

Patterns of Representation of the Algerian Child in Short-Video Content on TikTok: An Exploratory Content Analysis

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Received: 24/06/2026 ; Accepted: 16/10/2026

Abstract

With the evolution of new media and communication technologies, the social web wave — embodied in social media sites and applications — has extended into children's spheres of interest, becoming a constant companion both inside and outside the home. This paper seeks to uncover the patterns through which the Algerian child is represented in short-video content on TikTok, through an exploratory content analysis applied to a purposive sample of 90 videos, collected during 2024 through specific hashtags.

The study found that the child occupies a central position in most of the videos examined, that the dominant content revolves around art, dance, and songs, with a prevalence of mixed colloquial language, a modern appearance, and a notable tendency toward imitating adult behavior. These patterns point to a need for further research into their potential implications for the upbringing of the Algerian child, while underscoring the importance of conscious family oversight amid these digital transformations.

Keywords: short video; child; TikTok; child representation; content analysis.

Patrones de representación de la infancia argelina en los vídeos cortos de TikTok: un análisis exploratorio de contenido

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Recibido: 24/06/2026 · Aceptado: 16/10/2026

Resumen

Con la evolución de los nuevos medios y las tecnologías de la comunicación, la expansión de la web social, materializada en las plataformas y aplicaciones de redes sociales, ha alcanzado los ámbitos de interés de la infancia y se ha convertido en una presencia constante tanto dentro como fuera del hogar. Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar los patrones de representación de la infancia argelina en los vídeos cortos de TikTok mediante un análisis exploratorio de contenido aplicado a una muestra intencional de 90 vídeos, recopilados durante 2024 a partir de etiquetas específicas.

Los resultados muestran que los niños ocupan una posición central en la mayoría de los vídeos analizados y que los contenidos predominantes giran en torno al arte, el baile y las canciones. Asimismo, se observa el predominio de un lenguaje coloquial mixto, una apariencia moderna y una marcada tendencia a imitar comportamientos adultos. Estos patrones ponen de manifiesto la necesidad de profundizar en sus posibles implicaciones para la crianza de los niños argelinos y subrayan la importancia de un acompañamiento familiar consciente ante estas transformaciones digitales.

Palabras clave: vídeo corto; infancia; TikTok; representación de la infancia; análisis de contenido.

Problem Statement

Living in a digital society driven by information, whose actors are largely anonymous users, has produced an abundance of video content — the most potent tool actors now use to convey their ideas and present their content to the widest possible audience. TikTok, with its varied uses ranging from interaction and entertainment to promotional and marketing purposes, occupies a prominent place in this landscape, as many content creators use it to post clips featuring children, whether on their own initiative or with family participation.

Given this striking presence of children within TikTok content, this study seeks to uncover the patterns through which the Algerian child is represented in this digital space: how does the child appear? In what contexts? With what formal, linguistic, and behavioral characteristics? Without presupposing a specific effect, the study instead offers a systematic descriptive account that can serve as a foundation for later studies addressing psychological or behavioral dimensions using different tools (such as field surveys or interviews).

Accordingly, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most prominent patterns of the Algerian child's presence and representation in short-video content on TikTok?
2. What content, appearance, and linguistic-behavioral characteristics are associated with the child's appearance in these videos?

In addressing these questions, the study draws on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, read in light of a general Islamic educational value framework, as detailed below.

Study Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To document patterns of the Algerian child's presence and representation in short-video content on TikTok, through content analysis of a sample of videos, and to identify the recurrent representational patterns through which the child is presented in this digital space.
2. To analyze the content, appearance, and linguistic-behavioral characteristics associated with the child's appearance in these videos, through examination of visual elements (clothing, gestures, features), audio and linguistic elements (language used, songs, sound effects), and patterns of performance and interaction that the child either offers or is made to display.
3. To discuss the potential educational and value-based implications of the representational patterns uncovered, by reading them in light of prevailing upbringing standards and educational values in Algerian society — opening an academic discussion on the role of the family and educational institutions in keeping pace with these digital transformations — without claiming to measure any actual effect on the child, which would require different research tools (such as field surveys or interviews) in future studies.

