants made judgments about IM Naufal’s placing, and expected this as the outcome. They understood that age and experience played important roles in the finalists' performances. IM Hafiz and IM Jabar were perceived as more knowledgeable and experienced by virtue of the way they presented their arguments. Subsequently, the reflections in the commercial break developed into reactions towards the finalists’ performances in the Questions and Answers session. B1 and B2 made the assumption that the sessions were planned and rehearsed. B1 engaged in an elaborate discussion about the way the finalists performed in Segment Two. When the segment broke for a commercial, Huda looked at the researcher and asked:

Huda: Um... (looking confused) ...the script... in the questions and answers... Are the answers prepared beforehand? (Aisha looked at Amina and wanted to explain)

Researcher: Oh no! It is not prepared before the session (referring to the answers from the finalists). That is why... (interrupted by Huda)

Huda: Really? It cannot be. Is it impromptu? (she seemed surprised and could not believe that the finalist answered)

Researcher: Yes. Impromptu in the final. (interrupted by Aisha)

Aisha: No, they cannot be! (referring to Aisha’s question about preparing the answers beforehand)

Huda: SubhanAllah... (praise to god)

Maria: Yeah! That is the reality, you (looking at Huda)! (referring to the concept of the show)

Aisha: It would not be fair if they won.

Huda: It is very smooth...

Wahida: Yes! Smooth.

Huda: Like if the session was rehearsed.
Aisha: Yes (referring to the way the finalist answers smoothly). It is like your viva (looking at Huda)!

Huda: That is why I asked. I am impressed, obviously... like wow!

(CBR.S2P2B1.10:35-11.00)

Huda was impressed with the way the finalist answered the questions. She raised questions with the group, to establish if any of the members thought like her. Aisha dan Maria tried to recall the session in Segment Two. As the researcher explained that the finalists were briefed about the format for the ‘Questions and Answers with Mystery Guest’ section, the following conversation ensued:

Aisha: The finalist does not even know the questions?

Researcher: Yes. The contestants in the show, which include the finalists, attended classes with their Muallim (teacher) and were taught the related subject with the theme of the week. So, on stage, it is the finalists’ intelligence!

Maria: Yes, it’s reality TV (she emphasised her points for the second time).

Researcher: If they stumble in answering the questions, it is their loss!

Huda: They answer the questions very smoothly, non-stop.

Maria: Like when they got the question, they answered it straight after (Maria tried to give an example from Huda’s statement).

Aisha: Like it doesn’t take a minute to think.

Maria: Ye la… However, they attended the class, right? (looking at the researcher to confirm)

Researcher: Yes, they might have learnt about the subject related theme and might have prepared, but we (the production) don’t know.

Huda: Because it looks not normal.

(CBR.S2P2B1.11.01-11:52)

The group members started investigating how the finalists could answer the questions promptly, if they did not have time to think. Aisha and Huda described how the session seemed flawless, and Maria tried to rationalise the situation by stating that the finalists were able to perform such quality answers because they attended classes in the academy. However, Amina and Huda were not convinced and further evaluated the session,

Amina: Yes! It looks like they are acting (after listening to the conversation, she then responded and agreed with Huda).

Huda: Looks rehearsed to me...

Aisha: If the questions were given beforehand, probably...

Huda: It would take at least a few seconds. You must think before you answer.
Aisha: Probably there are clues or similar questions that they can prepare. However, they do not know which question it is.

Huda: Yes! Maybe they have the gist of the questions.

Aisha: So that they would not be shamed on TV!

(B2P2B1.11:52-12:13)

B1 questioned the performance of one of the finalists because they felt that the performance was outstanding and too good to be true. They rationalised that finalists might have a general answer prepared, to prevent public shaming on television. Surprisingly, Faisal (B2) implied that the Questions and Answers section in Segment Two was an example of rhetoric. In this way, he assumed that the finalists’ answers were just an exploitation of styles of speech using compositional techniques.

Faisal: I think the session is like a jetting session. For example, we can see in the Miss World competition (he laughed). When the Miss World contestant is asked questions by the juries, their answers are rhetoric. That is because, what I think, they need to give answers like that. They will say that “we need to be useful to the community…” and blaa... blaa... blaa...it is the format.

(B2P2B2.15:24-15:56)

Faisal was trying to tell the group and the researcher that the ‘Questions and Answers with Mystery Guest’ session was like a jetting session in the Miss World Competition. For him, the answers during the sessions were merely rhetoric, as the contestants could prepare a general answer that could fit any questions from the juries. Thus, Faruq interrupted to suggest an improvement to the session.

Faruq: I think it would be more challenging if the assessment was recorded when the finalists were giving a sermon to the public or something... Moreover, they do not realise that they are being assessed. (Faisal and Fahad nodded as a sign of agreement)

Faisal: Yes! That would be more challenging!

Faruq: Yep! It is open to the public to ask questions, and at the same time, there are judges among them. They can determine the difficulty of the questions. For example, the finalist giving Tazkirah in the Masjid, and at the end of his Tazkirah will be faced with an open question. We can evaluate the way he answers the questions depending on the level of difficulty. I think that would be a fair judgment if we want to see the Imam perform not in a competition mode. It is because in competition, sometimes other factors might contribute to the way the Imam answers the question, like nerves or something... this is what I think if we want to judge the overall performance.

(B2P2B2.15:56-16:10)

Faruq suggested improving the assessment so that the finalists’ ability to address issues was experienced like a similar situation in the real world. The reactions from B1, B2 and B3 in Segment Two showed that they understood the contents, as they discussed the
finalists’ performance. They rationalised the reasons IM Naufal had come in third place and discussed in depth the importance of criticality in presenting arguments. Thus, the participants indirectly understood that this segment required intelligence, with a good grasp of Islamic knowledge, and references to trustworthy sources. They also learnt to differentiate between the quality of the performance and the answers in the show, and identified which of the finalists’ answers was best. This shows that the participants were reflective about the young Imams’ answers and engaged critically with the way Islamic knowledge delivered was in this segment.

4.3.3 Manifested contents in Segment Three (CA.S3)

In this segment, the assessment continued by highlighting the Tazkirah between two finalists. Tazkirah is a short reminder that is usually conducted after prayers, on an organised theme. The theme for the finale was family relationships. Imam Muda Hafiz presented a Tazkirah about the importance of finding a suitable spouse. He told the story of Saidina Umar and Hassan al-Basri and shared the benefits of the story. He then recited a supplication for finding a suitable spouse (CA.S3.25:42). The opponent, Imam Muda Jabar, presented a Tazkirah about how to create a Sakinah family. He told the story of the prophet Ibrahim and gave tips on how to build a happy Sakinah family (CA.S3.29:41).

Segment Three portrayed the Syafawi assessment on the teachings of Al-Quran, Hadith and Sirah Nabawiyyah, by assessing the public speaking ability of young Imams in delivering Tazkirah. Among the attraction of an influential Imam is his capability to provide Tazkirah in any circumstances and to cater to the different levels of the community. Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors categorise the representation of content into Al-Quran, Hadith and Sirah Nabawiyyah. This means that the manifested content portrayed
verses from Al-Quran, quotations from Hadith and the story of the prophet from Sirah Nabawiyah. The Islamic content knowledge, delivered creatively by the young Imams in the Tazkirah, engaged the viewers. According to Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, viewers will be able to explain the gist of the Tazkirah, reflect on the content knowledge manifested in Tazkirah, and give an insight into the ability of the young Imam to engage in the art of public speaking. This was demonstrated in the reactions of the three groups, as I will now describe.

**a. Reactions to Segment Three**

Segment Three referred to the second part of the Syafawi Assessment. The segment started with IM Hafiz delivering his Tazkirah (reminder) about looking for a spouse in Islam. B1 and B2 reacted to the title of the Tazkirah. They smiled and teased each other. Their reaction was understandable, because B1 consisted of a mix of single and married Muslimah, and B2 consisted of single Muslim men, while B3 consisted of a married Muslim couple and their children. Their status as single or married person can be related to the advice in the Tazkirah in Segment Three. B3 reacted less to the segment, because the group featured a husband and wife couple. In the observation, B1 focused on listening to both Tazkirah, while B2 and B3 engaged in a more relaxed form of viewing. In B2, Faisal intermittently attended to his handphone, Faruq tried to focus on the contents, and Fahad looked sleepy during the second Tazkirah. In B3, Abdullah also intermittently attended to his handphone while his wife, Amal, watched television and attended to their child, Aliya. A different reaction was evidenced in B1, when they started to recall IM Jabar's tips at the end of his Tazkirah.

_Amina:_ Firstly, do not contradict each other. Secondly, do not lie even if you are joking.

_Huda:_ Joking (she added)

_Amina:_ Thirdly, noble manners (noble akhlaq)

_Huda:_ Behave (akhlaq) like the people who are in paradise (repeating back the tips from the Tazkirah of IM Jabar). The first is? (trying to understand what the first tips mean)

_Wahida:_ He (IM Jabar) said, leave the contradictory even though we feel that we are entitled to do so.

_Aisha:_ Leave the contradictory even though we are correct, means that we wanted to fight for the truth.

_Wahida:_ But if in a fight (referring to a conflict between husband and wife)

_Aisha:_ No need to fight. You can claim your right without fighting!
Wahida: (laughing)

Huda: Be tolerant! Wah! Marriage knowledge you all. (laughing)

Wahida: This is knowledge about marriage?

Amina: Yes! It is in the title, My Home My Paradise.

Aisha: Aaa. Do not fight!

Amina and Huda tried to recall IM Jabar’s Tazkirah contents, with particular regards to tips for building a happy family. Huda was unclear about the first tips, while Wahida, and Aisha explained the meaning to her. Huda understood that she had gained knowledge about marriage. She was also interested in IM Hafiz’s Takirah, which he ended with a supplication.

Huda: And the first one (referring to the first tazkirah by IM Hafiz). The Imams said, "Rabbana...hab lana...min azwajina wa dhurriyatina..." (that means “Our Lord! Grant unto us spouses and offspring ...” she did not finish the supplication and was interrupted by Maria, Aisha and Amina)

Amina: That is a supplication for a Spouse!

Aisha: That is a supplication for a Spouse!

Maria: That is a supplication for a Spouse!

(They said it at the same time.)

Aisha: Prayers to have a good spouse, a child that... (she did not finish and was interrupted)

Maria: To choose a wife (trying to explain what the supplication is about)

Amina: You (Huda) must be dreaming (pointing her hand to Huda and laughing in a joking manner)

Aisha: While the supplication was being recited what were you thinking?

Huda: I was thinking about what the Imam was saying (referring to the contents of Tazkirah)

(Huda covered her face with a piece of paper, and Wahida and Amina smiled. Maria looked at Huda)

B1 discussed two points they had taken away from the Tazkirah delivered: the tips for a Sakinah family from IM Jabar, and a Dua’ or supplication from IM Hafiz. They focused more on the contents in Segment Three, while B2 and B3 reacted to the general performance of the two finalists. B2 preferred IM Hafiz to IM Jabar because they were unable to understand IM Jabar's Tazkirah presentation.
Faisal: The second Tazkirah (IM Jabar) is not appealing. (looking at researcher)

Researcher: Oh, why?

Faruq: I did not get the point.

Researcher: What do you mean by not getting the point?

Faisal: Several things...

Faruq: Like I cannot follow... (meaning follow IM Jabar’s presentation)

Faisal: Haa, the way he (IM Jabar) closed his Tazkirah, was not reliable, like, ”let's turn our house into paradise..."

Faruq: Turn into paradise (slow tone, supporting Faisal points)

Faisal: What do you think Fahad? (everyone smiling at Fahad because he was surprised when Faisal asked his opinion)

Fahad: I think I agree, because it was less engaging, unable to relate. To be honest, at the time for the second tazkirah... (interrupted by Faruq)

Faruq: Not focused!

Fahad: Haa! Not focused!

Faruq: Ha! Correct! (confirming the situation during the second Tazkirah by IM Jabar)

Fahad: I lost my focus.

Faruq: I watched the tazkirah, but when he started to tell a story then I lost my focus. I remember bits about a prophet... prophet... (unsure and looked at Faisal. Then Faisal steered the conversation in another direction regarding the style of presentation)

(CBR.S3P1B2.07:22-08:05)

Faisal reacted by stating that IM Jabar’s Tazkirah was not engaging, and Faruq agreed with him. Faruq mentioned that he was unable to follow IM Jabar’s presentation due to his method of delivering the points. With regards to Fahad, he lost his focus during IM Jabar’s Tazkirah. B2 agreed that IM Hafiz’s delivery was more engaging than IM Jabar’s. B3 detailed the reasons why IM Hafiz’s Tazkirah was better than IM Jabar’s.

Researcher: What do you think of their Tazkirah?

Abdullah: Okay. Personally, I think both are okay. But the young Imam Jabar looks more unpretentious.

Researcher: Looks cool, you mean?

Abdullah: Yes, looks calm and relaxed, while Hafiz (referring to IM Hafiz) seems like a bit dramatic.

Amal: Maybe he (IM Hafiz) sticks to the script too much!

Researcher: Too scripted?
Abdullah: For example, he raised his hand for supplication. Dramatic element, I guess? Cliché? Haha... when critiquing, there is always something... haha.

Researcher: Maybe they were trained to present like that?

Abdullah: Yeah.

Researcher: Maybe for the show on TV. But are the contents presented clearly?

Abdullah: Yes. Clear. I like the first one, Hafiz, right?

Researcher: Yes, young Imam Hafiz.

Abdullah: Yes! Hafiz used an example in his Tazkirah. He utilised the facts, right? When he used a technique such as story telling it was easier to follow.

Researcher: Right.

Abdullah: It is easier for someone who might have heard about it (stories or Sirah) before. They can recall it back. Or someone who never heard about it, they would remember afterwards because of storytelling.

Researcher: So, it (referring to storytelling) can be used to teach people about the contents?

Abdullah: Because when we are in schools, we learnt about religion and in my opinion, the best subject is Sirah.

Researcher: Sirah. Stories of the prophets, right?

Abdullah: Stories. Stories about the prophets.

Researcher: Yes, we wanted Ustaz or Ustazah to tell us stories about the prophets.

Abdullah: Yes, and for me, if it involved storytelling, the Tazkirah was interesting.

(CBR.S3P3B3.06:01-07:43)

Abdullah reacted to the styles of delivery of both the finalists before he highlighted the technique that IM Hafiz used in his Tazkirah. In his opinion, IM Jabar was more relaxed than IM Hafiz because IM Hafiz’s delivery seemed scripted. Amal agreed with Abdullah. However, Abdullah praised IM Hafiz’s storytelling technique, as he could relate it to his experience in school. It is notable that only B1 discussed the contents in the Tazkirah while B2 and B3 were focused on the finalists’ performances. The reactions from B1, B2 and B3 in Segment Three showed that they understood the contents, as they discussed the finalists’ performances. B1 discussed the contents while B2 and B3 evaluated the effectiveness of the Tazkirah for the viewers, through the finalists’ performances. Consequently, the participants indirectly understood that this segment required creativity and charisma, to deliver an effective Tazkirah. They learnt to evaluate styles of delivery and identify techniques to engage with the viewers. They also identified which of the finalists’ performances was more attractive and efficient. This shows that the participants were
creativity reflecting on the presentation of Islamic knowledge and engaging with the contextual contents delivered in this segment.

4.3.4 Manifested contents in Segment Four (CA.S4)

This segment established Mudir as the Moderator for the last assessment: the Syafawi Ulumul Al-Quran session between the two finalists. He informed the two finalists that their marks were close, and he decided to test them on Surah Ibrahim (the 14th chapter of the Quran, with 52 verses). The assessment started with Tasmi’ [a reciting session], where the young Imams needed to complete the verses of the Quran interchangeably, back-to-back, depending on Mudir’s instructions (CA.S4.30:04). The young Imams followed the cue from Mudir before reciting the appointed verse, starting from IM Hafiz (CA.S4.31:06). Following this, there was a translation session. The young Imams translated each verse recited to them by Mudir. They were expected to give a correct translation of the verse. IM Jabar stumbled and did not complete his translation on the first attempt. He sought forgiveness and repeated the incomplete translation, answering Mudir for the second
translation (CA.S4.35:48). The last assessment related to Ulumul Quran. The young Imams needed to give Tafsir by explaining in-depth the meaning of the verse.

Segment Four portrayed the Syafawi assessment, to demonstrate the Imams’ memorisation abilities and knowledge of Al-Quran. This assessment was essential because an Imam must be able to lead prayers with a proper recitation of Al-Quran, and must be able to explain the meaning when asked by members of society. The Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors categorised the representation under Al-Quran and Ulumul-Quran (knowledge of Al-Quran). This means that the content mainly portrayed verses of Al-Quran, related to tafsir and the contemplation of the verses. On the other hand, the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standard evaluates attainment based on the viewer's ability to explain the nuances of the Translation and Tafsir. Thus, through the viewers’ reception of the contents, they achieved a stronger understanding of the role of Islamic Education, as guided by the researcher’s instrument.

a. Reactions to Segment Four

Segment Four showed the final Syafawi assessment. All participants focused on the content at the beginning of the viewing. In the middle of the segment, some of the participants in B2 and B3 got a bit irritated. The reason for this was that some of them felt that this segment required a higher degree of understanding of the Quran. They were more interested in the Translation and Tafsir session as it was presented in the local language. Across the groups, the general reflections revolved around the finalists’ performances. The groups stated their impressions of the two finalists. B1 praised IM Hafiz for his translation of the verses and appreciated IM Jabar’s Al-Quran recitation.

Wahida: I like the one on the left (referring to IM Hafiz). I prefer his explanation. (Wahida looked at Huda, and Huda nodded as a sign of agreement)

Huda: But I prefer IM Jabar’s recitation than IM Hafiz’s.

Aisha: Somebody is just like that (joking with Huda about her preference for IM Jabar). I think IM Jabar is a bit mature. Don’t you think so?

Huda: Really?

Aisha: With his confidence, he looks wise and mature.

Huda: Wallahua’lam (Allah knows best. Huda not sure about Aisha’s statement)

Maria: I am not sure about that (questioning Aisha)

Amina: But the explanation from the other one on the left (IM Hafiz) is better!

Aisha: He looks mature too! (laughing)
Wahida: From the way, he (IM Hafiz) explains...

Aisha: If he explains to us, it is clear!

Wahida: Like me who does not know anything, I understood it (referring to the verses recited and explanation of the poems)

Amina: Is he (IM Hafiz) the one who came back to his masjid, taught in the same masjid (relating to Segment One, finalist’s task), so that is the reason we can easily understand (referring to Segment Four, Al-Quran recitation, translation and tafsir) right? (Everyone nodded as a sign of agreement except Wahida). So, because of his (IM Hafiz’s) presentation skills, it made things easier to understand. He is used to being in front of an audience.

Wahida: Which one?

Maria, Aisha and Huda: Hafiz!

(CBR.S4P3B1.12:31-13:23)

Wahida was impressed with IM Hafiz’s explanation of the verses from Surah Ibrahim and she understood the contents. Huda agreed with Wahida and added that she preferred IM Jabar’s Quran recitation over IM Hafiz’s. Amina also admired IM Hafiz’s explanation and she related it to the first segment in the show when IM Hafiz executed his final task in his hometown, Masjid. She predicted that IM Hafiz was used to being in front of the general public and he already had the skills required. Aisha offered a different perspective, judging from the maturity of the finalists. Aisha then felt a bit confused about the finalists. At the same time, Maria demonstrated confidence and predicted that IM Hafiz would win the show.

Aisha: They are all Hafiz, right? (The statement was confusing for the group because Hafiz was the finalist’s name and Hafiz also refers to a person who memorises the Quran)

Huda: Insha Allah (guessing that Aisha meant that both finalists are Hafiz/memorise the Quran)

Amina: And Jabar... (she was trying to state her point but was interrupted by Maria, Aisha and Huda)

Aisha: He has a pretty good voice! (the points that she was trying to make were about the finalist Hafiz, who memorises the Quran)

Huda: Yes! His voice is good (she was referring to IM Jabar)

Maria: The winner is Hafiz (IM Hafiz). He is the winner for season three (with confidence stating her prediction)

Aisha: Really?

Huda: Yes? No... (unsure about Maria’s prediction)

Maria: Let’s see after this!

Aisha asked the group about IM Hafiz’s and IM Jabar’s backgrounds, as Hafiz (the guardian of Al-Quran who memorises the whole Quran) and Huda were unsure, and guessed that the finalists were Hafiz Quran. Aisha then praised the finalists that had good voices, judging from their Quran recitations with Tartil. Since Wahida and Amina expressed their excitement about IM Hafiz’s performance, Maria stated her prediction that IM Hafiz would be the winner of season three. However, Aisha and Huda were unsure about Maria’s prediction and they decided to wait until the results were revealed in the last segment. Meanwhile, in B2, Fahad was impressed with the recitation and revised the verses recited. He refreshed his memory on the lecture about Surah Ibrahim that he had listened to.

**Faruq:** Eh, is it finished? (he thought that the show had ended)

**Faisal:** Session... (referring to the Commercial Break Reaction)

**Researcher:** Not yet. What do think about this segment?

**Faruq:** Intense!

**Faisal:** It is good!

**Researcher:** You guys look focused.

**Faisal:** When we listen to the holy verses of the Quran recited (looked at Faruq), our hearts are touched! (in a funny manner; Faruq smiled and nodded)

**Fahad:** Impressed!

**Researcher:** Can you (Fahad) elaborate?

**Fahad:** Impressed because their recitations are very good and secondly because I like the verses recited (pointing to the TV) and it’s among my favourite verses in the Quran (Faisal impressed with Fahad). The ayah, kalimatan tayyibatan asluha thabit (he repeated the verses recited). That tells us about that (referring to the content in Segment Four), and then, Mudir asked the finalists about the verse. Because I listened to a lecture about the verse. Felt excited! (nodded with joy).

(CBR.S4P4B2.13:00-13:56)

Fahad was excited about Surah Ibrahim in Segment Four because he had learnt about the verses selected from the Surah in a lecture. Faisal and Faruq were impressed with Fahad’s ability to recite the verse in the show and explained the meaning of the verses. Abdullah (B3) stated that he was more impressed with IM Hafiz’s knowledge than IM Jabar’s.

**Researcher:** What do you think of this segment?

**Abdullah:** Especially Imam Hafiz. He is ’powerful’. Different. Different from Imam Jabar. From Imam Jabar’s face, it looks like he is not that confident. But like Imam Hafiz, he looks confident. For example, the quote from a tafsir that he read right? Versus, Imam Jabar likewise, he also quotes from Imam or Ulama’s opinions, which include like for example in Ibnu Kathir (quote one of the references given by IM
Jabar). There is a moment I thought he (IM Jabar) forgot the Tafsir that he read right?

Researcher: Yes.

Abdullah: Like that (referring to the incident that IM Jabar forgot), we can assess or make a judgment that maybe Imam Hafiz has more knowledge in translation, right? Another one, I would like to ask. When the assessment was about to start, Mudir mentioned that he would ask them about verses from Surah Ibrahim...

Researcher: Yes?

Abdullah: Are the Imams prepared for the surah before the finals?

Researcher: Oh! Actually, they are required to memorise the Quran when they attend the academy for three months.

Abdullah: So, they memorise specific surah (chapters in Quran)?

Researcher: No. they are required to remember based on Juzuk. and most of them are al-Hafiz (memorised the entire Al-Quran)

Abdullah: Ok.

(CBR.S4P4B3.02:32-03:54)

Abdullah was impressed with IM Hafiz because of his confidence, as compared to IM Jabar. Abdullah highlighted how IM Jabar made mistakes when he was unable to complete his translation for the first verse. IM Jabar then apologised and he completed the translation for the first verse before continuing to answer the translation for the second verse. Based on the incident, Abdullah assumed that IM Hafiz had more knowledge of Tafsir than IM Jabar. Abdullah was interested to know how the finalists prepared for the Quran memorisation, translation and tafsir assessment. The researcher explained that the contestants in Imam Muda were required to memorise surahs or revise their memorisation (if they were already Hafiz) when they were in the academy. Abdullah also thought that this segment was the hardest. He realised that memorising Al-Quran is not an easy task, as one must be able to translate and tafsir the meaning of each verse in the Quran.

Abdullah: For me, in this show, the best is this part (referring to Segment Four). It is the best because before this (before Segment Four), it is like giving advantages to those among the finalists who are more spontaneous.

Researcher: Yes. Like this one (Segment Four) is not spontaneous?

Abdullah: This one (Segment Four). You cannot be spontaneous. Need to be well prepared.

Researcher: If not, you will fail?

Abdullah: Yes! Like before this part (referring to Segment Two and Segment Three) for example, asking the question about technology and its effect on the youth, right? That one (relating to the problem) to those you read a lot you can answer well.

Researcher: Yes. Moreover, add verses from the Quran?
Abdullah: Yes. However, this one (referring to Segment four). If you are wrong then you are dead!

Researcher: Yes! In this one you can afford to make a mistake.

Abdullah: Yes! Can't afford to make a mistake.

Researcher: Quran, Hadith you cannot make mistakes or else, you are banned!

Abdullah: Correct!

As these quotations show, Segment Four is crucial as it defines an Imam. Abdullah understood that it is the most laborious assessment as it requires hard work to memorise Al-Quran and to extend this to a translation and contemplation of the book. The reactions from B1, B2 and B3 in Segment Four showed that they understood the contents, as discussed in the finalists’ performance. B2 discussed the contents because one of the members from the group had learnt about the Surah and was able to share his knowledge and experience. All the groups appreciated the Quran recitation and they understood that this was an important skill for an Imam to possess. The participants evaluated the effectiveness of the translation and tafsir session to the viewers through the finalists’ performance. Therefore, the participants indirectly understood that this segment required hard work to memorise the Quran, its translations and Tafsir. They learnt to evaluate the clarity of explanation of Ulumul Quran to create engagement with the viewers. Thus, they satisfied the requirements of the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, which posit that viewers will be able to explain the content, reflect on it, and give an insight into the ability of the young Imam to engage in the art of public speaking. This shows that the participants had reflected upon the recitation of Al-Quran and its translation, and had engaged with the contemplations delivered in this segment.

4.3.5 Manifested contents in Segment Five (CA.S5)
The segments started with a nasyid performance by each of the young Imams, which featured a song seeking forgiveness from Allah, entitled *Ikramul Kareem* (CA.S5.38:46). The host announced that the channel manager was on stage and was ready to give the prize to the winner (CA.S5.41.40). The host invited the Mudir and Mursyids on stage to announce the winner (CA.S5.41.54). Mudir invited *Imam Muda* Naufal to receive the third placing, and then he declared the winner of the season (CA.S5.42:35). *Imam Muda* Jabar was the winner, and automatically *Imam Muda* Hafiz was the runner-up (CA.S5.42:54). The faculty then invited *Imam Muda* Jabar to receive his robe (CA.S5.44:04) and give his winning speech (CA.S5.44:25). Finally, the host concluded the show (CA.S5.44:26).

Segment Five portrayed the credibility of a young Imam after they had evaluated the performances of the final task on stage. Additionally, their characters and attitudes were assessed continuously throughout the programme. Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors categorised this representation under Adab and Akhlaq because of the whole process of character building of a young professional imam, who should be flexible, adaptable and modern, and should understand deeply the fundamentals of Islam. With regards to Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, viewers should be able to reflect on the judgments of a young Imam’s identity, with regards to their behaviours and attitudes.
They should also be able to cast judgments on the commentary made by the faculty towards the young Imams.

**a. Reactions to Segment Five**

When Segment Five started, the participants anticipated who would be the winner of the season. They enjoyed the nasyid at the beginning of Segment five as the song had been remastered, creating a fresher version. Most of the participants were familiar with the song and they intermittently sung along with the new musical arrangement. Since all of the contestants performed in Kemuncak Meda Imam Muda season three, B1 reacted to one of the contestants and considered him to be handsome.

