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JURNAL STUDI PESANTREN



SANTRI NOWADAYS: BETWEEN SARONG, SMARTPHONE AND SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

The digital era presents several challenges and opportunities. Digital transformation has changed many aspects of life, including in the pesantren environment which usually upholds traditional values. The purpose of this study is to analyse the internal conflict felt by santri in maintaining a traditional identity represented by the sarong symbol, responding to technological developments, especially in the use of smartphones, and maintaining spirituality as the core of life in pesantren. This research uses a qualitative-descriptive type with a phenomenological approach. Data collection using interview and observation techniques in traditional pesantren, the location of this research is Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hasanain Genggong Probolinggo. This research shows that santri experience tension between the demands of modern times and their cultural heritage. On the one hand, they use smartphones as a tool for learning and preaching, but on the other hand, they also face moral disturbances and challenges that can damage the quality of their ruhiyah. This research concludes the need for a pattern of education in pesantren that can adapt to technology without neglecting spiritual values. The concept of 'Santri Digital Spiritual' is proposed as a new framework to shape the character of santri who are able to compete in the digital era while still adhering to tradition and spirituality.

Keywords: Santri, Smartphone, Spirituality, Digitalization of Islamic Boarding Schools

INTRODUCTION

Santri as the central figure in the pesantren environment has a crucial contribution in maintaining and preserving Islamic teachings, culture, and national character education (Masturin & Nadhirin, 2025). Over time, the characteristics of santri are not only tied to conventional symbols such as sarongs, caps, and yellow books, but have undergone changes in line with global and digital developments (Takdir, 2018). The emergence of information technology, especially smart phones and social media platforms, has resulted in a significant transformation in the way of life, learning methods, and also the way santri interact.

Life in pesantren, which is thick with simple values, respect for teachers, and strictness in learning and worship, is often faced with a fast-paced, borderless and open digital world. On the one hand, smartphones open a wide door to a variety of information, including religious knowledge. On the other hand, temptations are also inevitable such as social media, short entertainment, and content that is contrary to Islamic teachings. The santris also feel a dilemma. They want to remain a pious person and focus on worship, but also do not want to be outdated.

On the other hand, this change raises a new discussion about the identity of santri. How does the lifestyle of santri change in the digital era, especially in the use of smartphones in the pesantren environment? How do santri maintain the values of spirituality and Islamic manners in the midst of modernization and the development of digital technology? What are the challenges and opportunities faced by santri in integrating pesantren traditions (such as sarongs and yellow Islamic classic books) with digital media (smartphones, social media, etc.)? What is the role of pesantren or Islamic education institutions in guiding and directing santri to maintain a balance between sarong (tradition), smartphone (modernity), and spirituality (values)? These questions arise amid concerns that technology can shift traditional pesantren values such as simplicity, sincerity, and respect for teachers.

However, many santri are able to adapt to changing times (Risadiana et al., 2020). They act as Islamic content creators, promoting da'wah through TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram in an innovative way without losing substance (Ummah, 2020). They combine spiritual spirit with digital skills to face the challenges of the times (Mundiri & Nawiro, 2019). This is the new face of santri who wear sarongs in pesantren, but also use smartphones in the digital world (Simamora, 2019). They can read the book of Kifāyatul Akhyār in the morning, and create da'wah content in the afternoon. This shows that spirituality and technology do not conflict, but can complement each other in the spirit of adaptive and contextual da'wah (Ummah, 2020); (Jalal et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the identity of today's santri has also evolved in their roles (Firdausi et al., 2023). If previously santri were more often considered as passive learners in traditional teaching methods, now they are creative individuals in various aspects of life: as preachers, community activists, educational innovators, and even digital entrepreneurs (santripreneurs). (Wijaya & Yusrin, 2024); (Rahim & Rosyada, 2023). This shows that

the identity of santri is not fixed, but continues to evolve in accordance with social, cultural and technological dynamics.

