


# Habitus Tensions between *NU's Santri* and Students: Religious Education Cultural Transformation in the Disruption Era


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## Abstract

*Technological disruption has created a new arena for the distribution of religious knowledge and authority, bringing together two distinct habitus: the pesantren-based traditional habitus of santri and the academic habitus of NU university students shaped by higher education. This study aims to explore the symbolic and epistemological conflicts between the two groups, as well as the reproduction and contestation of cultural and symbolic capital in the digital context. Using a qualitative approach and Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, data were collected through social media observation and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that NU students utilize digital media to renegotiate religious identity, while pesantren institutions retain traditional authority structures. This tension reflects a hysteresis effect and a shift in symbolic authority within the NU community.*

Disrupsi teknologi menciptakan arena baru distribusi pengetahuan dan otoritas keagamaan, mempertemukan dua habitus berbeda: habitus santri berbasis pesantren dan habitus akademik mahasiswa NU yang dibentuk oleh perguruan tinggi. Penelitian ini bertujuan memahami konflik simbolik dan epistemologi antar keduanya, serta reproduksi dan kontestasi modal kultural-simbolik dalam konteks digital. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan teori Pierre Bourdieu, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi media sosial dan wawancara semi-struktural. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa NU memanfaatkan media digital untuk menegosiasikan identitas keagamaan, sedangkan pesantren bertahan pada otoritas tradisional. Ketegangan ini menunjukkan *hysteresis effect* dan pergeseran otoritas simbolik dalam komunitas NU.

## INTRODUCTION

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) has significantly transformed religious education in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> On one hand, the *pesantren* tradition as a community-based center of Islamic education continues to play a central role in preserving traditional Islamic values.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the emergence of a new generation of *mahasiswa NU* studying in higher education institutions has created new dynamics in how Islamic knowledge is understood, accessed, and distributed.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon becomes increasingly complex in the era of digital disruption, which blurs the boundaries between traditional and modern forms of scholarly authority. The dichotomy between *santri* and *mahasiswa NU* does not merely reflect differences in educational institutions and embodies distinctions in *habitus*, cultural capital, and the underlying social fields. Technological disruption accelerates this transformation process, opening new arenas in religious education and intensifying the contestation over the representation of religious authority in the public sphere.<sup>4</sup>

The transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia has become a critical focal point amidst rapid social change and digitalization. *In their study on Hybrid Pesantren*, Mustofa et al. (2023) illustrate how *pesantren* adopt online learning models, yet they do not address identity conflicts among *pesantren* actors themselves. Harnadi et al. (2021)<sup>5</sup> affirm that *pesantren* remain a space for socio-cultural reproduction that maintains the traditional authority of *kiai*, but they do not capture the *habitus* tensions between traditional *santri* and the emerging student generation. Fudiyartanto & Stahl (2023)<sup>6</sup> highlight the role of

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<sup>1</sup> Ian M. Newman et al., "Use of Policy, Education, and Enforcement to Reduce Binge Drinking among University Students: The NU Directions Project," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 17, no. 4 (July 2006): 339–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2006.01.005>.

<sup>2</sup> Dodik Harnadi, Hotman Siahaan, and Masdar Hilmy, "Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik* 34, no. 3 (June 22, 2021): 272, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V34I32021.272-280>.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Arif Nasruddin and Widiatul Fauziah, "Digitization Of Islamic Religious Education Learning In Enhancing Student Learning Motivation At Smp Nu Sunan Giri Kepanjen," *Cordova Journal Language and Culture Studies* 14, no. 2 (2024): 47–60.

<sup>4</sup> Carla Millar, Martin Lockett, and Ted Ladd, "Disruption: Technology, Innovation and Society," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 129 (April 2018): 254–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2017.10.020>.

<sup>5</sup> Harnadi, Siahaan, and Hilmy, "Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age."

<sup>6</sup> Fuad Arif Fudiyartanto and Garth Stahl, "Theorizing the Professional Habitus: Operationalizing Bourdieu to Explore the Role of Pedigree in Indonesian Higher Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 45, no. 2 (February 17, 2024): 157–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2023.2291324>.