Theoretical Framework

I. Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation (1997)

The theory of representation formulated by the Jamaican-British cultural theorist Stuart Hall in his 1997 book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* stands as one of the most influential critical frameworks in contemporary cultural and media analysis. Hall's central premise is that media and cultural products do not "reflect" social reality neutrally or objectively; rather, they produce and reshape meaning through processes of encoding, framing, and selection. Meaning, for Hall, is not inherent in things or people but is instead the product of representational systems — language, images,

sounds, and discourses — that work together to construct particular conceptions of the world and of different social groups.

The theory rests on the concept of the "signifier and the signified" within a cultural context, whereby images, words, and texts carry meanings shaped by context, culture, and audience. The theory also emphasizes that media representations are embedded in power relations, as prevailing cultural, social, and ideological frameworks determine how groups and categories ought to be portrayed, who holds the authority to represent them, and to what ends. It is this critical vision that makes Hall's theory well suited to studying the representation of a social category such as the child in digital content; the child, as a social category warranting particular attention, may be portrayed in media according to the discourses and agendas of adults, whereby stereotypical images can be reproduced in the service of marketing, cultural, or social aims, rather than the child being afforded space to express its own agency and voice. This theory thus enables the researcher to deconstruct the mechanisms through which the child's image is built in the digital space, to analyze the linguistic, visual, and audio elements contributing to the construction of this image, and to uncover the ideological and cultural dimensions underlying it.

II. The Islamic Educational Perspective (Reference Value Framework)

Alongside the analytical framework offered by Hall, this study draws on a reference value framework derived from the Islamic educational perspective, which forms an integral part of the cultural and religious identity of Algerian society. This framework rests on a set of central concepts drawn from the foundational sources of Islamic legislation, foremost among them the concept of *fitrah* (innate disposition), grounded in the Prophetic hadith: "Every child is born upon the *fitrah*; it is his parents who make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian" (narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim) — that is, the sound innate constitution and inclination toward goodness and moderation with which God has endowed every human being, which forms the foundation for building the child's character and sound upbringing. Among the other principal concepts within this framework is the shared responsibility for upbringing, grounded in the Qur'anic verse: "O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire" (Qur'an 66:6), and the Prophetic hadith: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock" (narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim), a responsibility distributed among the family, the school, and the community. The framework also foregrounds the concepts of modesty (*hayaa*) and concealment/protection (*satr*), grounded in the Qur'anic verse: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts" (Qur'an 24:30), pertaining to the norms governing how a child's image and private life are handled. Likewise, the concept of linguistic integrity holds particular importance within this educational framework, language being regarded as a vessel of identity and the primary carrier of values and heritage.

Recent academic studies have addressed the application of these concepts in analyzing digital content directed at children, though most have been confined to content deliberately designed for this educational purpose, rather than the spontaneous content that is the subject of the present study. Al-Mushaiqri and Sulistio (2024), employing a netnographic approach, analyzed the content of an Islamic children's animation channel, revealing how digital narratives are deployed to reinforce religious identity and moral education among children. Langga, Ahmad, and Mansoor (2020) similarly analyzed Islamic visual representation in the animated series *Nussa*, showing how elements of color, dress, dialogue, and name selection converge to construct a cohesive Islamic image directed at children. In a different vein, Yolcu and Çiftçi (2023) examined the capacity of televised cartoon content to convey religious

values to children, affirming that such content can effectively instill religious awareness in children when deliberately designed for that purpose.

Taken together, these studies reveal a research gap directly relevant to the subject of this paper: while the available literature has primarily addressed religious content deliberately designed for the child's upbringing, spontaneous, non-religiously-intentioned content that children post or appear in on platforms such as TikTok remains a comparatively under-explored area — one to which the present study seeks to contribute.

This value framework is adopted for this study not because it offers a priori interpretations of the analytical findings, but because it represents the prevailing cultural and religious framework of Algerian society, to which content producers, children, and the receiving audience alike belong. Reading the patterns of the Algerian child's representation in light of these values thus allows the researcher to situate the phenomenon within its authentic social and cultural context.

III. Methodological Integration of the Two Frameworks

The two theoretical frameworks above integrate productively, each performing a distinct yet complementary function. On one hand, Hall's model supplies the conceptual and analytical tools necessary for understanding how the child's "representation" is constructed in short-video content — a descriptive-analytical framework par excellence, enabling the researcher to read the phenomenon as it is presented in the media material. On the other hand, the Islamic educational perspective supplies the reference value standard against which these representations are read within the specifically Algerian context — an evaluative-referential, not interpretive, framework, offering a set of principles and values shared by the society under study. The two frameworks thus complement one another: the first addresses "how the representation is built," the second addresses "within what value context this representation is read," without either framework imposing a predetermined view on the findings or constraining them.

