

## Islamic Tradition and Digital Resistance: Constructing Moderate Religious Habitus in Indonesian Pesantren Salaf

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### *Abstrak*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana praktik keagamaan tradisional yang dijalankan secara kolektif di pesantren Salaf berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan perilaku keagamaan yang moderat dalam komunitas Nahdliyin. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi visual di pesantren wilayah Bandung, Purwakarta, dan Bekasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa praktik seperti tahlilan, maulid, ziarah kubur, dan pengajian kitab kuning bukan hanya berfungsi sebagai ritual, tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme internalisasi nilai spiritual dan sosial yang membentuk habitus keagamaan yang inklusif, beradab, dan kontekstual. Pesantren juga menunjukkan resistensi adaptif terhadap arus dakwah digital yang purifikatif dengan mengembangkan konten berbasis sanad dan literasi media berbasis tradisi. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan pentingnya pelestarian tradisi sebagai strategi pendidikan karakter dan deradikalisasi keagamaan berbasis budaya lokal. Kontribusi orisinal dari penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi antara praktik tradisi, teori habitus religius, dan respons digital pesantren sebagai aktor mediatif dalam lanskap keislaman kontemporer Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Islam moderat; pesantren; tradisi keagamaan; dakwah digital; habitus keagamaan.

### *Abstract*

This study aims to explore how traditional religious practices collectively performed in pesantren Salaf contribute to shaping moderate religious conduct

within the Nahdliyin community. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation in pesantren across Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi, and were subsequently analysed thematically. The main findings reveal that practices such as *tahlilan*, *maulid* celebrations, grave visitation (*ziarah kubur*), and classical Islamic book recitations (*pengajian kitab kuning*) serve not only as ritual expressions but also as mechanisms for the internalisation of spiritual and social values. These values, in turn, construct an inclusive, civilised, and contextual religious habitus. The pesantren also demonstrate adaptive resistance to puritan digital preaching trends by developing content rooted in *sanad* (religious authority chains) and media literacy grounded in traditional teachings. The implications of this research underscore the significance of preserving religious traditions as a strategy for character education and culturally-based religious deradicalisation. The study's original contribution lies in its integration of religious tradition, the theory of religious habitus, and digital responses of pesantren as mediating actors within the contemporary Islamic landscape in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Moderate Islam; Pesantren; Religious Tradition; Digital Dakwah; Religious Habitus.*

## Introduction

In Indonesian Muslim society, particularly within the *Nahdliyin* community, religious traditions such as *tahlilan*, *haul*, grave visitation (*ziarah kubur*), the recitation of *sholawat*, and the commemoration of Islamic holy days not only serve as expressions of spirituality but also shape collective identity and preserve local culture. These traditions are deeply rooted in the life of *pesantren* Salaf, which are widely established in regions such as Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi. *Pesantren* play a dual role as institutions of traditional Islamic education and as custodians of *Islam Nusantara* values—moderate, tolerant, and contextually grounded (Azra 2013; Mujahid 2021; Mukhibat and Ghafar 2019).

According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Open Data Jabar (2021), West Java Province holds the highest number of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia, with a total of 8,728 institutions spread across 27 regencies and cities. The ten regions with the highest number of *pesantren* include Tasikmalaya Regency (1,344), Bogor Regency (1,093), and Garut Regency (1,055). This data highlights the significant role of *pesantren* as educational institutions and centres for strengthening community-based religious traditions in West Java (Alhamidi 2022).

However, in the past two decades, *pesantren* have come under pressure from the currents of globalisation, the digitalisation of *dakwah*, and the growing influence of ideological purification movements such as Salafism.

Online *dakwah* via social media has given rise to digital *ustadz* figures who reject local religious traditions and promote a rigid scripturalism (Raya 2025; Rosidi 2021; Zamhari 2022). This disruption has triggered identity confusion, particularly among younger generations of Muslims increasingly exposed to transnational Islamic discourses that often diverge from local cultural values. In this context, *pesantren* Salaf function as cultural and spiritual strongholds, defending a contextual and moderate form of Islam (Fahrurrazi 2019; Jufri et al. 2024).

To gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics, a review of previous studies is essential. First, historical and institutional studies on *pesantren* have extensively examined aspects such as governance, curriculum, and social transformation (van Bruinessen, Wajidi, and Iffati 2012; Hussin, Mohamad, and Ghanad 2017; Permani 2011; Prof. Dr. H. Abuddin Nata 2012), yet they have not adequately addressed the internal processes by which students' religious conduct is shaped. Second, studies on *Islam Nusantara* and cultural acculturation highlight the role of *pesantren* in preserving local traditions such as *tahlilan*, *haul*, and *ziarah kubur* (Asrawijaya 2022; Fahrurrozi 2015; Ismail and Asso 2024; Jubba et al. 2022), but fall short in examining their impact on the formation of religious *habitus*. Third, research on religious moderation and conduct explores how *pesantren* foster moderate Islamic attitudes through the lens of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (Fuadi 2022; Hannan 2020; Meliani, Basri, and Suhartini 2023; Sabiq et al. 2022; Sary et al. 2024; Zaid et al. 2022) yet tends to be sectoral and does not comprehensively integrate traditional religious practices with the construction of student behaviour.

This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by explicitly linking traditional religious practices in *pesantren* Salaf to the development of religious conduct within the *Nahdliyin* community. Specifically, it analyses how rituals such as *tahlilan*, *haul*, *ziarah kubur*, and the recitation of *sholawat*, routinely practised in *pesantren*, inculcate values of spirituality, moderation, and socio-religious commitment. It also explores how these traditions are dynamically reinterpreted amid social changes and ideological challenges, particularly those posed by purification movements.

This research is grounded in the assumption that religious traditions in *pesantren* Salaf serve not only as rituals but also as mechanisms for value socialisation in shaping the religious behaviour of *Nahdliyin* communities. Rituals such as *tahlilan* and *haul* are believed to foster moderate spiritual awareness through collective engagement with the values of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. In the context of social change and purist currents, these traditions help preserve a local Islamic identity that is inclusive and culturally

rooted. The central hypothesis of this research is that the continuity of religious traditions within *pesantren* Salaf significantly contributes to the formation of moderate, cohesive, and adaptive religious patterns among *Nahdliyin*.

This study employs a qualitative approach using a fieldwork design to explore how religious traditions in *pesantren* Salaf shape the religious conduct of the *Nahdliyin* community. The units of analysis are traditional *pesantren* located in three main areas: Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi, which were purposively selected for their representativeness in preserving traditional Islamic practices. The choice of a qualitative approach is grounded in the aim to uncover meanings, symbols, and religious experiences that cannot be quantified. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with *kiai* and senior *santri*, participatory observation of religious practices such as *tahlilan*, *ziarah kubur*, and *pengajian kitab kuning*, as well as relevant institutional documents. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, field notes, and visual documentation. The data were analysed thematically through a process of categorisation, coding, and interpretation to identify patterns of meaning related to the formation of religious *habitus* and *pesantren* resistance to digital *dakwah* purification.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Traditional Religious Practices as Instruments of Moderation in Salaf Pesantren**

Field observations conducted at several Salaf *pesantren* in the regions of Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi reveal that traditional religious practices—such as *tahlilan* (collective remembrance), *maulid* recitations, commemorations of deceased scholars (*haul*), grave visitations (*ziyarah*), and *ratiban* (litanies)—continue to be observed consistently. At Al-Mardhiyyatul Islamiyyah Pesantren (Purwakarta), students participate in *tahlilan* every Thursday evening, led directly by the *kiai* or senior *ustaz* (Field Observation, 2025). In Bekasi, monthly pilgrimages to the graves of the *pesantren*'s founders are held as a means of reinforcing spiritual lineage (*sanad*). In Bandung, the weekly recitation of *Maulid Barzanji* is mandatory for all students, serving as a forum for the internalisation of Islamic manners (*adab*) and love for the Prophet Muhammad (Interview with Kiai A., 2025).

Beyond ritual activities, students are also required to attend *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) lessons each morning and evening, which cover not only *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tawhid* (theology), but also emphasise *tasawwuf* (spirituality) and social ethics. Practices such as *tawasul* (intercessory prayers) and *yasinan* (recitation of Surah Yasin) are also

conducted to commemorate Islamic holidays or express communal solidarity when a student falls ill or passes away.

