

## Managing Social Media Ethics in Islamic Boarding Schools: Challenges and Strategies for Crisis Response

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**Abstract** This study aims to explore the management of ethical issues in dealing with social media crises by Islamic boarding schools, focusing on the strategies implemented to maintain the institution's image and public trust. The research approach used is qualitative with a case study design. It takes Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School as the research subject because of its active social media activities and experience in handling various digital crises. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with social media managers and Islamic boarding school leaders, observations of Islamic boarding school social media activities, and analysis of digital documents in the form of uploads, comments, and responses to emerging issues. Data analysis techniques were carried out thematically by identifying relevant patterns from the collected data and triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. The results of the study indicate that Islamic boarding schools face a dilemma in balancing social media trends with religious values, challenges in responding to diverse audiences ethically, and the lack of a structured crisis management strategy. These findings emphasize the importance of value-based social media crisis management to maintain the integrity of religious institutions in a dynamic digital era.

## INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, traditional Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, have been a cornerstone of Islamic education for centuries (Darwanto et al., 2024; I. Hasanah et al., 2023; Roqib, 2021). These institutions are not just centers of academic learning but are also sanctuaries where religious teachings, spiritual development, and community building are prioritized. However, the rapid advancement of digital technologies presents both opportunities and challenges for pesantren. On the one hand, digital platforms, especially social media, offer a new channel for reaching a broader audience, including young people (Agojo et al., 2023; Alodat et al., 2023; Bellaaj, 2023). On the other hand, the use of these platforms raises concerns about the potential erosion of traditional values and religious teachings. Research has shown that religious institutions worldwide are increasingly using digital tools to engage with younger generations, yet this transition has not been seamless (Bulathwela et al., 2024; Oloba & Blankenship, 2024; Suhner, 2024). The digitalization of pesantren, however, has not been fully explored, creating an opportunity to understand how these institutions are managing this dual challenge.

Previous research on the digital transformation of religious institutions has highlighted the benefits and challenges of adapting to modernity. Religious groups in the West use digital platforms to attract younger followers, emphasizing the tension between maintaining religious authenticity and leveraging digital tools (Hussain & Wang, 2024; Laor, 2024; Missier, 2024). Similarly, studies by Bingaman (2023), Mónica (2021), and Zaid et al. (2022) discuss the role of social media in shaping religious practices but point out the difficulties religious organizations face in preserving their values when adapting to the digital environment. Research by Saini (2024) also addresses the role of technology in religious education, suggesting that technology offers new avenues for engagement. It also requires careful management to avoid compromising core religious teachings. While these studies provide valuable insights into the digital adaptation of religious institutions, few focus specifically on pesantren, particularly within the context of Indonesia, leaving a significant gap in understanding how these unique institutions navigate this challenge.

Despite the growing role of digital tools in religious education, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning how pesantren in Indonesia manage the balance between digital engagement and maintaining religious authenticity. Previous studies, while insightful, primarily focus on Western religious institutions or secular educational settings, leaving the specific challenges faced by pesantren largely unexplored. This gap is particularly significant given that pesantren represents a unique intersection of education, religion, and culture, where tradition plays a central role. The use of digital platforms in these institutions is a relatively new development that could impact not only their educational practices but also their broader societal role. Understanding how pesantren negotiate this digital transformation is crucial for developing strategies that allow them to engage with modernity while preserving their spiritual integrity. This area has yet to be sufficiently addressed in the existing literature.

This research offers a unique contribution by explicitly focusing on pesantren in Indonesia, a context that has not been extensively studied in the literature on religious institutions' digital transformation. Unlike previous studies, this research highlights the distinct cultural and religious factors that influence how pesantren engage with digital platforms. By examining the lived experiences of pesantren administrators, teachers, and students, this study provides a deeper, more contextual understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in balancing traditional religious education with the demands of modern digital engagement. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the nuanced intersection of religion, culture, and technology in an Indonesian context, offering fresh insights into the broader question of how religious educational institutions can successfully adapt to the digital age without losing their core values.

