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TRANSFORMATION OF PESANTREN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: STRATEGIES FOR PESANTREN TO BECOME CENTERS OF INNOVATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of organizational culture in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in response to the challenges and opportunities of the digital era. It explores how pesantren can become centers of innovation while preserving traditional values. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research gathered data through interviews, observations, and documentation from pesantren leaders, administrators, teaching staff, and students. The data were analyzed using an interactive model, including data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that visionary and inclusive leadership plays a crucial role in driving innovation within pesantren, despite facing internal resistance to change. Pesantren that manage the process of change effectively demonstrate the potential to become hubs of innovation by integrating digital technology with traditional Islamic education. These pesantren preserve their core values while adopting new tools and approaches to enhance learning and administration. The study concludes that pesantren can thrive in the digital era by strategically managing cultural transformation, fostering innovation, and staying true to their educational mission. The results suggest that pesantren leaders must prioritize flexibility, collaboration, and adaptability to create an environment conducive to innovation and digital transformation.

Keywords: Organizational Culture Transformation; Innovation Strategy; Pesantren; Digital Era.

A. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of pesantren organizational culture does not only

involve structural changes, but also the cultivation of innovative values that remain grounded in traditional roots (El-Bassiouny et al., 2022). The transformation of pesantren organizational culture is necessary because pesantren face the challenges of modernity and technological developments that are constantly changing (Madkur et al., 2024; Munawwar, 2020).

This requires pesantren to not only survive as traditional institutions, but also play an active role in responding to the needs of contemporary society. However, the success of this transformation depends not only on structural changes, such as institutional management or the use of digital technology, but also on the ability of pesantren to maintain the traditional values that have become their identity. Pesantren such as Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor show that changes in organizational structure (such as the use of modern management systems) can be in harmony with the preservation of traditional values such as discipline, sincerity, and independence. They are able to integrate digital technology in learning without losing their identity.

Various studies show that pesantren have successfully adapted to social, technological, and economic changes in the digital era without neglecting their traditional identity (Zaini & Hamidah, 2023). This adaptation can be seen in the application of digital technology in the learning system, such as the use of social media to support educational activities. Pesantren also began to integrate modern skills-based curriculum, such as entrepreneurship and information technology, to prepare santri to face the challenges of the times. On the other hand, pesantren still maintain traditional values such as adherence to Islamic teachings, noble morals, and yellowclassical book-based learning patterns. This identity is maintained through intensive teaching conducted directly by the kyai and strengthening the pesantren culture, such as living in a simple and spirituality-oriented community. With this adaptability, pesantren not only survive, but also develop as relevant educational institutions in the modern era.

In contrast to some of these studies, this research focuses on current phenomena related to the synergy between technology-based innovations and pesantren traditions. Different from previous research, this study offers a new perspective that emphasizes the importance of pesantren adaptation to the challenges of modernity without ignoring its traditional values. By exploring technology integration strategies in various aspects, such as education management, teaching, and pesantren management, this study aims to produce an adaptive model that is relevant to be applied in other pesantren. This approach not only maintains the traditional heritage of pesantren, but also enhances their competitiveness in the digital era, thus creating a balance between tradition and innovation. This is what attracts researchers to examine the pesantren darussalam blokagung, which is currently the largest pesantren in Banyuwangi regency with educational institutions that are able to harmonize cultural values with digital technology in learning.

This study aims to examine the transformation of pesantren organizational

culture in facing the challenges of the digital era, especially in its role as a center of innovation. This research explores the extent to which pesantren are able to adapt to the development of digital technology without neglecting their traditional values. Thus, this study seeks to answer the question*:* Can pesantren integrate a culture of digital innovation in their education system? *and* What are the driving factors and obstacles in the transformation of pesantren organizational culture towards innovation in the digital era?

The results of this study are expected to produce an in-depth understanding of the process of organizational culture transformation. In addition, it can provide a deeper understanding of the ability of pesantren to create relevant and sustainable innovations in accordance with the needs of the times without ignoring the traditional values that are their identity.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The object of this research is Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School, which is the largest Islamic Boarding School in Banyuwangi. This study allows the research to explore how pesantren leaders can examine the transformation of pesantren organizational culture in facing the challenges of the digital era, especially in its role as a center of innovation.

The design in this research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen to deeply explore the phenomenon of organizational culture transformation in the context of pesantren, especially how these traditional institutions can adapt and innovate in the digital era. Case studies allow researchers to understand the internal dynamics of pesantren as well as the external factors that influence the transformation. The research will be conducted in several pesantren that are considered representative, namely pesantren that have shown efforts to adapt to digitalization and pesantren that still maintain a traditional approach.

Data were collected through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with various key informants, such as pesantren leaders, pesantren administrators, santri guardians, and community leaders.