*symbolic capital* in Indonesia's academic hierarchy, while Mustofa (2019)<sup>7</sup> maps undisciplined student behavior as a product of social *habitus*. Meanwhile, Skourdoumbis & Madkur (2020)<sup>8</sup> reveal the challenges of English language instruction in *pesantren* due to tensions between global and local *symbolic capital*. Rahmadani & Alimi (2023)<sup>9</sup> also elaborate on the role of social and cultural capital in *madrasah diniyah*, but focus more on the continuity of traditional values than on conflicts with new *habitus*. All these studies agree on the dynamics of change, but none have explicitly mapped the conflict between the two types of *habitus*—*santri* and *mahasiswa NU*—within the arena of higher education shaped by digital disruption.

Conversely, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining the tension between the *santri habitus*—characterized by values of obedience, collective spirituality, and symbolic hierarchy—and the *mahasiswa NU habitus*—which is more rational, critical, and exposed to academic logic and digital capital. Unlike the study by Skourdoumbis & Madkur (2020)<sup>10</sup>, which highlights the failure of linguistic capital in *pesantren*, or Fudiyartanto & Stahl (2023)<sup>11</sup>, who emphasize symbolic inequality in higher education, this article offers a new theoretical contribution by applying Bourdieu's *hysteresis effect* approach to explain identity disorientation and epistemic clashes between two cultural classes coexisting within the contemporary *NU* environment. The focus on *mahasiswa NU* as a group undergoing a transition from *pesantren habitus* to the digital and academic arena also represents a novel empirical contribution, largely overlooked in previous literature. Thus, this article not only revises understandings of how *habitus* is reproduced, but also challenges the traditional-modern dichotomy in the landscape of religious education in the era of disruption.

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<sup>7</sup> Mustofa Mustofa, "Undisciplined Reviewed From the Habitus Pierre Bourdieu Theory," *The Journal of Society and Media* 3, no. 2 (October 19, 2019): 142, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v3n2.p142-158>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Skourdoumbis and Ahmad Madkur, "Symbolic Capital and the Problem of Navigating English Language Teacher Practice: The Case of Indonesian Pesantren," *TESOL in Context* 29, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 15–34, <https://doi.org/10.21153/tesol2020vol29no2art1428>.

<sup>9</sup> Shavira Rahmadani and Moh Yasir Alimi, "Social and Cultural Capital in Islamic Religious Education: Case Study of Madrasah Diniyah Nurul Huda Sarimulyo Blora," *Komunitas* 15, no. 1 (March 30, 2023): 14–26, <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v15i1.44453>.

<sup>10</sup> Skourdoumbis and Madkur, "Symbolic Capital and the Problem of Navigating English Language Teacher Practice: The Case of Indonesian Pesantren."

<sup>11</sup> Fudiyartanto and Stahl, "Theorizing the Professional Habitus: Operationalizing Bourdieu to Explore the Role of Pedigree in Indonesian Higher Education."

This study aims to examine the tension between the habitus of *santri* and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) university students in the context of cultural transformation in Islamic education amid technological disruption. It focuses on how their respective educational environments—*pesantren* and university—shape habitus, cultural capital, and social positioning, influencing power relations and claims to religious authority. Framed by Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field, the research explores how both groups navigate modernity, especially in digital spaces, and how this leads to symbolic contestation.<sup>12</sup> The study contributes to the understanding of identity negotiation and the restructuring of religious authority in Indonesia's contemporary Islamic education landscape.

This study is built upon the assumption that the differences in *habitus* between *santri* and *mahasiswa NU* are not merely institutional reflections of their educational environments, but rather representations of broader social structures that shape ways of thinking, behaving, and positioning within the religious social field. This assumption stems from the view that the transformation of Islamic education in the era of digital disruption does not occur in a neutral space, but is embedded with power, symbolic, and ideological relations. The central argument of this research is that the tension between *santri* and *mahasiswa NU* constitutes a contestation between two types of cultural and symbolic capital competing for legitimacy in the public eye.<sup>13</sup> Thus, this tension is not only a cultural phenomenon, but also a structural and political one within the context of socio-religious change. Through Pierre Bourdieu's approach, this study aims to demonstrate that this transformation process is dialectical in nature—encompassing both reproduction and resistance to dominant structures within Islamic education.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-critical design aimed at understanding the dynamics of *habitus* tension between *santri* and *mahasiswa NU* within the context of the transformation of religious education resulting from digital disruption.<sup>14</sup> This approach was chosen because the

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<sup>12</sup> Jeane Marie Tulung et al., "Study About Social Habitus Piere Bourdieu In Relations Of The Christian And Islamic People In Manado," *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology* 17, no. 4 SE- (November 17, 2020): 306–13, <https://doi.org/10.48080/jae.v17i4.294>.