This study aims to explore how pesantren in Indonesia navigate the complexities of digital engagement while maintaining their religious values. It seeks to understand the strategies pesantren use to integrate digital platforms, particularly social media, into their educational practices without compromising their spiritual integrity. By focusing on the perspectives of key stakeholders within pesantren, the study aims to uncover the challenges and opportunities that arise when traditional religious institutions embrace modern technology. Ultimately, this research will provide valuable insights into the broader question of how religious educational institutions can balance the demands of modernity with the preservation of their foundational beliefs, offering a case study that is highly relevant to similar institutions worldwide.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This qualitative research takes place in the context of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia, specifically focusing on Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. This setting is chosen due to its active presence on social media platforms and its experience in handling digital crises. Pesantren represents a unique intersection of religion, education, and culture, where tradition plays a central role, and the challenge of adapting to modern digital tools raises significant ethical dilemmas. This context is highly relevant to the theoretical problem of balancing the preservation of traditional religious values with the need to engage with younger audiences through digital media. The research employs a case study approach, which is ideal for exploring a specific instance in-depth within its real-life context (Muhaimin et al., 2023; Nurhamdani et al., 2024; Tahir & Elbarqi, 2023). By focusing on a single school, this research enables a detailed understanding of how pesantren navigate the complexities of digital engagement while upholding religious integrity. An inductive approach is adopted to build theories grounded in the real-world data collected.

The data for this study were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and digital document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with social media managers, school leaders, and community members, such as students and parents, to capture diverse perspectives on the ethical challenges faced in managing social media. These interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences while remaining flexible enough to address emerging topics. In addition to interviews, observations of social media activities, including posts, comments, and interactions with controversial content, provided real-time insights into the school's engagement with its online audience. The analysis of digital documents, such as posts and public responses, was crucial for understanding how the pesantren handles crises and controversial content. These data collection methods were chosen because they provide a comprehensive view of both internal perspectives and public interactions, allowing for a well-rounded exploration of the research problem.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying recurring patterns and themes related to the research questions. This process began by categorizing the data into key issues, such as ethical challenges, crisis management strategies, and public perceptions. Thematic coding was used to identify themes across the different data sources, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the context of the pesantren (Keles et al., 2024; Riazi et al., 2023; Scharp, 2021). Abstraction and comparison techniques were applied to explore the relationships between the data and identify commonalities and differences in stakeholders' perspectives. The analysis also employed triangulation, where data from interviews, observations, and digital documents were cross-checked to ensure consistency and validity. This rigorous approach helped refine the findings and ensure a robust understanding of the ethical issues in social media crisis management. The iterative process of refining the themes allowed for a nuanced interpretation of how pesantren balance modern digital practices with traditional religious values, providing valuable insights into the broader implications for religious, educational institutions.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