*Wahida:* Oh, He is handsome! (referring to IM Megat)

*Huda:* Handsome!

*Aisha:* Eh, handsome! I was about to say the same thing (looking at Wahida and Huda)

*Huda:* I was about to say too. Sister... (looking at Aisha and laughed) Astaghfirullah Azim, (laughed and covered her face. All of them laughed)

*Wahida:* Chup! (xxx)

*Amina:* Adoi! (she just smiled)

(OBS.S5P4B1.03:03-03:18)

The show also established the faculty of Imam Muda on stage. B2 and B3 knew one of the Murshids because they were alumni of Imam Muda. Amal (B3) recognised the Murshids, Imam Muda Asyraf (winner of season one) and Imam Muda Hizbur. B3 knew about Imam Muda Asyraf and Imam Muda Hizbur because they were the winner and first runner-up for Imam Muda season one. Abdullah (B3) mentioned that he had spoken to IM Asyraf a number of times before. The Murshids in Imam Muda, season three, are the alumni of Imam Muda season one. With their experience in the academy and as alumni, they had become guides to the contestants in season three. B2 elaborated on the discussion of one of the Murshids, since Faruq was watching Imam Muda for the first time.

*Faruq:* Eh? Who are they? Are they the winner from the previous season?

*Faisal:* Oh! Yeah... no wonder... (confirming)

*Fahad:* The left one (pointing at the TV) ... that one...

*Faisal:* Aaa... Asyraf!

*Fahad:* That is Asyraf, right? The other one... not sure.

*Faisal:* Is it Asyraf? (He was unsure)
Fahad: The one on the left! (Confirming his answer)

Faisal: He (Asyraf) looks different now.

Fahad: I think he still looks the same!

Faisal: The difference must be caused by make-up.

Fahad: Maybe!

(OBS.S5P5B2.04:31-04:48)

Faruq was curious because the two Mursyids were introduced in the last segment. Since Faruq was watching the show for the first time, and only the final episode, he did not have enough knowledge about the people involved in the show. However, Faisal and Fahad recognised one of the Mursyids, Imam Muda Asyraf, because he was the winner of the first season. The Mursyids in Imam Muda, season three, were IM Asyaf (the winner from season one) and IM Hizbur (the runner up of season one). Meanwhile, in B2, the tension was building up:

Wahida: Suddenly I felt nervous!

Huda: But, why? This show was in 2012 (everyone smiled at Wahida)

Aisha: I can say Hafiz should win! According to my observation previously (referring to Segment Four when IM Jabar stumbled in his translation)

IM Jabar will lose. Minus one mark! Haha!

(OBS.S5P4B1.05:04-05:17)

Aisha stated her prediction that IM Hafiz would win, based on his performances in previous segments. She also hypothesised that IM Jabar would come in second place because of his mistakes. When Mudir was about to announce the winner, the following conversation took place:

Aisha: Huda, you wait and watch (as she supported IM Hafiz to win)

(Everyone focused on knowing who the winner was. Wahida clapped her hands and Huda did a drum roll)

Maria and Huda: Hafiz! (Out loud)

Wahida: Hafiz! (Repeat)

(On TV, Mudir announced IM Jabar! Everyone surprised! Amina exclaimed ‘Subhanna Allah’ and they all clapped with joy, even though IM Jabar had won.)

Wahida: Why has Jabar won?
When the Mudir announced IM Jabar as the winner, some of the participants reacted with disappointment, as they had expected IM Hafiz to win. Maria, Aisha, Huda and Wahida were excited for IM Hafiz to win, but their prediction was wrong. The same situation was replicated in groups B2 and B3. Faisal questioned the choice of winner, when Faruq and Fahad raised the issue:

**(As IM Jabar put on his winning robe)**

**Faisal:** Why did he win?

**Faruq:** Not sure.

**Faisal:** Maybe the off-stage evaluation

**Faruq:** Yes, it is logical...

**(On TV, the winner was presented with RM100, 000)**

**Faruq:** Wah!

**Fahad:** One hundred thousand ringgit from Astro!

**(They continued watching)**

Faisal was unsure about IM Jabar winning but then he realised that IM Jabar might have accumulated marks from his off-stage evaluation. He understood that the episode that they were watching was the final episode. Faruq and Fahad were surprised with the amount of money that the winner had received. Faruq subsequently stated his disappointment.

**Faruq:** I am disappointed.

**Faisal:** Maybe when he (IM Jabar) speaks, he sounds intelligent. By the way, he is a mature person.

**(Faruq nodded as a sign of agreement)**

**(On TV, IM Jabar delivered his winner’s speech)**

**Faisal:** When he speaks, he sounds intelligent (confirming his previous statement)

**Faruq:** But as I watched the finals, I expected Hafiz (IM Hafiz) to win!

**(Faisal and Fahad nodded as a sign of agreement)**

**Faisal:** Well, as I said, if we listen to his speech, he sounds clever.
Faruq stated his disappointment that IM Hafiz had not won but he agreed with Faisal’s rationalisation of IM Jabar’s win. Faisal suggested that IM Jabar won because he sounded intelligent when he spoke, referring to his winning speech. Faruq and Fahad agreed with Faisal. Similar opinions were shared in B3. Abdullah was surprised when IM Jabbar was announced as the winner.

(On TV, IM Hafiz received his trophy and cheque)

Abdullah: Oh! He (IM Jabar) is the winner? I cannot believe it. Imam Muda Hafiz is powerful (referring to IM Hafiz's performance in the finals)

Amal: Maybe he (IM Jabar) won overall (because of the accumulated marks)

Researcher: Yes, overall assessment from all episodes, that includes practical and character assessment in and off academy.

Amal: Anyway, he (IM Jabar) looks confident.

Researcher: Really?

Amal: Maybe because he is a lecturer.

(OBS.S5P4B3.10:36-11:28)

Abdullah believed that IM Hafiz was going to be the winner, based on his performance in the final. Amal stated that IM Jabar won because of his overall marks. She recalled her previous experience watching Imam Muda, season one. The researcher then confirmed her opinion about the accumulated marks. Amal praised IM Jabar for his confidence, which might have come from his experience as a lecturer. The reactions from B1, B2 and B3 in Segment Five showed that they understood the contents and discussed the criteria for selecting the winner. All the groups anticipated IM Hafiz as the winner because of his performance on stage. B2 and B3 took time to rationalise IM Jabar’s victory. They came to the conclusion that IM Jabar won because of his accumulated marks from the previous episodes, during and after the academy. The participants realised that they evaluated the finalists only in the final episode. Yet, through the finalists’ performances, the participants indirectly learnt about the credibility and characteristics of an Imam. They learnt to evaluate the quality of a young Imam in modern Malaysia. Thus, they learnt in a similar way to the guidelines suggested in the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards. This shows that the participants had reflected upon their judgments of the winner and critically engaged with the Islamic practices portrayed in Kemuncak Imam Muda season three.
4.4 Conclusion

Chapter four comprised a content analysis of Kemuncak *Imam Muda*, season three, as well as a background analysis of Malaysian Muslim viewers’ reactions to each segment. The interaction between the participants and the selected contents was important as it served to highlight the content that might indicate informal learning. The primary ways the participants viewed the show, according to each of the segments, were as follows:

- **Segment One** portrayed practicality in terms of the functions of an Imam in the community. The participants were able to discern the importance and impact of community service.
- **Segment Two** portrayed criticality in presenting arguments and addressed the questioner suitable to their level. The participants were able to differentiate between the quality of performance and the answers given in the show.
- **Segment Three** examined the ways in which knowledge could be delivered to create engagement with the viewers. The participants were able to evaluate styles of delivery and to identify techniques to create engagement with the viewers.
- **Segment Four** portrayed integrity in knowledge production, by examining memorisation of Al-Quran, its translation and Tafsir. The participants were able to evaluate the clarity of explanations offered by Ulumul Quran, as a means of creatively engaging the viewers.
- **Segment Five** portrayed the credibility of the winner. The participants were able to evaluate the quality of a young Imam in modern Malaysia.

The participants’ reactions in each group showed that they understood the contents of each segment. They were able to state which contents appealed to them and to evaluate the segments. In addition, they were able to evaluate performances, differentiate between the finalists based on their performances, and rationalise their actions. However, the reactions were based on segments. Therefore, there is a need to understand the bigger picture of the show. This will be engaged within chapter 5, which will explore a focus group discussion, as the participants reflected on their experiences of watching Kemuncak *Imam Muda*, season three.
Chapter 5: Defining the parameters of the judgment process

5.1 Introduction

This study focuses specifically on the educational value of Kemuncak Imam Muda, season three. Reality TV is meant to entertain, and for some viewers, it is a guilty pleasure, depending on the content and the aims of the show (Hill, 2005; Nabi, 2007). Chapter Five reports on the study’s findings, based on the Malaysian Muslims’ reflections after watching Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda. As described in Chapter 4, during the observations, the participants’ reactions to each of the segments guided the way they perceived the show. Thus, the way the participants understood and interpreted the show was revealed in the focus group discussions and viewing reflections. Contesting the content of Islamic Reality TV shows, such as Imam Muda, this chapter examines how Malaysian Muslim viewers described the journey of the young Imams portrayed on the alternative platform of Islamic reality TV. The semi-structured focus group discussions, moderated by the researcher, attempted to investigate the participants’ reflections, and their underlying complexities, as part of an informal learning process derived from their critical engagement with the show.

During the viewing sessions, participants engaged with an assessment of the segments and related this back to their existing knowledge about Imams and Islam. The participants commented on the finalists’ performances, by putting their knowledge into practice throughout the assessments. During the viewings, they observed the behaviours and manners, known as Akhlaq [ethical conduct in Islam, or practices of righteousness] of the young Imams, and commented on how these elements interacted with the communities, mystery guests and faculty members in the show. Later, they commented on the finalists’ actions and behaviours during the Commercial Break Reaction (CBR) and further reflected on this in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The participants’ reactions were part of the observation process and selection of the manifested contents to respond to. Later, they reflected on the discussions as part of their interpretation of the manifested contents. It is important to unpack the complexity of the participants’ conceptualisation of the show, to map the negotiation process involved in their informal learning. In the focus group discussions, they understood that Imam Muda is a competition, and highlighted that they had accepted it as an alternative form of Islamic entertainment. They acknowledged the intelligence and performance of the young Imams on the show. Hence, the participants' commentaries and reflections on the manifested contents in the show will be categorised
into two themes, starting with the participants’ understandings of Imam Muda as a beneficial form of entertainment, and then with their interpretations of the contents.

5.2 Conceptualising Imam Muda as a beneficial form of Islamic entertainment

The young Imams in the Imam Muda Reality TV show have become significant subjects in the production of celebrity Imams. Reality TV has brought ordinary young Imams into the limelight, through their performances on stage, which have enabled them to gain fame. Imam Muda is the first show that has directly focused on the selection of young religious individuals or young Imams in Malaysia. Thus, the contestants on Imam Muda adopt a celebrity persona in the academy, through the portrayal of their daily lives in Kapsul Imam Muda (KIM). They are evaluated based on the way they behave in the academy, and the way that they socialise with the community in the weekly task, which includes activities such as giving a khutbah/sermon; Tazkirah, which refers to leading Friday prayers; and Syafawi/oral assessments on stage. The study raised a question related to how viewers conceptualise and gauge this new construction of modern young Imams. The format of combining Islam and Reality TV may provide Muslim viewers with an alternative form of entertainment. This proposition was tested through the responses in the Observations (OBS), reactions in the Commercial Break Reactions (CBR), points from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and justifications from the Viewing Reflections (Vref). Chapter Four explained the way the participants reacted to each segment in the show, and Chapter Five will examine the participants’ reflections after the viewing sessions. Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted after the viewing session, to further situate the study within the educational context. This was important, as the key hypothesis of this study was that Islamic Reality TV acts as a form of enrichment for Islamic Education among Malaysian Muslims.

5.2.1 An analysis of perceptions related to the representation of young Malaysian Imams

The representation of young Imams in the show was engaged with in this study through the assessment of each segment. This differed to the diary, Kapsul Imam, which portrayed their daily lives in the academy. The assessments are considered as main criteria for becoming an Imam, and the finalists competed to be the best in this regard. Through the representation of young Imams, the viewers associated themselves with the protagonists, as Malaysian Muslims in a Malaysian environment. The complexity of their engagement with the Imam Muda reality TV show indicated the learning and educational possibilities for the viewers,
as they followed the stories of the finalists on screen. The descriptions of the segments provided in the content analysis were reported in Chapter Four. The highlights of this chapter, with regards to the participants’ viewing of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three, and in particular their reactions to the selected segments, were as follows:

- **Segment One** introduced the finalists and portrayed the final VT playback of the young Imams completing their finalist tasks in their hometowns. The finalists’ tasks involved serving their communities, which included leading a forum, or Tazkirah and helping the needy, thus fulfilling the communal functions of gotong-royong (similar to spring cleaning). The participants showed interest in the show as it introduced the finalists and their final practical tasks. They familiarised themselves with and offered initial reflections on the finalists. The way they familiarised themselves was by asking the researcher about the finalists’ background and education.

- As the assessment continued to **Segment Two**, the young Imams were tested on the way they answered the questions from the invited mystery guests. The finalists need to do their best because after the Questions and Answers session, the faculty would decide on the third placing. The participants understood that the Imams were in a competition and that they needed to give the best answers. Religious questions or issues regarding Muslims in Malaysia were addressed with support from primary sources, such as Al-Quran and Hadith (recorded traditions of the prophets). The participants drew on these sources as analytic tools in this study, to strengthen their understanding of the application of Islam in the Malaysian context. Thus, the participants engaged with the finalists’ answers, as they would benefit from the solutions suggested in the show.

- In **Segment Three**, the young Imams were assessed during a Tazkirah. Imam Muda Hafiz and Imam Muda Jabar presented their Tazkirah, harnessing great creativity and stylistic innovation in their delivery. The participants engaged with the contents from the Tazkirah, as it was about finding soulmates and building a happy family. They joked amongst themselves about finding spouses, since some of the participants were still single in the Muslimah Viewer (B1) and Male Muslim viewers (B2) groups. Meanwhile, in the Muslim Family (B3) group, the members related their engagement with Tazkirah, especially the Sirah Nabawiyah (stories of the prophets), to their previous experience of attending Islamic Education classes in school.

- In **Segment Four**, the finalists were required to recite the selected Surahs [chapters of the Quran] with Tartil [correct diction, proper order, and with slow rhythmic tones], clear translation and Tadabbur [contemplation with regards to the meaning of the verses of the Quran]. The participants engaged with the recitation and related it to their experience of a good recitation, which would make them ‘feel’ the verses from Al-Quran and to gain a deeper insight into their contents.
In **Segment Five**, the show resumed with a Nasyid performance from all the contestants in *Imam Muda* season three, which was followed by the announcement of the winner. The participants engaged with the Nasyid sung in the show, and were surprised when IM Jabar was announced as the winner, since, across the group, they were rooting for IM Hafiz to win.

These summaries of the responses to each segment showed that it is essential to investigate the contents that triggered the participants’ reactions, to examine the way in which the viewers associated with the finalists and interpreted the show. The participants observed the finalists’ assessments and reacted in the commercial breaks. In a focus group discussion, Aisha (B1) stated how she perceived an Imam to be a representation of a Muslim leader.

*Aisha: .... Since the title of the show is Imam. Imam means leaders. When we see the finalists in the programme, we see the characteristics of an Imam. They are not only an Imam in prayers, but they are an Imam in society. So, when you watch this show, “Oh! He has the character of an Imam!”. Referring to what I said earlier, an Imam needs to understand what he recites in the prayers so that we can ‘feel’. When we go to the Masjid, we will recognise him: “That’s the Imam, we can feel his ‘aura’ when leading the prayers…”’ Different, right?

(Aisha looked at the group and they agreed with her. She continued her explanation.)

*Aisha: So, that is one. His leadership when he leads the prayers in the Masjid. Another point is, an Imam is also a leader to society. When we refer to the title of the show that is Imam, which means leader, my perception is not closeted to an Imam only in the Masjid. Hence, the criteria of an Imam should relate to being ‘smart’ not only in his ability to recite the Quran but also in his knowledge of how to apply and spread knowledge about Islam.

*(FGD2.B1.00:41-02:08)*

From this quote, it can be seen that Aisha viewed an Imam as more than just a leader in prayer at the mosque. She justified to the group that an Imam may function as a leader in the community, who is accountable and knowledgeable, and can attend to any questions related to Islam. The remaining members of B1 agreed with her statement. A similar situation was evidenced in B2 and B3, as the members understood the communicated messages about the functions of a young Imam and his connection to the community. For example, in B2, while they were discussing which segments had impacted them, Faisal and Faruq stated that:

*Faisal: ...The segment that impacted me is the recitation of the Quran verses.*

*Researcher: Why?*

*Faisal: Because this is the Imam Muda Reality TV programme. Other segments like Tazkirah as such can be produced... by produced, what I mean is that it can be planned. For example, we can ask a student from the university - even they can give Tazkirah (Faruq and Fahad nodded as a sign of agreement), but when it comes to this*
(referring to Segment Four), this (referring to memorisation skills) showed that they (the finalists) are the chosen ones. It requires effort! (referring to memorising Al-Quran). The Imam needs things like that (referring to the skill of memorising the Quran). And other skills (referring to public speaking) ... an Imam can do it.

**Faruq:** Yes, referring to what Faisal has said, the recitation of the Quran and after that, the translation of the verse... I think maybe this show is good for students who are studying in religious schools or for someone that wants to become al-Hafiz (literal meaning the guardian, in this context, the person who memorises the Quran)... It is hard to memorise the whole Al-Quran but when they see this show, it is proof to them that somebody has done it (memorised the Quran). For example, IM Hafiz looks like he has the credibility of an Imam and IM Jabar has the experience of an Imam. That's what I think. Everyone has TV and they can watch the show. It is a motivation for them.

(FGD1.B2.18:22-20:02)

It is interesting that the participants of B2 perceived that the most difficult assessment in Segment Four can be modelled by students in religious schools or by a person who wants to be an al-Hafiz (the person who memorises the Quran). Faruq drew from Faisal’s statement, by stating that memorising Al-Quran is a challenging task that would differentiate an Imam from the others, as a role model to be emulated. Based on the perceptions of each assessment, the participants built their conceptualisations, drawing from their existing knowledge and experience. ‘Conceptualisation’, in the context of this study refers to the ways in which the participants devised their ideas after watching *Imam Muda*, season three. They reacted in the commercial breaks, where they responded to the content and described the ways in which they perceived it. The content they responded to was selective, and was the starting point for a more detailed analysis. In the discussion phase, the participants organised their understanding after their initial viewing, which built their conceptualisations of the finalists and the show. Therefore, as the participants associated with the finalists, they understood that the *Imam Muda* reality TV show was a way to promote Imams.

The *Imam Muda* reality TV show portrayed the essentials of being a good Imam. Aisha (B1) pointed out that the idea of the show could be seen as a scholastic way to promote Imams. Aisha claimed that this show is upgrading the profession of an Imam to the same level as other academic professions. She gave an example of her neighbours’ cousin who auditioned for *Imam Muda*, but was unsuccessful in the final round of the audition. Since the audition is aired on television, the viewers from his village discovered his potential and appointed him as a young Imam in his village. She explained that the incident justified her statement about the need for the community to become more aware of how the show promotes the importance of young Imams. The participants related to the finalists in
Segment One because the manifested contents portrayed the finalists in their hometowns, completing their final practical assessment. The reactions and reflections revolved around the finalists’ backgrounds, which led to the conceptualisation of young Imams in modern Malaysia.

5.2.2 Contesting the educational values and fame of the Imams

Islam provides two forms of guidance for Muslims to follow: Al-Quran and Hadith. From these two primary sources, Islamic content knowledge can be derived and classified into various areas. As a Muslim, it is essential to understand and translate knowledge into practice. The Imam Muda reality show has created an alternative platform to spread the message of Islam. The show uses entertainment values, such as competition and talent in the context of reality TV, combined with a fresh perspective on young Imams, to reach a broader modern community. Portraying Imams in reality TV changes the viewers’ perceptions and understandings of the profession. This is because, in the Imam Muda reality show, the selection of young Imams is filmed and staged, to be part of the reality TV genre. The complete journeys of the young Imams are shown throughout 13 episodes, from 3 episodes of auditions to 10 episodes of assessments, which culminates in the crowning of the winner of the season. The show places young Imams in the spotlight, which breaks norms by showcasing their characters, knowledge and experience to the public. Famous Imams or religious figures are known through their work, such as writing in books and Quran Recitations. For example, Imam Al-Sudais, one of the most famous Imams, leads prayers in Masjidil Haram, the grand mosque of Mecca. Abd Rahman Al-Sudais is also the President of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques, and a renowned Qari. He is known in the Muslim world because of his beautiful recitation of the Quran through cassettes, CDs, TV and now social media platforms. Various forms of media have disseminated the intended information, to reach the public. In this context, the media have become interested in combining Reality TV with a religious icon, such as an Imam, to provide an alternative way of learning about Imams. Viewers watch how the young Imams in the show develop from week to week and become fans of their favourite Imams, until the final show. Since the show is inclusive towards expert judges and judges from the academy, this study investigated viewers’ engagements with Imam Muda, which are essential to understanding their interpretation of the show, in their specific role as home judges.
In the context of *Imam Muda*, the contestants are assessed thoroughly, from the perspective of their knowledge and performances on stage, to their Akhlaq or attitudes during and after assessment. In this study, the viewers critically engaged with the *Imam Muda* Islamic Reality TV show and in particular the fame of the featured Imams, in two ways: by highlighting concerns over the originality and transparency of the show, and the role of education in the context of reality TV. The first perception was evidenced in the researcher’s dialogue with Faisal (B2):

**Researcher:** What do you think of the show? Relevant? Is it educational?

**Faisal:** Yeah, it’s still relevant. Since Astro stopped producing it (*Imam Muda*), I think that’s a good move too. Because when we watch a reality TV show, the challenges are... from the start, it gets repeated many times, without improvements except an added drama element until people can predict that they (TV production) are making money again. Like the one we just watched, nothing much different than AF (Akademi Fantasia, Malaysian singing reality TV show). So, when *Imam Muda* stops, okay... it’s enough...

(FGD1.B2.07:12-08:15)

Faisal highlighted that the discontinuation of the show after the third season would be a good step. In this way, he understood that the show had bad connotations, with regards to the profession of an Imam. His reasoning was that reality TV nowadays is driven by and manipulated to focus on viewers’ emotional engagement with the content. Faisal understood how television works and was agreeable that some parts of reality TV are created to drive emotion as a form of engagement with the viewers. However, Faisal did not mention that an Imam is also a human being that cannot be separated from his mistakes or life circumstances. It is this so-called “drama” that makes us human. People learn from watching others, which shapes the way we understand the world. He asserted that reality TV should be transparent. Faruq and Fahad suggested that the idea of *Imam Muda* could be good for viewers. Removing the “drama” could cause less viewer engagement, as they could feel less attached to the contents. Fahad and Faruq from B2 (Muslim group) had the same understanding of the show, asserting that the show could be educational, but that the main objective is to entertain viewers, especially Muslim viewers. As exemplified in Fahad’s response:

**Fahad:** Um...educational is another concern, but the more important thing is the viewers’ reception. Do they watch this type of show? Is this show interesting or appealing to them? What I mean is among the challenges for an Islamic TV show, like this, is to attract viewers. Maybe I am not sure what should be improved in this show, but there might be an improvement that is needed to gain more viewers.

(FGD1.B2.10:31-11:40)
Fahad tried to highlight that viewers are the focus as they are the consumers, and it is important to cater to their needs. He understood that serious contents (such as learning about religion) might be less appealing to a wider audience. Thus, he acknowledged that the educational element in a Reality TV show is a key area of importance. When the researcher probed for more information, Fahad was unable to explain his opinion in detail. However, Faruq tried to elaborate on Fahad’s point and reflected on two segments that he considered to be potentially educational. He detailed his explanation with regards to IM Hafiz’s performance in Segment Three; when the finalists competed in delivering Tazkirah, and IM Jabar’s attitude in Segment Four; when the participants competed for their recitation of verses from the Quran, and translated its meaning. Below is the conversation:

**Researcher:** Fahad, can you explain a bit more?

**Fahad:** Um, in terms of educational… I think... maybe from the dialogue? (referring to the Tazkirah from Imam Muda Hafiz, when he created a dialogue between a mother and a daughter). Maybe it’s new to the viewers? I am not sure if it (the dialogue) works or not... but from an educational perspective... there might be much new knowledge from the show... I think...

(He seemed unsure about his answers, then Faruq interrupted and tried to elaborate on Fahad’s point)

**Faruq:** I think... if we just discuss the final episode, I can see, when he (IM Hafiz) elaborates on his points, he uses dialogue (referring to Fahad’s point) because being Malaysian, we have less tendency to do public speaking. When we watched these two finalists, we knew that they were the best two. They have the ability to change intonation, act a little bit, but the fact that they can sing is additional. What we learnt from them is that instead of being less engaging, they tried to create engagement with the audience like for example using dialogues in their speeches. Like Imam Muda Hafiz, created a dialogue between a mother... and ... um...?  

**Fahad:** A daughter?

**Faruq:** Yes... a daughter. I think if I were to do the public speaking, I wouldn’t know how to do something like that. That’s for me what I learnt. But maybe Fahad’s points more to the way the finalists explained the verses or... because he is quite familiar with those (referring to the Quran recitation in segment four).

(Fahad nodded, and Faruq continued to give another example)

**Faruq:** Because if you see, Imam Muda Jabar, at first, the way he responded was not convincing. For example, when he was asked to continue to recite the verse... or translate the verse... he looked like he didn’t complete his answers... and when it came to the next question, he told Mudir that he would like to complete his previous answers, which were not complete, and answered the second question. In the end, he wins the title, right? So...in terms of the translation mistakes and Imam Muda Jabar’s actions, I think we can learn from that...

(FGD1.B2.11:41-14:17)
As these quotations highlight, Faruq acknowledged that the show is a competition and interpreted the finalists’ performances as educational. Faruq gave examples from Fahad’s point and elaborated on the techniques and values that would benefit the viewers. From Faruq’s and Fahad’s explanations, we reach the second perception of the show: its educational role in informal learning. The perceptions derived from B1’s reflections on the show indicated that the show is potentially educational. When the researcher asked the Muslimah (B1) group about their opinions of the content, Wahida was the first to respond:

*Researcher*: What do you think of this show? Is it educational?

*Wahida*: Yes. Because it is informational. For me, anything that is informational from the show, it’s a form of education. For example, the finalists were asked questions (referring to segment two) and given the opportunity to experience (referring to segment one). All those things gave information to the people, either Muslim or non-Muslim. They can watch the show and be informed about Islam. Maybe they can get a little information if they don’t understand the whole show.


Wahida understood the show from the perspective of obtaining information. For Wahida, any new information that added to her knowledge was educational. She perceived the information about the essential skills and characteristics of an Imam. The participants in B1 agreed with Wahida about the educational role of the show. Amina and Huda added further detail to Wahida’s musings:

*Amina*: It (the show) has the potential (to be educational), meaning that it depends on how the viewers absorb (receive the content) and their readiness, which relates to their background. That makes a difference, right?

(Asked the group and they (B1) nodded as a sign of agreement. Then, she continued).

*Amina*: Personally, I think the show is good and has an educational element. For example, when the show starts, it starts with an Istighfar song [act of seeking forgiveness from Allah] and ends with another Istighfar song, right? That is educating the community, but it depends on the readiness of the viewers… If they are not interested in the show, they might not get anything from it.