<sup>13</sup> Newman et al., "Use of Policy, Education, and Enforcement to Reduce Binge Drinking among University Students: The NU Directions Project."

<sup>14</sup> Nur Wulan Intan Palupi, Siti Risdatul Ummah, and Pipit Larasati, "Konsep Dan Praktik Metode Kualitatif Untuk Penelitian Sosial," *RISOMA: Jurnal Riset Sosial*

primary focus of the research is to explore meanings, experiences, and symbolic representations that emerge in the relationship between these two socio-religious groups.<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual framework is explicitly utilized to map the relations between *habitus*, capital (both cultural and symbolic), and the religious field, which is undergoing shifts due to changes in social and technological structures.<sup>16</sup> This research not only describes cultural change but also critiques the structures of symbolic power that influence the positioning and legitimacy of scholarly authority between the two religious actors: *pesantren*-based *santri* and academically oriented *mahasiswa NU*.

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through observation of digital discourse on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, which are utilized by *mahasiswa NU* to preach their Islamic values.<sup>17</sup> In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with *santri*, active *mahasiswa NU*, as well as *pesantren* administrators and lecturers within Islamic educational institutions.<sup>18</sup> Secondary data were drawn from scholarly articles, organizational documents, and literature related to *pesantren* education and *mahasiswa NU*. Data collection employed purposive sampling, selecting informants who are representative of the two *habitus* categories under study.<sup>19</sup> The data collection process also considered diversity in geographic background and religious affiliation to capture a broader dynamic within the contemporary *NU* community.

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*Humaniora Dan Pendidikan* 3, no. 4 (2025): 188–98,  
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62383/risoma.v3i4.860>.

<sup>15</sup> Ali Murtadho Emzaed, Kamsi Kamsi, and Ahmad Bahiej, "Saprah Amal, Democratization and Constitutional Rights The Habitus of Philanthropy Practices for the Banjar Muslim Society in South Kalimantan," *Asy-Syir'ah: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Hukum* 55, no. 2 (November 2, 2021): 393, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajish.v55i2.1031>.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices," in *Rethinking the Subject* (Routledge, 2018), 31–45.

<sup>17</sup> Keith N. Hampton, "Studying the Digital: Directions and Challenges for Digital Methods," *Annual Review of Sociology* 43, no. 1 (July 31, 2017): 167–88, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053505>.

<sup>18</sup> Omolola A. Adeoye-Olatunde and Nicole L. Olenik, "Research and Scholarly Methods: Semi-structured Interviews," *JACCP: JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CLINICAL PHARMACY* 4, no. 10 (October 2, 2021): 1358–67, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1441>.

<sup>19</sup> Ilker Etikan, "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling," *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>.

The data analysis technique employed in this study is thematic analysis grounded in Bourdieu's theoretical framework.<sup>20</sup> The analytical process began with the transcription of interview data and digital observations, followed by coding to identify patterns of *habitus*, types of capital being contested, and the dynamics within the field of religious education. The coded data were then categorized according to key concepts such as *hysteresis effect*, capital conversion, and symbolic reproduction. Data interpretation was conducted reflectively by linking field findings to Bourdieu's theoretical framework in order to explain the tension between the traditional-*santri habitus* and the modern-*mahasiswa NU habitus*. Data validity was ensured through source and theory triangulation, as well as collective discussions with key informants and experts in Islamic studies. This approach enabled the researcher not only to capture surface-level dynamics, but also to uncover the underlying structures of symbolic power relations within the disrupted Islamic education field.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Habitus Characteristics of *Santri vs. Students*

The *habitus* of *santri* within the *pesantren* environment is strongly influenced by a culture of collectivism.<sup>21</sup> The communication pattern tends to be vertical and hierarchical, especially in the relationship between *santri* and *kiai*. The language used is respectful, often employing specific *pesantren* terms such as *tabarukan*, *ngalap berkah*, and polite expressions based on classical Islamic oral tradition. In this context, communication is not merely a transfer of information but part of *adab* and scholarly rituals. In contrast, *mahasiswa NU* undergoing education in higher institutions experience a transformation of *habitus* towards a more horizontal and egalitarian communication pattern. Discussions in lecture halls, academic forums, and peer interactions emphasize argumentation and rationality, with scientific authority based more on logic and academic references. This difference triggers tension when *mahasiswa NU* try to uphold

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<sup>20</sup> Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices."

