

## CHARISMA AND CONTINUITY: THE KIAI LEADERSHIP MODEL IN REPRODUCING PESANTREN VALUES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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### ABSTRACT

*The main objective of this study is to analyze how the charisma and continuity of kiai leadership play a role in the reproduction of pesantren values in the digital era at Pondok Pesantren Puncak Banyuwangi. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the role of charisma and continuity of kiai leadership in the reproduction of pesantren values in the digital era at Pondok Pesantren Puncak Banyuwangi. Data were obtained from kiai, teachers, and santri through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Analysis was conducted thematically through coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns of value reproduction, digital adaptation, and the influence of charisma. Source and technique triangulation were used to maintain data validity. The results are expected to become a model of adaptive, sustainable, and relevant pesantren leadership. The results of this study indicate that the leadership of kiai at Pondok Pesantren Puncak Banyuwangi plays an important role in the reproduction of pesantren values in the digital era through personal charisma, structural continuity, and technological integration. The charisma of the kiai serves as a moral and spiritual example, leadership continuity maintains social and cultural stability, while technology supports learning without diminishing exemplary behavior. The reproduction of pesantren values occurs through social interaction, behavioral observation, and digital adaptation. This leadership model demonstrates an effective combination of tradition and modernity and is relevant to the development of sustainable Islamic education.*

*Keywords: Kharisma Kiai, Leadership Continuity, Reproduction of Pesantren Values.*

### A. Introduction

The phenomenon of kiai leadership in Islamic boarding schools is not only a symbol of religious authority, but also serves as a main pillar in the reproduction of Islamic boarding school values amid the dynamics of the

digital era( Nassif et al., 2021; Antonakis et al., 2022; Hariadi & Sumardjoko, 2024) . The charisma of the kiai is a social factor that determines the level of attachment of santri to the teachings, norms, and culture of the pesantren (Alatas, 2021; Hernawati et al., 2024; Wahab & Umar, 2024) . Kiai with high charisma are able to present role models who are not only exemplary in terms of knowledge, but also in terms of behavior and social ethics, so that traditional values such as discipline, social awareness, and faith can be consistently transmitted to the younger generation (Halid et al., 2024; M. S. Hasan & Azizah, 2024; Nur et al., 2024) .

The continuity of kiai leadership is also an important element in maintaining social stability in pesantren, especially when pesantren face the challenges of modernization and digitalization ( Jackson & Dunn-Jensen, 2021; Aravena, 2022; Siambi, 2022) . The use of digital technology, including social media, online learning platforms, and pesantren applications, has opened up new spaces for santri to access knowledge, but at the same time requires kiai to adjust their leadership strategies so that traditional values are preserved (He et al., 2022; Bai et al., 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023) . Social observations show that kiai who combine personal charisma with digital adaptation skills are able to strengthen the cohesion of the santri community, maintain discipline, and ensure that pesantren values are not eroded by the flow of global information (Prabowo et al., 2024; Prabowo & Ekanigsih, 2025) . Thus, the leadership of kiai serves as a concrete example of how traditional religious figures remain relevant in shaping the identity, morality, and culture of pesantren education in the digital age.

Previous studies have shown that kiai leadership plays a central role in preserving pesantren values and shaping santri character in various social contexts. Research conducted by Ismawati,(2025) on kiai

leadership emphasizes the importance of the kiai's personal charisma as a source of social legitimacy that enables santri to emulate religious behavior, discipline, and social ethics. Another study by Furqon,(2024) found that the continuity of kiai leadership, whether through regeneration or strengthening the pesantren's organizational structure, plays a role in ensuring that traditional values such as simplicity, responsibility, and solidarity continue to be applied despite social and cultural changes in society.

In addition, research by Ma'shum,(2025) highlights the adaptation of Islamic boarding schools to the digital era, where clerics who are able to integrate information technology into the learning and preaching processes are able to maintain the relevance of Islamic boarding schools for the younger generation, without sacrificing the core values of Islamic boarding schools. The conclusions of these studies reinforce the finding that the combination of kiai charisma and leadership continuity is an important mechanism in the reproduction of pesantren values. In other words, kiai figures are not only religious leaders but also cultural mediators who adapt traditional educational methods to the challenges of modernization and digitalization. This finding is relevant to the context of the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School, where the kiai plays a dual role as a moral exemplar and a driver of digital adaptation, ensuring that pesantren values can continue to be effectively passed down in the digital age.