The *kiai* describe these traditions as spiritual disciplines that cultivate inner sensibility (*rasa*), rather than mere fulfilment of legal obligations. In their view, these practices constitute spiritual pedagogy that fosters social empathy, compassion, and mutual respect among Muslims. As one *kiai* expressed:

“This is not merely an obligation of worship but a path to nurture gratitude and love for fellow Muslims. Tradition is a heritage that guides the hearts of the students.” (Kiai F., Interview, 2025)

Religious traditions in pesantren serve as instruments of collective character formation, the inculcation of Islamic moderation, and the preservation of a tolerant and contextual local Islamic identity (Bilfagih 2016; Fahrurrozi 2015; Jubba et al. 2022; Zamhari 2022). Previous studies affirm that pesantren do not merely transmit Islamic jurisprudence but internalise Islamic practices that are adaptive to local cultures and responsive to contemporary challenges (Athoillah et al. 2024; Lukens-Bull 2008; Rosidi 2024).

**Table 1. Traditional Religious Practices in Salaf Pesantren**

Religious Practice Aspect	Values Instilled
Tahlilan	Spirituality & Collectivity
Maulid Barzanji	Love for the Prophet & Manners ( <i>Adab</i> )
Ziyarah Kubur	Spiritual Lineage ( <i>Sanad</i> ) & Reverence for Ulama
Ratiban and <i>Tawasul</i>	Tradition Awareness & Intercession ( <i>Shafa'ah</i> )
Kitab Kuning Lessons	Islamic Knowledge, Spirituality, & Ethics
Yasinan and Communal Solidarity	Empathy & Social Solidarity

These practices, as observed across pesantren in Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi, not only function as routine religious rituals but also as a medium for value education. They are embedded in students' daily lives and experienced as a path for cultivating manners, empathy, and tolerance. For instance, at Al-Mardhiyyatul Islamiyyah, the Thursday *tahlilan* serves as a spiritual forum that reinforces collective consciousness and reverence for tradition. In Bekasi, the grave visitations are regarded as expressions of respect for scholarly transmission, while in Bandung, the *Maulid Barzanji* sessions nurture affection for the Prophet and collective manners (Interview with Kiai A., 2025).

Beyond the teaching of *fiqh* and *tawhid*, *kitab kuning* lessons underscore *tasawwuf* and social ethics, reinforcing religious moderation. Practices such as *yasinan* and *tawasul* also serve as emotional support systems during times of illness or bereavement among students. As one *kiai* stated, “*Tradition is not merely a ritual obligation, but a path that nurtures gratitude and love among fellow Muslims. It is a legacy that guides students’ hearts*” (Kiai F., Interview, 2025). In the context of contestation with Salafism—which advocates purification and rejects local traditions—these traditional practices act as a social and spiritual bulwark for preserving Indonesia’s moderate Islamic identity (Lukens-Bull 2008; I. F. A. Nasution et al. 2024; Zamhari 2022).

From the observations and interviews, four key patterns emerged in the implementation of traditional religious practices as instruments of religious moderation. First is the consistent observance of rituals such as *tahlilan*, *maulid*, *ziyarah kubur*, and *ratiban*, which are consciously sustained as mechanisms of spiritual and moral education. Second, these rituals are collectively interpreted as cultivating communal bonds and reverence for scholarly lineage. The practices in Bekasi and Bandung are not merely symbolic but pedagogical—fostering love and respect for the Prophet and the ulama.

Third, the educational dimension of pesantren is evident in the daily *kitab kuning* lessons, which impart jurisprudence, spirituality, and ethics—thus fortifying students’ moral foundations in society. Fourth, traditions such as *yasinan* and *tawasul* function as collective responses to social events, instilling empathy and cohesion among students. These patterns show that traditional practices are not contrary to Islamic moderation but serve as effective mechanisms for sustaining an inclusive and adaptive Nusantara Islam identity. These findings affirm previous research on pesantren’s role in safeguarding *wasatiyyah* (moderate) values amidst digital religious purification and social fragmentation (Lukens-Bull 2008; F. A. Nasution, Irmayani, and Sazali 2024; Zamhari 2022).

