The Trap of „Halal" Entertainment

How the Permissible Numbs Our Youth

One
Ummah
Forum

Introduction

Panem et circenses. Bread and circuses. With these few words, 2nd-century Roman satirist Juvenal captured a timeless truth: a society that is well-fed and entertained stops asking questions. It demands no change, shows no resistance, and thinks no further than its own immediate comfort. As long as the spectacle continued, the system held firm, whether viewed from the seats of the amphitheater or felt in the arena's dust.

Today, however, we no longer need physical arenas. Our "games" now play out on screens, while algorithms serve up our daily "bread": personalized, available on demand, and streaming on an endless loop. What once began as a deliberate tool of social control has evolved in the 21st century into something far more subtle: a cultural autopilot that we now keep running all by ourselves.

And this isn't just about killing time anymore. In today's world, entertainment has become our social fabric, the new foundation upon which we build relationships, feel a sense of belonging, and navigate our place in society. Where we once shared convictions, visions, or life missions, we now bond over Netflix series, fandoms, and common childhood memories of Harry Potter.

But when entertainment becomes our ticket to community, it inevitably reshapes how we view ourselves. We increasingly define who we are by what we watch, listen to, and share - in short: by what we consume - rather than by what we actually stand for. And the deeper this new logic embeds itself in our daily lives, the less conscious we are of its presence anymore. In this way, distraction becomes habit, consumerism becomes normalcy, until - in the words of media theorist Neil Postman - we are "amusing ourselves to death."[1]

This cultural shift hasn't spared anyone, including us as a Muslim community. Many saw the need to respond – with alternatives that wouldn't just be harmless in content, but might even add positively to religious education. Underlying this was the hope of finding a way to combine the entertaining with the educational. Over the last decade especially, this has given birth to an entire subculture: "Halal Entertainment." This meant: nasheeds instead of music, films about the Sahaba

instead of Marvel heroes, Muslim comedy instead of mainstream stand-up – alongside Islamic lifestyle vlogs, food tours, and shopping hauls.

While much of this work has been incredibly creative and well-intentioned for sure, insha'Allah, and while the desire to create safe spaces for our children and youth is indeed noble, Postman's famous line of "amusing ourselves to death" raises an urgent question for us as Muslims: Should we really be spending our limited free time outside of school, university, or work watching others sing about Islam, stage battles, stroll through shopping malls, crack jokes, or travel the globe – simply because it's "halal"?

This question may sound exaggerated, but it highlights in an uncomfortable way what is easily overlooked: all these activities seem entirely "normal", even enriching and meaningful. And yet, when we strip away their packaging and call them by name, we find that - despite all good intent and high-quality production - their core still remains unchanged: entertainment. This holds true even when scrolling through "Muslim TikTok", where instead of anything explicit, we're fed a steady diet of funny preacher clips, viral Qur'an challenges, and reaction videos to a wide range of „Islamic" content.

But if that's become our new standard, how exactly do we differ from those Roman citizens content with their spectacles? Back then, they sat in stadiums watching gladiator fights. Today, we stare at our devices consuming religious content. The result? A clear conscience, but an understanding of Islam that extends no further than the edge of a display – largely missing the vast horizon of prophetic guidance.

What if this problem isn't the result of some external assault on young Muslim identity as is often assumed, but something we've inadvertently created ourselves? What if, in trying to protect our youth, we've cultivated a type of Muslim who consumes anything and everything that *looks* like religion, yet walks away with little more than an aesthetic, performative online Islam? A model that mimics direction and belonging, while in reality just stitching together scattered *halal* elements without illuminating the coherent path beneath them.

If that's the case, it's not enough to simply offer better or more morally sound alternatives. Instead, we would need to honestly examine if our efforts truly guide

people toward the clear path that the Prophet ﷺ left for us – or whether we are merely producing fashionable abayas, inspirational quotes, and impressive online appearances, in short, a lifestyle built on comfort, consumption, and self-indulgence. Perhaps, as a community we too have begun walking in the footsteps of the Roman emperors, ultimately serving the same ancient formula: bread and circuses, just with an updated recipe and script.

This whitepaper neither seeks to challenge the "halal" in "Halal Entertainment," nor does it question the sincerity of individuals working in this field. Rather, it invites to the following food for thought:

- What happens when we begin squeezing our religiosity into digestible formats?