The novelty of this research lies in combining two main dimensions of kiai leadership in the context of modern Islamic boarding schools: personal charisma and leadership continuity, which are integrated with the dynamics of the digital era. Most previous studies have focused on kiai leadership from a traditional perspective, such as moral authority, teaching classical texts, or administrative management of Islamic

boarding schools.

However, this study offers a new approach by emphasizing how kiai not only preserve pesantren values through charisma and sustainable leadership structures, but also utilize digital technology as a means to expand the reach of education, da'wah, and character building for santri. This approach enables the identification of adaptive mechanisms through which traditional values can remain relevant and be effectively transmitted to younger generations who are familiar with technology. Thus, this study makes a new contribution to the study of pesantren leadership by emphasizing the integration of charisma, continuity, and digital innovation as a holistic and contextual model for the reproduction of values in the modern era.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how the charisma and continuity of kiai leadership play a role in the reproduction of pesantren values in the digital era at Pondok Pesantren Puncak Banyuwangi. This study is based on the argument that kiai leadership is not only religious authority, but also a social and cultural medium that determines the continuity of pesantren values for the younger generation. In the digital era, santri are faced with broad and diverse access to information, so the role of kiai who are able to combine personal charisma, sustainable leadership strategies, and technological adaptation is key to maintaining the integrity of pesantren education (Solich & Ni'am, 2023; Fathiyah . By understanding this mechanism, the research is expected to make a tangible contribution to formulating a relevant and adaptive leadership model that can bridge the pesantren tradition with the challenges of digital modernization without sacrificing core values.

## **B. Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain

an in-depth understanding of the role of charisma and continuity of kiai leadership in the reproduction of pesantren values in the digital era at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School. The qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomenon of kiai leadership is complex, contextual, and related to social interactions, cultural values, and technological adaptation that cannot be measured quantitatively. The primary data sources are kiai as pesantren leaders, teachers, and santri who are directly involved in educational and da'wah activities at the pesantren 2023; .

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews to understand the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of kiai in transmitting pesantren values; participatory observation to capture leadership practices and social interactions in the pesantren environment; and documentation of learning materials, pesantren policies, and digital content used as educational media. Data analysis was conducted thematically through coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns of value reproduction, digital adaptation strategies, and the influence of kiai charisma on leadership continuity (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021; Mulyana et al., 2024) .

Data validity is maintained through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time to ensure the reliability and credibility of the findings. With this method, the study is expected to be able to fully describe how kiai leadership combines personal charisma and structural continuity with digital innovation, so that pesantren values remain relevant and effective in being transmitted to a generation of santri living in an era of technological modernization. The research results are expected to become a model of pesantren leadership that is adaptive, sustainable, and contextual, while also providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic educational leadership studies ( Roosinda et al., 2021; H. Hasan et al., 2025) .

### C. Results And Discussion

#### The Role of Kiai Charisma in Becoming a Moral and Spiritual Role Model

The phenomenon of kiai leadership at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic boarding school shows that a kiai's charisma plays a central role in shaping the character and morality of students. A kiai's charisma encompasses not only religious and scholarly abilities, but also exemplary attitudes in daily life that motivate students to emulate such behavior. Interviews with several students and teachers reveal that charismatic kiai are able to make pesantren values such as discipline, responsibility, and social awareness part of the students' daily lives, rather than just theory.

One of the students, for example, stated:

"When I see the kiai regularly performing his prayers, helping others, and patiently teaching the scriptures, I feel compelled to imitate that behavior. The values of the pesantren feel alive because the kiai is a real example for us."