<sup>21</sup> Khodijatul Qodriyah, Masykuri Bakri, and Djunaidi Ghony, "The Construction of Objective Consciousness in Multicultural Society Based on Pesantren," *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 50, no. 4 (March 4, 2024): 136–49, <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i41319>.

*pesantren* values while navigating the academic world that demands autonomy of thought and openness in discussions.<sup>22</sup>

Within the social structure of the *pesantren*, discipline becomes the primary manifestation of the *habitus* of *santri*.<sup>23</sup> Obedience to rules, *jadwal ngaji* (study schedules), and discipline in maintaining *adab* are practices internalized from an early age. *Santri* are accustomed to living a busy and structured routine, where the presence of the *kiai* as a central figure creates a sense of submission as well as symbolic dependence.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, *mahasiswa NU* face challenges in forming a new *habitus* that emphasizes independence. Flexible lecture schedules, the semester credit system, and minimal direct supervision require *mahasiswa* to manage their time and responsibilities independently. This shift often causes disorientation, especially for *mahasiswa* with a *pesantren* background. They experience a dilemma between maintaining traditional obedience or adopting an ethos of autonomy within the academic world. Discipline, which was previously understood as obedience to authority, now shifts toward self-management and individual productivity in a more contextualized way.

The *habitus* of *santri* is strongly tied to a learning approach based on *tafaquh fi al-din*—religious deepening through classical texts (*kitab kuning*).<sup>25</sup> Learning activities take place in the form of *halaqah*, where the meaning of the texts is interpreted through traditional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*.<sup>26</sup> This process emphasizes diligence, patience, and the stable reproduction of knowledge passed down through generations. In contrast, *mahasiswa NU* in higher education tend to experience a shift in learning orientation toward a critical literacy approach. They are required to analyze, compare theories, and synthesize various modern scientific sources. The curriculum, which emphasizes research methodology and argumentative skills, pushes *mahasiswa* out of their traditional epistemological comfort zone. Tensions arise when *mahasiswa* feel caught between loyalty to *pesantren* tradition and academic demands that

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<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Thohir et al., "From Disruption To Mobilization: Ire Teachers' Perspectives On Independent Learning Policy," *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan* 40, no. 2 (June 14, 2021): 359–73, <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v40i2.39540>.

<sup>23</sup> Thohir et al.

<sup>24</sup> Qodriyah, Bakri, and Ghony, "The Construction of Objective Consciousness in Multicultural Society Based on Pesantren."

<sup>25</sup> Mirza Mahbub Wijaya, "Islamic Education Model in Madrasah in The Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy," *Ar-Raniry: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1–11.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Yusuf Pratama, Ulfa Shofi Rohmawati, and Mokh Sya'roni, "Studi of the History and Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago, Case Study: Analysis of Al-Musthofa Mosque Bogor," *Tarikhuna: Journal of History and History Education* 7, no. 1 (2025): 41–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15548/thje.v7i1.10294>.

require scientific validity, objectivity, and an interdisciplinary approach to understanding religion and social realities.<sup>27</sup>

In the *pesantren* culture, scholarly authority is greatly influenced by the charisma and leadership of a *kiai*.<sup>28</sup> Its legitimacy does not solely come from academic degrees but from the chain of knowledge transmission (*sanad*), spiritual experience, and mastery of classical texts. A *santri* accepts knowledge not only because of the content but also because of the blessing believed to be attached to the teacher.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, *mahasiswa NU* in the university environment experience a redefinition of scholarly authority. On campus, the validity of knowledge is based on formal credentials, scientific publications, and research methodology. Lecturers are not sacred figures but discussion partners whose arguments can be questioned. This difference creates an epistemological tension when *mahasiswa* from a *pesantren* background feel a “spiritual void” in the academic process, or conversely, begin to question traditional authority if it does not align with the rational and critical approaches they learn at the university.<sup>30</sup>

The religious practices of *santri* are heavily influenced by an intense communal and ritualistic culture. Activities such as *tahlilan*, *istighotsah*, congregational prayers (*shalat berjamaah*), and routine *ngaji* create a collective and repetitive religious atmosphere.<sup>31</sup> These practices become part of a religious *habitus* that is not merely normative but deeply embedded in the daily experiences of *santri*. In contrast, *mahasiswa NU* living outside the *pesantren* undergo a process of individualization in practicing religion. The more secular and socially diverse campus environment encourages more personal, flexible,

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<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Amin Abdullah, “Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community,” *Al-Jami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (December 15, 2017): 391–426, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.391-426>.