*Huda*: Yes, from the perspective of a Muslim, it would be yes. We can accept that. That if they (referring to the viewers) have the readiness to or the background for (she is thinking) …um… because to watch this show (Imam Muda), the drive needs to come from themselves (the viewers). It (Imam Muda) is not like Akademi Fantasia (a singing reality show in Malaysia), which is solely about singing and entertainment. So, it (Imam Muda) gives you an educational context as well. If people watch it (Imam Muda), it is good because of its entertainment elements (Imam Muda) that can attract people to watch, right? For a non-Muslim, it would be a defect, since the context of this research is Malaysian Muslims, right? I would agree that it (Imam Muda) provides you with the educational context in two ways: Tazkirah and the Questions and Answers session. I think the Questions and Answers session is the best part because it is more general that, in a way it talks about how to cope with problems with teenagers. And that is very general, applies to all, and then it talks about how our education system is focusing on what... and the way that it should look at Akhlaaq and so on. So, that’s more in general… I believe that it is much more accessible
information that could be accessed by ‘general’ people as well. ‘General’ means regarding, even if the person doesn’t have extensive knowledge about religion, but then the person moves towards Tazkirah and that is the most religious part, which is very good, but you need a higher level of Islamic knowledge. But you know… to answer your question it (Imam Muda) does have it (educational contents) because it provides you with education about being a Muslim and a citizen in general. In Shaa Allah.


Amina and Huda complemented each other’s opinion when they expressed that the final of Imam Muda season three is somewhat educational, depending on the viewer's readiness to learn, and their background knowledge of Islam. They believed that if viewers are not equipped with previous knowledge about and of Islam, they would not be able to relate to it in context. This is because the show is a form of reality TV, so viewers need to be media literate or to have Islamic media literacy to extract educational contents from the show. However, the paradigm of the discussion changed, as Aisha expressed her opinion.

_Aisha_: But, frankly speaking, I would see that (Imam Muda) more like a competition, rather than education!

_Maria_: Yes! (Nodding her head)

_Aisha_: It (Imam Muda) has educational elements but the highlights are competitions and the target audience. To me, the competition is more of the Islamic intelligence kind. It challenges your intelligence related to Islamic knowledge. So, if you are ‘zero’, what I mean is, if you don’t have any background, you would probably see that (Imam Muda) without any meaning because you don’t know the reason for the actions. On the other hand, if you have some background, you will see the show as impressive, for example from the way the finalists answered the questions (referring to segment two). So, we evaluate from an intellectual standpoint. How people respond, how the Imam Muda (finalists) responded to questions, how critically he answered the questions, how he cited the Quran in an impromptu way. Things like that are intellectual. If I am a ‘Mak Cik kampung’ (an elderly person in the rural areas) who didn’t learn much about religion, I might not be interested. Or, I might be interested because I have a passion for learning about religion, and probably I would like to listen to the youngsters recite the Quran. That’s a different perspective. When you come with an academic background, you will be interested in the finalists’ intellectual capacity, their criticality, from very much an intellectual perspective. So, I see that more even though, it is educational, as it is more a competition than a way of educating. If I wanted to watch an Islamic TV show to learn, my favourite is always...

_Amina_: Halaqah!

_Aisha_: Halaqah! Tanyalah Ustaz...

(FGD1.B1.18:52-21:16)

Aisha agreed that Imam Muda has educational value, but that this is not the main agenda of the show. According to her, it is a competition in the form of a reality TV show, which tests Islamic intelligence. She interpreted the show as interesting for the Islamic intellectual as it showcased the finalists’ performances in the assessment, to be the potential winner of Young Imam. It is notable that the conversation developed from a discussion of the contents
being informational and educational. The dynamic changed when Aisha stated her opinion that *Imam Muda* is more a competition than a form of education. B1 responded to and agreed with this statement. Abdullah’s (B3) statement regarding the combination of competition-based reality TV and Imam as a beneficial aspect of the show added to Aisha’s perspective. The viewers understood the characteristics and responsibilities of an Imam in society. Abdullah’s statement about the *Imam Muda* Reality TV show referenced this:

**Researcher**: What do you think about this show? Is it educational?

**Abdullah**: Let me answer first. For me, I think this show is a beneficial form of entertainment. Because if I want to consider this show as educational, the timing is too short. The timing is short and too many people talk. So, it does not reach the required level. If we want to consider that the show is an educational TV show, usually, we compare with another TV show, right? For example, ‘Tanyalah Ustaz’. It has a core topic.

**Researcher**: Specific topic?

**Abdullah**: Yes, it will discuss a topic that is determined, so when we watch the show, we will know what to expect in the discussion. So, when we watch something like *Imam Muda*, we are not sure what is being portrayed.

**Researcher**: Aha... (nodding)

**Abdullah**: Things like that. What I see in this programme. The reason I say it is entertainment is because it will select who the winner is. Then people will judge who is a good orator, and the finalists’ characteristics: do they have charisma? If the show is purely educational, it does not have those aspects.

**Researcher**: Yes... (nodding)

**Abdullah**: Right? It’s like we watch, listen and receive knowledge. Like this show, we watched the show, and we will make judgments.

**Researcher**: Yes, there’s judgment involved.

**Abdullah**: Yes, there is! Things (referring to the content) like that. For example, the Imam who kneeled and raised his hand for prayer (Tazkirah in Segment Three). That looks cliché, right? But the things that he said before look normal (referring to the Tazkirah). But we judged him based on his performance.

(FIGD1.B3.05:40-06:35)

As can be seen in the quotation above, Abdullah understood that *Imam Muda* is a competition to find the best Imam among the finalists. He came to this conclusion because he had watched *Imam Muda* season one. He highlighted that the show is a beneficial form of entertainment, and less educational than other shows, because the title of the show – the search for the best Imam and the theme for season three – family communication – is too underdeveloped in one final episode, with only a handful of assessments for the finalists related to this theme. Thus, for Abdullah, this competition-based reality TV show invites
the viewers to evaluate the finalists’ performances and characteristics rather than to be educated with regards to the content. As Abdullah further explained:

*Abdullah:* ... The reason why I said that the show is entertainment is because the show will select who will become the winner. People will judge who can communicate well, their character, do they have the charisma or not, because in an educational programme we will not have these aspects.

*Researcher:* Right...

*Abdullah:* Right. It is like when we are learning, we are coming to listen and get the knowledge, not to judge.

(FGD1.B3.06:36-07:36)

Abdullah stated that viewers watching the show become judges and if the show was meant to be educational, it would not have any judging criteria. He understood that his position when watching the show is to evaluate the finalists, and to select a winner. Amal, his wife, agreed and added the following:

*Amal:* It has minimal educational value and it is in a subtle way. And it’s more appropriate for younger viewers, right? Because of the young Imams! (laughed). It is different for mature viewers. If this show were to gain followers, it would be the youngsters. I think this show (Imam Muda) is more to introduce the finalists or the contestants in the show to the public. When the show ends, the public would know or recognise them.

*Researcher:* But if you said that this show is different for mature viewers...

*Amal:* I think it’s not suitable (she meant the show is not suitable for mature viewers). If they were to watch that show... um... I never have seen yet a family sitting together watching this show. Like Mums, they are not going to watch that show. Because they prefer something more specific. If they would like to watch an Islamic TV show, they would look at the title or topic.

*Researcher:* Oh! Like Madrasah you meant? (an Islamic TV show in TV Al-Hijrah)

*Abdullah:* Yes!

*Amal:* This one (Imam Muda) the youngsters might like it.

*Researcher:* Oh. Because of the reality competition?

*Amal:* Yes, and singing songs, entertainment like that...

(FGD1.B3.07:37-08:50)

Amal extended her husband’s answers by stating that *Imam Muda* has the appearance, and the competitive elements, such as Nasyid performances (works of vocal music that are either sung acapella or accompanied by percussion instruments), which make it appealing to younger viewers. She had also watched *Imam Muda* season one. It influenced her opinion that this type of show would not appeal to mature viewers, as mature viewers would prefer more specific content. Amal also stated that she had not yet seen a family that had sat
together and watched *Imam Muda*. The reflections from B3 indicated that they understood *Imam Muda* as a beneficial form of entertainment, informational and potentially educational, which would appeal to younger viewers.

Across the groups, when the researcher asked group members about the show’s educational value, most of them responded that *Imam Muda* has some educational value, yet is mainly about competition. However, the participants were perhaps not fully aware that they had been informed about the whole process of grooming a young celebrity Imam. This is because combining a religious Icon with the format of reality TV transforms the show’s paradigm from pure entertainment to Islamic entertainment. After *Imam Muda* season one in 2010, new Islamic TV Reality shows for Muslim viewers emerged in the market, such as *Ustazah Pilihan* (Astro Oasis, 2011), *Solehah* (TV al-Hijrah, 2011) and *Daie Millenia* (TV3, 2013), which adopted a similar approach to Islamic reality TV entertainment. An Islamic reality TV show is about more than entertainment. It also has educational value because the representations of Islamic contents portray the practicality of Islam in modern life. Therefore, it is important for viewers to be equipped with media literacy so that they can understand and learn about Islam from the perspective of Islamic entertainment, in different contexts and on different platforms.

From this discussion, *Imam Muda* can be seen as beneficial because it provides information about Islam, the Akhlaq of a Muslim, and the essential skills and characteristics of an Imam. The participants agreed that this show is a competition to crown the best young Imam (FGD.B1B2B3). However, they were not fully aware that they were informally learning about the characteristics of Imams and their essentials skills. The concept of finding a young Imam in a reality TV show suggests to the community that it is important to groom the younger Muslim generation with knowledge about practices, so that they can be prepared to be future Imams and future Muslim leaders. Thus, the manifested contents portrayed in the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV show may benefit from providing practical examples and more theoretical knowledge. For example, Aisha (B1) suggested showing how the young Imams, being the point of reference about Islamic issues, prepare themselves to answer questions from the public. Also, Faisal (B2) suggested showing more on how the young Imams study and memorise Al-Quran so that the viewers could learn and adapt the technique. These suggestions from the participants demonstrated that the practical examples would be incidental informal learning for the viewers.
The show is a competition that is assessed by experts and experienced Imams, to shape the next generation of Imams. The contents of the competition are developed from Islamic content knowledge. Competition in this context is part of a constructive situation, which allows the contestants to be more competitive. The participants described the show as a beneficial form of competition, and considered it to be more a form of entertainment than an educational tool. However, a question arose with regards to the possibility that the viewers informally learnt from the manifested contents in Imam Muda. The remaining findings in this chapter will unpack this point retrospectively, drawing on the participants’ reactions to and reflections on the show, during their commercial break reactions (CBR). This will allow us to understand the complexity of their engagements, which would indicate their informal learning from Imam Muda.

5.2.3 Retrospective judgment of the finalists

After Segment One, the following dialogue ensued in B2, the Muslimah group:

Amina: Who do you think will win? (looking to the group)
Huda: Please be patient Amina. We will know the winner of the show later.
Maria: Who is the winner? (looking at the researcher)
Amina: Yes, I want to know who the winner is … (looking at the researcher)
Huda: Maria and Amina, please be patient.
Researcher: I can’t tell you…but you can watch the show till the end to know who the winner is. (teasing the participants)
Amina: I want to know who the winner is. I am about to vote now... (laughing)
Huda: I want to vote too. Which one do you want to win? (looking at Amina)
Amina: I can’t tell you. It’s a secret!
Maria: Hey! If you vote, your vote will not be counted!
Amina: That why I asked if there is already a winner ... (she did not finish the sentence)
Aisha: Look! The show (pointing to the television). Is it in 2012?!
Amina: Oh! 2012... (low tone of voice)
Huda: That’s in 2012, Amina!

(CBR.S1P1B1.15:38-16:02)

The quotation above from the Commercial Break Reactions (CBR) showed that the participants reacted as home judges, as reported in Chapter Four. The urge to vote was part of their engagement with the show. Drawing on the reactions in the Focus Group
Discussion (FGD), the participants complimented, criticised and reflected on the manifested contents of the show, as this is part of the rationalisation process related to their knowledge and experience. Watching the final stage of competition created pressures and assumptions concerning who was going to be the winner of the show. This situation emerged during the researcher’s observations, since the participants were exposed only to the final episode. Two of the participants had previous experience of the show, and some of them may have watched the previous season or have heard about Imam Muda. The reason is that the show ended in 2012 and the participants may have also watched or been exposed to other Islamic reality TV shows such as Pencetus Ummah and Daie Millenia, which are seen to have a similar format. In this study, participants were aware of the Imam Muda reality TV show, although they did not have an in-depth understanding of it. Thus, this study retrospectively examines the participants' reflections on the show, examining their reactions and explaining the complex processes behind their critical judgments as a form of engagement.

It is essential to understand the aspects of the contents that triggered the participants’ reactions to the TV show. The elaborations of this chapter started with the participants establishing Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda as a beneficial form of Islamic entertainment. It then discussed their interpretations of and identifications with the show’s judges. When they commented on the finalists’ performances, they associated themselves with the judges. Since the judgment process in Imam Muda is inclusive towards an expert from the Academy of Imam Muda, an experienced Imam and Muslim scholar, it would be insightful to describe views from home/public judges. The researcher will map the negotiation of the participants’ perceptions of the show to further investigate the dynamic of engagement in Chapter Six.

5.3 Interpreting the performances and identifying as home judges

The participants identified themselves with the faculty of Imam Muda when they started to comment about the finalists’ performances in Kemuncak Imam Muda. The participants were not experts or scholars of Islamic knowledge. However, since they were educated through Islamic educational approaches, and brought up in Malaysian Muslim environments, their comments arguably overlap with those of experts in the field. The participants engaged with the young Imams’ skills to communicate their knowledge and experience to the community. The skills assessed in the show included how the finalists addressed issues, by delivering Tazkirah and explaining the Quran. As Imams, they were
required to have good skills for recitation of the Quran, as this is an essential criterion for Imams to lead in prayers. Interpreting the performances and identifying with the experts or scholars on the show, by adopting the role of home judges, could be seen as a source of enrichment, which the participants harnessed during the research process. This showed how the viewers engaged with the show, since they judged the finalists based on their views as Muslims with various degrees of engagement with Islam, and how they would like the Imams to help them to understand the religion. Hence, the participants’ interpretations that emerged from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were cross-referenced with the data from Commercial break Reactions (CBR) in Chapter 4, and Viewing Reflections (Vref), to ensure the validity of the findings.

In brief, the finalists’ performances were assessed in four segments. The purpose of Segment One was to test the young Imams in completing the finalists’ task in their hometowns. Thus, the participants responded to the execution of the task in the VT playback. The finalists’ task was to do service to their community, which included to lead a forum or Tazkirah, and to help the needy, thus fulfilling the communal culture of gotong-royong. The participants commented on the finalists’ actions within society. As the assessment continued to Segment Two, the young Imams’ communication skills were tested through the way they presented the facts and arguments, by referencing trustful resources suitable to the viewers. In segment three, the young Imams’ communication skills in Tazkirah were challenged through their creativity and sense of stylistic innovation in delivering Tazkirah (a reminder). In these two segments, the participants commented mostly on the way the finalists conveyed the contents to them. In Segment Four, the finalists' memorisation of the Al-Quran was tested, as they were required to recite the selected Surah [chapters of the Quran] with Tartil [correct diction, proper order, with slow rhythmic tones], clear translation and Tafsir [literally meaning: interpretation, from the Arabic word for exegesis, usually of the Quran]. The participants listened carefully to the recitation and commented on the clarity of explanation of the verses. The participants’ knowledge about Al-Quran was finally tested because of its primary role in testing potential Imams to be leaders. From my analysis of the Commercial Break Reactions (CBR), as will be described in the upcoming sections, the participants across the group understood that to be Imams who lead prayers, they needed to be proficient in reading the Quran with Tajwid and Tartil. Hence, the perspective of the home judges’ reactions and reflections on the finalists’ performances are categorised into two important themes: excellence in Al-Quran recitation, and clarity and criticality in presenting knowledge about Islam.
5.3.1 The importance of quality in Al-Quran recitation

In segment four, the final assessment is Ulumul Al-Quran (knowledge of the Quran). As an Imam, this knowledge is crucial because an Imam is a guardian of the Quran and should be able to recite the memorised verses of the Quran with Tajwid and Tartil (recitation with good manners). In the Imam Muda reality TV show, recitation and memorisation skills related to the Quran were drawn upon to assess the ability of the young Imams to recite and memorise verse with minimal mistakes. This is challenging because a slight mistake would incur negative consequences. As an Imam, proper recitation of the Quran is necessary, as an Imam needs to lead prayers. For example, Abdullah agreed that memorising Al-Quran is the hardest part (CBR.S4.B3P1.05:07-05:25, see also the reactions in Chapter 4.3.4, p. 133) and restated this in his reflection:

Abdullah: For me, the interesting part is the part when the two finalists compete with each other in the memorisation of the Quran.

Researcher: I understood that.

Abdullah: Because for me that is the strength for an Imam. Like for other skills, such as preaching, other TV programmes do it too.

Researcher: Yes, that would be the difference.

Abdullah: Yes! That’s the selling point for Imam Muda!

(FGD2.B3.03:30-03:45)

Abdullah (B3) reflected that the important skill of an Imam is his memorisation of the Quran and this can be seen as a selling point for the show. This is significant, since an Imam needs to memorise the Quran, and this is a prioritised criterion in choosing an Imam. Furthermore, recitation with beautiful Qiraah (methods of Quran recitation) or Tarannum (literal translation: intonation, modulation, singing or recital), and understanding the recited verse adds value to young Imams. Across the groups, participants agreed that Segment Four was vital for the young Imams, although they had different perspectives on how the viewers would perceive the assessment. In B2, the participants showed an interest in the content portrayed at the beginning of Segment Four. However, they also worried that the content might not be appealing to every level of viewer, since it required a higher level of understanding of the segments.

Faisal: I think the content in Hafazan (memorisation of the Quran in segment four) might not be accessible to some groups of people in the public. They (the public), like myself will be impressed with the recitation...

Faruq: And the explanation of the verse... (Faruq added)
Faisal: Yes, another point also is that it depends on whether the explanation is good and how they (the public) cope with the session.

(CBR.S4B2P4.16:26 -17:42)

Faisal and Faruq felt that this segment required the viewers to have a good background of Islam so that they could appreciate the Quran. Faisal and Faruq agreed that the contents in Segment Four were suitable for a higher understanding of the Quran because they related the situation to themselves, with their limited knowledge of the Quran, and the process of challenging them to reflect on the verses (see Chapter 4.3.4, p. 133). Fahad agreed with them and stated that Segment Four was his favourite part, since he had previously learnt about the verses recited in the segment (CBR.S4P4B2.13:00-13:56, see also the reaction in Chapter 4.3.4, p. 133). As he reflected:

Fahad: My favourite part is that the finalists need to complete the verses of the Quran. That is because, if we look at our country, Malaysia, the number of people memorising the Quran (Hafiz) is growing, and when we know that person is al-Hafiz, we feel that we can trust him. What I mean is, if a person can memorise the Quran, this means that the person has 'thiqah' (literally meaning Confidence, Trust, Truth). We can trust the person’s knowledge and strong memorisation skills. I think this is a benchmark of whether someone wanted to be an Imam or a preacher. So, the viewers can put more trust in them.


Fahad understood that an Imam or a preacher needs to be trustworthy, and Segment Four challenged the finalists’ ability to prove their knowledge. In B1, Amina took her handphone during the viewing and scrolled through the content on her screen. She listened to the recitations of the finalists and intermittently looked at her phone (OBS.S4.B1P3.05-06:34). When the researcher asked her why she had done this in the Viewing Reflection (Vref), session, Amina justified her behaviour as follows:

Amina: The reason I am looking at my phone is that I am checking the finalists’ recitations of the selected verses, as questioned by Mudir...

Aisha: That’s is when ‘Ustazah’ [religious educator] watched this type of show (teasing Amina in a joking manner)

Huda: Yes, exactly what I said before. You can identify the level of the respondents here. It depends on the level of the academic that they have (confirming an example with the researcher)

Researcher: I understood that.

Aisha: We are not ‘Ustazah’ right? (in a joking manner and looking at Huda)

Huda: Yes, for laymen, they don’t check the recitation. They are just hoping that their favourite finalist doesn’t make mistakes.

(Vref.S4B1R3.12:07-12:43)
Amina reviewed the recitation via the Al-Quran application on her phone because she was the only member of the group who stated in her background that she studied Islamic subjects in some depth. She paid attention to the details of the recitation, translation and Tafsir. Aisha and Huda explained that their discussion demonstrated that the viewer’s level of academic and Islamic knowledge influenced the way they watched Islamic TV shows (FGD.B1.15:27-18:50). From these two scenarios in B1 and B2, it can be seen that educational background differences may impact viewers’ engagement with the content. Thus, a higher understanding of Islam would become a driver for engaging more with the content in Segment Four. Nevertheless, the participants appreciated the recitations of both finalists. B1 was interested in IM Jabar’s recitation, while Huda and Wahida were amazed by his voice and the way he recited the verse. The researcher explained that IM Jabar is a Qari, and he has a good voice. All the participants in B1 preferred IM Jabar's recitation because they could ‘feel’ the emotion behind his recitation. Aisha stated that if an Imam cannot recite the Quran accurately, he is not fit to be an Imam or to be in the final. Therefore, the participants’ discussions showed that they understood that an Imam who leads prayers should have learnt Al-Quran, memorised it and have correct recitation skills in their utterance. Additionally, knowledge about Al-Quran (Ulumul Quran) is essential for an Imam to be able to communicate the lessons from the Quran to other Muslims. It is every Muslim’s responsibility to learn the Quran, and it is an Imam’s role to facilitate further understanding of Islam.

5.3.2 Clear and critical thinking in the presentation of Islamic knowledge

The participants highlighted the importance of clear and critical thinking in the presentation of Islamic Knowledge. This is necessary because an imprecise explanation may cause misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the presented knowledge. The finalists’ clear presentation skills enabled the viewers to perceive and understand the knowledge delivered, while critical thinking skills bolstered the finalists’ ability to analyse issues, to form arguments or judgments. These two main criteria derived from the participants’ reflections, mainly on Segment Two, Segment Three and Segment Four. This demonstrates the complexity of the participants’ engagement, which created an informal learning experience. To discuss further how the participants evaluated the finalists, the next sections describe the participants’ reactions to the segments, discussing the criteria that were important to them as viewers.
a. Reflections on Segment Two

The participants responded to the finalists’ critical thinking skills in Segment Two (Questions and Answers with Mystery Guest) because this segment challenged the finalists' communication skills in delivering Islamic Knowledge clearly and critically. Good communication skills are essential for Imams, since they assist in answering any religious enquiries from the community. The participants highlighted the way the finalists addressed the questions, which included the appropriateness and criticality of the answers, and the importance of scholarly references. As the finalists competed, it was vital for the participants to understand the arguments and facts presented, so that they could judge the points discussed.

In Questions and Answers with the Mystery Guest, the participants commented on the finalists’ strategies for answering questions, which involved presenting arguments and facts, and quoting references. The finalists were required to showcase their ability, by applying their knowledge and ability to answer the questions, suitable to the level of the questioner. A mystery guest is an invited person from any background, who asks questions related to the main theme. In the final episode, the Mystery guest was a professor from a local university in Malaysia. Consequently, according to Fahad (B2), the session was arranged so as to provide a professional and academic standard of questions and answers.

Fahad: ... If we refer to the format of the assessment, it looks academic-oriented. This is because of the way the questions were asked by the... Prof Sidek, right? So, it looks academic, with serious intonation and serious questions. So, when the finalists answered the questions, they needed to be in the context with an academician. That’s why I feel that IM Naufal should answer with a serious tone (more academic).

Faisal: Yes, good point... because the questioner is Prof Sidek.

Faruq: (nodded as a sign of agreement)

Fahad was aware that an academician was moderating the session and that it should be formal. The other members of group B2 agreed with this assertion. They stated that the young Imams or the finalists needed to adjust their answers, so that they would be suitable to the various levels of the community. This was part of B2’s rationalisation of Imam Muda Naufal’s underperformance, as compared to Imam Muda Hafiz and Imam Muda Jabar (CBR.S2P2B2.10:38-11:53, see also the reaction in Chapter 4.3.2, p. 122). Faisal also described the contents in segment two as unremarkable, as he saw them as a form of common sense and general knowledge. He compared the session with the jetting session in
Miss World, as mentioned in Chapter 4, because he believed that the questions asked are overly general so that the contestants may answer with a broad perspective. Faruq suggested that the session would be more challenging if conducted in an open audience, with questioning from the general public. However, audience members still needed to listen carefully and evaluate the finalists’ presentation of arguments and facts. For them, the valuable lesson from this assessment was about content delivery. The answers needed to be clear and justified, to be fully convincing and to be critically assessed by the viewers.

In B1, Amina engaged with the criticality of the Imam answering the questions. Even though the answers were quite general for her, she believed they still matter, because the Imam needs to be a point of reference for any group within the community. Amina asked the group to repeat the questions to her so that she could evaluate the answers given by the finalists. Huda also stated her curiosity with regards to the way the three finalists answered the question, assessing to what extent they were prepared to answer it. She explained that an average human might take at least a few seconds to plan the answer. She observed that the finalists were answering the questions spontaneously and without thinking. Aisha then responded to Huda’s questions and assumptions by explaining that the Questions and Answers session is like a Viva process, since the finalist had attended classes related to the theme and subject (CBR.S2P2B1.10:35-11.00, see also B1 reactions in Chapter 4.3.2, p. 122). In the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Aisha also stated that one of Imam Muda’s target audiences would be Islamic academics and scholars.

_Aisha:_ … When I watched this (the final of Imam Muda 3) I wanted to see how people (finalists)…

_Huda:_ Performed?

_Aisha:_ Yes, performed. How people answered the questions (referring to Segment Two). Because when we observe the way they (the finalists) answered the questions, we wanted to do the same way too. It challenged our thinking too.

_Huda:_ But, in a good way it’s exposure too! An awareness for ordinary people. Like less exposure to Islamic Knowledge. Like you (Aisha) said, we watch it for the intellectual. So, it has a bit of entertainment, bits of competition and bits of educational contents. If they (the public) don’t know, the least that they will think about the show is, “oh! It’s like this the way people compete to become an Imam” (referring to the context of the show).
Aisha: Yes! And one more is it’s a promotion of religion as a scholastic field. You are upgrading the position of an Imam in society...

(FGD.B1.21:02-21:51)

Huda agreed with Aisha’s explanation because it is a reality TV show involving a competition. Thus, the finalists have been preparing themselves throughout the show. Aisha stated that the contents demonstrate that being an Imam is a profession that requires the person to be intellectually active, critical and knowledgeable. One important criterion that differentiates the segment from others is that the finalists put forward strategies by answering the questions, and by providing references from Al-Quran and Hadith. Indeed, one of the great strengths of an Imam is the ability to be able to support his presentation with reliable resources.

All the participants across the groups were interested in the integrity of the knowledge and arguments the finalists presented, when they quoted references and resources from the Quran and Hadith, in Arabic. This was to demonstrate their ability to present facts and arguments with the integrity of primary references. This might be challenging for some viewers to understand because the language used is specific and taken from a particular context. Abdullah from B3 expressed his concern about the use of Arabic terms and quotations. As he asserted, for a non-Arabic speaker, the use of Arabic terms, meanings and descriptions of terms, needed to be clarified by the finalists, to facilitate understanding and teach the viewers at the same time.

Abdullah: … About using the Arabic word, the lecturer, Imam Muda Jabar, he used some Arabic terms…

Researcher: Yes, which Arabic terms?

Abdullah: I’m not sure. Because I paid attention to the things he said, there are a few terms... For example, he recited some Hadith (in Arabic), and he translated it. But in the middle of his explanation, he used some more Arabic terms without translating them. If I’m not mistaken. But maybe when we used Arabic terms, we seem like we are smart, right?