Methodology

This descriptive study employed the descriptive method and a quantitative-qualitative content analysis instrument, aiming to uncover patterns of the Algerian child's representation in short-video content on TikTok. The study drew on a purposive sample of 90 videos, collected during 2024 through specific hashtag searches — *تيك_توك_طفل* (#child_tiktok), *#dz_kids*, and *#الجزائر* (#Algeria) — encompassing the videos retrieved through these searches in which an Algerian child (defined, per developmental psychological classification, as male or female from the end of the nursing period to age 14; Al-Aziz, 1995) appeared as a primary or secondary element of its content.

Drawing on the methodological literature on content analysis (Boumendjel, 2008), a coding instrument was designed specifically for this study, comprising the following categories: the child's position in the video, the actors present, content type, external appearance, behavior, language used, and reliance on effects — each expressed quantitatively as a frequency and percentage of the total sample.

Coding categories were operationalized as follows. A child's appearance was coded "modern" when clothing and hairstyle followed currently trending global fashions, and "ordinary" otherwise. Behavior was coded "imitating adults" when the child's performance reproduced adult or celebrity conventions (makeup, clothing, manner of movement and speech), and "spontaneous childlike" otherwise. Language was coded as standard Arabic, a foreign language, or mixed colloquial (Algerian dialect, possibly interspersed with foreign terms). Each video was assigned to a single category per variable.

Only publicly accessible videos were analyzed. No names, account handles, or links to the videos are reported, and the researcher did not interact with the children or the accounts. The children's Algerian

identity and approximate age were judged from the video content and the account information available, and could not be independently verified.

Presentation and Discussion of Analytical Units

Table 1: The Child's Position in Short-Video Content

Child's Position	f	%
Primary	81	90
Secondary	9	10
Total	90	100

A rate of 90% of the videos in the sample feature the Algerian child in the primary position. In light of representation theory, this high proportion reflects how the child is constructed as the central subject of the visual frame whenever he or she appears in this type of content — that is, the centrality of the child's presence is not a random given but a recurring representational choice worth pausing on. This pattern invites a question regarding the conditions of this content's production and the extent to which it is accompanied by conscious family oversight, though the data of this study alone do not permit a determination of the presence or absence of such oversight in any given case.

Table 2: Actors Present in the Videos Under Study

Actors Present	f	%
Child alone	65	72
Child with family	15	17
Child with friends	10	11
Total	90	100

The table shows that the child appears alone in the video frame at a high rate (72%), followed by appearances with family (17%), then with friends (11%). This distribution indicates that the dominant pattern of the child's representation is as a solitary actor before the camera, detached from any immediate family context within the visual frame itself — which does not necessarily indicate the absence of actual supervision during filming, but rather suggests that such supervision, where present, is not visually rendered within the filmed scene. This pattern of solitary appearance, which formally resembles adult self-filming practices, warrants further study of children's internet use and their awareness of digital protection issues. Related research on children's online video use points in a similar direction: in a survey of 176 mothers of Egyptian preschool children, supervision of YouTube viewing was only occasional for most (58%), and the protective measure mothers cited most often was not letting the child watch alone (74.4%) (Hussein, 2018). Such findings concern viewing rather than filming, and are cited here only as context for the question of supervision.

Table 3: Content of Short Videos on TikTok

Content Type	f	%
Purposeful educational	3	3
Religious	5	6
Comedic/entertainment	10	11

Art, dance, songs, variety	72	80
Total	90	100

Videos with artistic content (dance, songs, variety) ranked first at a substantial rate (80%), followed by comedic/entertainment videos (11%), then religious (6%) and educational content (3%). In light of the encoding logic within representation theory, this distribution reflects the fact that content selection and repetition are not neutral, but instead express the cultural codes governing the production of this type of short-form content on the platform, whereby certain content (fast-paced visual entertainment) is granted clear production priority over other content (religious, educational) — a finding that merits further reading in light of the prevailing educational values of Algerian society.