This interview is consistent with field observations, where direct interactions between kiai and santri demonstrate role modeling that influences the daily behavior of santri. Pesantren teachers also emphasize that the charisma of kiai facilitates the process of internalizing values, because santri value and listen more to teachings from figures they admire. These findings reinforce the understanding that the reproduction of traditional pesantren values remains intact in the digital age, even though santri have broad access to outside information and culture, due to the presence of charismatic kiai as moral and spiritual centers. In other words, the charisma of the kiai is an effective social mechanism in ensuring that pesantren not only transfer knowledge, but also build consistent character and ethics among santri.

### Continuity of Leadership as a Support for Pesantren Stability

The continuity of kiai leadership at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School is a crucial factor in maintaining the social and cultural stability of the boarding school. This stability encompasses not only administrative aspects, but also the continuity of core values that form the identity of the boarding school, such as discipline, social ethics, solidarity, and the spiritual development of students. The mechanism of continuity is carried out through leadership regeneration, the involvement of kiai family members in the pesantren structure, and the strengthening of a clear organizational structure so that the leadership transition can run smoothly without disrupting the educational climate and the guidance of santri.

An interview with one of the senior teachers provides clear evidence of this:

"We always ensure that every change in leadership does not alter the basic principles and values of the pesantren. Senior clerics guide their successors so that teaching methods, coaching patterns, and interactions with students remain consistent, so that the pesantren remains stable and students feel safe in their studies."

This interview is consistent with field observations, which show that students continue to practice pesantren traditions, daily discipline, and religious activities even when there is a change in leadership. Students also acknowledge a strong sense of attachment to the pesantren because this continuity of leadership makes them feel part of a solid community. These findings confirm that the continuity of kiai leadership is not merely an administrative formality, but rather an effective social strategy to ensure the reproduction of pesantren values across generations, maintain the integrity of pesantren culture, and strengthen community cohesion

amid the challenges of modernization and digitalization. Thus, leadership continuity is one of the main mechanisms for ensuring the stability and sustainability of pesantren.

#### Integration of Digital Technology in Islamic Boarding School Education

The use of digital technology at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School has emerged as an important strategy in maintaining the relevance of Islamic boarding school values in the modern era. Adaptive clerics use digital media, such as online learning platforms, Islamic boarding school applications, and social media for preaching, to expand the reach of education and facilitate students in accessing knowledge without sacrificing traditional values.

An interview with one of the clerics provides clear evidence of this:

"We use digital platforms to teach the scriptures, guide students in discussions, and spread the word of God, but we always ensure that each material continues to teach pesantren values such as discipline, simplicity, and responsibility. Technology helps, rather than replaces, our learning process."

These findings are consistent with field observations, where students were seen using learning applications to read books, discuss, and follow guidance, but still emulating the behavior and values taught by the kiai directly. Pesantren teachers added that digital integration also increases santri engagement and facilitates communication between kiai, teachers, and santri, without reducing the face-to-face interaction that is important for the internalization of pesantren values. Santri also admitted that they feel helped in accessing knowledge and information, but still understand the importance of kiai role models in their daily lives. These findings confirm that digital technology integration is not merely an educational innovation, but a strategic tool for kiai to maintain the continuity and

reproduction of pesantren values, bridge tradition and modernity, and strengthen the effectiveness of learning in facing the challenges of the digital era.

#### The Role of Kiai Charisma in Becoming a Moral and Spiritual Role Model

Interpretation of findings regarding the role of kiai charisma in shaping the morals and spirituality of students at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School shows that charisma is not merely a personal quality, but an essential social mechanism in the process of internalizing values. Charismatic kiai are able to create a learning environment that combines practical examples with religious teachings, so that santri not only understand theory, but also emulate behaviors that reflect the values of the pesantren.

This perspective is in line with the theory of transformational leadership Solich,(2024) , which emphasizes that inspirational and exemplary leaders can increase the motivation and morale of their followers. Previous studies by Muid et al.,(2024) also highlight the importance of kiai charisma in building social legitimacy and facilitating the process of pesantren cultural reproduction. However, this study adds the dimension of the digital era, in which santri have access to a variety of information and cultural values outside the pesantren. The findings show that kiai charisma remains the main support for traditional values so that they are not eroded by the tide of modernization and technology.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the idea that the internalization of values does not only occur through formal learning, but also through observation and imitation of the consistent behavior of kiai in everyday life, in line with Aziz et al.'s social cognitive theory (2023) regarding learning through role models. Thus, the charisma of kiai serves as a bridge between tradition and modernity, ensuring that the reproduction

of pesantren values takes place effectively, relevantly, and sustainably. These findings confirm that the figure of the kiai is not only a teacher or manager of the pesantren, but also a moral and spiritual center that mediates the character formation of the younger generation.