In the midst of this phenomenon, there is an urgent need to re-evaluate the direction of santri development in the digital era. How should pesantren institutions handle the increasingly inevitable digital reality (Budiantmaja et al., 2022)? How can kiai, ustaz, and pesantren caregivers provide guidance so that santri maintain spiritual values while being active in the digital world (Zuhri, 2021)? A new approach is needed that combines traditional role models with strengthening digital literacy and positive media management.

Therefore, it is very important to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the lives of santri in the current era (Harmathilda et al., 2024). This research aims not only to understand the changing identity of santri in the current context, but also to explore how technology can be a *da'wah* tool that supports increased spirituality. In this way, santri are not only a symbol of historical heritage, but also as agents of change in the future who can integrate sarong, smartphone, and spirituality.

Review of previous studies related to the theme "Santri Nowadays: Between Sarong, Smartphone, and Spirituality". These studies provide a scientific foundation to prove that your research has an element of novelty because not many have analyzed the three in an integrated manner. As conducted by Fitriani, L. (2021). "Social Media and Santri Identity: A Study of Pesantren Sociology" *Journal of Islamic Communication*, 11(1), 33-45. Fitriani explains how social media platforms change santri's perspectives on themselves and their surrounding environment. This research emphasizes changes in identity, but has not reviewed in depth the value conflict between tradition and spirituality (Fitriani, L. (2021).

This research has unique characteristics because it raises the phenomenon of cultural and spiritual change in the pesantren environment, which has been known to maintain tradition. Santris, who are a symbol of piety and protectors of classical Islamic knowledge heritage, are now at a crossroads: between maintaining traditional identity and responding to the demands of the digital era. The specialty of this research lies in: First, the tension between traditional symbols and modernity. Second, contemporary phenomena that are less scientifically researched. Third, the potential emergence of a new identity of santri in the digital era. Fourth, The importance of maintaining spirituality in the era of technological disruption

In the midst of the swift flow of digital entertainment and moral challenges in cyberspace, maintaining solemnity and diligence in worship is a new test. This research provides insight into how santri attempt to maintain spirituality amidst the ease of access to technology, a very important theme in modern Islamic character education. Thus, this research is not only actual and relevant, but also unique and strategic in reading the direction of the transformation of Islamic education, especially in pesantren, in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Identity and Traditions of Santri

The identity of a santri is fundamentally shaped through the process of internalizing the values, traditions, and culture of the pesantren, as reflected in respect for the kiai and ustaz, discipline in worship, simplicity, mastery of Islamic knowledge, and the practice of proper conduct in daily life. (Ferihana Ferihana, 2023) Over time, this identity has undergone dynamic changes in tandem with globalization and the penetration of digital technology. The sarong, classical Islamic texts, study circles, and pesantren lifestyle remain symbols of traditional continuity, yet at the same time, santri have begun to interact intensively with smartphones, social media, and various digital platforms. These conditions indicate that the identity of contemporary santri is not static but is continually negotiated through the interplay between traditional heritage and the demands of modernity. Digital technology provides opportunities for santri to expand access to learning resources, develop digital literacy, and utilize media as a means of da'wah and religious communication. (Aini et al. 2026) However, the unguided use of technology also has the potential to cause distractions from learning, undermine discipline, and provide access to content that is inconsistent with pesantren values. Therefore, digital transformation within the pesantren environment must be approached within a framework of selective adaptation so that the use of technology continues to support educational goals and the character development of santri.