Table 4: External Features of the Child's Appearance on TikTok

Child's Appearance	f	%
Modern	75	83
Ordinary	15	17
Total	90	100

The table shows that 83% of the videos featured a "modern" appearance for the child (in terms of clothing and hairstyle), against 17% with an "ordinary" appearance. This distribution represents a notable representational pattern warranting two separate readings: descriptively, it indicates that a wide swath of short-video content foregrounds a visual style attuned to globally trending fashions in dress and appearance. Evaluatively, and in light of the general Islamic educational framework grounded in modesty (*hayaa*) and concealment (*satr*) as governing principles for a child's appearance, this pattern raises a legitimate question about the degree to which some of the observed clothing styles align with these values — without the study's design (a descriptive content analysis) permitting any conclusion regarding a confirmed effect on the child's psychological or social wellbeing. The matter of digital privacy and protection for children remains a concern documented in prior literature as one of the general issues associated with publishing images of children on digital platforms (Al-Mansour, 2013), without directly projecting those findings onto this study's particular sample.

Table 5: Nature of the Child's Behavior in TikTok Videos

Child's Behavior	f	%
Spontaneous childlike	9	10
Imitating adults	81	90
Total	90	100

The table shows that most videos (90%) display behavior imitating adult conduct, against only 10% reflecting spontaneous childlike behavior. From the perspective of representation theory, this pattern constitutes a reproduction of the image of the "child as miniature adult" within the digital space, whereby the child's performance is built on direct imitation of celebrity and stardom symbols (makeup, clothing, manner of movement and speech) rather than spontaneous expression of age-appropriate traits. This observation opens a legitimate educational discussion regarding the relationship between this representational pattern and the broader system of social upbringing — a discussion addressed in prior research on children's intensive exposure to TikTok content (Abdel Karim, 2021) — while affirming

that the current study's design allows for the description of this representational pattern without measuring its actual effect on the child's behavior or upbringing outside the digital space.

Table 6: Language Used in Short-Video Content

Language Used	f	%
Standard Arabic	20	22
Foreign language	5	6
Mixed colloquial	65	72
Total	90	100

The table shows that mixed colloquial language predominates (72%), against standard Arabic (22%) and foreign languages (6%). This distribution reflects the spontaneous oral register prevailing in this type of short-form digital content, whose fast-paced, unscripted nature imposes a communicative style closer to everyday colloquial speech than to standard language. In light of the general Islamic educational framework's concern with linguistic integrity as a vessel of identity and values, this mixed linguistic pattern warrants reflection on its potential effect on the shaping of the child's linguistic awareness, without casting any judgment on the cultural or educational competence of this content's creators themselves.

Table 7: Reliance on Effects in Children's Videos

Use of Effects	f	%
Yes	86	96
No	4	4
Total	90	100

The table shows that a high proportion of videos (96%) rely on audio, musical, or visual effects, against only 4% that do not. This high rate points to notable technical engagement on the part of the child, or of whoever accompanies them during filming, with the creative capabilities the platform provides — reflecting a practical familiarity with the fundamentals of the TikTok application and its creative tools.

Conclusion

This study emerges within a context of growing interest in the phenomenon of children's content proliferating on short-video platforms, particularly TikTok, which has witnessed an extensive presence of Algerian children in videos. Given that Arab and Algerian academic scholarship lacks sufficient studies addressing this type of spontaneous content (as distinct from content deliberately designed for explicit religious or educational purposes), this study seeks to help close part of this gap by offering an analytical reading of the patterns of the Algerian child's representation in this new digital space, drawing on an exploratory content-analysis method.

The study's findings revealed that the Algerian child occupies a primary position in the majority of the videos examined, with content centered on art, dance, and songs predominating, alongside a prevalence of mixed colloquial language, a modern appearance, and a notable tendency toward imitating adult behavior. These patterns may reflect the conventions of short-video culture on the platform, although the study did not code local and global cultural markers and therefore cannot assess the balance between them. These findings, in turn, raise deeper questions regarding the role of the family and society in guiding the child's digital presence, and regarding how to strike a balance between

openness to global digital spaces and the preservation of cultural values and identity within the process of upbringing.