Researcher: Yes? Look intellectual?

Abdullah: Yes. A high level of Arabic proficiency shows that we have a higher understanding of Islamic knowledge, right? But if we forgot to translate the meaning, it would be worthless, because people don’t understand. At last, nothing is delivered (referring to the content of the answers in Segment Two)

(CBR.S2B3P2.13:57-15:00)
Abdullah was concerned about the Arabic terms used, which were not translated into Malay (the local language). Translation of these terms would assist the viewers in familiarising themselves with the content, so that they would understand the terms if they were used in the show again. In this way, these terms could become part of their vocabulary. The use of Arabic jargon means that this segment could only reach some viewers, who had more exposure to Islamic Education and were practising the religion. As further detailed in Abdullah’s discussion, he understood that the finalists had to be able to provide references from appropriate primary sources, namely Al-Quran and Hadith [the traditions of the prophets]. As Abdullah stated:

*Abdullah: It is informational to have references, and he [IM Hafiz] gave an example from one of the Imams quoting Ibnu Khaldun, which reminded me, since I read bits of the book (Muqaddimah) previously. So, when the Imams gave the quotation, I could refer back to the primary source. In contrast, the less religious viewers might not be able to relate to the references but may still be able to understand in general.*

(CBR.S2B3P2.12:27-12:57)

From the statement, it can be seen that Abdullah reacted to the manifested contents in IM Hafiz’s answer and recalled his readings. He was aware that only some viewers might be able to understand the contents and to appreciate the resources provided in the show. An excellent grasp of Islamic content knowledge and its application would assist the young Imams in their profession, both locally and internationally. This Questions and Answers (QandA) segment can be viewed as an enrichment of the viewer’s ability to learn from the way the young Imams responded, using quotations from trusted resources in their speeches or answers (CBR.S2.B3).

These reactions show that the participants paid attention to the questions and answers in the segment. They commented on the way the finalists presented facts and justified their arguments. They judged the way the finalists answered the questions because, as viewers, they needed to be able to understand the content delivered. As an Imam usually leads in prayers, and he is also the point of reference for the Jemaah or community, segment two portrayed the reality of life as an Imam.

The participants understood that this was an assessment of the way the young Imams communicated the information to various levels of viewers. Since the content was general, with an explanation from an Islamic perspective, the participants were comfortable to assess the delivery of the content. Huda (B1) commented that the session looked planned,
and the rebuttal looked staged. She concluded that the manifestation of the segment might cast doubt on to the validity of the content. Aisha (B1) understood that this segment intended to test the Imams’ knowledge and the way they provided their answers, drawing on appropriate references. The remaining members of B1 supported Aisha. In contrast to the discussion in B1, B2 did not reflect on what they had learnt from the session. B2 rather focused on commenting on the way the Imams answered the questions, and the suitability of the contents to the viewers. B3 highlighted the use of resources, which is interesting, since neither member was from a religious background. Rather, their academic background encouraged them to have an interest in how the common topics could be related to Al-Quran. Therefore, in order for the finalists to win the show, they required more than just the ability to recite appropriately, explain clearly and present critically. They needed to be able to showcase their ability to engage with the audience.

b. Reflections on Segment Three

In segment three, apart from their clear presentation, the participants commented on the finalists’ creativity, sense of stylistic innovation, and appropriate techniques used to deliver the points in Tazkirah. Tazkirah is an Arabic term used to refer to a reminder about the remembrance of responsibility, as a servant of Allah. The Tazkirah consists of a summary of authoritative scholarly work, drawing on truthful references such as verses from Al-Quran or quotations from Hadith that critically reflect upon and guide Muslims in life. This is an important skill for a young Imam because he will practise this skill for the rest of his professional life. In the Commercial Break Reactions (CBR) reported in Chapter Four, the participants of B1 (Muslimah Viewers) were interested in the topic and tended to revise the content that they had engaged with during the commercial break. B1 paid more attention to the topic of relationships and family development, while B2 (Muslims Viewers) and B3 (A Muslim Family) focused on the competition format and the skills of Imams. B3 was interested in the way Tazkirah was appealing to them, namely through the use of storytelling. B2 commented that the format should be conducted using an open audience, which would challenge the Imams’ performances. The Muslimah Viewers (B1) and Muslim Viewers (B2) perceived the content differently. B1 liked the in-depth discussion of the topic, and took note of the essential tips given, while B2 perceived it as a general reminder, and was more relaxed. Nevertheless, the participants shared a common argument about the finalists’ preaching skills, which included styles and techniques.
The techniques used in the Tazkirah showcased the creativity of the finalists. Since the finalists were delivering their Tazkirah on television, they needed to be able to utilise various media, such as music and images to provide increased clarity. The participants commented on the style of presentation and creativity, which can be referred to as practicality in creating engagement. For example, in segment three, where the finalists needed to deliver Tazkirah on stage. Preaching on a platform such as television requires personality and charisma on the part of the presenter. Thus, as the young Imams had trained in the academy to be presentable on television, they developed their unique styles and appearances. The chosen preaching style is essential to creating engagement with the viewers. Each Imam has his own style, which is an essential criterion for winning the competition. Since segment three portrayed the finalists’ preaching skills, Abdullah (B3) mentioned that IM Jabar had a relaxed style in presenting his Tazkirah, while IM Hafiz had a more scripted and dramatic style. Abdullah (B3) and Amal (B3) adored both approaches. Abdullah (B3) commented that both finalists were equally good, and he was impressed by IM Hafiz’s storytelling technique.

However, IM Jabar’s relaxed style did not lead to clarity in the delivery of his Tazkirah. In B1, Amina repeated the tips to the group, since Huda had a question about the first tips, and she did not understand the points made. Aisha assisted Amina by explaining these to the rest of the group. Huda and Wahida questioned: "Is it related to knowledge about marriage?" Amina and Aisha replied: "Yes". Amina responded that it was about marriage, with particular regards to the search for a good spouse, which was supported by Maria and Amina. Maria, Aisha and Amina understood the topic because they were married, and they had learnt about it in a pre-wedding course.

With regards to B2, the participants responded that they could relate to the content, as it was about family and relationships. However, while they could understand the points delivered by IM Hafiz, they were unable to focus on the second Tazkirah delivery by IM Jabar. All of them agreed that in this Tazkirah, IM Jabar did not convey his Tazkirah well enough. They were unable to understand and derive points from the Tazkirah. They questioned the preparation of the finalists for the Tazkirah. When the researcher explained that the finalists were provided with time to prepare their Tazkirah, Faisal was disappointed with IM Jabar. He should have done better, since he had had time to prepare. For B1, the
reason for this underperformance was that IM Jabar had to perform on a media platform. B1's suggestion highlights that they were aware of the techniques employed to attract viewers to engage with the Tazkirah.

The utilisation of multiple audience engagement techniques in delivering Tazkirah showcased the creativity of the finalists. Since the finalists were delivering their Tazkirah on television, they needed to be able to utilise media such as music, images or videos to increase the clarity of delivery for their Tazkirah. By utilising storytelling skills, they could add clarity to their explanation of the topic, since the story generated a general picture in the viewers’ minds. This is an interesting point, as it highlighted their awareness of the importance of engagement in delivering contents.

_Abdullah:_ ... I like the first one. His name is Hafiz (IM Hafiz), right?

_Researcher:_ Yes. He is Imam Muda Hafiz.

_Abdullah:_ He uses examples in his Tazkirah. When he (IM Hafiz) uses examples like stories, it is easy to understand.

_Researcher:_ Yes. I agreed.

_Abdullah:_ It is easy to recall, as if like we remembered the gist of the stories. Or, if the person never heard about the story before, they would be able to remember because of storytelling.

_Researcher:_ So, it does deliver educational messages? The religious messages?

_Abdullah:_ Because when we were in school, we learnt about religion, and the best part was Sirah (stories of the prophets)

_Researcher:_ Yes?

_Abdullah:_ For me, if it involved storytelling it was interesting!

(CBR.S3B3P3.06:47-07:42)

When Abdullah reflected that the storytelling of the Sirah Nabawiyah reminded him of school, he showed that Islamic Education had had an impact on him. For example, when IM Hafiz was about to end his Tazkirah, IM Hafiz engaged in Dua’ [said prayers]. As a reaction to the Dua’, three of the participants in B1 raised their hands as a sign of praying (OBS.S3. Aisha, Huda and Wahida). The gesture of Imam Muda Hafiz, saying prayers on his knees with his hand up in the air, showed that the effect had been dramatic, and useful to Aisha, Huda and Wahida. They looked like they were taking the prayers seriously. This reaction is a sign of engagement, and the participants noted its effect. This indicated that fostering viewers’ engagement is essential, as it can benefit viewers intellectually and emotionally.
In Segment Four, the participants commented on the way the finalists explained the meaning of the verses and Tafsir, or exegesis, by attempting to clarify, explain, interpret or convince through God’s will. B2 and B3 were interested in the translation and Tafsir session presented in the local Malay Language (literal translation: Bahasa Melayu). In B2, Faruq stated that this segment was critical and focused on the memorisation of the verse, and its meaning, through proper recitation. Faisal and Fahad agreed that a proper Quran recitation, fostered through the understanding of meaning, is an essential skill for an Imam. Abdullah (B3) also mentioned that some of the verses recited were not equally divided between finalists. He felt that one of the finalists recited more verses. He also suggested that the verses recited were displayed on the screen so that the viewers could learn and take note. Thus, this signified that besides the Imams having quality recitation skills and engaging in successful memorisation of the Quran, a clear translation was essential to explaining the meaning and Tafsir (interpretation) of the verse, and to create engagement with the viewers. Amina (B1) added another reflection in her group:

_Aisha: _[pointing to the television] I think this [segment four] is good.

_Huda:_ Wait… it’s not the time for discussion yet…

_Maria:_ It’s okay [referring to Huda]

_Aisha:_ Before I forget…I want to reflect while its fresh in my mind (while pointing to her head)

_Huda:_ Oh! Okay-okay…

_Amina:_ Referring to the last question that requires the Imam to continuously utter recitations and explain the verses like Tadabbur (meaning to ponder, reflect and think), I think is very important for an Imam. An Imam, when he recites the Quran, he needs to understand the verses he has recited. So, when he has recited with feeling, for example, Imam Syaari… erm… [fumbled and she corrected] … Imam Mishari…When we listened to his recitation, if he cried, we felt like crying too, even though we didn’t understand the meaning of the verses recited. It is because he understands his recitation and if the Imam only recites the Quran without emotion, we also can feel that the Imam is only reciting or parroting the verses. But like this [segment four], the Imam understands, and he feels what he recites, this kind of Imam that we want.

_Huda:_ Yes, I agree… teacher! (joking manner)

_Wahida:_ I agree.

(CBR.S4B1P4.00:52-01:40)

Amina stated an Imam should not only have good recitation skills but must also be able to understand the verses of the Quran that he has recited. She described in detail the type of Imam she would admire. It would preferably be an Imam with good recitation skills, who
would understand the meaning of the Quran, and would be able to lead prayers, since this would affect the listener or Makmum (the followers in prayer). These commentaries showed that the participants described one of the key characteristics of an Imam. It indicated that they were informed about the qualities of a good Imam, as referenced when they reflected on the finalists’ performances in segment four. In the same segment, the participants commented on the way the finalists delivered their knowledge.

Following the verse translation, B1, B2 and B3 agreed that IM Hafiz offered a clear explanation of the verse and that his presentation of the content was reasonable (see also the reactions in Chapter 4.3.4, p. 133). Amina (B1) related her reflection on segment one, which featured IM Hafiz as an Imam in the Masjid, to the clarity and concise nature of his explanation. Abdullah (B3) stated that IM Hafiz looked comfortable and confident in his translations and tafsir, as compared to IM Jabar, because he stumbled in his translations. Faruq (B2) highlighted that IM Jabar apologised and tried to complete his incomplete translation. B2 challenged this point, by highlighting that the finalists should avoid making mistakes. These reactions show that the participants focused on and were concerned about a clear explanation of knowledge. The participants commented on the recitation and the clarity of the explanation because they were not experts on the content. Since Segment Four was intended to test the finalists’ Al-Quran knowledge, the participants mostly commented on the performance. This segment also required a higher level of understanding of Al-Quran. In the observation, only one participant responded in detail. Amina cross-checked the recitation or the verse’s meaning, and Tafsir. She was brought up in a religious background and had learnt about Islam in depth (see Chapter 4.2.1, p. 106)

_Amina:_ I like to evaluate the finalists’ recitations because that is one of the most important characteristics an Imam should have. That’s why I checked the recitation in a Quran application on my phone to make sure it was correct or not. Even though we knew they are Al-Hafiz (a person who memorises the whole Quran), it is still a competition. So, I did that, became the jury! (laughed)

_Maria:_ Yes, the title is Imam, so the recitation needs to be correct.

_Amina:_ One of the finalists, fumbled. Jabar (IM Jabar), the way he answers...

_Huda:_ He (IM Jabar) recites with ‘feeling’...

_Amina:_ Yes, he did, but in the translation, he is not doing well...

_Maria:_ Stuttered a bit...

_Huda:_ Yes, when he translated the verse, he hesitated...
Amina: My understanding of Arabic is not comprehensive. But Hafiz (IM Hafiz) was excellent!

Huda: Hafiz! Yes! I agree.

(FGD2.B1.17:26-18:22)

Amina’s reactions showed that she understood the criteria of a good Imam and with her religious background, she could evaluate the performance. In contrast, the other participants in B1 commented on the finalists' performances, in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. They appreciated the contents in Segment Four and were intrigued by the preparations made by the finalists to become Imams in their communities. Faisal (B2) concurred, suggesting that the content revealed information about the young Imams’ lifestyles and the ways they were learning.

Faisal: I think this show should push the contents to another level. I don’t want the diary (referring to Kapsul Imam Muda), so I don’t know. What I meant by pushing the contents to another level is to show the Young Imams’ capabilities. If the production team knew that the young Imams had talent and could remember books from the front page to the back page, they should reveal to the audience how they do it.

(FGD1.B2.16:55-17:05)

Faisal suggested that the show should reveal more about the contestants to gratify the viewers. B2 were also keen that the representation of the young Imams to the younger generation should at the same time be relatable to the older generation. These reflections highlighted that the viewers had critically engaged with the contents, which had sparked their interests in knowing more about Imams. They also demonstrated that clarity in the delivery of knowledge is essential to the viewers.

5.4 Negotiating the judgment process

Throughout the Commercial Break Reactions (CBR), the participants expected IM Hafiz to win the title. However, their prediction proved to be wrong, and IM Jabar won the title for season three. Even though their judgments contradicted the judgments of the experts on the show, they realised that they were not following the show since the first episode. Their judgments were therefore restricted to only the final episode. For example, when reflecting on the criteria of a good Imam, Abdullah (B3) stated that Segment Four would determine the winner of the show.

Abdullah: Referring to what I have said previously (in the commercial break reaction), I was surprised why Imam Hafiz didn’t win.

Researcher: Yes, why do you think so?
Abdullah: Because for me, I evaluated him on that segment...

Researcher: Which segment?

Abdullah: The Quran recitation.

Researcher: Oh yes.

Abdullah: He is the ‘champion’ at that (referring to Segment Four)

Researcher: He is good. He has good memorisation of the Quran.

Abdullah: So that means, I will judge the Imam on this segment (referring to Segment Four). That is the segment that will determine who the winner of the show is.

Researcher: The Quran recitation you meant?

Abdullah: Yes! Because I didn’t consider another part. When the finalist recited the verses from Al-Quran, I was drawn to them. In my mind, this is what the show is all about. But as I said, the show considers other criteria to judge.

Abdullah understood that Segment Four was an important segment that determined the winner. This was because he realised that to choose an Imam, the person needed to be able to recite the Quran correctly and then to understand the verses recited. From a similar perspective, Amina (B1) reflected with her group on the benefits that she would gain from the show, by referring to the challenge presented in Segment Four. She questioned why IM Jabar had won the title.

Amina: For me, I like to watch the way an Imam recites the Quran and to evaluate them (referring to the memorisation assessment). That is because this is the main criterion an Imam should have. When the finalist recited the verses, I took the time to check their recitations, to confirm which verse the finalist had recited, and if the finalist was reciting in the correct way. Even though I know them (the finalists) are Hafiz (the person who memorises the Quran). So, we become the assessor, jury (laugh)

Maria: Well, if we refer to the title of the show, it is about Imams. So, their recitation has to be correct.

Amina: But, I’m not satisfied with Imam Muda Jabar’s answers to the translation. (Huda interrupted)

Huda: Jabar’s recitation is mesmerising...

Amina: Yes, I agree with that. But his explanation of the verse, tafsir is not good.

Maria: Yeah, fumbled a bit.

Huda: Yes, when he answered the translation, he fumbled.

Amina: His (referring to IM Jabar) comprehension of Arabic is poor compared to Hafiz (referring to IM Hafiz)

Huda: Yes! Hafiz, I agree. (She agreed that IM Hafiz had a better explanation).

Amina: When we say Jabar won, would they (expert juries) consider this (knowledge about Quran) is crucial for an Imam?
Huda: Well. Maybe we need to check the previous episode.

Amina: Maybe. Because we only watched this episode, right? (Looking at the researcher)

Researcher: Yes. The marks are accumulated from the first episode.

(Amina understood that the main criterion for an Imam was his knowledge about the Al-Quran, based around his correct recitation and understanding of the meaning of the verses. Negotiating her view with Huda and Maria widened her perspective on other criteria that should be accounted for, as the competition assessed all the skills before the selected finalist was crowned as the winner. B2 added another perspective to the rationalisation of IM Jabar as the winner of the show. Faruq explained what he had learnt from IM Jabar:

Faruq: Referring to IM Jabar action (in Segment Four), it is not wrong to admit mistakes in competition. There are no rules about that. He just added two or three words to make sure his previous answers were correct.

Faisal: “I missed...” (quoting IM Jabar’s word)

Faruq: Ahaa! “I missed the previous translation...” The word that he (IM Jabar) used to correct his mistake and to complete the translation of the selected verse of the Quran.

Researcher: Does this change your opinion about Imam Muda Jabar?

Faruq: Yes! Because, usually in a competition, we don’t make mistakes. The fact that he is brave enough to admit his mistakes and corrected it...He just didn’t go with the flow as if nothing was wrong. In the end, he (IM Jabar) won! And it's like... didn’t he make a mistake earlier?

Faisal: Ahaa! (nodded)

Faruq: That is my opinion. How come he can win? Because he did make a mistake. I'm still thinking conservatively that time (referring to the fact that a mistake cannot happen in a competition).

Faisal: That is something we can learn. Means that the Imams are up to another level (looking at Faruq and Fahad)

Faruq: We don’t judge people when they make mistakes.

(everyone nodded as a sign of agreement)

(FGD1.B2.14:18-16:02)

Faruq’s perspective on Imam Muda Jabar’s mistake demonstrated a negotiation between his current experience and his previous understandings. This negotiation highlighted the way he rationalised the situation and learnt from the incidents on the show. Across the groups, the participants rationalised IM Jabar’s victory through the negotiation of their understanding and the results portrayed on the show. They accepted that they had not been entirely exposed to the show, but from the final episode, they could identify the main
criteria of an Imam: to have good recitation skills with regards to the Quran, to understand the meaning of the verses, and to be able to communicate knowledge to the masses. Furthermore, the participants' reflections on Segment Two, Segment Three and Segment Four indicated that they had engaged differently with the manifested contents. The negotiations of their understanding showed different types of engagement with the show, which indicated various levels of informal learning. Therefore, the complex process of engagement shows that the participants may have experienced informal learning.

5.5 Conclusion

Chapter five has highlighted the ways in which the participants perceived and interpreted the show. The reactions (OBS and CBR) from Chapter Four were explained in the reflections obtained from the focus group discussions (FGD) and viewing reflections (Vref), thus referencing a complex process of engagement that started from reactions and continued to reflections. The participants selected the manifested contents that appealed to them and organised their understandings of the show. The participants reflected on the show as a beneficial form of entertainment, which they later thematised according to the segments, to further investigate the ways in which they interpreted and identified themselves as home judges. These were the perceptual processes involved in selecting, organising, interpreting and negotiating their understandings of the show. In Chapter 6, the specific negotiation processes involved in the viewers’ engagement will be mapped, as they showcase the participants’ discernments, indicating informal learning related to the characteristics of an Imam and what it means to be a good Muslim.
Chapter 6: Patterns and levels of engagement with Imam Muda

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six contextualises the findings from Chapter Four and Chapter Five, by placing them on a platform that seeks to reveal the Malaysian Muslims’ engagement with the Islamic television programme, Imam Muda. Chapter Four reported on the findings relating to the participants’ educational backgrounds, the content analysis of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three, and the participants’ reactions to each segment in the commercial breaks. Chapter Five identified the themes that emerged from the participants’ focus group discussions after watching the show. Chapter Six highlights the judgment process involved during the viewing and the discussion, to investigate the ways in which the participants made their judgments. Chapter 7 will further examine the learning that took place and its transformative value, drawing on an Islamic Critical Realist framework (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a).

This chapter identifies the patterns in the participants’ reactions when watching Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda season three and their reflections on it during the focus group discussions. In the process, it seeks to encapsulate the judging process, focusing on the interaction between viewers’ perceptions and the manifested contents in the show. The perceptual processes and discernment involved demonstrated a variation in terms of the participants’ proximity to the Islamic faith and to the specific contents in Imam Muda, within a dynamic level of engagement. The findings also highlight possible learning outcomes, by identifying as and when informal learning took place during the viewings and discussions. Therefore, analysing the patterns in the viewers’ discernment will provide insights into their engagement, to apprehend manifested contents in the show at a more profound level.

6.2 Patterns in the viewers’ discernment

Judging the deserving winner in Kemuncak Imam Muda is a challenging task. This chapter focuses on the negotiation process that occurred in the viewers’ minds and across the discussions with other group members, when it came to judging the winner of the show. This process requires an understanding of the interaction between the participants’ existing knowledge and their new experiences. Information from the show, such as Islamic knowledge in the segments, evaluation of the finalists’ performances, the influence of
peers, personal expectations and emotions contributed to the participants’ processes of discernment. These means of empirical experience, combined with the manifested contents, are evidence of a dynamic form of interaction between the participants. For example, when the participants commented on the finalists’ performances, they were associating themselves with the finalists beyond merely their role as laymen viewers, thus becoming home judges in the process. The researcher attempted to investigate the participants’ interactions with the manifested contents and discussed the possible learning outcomes with the participants, constructed through their engagement with the show. The discussion of the participants’ viewing experiences, as described in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, identified the ways in which each group experienced the assessments presented in the segments and the contents from the whole show. Subsequently, this chapter will map the patterns of variation and explain the reasons for variations in the participants’ experiences. The participants’ awareness of the manifested contents assisted them in discerning critical aspects from the show in a new and more sophisticated way. This is because the participants’ variations in experience indicated the possibility of learning.

When the participants watched Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, they experienced the manifested content simultaneously. They reacted to the contents that appealed to them and evaluated the contents from the vantage point of their existing or current knowledge and experience. Subsequently, the participants organised, interpreted and negotiated their understandings of the whole show through their discussions in the focus groups. Identifying critical aspects (dimensions of variation) and critical features (values along the dimension) will assist in understanding the patterns of variation. This process is adapted from Variation Theory, which was developed by Marton and colleagues (Marton, 1986, 1992; Marton and Booth, 2000; Marton and Tsui, 2004). This theory encourages us to examine critical aspects of a learning experience and posits discernment as a key aspect. In this way, the participants’ ability to discern, make comparisons, and associations were the dimensions of variation that demonstrated their engagement with the show. Thus, in this chapter, I seek to establish the critical aspects of how participants understood and interpreted the manifested contents. They also distinguished between the various contents of the show and further explained their interpretations with other group members. The negotiation process, from the perspective of educational outcomes, emerged from verbal responses that showcased their knowledge about Islam and life experiences as Muslims in Malaysia.
Furthermore, the critical features that became the focus of this study were the Islamic educational contents identified, using the Ta’dib bil al-Risalah matrix (Patahol Wasli, 2014). Content analyses assisted in identifying the critical features, which were the educational values from the manifested contents in the show (see the analysis of reactions in Chapter 4.3, p. 111). Each segment had a different emphasis in terms of assessments (critical features). Furthermore, the ways in which the participants perceived the contents differed. However, these responses were unified with the key research question, which was to understand the way Islamic reality TV shows such as *Imam Muda* can be educational from the viewers’ perspective. The complex processes involved in the participants’ discernment were revealed in patterns of variation, such as contrast, separation, generalisation and fusion (see Åkerlind, 2008, pp. 637–638; Ling Lo, 2012, pp. 83–102; Marton and Pong, 2005; Marton and Tsui, 2004, pp. 16–17). Below I offer a brief description of these patterns, which will be elaborated on in more detail later, drawing on specific examples.

- **Contrast** is when the participants recognised the values of an aspect. The specific aspect of this study is the manifested contents in *Imam Muda*. Manifested contents are the contents observable by the viewers without further effort required to analyse the meaning behind the content. In the observations and the focus group discussions, the values related to the fact that the participants were aware of the finalists’ assessments and genres of the show. The participants selected the contents that appealed to them, described the contents portrayed and offered their judgments.

- **Separation** occurred when the participants could separate aspects with varying values from invariant aspects. The invariant aspect proposed by the researcher in the focus group discussion was the perspective of education applied to the manifested contents in *Imam Muda*. The participants reflected that the show was more entertaining than educational, based on the element of competition and drama on reality TV. However, they accepted the fact that the show is informational and beneficial, depending on the viewer's readiness to watch the show. The participants also stated that in order to learn from a TV show, it should be more a form of direct content delivery such as a talk show, forum, or questions and answers genre, rather than reality TV. The way the participants separated the entertainment value indicated that they were in the process defining the values of education that exist in *Imam Muda*. 
• Generalisation was engaged in when the participants experienced various appearances of the same value, referring specifically to the manifested educational contents. The participants reflected on their formal learning and life experiences as they rationalised their judgments towards the show. This was because formal learning experiences that take place in school and through life experiences are sources of knowledge unique to each individual. This reflection indicated that the participants’ viewing experiences acted as a form of informal learning that allowed them to actively relate their knowledge and experience to the content they were judging.

• Fusion was when the participants were experiencing several critical aspects simultaneously, such as being entertained and engaging in informal learning. Watching Imam Muda is entertaining as it showcases young Imams who are in a competition to become the best. Assessments that challenged the finalists also informed the participants about the characteristics of becoming a good Imam. Islamic values in the show existed not only as a concept or genre. Their function was to provide information that would later be absorbed by the viewers. Therefore, these patterns would assist in revealing variations in the participants’ experiences that might indicate informal learning about Imams and their characteristics.

Investigating learning in informal settings, such as when watching television, is challenging because learning is usually incidental rather than intentional. It was appropriate to situate the learning in an informal setting, because the Imam Muda Reality TV show is entertaining and at the same time, informs people about Imams in the modern world. Any form of engagement offers a probable learning experience for the viewers. This study started to unpack the participants’ engagement with the show using variation theory (see Marton and Booth, 2000) because variations in experience are necessary as a pre-condition for learning. Learning in variation theory has three integral parts: discernment, variation and simultaneity (Bussey et al., 2013; Ling Lo, 2012). In this study, I examined the participants' comments (a process of discerning the content), comparisons (a process of comparing opinions and understandings) and associations (a process of finding relations and links) with the manifested contents, which indicated the possibilities of informal learning. The whole process was relatively interconnected with their existing knowledge and experiences. Thus, the way the participants judged Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda season three is explained using the patterns in the variations.
Nevertheless, the participants’ learning experiences existed independently of the knowledge of the researcher. The researcher utilised Critical Realism, which refers to a philosophical branch that brings together a philosophy of science and a philosophy of social science (see Bhaskar, 2008b), to investigate learning derived from the participants’ depth of understanding. When the participants verbalised or discussed the latent content from Imam Muda, this showed the depth of their understanding of a phenomenon in the show. This assisted the researcher in coming to a more comprehensive understanding, since the evaluation was limited to empirically observed and analysed events such as TV viewing and the group's discussion. The three domains of reality in Critical Realism are: the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 17).