In this context, spirituality and etiquette hold a strategic position as both a normative foundation and a regulatory mechanism in responding to technological developments. The spirituality of santri is manifested not only through ritual activities but also through self-awareness, behavioral self-control, sincerity, discipline, and a life orientation grounded in Islamic values. (Mariska et al. 2025) Meanwhile, adab must be contextualized within the digital space through courteous communication, responsible access to and dissemination of information, and the ability to select content that serves the common good. Thus, the pesantren tradition, smartphones, and spirituality need not be positioned as three contradictory elements, but rather as components that can be integrated into the formation of the contemporary santri's identity. The sarong represents the continuity of tradition and pesantren identity; the smartphone represents the ability to adapt to modernity; while spirituality and adab serve as a moral compass in guiding the use of technology. The integration of these three aspects gives rise to the concept of the "Digital Spiritual Santri"—that is, a santri who is capable of adapting to developments in digital technology while still preserving the traditional roots, Islamic values, etiquette, and spirituality of the pesantren. This framework emphasizes that the transformation of the santri is not a linear shift from the traditional to the modern, but rather a process of negotiating and integrating identities that allows pesantren traditions to remain relevant in the digital age.

Digitalization, Smartphones, and the Transformation of Students' Lives

Digitalization has driven significant changes in the lives of santri, particularly in their patterns of communication, learning, access to information, and religious expression. The prevalence of smartphones has expanded the santri's learning environment by providing access to various sources of knowledge that were previously obtained primarily within the physical setting of the pesantren. Classical Islamic texts can now be studied in digital formats, Islamic studies are accessible through various video platforms, and religious interactions and discussions can take place in virtual spaces (Muhtar and Manan, 2025). These changes indicate that digital technology serves not merely as a communication tool but has contributed to the transformation of learning patterns and da'wah practices within the pesantren environment. Masruroh and Muhid (2022) highlight a shift in religious study sessions from conventional formats to virtual spaces, while Risdiana et al. (2020) demonstrate the transformation of "kitab kuning"-based da'wah into digital platforms. Thus, digitization has become an integral part of the changing educational and da'wah ecosystem in pesantren, influencing how students acquire, process, and disseminate religious knowledge.

Although smartphones offer many conveniences, their use also presents challenges for life in Islamic boarding schools, particularly when their use is not accompanied by self-control and adequate digital literacy. Intensive use of digital media has the potential to disrupt concentration during study, reduce discipline, increase consumption of entertainment, and expose students to content that is inconsistent with Islamic values. (Moch. Fauzie Said, 2025) However, technology can simultaneously serve as a productive tool for students to enhance their learning, deliver da'wah, and produce Islamic content. Ummah (2020) points out that the development of digital da'wah opens up broader opportunities for the next generation of students to participate in spreading religious messages through digital media. Therefore, the issue of digitalization in Islamic boarding schools does not lie in the acceptance or rejection of technology, but rather in the students' ability to utilize, control, and direct it in accordance with the values of the boarding school. In this regard, digital literacy needs to be developed not only in terms of technical skills but also to include critical and ethical competencies. Safitri (2020) emphasizes the potential of students in the transformation of digital literacy, which can be directed toward the development of knowledge and da'wah, so that smartphones can be positioned as instruments of modernity whose use remains grounded in the character and values of the pesantren.

Spirituality and Etiquette Among Islamic Boarding School Santri in the Digital Age

Spirituality is one of the fundamental dimensions of life in a pesantren; it is not limited to the performance of religious rituals but also encompasses an awareness of the relationship between humans and God, self-control, sincerity, self-reflection, and behavior guided by Islamic values. In pesantren culture, the development of spirituality occurs through a continuous process, including through worship, religious study sessions,

zikir, halaqah, the example set by the kiai, and the practice of proper etiquette in daily life. (Mashuri, Futaqi, and Sulhan 2024) However, the development of digital technology presents new dynamics for the sustainability of these values. The fast-paced, open nature of the digital space which is closely intertwined with various forms of entertainment has the potential to clash with pesantren culture, which emphasizes simplicity, discipline, devotion, patience, and respect for teachers. Therefore, technological advancements not only present opportunities for students to access information and knowledge but also pose challenges in maintaining the quality of spirituality and a life orientation grounded in pesantren values.