Overall, traditional religious practices such as *tahlilan*, *maulid*, *ziyarah*, and classical text recitations are not merely symbolic rituals but mechanisms for instilling moderate Islamic values. They form collective spaces for fostering empathy, manners, and tolerance, which manifest in the students’ religious habitus. Within Bourdieu’s framework, these practices constitute a religious habitus continuously reproduced within the social space of the pesantren, shaping moderate and contextual religious dispositions (Lukens-Bull 2008).

Moreover, such practices represent cultural resistance to Islamic purification movements associated with Salafism and Wahhabism. In this

regard, pesantren function not only as centres of Islamic knowledge transmission but also as arenas for constructing a culturally rooted, inclusive Nusantara Islam. These collective practices reflect how pesantren preserve spiritual capital in the face of global religious homogenisation (Jahroni 2018; Wahib 2017; Zamhari 2022).

The implication of this study reinforces the argument that tradition-based education in pesantren plays a crucial role in cultivating moderate and tolerant religious character. This also critiques formalised state approaches to religious moderation that often overlook lived communal practices. Thus, the Salaf pesantren model may serve as a reference for developing de-radicalisation strategies grounded in local culture and *wasathiyah* Islamic tradition (Burga and Damopolii 2022; F. A. Nasution, Irmayani, and Sazali 2024).

## **2. Formation of Nahdliyin Religious Habitus Through Tradition**

Findings from observations and interviews conducted in several Salafi pesantren in the Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi regions reveal that the formation of religious habitus among santri (Islamic boarding school students) is shaped not only through formal instruction using classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), but also through structured and repeated internalisation of religious traditions. In all three regions, the lives of santri are immersed in institutionalised ritual activities-such as *tahlilan*, *yasinan*, *ziyarah kubur*, *Maulid Barzanji* recitations, and classical text studies-which are collectively practised in daily life. For instance, at Al-Mardhiyyatul Islamiyyah Pesantren (Purwakarta), santri undergo strict habituation in manners towards the *kiai*, such as kissing hands, maintaining respectful posture during lessons, and refraining from speaking carelessly in the teacher's presence. In Bekasi, monthly visits to the grave of the pesantren's founder serve not only as acts of reverence but also as spiritual exercises to reinforce the chain of religious knowledge (*sanad*) and eschatological awareness. Meanwhile, in Bandung, weekly *Maulid Barzanji* recitations are consistently accompanied by the *kiai*'s reflections on the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary life, fostering inner manners (*adab batin*) and emotional religious attachment among santri (Interview with *Kiai A.*, 2025).

Beyond formal rituals, santri also attend *kitab kuning* sessions twice daily, covering not only jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and creed (*aqidah*), but also Sufism (*tasawuf*) and social ethics. These lessons are delivered using *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods, which emphasise interpretative depth and real-life application, such as guarding one's speech, honesty, and compassion towards others (Bali and Susilowati 2019; Rohman and Muhtamiroh 2022; Sauri et al. 2016). Rituals are also present in emotionally significant moments, such as

during haul (commemoration of deceased scholars), the death of a santri, or major Islamic holidays, where the entire pesantren community gathers for tahlil, yasinan, and collective prayer. These events serve as spaces of emotional education, fostering empathy, solidarity, and deep spiritual awareness. As one kiai noted: “Knowledge can be taught, but ‘feeling’ must be cultivated. Tradition is not a burden; it is our way of integrating with Islamic values” (Interview with Kiai F., 2025).

These findings align with the concept of religious habitus as explained by Naaman (2017a) and Asror (2017), which refers to the formation of spiritual dispositions through repeated routines, symbols, and social interactions within religious spaces such as pesantren. Religious habitus is not merely a product of textual learning but is embodied through holistic experiences within the pesantren ecosystem (Lukens-Bull, 2008; Mujahid, 2021). Thus, pesantren function not only as educational institutions but also as cultural fields that shape the Nahdliyin religious habitus contextually and sustainably within the Nusantara Islamic tradition.