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Bhaskar's (2017, p. 17) transcendental realism as his new philosophy of science featured the idea that reality is stratified into three concepts. First is the distinction between structures or mechanism, second is events and conjunction, third is the empirical experience. The domain of the empirical was referenced when the participants commented upon and reacted to their observable experiences. The domain of the actual was when the participants could explain what ‘actually’ happened using the rationalisation of their previous knowledge or experiences in response to the manifested contents that appealed to them. Finally, the domain of the real was evidenced when the participants could understand the latent contents of the show from their discussion and analysis. Therefore, the findings in this chapter will proceed by firstly presenting the participants’ reactions and reflections using variation theory, before mapping the patterns in the overlapping domains of reality through a critical realist ontology. The researcher will break down the processes into the processes of contrast, separation, generalisation and fusion, as defined (Ling Lo, 2012, pp. 83–102; Marton and Tsui, 2004, pp. 16–17) in order to investigate the negotiation between the participants' judgments and the manifested contents. Subsequently, the researcher will explain the participants’ level of engagement and will categorise the patterns using the domain of realities.
6.2.1 Contrast

Contrast was a state of differentiation indicated by the participants’ ability to establish a comparison regarding the manifested contents from the Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda reality TV show. The participants commented on a critical feature from the show and discussed this with the group. In order to experience contrast, the participants drew on their prior experience of watching any genre of television programming or a similar reality TV show. The participants compared the selected contents in order to organise and establish a hierarchy of their understanding of the show. Utterances regarding contrasts are compiled and thematised into the critical aspects of the manifested contents, such as comparisons of the finalist, the segments and the genre of the show.

a. Comparison of finalists’ knowledge, experience and talents

The first contrast is between the finalists. In Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda season three, the finalists were IM Naufal, IM Hafiz and IM Jabar. After nine episodes of the weekly challenges, their accumulative marks ranked them in the top three, thus qualifying them for the finals. The finalists’ final assessment on stage consisted of their final task in their hometown, and questions and answers with a mystery guest, Tazkirah and Syafawi Ulumul Quran. In the study, the participants commented on the finalists’ performance (critical aspects) based on the finalists’ knowledge, experience and talents (critical features).

Knowledge and experience

The participants across the group commented on the age of the finalists when the third placing was announced at the end of Segment Two. They started to offer judgments of their own and reflected on the performances of the three finalists in Segment One and Segment Two. Between the three finalists, IM Naufal was the youngest, at 21 years old, while IM Hafiz was 27 years old and IM Jabar was 28 years old. With the age gap, IM Jabar and IM Hafiz had a distinctive advantage, with their knowledge and experience. Amina (B1) stated that IM Naufal was still young and because of his age, he lacked knowledge and experience. B1 agreed with her point, and they accepted that IM Naufal deserved to be placed in third. Meanwhile, in B2, the participants noted a further weakness of IM Naufal, from another perspective. Fahad (B2) pointed out that IM Naufal failed to provide a fruitful argument or to address the questioner appropriately, since the questioner was an academician. They agreed that IM Naufal’s way of answering the question might be more suitable for a younger audience. On a similar note, Abdullah in B3 stated that being young did not mean
IM Naufal was not qualified, but rather it showed that there was room for improvement if he was to become a shining beacon for the next generation of Imams (See the analysis of reactions in Chapter 4.3.2, p. 122).

The participants discussed the age gap because IM Naufal’s performance was seen as amateur. They agreed that because of the age gap, IM Naufal was a more suitable contestant for a younger audience. The participants came to the conclusion that based on IM Naufal’s presentation of facts and quotation of references, he lacked exposure. IM Naufal’s points were quite general and lacked a depth of knowledge compared to IM Hafiz and IM Jabar. Both IM Hafiz and IM Jabar had graduated from universities in the Middle East, and at the time of the show, they were pursuing their postgraduate studies at a local university, while IM Naufal was still an undergraduate. IM Hafiz’s and IM Jabar’s grasp of Islamic content knowledge was an advantage. Besides, IM Naufal also lacked experience compared to IM Hafiz and IM Jabar. IM Hafiz was an Imam in his local mosque, and IM Jabar was a lecturer in a college. These differences in exposure to knowledge and experience led the participants to state that Imam Muda gave a scholastic view of the profession of an Imam.

Nevertheless, the participants were impressed that IM Naufal could get to the finals and this showed that he had made a big effort and had striven to be the best. IM Naufal also had the talent and looks to become a Muslim role model for the younger generations. Other contestants on the show who were about the same age as IM Naufal were IM Omar and IM Naim. Hence, this comparison shows that the participants understood the importance of knowledge and experience for an Imam, and could differentiate between an amateur and experienced Imam.

**Talent**

The contrast between participants extended to the comments they made about the finalists’ talents. After the third placing was announced, the participants continued their comparisons between the two finalists. They were unsure who should be the winner of the show. However, they commented on the finalists’ talent in the following two segments. In Segment Three, the participants were complimentary of the way IM Hafiz presented his Tazkirah. They were interested in his storytelling abilities, and his ending of his Tazkirah with Dua (prayer). Aisha, Huda and Wahida in B1 raised their hands and said “Amin” to the Dua. Abdullah (B3) stated that the material of IM Hafiz was dramatic and scripted, which successfully captured his attention. He compared the two finalists and praised the
way that IM Hafiz reminded him of his school times. He told the researcher that he learnt about Islamic civilisation by listening to the stories of the prophet, Sahabah, or Islamic scholars. Some of the participants had a different opinion about IM Jabar’s talent in delivering Tazkirah. B1 was a bit unclear about IM Jabar’s tips, so they decided to repeat the tips given. B1 supported the commentaries from B2, agreeing that the points delivered by IM Jabar were unclear. Faisal and Faruq (B2) stated their disappointment with IM Jabar's Tazkirah. However, according to B3, IM Jabar's style was quite relaxed and unscripted (See the analysis of reactions in Chapter 4.3.3, p. 128).

Another contrast between the two finalists was evidenced in Segment Four. All the participants were impressed with IM Jabar’s voice and his Al-Quran recitation. With his advantageous background as a Qari, he was able to engage the participants. IM Hafiz’s recitation was proper because they could compare his recitation to one of the famous Imams in Saudi Arabia. However, the participant praised IM Hafiz more for his translation and explanation of the verse. IM Hafiz spoke explicitly and delivered his points concisely. The competitor, IM Jabar, was not doing well because he slipped up in the translation and forgot some of the interpretation. However, he mentioned to the juries and Mudir that his previous translation was incomplete, and he tried to revise his answers before answering the next question. B2 stated that it is a noble act to admit mistake in a competition, even though it seems like an advantage to the opposite competitor (See the analysis of reactions in Chapter 4.3.4, p. 133). In sum, the participants’ ability to compare indicated that they understood the characteristics of an Imam through their exposure, as evidenced through having good communication and Akhlaq in the show.

b. Comparison of the segments’ difficulty and suitability

The second contrast relates to the difficulties involved in the assessments for each segment in Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda. The participants discussed the level of difficulties in relation to viewers’ level of Islamic exposure and their readiness to understand the contents. Thus, the participants reflected on the suitability of the content, arguing that some segments were more accessible to a broader range of viewers, while other segments were more viewer-specific. The ability to see the whole picture or understand the manifested contents (critical features) and evaluate criteria in the show, such as the level of difficulty and suitability of the segments (critical aspects), indicated that the participants viewed themselves not only as judges but also as learners, at the same time.
Difficulty

Syafawi Ulumul Quran in Segment Four is considered the most challenging assessment in the final of *Imam Muda* season three, followed by Tazkirah in segment three, Questions and Answers in segment two, and the finalists’ hometown task in segment one. These segments are difficult because the finalists need to be very careful not to make any mistakes in the recitation of Al-Quran, focusing on conveying the precise and correct meaning and translation of the verse. Aisha (B1) and Amina (B1) stated that Syafawi Ulumul Quran is challenging, and that they had learnt a lot because they had listened to the correct recitation, noted the translation and contemplated the meaning of the verse. According to Faisal (B2), this was the most laborious assessment, as it required the Imam to master the content by heart. Faisal justified his statement by comparing Syafawi Ulumul Quran to Tazkirah. Tazkirah can be delivered in the mother tongue, which is less challenging than memorising the Quran. Faruq supported the assertion that memorising Al-Quran is challenging and that the content of *Imam Muda* can provide an excellent example to the younger generation Huffaz,\(^{66}\) as a source of encouragement and motivation. Since Segment Four was the last assessment, Abdullah (B3) concluded that Syafawi Ulumul Quran was the segment that determined the winner. Thus, the participants understood the difficulties of each assessment for an Imam (See the analysis of reflections in Chapter 5.3, p. 158). In a focus group discussion, Huda (B1) mentioned a comparison between the Questions and Answers section (Segment Two), which is more general and accessible to general viewers, and Tazkirah (Segment Three), which is more religious and factually oriented, and thus limits its understanding to literate Islamic viewers. She related this also to the viewers’ readiness to identify which segments were more difficult.

Suitability

Segment One and Segment Two portrayed general content that could appeal to a broader audience. The manifested contents in the first segment were the finalists’ tasks in their hometown, and in the second segment, the questions and answers with a mystery guest, which discussed social problems. These two segments were appealing to general viewers, for example, non-Muslim viewers or less religious viewers, because viewers could use their common sense and relate this to their surroundings, to understand the manifested contents. B2 reflected in detail that the first segment’s task execution VT playback was suitable for

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\(^{66}\) Huffaz is an Arabic plural term for Hafiz. Hafiz refers to a person who memorises the whole Quran.
all viewers because of its general content, while the Q&A session in Segment Two was an academic contest, which required a certain level of viewer understanding. They agreed that since this is a competition, there are specific standards that need to be achieved to crown the best Imam (See the analysis of reflections in Chapter 5.3, p. 158).

Segment Three and Segment Four are more specific to the viewers who have an interest in learning about Islam or have a higher understanding of Islam. The manifested contents in Segment Three contain reminders of Al-Quran, current fatawa, the study of Aqidah, Ibadah, Adab and Akhlaq and Sirah Nabawiyah. This segment is suitable for moderately religious viewers since the title references a family relationship and the content is presented with stories, Islamic facts and life advice that might appeal to some viewers. Segment Four is specific to a higher understanding of Al-Quran because it requires the viewers' ability to listen to the quality of recitation of the Quran. With regards to the translation of the verses, this requires a background in Arabic so that viewers can understand and assess the translated meaning. Knowledge of Islamic sciences is also essential to contemplate the meaning of the verses of Al Quran because the participant needs to be able to understand the references provided by the finalists and review these with primary sources (See the analysis of reflections in Chapter 5.3.2, p. 162).

Wahida (B1) referred to the Questions and Answers (Q&A) segment and the Syafawi Ulum Al-Quran assessment as a point of comparison. She identified that the Q&A is suitable for a standard level of viewers, while Syafawi Al Quran is more suitable to those who have a higher level of understanding of the Quran. She wanted to highlight the segments that would be only suitable for less educated viewers. Most of the participants stated that Segment Four was critical and they agreed that this segment was an essential indicator of the winner of the show. They appreciated the Tadabbur [contemplation with regards to the meaning of the verses of the Quran] session because they could relate to and contemplate the meaning of the verses with regards to their existing knowledge and experience. Through the comparisons, it was evident that the participants’ level of understanding about Islam was mostly on a moderate level. They learnt about Islamic Education in school, and their

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67 The Arabic plural term for Fatwa, meaning a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognised authority.

68 An Islamic term meaning "creed".

69 An Arabic word meaning service or servitude. In Islam, ibadah is usually translated as "worship", and ibadat—the plural form of ibadah—refers to Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) of Muslim religious rituals.

70 A literary genre that developed out of narrative histories of Muhammad’s life and activities, often comparing him to other prophets.
surroundings helped to scaffold Islamic learning, relative to their cultural context. The participants understood that among the main characteristics of an Imam is to have Tartil Quran recitation skills, with knowledge of the exegesis and the ability to apply the content to themselves and society. The participants’ ability to state the difficulty and suitability of the contents in each segment indicated an increase in their understanding of criteria for being a successful young Imam (See the analysis of reflections in Chapter 5.3.2, p. 162).

c. Comparison of Islamic entertainment with other shows

The third contrast relates to the participants’ perceptions of Islamic TV shows, as reflected in their comments comparing the final of Imam Muda season 3 with other Islamic TV shows. For example, Huda (B1) compared Kemuncak Imam Muda with Akademi Fantasia. These programmes have the same base as reality TV shows that scout for new talent, but the contents are different. Imam Muda aims to find the best Imam and thus is more oriented towards Islamic content, while Akademi Fantasia aims to find the best singer, which is more entertainment-oriented. Huda’s statement about the two perspectives showed that she tried to place her answers in the context of the discussion that reality TV can be educational as well as entertaining. At the same time, her comment demonstrates an awareness of the differences in approach utilised with regards to the different contents (FGD.B1.17:08-17:42). Therefore, by comparing Imam Muda with the same genre or another genre, my research seeks to bring another level of understanding to how participants can understand and benefit from reality TV shows.

Islamic-based TV shows

The first contrast relates to the comparison of the segments in Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda (IM) with other Islamic Reality TV shows, such as Pencetus Ummah (PU) and Daie Millenia (DM). In the first commercial break, Maria (B1) was intrigued as to which season of Medan Imam Muda she was currently watching. The moderator explained that the show last aired in 2012 and a new show had come out afterwards, which was called Pencetus Ummah (PU). Maria recalled her experiences of watching Pencetus Ummah (PU) and mentioned one of the contestants from the show in season two. She tried to assemble the similarities between the two shows so that she could understand the show she was watching. Subsequently, Huda (B1) prompted a question about the difference between Imam Muda and Pencetus Ummah. The moderator explained that Imam Muda focused on the search for a young Imam while the purpose of Pencetus Ummah was more to establish
a Muslim celebrity preacher, such as Azhar Idrus, in Malaysia. The young Imams who graduated from this show were licensed and eligible to be appointed as official Imams to lead prayers in local mosques (CBR.S1.B1).

The participants compared the two shows in terms of their similarities in content, which were Questions and Answers from the audience or guest in Segment Two, and Tazkirah in Segment Three. In *Pencetus Ummah*, the contestant in the show was required to deliver a Tazkirah and answer open questions from the audience relating to the weekly theme. According to Fahad (B3), PU was more interesting to watch by virtue of its use of media and creativity in the Tazkirah delivery (CBR.S3.B2). Faisal and Faruq agreed that PU was more casual and inspirational to watch. B2 detailed their discussion about the improvements in PU, in comparison to IM. Without the moderator's interruption, Faisal (B2) took the chance to explain the nature of each show, describing how the shows were different mainly in terms of their primary objectives. Faisal clarified to the group that there was a difference between the two shows because Imam Muda was rooted in the Arabic language via the term Imam, which means the leader of prayers. To become an Imam, the contestant needs to be more thoughtful of their approach and actions with Thiqah [literal meaning: Confidence, Trust, Truth] as this could affect the social perception of their society. *Pencetus Ummah* (PU) is more casual and straightforward because the contestants are mainly preachers, and they can be humorous sometimes. Faisal (B1) further explained that most Imams can be preachers. However, not all preachers can be Imams, if there is someone more qualified than them. Fahad agreed with Faisal and justified that *Pencetus Ummah* is engaging because of the way the contestants present their topics in a creative way, by utilising music, props and graphics. After Segment Four, the participants in B1 reflected on the final of Imam Muda season three. Aisha preferred Imam Muda (IM) than Daie Millenia (DM) because in DM the content portrayed too much drama, with tears and conflicts (CBR.S4.B1). Maria also stated that she preferred IM than PU because PU is more about the contestants’ popularity and some of the judges on the show are celebrities (CBR.S4.B1).

The second contrast is between Kemuncak Imam Muda season three and other Islamic TV shows, with particular regards to the comparison between Islamic reality TV shows and Islamic TV shows portraying Islamic contents within a different genre of television programming. Each genre proposes a different orientation with regards to the content presented and different target viewers. Kemuncak Imam Muda can be seen as a TV show
that focuses on entertainment value, because the competitive element is more dominant than the educational element (FGD. B1, B2, B3). All the participants came to a consensus that to obtain knowledge from an Islamic TV show, they would have to choose other shows such as al-Kulliyyah or Halaqah (B1 and B3). This is because Islamic TV shows like Kuliyyah or Halaqah are oriented towards sharing knowledge of specific topics without any competitive elements. Viewers only watch the show to learn. Therefore, the participants’ comparison of Kemuncak Imam Muda with other Islamic TV shows indicated that they were able to identify Islamic educational TV shows for the purpose of intentional learning.

Entertainment-based TV shows

Another contrast is Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda’s relationship with other TV shows, which are entertainment-oriented. Faisal (B2) established a comparison by giving the example of the Miss World competition, in the jetting session whereby Miss World needs to answer the jury’s questions. Faisal assumed that the answers given by the finalists in Imam Muda were general and rhetorical (CBR.S2.B2). On the same note, Amina (B1), agreed that the questions in Segment Two were broad questions and only required the finalists to answer them using their knowledge about current issues from an Islamic perspective (CBR.S2.B1). Her opinion was probably influenced by her family background and her educational background in Islamic Studies. Another perspective came from Abdullah (B3), who stated that the show did appeal to the younger viewers, but the contents covered too much material. Abdullah gave an example of American Idol, as it showcases musical talent, which is a specific criterion to judge, while in Imam Muda, the judging criteria are a bit looser, because the show covers a broader base. He suggested that it would be better if Imam Muda had a similar style to American Idol. The various criteria and assessments in Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda made it hard for him to decide who was the best young Imam (FGD.B3). The participants also compared the number of prizes in IM with other entertainment competition-based reality shows. B1 and B2 stated that entertainment shows offer more prizes than Islamic shows. They had seen other TV shows that gave higher value prizes to their winners, and they would like to see religious TV shows being treated the same way. This is because of their assumption that Islamic TV shows do not have big sponsors, and thus the prize for the winner is much less than for entertainment TV shows. However, in Imam Muda, they were surprised that a religious show could offer big prizes like other entertainment shows (CBR.S5.B1). The participants’
ability to differentiate between Imam Muda and other entertainment-based shows indicated that they were aware of the potential of Islamic Reality TV as a beneficial alternative form of entertainment.

6.2.2 Separation

This pattern highlights the way the participants were aware of the value of comparing and contrasting various values (for example, one of the values in this study is the finalist). Therefore, the finalists became ‘separated’ from the rest of the manifested contents. This separation opened up the dimension of variation, such as the differences in finalists’ level of knowledge, experience and talent. This showed that the participants could focus on the value independently as it became visible through varying critical aspects. In order to investigate the way that the participants might learn from the Imam Muda reality TV show, the researcher asked the participants a question about how they perceived the contents of the show. The participants started to organise their understandings and interpretations of the show in the focus group discussions. They verbalised their opinions and explained their rationalisations to further define their understandings of the show. The aim was to investigate the participants’ discussions through the dimension of education. The findings show how the participants determined educational contents and vice versa. Therefore, understanding separations in the various perceptions are essential to identify any informal learning that took place.

The participants reflected that the show was based on a feature proposed by the researcher. Reflecting on a feature such as educational value from the reality TV show is challenging because it requires the viewers to be media literate in order to be able to read the messages put forward. During the viewing, the participants responded to different critical aspects in the show, depending on which manifested contents appealed to them. These responses cross-referenced the data from the content analysis, observations and focus group discussions, thus assisting in gaining a deeper understanding of the participants’ perceptions of the show. The perceptions were analysed to highlight the dimension of education, to further investigate learning in an informal setting. In B1, Kemuncak Imam Muda was seen as informational because any informational show is educational, according to Wahida (B1). However, according to Amina (B1) and Huda (B1), this depends on the viewer's readiness to learn. Aisha (B1) stated that the show is more entertaining than educational because it is a competition, and Maria (B1) added that if the viewers would like to learn from television, they should instead watch more Islamic knowledge-oriented.
shows, for example, Halaqah or al Kuliyyah. Furthermore, according to B2, Kemuncak *Imam Muda* can be seen as entertainment because of its element of ‘drama’ that exists in the genre of reality TV. Faisal (B2) was glad that the show had ended. On the same note, Fahad (B2) mentioned that the main focus of the show is not to educate because it is a competition. Faruq (B2) stated that the aim of this show is to select specific people to hold the title and to disseminate information to other Muslims, so that they can be more open to the idea of Imams. Abdullah (B3) started the discussion by mentioning that the primary purpose of the show is its entertaining nature, but later he suggested that it is a beneficial form of entertainment. Amal (B3) supported this statement and added that the show would appeal to younger viewers. From these reflections, it can be seen that the participants perceived the show as an alternative form of entertainment for Muslim viewers. Nevertheless, it showed a significant process of contrasting and separating. In order to learn about education, the participants might need to determine what entertainment means to them. This basic definition would assist them in understanding the educational element of reality shows like *Imam Muda*.

The way the participants separated the value of entertainment indicated that in order to understand shows’ educational value, they needed to compare *Imam Muda* to other genres of Islamic TV programming. Across the group, they understood that the critical feature of the show is entertainment. The critical aspects that emerged were the show as a competition that contained dramatic elements. Drawing from this, the participants negotiated their understandings of entertainment and educational contents. The participants were informed that the way they saw an educational TV programme (critical feature) emerged from the information they had obtained in the manifested contents (critical aspect) and knowledge delivery orientation, such as the forum and questions and answers TV show (critical aspect). From this contrast, the participants were able to conceptualise the educational values in *Imam Muda* that ‘separated’ it from entertainment, and indicated that they were aware of the informal learning they had gained from the show. However, contrast and separation are not complete without the ability to look for similarities and relations within the relevant dimension. Thus, the participants’ generalisations about the show will assist in investigating the variation process of learning gained from *Imam Muda*. 
6.2.3 Generalisation

This pattern highlights the ways in which the participants were aware of other aspects that were equally crucial in their experiencing of a phenomenon. To generalise about the idea of education, the participants needed to experience similar reactions to the manifested contents, specific definitions of various aspects, and different functions of assessment on the show. The invariant critical feature separated in this study is education and the critical aspects that emerged from the participants’ reflections regarding the manifested contents in Imam Muda are informational. For them, to learn from a TV show, it needs to be a knowledge delivery-oriented TV programme. The participants’ reflections also point out other critical aspects that are equally as important to education, namely the role of learning experiences and life experiences. This is because learning from these experiences can be gained in an informal way. Education goes beyond acquiring knowledge. It also refers to the ability to apply this knowledge in practice. From watching Imam Muda, the participants can state their judgments, such as making a comparison between the finalists, segments and other shows. In the discussion, the participants’ understandings focused on ‘separating’ the entertainment and educational contents into their respected dimensions. Thus, as can be observed from the way the participants generalised from their learning and life experiences, education is about more than just knowledge transfer.

a. Relationship to the formal learning experience

Everyone has their own learning experiences, which are unique and personal. In response to the show, the participants elaborated on their judgments, providing examples from their formal learning experiences and relating these to the points of discussion. For example, the participants were aware of the application of Islamic content knowledge from the VT playback of the finalists' task in their hometowns. They stated that from watching this show, their knowledge and experience were enhanced. Maria (B1) described how her Islamic Education in school was not very helpful for her to learn about Islam because the subject was less crucial than for her to score well in her examination. To put this into context, to excel in the sciences is important for getting into universities. Wahida (B1) added to Maria's points by stating that she studied Islamic Education only to pass the examinations. In response, Amina (B1) then said that Islamic educators should be more active and creative in delivering the subject. Aisha (B1) told the group about her experience in boarding school. She had had more exposure to Islamic Education after attending a religious school, and she was able to practise what she had learnt. Aisha (B1) then compared the syllabus of Islamic
subjects in religious schools and non-religious schools. She found that the programme in non-religious schools is more basic than in Islamic religious schools, where more in-depth knowledge is acquired. B1 discussed their personal learning experiences related to Islamic Education, which impacted their life perspectives. They understood their differences in perspective and complimented each other’s opinions.

Another perspective on learning experiences highlighted by the participants was that they were aware of criticality in the finalists’ answers. Aisha (B1) compared the viewers’ academic background since having less educational background would affect the way they watched the show. Aisha (B1) asserted that more academic viewers would be interested in the show by virtue of the way the Imams made references to Al-Quran and Hadith, in addition to the criticality of their arguments. The participants also learnt to quote the references. They understood that to become a successful young Imam; one needs to be able to provide trustful references from Al-Quran and Hadith. Abdullah (B3) stated that it is informational to have references when presenting facts, and he gave an example from one of the finalists (IM Hafiz) quoting Ibnu Khaldun. This reminded him of the contents since he had previously read sections of the book (Muqaddimah). Thus, when the finalists offered the quotations, he could refer to the primary source. The way the young Imams responded using quotations from Al-Quran or Hadith in their speeches or answers provided an additional layer of enrichment for the audience. In contrast, the less religious viewers might not be able to relate to the references but would still be able to understand the manifested content in general. Aisha (B1) and Abdullah (B3) related their previous learning experiences to a more specific moment or manifested contents in Imam Muda.

Furthermore, Abdullah (B3) were aware of Arabic words used in Segments Two, Three and Four. Abdullah (B3) highlighted the use of Arabic terms in making references to the quotations of Al-Quran or Hadith. Abdullah (B3) said it was essential to clarify the Arabic terms used so that they could learn and familiarise themselves with the new vocabulary. Participants in B2 pointed out that they were learning how to deliver a good Tazkirah or speech. Faruq (B2) stated that by using dialogue or storytelling in a Tazkirah, the results would be more impactful. The participants in B1 learnt about the essence of becoming an Imam. B1 learnt how to choose an Imam. They realised that it is essential to know the characteristics of an Imam because they are the leaders in society and in the family. B1 also learnt to view an Imam in a scholastic way. Aisha (B1) stated that this show can be seen as a scholastic way to promote Imams. Aisha (B1) claimed that the show is upgrading the
profession of an Imam to the same level as other academic professions. Therefore, the ability to experience this learning from watching *Imam Muda* indicated that the participants could relate to learning in an informal context.

**b. Relationship to participants’ life experiences**

Life experience is another critical aspect that influenced the participants’ understandings of education. The participants commented on Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three by relating the content portrayed with their interpretations of an Imam’s role in the community, based on their life experiences. The participants understood that Imams are role models in society. The participants reflected that the finalists' assignment in their hometowns was one of the ways in which they could connect to their community. This was also an alternative approach that demonstrated they were role models for the younger generation. Faruq (B2) provided an example for the manifested contents in the Imam Jabar task at his alma mater. Faruq (B2) and Fahad (B2) praised that action because it showed the juniors that they could become someone successful. They described the action of becoming a role model and contributing to the community based on their experience of giving back to their alma mater (FGD.B2). In another event, Aisha (B1) told the group that her neighbour had auditioned but had not got through. It is interesting how she related the brand of *Imam Muda* to its impact on society. This showed that the younger generation of Imams is essential to provide a role model for young Muslims. These life experiences were interpreted in their reflections on the finalists’ task in their hometowns.