In this context, spirituality serves as both a guiding foundation and an internal control mechanism in the use of technology. Spiritual awareness enables santri to regulate their digital behavior not merely because of external rules and supervision, but based on a personal awareness of moral values and responsibilities. In line with this, adab as an integral part of a santri's character must be contextualized within the digital space. Interactions via social media, virtual communication, content creation, and the dissemination of information must remain grounded in politeness, honesty, responsibility, and respect for others. Nurhadi et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of social media ethics for santri in navigating the digital transformation. Thus, digital etiquette can be understood as the actualization of pesantren values in a virtual environment, which requires students not only to be proficient in using technology but also to be able to select, process, and disseminate information responsibly. The integration of spirituality and these digital etiquette principles serves as a crucial foundation to ensure that the use of technology remains focused on the common good, learning, da'wah, and self-development without shifting the value orientation in the lives of santri.

The Integration of Tradition, Smartphones, and Spirituality

The relationship between tradition, smartphones, and spirituality serves as the primary conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of contemporary santri. These three elements need not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Tradition provides identity and cultural roots; smartphones offer tools for adapting to modernity; and spirituality provides a value-based orientation for the use of technology. (Zaini and Hamidah, 2023) Conceptually, the sarong can be seen as a representation of tradition and pesantren identity, the smartphone as a representation of technology and modernity, and spirituality as a moral compass and regulator of technology use. The relationship among these three elements indicates that contemporary santri are in the process of negotiating between preserving their traditional identity and responding to technological change.

Pesantren play a strategic role in this integration process. The roles of the kiai and ustaz, the curriculum, rules and regulations, the practice of worship, and the culture of the pesantren serve as important mechanisms for guiding students in navigating technological advancements. The research paper indicates that Islamic boarding schools can develop a curriculum that integrates the study of classical texts with digital literacy, digital da'wah,

online learning, the production of Islamic content, and social media ethics, while maintaining the traditions of halaqah, zikir, and character building.

Based on this synthesis, the transformation of santri should not be understood as a linear shift from a traditional identity to a modern one. Rather, this transformation is best understood as a process of identity integration and negotiation, in which santri preserve the core values of the pesantren while developing the competencies needed to thrive in a digital society. This framework gives rise to the concept of the “Spiritual Digital Santri” a vision of santri who can use digital technology productively without losing their pesantren identity, traditions, etiquette, and spirituality. This concept has four main characteristics: (1) possessing an identity rooted in pesantren tradition, (2) possessing digital literacy competencies, (3) applying etiquette in the digital space, and (4) making spirituality the guiding principle in the use of technology.

Thus, the ideal santri in the digital age is neither one who rejects technology nor one who accepts it without limits, but rather one who is able to integrate tradition and technology through a foundation of spirituality. This perspective shows that the sarong and the smartphone are not two symbols that must be pitted against one another, but can instead serve as two representations of contemporary santri life, united by the spiritual values and etiquette of the pesantren. Simply put, this conceptual relationship can be formulated as:



RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach (Tumangkeng & Maramis, 2022). The phenomenological approach aims to understand and explore the meaning of the subjective experiences of individuals or groups of people

regarding certain phenomena (La Kahija, 2017). This approach is rooted in the understanding that human experiences are specific and have meaning, so to understand social reality, researchers need to see from the perspective of the people who experience it (Nasir et al., 2023).