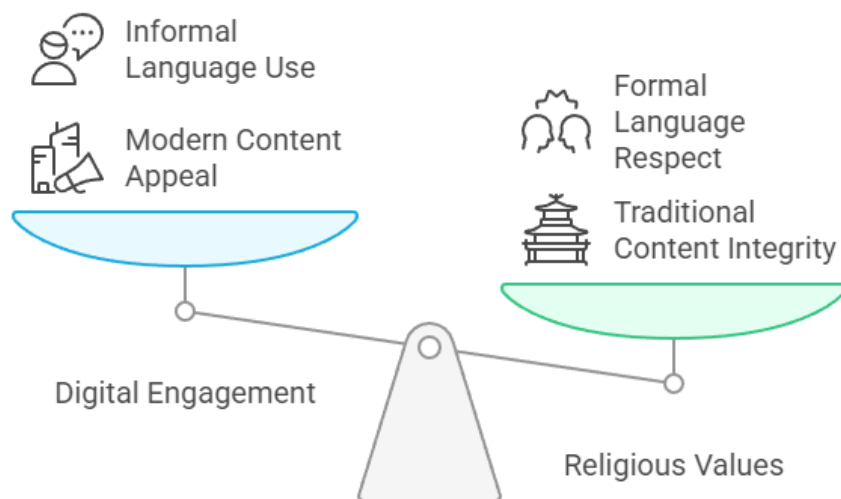
### **Result**

#### **Balancing Digital Engagement with Religious Values**

The primary finding in this study is the challenge faced by Islamic boarding schools in balancing modern digital engagement with the preservation of religious values. A recurrent theme across the data was the tension between keeping up with social media trends and maintaining an image that is in alignment with Islamic principles. Participants indicated that social media engagement has become an essential part of the school's outreach strategy.

However, it often presents challenges when the content or style deviates from the religious values they uphold. For instance, one participant explained, "We try to balance between preaching and relatable content, but sometimes, these trends clash with what we believe is the essence of our faith" (P2, 2023). This concern was echoed by another respondent who stated, "We want to reach out to young people, but it feels like the more we follow trends, the more we lose touch with our true identity" (P3, 2023).

Further elaboration on this issue revealed that while there is a strong desire to appeal to younger audiences by adopting popular trends, there is an underlying fear that doing so could jeopardize the school's reputation. Some participants shared that they felt conflicted about using informal language and modern visual effects that are widely accepted in the digital age but may appear too casual or inappropriate in the context of religious teachings. As one respondent noted, "Our students expect us to provide content that reflects both the faith and their modern world, but sometimes what works for others does not work for us" (P4, 2023). This tension underscores the dilemma faced by these institutions as they attempt to remain relevant in an increasingly digital society. The following image shows the results related to Balancing Digital Engagement with Religious Values.



**Figure 1. Balancing Modernity with Tradition in Education in Nurul Jadid University**

Through the above explanation, it can be concluded that there is a dilemma between the relevance of social media and religious integrity. Pesantren wants to remain attractive to young audiences by following digital trends, but they are worried that it could erode the religious values they hold. This shows that pesantren must find a balance between modernity and tradition. They need to develop a digital strategy that not only prioritizes audience engagement but also maintains the authenticity and purity of pesantren as a religious, educational institution. In this context, a more structured and value-based approach will help them stay relevant without losing the core of religious teachings.

## Crisis Management and Response Strategies

The second key finding revolves around the crisis management strategies employed by Islamic boarding schools, particularly in response to negative comments and online controversies. Participants expressed that there was often a lack of preparedness for dealing with digital crises, which led to delays and sometimes ineffective responses. One participant explained, "When something goes wrong on social media, we do not always know how to react quickly. We do not have a solid crisis management plan" (P5, 2023). Another highlighted that "Sometimes, our response is too late, and by then, the issue has already escalated" (P6, 2023). This finding highlights a significant gap in the school's ability to respond effectively to online challenges.

Further elaboration on this issue revealed that while there was some awareness of the importance of rapid responses, the absence of a structured crisis management plan made it difficult for the institution to address emerging issues proactively. This became particularly evident during instances when misinterpretations or controversial content were shared on social media platforms. One participant described how "a misunderstanding about our policies once went viral, and we struggled to contain the damage because we did not have a pre-set plan in place" (P7, 2023). The inability to manage these crises effectively contributed to negative perceptions of the institution's transparency and responsiveness. From the results of the research findings above, several points of research findings can be identified, as shown in the following table.

**Table 1. Crisis Management and Response Strategies**

Main Themes	Crisis	Response Strategies
Lack of Crisis Management Preparation	No Solid Crisis Management Plan	Islamic boarding schools do not have a structured plan to deal with crises on social media, which leads to unpreparedness in responding.
Delayed Response	Late and Ineffective Response	When a crisis occurs, Pesantren's response is often delayed, leading to an escalation of the problem and greater damage to its image.
Controversial Content and Misconceptions	Unable to handle controversial content	Islamic boarding schools have difficulty responding to misunderstandings or controversial content on social media because they do not have a plan that has been prepared.
Proactive vs Reactive	Reactive Approach in Facing Crises	Islamic boarding schools tend to respond to crises reactively, not proactively, which can make managing problems that arise on social media challenging.
Negative Perception of Transparency	Loss of Public Trust	Delays in responding or inability to effectively manage crises lead to negative perceptions of pesantren transparency and responsiveness.