- Is it enough to offer young Muslims a "better alternative" – or do we need a revival of our own educational culture?

- Are we truly on the right path if we keep reacting to cultural trends instead of setting a long-term direction of our own?

Perhaps we can't stop the game from running. But maybe our real problem as Muslims isn't really that the game is running – but that we've as a community started to reshape it as though it were always ours to begin with. We adjust the rules, repaint the stage, assign new roles, and convince ourselves that we are making a change. But what if we're ultimately just raising a new generation of viewers and players who've long forgotten that the game isn't real?

Media and Being Muslim

In the 1960s, Canadian media theorist and television critic Marshall McLuhan coined a phrase that continues to spark debate today: **"The medium is the message."** With this, he completely challenged the way people thought about messages and meaning. Communication studies at the time focused primarily on a message's content, i. e. *what* is being said. McLuhan, however, shifted attention to form itself, arguing that the way a message is packaged fundamentally shapes how we receive it. Or, to put it in simpler terms: it's not **what** is being said that matters most, but *how*.

Just consider this well-known example: books affect us differently than screens. Reading demands time, focus, and mental visualization. Scrolling, on the other hand, sets us up to expect speed, stimulation, and instant reward. The same principle applies in religious contexts: a lecture in a mosque has a different impact on us than a viral clip of the exact same talk. A Qur'an verse on TikTok moves us differently than when it is recited during prayer. The content is identical, but the medium changes how we receive it.

This is because every medium functions according to its own logic. At first, this logic determines how content is presented – for instance, in what length, pace, and the emotional tone it carries. These presentation choices create specific expectations about duration, urgency, and engagement level. Our expectations, in turn, influence our perception: we judge content as valuable, trivial, or entertaining based on whether it meets them. Over time, this process actually rewires our own thinking. We unconsciously adopt these standards and apply them across more and more areas of life. Gradually, we develop a mental framework that judges everything by how engaging, brief, or "worthwhile" it feels. This is precisely how the **medium** stops being just a vessel for a message – and becomes **part of the message itself**.

How the Medium* Becomes the Message: Two Examples

1) Letter vs. WhatsApp Message

A letter is typically long, carefully composed, and formal. We expect to read it thoroughly and view it as personal and significant. Our minds associate it with thoughtfulness and seriousness. A WhatsApp message, by contrast, is usually brief, hastily written, and informal – so we naturally perceive it as casual and less binding.

2) Cookbook vs. Cooking Video

A cookbook provides detailed step-by-step instructions, which we study and take as reliable. A cooking video is dynamic, short, and visually appealing – we expect a quick result and see it as practical and entertaining. The book becomes a source of learning, while the video is a shortcut.

It's important to note that the typical form of a medium is often not rigid: A WhatsApp message may sometimes very well be longer than a letter, and a video longer than a book. What's decisive for the effect is usually the prevailing or dominant form that shapes our expectations and perception.

In our current era, where most knowledge is conveyed through flashy short videos, emotionally charged posts, and algorithm-driven feeds, this transformation often goes unnoticed. Quite the contrary, today it's become almost second nature to adapt our Islamic content to modern "edutainment"[2] standards: accessible, engaging, and above all, entertaining. Young people remain the primary focus, as we seek to provide halal alternatives that can compete with mainstream entertainment culture while delivering genuine Islamic value.

This approach has long since spawned an entire market: nasheed channels with millions of views, family-friendly "Muslim Netflix", Islamic gaming apps and quiz formats – the range keeps growing, becoming more professional, more diverse, more appealing. Add to that countless Muslim influencers sharing their daily lives, shopping trips, outfits of the day, travel diaries, and personal reflections with the world. Muslim parents feel genuinely grateful for these developments – finally,

options exist that not only shield their children from harmful influences, but even spark interest in the religion. And our youngsters? They absolutely love this content, because for the first time ever, they feel seen, represented, and experience their religion not as "foreign" or "outdated," but as something to be proud of and to actually even call "sick". The long-standing tension between fitting in and being Muslim seems resolved once and for all.