**Table 2. Stages in the Formation of Nahdliyin Religious Habitus in Salafi Pesantren**

Stage	Description of Activity	Internalised Values	Impact on Santri
Collective Religious Tradition	Activities such as <i>tahlilan</i> , <i>Maulid Barzanji</i> , and monthly <i>ziyarah kubur</i>	Communal spirituality, collective awareness	Sense of belonging to tradition and pesantren
Integration into Daily Life	Routine sessions of <i>kitab kuning</i> , <i>yasinan</i> , and <i>ratiban</i> in daily curriculum	Spiritual discipline, affinity to Sufi teachings	Daily habituation of worship and manners
Interpretation by Kiai	Teachings that stress these traditions as spiritual acts, not mere formal obligations	Deep understanding of tradition’s meaning	Religion perceived as an inner, lived experience
Emotional and Social Moments	Rituals during <i>haul</i> , santri deaths, and Islamic festivals build communal emotion	Empathy, reverence, compassion	Strengthened communal bonds
Internalisation of Ethics	Traditions as media for learning <i>adab</i> , love for the Prophet, and social courtesy	Manners, tolerance, social concern	Formation of a moderate religious habitus

The formation of religious habitus in Salafi pesantren does not merely occur through cognitive learning of the kitab kuning, but through santri's lived experience imbued with meaningful repetition of religious traditions. Routine activities such as tahlilan, yasinan, ziyarah kubur, and Maulid Barzanji recitations are not only ritualistic worship practices; they have become integral parts of a collective culture that cultivates spiritual awareness and moral discipline over time.

Rituals performed daily or weekly create spiritual regularity that links religious values with everyday actions. As emphasised by Lang et al. (2022) and Karl & Fischer (2018), repetition in ritual has a regulatory effect on emotion and behaviour, reducing anxiety and enhancing self-control. In pesantren contexts, rituals also nurture social empathy and collective cohesion, as shown by Kişjuhas (2024), who argue that emotional interactions during ritual strengthen moral solidarity in communities. These field findings also resonate with the Islamic habitus framework proposed by Naaman (2017a) and Asror (2017), in which religious habitus is shaped not merely by doctrinal knowledge but through repeated practices within religious social spaces. Pesantren thus function as value-forming spaces where text, affect, and community are woven into an educational ecosystem that shapes santri's religious dispositions in an embodied and sustainable way.

Based on the collected data, four key patterns emerge in the process of religious habitus formation in Salafi pesantren. First, the collective repetition of religious traditions serves as a medium for the internalisation of spiritual and social values. Activities such as tahlilan, Maulid Barzanji, and ziyarah kubur, practised regularly and collectively, shape a pattern of communal spiritual consciousness deeply embedded in santri life. These values are not simply taught verbally but are emotionally and collectively internalised (Karl and Fischer 2018; Kişjuhas 2024). Second, pesantren traditions emphasise the dimensions of adab and religious affection through everyday practice. Santri are taught to show deference to kiai, maintain respectful communication, and develop love for the Prophet Muhammad-not solely through formal lessons but via symbolic repetition.

Third, participatory spirituality emerges during emotional and social moments. Events such as haul, the passing of santri, or major Islamic holidays unite the pesantren community in prayer and remembrance rituals, strengthening solidarity and nurturing empathy. Fourth, there is integration between classical Islamic text education and real-life ethical application. Santri are not only taught fiqh and tauhid, but also Sufi teachings and social

ethics, which are practised through habits of careful speech, honesty, and mutual care. These patterns demonstrate that the formation of Nahdliyin religious habitus operates not solely through cognitive processes, but through embodied, affective experiences rooted in moderate local Islamic traditions.

These findings suggest that Nahdliyin religious habitus is formed not only through formal instruction but through the repetitive integration of religious traditions into the daily lives of santri. Activities such as tahlilan, Maulid Barzanji, ziyarah kubur, and kitab kuning studies function not just as rituals, but as mechanisms for cultivating religious feeling, ethics, and social solidarity. This formation of religious character does not occur merely through doctrine, but through consistent collective and affective experience.

Within the religious habitus framework (Asror 2017; Naaman 2017a), pesantren serve as spaces where texts, symbols, and social practices converge to form inner religious dispositions. Repeated ritual experiences help regulate emotions, enhance respect, and develop santri's social concern (Kişjuhas 2024; Lang, Krátký, and Xygalatas 2022). Thus, pesantren act as cultural agents in sustaining a tolerant and contextual expression of Nusantara Islam while simultaneously resisting the encroachment of scripturalist and purification-based ideologies.