From the results of Table 1 above, the crisis management strategies faced by Islamic boarding schools in dealing with issues that arise on social media. Lack of crisis management preparations leads to the inability of pesantren to respond in a timely and structured manner, which exacerbates the situation and leads to image damage. When crises occur, pesantren responses are often delayed, leading to an escalation of problems and negative images. In addition, Islamic boarding schools also have difficulty dealing with controversial content and misunderstandings because they do not have a pre-prepared plan. Islamic boarding schools tend to adopt a reactive approach in responding to crises, which makes problem management even more difficult. This ultimately lowers public perception of the transparency and responsiveness of Islamic boarding schools, reducing public trust in the institution. Therefore, pesantren need to develop a structured crisis management plan to respond proactively and maintain their image.

From the findings of the research above, it can be seen that pesantren are unprepared to deal with the digital crisis, which can damage their image. Delays in responding or a lack of a clear crisis strategy can erode public trust, potentially exacerbating the situation. In the digital era, a quick and structured response is crucial to maintain the reputation of the Islamic boarding school. Islamic boarding schools need to have a solid crisis management plan in order to respond appropriately, reduce negative impacts, and maintain an image that is in accordance with religious values. In addition, pesantren needs to strengthen internal communication mechanisms, ensuring that any crisis can be addressed with consistency and clarity. Without a systematic approach, pesantren risk losing control of public perception and facing significant challenges in maintaining their relevance in the digital world.

### **Public Perception of Social Media Content**

The third significant finding centers on the public's perception of Islamic boarding schools' content on social media, particularly the ethics of the language and visuals used. Many participants highlighted concerns about the appropriateness of visual aesthetics and the tone of social media narratives. One respondent remarked, "Sometimes, the posts are too informal, and it makes us question if they are truly representing the Islamic values we cherish" (P8, 2023). Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying, "The visuals should reflect the seriousness of our message, not distract from it with flashy effects" (P9, 2023). These insights point to the tension between engaging an audience visually and maintaining the solemnity expected of religious institutions.

Further analysis revealed that there were mixed feelings about the type of content that should be shared. While there was general support for educational and informative content, participants were more skeptical about content that used trendy formats or excessive visual effects. One participant explained, "We need content that's simple but impactful; flashy images do not always align with what we are trying to convey" (P10, 2023).

From the above, pesantren needs to be careful when choosing the language and visuals used on social media. Content that is too casual or not in accordance with social norms can be considered as not reflecting the identity of the Islamic boarding school based on religion. Therefore, pesantren need to maintain simplicity and depth in their content so that the message conveyed remains relevant and in accordance with religious values. Simple but meaningful visuals are more effective than flashy ones because pesantren aim to educate, not just follow digital trends. The success of Islamic boarding schools in managing their social media relies heavily on the ability to balance digital relevance with loyalty to religious teachings. With this approach, pesantren can attract young audiences without sacrificing their core values while maintaining a positive image and credibility in cyberspace.

## Discussion

This research aims to explore the challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in managing digital engagement while maintaining their religious values. The main findings of this study show that pesantren have difficulty in balancing engagement with social media and maintaining the integrity of their religious teachings. In addition, the problem of digital crisis management is also a significant obstacle for Islamic boarding schools in managing issues that arise in cyberspace. In this discussion chapter, we will relate these findings to relevant theories and the existing literature, as well as provide arguments regarding the implications of the findings for future research, existing theories, and professional practice.

The main question in this study is how pesantren face the dilemma between modern social media engagement and the religious values they maintain. The findings of this study provide a clear answer, namely that Pesantren strives to remain relevant to young audiences through social media. However, they find it challenging to maintain the religious values that are the basis of their institutions. This can be seen from the tension between following social media trends that lead to the use of informal language and modern visual effects with more conservative religious principles.

