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COSMOPOLITAN-RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: PESANTREN STRATEGIES TO SHAPE SANTRI IDENTITY IN THE VIRTUAL CULTURAL ERA

Adi Nur Ali*¹, Siti Aimah²
Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafaat Banyuwangi, Indonesia
e-mail: 1adiali1207@gmail.com , 2sitiainmah1@iaida.ac.id

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*Corresponding author

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the cosmopolitan-religious leadership strategies applied by pesantren in directing the construction of student identity in the midst of the vortex of the virtual culture era. Using a qualitative approach with a case study type. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with pesantren leaders, ustadz, and students, and supported by participatory observation and documentation studies. Data analysis used interactive models. Data validation using triangulation. The results of the study show that the cosmopolitan-religious leadership at the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School, Sungai Lilin, successfully combines traditional spirituality with digital cosmopolitanism. Leaders become architects of virtual ecosystems that embed prophetic codes of ethics on students' devices. This technological adaptation does not erode the salaf tradition, but rather reconstructs cyberspace to form spiritually local and sovereign students in global cyberspace. The theoretical contribution of this research enriches the scientific treasure of Islamic education management, especially in the development of cosmopolitan-religious leadership discourses that are adaptive to modern cultural dynamics. The practical contribution of this research presents alternative leadership models as well as strategic guidelines that can be implemented directly by Islamic boarding schools and other Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: *Cosmopolitan-Religious Leadership; Islamic Boarding School Strategy; Santri Identity; Virtual Cultural Era.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis strategi kepemimpinan kosmopolitan-religius yang diterapkan oleh pesantren dalam mengarahkan konstruksi identitas santri di tengah pusaran era virtual culture. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pimpinan



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pesantren, ustadz, dan santri, serta didukung oleh observasi partisipatif dan studi dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif. Validasi data menggunakan triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan kosmopolitan-religius di Pesantren Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo, Sungai Lilin, sukses memadukan spiritualitas tradisional dengan kosmopolitanisme digital. Pemimpin menjadi arsitek ekosistem virtual yang menanamkan kode etik profetik pada gawai santri. Adaptasi teknologi ini tidak menggerus tradisi salaf, melainkan merekonstruksi ruang siber demi membentuk santri yang kokoh secara spiritual-lokal sekaligus berdaulat di siber global. Kontribusi teoritis penelitian ini memperkaya khazanah keilmuan manajemen pendidikan Islam, khususnya dalam pengembangan diskursus kepemimpinan kosmopolit-religius yang adaptif terhadap dinamika kultural modern. Kontribusi praktis penelitian ini menyajikan model kepemimpinan alternatif serta panduan strategis yang dapat diimplementasikan secara langsung oleh pesantren dan lembaga pendidikan Islam lainnya.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Kosmopolit-Religius; Strategi Pesantren; Identitas Santri; Era Budaya Virtual.*

INTRODUCTION

The Society 5.0 era and the massive development of virtual culture have disrupted Islamic boarding schools (Ichwan et al., 2024). Cyberspace offers unlimited freedom of information as well as the risk of spiritual shallowness (Bakirov & Suleimenov, 2025; Rumpala, 2026). Digital platforms bombard young generations with global narratives that contradict local values (Nicolaou, 2022; Wilf et al., 2023; Kianpour et al., 2026). Generally, in metropolitan urban areas that tend to have mature information infrastructure with instant and cosmopolitan exposure to digital culture, the adaptation of urban students is more accustomed, but vulnerable to digital consumerism (Aidulsyah, 2023; MF & Tasmin, 2025; Habibi, 2025). On the other hand, the dynamics in *suburban areas* such as Sungai Lilin, Musi Banyuasin, present the complexity of identity hybridity due to the penetration of unlimited gadgets that trigger a direct clash between local traditions and global information flows (Magar, 2026). Islamic educational institutions are obliged to redefine their orientation so as not to be crushed by destructive modernity (Kanat et al., 2025). This redefinition is crucial to transform technology into a da'wah medium as well as fortify the morality of students from the annexation of global virtual culture.