#### Continuity of Leadership as a Support for Pesantren Stability

The interpretation of findings regarding the continuity of kiai leadership at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School shows that leadership continuity is not only a structural aspect, but also a social mechanism that maintains the stability of the values and culture of the pesantren. This continuity ensures that core principles such as discipline, solidarity, social ethics, and the spiritual development of santri ( ) can be consistently passed down from generation to generation, even when there is a change in leadership.

This theoretical perspective is in line with the theory of sustainable leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leadership regeneration and knowledge transfer so that organizations can maintain their identity, culture, and performance in the long term (Siregar & Priyatmono, 2025) . The results of this study are also consistent with the findings of(2025) , which show that the involvement of kiai family members and a clear pesantren organizational structure strengthen the leadership regeneration process, while maintaining social stability and community cohesion. Furthermore, the social system theory CHIRZIN,(2025) emphasizes that educational institutions such as pesantren require stable value internalization mechanisms to ensure their social functions continue to operate, and the continuity of kiai leadership is a key element in this regard.

Field observations and interviews show that students feel secure and strongly attached to the pesantren because leadership transitions are planned and guided by senior clerics. Thus, leadership continuity is not

merely an administrative formality, but an effective strategic strategy for bridging tradition and modernity, ensuring the reproduction of pesantren values, and strengthening community integrity and cohesion amid the challenges of the digital age.

#### Integration of Digital Technology in Pesantren Education

The interpretation of findings regarding the integration of digital technology at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School shows that technological adaptation is not merely a technical innovation, but a pedagogical strategy that strengthens the reproduction of Islamic boarding school values in the digital age. Kiai who are able to utilize online learning platforms, pesantren applications, and social media for da'wah facilitate santri in accessing knowledge flexibly, while emphasizing traditional values such as discipline, responsibility, and simplicity. These findings align with the perspective of blended learning theory developed by Anggraeni & Nuraini,(2022) , where the integration of technology and face-to-face interaction enables a more effective and holistic learning process.

In addition, this study adds to the previous understanding by Aly,(2025) , which highlights digitization in Islamic boarding schools as a tool for communication and dissemination of knowledge, emphasizing the importance of the charisma of the kiai in maintaining the relevance of traditional values. The results of the study show that even though santri have broad access to external information, the kiai's exemplary behavior remains central to the internalization of values, so that technology functions as a supporting medium, not a substitute for the kiai's leadership. This integration also increases santri engagement, collaboration between teachers and santri, and strengthens pesantren community cohesion, in line with the social cognitive theory by Faj,(2021) which emphasizes that learning occurs through observation

and interaction with role models. Thus, digital integration in pesantren education not only expands the reach of learning but also serves as a strategic mechanism to bridge tradition and modernity, maintain leadership continuity, and ensure that pesantren values can be consistently transmitted to the younger generation in the digital age.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that the leadership of the kiai at the Puncak Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School plays a strategic role in reproducing the values of the Islamic boarding school ( ) in the digital era through a combination of personal charisma, structural continuity, and technological integration. The charisma of the kiai serves as a moral and spiritual role model that motivates santri to emulate behavior and internalize the values of discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. Leadership continuity through regeneration mechanisms and the involvement of the kiai's family maintains social and cultural stability and cohesion among santri across generations. Meanwhile, the integration of digital technology is a strategic tool that supports the learning process and interaction without diminishing the kiai's exemplary role, bridging tradition and modernity, and expanding students' access to knowledge. These findings confirm that the reproduction of pesantren values is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but a complex process involving social interaction, behavioral observation, and technological adaptation. Overall, the kiai leadership model that combines charisma, continuity, and digital innovation can be used as a reference in developing adaptive, sustainable, and relevant Islamic educational leadership in the face of modern challenges.

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