### **3. Pesantren's Resistance to Purification Trends in the Digital Era**

Observations and interviews conducted at several Salafi pesantren in Purwakarta, Bekasi, and Bandung reveal the emergence of adaptive resistance towards the currents of digital da'wa, which are perceived as promoting religious purification and undermining traditional sources of religious authority. This phenomenon reflects the contemporary dynamics of religious authority in the digital age, where traditional institutions such as pesantren must contend with "digital preachers" who adopt populist and rhetorical styles, often lacking epistemological depth (Hefner 2022; Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020).

For example, in a pesantren in Purwakarta, several kiai expressed concerns about a "migration of authority," where some students prefer watching YouTube sermons over attending live sessions with their teachers. In response, the pesantren introduced media training for da'wa rooted in classical texts, established official social media accounts managed by senior teachers, and reinforced the importance of *sanad* (transmission chains) and ethics in the transmission of knowledge. One kiai stated, "If students learn religion only from YouTube, they lose the soul and *sanad*. Tradition is not just an activity, it is a path for cultivating *adab* and character" (Interview with Kiai F., 2025).

Meanwhile, Salafi pesantren in Bekasi face the widespread circulation of literalist scriptural content on social media, often lacking context or a valid *sanad*. As a countermeasure, pesantren encourage senior students to create digital content grounded in classical texts, scholarly history, and ethical principles of preaching. A senior *ustaz* remarked, “We teach our students to use TikTok for da’wa, but the content remains rooted in the *kitab kuning*, and always with *sanad*” (Interview with Ustaz, 2025).

In Bandung, resistance to populist media-based da’wa takes a more integrative approach: several pesantren have incorporated creative media training and digital literacy into their da’wa curriculum. This strategy is not a rejection of technology, but rather a means of preserving traditional authority while adapting to the realities of digital communication.

These findings reinforce the argument that pesantren do not resist digital religious purification by isolation or outright rejection of new media, but through adaptive and contextual strategies. Pesantren thus play a dual role—as guardians of scholarly *sanad* and as digital actors guided by traditional values. The strategy seeks not only to preserve the epistemic authority of pesantren but also to respond to contemporary challenges with relevance and moderation.

Moreover, this phenomenon illustrates the contested nature of religious authority in the digital age, in which traditional institutions must compete with emerging figures whose legitimacy stems from social media popularity. These “digital preachers,” often favouring populist and rhetorical approaches, shape public religious discourse without grounded scholarly *sanad* (Hefner 2022; Slama 2017). In this context, pesantren face both the threat of doctrinal purification and an epistemological crisis that requires them to reposition their role in the national digital da’wa landscape.

Table 3. Salafi Pesantren’s Responses to Digital Da’wa and Purification Challenges

<b>Pesantren</b>	<b>Digital Da’wa Challenge</b>	<b>Pesantren Response</b>	<b>Epistemic Basis</b>
Salafi Pesantren in Purwakarta	Students prefer YouTube sermons over live sessions with teachers	Media training based on <i>kitab kuning</i> , official social media accounts	Reinforcement of <i>sanad</i> and ethics
Salafi Pesantren in Bekasi	Abundance of literalist content lacking classical <i>sanad</i> or context	Senior students produce digital content highlighting <i>sanad</i> , ethics, and scholars	Contextualised preaching with tradition

Salafi Pesantren in Bandung	Low media literacy, dominance of populist narratives by digital preachers	Integration of digital literacy and creative media in the da'wa curriculum	Media adaptation to uphold authority
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In short, field observations indicate that Salafi pesantren in Purwakarta, Bekasi, and Bandung are addressing the challenges of digital da'wa not through confrontation, but through strategic, tradition-based responses. As summarised in Table 3, these include media training based on *kitab kuning*, production of *sanad*-driven digital content, and integration of digital literacy into religious curricula. These efforts show that pesantren do not reject technology; rather, they seek to adapt it to their traditional values as a form of resistance against the scripturalist purification trends that threaten the legitimacy of religious authority rooted in *sanad*.