The biggest challenge of virtual culture is no longer just a global discourse about Society 5.0 or the abstraction of the cyber world, but has transformed into a real identity crisis among the younger generation of Muslims (Dalimunthe et al., 2023; Zulkarnain, 2024; Ullah, 2025). This unique phenomenon is clearly seen in

Islamic boarding schools in suburban areas such as in Sungai Lilin, Musi Banyuasin, where students who are used to living in a traditional communal environment are now suddenly forced to interact massively with the permissive cyber world without the readiness of mature cultural filters (Khotimawati, 2022; Hefner, 2023; Of Conception, 2024; Jaffré et al., 2026). Without adequate navigation, digital exposure in this transition area has been shown to have the potential to erode spiritual orthodoxy (Bingaman, 2023), trigger polarization of thinking (Van Baar & FeldmanHall, 2022), and degrade the prophetic morality of students (Badrudin, 2022). A concrete cultural defense mechanism to harmonize technological progress with the firmness of the faith (AlJahsh, 2024; Fengcai et al., 2025), in order to prevent digital dual personalities, maintain the purity of pesantren ideology, and maintain moral-spiritual integrity at the local level.

Literature reviews on the digitalization of Islamic boarding schools generally focus on a defensive-restrictive approach, where technology is considered a moral threat that must be strictly limited through physical regulation (Danaher & Sætra, 2022; Bednar & Spiekermann, 2024; Hidayat-your-Rehman, 2024; Smith & Miller, 2025). Some studies also highlight the use of digital media as a da'wah instrument or the renewal of the institutional administrative system (Izquierdo-Iranzo, 2025; Wider et al., 2023; Rohman et al., 2026; Suryawati et al., 2026). The literature tends to place Islamic boarding schools as passive objects that simply respond to the external impact of technological developments.

Furthermore, some recent literature has begun to shift the focus of studies by exploring the active role of pesantren leaders as architects of virtual ecosystems (Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025; Partners & Mokhtar, 2025; Khoirurrijal et al., 2025). Through the concept of cosmopolitan-religious leadership, several of these studies examine how digital culture is strategically integrated to reconstruct students' identities towards identity hybridity (Chong, 2022; Jubba et al., 2022; Jamjoom & Mills, 2023; Wahono et al., 2023). The study in this group seeks to dissect aspects of cultural dialectics and the importance of planting a prophetic code of ethics directly in the cyberspace of students in order to fortify their morality. Instead of stopping at global theoretical assumptions about the cyber era or Society 5.0, the root of this problem is examined specifically from the reality in the *suburban* area of Sungai Lilin, Musi Banyuasin. In this region, the penetration of digital culture infiltrates directly into the domestic spaces of Islamic boarding schools without adequate screening, thus urging the need for a local leadership strategy that is able to translate prophetic ethics in real life into the digital daily lives of students.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in the deconstruction of the defensive-restrictive paradigm of pesantren towards technology through the

articulation of a cosmopolitan-religious leadership model that acts directly as the architect of the virtual ecosystem. In contrast to previous research, which generally saw digital adaptation in Islamic boarding schools as limited to administrative updates or physical device restrictions, even simply duplicating classic values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance) into social media platforms in a partial manner, this study offers conceptual originality in the form of a *cyber-morality* formulation new ones. This concept is formulated not as a conventional transfer of values, but as an autonomous prophetic digital ethics, covering three original dimensions: cognitive resilience to polarizing algorithms (*digital discernment*), self-verification ethics based on prophetic veridiability (*tabayyun-algorithmic*), and the ability to project salaf orthodoxy productively in a permissive cyberspace. Through the application of this model at the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School, this study proves that the orthodoxy of spirituality and digital cosmopolitanism are not in a dichotomy position, but rather merge harmoniously in a sovereign cyber-religious identity entity.

The urgency of this research is based on the urgency of accelerating virtual culture, which is no longer just a means of communication, but has mutated into a new living space that dictates the way of thinking and acting of the young generation of Muslims, including students. This research contribution provides an alternative leadership model and strategic guidance for other Islamic educational institutions in facing the destructive challenges of virtual culture, while enriching the scientific treasure on Islamic education management based on modern cultural adaptation. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the cosmopolitan-religious leadership strategies applied by Islamic education leaders in directing the construction of student identity in the midst of the vortex of the virtual *culture era*.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of cosmopolitan-religious leadership (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This case study approach was deliberately chosen with a focus on the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School, Sungai Lilin, because this institution represents a model of pesantren in *suburban areas* that are at the forefront of cultural clashes where the interaction between strong salaf traditions and the penetration of space-boundless gadgets gives rise to the most intensive and unique dynamics of digital adaptation. The implementation of the field research itself lasted for four months, starting from January to April 2026. Through these methods and time spans, the complex interaction between leadership policies, Islamic boarding school cultural dynamics, and the use of cyber technology can be

observed comprehensively, contextually, and deeply in their natural setting without the manipulation of variables by researchers.