This creates a new normal: Islam enjoys unprecedented visibility — no longer confined to distorted news coverage but woven directly into everyday digital life. Islamic reaction videos populate YouTube, *masha'Allah* memes fill Instagram feeds, and Ramadan morning routines trend on TikTok, all flowing seamlessly into the stream of popular formats. Even prominent Muslim preachers now appear in viral templates, while Islamic products integrate naturally into self-care, fashion, and fitness content. For many young Muslims, this media presence of their faith has become integral to their lived experience, while non-Muslim friends actively engage with the "Islamic online bubble" through comments, likes, and shares. Religion is no longer excluded or hidden, but actively lived: visible, relatable, inclusive.

But where boundaries blur, standards begin to fade. When does simplification become dilution? When does adaptation become loss? And what remains of a message when its form has long begun determining what we think we understand?

Emotion over Education

A Dangerous Transformation

What appears to be obvious progress reveals itself, upon closer examination, to be a quiet change — precisely for the exact same reason McLuhan anticipated with his famous words. His realization that the medium itself shapes our perception applies perfectly to today's Muslim media landscape, where we increasingly force our religion into the logic of secular entertainment — into something designed merely to keep us watching, not to internalize, let alone implement.

Young Muslims today experience their faith through a media-saturated environment, embedded within structures built for instant gratification, emotional stimuli, and passive consumption — all of which obscure their view of what truly matters. Rather than systematically learning their faith and everything that comes along with it, they become conditioned as consumers of religious content. They may "feel" Islam, but have no real understanding of what it truly means to be Muslim beyond all of these fleeting impulses. They learn to like, share, follow (and even purchase), but nothing about inner character, outward responsibility, or meaningful ambition. This gives rise to an Islam that looks good and feels good, yet costs nothing — and that ultimately trains the same superficial, consumerist habits as conventional entertainment does, just with a cleaner conscience.

Neil Postman, whose concept of "amusing ourselves to death" we introduced earlier, describes this tendency to transform religion from serious commitment into trivial entertainment using the example of his own faith tradition: "I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether." He continues: "On television, religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away."

The Forgotten Standard

And yet, we don't even need to turn to Western media criticism to understand how far we've drifted from our own principles. The Prophet ﷺ left us a crystal-clear, unmistakable path, about which he said: "I have left you upon a clear path whose night is like its day (in clarity). No one deviates from it after me except that he is destroyed." This path is the path of revelation: the Qur'an, which describes itself as *Al-Furqan* - „the Criterion" that distinguishes truth from falsehood - and the Sunnah, which explains the Qur'an and turns it into a lived example through the life of the Prophet ﷺ. These two sources together form our standard – not only for foundational pillars like prayer and fasting, but for every aspect of our lives.

Instead of following this clear path, however, much of our efforts today flow into an entirely different direction — one we merely pave with "halal" building blocks while forgetting where the path actually originates (and where it leads!). We make sure that music, food, films, clothing, or images are Islamically permissible without truly questioning whether the essence of it all actually is in line with Islam's comprehensive guidance. This isn't even about imposing an ascetic ideal foreign to Islam, but what gets lost as a matter of fact is inner orientation: instead of examining the path itself, we focus on simply stamping it with the "halal" seal — perhaps because we've inwardly given up or begun to miss the forest for the trees.

But what does revelation actually say about this seemingly reassuring standard? What does it say about a lifestyle oriented exclusively around the technical question of whether something is "halal"?

In fact, Allah warns His Prophet ﷺ not to set his gaze on that with which He has granted other people temporary enjoyment: **{Do not let your eyes crave what We have allowed some of the disbelievers to enjoy; the ˹fleeting˺ splendour of this worldly life, which We test them with. But your Lord's provision ˹in the Hereafter˺ is far better and more lasting.}**[3] Additionally, the Prophet ﷺ said: "When you enter into the ˹īnah transaction, hold the tails of oxen, are pleased with agriculture, and give up conducting jihād (struggle in the way of Allah). Allah will make disgrace prevail over you, and will not withdraw it until you return to your original religion."[4]

In other words: some things are halal — yet still a test. This is precisely where the danger of the famous "halal" seal lies: it soothes our conscience without ever asking whether this thing actually brings us closer to the purpose for which we were created in the first place. Revelation doesn't just ask *what's* permitted — it primarily asks **what** we're living **for**. This brings us to a standard that extends far beyond any permissions and prohibitions, affecting every Muslim equally: the prophetic mission.