Table A.1 Research Informants

No.	Informant Category	Informant Code
1.	Pesantren Leader	PS
2.	Boarding School Management	PS
3.	Santri	San
4.	Community Leaders	TS

Source: processed by researchers, 2024

The data obtained was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. This process includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data was simplified, arranged in an easy-to-understand form, and then analyzed to find

patterns and meanings. This process is done interactively and iteratively until it produces a valid conclusion.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Changes in Communication Patterns in Pesantren

Technological developments have influenced the way of communication, including in the pesantren environment (Qorib & Afandi, 2024) . Pesantren have started to adopt modern communication media, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, or other digital platforms, to manage learning activities and relationships with student guardians (Roihan, 2023) (Shahriar et al., 2021) . Many pesantren now use social media groups to provide information to students and guardians (Alias, Ishak, & Nordin, 2022; (Ambarwati & Sari, 2024). The existence of official websites or social media of pesantren is also used to reach a wider community (Muslikatun & Siswanto, 2024) . This is reinforced by the results of an interview with the head of the Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School, Mr. Nur Ahmadi as follows:

"We cannot avoid the development of technology today, including in the pesantren environment. I see technology as a tool, depending on how we use it. If used wisely, technology can support pesantren activities, both in education and communication."

However, it is also reinforced by an interview with the santri guardian, Mr. Ahmad Husein, as follows:

"I see this as a very good and progressive step. Technology has now become a part of everyday life, and pesantren should not be left behind. By adopting technology, pesantren not only maintain their relevance, but are also able to reach out to the wider community."

Based on the above interviews conducted with the head of the pesantren, the santri guardian, and Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi, it can be concluded that technology is seen as a tool that, if used wisely, can support pesantren education and communication, helping pesantren remain relevant, progressive, and able to reach a wider community without neglecting traditional values.

In addition, the development of technology in pesantren serves to identify the dynamics of interaction between santri, kyai, and the community in facing the influence of modernity, as well as to find effective strategies in maintaining traditional pesantren values without ignoring the communication needs of the digital era.

Table A.2 Benefits of changes in communication patterns in pesantren.

No.	Benefits of Communication Change	Description
1.	Improved access to information	It is easier for students to gain new knowledge and insights through digital media.

2.	Efficiency of information delivery	Communication between parties in the pesantren becomes faster and more structured.
3.	Improved connectivity	Strengthening the relationship between pesantren and the community through digital platforms
4.	Modern administrative management	More structured communication helps in the internal management of the pesantren
5.	Adaptation to modern technology	Equipping students with communication skills relevant to the digital era

Source: processed by researchers, 2024

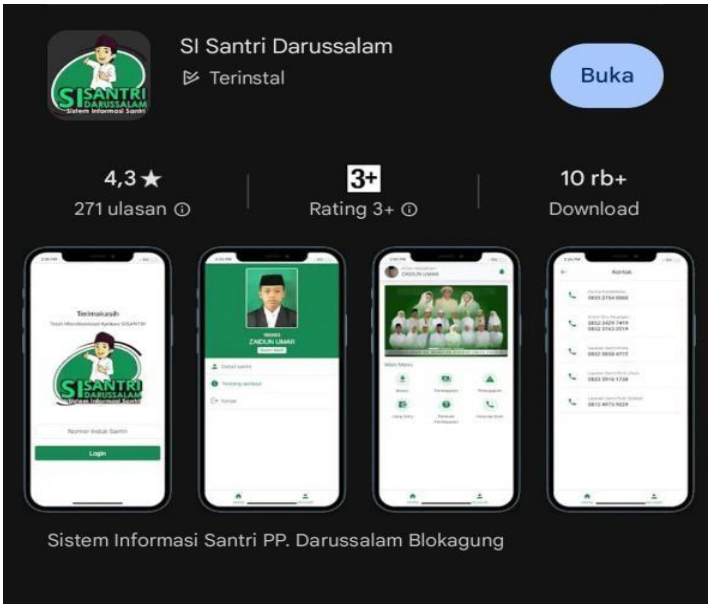
Based on table A.2, changes in communication patterns in pesantren provide significant benefits for PonPes Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi, changes in communication patterns in PonPes Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi improve access to information, learning efficiency, and connectivity with the community. By adapting to technology, pesantren strengthen da'wah, modern management, and competitiveness, while maintaining the relevance and values of Islam in the midst of the development of the digital era.

2. Technology Adoption as Part of Learning

The use of technology such as digital TV, Discord application, and Santri Darussalam Information System (SIS DARUSSALAM) at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung has important implications for learning. Technology increases accessibility of learning, transparency, and parental involvement. However, reliance on technology also brings challenges such as technical glitches and digital divide among santri. Studies by (Bergdahl, Nouri, & Fors, 2020; Heo et al., 2021; Lacka et al., 2021; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022) mention that digital technology in learning increases student engagement and learning efficiency.

However, research by (Hendrawan et al., 2024; Matthews & Wynes, 2022; Nimavat et al., 2021; Oyediran et al., 2020) warns that inadequate infrastructure can lead to limitations in the use of technology. Technology adoption at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam serves as a catalyst for innovation in learning. However, its impact must be continuously monitored to reduce dysfunctions such as inequality in technology access. The following is evidence that Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi has adopted technology in the form of SIS Darussalam application.