The data collection technique in this study was carried out through a triangulation method scheme which included *in-depth interviews*, participatory observations, and digital documentation studies (Liang, 2019). In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a total of 11 key informants selected through *purposive sampling techniques* based on specific criteria, namely direct involvement in the formulation of Islamic boarding school digital policies, mastery of religious curriculum materials, and intensity of exposure to daily cyber activities. The details of the informants include 1 pesantren leader who is responsible for the strategic direction of institutional policies, 4 ustadz or administrators in charge of curriculum affairs and character development of students, and 6 student representatives (consisting of 3 male students and 3 female students) who actively use digital technology and represent the dynamics of identity hybridity in the boarding school environment (Cole, 2024). Observations were made on the patterns of digital interaction and daily activities of students, while documentation studies were used to examine written policies, digital literacy curriculum, and digital track records or official social media content managed by the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School. The characteristics and classifications of the key informants involved in this study are presented in detail in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Research Informant

Code	Role	Quantity	Information Focus
PP	Islamic Boarding School Leaders	1	The main policy determinant, the formulator of the cosmopolitan-religious vision, and the highest authority holder of the Islamic boarding school.
U/P	Ustadz/Management	4	Policy implementer, supervisor of student discipline, and compiler of the digital literacy curriculum.
S	Stuttgart	Sons (3) Girls (3)	Objects as well as main actors in identity construction and virtual cultural interaction in Islamic boarding schools.

Data analysis is carried out circularly and interactively referring to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion withdrawal and verification (Miles et al., 1996). At the condensation stage, raw data from the field is selected, focused, and simplified to discard information that is irrelevant to the focus of the leadership

strategy. Furthermore, the data is presented in a narrative and categorical matrix to see the pattern of relationships between variables. The final stage involves the process of drawing strong theoretical conclusions regarding the hybridity of student identities constructed by the pesantren policy.

Data validation or data validity test in qualitative research is strictly monitored through the application of *credibility criteria* with triangulation techniques. The researcher combines source triangulation by comparing the degree of correctness of information between leaders, ustadz, and students as well as technical triangulation, which is confronting interview data with empirical evidence from field observations and Islamic boarding school digital documents. In addition, *peer debriefing* was also carried out with Islamic education management academics and *member checks* to ensure that the interpretation of the data written by the researcher was fully in accordance with the objective reality at the research locus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Reconceptualization of Cosmopolitan-Religious Leadership

The findings of the study show that the leader of the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School succeeded in deconstructing the conventional view of Islamic boarding schools that tend to be defensive against modernity by introducing a cosmopolitan-religious leadership paradigm. Islamic boarding school leaders translate this concept into an institutional vision that no longer positions cyber culture as a threat, but as a cultural reality that must be colored by prophetic values. The values of traditional Islamic spirituality are maintained as an epistemological foundation, while global insights are adopted as an instrument to expand the reach of da'wah and the thinking of students in the international arena. The change in the internal paradigm of Islamic boarding school administrators in responding to digital disruption is explicitly described by the U/P informant who stated:

"The Kiai policy in Sungai Lilin, Musi Banyuasin, changed the paradigm of the management from defensive-restrictive towards gadgets to proactive. Through cosmopolitan-religious leadership, gadgets and the internet are now used as new da'wah instruments to expand the reach of salafiyah values to the international arena through digital media."

Kiai Abdul Hadi's cosmopolitan-religious leadership has transformative power that is able to collapse the rigidity of the bureaucracy and the orthodoxy of thinking

of the administrators from a pattern of supervision that was originally punitive-restrictive to emancipative-educational. This strategy intelligently does not negate the noble *values of salafiyah*, but revitalizes them through the process of media recontextualization, so that the internet is adopted not as a cultural threat, but as a space for the expansion of traditional da'wah agencies to a cosmopolitan global stage.