Faith with Purpose

Our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ intended a clear trajectory for every single one of his followers: the voluntary and comprehensive act of submission to Allah in all areas of life. This means: as a Muslim, one actively strives to place Allah's word in the highest position — within oneself, one's immediate environment, and ideally throughout society. This mission, then, calls for far more than simply practicing ʿIbādāt within the confines of our own homes (which, quite "coincidentally", aligns all too well with a secular worldview). It requires us to actively take responsibility, make sacrifices and struggle against our own desires while overcoming all forms of false idols and worldly dependency. This obligation extends to every aspect of our lives, manifesting in our personal actions, social engagement, and in the fruits it yields – such as justice, freedom, and unity of the Ummah.

But what course do we pursue today, and how do we understand religion now? Unlike the prophetic mission, which understands Islam as a thoroughly ethical way of life (note: way of *LIFE*!), religion today gets increasingly romanticized as a "spiritual safe space" in a society shaped by hedonism and utilitarian thinking. Religion supposedly exists primarily to enhance our well-being and provide emotional support. It becomes nothing more than a "feel-good" product, a "lifestyle accessory" that should remain "neutral" (perfectly in line with liberal secularism), and stay out of important decisions like education, career, or goals in life.

How deeply this new understanding of religion has already imprinted itself in our thinking becomes evident not just theory, but in all the things we quietly label as "Islamic." A closet full of hijabs, khimars, and abayas - ideally even walk-in and its contents mass-produced under questionable conditions - is taken as a sign of "commendable religiosity", while the Qur'an and Sunnah teach us contentment,

mindfulness, and the mindset of a traveler, thus a way of life rooted in restraint and sacrifice, not in excess, materialism, or self-display.

Therefore, the greatest danger for today's Muslim youth lies less in the obvious "haram" from outside - in the temptations of the non-Muslim world - and more in the un-Islamic standards we've uncritically adopted from that world into our own community as influential voices. It's not the forbidden that threatens our children's Islam the most, but the superficial – what lures them with appealing, "halal" formats while stripping their faith of any depth and distracting them from the prophetic mission.

Trapped in the Permissible

A young Muslim who spends his free time with "clean" video games, films, or other media might have a clear conscience, but in the process loses something crucial (not to mention his time): the kind of inner compass which reminds him of his purpose in life and his role as part of the Ummah of the best human who ever walked the face of this earth ﷺ.

This loss happens gradually: regular consumption creates thinking in short impulses — and these impulses often create the illusion that one is already "doing enough." After all, everything carries that reassuring "halal" label. Over time, a kind of comfort zone begins to form, in which the boundaries between what is truly beneficial and what is merely "not forbidden" become increasingly blurred. Everything somehow labeled as Islamic automatically counts not only as harmless but especially meaningful.

But this deceptive self-satisfaction runs deeper than individual weakness. What we observe here stands as an example for an entire generation: a generation that consumes much but internalizes little; that "lives halal" but has forgotten completely that the Prophet ﷺ left them a mission. Instead of orienting their lives around this mission, they lose themselves in consumerism, pleasure, and distraction – and thus remain at the lowest level of the *nafs*, which is never satisfied and always wants more.

Even those who see through this attitude and recognize it as a weakness escape this pull only with difficulty. After all, we live in a time when entertainment is omnipresent and has achieved an unprecedented weight. Sometimes it's a series that captivates us despite all concerns, sometimes a game we actually recognize as a waste of time, sometimes endless scrolling on social media. Hardly anyone today can even way for sure what a "healthy" amount of entertainment and relaxation would even be. But can we really afford to be so indifferent?

In a time when the Ummah is burning, when people are starving, fighting, and losing their religion, it cannot suffice to simply consume mindlessly — even if it's labeled "halal." We need standards greater than our own well-being. Standards that remind us we were created for something far greater than ourselves. Because ultimately, this whole issue is about much more than just   poor media consumption — it's about the fundamental responsibility toward the Ummah which we are going to be held accountable before Allah.

Youth as a Driving Force

While this responsibility applies to every Muslim alike, the Prophet ﷺ still placed particular emphasis on young people as the cornerstone of Islam's future. This special appreciation shows not only in his practical approach but also in the texts of revelation itself: many may know the hadith where the Prophet ﷺ names seven groups who will stand in the shade of Allah's throne on the Day of Judgment. In second place, directly after the just ruler, he mentions "a youth who grew up in the worship of Allah".[5]

Why specifically the youth? Because this life phase is characterized by strong impulses and distractions — and because a young person who still takes his faith seriously not only strengthens himself but also acts as a powerful example for his peers. The just ruler influences through his position as ruler; the other through his example as a young person — both receive the same reward.