These findings, however, must be read in light of the methodological limitations of the study: it is a descriptive content analysis that describes what appears in the videos, without measuring the actual psychological or social effects on children — a task that would require other research tools, such as interviews and field surveys. Moreover, categories such as "modern" appearance and "imitating adults" involve interpretive judgment, which may carry a degree of subjectivity. The coding scheme also did not include variables for local versus global cultural markers, so the study cannot determine the extent of Algerian cultural specificity relative to global digital culture. Furthermore, the sample of 90 videos, collected through specific hashtags during 2024, does not necessarily represent all content related to Algerian children on the platform across time, which calls for future studies encompassing longer time periods and other platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube Shorts, to test whether these patterns are specific to TikTok or a general feature of short-video content.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a tangible contribution to understanding one of the most prominent contemporary digital-culture phenomena within the Algerian context, and opens the door to an academic and educational discussion on how families and educational institutions might engage with children's digital presence, in light of the variables of cultural globalization and the evolving patterns of digital communication and content creation. It further underscores the importance of developing regulatory and awareness-raising mechanisms directed at both content creators and families alike, so as to ensure content that preserves the child's dignity and rights and contributes to raising the child within a more conscious and responsible digital environment.

General Findings

In light of the results obtained in this study, and within the limits permitted by its design as an exploratory content analysis, the following general findings may be drawn:

First: The Dominance of the Entertainment Dimension over Other Dimensions

Analysis of the sample shows that entertainment content, particularly dance and songs, constitutes the most prominent pattern in the representation of the Algerian child on TikTok, while educational and value-based dimensions are notably absent (not exceeding 3% and 6%, respectively). This indicates that TikTok, given its technical nature grounded in fast pacing and visual effects, tends to entrench an image of the child as "performer" or "actor" rather than as a "child who learns" or a "child who expresses themselves" within cognitive or moral contexts.

Second: An Intensive Presence of Colloquial Language and the Recession of Standard Arabic

The findings revealed that mixed Algerian colloquial Arabic predominates in the videos examined (72%), against a more limited presence of standard Arabic (22%) and foreign languages (6%). This raises questions about the role of digital content in shaping the child's linguistic taste, and the extent to which it contributes to entrenching the colloquial as the dominant register of communication in the digital space, at the expense of standard Arabic as a vessel of identity, heritage, and cognitive and cultural formation.

Third: A Tendency toward Imitating Adult Behavior

The study revealed a marked tendency (90%) toward presenting the child in performances and behaviors coded as imitating adults, in terms of makeup, clothing, manner of movement and speech. This pattern invites discussion of how the boundaries of childhood are represented in the digital space, although the data do not show who directs the child's performance.

Fourth: Performing Roles and the Question of the Child's Agency

The findings show that the Algerian child is most often presented in performing roles (dancer, imitator, comedic performer, fashion-conscious presenter), and rarely in educational or religious content (3% and 6%, respectively). Because the study did not examine who produced or directed the videos, it cannot determine whether these formats serve creators' goals such as virality or follower growth, nor whether the child takes part in shaping them. The pattern can nonetheless be read against the concept of "agency" in childhood studies (James & Prout, 1997), which views the child as a social being capable of participating in the production of meaning, rather than merely an object of adult discourse. Future research combining content analysis with interviews of children and parents could examine this question.

These findings may be summarized as follows: in this sample, the Algerian child's representation on TikTok is dominated by entertainment performance, mixed colloquial speech, a modern appearance, and the imitation of adult behavior, while educational and religious content is marginal. Whether this pattern reflects the child's own agency or adult direction, and what effects it may have, remain questions for future research using other tools.

Recommendations

Building on the patterns this study has uncovered, and within the limits permitted by its design as a descriptive content analysis, the study recommends the following:

1. Research Recommendations

Conducting field-based reception studies (surveys, interviews with children and their families) to test whether the representational patterns uncovered here (imitation of adults, modern appearance) are actually associated with effects on the child's upbringing or self-perception — a question the content-analysis design alone cannot answer. Likewise, expanding the sample to cover longer time periods and other platforms (Instagram, YouTube Shorts) to test whether these patterns are specific to TikTok or a general feature of short-video content.

2. Educational and Family Recommendations

Raising families' awareness of the representational roles a child may perform before the camera (imitating adult behavior, adopting a modern appearance) — not necessarily as something forbidden, but as a conscious choice warranting family discussion in light of each family's own educational values — alongside encouraging greater diversity in the content of videos featuring children, to include educational or value-based dimensions, given the weak presence of these two categories in the sample studied (3% and 6%, respectively).

3. Recommendations Concerning the Platform and Policy

Strengthening TikTok's policies and moderation mechanisms regarding content that features young children (the study's design does not establish who operated the accounts or the exact ages of the children shown), and exploring the development of awareness guidelines directed at family-content creators regarding best practices in featuring children.

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