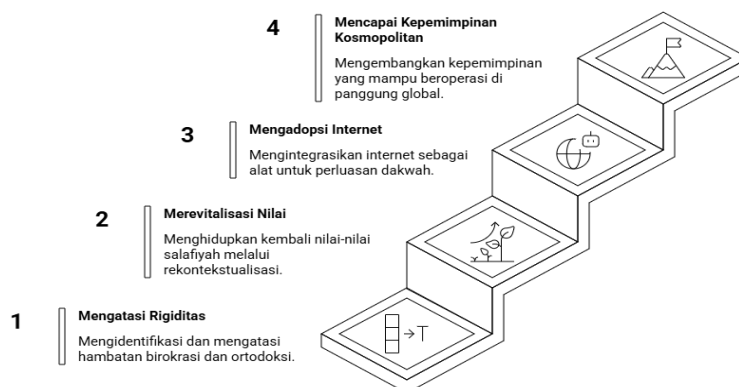


Figure 1. Leadership Transformative Escalation Model

The image above shows a systematic and gradual transformative escalation (*stepping-stone model*) in realizing adaptive Islamic education leadership in the digital era. This process begins at the first step, namely the deconstruction phase to overcome bureaucratic rigidity and orthodoxy of thinking that has tended to limit the movement of institutions through a pattern of punitive-restrictive supervision. The success of passing this initial phase triggered the second stage, namely revitalizing the noble *values of salafiyah* through the contextualization of the times so that classical teachings remain adaptive without losing their originality. Furthermore, on the third step, pesantren made a tactical leap by adopting the internet and cyber devices no longer as moral threats, but as emancipatory instruments for expanding the reach of da'wah. The culmination of this model is on the fourth step, where the accumulation of openness of perspective, theological root firmness, and technological prowess has succeeded in giving birth to a complete Cosmopolitan Leadership model, a visionary leadership figure who has the capacity and strong legitimacy to operate, interact, and navigate student agencies on the global cyber stage.

Formulation of Multi-Cultural Santri Identity with Global Perspective

The leaders of the pesantren have succeeded in constructing a unique identity of students through a cosmopolitan-religious concept. In the midst of the

sociological reality of Muba, which is multiethnic (a mixture of transmigrant Javanese culture and local Malay), leaders use virtual culture to expand the horizons of students beyond the geographical boundaries of South Sumatra. Students are formed to be individuals who are open to global modernity, but still hold fast to the anchor of Aswaja religiosity and local wisdom of Musi Banyuasin. Efforts to accommodate the diversity of cultural backgrounds of students in suburban areas, the PP informant emphasized the following philosophical policy direction:

"Sungai Lilin is unique with a heterogeneous Javanese-Malay society. Therefore, the identity of the students is constructed inclusively via virtual culture so that they have a global perspective beyond geographical boundaries, without diluting the cultural memory of Muba's local wisdom and Aswaja religiosity. That's the hybridity of our target identity."

The construction of student identity at the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School is consciously designed on the foundation of sociological interculturalism of the plural Muba community. Kiai Abdul Hadi's leadership strategy succeeds in utilizing virtual culture not as an assimilation tool that uproots culture, but as a dialectical space to bring together three value entities at once, namely global cosmopolitan insights, South Sumatra's subethnic local wisdom, and the religious orthodoxy of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. This analytical synthesis proves that the output of the leadership strategy does not give birth to cultural alienation, but rather a hybridity of cyber-religious identities that are inclusive, adaptive, and robust locally and globally.

Table 2. Value Dialectics in the Construction of Student Identity Hybridity

Value Entities	Cultural Sources/Manifestations	Role in Santri Identity	Strategic Output
Global Cosmopolitan Insights	Utilization of <i>Virtual Culture</i> (Cyber World)	Expanding intellectual horizons and digital agency beyond geographical boundaries.	Students who are adaptive and do not stutter with technology (<i>cyber-literate</i>).
Sub-Ethnic Local Wisdom	Sociological interculturalism of the Muba community (Java-Malay South Sumatra)	Maintaining the collective memory and cultural anchor of the region of origin so that it is not uprooted.	Students who are inclusive and respect sociological pluralism.
Orthodox Religion	Salafiyah Tradition and the <i>Faith of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah</i> (Aswaja)	It becomes a moral navigation, media ethics (<i>cyber-morality</i>), and spiritual foundations.	Students who are spiritually strong and have prophetic integrity.