From the Prophet's ﷺ school emerged young companions like 'Usama ibn Zayd, whom he appointed as expedition leader while still under twenty years of age, despite criticism from elders. Or Ibn Abbas, for whom the Prophet ﷺ personally spoke a special Du'a[6] that Allah should grant him understanding in

religion, and who later sat in Umar's circle of advisors—a circle that deliberately consisted of people of all ages. These young men understood Islam not as a consumer good, but as a mission.

Youth is a time full of energy and moldable character. If this energy gets wasted on trivialities, the Ummah loses its strongest force. But if it is invested in meaningful goals, it gives rise to the very generation the Prophet ﷺ relied on, which makes Islam truly viable. A young Muslim who truly understands what he lives for will hardly have any time to lose himself in meaningless pursuits — because real goals subordinate everything else.

Looking Beyond the Screen

Let's face reality: when has a young person last been seriously inspired after a Ramadan TikTok sketch, a catchy nasheed video, or a Muslim ex-gangster film to the degree they thought to themselves: *"Now I know what my role in the Ummah is — and what I must do for its revival!"* As already mentioned, we're not trying to deny that content like this moves people. But our point is: it rarely moves them beyond a swipe to the left. What stays is a feeling of religious connection, but no real commitment.

If, at all, young Muslims do get genuinely inspired by such content to take the leap from mere consumer to active participant, this still doesn't happen as a result of long-term growth or solid knowledge, but rather as a spontaneous reaction to emotional impulses. Impulsive consumption then turns into impulsive production. The main thing is somehow "to inspire others" in one way or another, but this is exactly where the vicious circle begins: this "halalized" lifestyle is simply reproduced and remains characterized by feelings and consumerism rather than a clear vision based on the prophetic mission.

And that's the very point: our religious content is packaged in a form that makes real transformation almost impossible. It offers religion without friction, faith without responsibility, spirituality without sacrifice — in short: the very "feel-good Islam" we've already exposed as a hollow, hedonistic narrative. This was by no means the kind of Islam the Prophet ﷺ taught his Sahaba. He didn't give them a soft and cozy religion, but a responsibility to carry. He didn't just soothe, he

educated. He didn't just comfort, he empowered. The Prophet ﷺ shaped characters and personalities and through them an entire civilization.

Islamic education therefore doesn't mean serving better shows, but returning to our standards. Anyone who believes they can educate an entire generation with well-intentioned formats might be missing the goal themselves. The standard shouldn't be inspiring at all costs or generating reach, even when driven by sincere intention to "spread Islam." What matters is whether our content truly prepares young people for what it means to be carriers of the prophetic mission. Instead of embedding young Muslims in religiously packaged endless entertainment, we should help them understand themselves as part of a greater vision — age-friendly, but without underestimating them. Because whoever understands themselves as carriers of Islam no longer asks: *"What am I allowed to consume?"* but rather: **"How can I truly serve Islam?"**

The critical question for us as a community therefore isn't just what we keep our children away from, but what we actually want to empower them for.

From Format to Foundation

So far, we've established that much of what circulates today as Islamic content may touch, move, and inspire indeed, but it neither educates, nor empowers, and certainly does not obligate. Overcoming this situation requires more than merely labeling content with a "halal" seal. Otherwise, we unconsciously adopt the same kind of logic that has already failed in other areas of society: we "decriminalize" instead of changing fundamentally.

Western society demonstrates this principle everywhere: instead of regulating sexuality, "safe sex" gets promoted. Instead of curbing consumption - such as alcohol, drugs, or gambling - society prefers to promote "enjoyment in moderation" or "at your own risk." The fallacious argument: if you can't change the behavior in and of itself, it should at least cause "as minimal harm as possible" (we'll spare ourselves any sarcastic commentary here).

But an Islamic culture that is to endure must go deeper than this. It is not enough to simply "optimize" content. At the end of the day, those who bring Islam into the public sphere shape more than just content. They shape modes of thinking, set standards, and claim a share in defining what is truly Islamic in our community. And they help decide whether we really teach young Muslims that religion is a holistic mission — or merely a framework which legitimizes (or „halalifies") their individual preferences.