The phenomenon of “digital preachers” popularising religious narratives through populist and rhetorical methods-often lacking robust epistemological foundations-has prompted pesantren to assume new roles as both guardians of *sanad* and participants in the national digital da'wa sphere (Hefner 2022; Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020). In doing so, pesantren are not merely preserving their authority, but actively repositioning their epistemological identity amidst the shifting dynamics of religious authority in the digital age.

Field data reveals several consistent patterns in pesantren's responses to religious purification in the digital era. First, there is a trend of technology adaptation grounded in tradition. Rather than rejecting digital media, pesantren utilise it to expand their outreach while preserving core epistemic values such as *sanad*, teaching ethics, and *kitab kuning* traditions. This is evident in their media training programmes and official social media accounts managed by senior scholars. Second, there is a counter-narrative to the prevalence of literalist content. In Bekasi, pesantren encourage senior students to produce digital da'wa materials that emphasise *sanad*, ulama history, and *adab* to counter the influx of context-deprived religious populism. Third, there is an active repositioning of religious authority. Recognising the rise of “digital preachers” who gain public legitimacy from popularity rather than depth of knowledge, pesantren are enhancing internal capacities to maintain their epistemological authority in the digital public sphere. Fourth, some pesantren have begun incorporating digital literacy and creative media into da'wa training. This is not merely an innovation, but a long-term strategy to address contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in tradition.

These patterns show that pesantren's resistance to purification trends is adaptive and reflective rather than reactive. The primary aim is to maintain the continuity of traditional Islamic knowledge and authority amid ongoing change.

These findings demonstrate that Salafi pesantren are not merely bastions of tradition but are also dynamic actors in responding to the disruptions of digital da'wa and the infiltration of purist narratives. Through adaptive strategies-such as media training grounded in classical texts, the production of *sanad*-based content, and the incorporation of digital literacy into curricula-they reaffirm an epistemic authority that cannot be substituted by popularity alone. As Rosowulan et al. (2025) note, pesantren are confronting an identity crisis spurred by the influx of rhetorical and instant content from digital preachers who often lack epistemic legitimacy. In this context, pesantren play a vital role in counterbalancing the digitalisation of da'wa, which tends to favour scripturalist and populist approaches (Qodim, Wasik, and Rohman 2022; Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020).

Moreover, this supports Hefner's (2022) argument that there is a shift in religious authority from institutions to media figures, which has led to contested terrains in Islamic knowledge production. However, the creative resistance enacted by pesantren-as illustrated in Table 3-demonstrates that these traditional institutions are not only surviving but reshaping the digital da'wa space by prioritising *sanad*, *adab*, and contextualised knowledge. This strategy is not a rejection of digital media, but a form of media resistance rooted in pesantren values (Syvertsen 2017; Woodstock 2014).

The academic implication is that studies of Islamic digitalisation in Indonesia must expand their focus beyond digital preachers to include traditional institutional strategies in constructing *counter-publics* rooted in *sanad* and affective pedagogy. In this framework, pesantren emerge as mediating actors that serve a dual role: preserving traditional orthodoxy and transforming digital da'wa in contemporary Indonesia.

#### **4. Discussion: Tradition, Habitus, and the Repositioning of Religious Authority in the Digital Age**

This study aims to explore how collective religious traditions practised in Salafi pesantren contribute to the formation of moderate religious conduct within the Nahdliyin community. Through observations and interviews at several pesantren in Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi, it was found that activities such as *tahlilan*, grave visitation (*ziarah kubur*), recitation of *Maulid Barzanji*, classical Islamic study circles (*pengajian kitab kuning*), and other Sufi-oriented practices function not merely as religious rituals, but as

instruments of value socialisation that operate affectively, repetitively, and collectively.

Three key findings emerge from this research. First, traditional religious practices serve as a means of internalising values such as spirituality, *adab* (etiquette), and empathy through meaningful repetition. Second, this internalisation process forms a distinct religious *habitus* among the Nahdliyin through symbolic interaction, emotional bonding, and shared experience within the pesantren's sacred space, resulting in a contextual and tolerant religious disposition. Third, pesantren have demonstrated adaptive responses to contemporary ideological challenges by engaging in digital *da'wa* based on *sanad* (chains of transmission), without compromising their traditional epistemic integrity.