Final Synthesis	Harmonious Integration of Three Value Entities	Preventing <i>Cultural Alienation</i>	<i>Cultural</i>	Hibriditas Identitas Siber-Religius
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The values mapped in the matrix structure above indicate that the formation of the character of today's students cannot be done through a single cultural isolation, but must go through the harmonious integration of the three pillars of value. The first pillar, Global Cosmopolitan Insights, which manifests through the use of virtual culture, plays an important role in transforming students into digital agencies that are adaptive and transcend geographical barriers.

The global acceleration is then balanced by the second pillar, namely Sub-Ethnic Local Wisdom based on the sociological interculturalism of Muba (Java-Malay South Sumatra), which functions to maintain collective memory so that students remain inclusive and appreciate social plurality. Finally, the Salafiyah Tradition and the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Faith* are present as the third pillar that injects the orthodoxy of religiosity as a moral navigation (*cyber-morality*) and a solid prophetic spiritual foundation. The merger of these three entities dialectically proved effective in preventing *cultural alienation*, as well as giving birth to a strategic culmination in the form of Religious Cyber Identity Hybridity, a profile of modern students who are fluent in mastering global cyberspace without losing the roots of local culture and the integrity of the spirituality of their boarding schools.

Spiritual Filtering Strategies for *Virtual Culture* in Sub-Urban Areas

As a pesantren located in developing areas, the main challenge is the shock culture of digital students. The leader's strategy here is very distinctive and factual: not to implement total technological isolation, but rather to channel. Leaders integrate virtual culture into a controlled pesantren space by involving students in the management of digital da'wah, multimedia, and Islamic boarding school creative content. Interestingly, this channeling strategy is not applied uniformly, but is adjusted differentially based on the level of digital accessibility, gender, and age level. For the group of first-level students, the policy of access to gadgets is strictly limited under the direct supervision of ustadz pickets, while vocational intermediate-level students or students are given a more independent portion of responsibility through creative content creation projects.

In addition, there are differences in handling strategies between male and female students; Male students tend to be directed to network technical management, field videography, and open multimedia production, while female students are given a special portion on digital privacy literacy, social media ethics (netiquette), and management of women-friendly da'wah narratives in cyberspace.

This differential policy has proven to be effective in mitigating negative exposure to cyber-culture such as online gambling, cyberbullying, and gadget addiction that are rampant in the environment around Muba. The real impact of the digital channeling strategy on the daily activities of students was revealed directly by informant S through the following confession:

"We are not strictly prohibited from holding technology here, but directed through clear channeling. The first level of students are closely supervised in the use of daily gadgets, while the higher level is entrusted with managing the pesantren multimedia team to make designs and edit da'wah videos. In fact, the division of tasks is adjusted; Many male students in the field handle open videography, while female students focus on privacy ethics, narrative management, and social media netiquette. So, our curiosity about the world of the internet is fulfilled positively and safely without being trapped in online gambling or gadget addiction."

The quote reflects on the successful implementation of an adaptive and structured digital channeling strategy in the pesantren environment. Through active involvement adjusted to age levels and gender-based role sharing, where male students focus on field technical production and female students oversee privacy ethics and institutional media narratives, they have succeeded in transforming the potential threat of *shock culture* into productive educational opportunities. This approach not only reduces destructive curiosity about the cyber world such as online gambling and gadget addiction, but also succeeds in instilling moral autonomy and solid digital literacy skills for students.

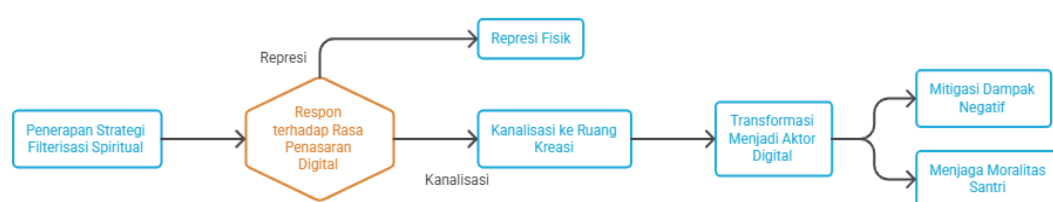


Figure 2. Digital Channeling Mechanism Flow

The figure above shows a strategic mechanism in managing the penetration of technology in the environment of religious educational institutions through the mapping of two contrasting response patterns to the psychological dynamics of students. When faced with the response phase to digital curiosity, this chart shows that the path of repression that manifests in acts of physical repression in the form of total prohibition is a dead end that is not productive for the development of