Image: A.1 Darussalam Santri Information System (SIS DARUSSALAM)



Source: SIS Darussalam

The use of digital TV and Discord applications for the recitation of Ihya' Ulumuddin, as well as SIS DARUSSALAM to monitor santri achievements, reflects the pesantren structure that supports the modernization of education. The support of pesantren leadership, technology-savvy human resources, and the need for learning transparency are the main factors that drive the implementation of this technology. Research by (Candrasari et al., 2023; Karwan et al., 2021; Montgomery, 2020; Wijaya, 2023) shows that technology adoption in education is often successful if supported by visionary leadership. In addition, studies by (Kartel et al., 2022; Panaoura, 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2021) confirm that technology increases parental involvement in children's education. The correlation between adaptive leadership, human resources, and the need for transparency forms a structure that supports the use of technology in pesantren. This structure provides a strong foundation for future technology-based learning innovations.

Image: A.2 Recitation of Ihya' Ulumiddin Using Digital TV



Source: Personal Documents

3. The Role of Pesantren Leaders in Encouraging Innovation

This study found that the role of pesantren leaders, especially kiai, is very significant in encouraging innovation in the pesantren environment. Kiai not only acts as a spiritual driver but also as an agent of change who is able to create a conducive environment for innovation (Dian et al., 2024; Mukarromah et al., 2024; Zaenurrosyid et al., 2020) . Findings show that innovation in pesantren relies heavily on visionary leadership that is open to the times without neglecting traditional values (Kadhum et al., 2023; Sibeko & Barnard, 2020) . Progressive pesantren leaders tend to have strategic views, such as integrating digital technology in learning, developing skills-based education programs, and strengthening cooperation networks with external parties (Ambarwati & Sari, 2024; Mariyono, 2024).

However, challenges were also found, especially in the form of internal resistance from some parties who were concerned that innovations could shift the traditional values of pesantren. Therefore, the ability of leaders to manage change with an inclusive approach is very important so that innovations are accepted without causing cultural conflicts.

The interviews reinforced this finding. One interview with Kiai Ahmad, the head of a modern pesantren, highlighted the importance of kiai's role as role models in adapting to the digital era:

"We can't just teach the yellowIslamic classic books (kitab kuning) without giving the santri the knowledge of how to utilize technology wisely. As a leader, I must show that technology is a tool, not a threat. If the kiai is open to innovation, God willing, the students and administrators will follow suit."

Other interview results also show that santri and pesantren administrators tend to be more accepting of changes if the innovation initiative comes from the kiai whom they respect. One of the santri mentioned,

"If the kiai initiates it, we believe what he directs must be good for the pesantren." This opinion shows the high influence of kiai as a role model.

The conclusion of this study shows that the role of kiai as a pesantren leader is crucial in encouraging innovation. Visionary kiai can create a conducive environment for adaptation to technology and change, without neglecting traditional values. Despite internal resistance, kiai's inclusive approach in managing change allows innovations to be well received by santri and administrators. Interviews revealed that role-model kiai are able to build trust and support, allowing pesantren to transform into innovation centers that are relevant in the digital era, while maintaining existing traditions.

Table A.3 Role of Pesantren Leaders

Key Findings	Details
Role of Pesantren Leaders	Kiai acts as both a spiritual guide and an agent of change, fostering a conducive environment for innovation.

Visionary Leadership	Leadership is open to modernization while preserving traditional values.
Types of Innovation in Pesantren	Integration of digital technology, development of skills-based education, and strengthening external cooperation.
Challenges	Internal resistance due to concerns about losing traditional values.
Importance of Inclusive Leadership	Leaders must manage change inclusively to prevent cultural conflicts and ensure acceptance of innovation.
Kiai's Role as a Role Model	Kiai's openness to innovation encourages acceptance among santri and administrators.
Interview Insights	Leaders show that technology should be viewed as a tool, and students trust the kiai's direction.
Conclusion	Kiai's leadership plays a pivotal role in adapting to the digital era while preserving tradition, ensuring innovations are accepted by the community.

D. CONCLUSION

This study found that the adoption of technology in pesantren communication patterns —such as social media, digital TV, the Discord application, and the Santri Darussalam Information System (SIS DARUSSALAM)— supports the modernization of education without compromising traditional values. A key finding is the role of visionary leadership, particularly that of the kiai (religious leader), which is essential for successfully driving innovation and overcoming internal resistance through an inclusive approach. Technology not only improves the efficiency of communication and learning but also enhances the access and connectedness of pesantren with the wider community.

From a scientific perspective, this study updates our understanding of the role of pesantren in adopting technology to remain relevant in the digital era. It emphasizes the collaboration between leadership, tech-savvy human resources, and the need for transparency. The limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single pesantren, which restricts its applicability to other pesantren with varying infrastructural conditions. Further research is recommended to explore the application of technology in a wider range of pesantren, using broader methods and variables to better understand the generalized impact.

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