This study aims to understand the subjective experiences of santri in utilising technology (smartphones/social media) and how they interpret these changes in relation to aspects of their spirituality. The location in this study is Pondok Pesantren Klenang Kidul Banyuanyar Probolinggo. The primary data sources in this study are Kiai, Ustadz, and santri. The focus is on the meaning of the santri's experience of the digital world, with an emphasis on the perceptions, values, and self-awareness of today's santri. Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews with santri who actively use smartphones, participatory observation of santri behaviour in daily life at the pesantren, and documentation of digital content produced by santri (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, etc.).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of changes in the lifestyle of santri in the digital era, especially in the use of smartphones in the pesantren environment

The rapid advancement of digital technology has changed the way santri live their days in pesantren (Simamora, 2019). In the past, santri life was closely related to simplicity and lack of access to information, but now the picture is much different. Today's santri are not only concerned with the yellow book and recitation, but are also familiar with smartphones connected to cyberspace. This digital device has become an inseparable part of the santri's daily life, both for establishing communication with family, as an additional source of learning, and simply looking for entertainment and showing off on social media. Smartphones open up new opportunities for santri to access various sources of knowledge more quickly and easily. The yellow book now comes in PDF or app format, scholars' lectures can be re-watched on YouTube, and religious discussions are available in online forums (Ummah, 2020).

Learning methods have also shifted from conventional methods such as *bandongan* or *sorogan* to the use of digital media as a tool (Masrurroh & Muhid, 2022). On the other hand, a new phenomenon has also emerged where santri become *da'wah* content creators, producing *tausiyah* videos on TikTok or Instagram in a more popular and digestible style (Risadiana et al., 2020). This proves that santri are not only the object of change, but also play an active role in the digitalisation process in the Islamic sphere. Muhammad Syahrul Hasan, "Transformation of Pesantren Literacy in the Archipelago: From Kitab Kuning to Ebook in the Perspective of Islamic Civilisation (16th Century to 21st Century)" (UNUSIA, 2025). However, the use of smartphones in the pesantren environment also raises a number of challenges. Many pesantren are forced to implement strict rules regarding usage to prevent misuse, such as access to negative content or addiction to digital entertainment.

The lifestyle of santri becomes more complex because they have to balance the discipline in pesantren with the freedom offered by the digital world. Therefore, this lifestyle change is not merely a matter of technology, but also includes values, ethics, and perspectives on life as a santri. This transformation becomes a link between tradition and modernity that requires guidance and character strengthening so that santri continue to develop in the corridor of Islamic spiritual values.

Maintaining the values of Islamic spirituality and adab amidst modernisation

The development of the times has had a major impact on various aspects of the lives of Muslims, including santri, ranging from social, cultural, to education (Arif, 2016). Fast-paced lifestyles, easy access to information, and the popularity of pop culture are a test for the spiritual values and Islamic manners that have been the hallmark of pesantren (Nurhadi et al., 2022). Noble values such as humility, sincerity, courtesy, respect for teachers, and sincerity in studying are often eroded by a more selfish and instant lifestyle due to the influence of the digital era (Huda et al., 2023).

In these conditions, maintaining spirituality is not only about performing formal worship, but also about guarding the heart, introspection, and getting closer to Allah in the midst of strong worldly temptations (HARINI & SI, 2019). Therefore, the role of education, especially in pesantren, is very important in instilling spiritual awareness and Islamic manners to the next generation (Rajab, 2024). The santri need to be equipped with ethical digital knowledge and deep spirituality in order to be able to sort out the bad influence of modernisation. Activities such as halaqah, dhikr together, strengthening morals through examples from kiai, and familiarising adab in daily life are important foundations so that santri still have an Islamic character despite living in the technological era. So, spirituality and adab are not something that is obsolete or hinders progress, it is a very important basis so that modernisation does not erase the moral roots in the lives of santri.

Challenges and opportunities faced by santri in integrating pesantren traditions (such as sarong and kitab kuning) with digital media (smartphones, social media, etc.)

In this modern era, santri experience considerable difficulties in maintaining pesantren traditions, for example wearing sarong, studying kitab kuning, and practising adab in daily life, especially with the rapid advancement of digital technology. The existence of smartphones, social media, and various digital applications in the lives of santri often leads to conflicts between traditional values and more modern lifestyles (Dhuhani, 2020). Some of the problems that arise include the disruption of the learning process due to overuse of social media, the emergence of content that is contrary to Islamic teachings, and the potential for a decrease in discipline and solemnity when worshipping. In addition, the uncontrolled use of smartphones can reduce the essence of simplicity that has been the identity of a santri.