students. Instead, the application of spiritual filtering strategies takes an emancipatory alternative path through the method of channeling into the space of creation. This channeling path systematically directs students' digital curiosity towards productive activities to trigger the transformation of students into *empowered digital* actors (digital agencies). The culmination of this mechanistic flow proves that the accommodative-educational approach has succeeded in achieving two strategic goals simultaneously, namely mitigating the negative impact of cyber culture such as online gambling, cyberbullying, and gadget addiction while maintaining the morality of students so that they remain in harmony with the prophetic values of the Islamic boarding school.

Synthesis of Reading Books and Digital Literacy as the Basis of Santri Agencies

The cosmopolitan-religious leadership in Islamic boarding schools led by Kiai Abdul Hadi manifests in the ability of leaders to juxtapose two contrasting poles: the tradition of literacy of the yellow book (salafiyah) and the mastery of digital devices. Field findings show that caregivers instill the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance) from the classic book as an ethical instrument for students when interacting in cyberspace. As a result, the virtual space does not erode the identity of the students, but is occupied by the students as a space for self-actualization and friendly Islamic teachings. Regarding the conceptualization of the integration of classical curriculum and modern skills as the basis of cyber ethics for students, the PP informant gave his philosophical explanation as follows:

"My main synthesis is to juxtapose the study of the yellow book with digital literacy. The values of tasamuh and tawazun from the classic book are applied as moral navigation on social media. As a result, the virtual space does not damage the originality of the students, but is occupied as a space for the actualization of friendly Islamic teachings."

From the above statement, the essence of cosmopolitan-religious leadership lies in its ability to carry out a deep epistemological synthesis between salafi orthodoxy and contemporary dynamics. Kiai Abdul Hadi does not place the tradition of reading the yellow book and digital literacy as two dichotomous entities, but rather makes it a functional unit where the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance) are revitalized into a moral navigation system (*cyber-ethics*) for students. This interpretation proves that mastery of technology balanced with spiritual depth is able to give birth to active, critical, and resilient student agency; they not only survive the flow of virtual culture, but are able to occupy the digital space as an inclusive and peaceful medium of contemporary Islamic teaching.



Figure 3. [Conventional Learning at Hidayatul Fudhola Islamic Boarding School'](#)

The empirical embodiment of the maintenance of traditional spirituality orthodoxy that remains consistently maintained in the midst of the current of virtual cultural disruption. The atmosphere of *face-to-face interaction* in a halakah recitation shows elementary and middle-aged students sitting in a circle on a wooden floor while physically holding religious manuals. The use of typical student identity attributes such as black peci, sarongs, and cocoa clothes emphasizes the internalization of the values of manners, simplicity, and communal discipline that are not eroded by the trend of cyber worldliness in the suburban area of Sungai Lilin. This comparative activity proves that the portrait of conventional literacy in real space is not a form of outdated, but the epistemological foundation and the most crucial moral navigation that is deliberately maintained by the management of pesantren education to equip the internal character (*cyber-morality*) of students before they navigate, occupy, and direct their da'wah agencies in the wider virtual public space.

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate a fundamental paradigm shift in the institutional governance of *Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo*. The pesantren leadership successfully dismantled the entrenched dichotomy between religious tradition and global modernity that has long dominated the bureaucratic culture of traditional Islamic educational institutions (Aminah & Prayogo, 2026). Rather than maintaining a defensive and resistant stance toward the penetration of digital culture, institutional leadership initiated a radical reconceptualization through the adoption of a cosmopolitan-religious paradigm (Jamjoom & Mills, 2023). This paradigm positions leaders not as gatekeepers shielding the institution from external information flows, but as cultural architects

who deliberately orient cyberspace with prophetic values. Consequently, modernity is no longer perceived as a destructive threat but as a legitimate arena for the actualization of Islamic values (Lapidus, 1997; Zaidi, 2006; Ali, 2022).