Moreover, the participants also viewed an Imam as a concerned citizen. The participants cared about the Muallaf, and Aisha (B1) identified a similar theme in the finalists’ tasks. She understood that it is an Imam’s responsibility to care for the Asnaf.71 On the same note, B2 focused on the reality of the poor in the village. They had sympathy with the old lady in the case of IM Jabar. Faruq (B2) said that the money the old lady received from the government was not enough. He spoke based on his judgment of the reality of life, as related to his life experiences. From these distinctive relationships, it can be seen that the participants generalised about the manifested contents in *Imam Muda*. The results from the contrast and separation assisted the participants in generalising, as these enabled them to rationalise their judgments. Nevertheless, informal learning is about more than just the ability to focus on one dimension but is also about taking into account other important

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71 Asnaf refers to a group of people who are eligible to receive Zakat (money).
dimensions that create reality shows as forms of entertainment. When the participants cast their judgments, a complex engagement process was involved, which showcased the simultaneous awareness of several critical aspects in *Imam Muda*, and explored how these aspects related to their perceptions and interpretations.

### 6.2.4 Fusion

Fusion occurred when the participants experienced a variation in multiple critical aspects that were part of the whole experience. The participants understood that the show was more than just a form of entertainment. They gained information about Imams and reflected on this in their current context. An understanding of a phenomenon or an object sometimes depends on experiencing simultaneous critical aspects. In this case, they could enjoy the show because of its entertainment value and could informally learn about Imams at the same time. Thus, this experience highlighted *Imam Muda* as an alternative form of Islamic entertainment, as well as the importance of having clarity when viewing an entertainment show.

#### a. Alternative Islamic entertainment

The participants described *Imam Muda* as an alternative form of Islamic entertainment, as compared to universal Islamic TV programmes in Malaysia, such as Al-Kulliyyah, Forum Perdana Islam, Halaqah and other shows of the reality TV genre. The similarities in manifested contents that they observed within *Imam Muda* were the use of Arabic terms, references from Al-Quran and Hadith and examples from Sirah Nabawiyyah. The participants understood that *Imam Muda* was a beneficial competition, as it provided information about young Imams and Islam. The participants learnt that some improvements should be implemented to Islamic entertainment, when watching the show. By watching *Imam Muda*, the participants suggested ways of improving the show, at the same time as they were defining Islamic entertainment. From watching this show, the participants emphasised the clarity of the contents, namely the explanation of Arabic terms used. The participants also appreciated that the show’s knowledge is delivered by experts in the field to maintain the trustworthiness of the subject knowledge presented.
b. Clarity of knowledge in entertainment shows

It is essential to convey clarity of knowledge in entertainment shows because Islam needs to be portrayed transparently to avoid any vague interpretations, which may associate its teachings with terrorism or other societal ills (S. Ahmed and Matthes, 2017; Tamuri, 2007). The interpretations of untrained minds can be misleading. Therefore, there is a need to present contents about Islam in a precise manner, supported by an explanation from a field expert. Manifestation needs to be monitored by an authorised body to avoid any wrong manifestations. Manifested contents on television can be complicated to decode since each viewer has their own interpretations of the representations depending on their knowledge, experience and context. It is the responsibility of the show’s producer to ensure that the content portrayed delivers the intended meaning or outcomes. The participants in this study suggested a few improvements for the show, which would involve the usage of Arabic or Islamic related terms in the written format, as presented through graphics, to support understandings (FGD.B3).

The participants needed further information in the VT playback. Thus, they sometimes prolonged segments so that they could learn from the assessments in the community. This was also important as the participants in B1 agreed with the views of a representative of Bank Islam, who asserted in an interview that an Imam should be able to serve and lead the community (FGD.B1). In another example from segment three, B2 commented on Imam Muda Jabar’s Tazkirah, commenting that it was unclear. By comparing the clarity of delivery between IM Hafiz and IM Jabar, the participants were paying attention to the contents of the Tazkirah. B1 reinforced that this was repeating the tips given by IM Jabar right after the segment’s end, prior to the commercial break. The participants needed to put extra effort into understanding the content delivered by IM Jabar. From these two examples, it is acknowledged that the selection of VT playbacks and the delivery of the participants needed to be clear to avoid any misunderstandings and uncertainties.

Another point that requires clarification is the use of Arabic. Arabic is the primary source of knowledge related to Islam, since most of the knowledge is derived from the Quran and Hadith, which are mostly written in Arabic. To make sure that the content is accessible to the viewers, it has to be presented reasonably. The reason is that the representation of Islamic knowledge needs to maintain original terms within context, and needs to be presented at a certain level of understanding, which is suitable to a broader range of viewers, as explained by the finalists, the faculty or the host. Together with the explanation,
this helped the viewers to understand more the context of the words used in the show. These words use the lower third, which refers to written information integrated into the video or VT playback. This feature shows that the participants were learning and were urged to demonstrate their intention to learn from the show. Additionally, the show did not offer any detailed commentary from those experts, and it is suggested that detailed comments from the experts, such as experienced Imams or Muslim scholars, should be shared with the public or viewers. The participants understood that an Imam must be specialised in a particular field because knowledge in Islam is broad. Thus, displaying comments from experts would act as a validation for their understandings and interpretations of the assessment and contents in the show. These patterns of variation demonstrated the process involved in the participants’ judgments. The results indicated that the participants were informally learning about Imams and relating this newly acquired knowledge to themselves. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the depth of the participants’ understandings and interpretations using Critical Realism, to reveal which level of engagement the participants have towards Imam Muda.

6.3 Level of active engagement

Viewers engage differently with content, depending on their backgrounds, interests, existing knowledge and experience. The essential criteria for selecting participants for this study were that participants were Malaysian Muslims, had been educated in the Malaysian education system, had studied Islamic Education at least in primary and secondary school, and had grown up in Malaysia. The participants’ viewing behaviours were revealed in a methodological reasoning approach from cross-referenced data collected from observations, focus group discussions and viewing reflections. From the triangulation of data, this study was able to come to conclusions regarding the ways Malaysian Muslims perceived and interpreted the Imam Muda reality TV show. Indeed, watching reality TV can be beneficial as long as the viewers are equipped with media literacy for understanding the manifested contents in a particular show, or vice versa (Hill, 2005; Silverblatt et al., 2014). The participants contributed judgments as home judges, which explained their level of engagement with the TV show. Viewers may interact with the content, drawing on a superficial form of reception or in-depth interpretation. Thus, this section discusses the levels of Malaysian Muslim viewers’ engagement with Kemuncak Medan Imam Muda season three.
The assessments of the finalists in Kemuncak Imam Muda were the observable manifested contents portrayed. The first segment tested the finalists' practical skills, implementing the lessons they had learnt in the academy and establishing their associations within society. The second segment tested the finalists' criticality in answering religious questions and addressing these appropriately. These two assessments were essential to building the young Imams’ reputation as inspiration for other Muslims. The third segment tested the finalists’ creativity in the delivery of Tazkirah, and their communication of knowledge. The fourth segment tested the finalists' memory, and recitation of the Quran, with translations and Tafsir, while the last segment announced the winner. These assessments were vital as they clarified and tested the characteristics of a trustworthy and reliable Imam. Young Imams need to be able to disseminate knowledge, especially to youth, and need to be equipped with good understandings of the two main references in Islam: the Quran and Sunnah. The events in each segment triggered the participants' reactions, reflections and judgments, depending on their situatedness and geo-historical context, which had an impact on their reception and interpretation of the show.

The three groups selected for this study act as sample settings of people who spend time together watching television. The findings might provide insights into the viewing behaviours of Malaysian Muslim viewers, yet should not be generalised. Furthermore, the study was conducted by imitating a domestic situation, with the existence of a moderator/researcher, which might have influenced the authenticity of the TV-watching process. The moderator/researcher had in-depth knowledge of the Imam Muda reality TV show, seasons one to three. Being together with the participants allowed them to engage with the show on a deeper level. As previously described, the focus of this study was the way the Malaysian Muslim viewers perceived and interpreted the Imam Muda Islamic Reality TV show as an informal educational source. The participants went through observations, focus group discussions and viewing reflections, to obtain rich cross-referenced data. This procedure of data collection was explicitly designed because it required multi-level analysis to unpack a process of decision-making that was embedded into the level of their various engagements.
The interactions between participants and the manifested contents comprised their reactions to and reflections on the finalists and the show’s presentation. They compared and contrasted Imam Muda reality TV show with other Islamic TV shows and relate it to their knowledge and experiences. This showed that the participants associated their identity as Muslims with their Malaysian nationality. These interactions demonstrated the variation in reactions and reflections that led to the participants' judgments. Therefore, this study attempted to explain the participants’ level of active engagement in the domains of reality, through transcendental realism (see Bhaskar, 2008a, 2017, p. 17; Mingers and Standing, 2017; Radulescu and Vessey, 2008). It is important to understand the depth of the participants' engagements in the context of the dialectics of decision-making, since the stratification of participants’ reactions and reflections provide the base for exploration of their understandings or interpretations of the show and religion.

The domains of reality in Critical Realism consist of three levels: the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 17; Mingers and Standing, 2017; Radulescu and Vessey, 2008). These domains overlapped in the minds of the viewers; in this case the Malaysian Muslim viewers. The participants experienced the show through their observations. They then discussed the events generated by the show and finally they reflected on the structures and mechanisms that created these circumstances. The triangulated data sought not to measure the participants' religiosity but rather to explore the ways in which they utilised their spiritual and judgmental rationality to come to a better decision, thus impacting their Islamic worldview. Through the explanation of the empirical, actual and real domains, the study highlighted significant moments as indicators of the participants’ engagement level with the Imam Muda Reality TV show.

6.3.1 The Domain of the Empirical

The domain of the Empirical is related to what the participants observed and heard (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 17; Mingers and Standing, 2017; Radulescu and Vessey, 2008). This empirical experience was explained through the participants’ sensory reactions to the stimulus: The Imam Muda reality TV show. When the participants were actively watching and thinking, most of them tended to be quiet and focused on the TV contents. Meanwhile, some of the viewers needed to attend to various other priorities. For example, Maria from Muslimah Viewers (B1) and Amal the wife from the Muslim Family (B3) were occupied with children, but were still able to focus on the segment that they were watching. By contrast, Faisal and Fahad in the Muslim viewers group (B2), folded their arms while
watching the TV shows. Their body language appeared to be reserved, but they justified this in the viewing reflections (Vref) by stating that they were relaxing their bodies and trying to give their full attention to the show. However, a particular personal attitude of Faisal (B2) was recorded in Segment Two, when he seemed to lose his focus on the show by drawing on a piece of tissue. He stated that the visual element of television interfered with his focus, so he decided to draw and focus on listening instead. As Faisal’s behaviour shows, humans can create and maintain focus on events or things in our empirical domain in unique ways.

At the segment break for a commercial, the group members started to comment on and react to the contents they had watched. The participants expressed their opinions instantly because they were intrigued about what was going to happen in the next segment, which triggered their judgments and emotions. The observations only identified the visual behaviours of the participants, and as they rationalised the contents they had watched, this provided them with pieces of information from the domain of the empirical, through the sharing of their thoughts and emotions. The emerging reactions from the viewing of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three are that the participants were interested in how the finalists had prepared for the task, executed the work and identified their mission. Following this, they were able to evaluate the criticality of the Imams answering religious questions and to appropriately address the answers to the questioner. The participants engaged in a brief discussion at the end of Segment Two because they were not surprised with the announcement of the contestant placed third: Imam Muda Naufal. They had anticipated this result, since IM Naufal was young, and this indicated to them that he had less knowledge and experience compared to IM Jabar and IM Hafiz. The participants started to demonstrate their favouritism, by stating which finalist they thought should win. As the tension was building up, they became critical of the performance of two finalists. As the segment progressed to Tazkirah, the participants commented about the effectiveness of the Tazkirah delivered, discussed the points made and morals provided. They showed their preference for IM Hafiz, stating that they anticipated him to be the winner. The participants admired his Al-Quran recitation and benefitted from the Taddabur of the verses in the Quran. They also showed and expressed their admiration for IM Hafiz as he performed well in Segment Four. Nevertheless, the participants’ questions were answered in Segment Five when IM Jabar was announced as the winner. They were surprised and started to generate discussions among themselves about their expectations and frustrations.
These instant reactions in the commercial breaks were generated by the participants’ curiosity for the show and desires to put the pieces of the puzzle in place. The participants started to unpack what they saw by having a conversation with the moderator about the things they wanted to know more about. 8 out of the 10 participants had not watched *Imam Muda* season three. However, they had been exposed to other Islamic reality shows, such as *Pencetus Ummah* and *Daie Millennia*. The participants learnt that the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV show is a competition with different assessments that act as part of the search for the best young Imam in Malaysia.

### 6.3.2 The Domain of the Actual

The domain of the Actual relates to the explanation of the events and the conjunction derived from observations or reflections (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 17; Mingers and Standing, 2017; Radulescu and Vessey, 2008). This domain was brought into play after the viewing session, the participants were involved in a semi-structured focus group discussion. The moderator asked an open question to start the discussion. He then formulated questions depending on the participants’ responses and the dynamic of the discussion. The participants provided an overview of the contents of the *Imam Muda* reality TV show. They shared their ideas and their understandings of the show, prompted by a few introductory questions, which allowed the participants to contribute more to their understanding of their perceptions and interpretations of the event/show.

Emerging themes from the discussion were the characteristics of a young Imam and the characteristics of an Islamic TV programme. The initial question for the discussion related to the participants' reflections on the show as an educational tool for viewers. Some of the participants responded directly, and some tried to explain what they perceived and interpreted from the show. The participants mostly reflected that the show is informational, potentially educational, depending on the viewers' readiness to watch the show. Thus, overall, it is a beneficial form of entertainment. The participants found that the show was informational because it enabled them to identify the characteristics of an Imam, such as the importance of quality and proper Quran recitation in prayers, clarity and criticality in communicating knowledge to a broader audience, and the ability to demonstrate the practices of the religion so that people may emulate and improve their practices.
Yet, the participants also understood the characteristics of an Islamic TV show and were able to understand the elements of an entertainment TV show. They stated the criteria indirectly by comparing and contrasting them with other Islamic TV shows. They realised that to learn more about Islam, for example, the *Imam Muda* show, Islamic TV programmes need to focus on a topic or a theme, since it is easier for viewers to learn about a specific topic. The participants suggested that the manifestation of contents needs to be clear by providing a translation of Arabic words, quotations of Al-Quran and Hadith and scholarly references on the graphic content, so that this would assist them in understanding the manifested contents.

From the evidence put forward in the discussion, the participants were inspired by the events/manifested contents in *Imam Muda*. They understood what needs to be done to have a better learning experience in an informal setting, such as watching television. Nevertheless, education was not just about gathering information or knowledge, but was also related to learning about themselves, as their comments projected their commitment to Islam.

6.3.3 The Domain of the Real

The domain of the Real relates to an explanation of the structures or mechanisms that generated the events (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 17; Mingers and Standing, 2017; Radulescu and Vessey, 2008). In this case, its purpose was to reveal the factors that caused the participants to react to and reflect upon the event. The three main processes involved were: the participants' ability to make comparisons, to identify relations between content, and to reconstruct the meaning of being an Imam as a means of keeping abreast with modernity. This shows that making a judgment is a complex task that transcends from the domain of the Empirical to the domain of the Actual, and finally to the domain of the Real. The Real rationalises the reactions and reflections into a translatable process of making judgments. Thus, this process ultimately enabled the participants to reach a deeper meaning in their self-reflections and to identify themselves as good Muslims.

The participants’ ability to make comparisons was discovered when they understood the acquired knowledge and experience needed to be a good Imam, by comparing the finalists in their assessments in Segment One and Segment Two. Besides this, the participants also understood that talent has an added value, as it enables one to further reach the community. The Imams’ effectiveness of communicating knowledge was demonstrated in the finalists’
assessments in Segment Three and Segment Four. The participants' ability to identify the relationship between the manifested contents showed that their interactions offered a deeper level of understanding. They stated that they could relate their favourite parts of the show to their own lives, even though this depended on their individual backgrounds. The participants reconstructed their understanding of an Imam in modern society. They also understood the representation of Imams in the media and how modernity affected their perceptions of young Imams, by emphasising the importance of being relatable and maintaining Thiqah (trustworthiness) at the same time. Thus, Imams are role models for young Muslims.

When viewed together, these processes highlight that informal learning started to take place, as the participants interpreted and negotiated the meaning behind the contents that they watched. This raised questions about how far the viewers were informally educated from the show. In the domain of the Real, the participants demonstrated their understanding of the mechanisms and structures that made the things happen. The participants gained a bigger picture of the whole episode. The assessments in the show primarily allowed them to suggest the criteria that would make a good Imam in the modern world. They understood that the contents provided the data for their analysis and critical judgments, which led to self-reflection about practising Islam in the modern world. Since the level of active engagement was explicitly explained through the domain of the Real, it is crucial to discuss the ways that judgmental rationality functions and interplays with epistemic relativism and ontological factors within the Islamic Critical Realist framework. This topic will be expanded upon in Chapter 7.
6.4 Conclusion

Chapter Six highlighted the interaction between the participants’ perceptions and manifested contents in the *Imam Muda* reality TV show, season 3. The participants’ perceptions were analysed through patterns of variation drawn from variation theory (see Marton and Booth, 2000), and the depth of their understandings were analysed through the domains of reality in Critical Realism (see Mingers and Standing, 2017; Raduescu and Vessey, 2008). These aspects were discussed to break down the complexity of the judgment process that took place in the realm of non-duality. From patterns of variation, the way the participants made judgments was mapped through patterns of variations. This was a dense process starting from an engagement with contrast and separation, as mentioned by Ling Lo (2012, pp. 83–102) and Marton and Tsui (2004, pp. 16–17). These processes occurred when the participants compared the finalists and their assessments, and separated entertainment values, in order to gain a better understanding of the educational value of *Imam Muda*. Following contrast and separation, the participants generalised about their new experiences from watching *Imam Muda* by connecting the learning outcomes with a broader perspective of personal experiences of Imams. Finally, fusion occurred when the participants indicated that they were experiencing the values of entertainment and informal education simultaneously. Moreover, the depth of their understandings and patterns of variation were analysed from the perspective of the domain of realities, where the participants’ judgments were stratified into the empirical, the actual and the real (Mingers and Standing, 2017; Raduescu and Vessey, 2008). These findings assist in defining the judgmental rationality of the Muslim viewers through the framework of Islamic Critical Realism (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a), thus codifying the transformative values of informal Islamic Education.
Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven discusses the findings from Chapter Four, Five and Six, which examined Malaysian Muslims’ engagement with Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. Chapter Four and Five provided an analysis of the participants’ reactions and reflections during and after their viewing experiences. Chapter Six broke down this process, as they organised and negotiated their understandings and interpretations of the show. The researcher adapted variation theory (see Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000) in order to explain the spectrum of the participants’ rationalisations. To clarify the analysis, the researcher later explored the participants' various understandings with guidance from the domains of reality of transcendental realism (see Bhaskar, 2017, p. 17), which are the empirical, the actual and the real. In the process of analysing the viewers’ judgments, the researcher explained how the participants’ engagement with Kemuncak Imam Muda season three was associated with their pleasure in watching reality television and gaining the benefits of Islamic information. Hence, chapter 7 will seek to under-labour an interpretative educational framework, in this case, Islamic Critical Realism, to assist in understanding Muslims’ critical engagement with media, in the context of informal Islamic Education. Under-labouring (Bhaskar, 2013, p. 11; Locke, 1690, p. 13) will assist in clearing the ground in order to more accurately define critical engagement, as well as to more clearly conceptualise the formation of Islamic media literacy and Islamic educational TV contents.

From Kemuncak Imam Muda season three, the participants learnt about the finalists’ characters, and evaluated their knowledge and experience. The participants were presented with the Imams’ capability of applying knowledge and communicating information to the viewers. The participants were also aware of the importance of studying Al-Quran, As-Sunnah (recorded traditions and words from the prophet Muhammad), Sirah Nabawiyyah (History of the prophets) and Akhlaq (behaviours, morality and virtues), when watching the finalists’ assessments in Medan Imam Muda (Kemuncak) season three. The participants engaged with the show as Malaysian Muslims and as home judges. Therefore, this chapter discusses the viewers’ perceptions and rationalisations in defining religious experience from watching Imam Muda. Considering that people experience and learn differently, the participants’ judgments revealed the possible variations and depths of experiencing,
learning and understanding the given phenomenon. My understanding the process of the viewers’ judgments, this chapter will show how judgmental rationality interacts with epistemic relativism (which refers to Kemuncak Imam Muda season three) and ontological realism (which refers to Al-Quran and As-Sunnah) in Islamic Critical Realism, as proposed by Matthew Wilkinson (2013) (see theoretical framework in Chapter 1.7.2, p. 19).

7.2 Viewers’ definitions of informal learning experiences

Every viewer has his/her own definition of learning experiences. This study focused on how Malaysian Muslim viewers learnt from the Kemuncak Imam Muda TV show. Thus, the research question (see Chapter 1.4, p. 13) investigated the participants' engagements as home judges in evaluating the best young Imam among the finalists. The findings showed that they learnt by critically engaging with the contents, using different levels of understanding and interpretation. To unpack their critical engagement, the researcher used different methods to obtain data to answer the research questions. The data collected was categorised into reactions and reflections. Subsequently, the data were cross-referenced to reveal the patterns of learning from media contents. Therefore, by answering the two sub-questions, this led to in-depth knowledge, which could answer the main question. The sub-questions and answers are:

7.2.1 What were the viewers’ perceptions of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three?

The participants’ reactions were detailed and cross-referenced in the focus group discussions. By responding to an open question about viewing Kemuncak Imam Muda from an educational perspective, the participants verbalised their interpretations of the show. This was the time when the participants started to organise the information they had obtained from the manifested contents. The participants conceptualised the show as a beneficial form of entertainment for Muslims. They interpreted the performances and identified as home judges. A significant moment occurred during their viewing of Segment Five, when the participants’ predictions of the winner were contradicted by the faculty of Imam Muda. All the participants across the group were expecting IM Hafiz to win but instead, their least favoured finalist, IM Jabar, won. The participants reflected on and negotiated their judgment process in comparison to that of the expert judges in the focus group discussions. They concluded that as they only viewed the final episode, they might have missed out on the finalists’ assessments throughout season three. Hence, they agreed with the experts’ verdict because both the finalists, IM Hafiz and IM Jabar, were good
contestants. The participants’ perceptions demonstrated that they had gained an understanding of the show. They recognised the characteristics and behaviours/manners of an Imam. The participants also discovered the knowledge and skills that a young Imam needed to strive towards in modern Malaysia. For them, Kemuncak Imam Muda was entertaining and beneficial. However, a more profound question remains: did the participants learn from the show?

7.2.2 Did learning take place while watching Kemuncak Imam Muda?

Since watching television in informal settings is rarely related to learning, the need to study viewers’ reactions and reflections during and after the show is essential to unpack the learning process. Undeniably, the ability to reflect upon the show’s content indicated that the participants were learning. However, the reflections varied on different levels. The patterns of variations from Variation theory (see Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000) guided the researcher with regards to the variations that existed in the way the participants judged the contents of the show. This highlighted the moments when members of each group had contrasting opinions, which separated their values with regards to education and entertainment. In turn, they generalised the ideas in relation to their personal knowledge and experience, and finally gained an understanding of a bigger picture of the part-whole phenomena, via the process of fusion. In the bigger picture, the patterns showed that the participants negotiated learning in an informal setting.

Nonetheless, I decided to further extend the investigation beyond the variation of opinions or judgments, to the depths of the participants’ understandings. I did so, because variations are more meaningful if the rationality is bound to reality. The researcher utilised the domains of reality from transcendental realism (see Bhaskar, 2008b) to analyse the participants’ reactions and reflections. The purpose of this was to understand the reasons behind the viewers’ perceptions when identifying its causal mechanisms. The Empirical related to when the participants expressed their feelings and instant reactions. The Actual was when the participants reflected on their expression from an empirical standpoint, by explaining the actual reality, as manifested in the latent contents. The Real was when the participants related the actual material they had learnt to a broader perspective, referring to their knowledge and experience. The significance of utilising the patterns in Variation Theory and domains of reality in Transcendental Realism was that these showed how the participants’ understandings were nuanced and wide-ranging. This analysis of the
participants’ judgments justified that learning took place on different levels while watching Kemuncak Imam Muda. Therefore, in order to investigate informal learning while watching Kemuncak Imam Muda, participants’ judgments need to be positioned within an interpretive framework. The following discussion will highlight the contribution of this research to defining Muslims’ critical engagement with the Imam Muda reality TV show, and its implications for the informal Islamic educational setting.

7.3 Contribution to defining critical engagement with Kemuncak Imam Muda

I drew the findings from the two sub-questions, which addressed the viewers’ perceptions and learning processes while watching Kemuncak Imam Muda season three, to answer the main research question:

**To what extent can viewers’ critical engagement with Kemuncak Imam Muda season three be seen as a form of informal Islamic Education?**

The data suggested that the viewers’ critical engagement with Kemuncak Imam Muda season three can be considered as a form of unintentional or incidental informal learning, within an Islamic educational context. When I initially asked the participants for their opinions on the content’s educational value, they only agreed that some of the contents were educational, and further added that this was dependant to the viewers’ openness towards the show. The participants across the groups agreed that Kemuncak Imam Muda season three is a beneficial form of entertainment. Their reason for this was because it is a competition with Islamic contents, with the primary aim of entertainment. By contrast, an educational TV show usually has a direct format, such as a talk show, forum or QandA programme. This study highlighted that in their roles as home judges for Kemuncak Imam Muda, the participants were involved in reacting to and reflecting on the show, which acted as a form of critical engagement. This in turn can be viewed as unintentional or incidental informal learning.

For the discussion, I selected the Islamic Critical Realist framework proposed by Wilkinson (2013, 2015a) to understand further how informal learning might take place while watching an Islamic television programme. The research showed that on an event that the participants negotiated their understanding of the show and referring to the ontology of the TV show. Any form of informal learning indicators from the viewers such as reactions, reflections and judgments are signs of critical engagement. Unpacking learning in informal settings
requires multiple data referencing of these indicators and identifying interactions between learners and the object of learning (Bull et al., 2008; Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Pong, 2005). Therefore, this study provided a valuable contribution, as it defined critical engagement as a dialectical process, learning experience and rationalisation of judgments.

7.3.1 The dialectical process as a form of critical engagement

The dialectical process of informal learning was obtained from the processes that led to the participants’ judgments (see Chapter 6, p. 176). As the participants’ judgments were placed within an Islamic Critical Realist framework, the interactions between the principles require further explanation. A judgment is a statement of a new understanding. The process of making judgments was vital as it showed how the participants were negotiating their understandings and interpretations. The participants’ perceptions were selective, organised, interpreted and negotiated through their previous knowledge and experiences (see Chapter Four and Chapter Five). Since I situated the study within the discipline of Education, the participants’ judgments were analysed through Variation Theory (Ling Lo, 2012; Marton and Booth, 2000, Transcendental Realism (Bhaskar, 200b) and Islamic Critical Realism (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015a). I utilised variation theory and transcendental realism in the context of learning and Islamic Critical Realism to interpret the interactive process between the participants’ reactions and reflections within Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. Through patterns of variations, I understood how the variation in judgments and interpretations indicated that learning was taking place. As the participants verbalised their opinions to the group, patterns started to emerge. The participants contrasted and generalised their opinions, separated their ideas, and interpreted their conclusions to gain a bigger picture (fusion). Through the domains of reality, the researcher understood the participants’ level of engagement with the show. These processes of discerning, rationalising, and judging led to critical engagement, which indicated that informal learning had taken place. Below figure 7.1 is an illustration of how the researcher understood the application of both theories in understanding participants’ reactions, reflections and judgments.
Figure 7.1: Illustration of unifying theories in understanding judgments

Figure 7.1 shows that the analysis of the participants' interactions with the TV show is a form of critical engagement and may be considered an informal learning experience. Drawing from both theories, the ability to discern is vital as a criterion for media literacy. One such example was in segment Four, where the participants had different opinions and offered different evaluations of the performances of the two finalists, IM Hafiz and IM Jabar. Across the groups, the participants agreed that IM Jabar had the best recitation and that IM Hafiz’s translation of the verses was better. From the viewpoint of variation theory, the participants were able to come to an agreement (see Chapter 4.3.4, p. 133 and Chapter 5.3.1, p. 160). The participants also reached the domain of Real of Transcendental Realism (see Bhaskar, 200b) since they knew the show was a competition and were able relate to the primary source of Al-Quran (see Chapter 6, p. 176). Amina from the Muslimah group and Fahad from the Muslim male group were able to quote the verse recited in the show and explained it to the rest of the group. This impacted their judgments towards the selection of the winner. The dialectical process involved in the interplay between the viewers’ judgments and the TV show informed the learning that took place, and acted as a form of critical engagement in an informal setting.