We as a Muslim community need a solid foundation, and that includes three things: reliable structures, authentic role models, and above all, collective awareness of what education truly means in Islamic terms. This responsibility does not lie with a single group. But it demands that everyone who creates or shares content to ask themselves one central question:

What kind of person should emerge from this?

1. Content Creators and Artists: From Inspiration to Foundation

Whether Muslim vloggers, nasheed artists, film producers, reminder channels, or podcast voices — they all want one thing above all else: to inspire positively and create an alternative. They share videos and stories, express their faith through art, and convey values. But anyone who reaches people with religious content or creates publicly in the name of Islam also shapes perceptions of what "Islamic" means. Mere emotional activation must therefore not be the end point, but rather the beginning of a journey — both for the producer and for their target audience. Before educating (or exerting influence), you must first allow yourself to be educated.

Specifically, this means:

- **Establishing a Sound Worldview:** Many content creators grew up in secular systems, shaped by Western thinking, consumerist logic, and an individualistic pursuit of self-fulfillment. Anyone producing Islamic content must first honestly acknowledge: My way of thinking may not even be grounded in Islam. Thus, it does not suffice to create "halal content" out of emotional enthusiasm while one's underlying worldview continues to be dominated by Western values. Without systematic and in-depth study of the Qur'an and Sunnah as well as a conscious correction of one's own assumptions, even well-intentioned content will ultimately remain secular logic in Islamic packaging.
- **Call to Action, Not Inspiration Without Follow-Through:** Those who have understood that true Islamic education requires more than emotional impulses will also recognize this: every piece of inspiring content should leave more than just a good feeling. With a firm foundation, it becomes clear that reach is not meant to keep people passively engaged, but to guide them toward genuine learning. This means extending concrete invitations to local courses, online academies, or study circles – offerings that don't just skim the surface but help build structured and internalized knowledge. Those who take their own foundation seriously will use their platform to move others from consumption to education.

- **Regular Reality Checks:** Anyone regularly producing religious content should also regularly ask themselves: What is actually emerging from my content? Whom am I influencing – and in what direction? Does it lead to people who recognize their role within the Ummah, or just to consumers who superficially jump between delicious recipes, spiritual quotes, aesthetic travel destinations, and fancy outfit inspirations – ultimately just in search of the next pleasant impulse for their own well-being? Equally important is perceiving one's audience as they evolve within their lived reality, so you don't keep addressing outdated problems while the real questions of today remain unanswered. This kind of self-examination is part of the responsibility that Muslim public figures carry.
- **Becoming Effective Offline:** Digital reach is no substitute for real impact. Anyone who reaches people online should also engage in real-world structures — programs that promote Islamic education, personal development, and communal learning. In times of digital alienation, what happens offline often matters even more than what happens online. Content creators can become bridge-builders between digital inspiration and real-life education.
- **Mentorship, Not „Meet & Greet":** When young people inevitably perceive certain content creators as role models, spaces for meaningful encounter are needed under clear conditions, i. e. through guided study groups, project mentorships, or advanced training programs. The goal is never closeness for its own sake, but always orientation. It's not only about avoiding false role models, but also protecting the right ones from the wrong setting. Values such as humbleness, decency, and avoiding *riya* (showing off) belong inseparably to the message. We don't need "celebrities you can touch", but people who embody the path to Allah sincerely — without applause, without autograph sessions, but with humility and down-to-earthness. It's a fine line: on the one hand, we urgently need authentic, contemporary role models for the next generation. On the other hand, we see how easily public attention can distort even religious roles.

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- **Explain Art, Don't Just Present It:** Artists who use creative expression as a means of impact shouldn't simply publish their work without comment or "put it out there" without context. Just as many well-known non-Muslim artists already do in popular formats, Muslim artists too could offer explanations for their works: How did this piece come about? What ideas or intentions lie behind it? What impact is it meant to have? Providing such context allows for deeper engagement. For nasheed artists, this could mean walking through their lyrics line by line. For authors, filmmakers, or illustrators, it might involve sharing the story behind a book, a film, or a visual piece. In this way, art isn't just consumed, but thoughtfully explored.