This strategic transformation was operationalized through a systematic framework resembling a stepping-stone model (Chen & Thapa, 2026; Galán-Mena et al., 2026). The initial phase focused on institutional deconstruction, dismantling bureaucratic rigidity and orthodox modes of thought that had entrapped pesantren governance in punitive and restrictive surveillance patterns. The successful removal of psychological and structural barriers within the administration became a crucial stepping stone toward the second phase: the revitalization of *salaḥiyah* values. At this stage, classical doctrines were dynamically contextualized to ensure the continued relevance of religious teachings in the modern era without compromising their epistemological authenticity.

In the third phase, pesantren leadership executed a progressive tactical leap by transforming the function of information technology within the learning ecosystem. The internet and mobile devices—once suspected as sources of moral degradation—were emancipatively repurposed as strategic instruments to expand the reach of religious dissemination and institutional *dakwah* capacity (Nihayaty, 2024). This reorientation demonstrates that digital adaptation need not compromise the moral integrity of pesantren; rather, it enriches institutional tools for engaging broader audiences in the boundless virtual public sphere.

The culmination of this transformative escalation materialized in the fourth stage, where the synthesis of openness in worldview, theological rootedness, and technological proficiency produced the archetype of a consummate Cosmopolitan-Religious Leadership. This leadership model embodies visionary capacity, strong cultural legitimacy, and sufficient moral authority to navigate, direct, and optimize students' agency, enabling them to interact, compete, and assert sovereignty in the global cyber arena with dignity and security (Johnson, 2024; Bıçakcı & Gücüyener Evren, 2026).

The leadership strategy at *Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo* illustrates extraordinary adaptability in responding to the plural sociological landscape of Musi Banyuasin (Muba). Situated within a multiethnic environment characterized by the cultural interplay between Javanese transmigrant communities and indigenous Malay populations, pesantren leadership strategically harnessed virtual culture to transcend the geographical boundaries of South Sumatra. Rather than isolating students from modernity, cosmopolitan-religious leadership proactively broadened their intellectual horizons, cultivating openness to global

developments and equipping them to navigate external complexities without cultural disorientation in a plural society.

Nevertheless, this global orientation was not pursued in isolation from its foundational identity. Under institutional guidance, students were consistently trained to uphold the theological anchor of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (Aswaja) while harmoniously preserving local wisdom from Musi Banyuasin. The dialectical synthesis between cosmopolitan openness and local rootedness produced a resilient hybrid identity, whereby students emerged not only as digitally adaptive actors in the face of technological disruption but also as morally grounded individuals deeply rooted in pesantren traditions.

Within the operational landscape of Islamic education in suburban contexts, the most critical challenge faced by institutions is the threat of digital shock culture among students. Empirical evidence from this study reveals that pesantren leadership rejected restrictive isolationist approaches, such as outright bans on mobile devices, which often prove ineffective. Instead, they adopted a proactive and structured canalization model. Through this approach, virtual culture was deliberately integrated into a controlled pesantren ecosystem, where students actively participated in managing digital *dakwah*, producing multimedia, and creating institutional content. This policy reflects a progressive managerial shift, whereby technology is no longer demonized but reclaimed as an educational and *dakwah* medium under institutional supervision.

Further analysis of managerial implementation reveals that canalization strategies were not applied uniformly but were carefully differentiated according to students' accessibility levels, age groups, and gender identities. Strict device restrictions were imposed on junior students under direct supervision, contrasted with broader autonomy granted to senior students in managing creative multimedia projects. Gender-based role distribution was also functionally designed: male students were directed toward mastering technical infrastructure and field videography, while female students focused on digital privacy literacy, social media ethics (*netiquette*), and managing female-friendly *dakwah* narratives in cyberspace. These stratified interventions empirically mitigated students' vulnerability to digital pathologies such as online gambling, cyberbullying, and gadget addiction—issues prevalent among youth in surrounding communities.