7.3.2 Critical engagement as an Informal learning experience

Informal learning can be described as self-directed learning or learning from experience (Bull et al., 2008; Rockman et al., 2007). It is an ongoing phenomenon of learning, which leads to learners’ knowledge creation and acquisition. This research was inspired by the
results of my previous study of Islamic educational content representation in *Imam Muda* season one. Investigating the way the viewers perceived Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three led me to explain the viewers’ interpretation and negotiation of the contents that indicate informal learning. Informal learning from media such as television is challenging to assess since it does not have an appropriate assessment measure. This differs to formal and non-formal learning. In a formal educational context, television functions as a form of support, with content reinforcement attached to the goals and objectives defined by the training department or school (Ali *et al*., 2013; Berk, 2009). In non-formal education, television functions in providing various structured learning contexts and is used as part of a multi-media communication tool that directly or indirectly teaches the subject matter (Hunt, 2001; Lefstein and Snell, 2011). Both formal and non-formal learning have a structure that would allow the assessment of the viewers’ or students’ understandings or learning experiences. Hence, informal learning in this study was indicated by the way that the participants discerned the contents of the television show.

Yet, it can be asked: Do we learn from watching television? The simple answer is that we can learn from television. The information represented in visual and audio form activates the viewers’ empirical senses, thus generating meaning. Subsequently, the mind starts to select, organise, interpret and negotiate understandings. In this study, the viewers perceived contents from the TV show and created a learning experience for themselves. This pseudo audience reception study of Islamic reality television, therefore, contributes to the field of public pedagogies and media literacy. Public pedagogy is the application of educational theory and its development in an informal context that spans popular culture, cultural education, public space and politics (Kellner and Share, 2007; Middaugh and Kahne, 2013). Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media that allows viewers or users to access, evaluate and produce media contents in various contexts (Filiz and Fisun, 2012; Kress, 2003). With this fundamental ability, viewers or users can regulate their engagement from the standpoint of the way they interpret and negotiate the meanings surrounding the media. Using a cultural reference, the *Imam Muda* Islamic reality TV programme as a form of alternative entertainment tests Malaysian Muslims’ media literacy, encouraging its viewers to understand the contents portrayed. In order to reveal what the participants learnt from the show, I explained the process from an educational perspective, using an Islamic Critical Realist approach, proposed by Wilkinson (2013, p. 435; 2015a, p. 50) (see Figure 7.2).
From Figure 7.2, it can be seen that this study is situated in the context of public pedagogies (Giroux, 2000; Kellner and Share, 2007) and media literacy (Burn and Durran, 2007; Kress, 2010), with the aim of deeper critical engagement. The term critical engagement is drawn upon to magnify the type of engagement that exists between the participants and the contents. It refers to the criticality portrayed in the participants’ ability to discern, rationalise and judge, as they got involved as home judges in evaluating the finalists of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. The participants’ judgments of the show were a synthesis of various aspects and considerations. The embedded process of decision-making combined with a spiritual aspect such as religion highlights the learning that takes place in an informal setting. The researcher carefully chose the formulated term of spiritual judgment to represent the elements of religion and decision-making, as these aspects indicated informal Islamic Education. Therefore, the application of Islamic Critical Realism, as designed in the theoretical research framework, was employed to ground the discussion in explaining the Malaysian Muslims’ judgmental rationality towards Kemuncak Imam Muda season three (see Chapter 1.7.2, p. 19). In the following, I will discuss the characterisation of participants judgments, participants description of Kemuncak Imam Muda and their attribute to Islamic Reality TV shows.

**a. A Characterisation of participants’ judgments**

In this study, critical engagement comprised a sequence of complex processes, involving discernment, rationalisation and judgment. These aspects focus on the way the Malaysian Muslim viewers judged Kemuncak Medan Imam season three. The judgments derived from their critical engagements led to their construction of knowledge and learning experiences.
in an informal setting. As part of the contribution to the theoretical framework, I have characterised the observable judgments in this study, based on the relativity of the participants’ background and educational experience. Specifically, in their judgments, the participants referred to their morality, emotions and spirituality. These three aspects overlapped and guided the participants in coming to conclusions and generating decisions (see Figure 7.3).

![Figure 7.3: Overlapping judgments](image)

Figure 7.3 illustrates the data obtained from the participants overlapped. This figure shows how the representation of Islamic knowledge about Imams was influenced by the genre of the show, namely reality TV, with its dominant characteristics of competition and entertainment. The participants’ judgments can be characterised in the following way:

1. Moral Judgment is the capacity to justify in relation to the cultural aspects and norms of society. In this study, the participants commented on the manifested contents in Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three according to their backgrounds, morality and cultural influences. They understood the role of Imams in society and were able to relate the contents, such as content related to community service (‘gotong-royong’) and approaching the Asnaf (a group of people who are eligible to receive zakat), in Segment One (see Chapter 4.3.1, p. 112). The participants also assessed the quality of the young Imams in the show, in terms of their fit with modern Malaysia. They offered suggestions on how to improve the representation of Imams or religious figures within the media and society. The participants used their values and morality to rationalise the show so that it would be more appealing to viewers in the local context.
2. Emotional judgment is the capacity to identify a situation or matters that might trigger strong emotional reactions in participants (Gordon, 2011; Shamshudeen and Morris, 2014). Since some of the participants’ emotional judgments derived from their non-verbal behaviours, I cross-checked the data from the observations with the participants' focus group discussions (FGD) and viewing reflections (Vref). In the viewing sessions, the participants focused on the content; intermittently smiled and nodded as a sign of agreement and verbally expressed themselves in the commercial breaks. These non-verbal expressions were explained with regards to the participants' justifications in the reflective viewing sessions. The purpose of this was to allow the participants to discuss and explain their behaviours. The session was conducted by the researcher as a moderator who intermittently paused the video for clarification. Some participants might have seemed to have had conscious control of their emotions because they were in an observational setting. However, throughout the process, their consciousness dissolved, as they started to express their feelings. They demonstrated favouritism towards their selected finalist, IM Hafiz, and offered dissenting judgment towards the winner, IM Jabar. After the viewing sessions, the participants discussed the content and concluded that their judgment was limited to the final episode. The participants rationalised that the faculty of Imam Muda chose IM Jabar as the winner, as they considered IM Jabar’s performance throughout the season. Emotional judgments are inevitable when watching Kemuncak Imam Muda because it is a competition and biases exist when determining the winner. However, it is crucial to be aware of the cloudiness of emotional judgment.

3. Spiritual Judgment is the capacity to justify a process of negotiation and to critically engage with spiritual or religious phenomena (Wilkinson, 2013, 2015b). It does not indicate a person’s spirituality or religiosity but rather demonstrates his/her consciousness of the religion. When the participants watched Kemuncak Imam Muda, they reflected on and interpreted the contents drawing on their previous knowledge and experience of meeting or being with an Imam. They liked the idea of a young Imam obtained from the show and analysed it through the lens of religion by referring to the Al-Quran and Sunnah.
These three judgments were obtained from the way the participants described Kemuncak Imam Muda season three. The participants constructed their new understandings of young Imams, by characterising Imams as beneficial to modern society, being strong role models for youths. However, their perceptions and interpretations were relative and limited. Therefore, the participants’ description of Kemuncak Imam Muda season three might contain fallible interpretations.

### b. Participants’ descriptions of Kemuncak Imam Muda

The Imam Muda Islamic reality TV programme can be viewed as a form of epistemic relativism in this study because it portrayed a limited representation and functions of Imams in Islam. It is relative to the cultural background and religious practices within the Malaysian context. The show aims to provide a fresher perspective on young Imams and attempts to act as a representation of religious youth realities, through the combination of entertainment and modernity. Most of the information portrayed concerns Akhlaq and explores the ways in which the finalists and the TV show mediate knowledge to the viewers. Each segment represents the finalists’ assessments on stage. Segment One focused on practicality when the finalist went back to their hometown to execute their task within the community. Segment Two focused on criticalities when the finalists needed to answer questions according to the questioner, and to be able to be critical and clear in the presentation of facts and references. Segment Three focused on creativity when the finalists needed to deliver impactful Tazkirah (reminders), as this offered a way to attract society to learn about religion. Segment Four focused on integrity when the finalists were tested with regards to their memorisation skills in memorising the Quran, translating the verses and conveying the tafsir clearly to the community, so that they could learn. Finally, Segment Five conveyed the faculty of Imam Muda, who crowned the winner of the third season.

Imam Muda offers a representation of the life of an Imam in society and how he can function to serve the community. The assessments highlighted the characteristic and criteria of a good Imam, so that the viewers would be able to evaluate and emulate what they watched on the show. In the study, the participants understood and interpreted the show as a beneficial form of entertainment because they could benefit from the assessments of the finalist. On the one hand, the participants gained benefits by obtaining information about the characteristics and Akhlaq of a young Imam, Islamic knowledge related to Imams, and the skills required to be more upfront as an Islamic youth leader. On the other hand, the
show’s entertainment quality created the ambience of competition, healthy rivalry and emotions for the participants, as these qualities encompassed the central aspects of reality TV. The participants enjoyed the show from the perspective as viewers and engaged critically with the material through their role as home judges. Therefore, the researcher concluded from the participants’ judgments that Kemuncak Imam Muda season three is an info-tainment TV programme that would enrich the participants’ knowledge about Imams and Islam.

When participants can read messages or extract information from media, such as television, this shows that they are media literate. Media literacy is an essential skill because it helps users, viewers or consumers to be inquisitive and to have the skills to engage critically and communicate effectively (Burn and Durran, 2007; Kress, 2003). This study put into practice media literacy as it relates to the reading and understanding of Islamic media messages in Imam Muda. The literacy is also gained from previous knowledge or experience as a point of reference, as a means of evaluating current knowledge and experience. Reading and processing media messages allow viewers to construct new understandings. For example, the participants in this study had a previous understanding of Imams within society. After watching Imam Muda, they could suggest new modes of representation of modern young Imams that were more accessible to the younger generation. However, media such as Islamic reality TV shows are limited to specific viewpoints and positions, which require participants to look for more information and knowledge. This critical engagement shows that informal learning took place as it activated the participants to learn and understand more about Imams and how to be good Muslims.

**c. Participants’ attribution to Islamic reality TV shows**

Ontological realism in the study covers the related reality of spiritual phenomena beyond the participants’ descriptions or judgments. This is because being an Imam is about more than a competition to select the best young Imam in a reality TV show. The show portrayed the systematic assessment and the character development of a young Imam. The participants informally learnt how an Imam should be and the knowledge acquired. As home judges, they commented on the finalists’ performances in their hometown and within their communities. They also reflected on the values that an Imam should have, such as communication skills in answering questions by the invited mystery guest and a skilful tazkirah session. They also enjoyed the finalists’ Quran recitation, translation and
contemplation of the selected verses. All these judgments were obtained from the participants’ reactions and reflections. This shows an interaction between the participants’ judgments and the show.

In the observations and discussions, the participants constructed a new perspective and understanding of Islamic reality TV shows such as Imam Muda. They understood the show as a beneficial form of entertainment. The comments made were based on the participants’ previous knowledge and experience of watching other Islamic reality TV shows, such as Pencetus Ummah and Daie Millennia. This shows that the participants only knew some of the functions of an Imam in the Malaysian context, and further that this was under an umbrella of knowledge related to the role of Imams in Islam. Therefore, the knowledge about Imams’ characteristics, Akhlaq and functions were put under the lens of ontological realism in this study because of broader knowledge about Imams in Islam, such as in the Al-Quran and As-Sunnah, which exists independently.

7.3.3 The embeddedness of judgments in Judgmental Rationality

As Wilkinson (2015a, p. 60) stated, Judgmental Rationality in Islamic Critical Realism pertains to deliberation about the plausibility of spiritual phenomena and their interconnected traditions, according to related exegetical (textual), philosophical-theological, experiential and emotional criteria. As this study investigates critical engagement, the focus is beyond reception. It includes the understanding of the transmitted messages and the judgments towards the messages. Gathering and classifying the judgments allows the researcher to assess the participants’ reception of Kemuncak Imam Muda (see figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4: Illustration of the viewers’ interaction with the TV show
As this study progressed, the judgmental rationality involved in watching *Imam Muda* season three became enriched by three types of judgment: moral judgment, emotional judgment and spiritual judgment. These judgments were verbalised during the reception, and were analysed qualitatively. Critical engagement derived from the reactions and reflections using patterns of variation in variation theory (see Marton and Booth, 2000) and domains of reality in transcendental realism (Bhaskar, 2008b), which laid the foundation for characterising learning in an informal setting (see illustration in figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: Illustration of viewers’ critical engagement with an Islamic TV show, during the viewing process

Figure 7.5 shows that enrichment in this study contributed to Islamic Critical Realism. The critical realist principles — Judgmental Rationality, Epistemic Relativism and Ontological Realism in an Islamic Critical Realist framework (see Wilkinson, 2013, p. 433) — provided a bigger picture and the interpretive ground to understand the interaction of viewers’ judgments when viewing an Islamic TV show. I applied the theory of learning — Variation Theory and Transcendental Realism — to further investigate learning through the interaction between principles. This shows that the viewers’ judgments were liable to misinterpretation, which may lead to false understandings or judgments. Nevertheless, the critical reflections assisted in unpacking the level of realities by cross-referencing sources of knowledge and experiences to unearth the truth. Therefore, critical engagement with
Kemuncak *Imam Muda* benefits Malaysian Muslim viewers from both the perspectives of entertainment and education.

### 7.4 Implications for the informal Islamic educational setting

As this research has shown, learning in informal settings is characterised by the existence of critical engagement. Critical engagement may happen in conversations with the self or with a group. In this thesis, existing knowledge and experiences of Islam were discussed dialectically with reference to primary sources, namely al-Quran and Hadith, and were contextualised in the context of watching the Islamic reality TV show, *Kemuncak Imam Muda*. The thought processes involved in critically engaging with Islam may vary between individuals, but the most important thing is the encouragement of human agency in Muslims’ construction of knowledge about Islam, at the same time as embracing the ontology of the religion. By highlighting the spiritual judgmental rationality of the Muslim viewers in this thesis, I displayed their consciousness of Islam. The implications of the study for future research can be divided into three themes: Muslim viewers as active learners, Islamic Media literacy as an informal learning skill, and the production of creative contents. I will now describe each of these in turn.

#### 7.4.1 Muslims as active learners

Al-Quran is one of the Mu’jizat[^72] of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. It is the word of Allah, which contains Syariah: stories of the prophets and guidance for Muslims, which may educate the souls of those who read the Quran, and enable them to understand its meaning. The study of the Quran requires a teacher, and it constructs a formal learning experience as the learner works through a curriculum that consists of steps of learning related to recitation and learning about knowledge derived from Al-Quran. Another useful source is the Sunnah, which is the tradition or the way of the prophets that contains the words and depicts the actions of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. It is a form of informal education that Muslims engage with, to acquire the appropriate skills for obeying Islam. Both sources are passed down from generation to generation. Relating this to the present study, Al-Quran and Sunnah were mediated through the show *Imam Muda*. Emulating the prophet as an Imam for the community and in prayer creates a representation of an exemplary Akhlaq to the

[^72]: Literal meaning: miracles that had been bestowed by the Prophet.
viewers. Therefore, the representation of Muslims and Islam in the media act as a form of enrichment for the benefit of Muslim viewers’ knowledge and experiences of Islam.

The impact of the show on the participants was reflected in their more nuanced understanding of the role of an Imam in modern Malaysia. Muslims are introduced to the functions of an Imam during their early education when they are taught the act of worship, or through their observation of Muslim surroundings. The participants in this study had learnt that an Imam is a person who is a leader in prayer, who gives Tazkirah (reminders), who offers khutbah every Friday, and disseminates Islamic knowledge in the masjid (mosque). They are also used to the idea that an Imam is usually an older and wiser member of the community. The emerging trend of a famous preacher in the media has sparked the idea of a famous Imam. Combined with the context of reality TV, this offers a fresh perspective on the profession of an Imam. Young Imams are getting more involved in society and on media platforms. Training the younger generation to be good Imams offers an opportunity to provide an example to Muslim youth.

The participants also demonstrated an understanding of the characteristics of a good Imam, viewing him as a person of noble character, with a good grasp of Islamic knowledge and good Akhlaq as a religious figure. The participants in the male Muslim group reflected on their self-practise as Muslims because, for Muslims, the Imam is an exemplar for being a good carer for wives, children or extended family members. With regards to the Muslimah, they learnt the qualities of being a good leader. Muslim women or Muslimah can be leaders, just as much as Muslim men. This engagement allowed the participants to reflect on the Muslim lifestyle, the practices of good Akhlaq, portraying understandings of Islamic knowledge and perfecting the recitation of the Quran.

The research shows that reflections and discussions during and after the process of watching Kemuncak Imam Muda highlighted the function of Muslim viewers as active learners. Whenever Muslims watch an Islamic TV Programme, presumably a reflection or discussion takes place during or after the show, which indicates that learning has taken place. In an Islamic context, this can be considered as ‘Muhasabah’, which refers to a change or an increase of understanding in areas related to knowledge of Islam. In this research, data obtained from the participants' reactions and reflections can therefore be seen as a form of critical engagement. Therefore, the research emphasised that even in the seemingly ordinary experience of watching television, learning can take place. This offers
an alternative perspective to the traditional teachings of Islam, where the teacher is the main focus of learning. This traditional form of teaching is mostly implemented in educational settings, with the purpose of constructing Islamic knowledge in the areas of Adab and Akhlaq.

Active learning in Islamic Education allows students to participate in their construction of knowledge, and enables them to understand the subjects presented. It is applicable in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts, as part of Islamic Education. I suggest that in formal and non-formal settings for Islamic Education, watching Islamic TV programmes should be accompanied by a teacher as a facilitator to lead students to initiate discussions or reflections based on the stimulus, and contents obtained from the TV show. The conclusion of their discussions could be reflected upon together with the teacher. With regards to active learning in an informal setting, it is generally self-initiated, self-sustained and self-motivated. Contextualising the active learning in this study, it can be argued that the creation of media contents is intentional, but the consumption of media contents may vary, depending on the state of the viewers. Thus, the viewers may experience what Marsick and Watkins (2001) refer to as intentional, unintentional or incidental informal learning. Intentional informal learning will happen if the viewers have an explicit aim to learn informally. For example, watching Kemuncak Imam Muda with the state of mind to learn about Young Imams in Malaysia, viewers would be able to distinguish the manifested contents that contain messages related to the finalists’ performances in each segment. Yet, unintentional or incidental informal learning may happen in other areas, in the absence of an explicit focus or aim. In this study, the viewers were unaware that they were being educated with regards to the characteristics of a young Imam in modern Malaysia because the show was framed by a contest format that aimed to entertain Muslim viewers. Therefore, in order for the viewers to be aware of the state required for active learning and to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of Islam, they needed to be equipped with Islamic media literacy as an informal learning skill.

7.4.2 Islamic media literacy as an informal learning skill

Religious literacy relates to the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to understand religion (Conroy, 2016; Richardson, 2017; Wright, 2016). This process is undergoing transformation, in an age of globalisation, which has created links between societies with different faiths and cultures, via the processes of migration (ibid). Islamic media literacy in
this context can be seen as the development of media literacy related to Islam. It allows Muslims to be able to access the knowledge of Islam, which is available in the media, and to critically evaluate related sources and references. The ultimate aim is to create trustworthy media, which do not thrive on misrepresentations of Islam. When knowledge about Islam is portrayed on television, viewers, especially Muslims, need to be able to relate their understanding of Islamic TV programmes to the root of Islamic knowledge. With Islamic media literacy, Muslims are becoming active learners, as learning is a never-ending process. Thus, watching television with critical engagement shows the viewers’ ability to read the messages put forward in the media. Reading media messages involves the cognitive process of understanding the contents of media within the social context and cultural background of the viewers (Ali et al., 2013; Getz, 1994; Glover et al., 2011; Kellner and Share, 2007). The viewers negotiate and interpret the meaning, then express their reflections or judgments.

This study has shown that the Islamic Education system needs to integrate Islamic media literacy more into its curriculum. This is an essential skill for the future as it would assist in assessing information obtained from the media. The under-labouring philosophy, incorporating Islamic Critical Realism in media literacy, allows a critical evaluation, contextual interpretation, and spiritual judgment of reading or extracting media messages. For example, participants in this study agreed that Kemuncak Imam Muda provides them with beneficial information, as well as being a form of entertainment. The participants’ reflections on the contents indicated that they had indirectly learnt about the essence of being an Imam. This involved a process of critical engagement that indicated informal learning. Therefore, teachers or parents should be encouraged to teach media literacy and to use creative media and alternative forms of Islamic entertainment as a means of enriching Islamic knowledge and practices.

Nevertheless, Islamic media literacy is an underdeveloped concept. This study has shown the need to acquire media literacy as part of the essential skills of practising Muslims. It is suggested that a combination of Media literacy and Original Islamic Critical Realism would provide useful guidance for Muslims’ assessment and critical thinking. The Centre of Media Literacy (2019)\(^73\) has stated that media literacy consists of five main aspects:

\(^{73}\) Information regarding Media Literacy was obtained from https://www.medialit.org/ [Accessed 20 August 2019].
authorship, format, audience, content, and purpose (see Hobbs and Jensen, 2009; Koltay, 2011), as described below:

1. Authorship refers to the creator or sender of the message. All media messages are constructed from selected or manifested media texts, and appear to be ‘real’. Yet, in reality, these are the product of an editorial team.

2. Format refers to the construction of messages using a creative approach or language that appeals to viewers. The creation of a medium has a unique influence that inspires various understandings and interpretations of a message amongst viewers.

3. Audience refers to the receiver who negotiates meaning in context. Within the same media message, people may have a similar understanding or different opinions. This negotiation allows people to offer various interpretations of the manifestations of media messages.

4. Content refers to the message conveyed in the media, embedded within the ideas and values presented. Media messages are designed in certain ways and have commercial implications that incline towards the advertising agencies’ preferences.

5. Purpose refers to the coordination of media messages to gain profit and power. The media have social power to persuade others to view content, which in turn has political implications.

Media literacy provides a critical procedure and when combined with a shared commitment to Islamic Critical Realism, will enhance viewers’ understanding of Islam in the media (see Chapter 2.3, p. 53). Therefore, combining these two concepts to create Islamic media literacy provides an opportunity to contribute to the development of the enrichment of Islamic Education. It will become a tool for Muslims to stay grounded within Islam and to explore innovations in the creation of media contents. The development of Islamic Media literacy could assist Muslim consumers or viewers to be mindful of the media sources they engage with. Through the acquisition of media literacy, viewers would be able to read media messages and assess their understanding of the phenomenon propagated. The aim is to mitigate authentic and inauthentic understandings of Islam. Undeniably, the media portray Islam in various ways, and some can be biased in their adoption of a certain political stance. Globalisation has blurred the boundaries between the true story and false news, and it is up to consumers or viewers to evaluate the media for themselves (Bazalgette and Buckingham, 2013; Kress, 2003; Silverblatt et al., 2014). For example, this study portrayed
young Imams in Malaysia through the representation of localised customs relative to the Malaysian cultural context. These representations would be different in other countries that practise Islam. The judgments involved in understanding the different contexts in which Islam is practised would lead the viewers back to the primary sources of Islam – Al-Quran and As-Sunnah – and thus through their critical engagement with these texts, to the acquisition of Islamic media literacy.

7.4.3 The production of Islamic entertainment

The purpose of Islamic entertainment is more than to entertain. It is a subtle way to propagate the messages of Islam on multiple levels. Higher intellectual viewers (i.e. viewers who have more formal and non-formal Islamic Education) will be able to read and interpret messages appropriately. Dissemination of Islamic messages are thus essential to the proper practise of Islam. Entertainment is an element that can attract younger viewers, as it can expose them to Islam in a fun and exciting manner. The primary purpose of creative contents such as television programmes is entertainment. Television programmes integrated with Islamic knowledge should be managed carefully by considering the content created as potentially educational for the viewers. This is important because Islamic television programmes might serve as a form of enrichment to scaffold Islamic Education among Malaysian Muslims. Thus, the production of Islamic creative content on media needs to follow and observe the characteristics of Islamic television programmes suggested by Ahmad Kamil, Mohd Fauzi, and Mohd Shamsul (2011): delivering clear facts, standing against reports that insult and engage in slander against Islam, providing authentic Islamic content knowledge and portraying good Akhlaq (see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 55).

With the creation of Islamic creative contents comes the responsibility of dealing with the issue of terrorism on a global scale, in the aftermath of 9-11 in America. A meta-analysis of 345 published studies between the years 2000 and 2015 (see Ahmed and Matthes, 2017) examined the media’s role in the construction of Muslim and Islamic identity. This study found that most previous research had investigated the themes of ‘migration’, ‘terrorism’, and ‘war’. It showed that Muslims were negatively represented and that Islam is portrayed as a violent religion (ibid). The current study, therefore, highlights the importance of Islamic TV shows in enriching Islamic Education. Thus, this highlights the essential role of content creation as a means for educating about Islam and clearing misconceptions surrounding the faith.
From this research, it can be asserted that TV productions may need to reconsider the creation of Islamic contents, by viewing them as educationally influential on the viewers. In this study, the representation of Islamic figures in *Imam Muda* educated the viewers about the Imams’ characteristics, knowledge and experiences, which could be emulated. In their judgments, the viewers assessed the finalists in the show and related their performances to their knowledge and experiences. They became active learners and media literate, as they read the contents of *Imam Muda* using a fresh critical lens. Hence, TV productions are encouraged to take into account academic studies that engage with creative ways of producing Islamic contents.

### 7.5 Limitations and delimitations of the study

This study was limited only to Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three and Malaysian Muslims because of the focus of the research, which was to investigate Muslims’ critical engagement with Islamic TV programmes in Malaysia. It also used only qualitative methods to gain new insights from the data obtained from observations, focus group discussions and viewing reflections. The findings were interpreted using the educational philosophy of Islamic Critical Realism. This enabled the researcher to gain a more in-depth insight into the participants’ informal Islamic Education. Due to the limitations of this study, the findings may not be generalised, since this was a small-scale study that engaged with only three groups of Muslims. Yet, this study informs that informal learning experience exists in any form of interaction either from reacting to the television programme, communicating reflections and discussing ideas with peers. The findings in this study can be the ground to study on Islamic active learning in various context, contribute to the development of Islamic media literacy and become the basis of market research to produce Malaysian ‘Gogglebox’ or Islamic creative contents productions.

The delimitation in this study is the application of variation theory and transcendental realism to reveal the learning that took place in the interactions between the participants and the show. This was crucial because of the viewers’ discernments, rationalisations and judgments about the show needed to be analysed qualitatively in order to acknowledge the informal learning that took place in the informal setting of watching television. The researcher also revised the research question, as the findings guided the ontology of this research. Thus, the strength of this study is its focus on its critical approach to informal Islamic Education in Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three. The multi-faceted analytic
approach and the qualitative data gained can contribute to the body of scholarly knowledge in the fields of Reality TV and Islamic media literacy.