However, despite these challenges, the digital era also provides opportunities for santri to play a more active role in spreading the teachings of Islam. Santris can use digital media to expand their access to religious knowledge, create creative da'wah content, and become drivers of change in society. Currently, the yellowIslamic classic book can be learnt through apps or e-books, ulama lectures can be recorded and shared through YouTube, and pesantren values can be displayed in a more attractive way on social media (Saputra & Sirozi, 2025). This opportunity will become a great strength if santri have qualified digital skills, good media literacy, and strong religious understanding (Safitri, 2020). Combining tradition with technology is not impossible, in fact, this can be the hallmark of today's santri: digital literacy, but still adhering to the spiritual values and culture of pesantren.

The role of pesantren is to direct santri to maintain a balance between sarong (tradition), smartphone (modernity), and spirituality (values)

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, play a vital role in shaping the personalities of santri to be able to adapt to the times without forgetting their identity (Takdir, 2018). Here, pesantren act as guardians of values and guidelines, emphasising the importance of maintaining Islamic identity (which is reflected in the sarong), while equipping santri with skills to use modern technology such as smartphones. The role of kiai, ustadz, and teaching methods in pesantren is very important to direct santri not to be swept away in the flow of modernity that may ignore religious values, but instead utilise it as a means of da'wah and self-development (Jalal et al., 2021). In short, pesantren is not only a place to gain religious knowledge, but also a centre of character building that is spiritually, intellectually, and culturally intact.

To maintain harmony between tradition, technology, and noble values, pesantren can develop a curriculum that combines the teaching of classical books with digital understanding based on Islamic values (Adib, 2021). Programmes such as da'wah through digital media, online learning, training in creating Islamic creative content, and instilling ethics in social media can be concrete steps so that santri can use the media wisely. At the same time, pesantren continue to carry out traditional activities such as halaqah, dhikr together, and strengthening morals as a moral and spiritual fortress. In this way, santri not only become heirs of tradition, but also agents of change who always uphold Islamic values. Therefore, pesantren today need to have an adaptive and broad-minded attitude in order to be able to produce santri who are ready to face global challenges without losing the roots of their values and traditions.

Pesantren has an important role in forming santri who are able to adapt to the times without abandoning Islamic values. By maintaining identities such as sarongs and yellowIslamic books, pesantren also equip santri with digital skills based on religious teachings. The curriculum can combine classical teaching with media literacy, such as digital da'wah, online learning, and media ethics. On the other hand, traditions such as halaqah and dhikr are maintained as the foundation of spi

CONCLUSION

Santri in this modern era are not only focused on the yellow book and recitation, but are also familiar with smartphones connected to the internet. These digital devices are now a very important part of santri's daily lives, both for communicating with family and as a learning tool. Learning methods have also changed from traditional methods such as bandongan or sorogan to the utilisation of digital platforms. On the other hand, there is a new phenomenon where santri act as creators of da'wah content, creating tausiyah videos on TikTok or Instagram with a more contemporary and easy-to-understand approach.

The function of education, especially in Islamic boarding schools, has a crucial role in reshaping spiritual awareness and Islamic manners to the next generation. The santri must be equipped with ethical digital knowledge and spiritual depth in order to filter out the negative influences of modernisation. Activities such as halaqah, dhikr together, strengthening morals through the example of kiai, and the application of adab in daily life are important foundations so that santri still have an Islamic character despite living in the technological era.

In the digital era, santri face the challenge of maintaining pesantren traditions such as wearing sarongs, studying the yellow Islamic classic books, and practising adab, due to the swift influence of smartphones and social media. Technology often disrupts the learning process, reduces discipline, and brings content to the students.

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