The essence of the cosmopolitan-religious leadership model implemented by Kiai Abdul Hadi is most evident in its managerial capacity to reconcile two seemingly contrasting epistemological poles: the tradition of *kitab kuning* literacy rooted in *salafiyah* orthodoxy and mastery of contemporary digital technologies. Field findings indicate that pesantren leadership consciously bridged these domains

through the adaptive internalization of classical values. This approach demonstrates that digital modernity and classical religious tradition are not mutually exclusive but can be synergistically integrated to strengthen students' moral resilience amid the pressures of virtual globalization while preserving their *pesantren* identity.

In guiding students' interactions in cyberspace, institutional mentors consistently instilled classical ethical principles such as *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance), derived directly from the corpus of *salafiyah* texts. These values were functionally revitalized and transformed into a moral navigation framework—cyber-morality—that fortified students' mentality when engaging online. The internalization of these values proved highly significant, as the virtual sphere—often perceived as a moral threat—was proactively and productively occupied by students as a space for self-actualization and the dissemination of Islam's peaceful and inclusive message.

Conversely, the successful mastery of digital space was inseparable from the institution's consistent commitment to preserving traditional spirituality through face-to-face learning practices. The atmosphere of traditional *halaqah* study sessions, where students of varying ages sat in circles on wooden floors holding physical texts while wearing distinctive attributes such as black caps, sarongs, and *baju koko*, affirmed the authentic transmission of *adab*. These communal activities consistently nurtured discipline, simplicity, and moral integrity, effectively shielding the *pesantren* community from the worldly hedonism prevalent in suburban Sungai Lilin.

Moreover, conventional literacy practices based on face-to-face *halaqah* were not manifestations of backwardness or passive resistance to modernity but deliberate epistemological strategies maintained by *pesantren* management. These pedagogical practices functioned as the most crucial moral and character-building foundation before students were permitted to navigate, occupy, and direct their *dakwah* agency in the limitless virtual public sphere. Thus, the integration of *kitab kuning* study traditions with digital literacy produced student agency profiles that are resilient, critical, and spiritually sovereign in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

The above research succeeded in radically reconceptualizing the management of contemporary Islamic education through the implementation of a cosmopolitan-religious leadership model. Islamic boarding school leaders act consciously as architects of the virtual ecosystem by deconstructing the old paradigm of administrators that were originally defensive, restrictive, and punitive to emancipative-educational. Instead of implementing total isolation that triggers

resistance, pesantren adopts a channel-based spiritual filtering strategy, where students' digital curiosity is diverted to productive creative spaces such as multimedia teams and da'wah content management. This accommodative approach has been empirically proven to be able to mitigate various suburban cyber disruptions such as online gambling, cyberbullying, and gadget addiction while transforming the role of students from just passive consumers to productive digital actors (*digital agencies*) under a controlled and safe cyber environment.

The success of this leadership model boils down to the formulation of a dialectically solid cyber-religious identity hybridity through the harmonious integration of the three pillars of values. Pesantren intelligently conducts a functional epistemological synthesis that juxtaposes the tradition of reciting the yellow book (*salafiyah*) with modern digital literacy. Classical values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance) are revitalized into a moral navigation system (*cyber-ethics*) that fortifies the spirituality of students when surfing in cyberspace. Thus, the output of this identity reconstruction does not give birth to cultural *alienation* over the sociological pluralism of the Muba society, but rather forms a profile of today's students who are inclusive, adaptive, and have a global cosmopolitan perspective, and can occupy virtual space as a friendly contemporary Islamic media without ever losing the orthodox roots of the religiosity of their pesantren religion.

Although this study has provided a comprehensive conceptual and empirical framework for cosmopolitan-religious leadership in *suburban Islamic boarding schools*, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged and make room for further study. First, the empirical scope of this study is limited to one specific location, namely the Hidayatul Fudhola' Wali Songo Islamic Boarding School in Sungai Lilin, Musi Banyuasin, so the generalization of findings on the typology of Islamic boarding schools in other areas (such as metropolitan urban Islamic boarding schools or remote rural boarding schools that have not been touched by adequate digital infrastructure at all) needs to be done carefully. Second, the methodology used is qualitative with an in-depth case study approach that relies heavily on the subjective perception of key informants, so that it has not measured the effectiveness of the model quantitatively or comparatively on the level of digital literacy of students en masse. Therefore, future studies are suggested to test this leadership model through a broader quantitative approach or comparative research between pre-existing schools in a variety of different demographic zones.

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