A creator who constantly puts out "good vibes only" without pointing toward a greater purpose remains part of the problem. Even if they can't offer the full solution themselves, they should at least help open or ease the path toward it. Influencers, vloggers, nasheed artists - just anyone with a platform - shouldn't operate in isolation, but rather as extensions of established educational efforts. It's not enough to spread knowledge or create feel-good moments. The ultimate goal must be to help young Muslims understand their role in the Ummah — rooted in a prophetic vision, not reduced to consuming spiritual soundbites.

2. Parents and Educators: From Offering Alternatives to Creating Meaning

The greatest challenge in Islamic education today is not *how* we teach, but *why* we teach in the first place. What may seem like a smart parenting solution is often just a convenient outsourcing to 'halal' content. Yet true education does not begin with the choice of content, but with personal clarity and commitment. Before parents and educators can pass on Islam to children, they must first ask themselves: Do I even understand what Islamic upbringing truly means? Children don't need religiously packaged distractions — they need adults who carry a clear vision of the prophetic mission and are able to live it out with sincerity themselves.

How can this be achieved?

- **Islamic Education Begins with the Educator:** Many parents and educators have themselves been shaped by secular education systems and have never systematically learned what Islamic education means beyond rituals and prohibitions. Those who want to give children guidance must first understand their own role as Muslims and as Muslim educators. This means studying the Qur'an and Sunnah themselves, learning about prophetic pedagogy, and questioning their own understanding of education.

- **Creating Meaning Instead of Replacing It:** What children lack are not Islamized alternatives to Western entertainment, but true orientation. Those who present them with lofty, noble goals, entrust them with responsibility, and help them understand their place in the Ummah offer them an inner compass that no entertainment in the world could ever provide. Parents must therefore ask themselves: What are we really raising our children for? What is it that we hope to plant in their hearts?

- **Relationship Over Entertainment:** Real education doesn't begin with content but with connection. A conversation about the purpose of prayer, a quiet moment of Quranic reflection, a bedtime story from the Sira — such experiences have more lasting impact than any well-meant movie. The most profound form of education happens in everyday life: through relationship, through regular mini-rituals, through shared reflection. Anyone who wants to shape children must live with them, not just keep them busy.

- **Expecting Depth:** Children are capable of far more than many adults assume. Those who constantly try to entertain them underestimate their actual mental capabilities. Those who challenge them, however, respect and nurture their fitrah. Education isn't about making everything fun — it's about making it meaningful and binding. Repetition, seriousness, and a sense of responsibility are not burdens, but marks of respect. Halal entertainment must never become a pedagogical excuse.

3. Community: From Individual Efforts to Shared Standards

Our Islamic community is certainly not lacking in content. Today, there are more than enough formats, channels, and voices. But what's missing though is a shared direction, a clear purpose, and a long-term vision. What does quality really mean? What counts as education? And what's merely emotional hype? Before we set standards for others, we must ask ourselves honestly: Do we even have collective benchmarks still rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, or is everyone defining their own version of what "Islamic" means? Early Islamic education was anything but "edutainment." It was a school for developing patience, discipline, and mission. What does that mean for all of us?

- **Collective Standards Instead of Individual Arbitrariness:** As a community, we bear structural responsibility when "Islamic education" becomes a matter of personal whim and everyone does their own thing. While individuals must correct their personal worldview, the community needs a return to binding criteria: What truly defines Islamic education? Which methods align with prophetic pedagogy? These are not questions that can be answered individually, but they demand collective clarity and the courage to question even popular formats if they do not meet the standard.
- **Framing Knowledge Like in the Past:** Islamic educational initiatives cannot be driven by the zeitgeist. When more and more formats get marketed with an "entertainment spin," this flattens not only youth expectations but also educational quality. The community needs spaces again where knowledge gets conveyed as something precious and respectful (just like in the spirit of the hadith in which the Angel Jibril ﷺ comes to the Prophet ﷺ to ask him about Islam, Iman, and Ihsan[7]) — not as something that must be as easily digestible and consumable on the side as possible. The Prophet ﷺ educated a generation that first learned iman before they learned the Quran—and then grew and acted in faith through the Quran.
- **Orientation Instead of Fragmentation:** When Islamic knowledge is conveyed arbitrarily, out of order, and taken out of context, it does not convey a clear picture of the coherent message of Islam, but merely a collage of nice single impulses. As a community, we share responsibility when young people are touched but not grounded. We need educational

formats that provide orientation, convey a complete worldview, and enable intellectual maturation.