The data obtained from the participants’ reactions and reflections were analysed to investigate how the viewers made judgments. From the judgments, it can be inferred that learning took place through the participants’ ability to discern the contents that they watched in Kemuncak *Imam Muda* season three. The conclusion of the discussion was that the participants perceived the show as a beneficial form of entertainment. The participants gained knowledge and experience that enabled them to suggest improvements for the show. They suggested that the show should have a more relaxed approach in the representation of young Imams. For example, one of the suggestions was related to the identity of the young Imam. Instead of having the Imam wear the same attire or restrictions in terms of their image or personality, the participants suggested that young Imams should create their own identity in the media space. The participants also suggested that the contents should be more transparent so that they could show the reality of the life of an Imam. Additionally, the judging bodies or faculty of *Imam Muda* should be visible because their comments offer a learning opportunity for the audience as they share their evaluations with the experts. Finally, the participants also would like to see the local young Imams become more recognised on an international scale.

7.6 Suggestions for future studies

Since this study is conducted on a small scale, with the central aim to explore Muslim viewers’ judgments, it is suggested that future studies should employ quantitative methods to engage with a broader range of examples of Islamic reality TV in Malaysia, and to focus on a broader sample of viewers, beyond Muslim populations. Also, it is encouraged to conduct a comparative study with the reception of non-Islamic media to reveal the difference of the reception between Islamic media and non-Islamic media to the Muslims and non-Muslims. Comparative studies should also be carried out on the similarities and differences between Islamic TV programmes in Malaysia and Islamic TV programmes in other countries in the South-East Asia region, as well as other parts of the world, such as the Middle East and Western contexts. It would be more contribution to the field of Islam media as there is also a need to study the representation of Muslimah or Muslim woman, and Muslim children in the media.
Another suggestion is to carry out research related to developing Islamic media literacy skills and instruments. This is important because in the era of new media, reading the media messages in television broadcasts or online media spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or blogs requires a critical assessment, since these sources influence or indoctrinate the users or viewers (Burn and Durran, 2007; Higgins, 1999; Kress, 2003; Livingstone, 2000; Silverblatt et al., 2014). Besides this, exploring Islamic media reception from different perspectives in education, such as the use of Islamic entertainment TV shows in different settings — formal and non-formal — would benefit from an integrated Islamic Education approach to the media. Future studies should also encourage collaborative industrial collaboration between TV productions or TV stations to understand the trend of Islamic content creations, with the application of different theories of learning to understand media reception of Islamic media from the perspective of education.

7.7 Conclusion

The Malaysian viewers in this study described Kemuncak Imam Muda season three as a beneficial form of entertainment. Through the content analysis described in this thesis, we can identify interactions that led to the transformation of their opinions and judgments. Since all the participants’ knowledge was obtained in the context of Islamic Education in school, some of them were more religious and were able to understand the content on a deeper level than others, who were less religious. The variety of Muslim backgrounds provided a variation of judgment that indicated informal learning. The under-labouring theoretical framework of Islamic Critical Realism highlighted that Islamic reality TV shows such as Imam Muda might function as a form of informal Islamic Education, which encourages the development of Muslims’ spiritual judgmental rationality. The data and theoretical cross-referencing employed created a unique approach to understanding learning in an informal setting. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers and viewers alike should utilise Islamic entertainment as a form of enrichment for Islamic knowledge and practices. This study has also highlighted that Islamic entertainment holds a transformative value to educate society about Islam, thus challenging the misperceptions that abound in mainstream media.
This research unpacked the learning sciences involved in the judgments of Muslim viewers, whilst watching Islamic Reality TV shows. It showed that we can learn during the seemingly ordinary experience of watching television. It also highlighted how we can understand viewers’ receptions of and social interactions with TV programmes in natural settings, whilst respecting each viewer’s individuality. This study demonstrated different and creative ways of examining knowledge about Islamic Education portrayed in the Imam Muda reality TV show. The possibilities of learning from reality TV go beyond discussions of entertainment. By researching reality TV in an educational context, this study suggested another mode of reception of Reality TV. It was valuable to understand how viewers understood Islamic TV because the production of Islamic content is not the only essential component. Rather, it is more important to educate the viewers or the end-users to be able to evaluate the content and apply their knowledge to the context presented.

The impact of this study on Malaysian society is its demonstration of the effectiveness of Islamic Education in formal and non-formal settings, when teaching about Islamic knowledge and practices. Therefore, informal learning should become a more dominant aspect of Islamic Education in the Malaysian context. Furthermore, educational resources such as the media can enrich the whole process of living as a Muslim. Islam relates not only to knowledge about the history of the prophets and Syariah. It is also a way of life. In order to develop progressive Muslim identities, which are modern and reflexive, viewers must go back to the roots of Islam — Al-Quran and As-Sunnah — to develop critical and creative informal educational approaches for the future.
References


Joseph LoSasso, J. (2011). *That is bad! This is good: Morality as constructed by viewers of television reality programs*. University of South Florida.


Appendices

Appendix A

Qualitative Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video description</th>
<th>Commentaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B

*Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors (TbrCD)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Al-Quran</td>
<td>This field focuses on correct Al-Quran, spoken fluently, with tajwid; memorising selected verses, to understand, and appreciate the lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hadith</td>
<td>This field focuses on understanding the general meaning of Hadith and appreciating the lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Akidah</td>
<td>This field focuses on the foundation of beliefs, attitudes and responsibilities towards God, and understanding that true faith portrays the application of faith in daily life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ibadah</td>
<td>This field focuses on understanding and appreciating <em>Ibadah</em>, which is determined by Allah and implemented in Muslims’ daily lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sirah</td>
<td>This field focuses on understanding <em>Sirah</em> of the Prophet, learning from it, and applying it in daily life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adab and Akhlaq</td>
<td>This field focuses on the appreciation of the rules and methods of engaging in human relationships with God, with other human beings, and with the environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islamic Education Content Standards circulated by the Ministry of Education, 2011.
# Appendix C

**Ta’ dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standard (TbrPS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main category</th>
<th>Sub Category/ Definition of category</th>
<th>Sub-sub category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1.  <strong>KNOWLEDGE</strong></td>
<td>Able to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understands the basics of Quran recitation: has memorised the standard verses, understands the basic meaning of the standard verses, and has been introduced to selected Hadith, the fundamentals and basic concepts of <em>Akidah</em>, <em>Ibadah</em>, <em>Sirah Nabawiyah</em> and Islamic Civilisation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a.  Al- Quran Recitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Repeat the verse of Al-Quran by following the recited examples.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Memorise the selected verse from Al-Quran. (one verse only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Hadith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Recall in brief the meaning of the Hadith.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c.  <em>Akidah</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. State the basic concepts of <em>Akidah</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d.  <em>Ibadah</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. State the concepts of specific <em>Ibadah</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.  <em>Sirah Nabawiyah</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Restate the biography of selected Islamic figures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2. <strong>KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</strong></td>
<td>Able to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS | Understands the basics of Quran recitation: has memorised the standard verses, understands the meaning of the standard verses, has been introduced to selected Hadith, the fundamentals and basic concepts of *Akidah*, *Ibadah*, *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization, has *Adab and Akhlaq*. | a. **Al- Quran Recitation**  
  i. Repeat after the models of Al-Quran recitation with minimum guidance.  
  ii. Memorise selected verses of Al-Quran (more than one)  
  iii. State the meaning of selected verses of Al-Quran.  
 b. **Hadith**  
  i. Restate the deeper meaning of the Hadith.  
 c. **Akidah**  
  i. Explain the concepts of *Akidah*.  
 d. **Ibadah**  
  i. Explain the basics of performing specific *Ibadah*.  
 e. **Sirah Nabawiyah**  
  i. Recognise the distinct roles of Islamic figures.  
  ii. Relate the roles of the Islamic figures in the *Sirah*.  
 f. **Adab and Akhlaq**  
  i. Identify manners as practised by Muslims in daily life and social interaction.  
  ii. Compare between good practices and bad practices in daily life.  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3. <strong>KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND BEING ABLE TO PERFORM</strong></th>
<th>Demonstrates the basic ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS | Demonstrates the basic ability to recite the Quran: has memorised the standard verses, understands the meaning of the standard verses and selected Hadith, understands *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman*, performs *Ibadah*, emulates good practices from the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization, has *Adab and Akhlaq* | a. **Al-Quran Recitation**  
   i. Recite Al-Quran without guidance.  
   ii. Memorise selected verses from Al-Quran correctly.  
   iii. Explain the meaning of selected verses of Al-Quran.  

b. **Hadith**  
   i. Explain in brief the meaning of the selected Hadith.  
   ii. Describe the relationship between the meanings of the selected Hadith to the current context in life.  

c. **Akidah**  
   i. Identify the *Rukun Iman* portrayed.  
   ii. Express *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman*.  

d. **Ibadah**  
   i. Describe the manner of performing specific *Ibadah*.  
   ii. Show the manner of performing specific *Ibadah*.  

e. **Sirah Nabawiyah**  
   i. Report specific events in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.  |
ii. Discuss key points of the specific events in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.

f. *Adab and Akhlaq*
   i. Choose specific good practices in daily life.
   
   ii. Explain the cause and effect of bad practices.
   
   iii. Identify strategies to prevent/avoid bad practices and solutions to overcome the consequences of bad practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th><strong>1. KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, AND BEING ABLE TO PERFORM WITH ADAB</strong></th>
<th>Demonstrates the ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| LIFE AND CAREER SKILLS | Demonstrates the skills of Quran recitation: has memorised the standard verses, is able to clarify the meaning of the standard verses and of selected Hadith, embraces Akidah based on the Rukun Iman, performs Ibadah, and emulates good practices from the Sirah Nabawiyah and Islamic Civilization, has Adab and Akhlaq. | a. Al-Quran Recitation  
   i. Recite Al-Quran with correct *tajwid*.  
   ii. Relate the meaning of selected verses of Al-Quran to the current context in life.  

b. Hadith  
   i. Recognise the relationship of the meanings of selected Hadith to the current context in life.  
   ii. Relate the meanings of selected Hadith to the current context in life.  

c. Akidah  
   i. Describe the *Rukun Iman* portrayed.  
   ii. Discuss the *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman*.  

d. Ibadah  
   i. Relate the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* to particular situations.  
   ii. Apply the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* for particular situations.  

e. Sirah Nabawiyah  
   i. Analyse specific events in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.  
   ii. Distinguish key points for the specific events in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.  

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f. *Adab and Akhlaq*
   i. Establish good practices in daily life.

   ii. Role play good practices and bad practices in daily life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>LIFE AND CAREER SKILLS</th>
<th>2. KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, AND BEING ABLE TO PERFORM WITH EXCELLENT ADAB</th>
<th>Uses the basic skills to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| | Applies the skills of Quran recitation: has memorised the standard verses, explains the meaning of the standard verses and of selected Hadith, embraces *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman*, performs *Ibadah*, and emulates good practices from *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization, has *Adab* and *Akhlaq*. | a. Al-Quran Recitation  
   i. Recite Al-Quran fluently and with correct *tajwid*.  
   ii. Apply the relationship of the meanings of selected verses from Al-Quran to the current context in life. |  |
| | | b. Hadith  
   i. Analyse the meaning of selected Hadith.  
   ii. Apply the relationship of the meanings of selected Hadith to the current context in life. |  |
| | | c. *Akidah*  
   i. Relate *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman* in daily life.  
   ii. Compare between the concepts of the right faith and misguided faith. |  |
| | | d. *Ibadah*  
   i. Review the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* for particular situations.  
   ii. Differentiate the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* for particular situations. |  |
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e. Sirah Nabawiyah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Propose novel key points for the specific events in the <em>Sirah Nabawiyah</em> and portray Islamic Civilization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Consolidate the lessons and teachings from the specific events in the <em>Sirah Nabawiyah</em> and Islamic Civilization portrayed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Adab and Akhlaq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Evaluate good practices and bad practices in daily life.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Integrate good practices into daily life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3. <strong>KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, AND BEING ABLE TO PERFORM WITH MITHALI ADAB</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **LIFE AND CAREER SKILLS** | Recites the Quran skilfully: has memorised the standard verses, describes understanding of the meaning of the standard verses and of selected Hadith, embraces *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman*, practices *Ibadah*, and emulates the good practices in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization, applies *Adab* and *Akhlaq*. | a. Al- Quran Recitation  
   i. Model Al-Quran recitation fluently and proficiently with correct *tajwid*.  
   ii. Evaluate the relationship of the meanings of selected verses of Al-Quran to the current context in life.  
   iii. Interpret the relationship of the meanings of selected verses of Al-Quran to the current context in life. |
|  |  | b. Hadith  
   i. Evaluate the meaning of selected Hadith.  
   ii. Draw conclusions from the relationship of the meanings of the Hadith to the current context in life. |
|  |  | c. *Akidah*  
   i. Debate on the concept of the right faith and misguided faith.  
   ii. Defend *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman* in daily life.  
   iii. Support *Akidah* based on the *Rukun Iman* in daily life. |
d. **Ibadah**  
   i. Evaluate the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* for particular situations.  
   ii. Justify the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* for particular situations.  
   iii. Appraise the manner of performing specific *Ibadah* for particular situations.  

e. **Sirah Nabawiyah**  
   i. Draw conclusions from specific events in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.  
   ii. Appreciate novel key points from specific events in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.  
   iii. Appraise the lessons and teachings from specific events in *Sirah Nabawiyah* and Islamic Civilization portrayed.  

f. **Adab and Akhlaq**  
   i. Assess good practices and bad practices in daily life.  
   ii. Reflect on the good practices in daily life.  
   iii. Practise the teachings of Islam in daily life.  

### Appendix D

**Observation Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Manifested IE content</th>
<th>Audience reactions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Theme:

Episode:
Appendix E

Focus Group Discussion Guide (Adapted from Krueger, 2002)

I. Opening Script
   a) **Establish Rapport**
      Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our session. Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about the TV show that you just watched. My name is Mohamad Muhidin and I am a PhD student in the Institute of Education, UCL, on a project that seeks to study Malaysian Muslims’ critical reflections related to the *Imam Muda* Islamic Education-oriented reality television. I want to know what you like, what you don't like, and how programmes might be improved.

   b) **Purpose**
      I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your education, some experiences you have had within the context of Islamic Education in school and in the community, which can be related to what you have watched or experienced in life. There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

   c) **Recording**
      You've probably noticed the microphone and video camera. We're recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will be on a first name basis, and we won't use any names in our reports. You may be assured of complete confidentiality.

   d) **Motivation**
      I hope to use this information to help me in my study to understand the way Malaysian Muslims make judgments about manifested Islamic educational content in television and how they negotiate it with their modern lifestyles.

   e) **Timeline**
      The discussion should take about 30-50 minutes. Well, let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your name and where you live.

      (Transition: Let me begin by asking you some questions about where you live and your family)
II. Body

A. (Topic) General demographic information
   1. How long have you lived in ___________ (depends on the location)?
      a. Are you originally from ___________ (depends on the location)?
      b. What was it like living there?
   2. Do you have a small or large family?
      a. How many siblings do you have?
      b. Please describe your relationship with your family.
      c. What type of activities do you do with your family?

(Begin transition to the next topic)

B. (Topic) Rationales
   1. Can you tell me about what you think of the Imam Muda reality television?
   2. How did you feel about the content of the show? Is it educational?

(Begin transition to the next topic)

C. (Topic) Viewing Experiences — Probing on reactions observed
   1. Where do you get your educational information from?
   2. Can you tell me any more about that?
   3. When you are doing that, what are you thinking about?
   4. When you say... what exactly do you mean?
   5. Can you give me an example of that?

(Begin transition to the next topic)

D. (Topic) Probing for conscious decisions about their reaction and rationalities
   1. Did anything make you change your mind about how to do this / that?
   2. Was there anything you found difficult? What did you do then?

(Begin transition to the next topic)

E. (Topic) Probing for intentions and conceptions
   1. When you use the word learning there, what exactly do you mean?
   2. When you say you want to get more knowledge about this subject what do you mean?
   3. What counts as understanding?
   4. Is all learning the same?
   5. What do you like best about the proposed program?

(End transition. Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about you. Let me briefly summarise the information that I have recorded during our discussion.)
III. Closing
   A. (Summarise)
   B. (Maintain Rapport) I appreciate the time you took for this discussion. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know?
   C. (Action to be taken) I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you at home if I have any more questions? Thanks again. I look forward to being in touch with you again.
Appendix F

Sample of Content Analysis (CA) sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content manifestation</th>
<th>Content Analysis</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>A Muslim Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Segment One (S1) – Story Board | CA.S1.02:46 - The show started with an opening nasyid performance by three finalists, which was a song seeking forgiveness from Allah, entitled *Astaghfirullah*  
CA.S1.03:03 - The host introduced the three finalists and established that the song to be performed was going to appear on an album later that year, in 2012. The finalists were *Imam Muda* (IM) Jabar, *Imam Muda* (IM) Hafiz, and *Imam Muda* (IM) Naufal. The host thanked the sponsors and explained the assessment structure, which consisted of Tahriri [a written examination], Syafawi [an oral examination], a practical assessment and Sahsiah [character] assessment. For Kemuncak Medan *Imam Muda*, the initial assessment was Syafawi, which consisted of a segment called ‘Questions and Answers’ performed by Muslimah 02:50 - They look focused and watched the show with curiosity and an open mind. They admit that they have not watched the show, even though it was aired in 2012. They are aware of other Islamic Reality shows such as Daie Millenia (TV3) | A group of Muslims                                                                                                                                                                                                 |-----------------|
<p>| CA.S1.02:46 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | A Muslim Family                                                                                                                                                                                                 |-----------------|
| CA.S1.03:03 | A group of Muslimah 02:50 - They look focused and watch the show with curiosity and an open mind. They admit that they have not watched the show, even though it was aired in 2012. They are aware of other Islamic Reality shows such as Daie Millenia (TV3) and | A Muslim Family                                                                                                                                                                                                 |-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA.S1.04:24</td>
<td>IM Hafiz (IMH) visiting a masjid (mosque) in Subang Jaya, where he used to be an Imam, and where he subsequently became a member of a panel in a forum. These shots were intercut with content from an interview with his parents, where they acknowledged their support for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA.S1.04:24 to CA.S1.04:49</td>
<td>The VT playback started with IM Hafiz visiting a masjid (literal translation: mosque) in Subang Jaya, where he used to be an Imam, and where he subsequently became a member of a panel in a forum. These shots were intercut with content from an interview with his parents, where they acknowledged their support for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>274</td>
<td>Answers with Mystery Guests’, Tazkirah and Syafawi Ulumul Quran. The shot then transitioned from the stage to the VT Playback of gotong-royong [collective spring cleaning], organised and executed by the finalists in their hometown, as their final practical assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>274</td>
<td>Pencetus Ummah (Astro Oasis).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>05:21</td>
<td>From the forum, the VT Playback transitioned to the gotong-royong in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bukit Malawati, with one of the sponsors of the show, Bank Islam.</td>
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<td>This was an outreach activity that Bank Islam engaged in with the</td>
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<td>community. Rohana Kasim, the Bank Islam Branch Manager (Sungai</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Besar) stated her opinion: that the role of a young Imam should be</td>
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<td>expanded into the community, rather than being limited to the masjid</td>
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<td>05:35</td>
<td>While watching the finalist task in their hometown, Maria’s child</td>
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<td>comes to her mother and plays with her. The children continue playing</td>
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<td>in front of the television. I did not remove them, as I wanted to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>keep it as original and as natural as I could.</td>
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<tr>
<td>05:31</td>
<td>They were discussing IM Hafiz’s activity. Fahad recognised the place</td>
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<td>It was his former school.</td>
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<td>CA.S1.06:21</td>
<td>IM Naufal (IMN)</td>
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CA.S1.08:11 to CA.S1.08:57 - From the Tazkirah, the VT Playback transitioned to his visit to Orang Asli village in Ulu Melaka, Serendah, to learn about the local community and to show his support for them. In IM Naufal’s interview, he described the realities of life for new Muslims, and stated that he was there to share more knowledge about Islam. IM Naufal's statement was reinforced by an interview with the Bank Islam Customer Business Manager (Kawasan Tengah), Muhammad Rizal Mohamed Rosly, who stated that they were coming to the village to do gotong-royong and were going to send the contributions to the villagers.

CA.S1.09:20 to CA.S1.09:20 - IM Naufal continued his final task by distributing donations to the less fortunate in his neighbourhood together with Islamic Relief. Mariha Suhaimi, a trustee and one of the representatives of Islamic Relief, stated that this activity [Ramadan Relief] aimed to help more Muslim families in need.

08:55 – Fahad mentioned to the group that he thought the activities conducted by the finalists were part of the assessment.
CA.S1.09:20

11:08 – Faruq mentioned that IM Jabar might be a good singer. Faisal agreed with his statement and added that this was usually the case in the Malaysian context.

09:43 - The child started to play with the mother while the father concentrates on watching the show. The child went to the kitchen and the mother went to follow her child to the kitchen. Then they continued to watch the show.

CA.S1.09:30 to CA.S1.10:04 - The last VT Playback showed Imam Muda Jabar visiting Kolej Islam Darul Ridzuan, where he worked as an assistant lecturer. In the footage, he is welcomed by his students and faculty members, which is intercut with an interview from Anas Md Yusof, Deputy president of administration and finance in his college. IM Jabar proceeded to give a talk to the students and to share his experience with the Imam Muda academy.

CA.S1.10:04

IM Jabar (IMJ)
The VT playback then transitioned to IM Jabar going to his alma mater in Malim Nawar to engage in gotong-royong. Mohd Noor Jab, the Bank Islam Customer Business Manager (Perak) stated in his interview that this was an outreach initiative instigated by Bank Islam, which involved going into schools and contributing to society. IM Jabar thanked his former school for allowing him to give something back.

CA.S1.10:28 to CA.S1.10:24

IM Jabar completed his final task in his village. He met a poor single 70-year-old lady in his community who was living in a small dilapidated house, and sought to send donations and to distribute food. He ended his visit by reciting prayers for the old lady.
The analysis according to Ta’dib bil Ar-Risalah Standard Matrix (Appendix A and B)

Segment One portrayed the practical assessments of the young Imams, focusing on their ability to plan and execute tasks. It is essential to show the parts of the assessment that highlighted their involvement in the community. In Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Content Descriptors, the representation of the manifested contents in Segment One was categorised under Adab and Akhlaq. This means the content portrayed the manners of the finalists in the masjid and in the community. The result correlated with Ta’dib bil al-Risalah Performance Standards, which posit that viewers will be able to show them their understanding of the contents, reflect on the behaviour of the Imams, analyse the task execution and cast judgments on the comments made about the young Imams.

12:12 – Faisal asked the group to pray for the old lady in the video.

CA.S1.11:25
<table>
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<th>Commercial Break #1 - anecdotes</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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| - The participants were already curious about the winner and wanted to vote for their winning finalists. | A group of Muslimah (Batch 1) – Discussion Part 1 – Time frame 14:40-15:12  

**Aisha:** I think some of the Imams do the same activities in the show, for example visiting the Muallaf? (she assumed that the task was determined by the production team). So, each finalist needs to visit Muallaf? Or, is it individually planned by the finalist?  

**Researcher:** Oh, it is the finalists' plan.  

**Maria:** That means when announced that they are the three finalists. They started to plan what to do for their final task, right?  

**Researcher:** Yes. They started to plan what they needed to do as they already knew the requirement for the practical assessment since episode two. |

| - The participants responded to one of the finalists’ tasks which is to go to their hometown and organise an activity with their locals. | A group of Muslims (Batch 2) – Discussion Part 1 – Time frame 17:15-17:28  

**Faruq:** It is good to see the finalists (referring to IM Jabar) choose to do activities in their alma mater. At least the juniors in the school, like religious school, have a path to follow.  

**Fahad:** Um. (nodded his head). Yes, they were inspired by their alumni, and they have a role model too!  

**Faisal:** Yes (nodded)  

**Fahad:** They (the juniors in the school) will know whom to model.  

**Faruq:** Yes, they (the finalists) made a good choice. |
Both participants have experienced watching Imam Muda season One and have made a comparison between the two seasons.

- They were not satisfied with the way the task was shown as it was too short for them to get the message in the clip.
- They acknowledged the format of the show as they were only watching the final episode.

A Muslim Family (Batch 3) – Discussion Part 1 – Time frame 13:37-14:35

Abdullah: For me, who did not follow this Imam Muda (referring to the third season), I would not know who the finalists are, and their backgrounds. So, to the viewers who watch the show for the first time, they would not be able to see the Imam in detail right? For example, if you are reading a newspaper about a case in court, and it is in the fourth session; usually, the reporters gave some catch-up information and explained to the readers about the case backgrounds. So, in this show, I did not see any… I do not know what the young Imam worked as before, their age and that to state a few. If it said while establishing the finalist, written (on lower third) or explained by the host, at least, “oh… that young Imam is at this age, from here” … then it would be great!

Researcher: So, meaning in the final show, they (Imam Muda, season three) need to show more about the finalists’ background?

Abdullah: Yes!

Researcher: For each finalist?

Abdullah: Yes, because we need to take note that not everyone follows the show from the first episode. Also, people usually watch the final episode because of the media attention (concerning the promotion of the final). So, people would switch on to the programme and watch it. However, if they do not know who they are (the finalist/contestant in the show) in some detail, it would be like: “Who is this?”

Researcher: Oh, but they (the show) have daily updates towards the final. Like daily capsules (the show diaries referring to Kapsul Imam Muda)

Abdullah: Yes! Kapsul! Yes! Yes!

Researcher: It is there (referring to the final of Imam Muda, season three) but maybe needs to have more recap.

Abdullah: Yes! Just a little. As I said before, not everyone watched the show from the first episode…people who watched the show for the first time and it is the final.
**A Muslim Family (Batch 3) – Discussion Part 1 – Time frame 15:22-16:52**

**Amal:** Looks like the show has too many shortcuts and the shortcuts are too simple. It does not deliver what is intended to be shown. For example, in the mosque (referring to IM Hafiz, who conducted a forum in the mosque), it (the final of Imam Muda) should explain what he (IM Hafiz) does in the mosque…

**Abdullah:** One more thing, for example like the Kedahan (people from a state named Kedah, Malaysia), “it is too scattered” … scattered like, some went to the school (IM Jabar school) because of what? Like he (IM Jabar) went to his university, right? (confirmed with the researcher and the researcher nodded), Forum? Like, “the forum is about what?” like that, like visiting the Orang Asli village. The one (IM Naufal) who visited the Orang Asli village is good. For example, what he did is good; he mentioned a little bit about what he is currently doing. For example, “Look inside the building, Ustaz is explaining”, or whatever he had said.

**Researcher:** Yes.

**Abdullah:** Yes (nodded)

**Amal:** Yes, I received the message (referring to IM Naufal’s task).

**Abdullah:** Yes, that part I received (meaning that he understood the message of da’wah). Others I am not sure what they are doing.

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The analysis according to Ta’ dib bil Ar-Risalah Standard Matrix (Appendix A and B)

The reactions from B1, B2 and B3 in Segment One showed that they understood the contents and discussed the latent contents in the practical and character assessment. For the main contents, they reacted to the task and investigated how the task was prepared and executed. They also reacted to the way the contents were presented and suggested elements that could be improved. Meanwhile, for the latent contents, they displayed the ability to analyse the themes presented and discussed the impact of the contents on society. Hence, the participants indirectly understood the Adab and Akhlaq of an Imam and reflected upon the importance and impact of community service. This shows that the participants were reflective about the young Imams’ behaviours and engaged with the way young Imams should function in the real world.