The close interrelationship between traditional practice, the formation of religious *habitus*, and pesantren's resistance to digital purification narratives reflects their role as sites for the embodied production of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* values. Rituals such as *tahlilan* and *ziarah* are preserved not merely as spiritual heritage, but as mechanisms of *emotional education* that cultivate inner disposition through repetition and affective proximity. In the framework of Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, this suggests that moderate religious values are not simply transmitted normatively, but are internalised through consistent and participatory praxis (L and P 2015; Naaman 2017b).

Furthermore, pesantren's response to the populist scripturalism dominating digital *da'wa* platforms reveals a strategic repositioning in the face of shifting religious authority. As viral sermons and digital preachers increasingly occupy public religious discourse without a solid foundation in *sanad* or scholarly *adab* (Slama 2017), pesantren have chosen a transformative path-constructing a digital *da'wa* ecosystem grounded in *kitab kuning* and traditional values. This indicates that pesantren are not anti-technology; rather, they develop a form of media resistance rooted in local epistemologies (Syvertsen 2017; Woodstock 2014).

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in its integration of traditional religious practice and the theory of religious *habitus* to explain the formation of moderate religious character. In addition, the study offers a new dimension to the field of Digital Islam by demonstrating that pesantren are not merely victims of digital media disruption, but are active and reflective agents in shaping value-based *da'wa* contestation. As such, these findings expand existing studies on religious moderation in Indonesia, which tend to be normative and often neglect the internalisation of values at the level of communal praxis.

Socially, the preservation of these traditions functions as a collective mechanism for cultivating empathy, moral discipline, and spirituality rooted in the community. Historically, it continues the legacy of *Islam Nusantara*, which interweaves knowledge, tradition, and communal life. Ideologically, it serves as a form of resistance to the purification currents that neglect affective and local dimensions of religiosity. Taken together, these findings underscore that Salafi pesantren are institutions not only capable of enduring, but also of strategically reconstructing their identity within the contemporary landscape of digital Islam.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that traditional religious practices collectively carried out in Salafi pesantren—such as tahlilan, maulid celebrations, grave visitations (ziarah kubur), classical Islamic study sessions (pengajian kitab kuning), and ratiban—play a significant role in shaping a moderate, tolerant religious habitus among the Nahdliyin, one that is deeply rooted in local culture. These traditions are not merely performed as ritual obligations, but function as affective and embodied mechanisms for consistently instilling spiritual values, social ethics, and communal awareness. Within the social environment of the pesantren, these values are transmitted not solely through normative doctrinal teaching, but through repetition, habituation, and deep emotional interaction.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its integration of traditional religious approaches with the theory of religious habitus to explain the formation of santri's religious behaviour within the context of *Islam Nusantara*. The findings broaden our understanding of how Salafi pesantren not only preserve local Islamic heritage, but also actively reproduce contextual religious values through institutionalised collective practices. Moreover, the study introduces new discourse within Digital Islam scholarship by showing that pesantren are not merely passive objects affected by the disruption of digital da'wa, but are active agents engaged in epistemic resistance rooted in sanad and traditional values. Pesantren take on a strategic role as custodians of scholarly authority amidst the contestation posed by populist but methodologically weak digital ustaz figures.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the geographical scope is limited to three areas (Bandung, Purwakarta, and Bekasi), so generalisation to pesantren in other regions should be approached with caution. Secondly, while the qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration of meaning, it does not yet capture broader quantitative or

longitudinal comparisons regarding the transformation of religious habitus. Thirdly, the constraints of time and access during the pandemic may have affected the depth of long-term observation of santri dynamics.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the study area to include pesantren beyond West Java, and to strengthen the use of mixed-method approaches to test the consistency and quantitative variables that support these qualitative findings. Subsequent studies may also explore the effectiveness of kitab kuning-based da'wa media in developing digital counter-publics rooted in tradition. Accordingly, these findings are not only relevant to the development of Islam Nusantara and religious habitus studies, but also to public policy initiatives aimed at promoting religious moderation literacy and managing digital da'wa grounded in local values.

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