- **Clarifying Authority:** If the voice with the most clicks also becomes the most influential, something is seriously wrong. Communities should really ask which voices they amplify and whether reach has become the new measure of legitimacy. For we must not merely follow trends. The minimum requirement should be that the people we promote are themselves firmly anchored in Islam and know and carry on the prophetic mission.
- **No Ummah on the Red Carpet:** Community is a precious good, but not an end in and of itself. Anyone offering events for "networking" or "strengthening the Ummah," for example, cannot base them on shared entertainment. And certainly not on visibility and self-presentation. Unfortunately, we increasingly see Muslim events dedicating themselves more and more to the spotlight. The question is: What do young people actually take away from this? What perspective does it give them? Even social or creative events must be designed to provide direction and orientation, not just a sense of belonging.

Conclusion and Outlook

This whitepaper was by no means intended as judgment on individuals or formats, but rather as an urgent invitation to pause and reflect honestly: *What exactly are we doing here?* Does the "Islamic content" we produce, disseminate, and consume on a daily basis truly correspond to the clear guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah? Or have we long since become accustomed to a culture that Islamizes the external framework while the internal standards remain secular?

What makes Islamic content *truly* Islamic? The answer doesn't lie in packaging or good intentions, but in the long-term effect: Does it lead to maturity or merely to reaction? Does it shape personalities or merely produce consumers and followers?

The more we focus on entertainment, even turning it into a business model or community market, the more we lose sight of the true vision of Islam: to educate people who know and fulfill their purpose in this world in order to prepare for the next. Instead of investing our energy in this vision, our creativity and ambitions are increasingly focused on side issues — things that have little to do with it and at the same time give us the illusion that we already live in an established civilization and can sit back and afford the luxury of "passive enjoyment."

We should face the fact that, at the end of the day, entertainment, even if halal, remains entertainment. It reassures, excites, and distracts. But it doesn't replace what young people are truly in need of: clear guidance, a firm self-image, and a deeply rooted sense of responsibility toward Allah and the Ummah. Without these foundations, even the best Islamized content will not stand the test of time – neither against the power of secular narratives nor against the crisis of meaning in young hearts.

But this is precisely where our error in reasoning lies.

We are convinced that we are protecting our children from the dangers of the world. With costly produced halal alternatives, we draw them behind us. We think we've finally found a solution. But all too often, we are functionally similar to the Pied Piper of Hamelin: we lead with our flute, but where are we actually going? Not out of the game and into their true destiny as bearers of a mission, but into

just another land of milk and honey: staged in an Islamic manner, but disconnected from true guidance. We are not the "saviors" — we have become seducers of our own offspring, luring them into another form of distraction. For Islamic should mean prophetic. Not just in content, but also in intention, method, and goal.

The real challenge does not lie in the media format, but in our very understanding of education itself. As long as we act in isolation and everyone pursues their own agenda, there will be no common educational structure—and therefore no awareness of the responsibility that content entails. Whoever produces content sets standards: for themselves, and for everyone who watches and listens. What we lack today is therefore not more content, but a shared vision. Where do we want to lead our youngsters? What does it mean to pass on Islam in an age of distraction — not as a short-term stimulus, but as a lasting direction to sacrifice for?

This is precisely where the book **"Resisting Triviality"** by Sheikh Aḥmad al-Sayyid comes in, which we at the One Ummah Forum have translated into the English language. It shows why quick, superficial solutions are doomed to fail and what it takes to enable genuine character building once again. The focus is on developing a type of generation that thinks prophetically, acts responsibly, and takes responsibility — far removed from mere religious entertainment.

For the challenge is no longer what we offer, but whether we rise above the trivial. Islamic education must return to what it always was: **the shaping of people who may even be able to put an end to the game.**

Footnotes

1. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985).
2. *Edutainment* is a neologism derived from the words "education" and "entertainment." It refers to formats that convey learning content in a way that is as entertaining and accessible as possible, e.g., educational videos or documentaries suitable for children. A similar term is *infotainment* (from "information" + "entertainment"), which is mainly used in connection with news or social issues. While *edutainment* is more about learning, *infotainment* focuses on providing information.
3. The Holy Qur'an, 20:131.
4. Sunan Abi Dawud 3462.
5. Riyad as-Salihin 658.
6. Sahih al-Bukhari 143.
7. Sunan Ibn Majah 63.