These findings highlight that pesantren face a dilemma related to public perception of their image in cyberspace, which is often reflected in the response to the digital crisis and in the content they share. Digital engagement is not only to reach the audience but also to maintain an image and reputation that is in accordance with their religious principles. The findings of this research can be understood in the context of technology adaptation theory and crisis management theory. In line with the theory of technological adaptation, as stated by Kumar et al. (2022), religious institutions can adopt modern technology without losing their traditional essence and value. These findings support the theory by showing that pesantren does not entirely reject social media but seeks to adapt the use of such technology in a way that is consistent with their religious teachings.

However, these findings also challenge existing thinking about the readiness of religious institutions in the face of the digital crisis. Previous research shows that many large institutions already have well-established structures in place to deal with the digital crisis (Lee-Geiller & Lee, 2022; Lee & Trimi, 2021; Riebe et al., 2021).

In the case of Islamic boarding schools, these findings reveal that many Islamic boarding schools do not have a clear crisis plan, which leads to delayed responses and escalation of problems on social media. This shows a significant gap in terms of pesantren readiness to face challenges in the digital age, in contrast to what was found in research by (Ausat, 2023; R. Hasanah, 2024; Massey et al., 2024).

One of the new insights provided by this study is the importance of developing value-based digital strategies for religious institutions. Although many studies suggest that religious institutions tend to avoid or respond to digital technologies with caution (Davies et al., 2021; Kühle & Larsen, 2021; Quach et al., 2022), these findings suggest that Islamic boarding schools actually seek to use social media to maintain their engagement with young audiences, but with strict scrutiny of the suitability of religious values. This insight opens up space for further research on how religious institutions can balance the need to remain relevant in the digital world with maintaining the integrity of their religious teachings.

This research's contribution, both theoretical and practical, provides new insights into the challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in managing digital engagement without sacrificing religious values. Theoretically, this study enriches the theory of technological adaptation in religious contexts by highlighting the importance of value-based approaches in managing digital technologies, an element that has often been overlooked in previous research. These findings broaden the understanding of how religious institutions can use social media effectively while maintaining the principles of religious teaching. This research guides Islamic boarding schools in developing digital strategies that are relevant to young audiences and reflect their religious values. In addition, the findings on the importance of digital crisis management make a practical contribution to strengthening the readiness of Islamic boarding schools to respond to problems that arise in cyberspace quickly and in a structured manner, maintaining their image and integrity in the digital era.

## CONCLUSION

In an era where digital presence increasingly intersects with religious life, the challenge for Islamic boarding schools lies in navigating the tension between digital relevance and the preservation of religious identity. As these institutions attempt to engage younger audiences through social media, they face complex dilemmas that test their ability to remain faithful to long-standing values while adapting to rapidly evolving digital norms. This study has provided in-depth insight into how pesantren respond to these challenges, revealing both the aspirations and anxieties they experience in their efforts to balance modern engagement with spiritual integrity.

Through qualitative exploration, this research has identified three key areas of concern: the struggle to align social media practices with religious values, the institutional unpreparedness in managing digital crises, and the sensitivity surrounding public perception of religious content online. The findings affirm that while pesantren recognize the importance of media

engagement, they lack structured strategies to do so in ways that are consistent with their core principles. These insights contribute to the existing literature by contextualizing digital adaptation within a religious, educational framework, highlighting the nuanced complexities faced by traditional institutions in the digital age.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study expands the discourse on technology adaptation by incorporating value-based constraints, prompting future scholarship to consider how religious institutions negotiate digital modernity. Practically, the results underscore the urgent need for pesantren to develop coherent digital strategies and crisis management protocols that preserve institutional credibility while facilitating meaningful public outreach. Future research should investigate how religious schools can co-create digital literacy frameworks that uphold their values, as well as examine the role of digital platforms in shaping the identity of religious education in broader societal contexts.

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