<sup>28</sup> Asep Kurniawan, “Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Kharismatik Kyai Dan Motivasi Orang Tua Terhadap Etos Belajar Santri Studi Kasus Atas Pondok Pesantren ‘Ainurrafiq Kuningan,” *JIEEM (Journal of Islamic Education Management)* 2, no. 2 (December 5, 2018): 87, <https://doi.org/10.24235/jiem.v2i2.3621>.

<sup>29</sup> Tammulis Tammulis, M. Galib M, and Achmad Abubakar, “Jabat Tangan Dengan Cium Tangan Kyai Untuk Keberkahan Dalam Perspektif Quran,” *Ulumuddin: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (June 12, 2021): 115–28, <https://doi.org/10.47200/ulumuddin.v11i1.773>.

<sup>30</sup> Noor Hasbi Yusoff, “Challenges and Tensions in Enacting Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – A Case Study in Teaching International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts at an Islamic School in Australia,” *Journal of Research in International Education* 23, no. 3 (December 30, 2024): 270–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14752409241302908>.

<sup>31</sup> Qodriyah, Bakri, and Ghony, “The Construction of Objective Consciousness in Multicultural Society Based on Pesantren.”

and reflective forms of religiosity. They begin to reformulate religious understanding through interdisciplinary readings, discussions in philosophy of religion, and social activism. A dynamic tension emerges between the ritualistic patterns inherited from the *pesantren* and the need to contextualize Islamic teachings in modern realities.<sup>32</sup> This creates a negotiation space within *mahasiswa NU*: whether to remain loyal to collective practices or pursue a more personal and critical spirituality.

### **Capital Transformation and Contestation in the Religious Arena**

Within Bourdieu's framework, the current transformation of the religious landscape can be understood as a transformation of capital.<sup>33</sup> The traditional *habitus* of *santri* gains legitimacy from symbolic capital based on the blessings (*keberkahan*) of the *pesantren* and chains of knowledge transmission (*silsilah keilmuan*). However, the emergence of social media creates a new arena where symbolic capital is reproduced in more visual and instant forms, such as follower counts, likes, and shares. *Mahasiswa NU*, who are accustomed to technology and digital networks, begin to utilize platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to preach Islamic values, positioning themselves as new actors in the religious arena.<sup>34</sup> Here, a contestation arises between those who carry the old capital—classical scholarship and traditional charisma—and those who rely on new capital in the form of mastery over digital media and public communication skills.<sup>35</sup> This change creates tension between the old structure and new agents competing for legitimacy in preaching during the era of disruption.

One major change in religious practice is the shift of preaching spaces from physical arenas to digital arenas.<sup>36</sup> Traditionally, *santri*—through the *pesantren*—deliver preaching through *pengajian*, sermons in mosques, or *halaqah* forums. These spaces are geographically and socially limited. However,

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<sup>32</sup> Niswaton Hasanah, "Keberkahan Sebagai Formulasi Mashlahah Dalam Kehidupan (Refleksi Santri Di Pesantren)," *Jurnal Qiema (Qomaruddin Islamic Economics Magazine)* 4, no. 2 (2018): 129–42.

<sup>33</sup> Jeane Marie Tulung et al., "Study About Social Habitus Piere Bourdieu In Relations Of The Christian And Islamic People In Manado."

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Yusuf Pratama and Ahmad Nabil Annuha, "Digital Da'wah Transformation of *Nahdlatul Ulama*: Religious Moderation Strategies in the Technological Era," *NAHNU: Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama and Contemporary Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2024): 321–38.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah E. Koss et al., "Training Community Clergy in Serious Illness: Balancing Faith and Medicine," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 4 (August 6, 2018): 1413–27, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0645-8>.

<sup>36</sup> Pratama and Annuha, "Digital Da'wah Transformation of *Nahdlatul Ulama*: Religious Moderation Strategies in the Technological Era."

*mahasiswa NU* now articulate their Islamic thoughts through digital media, reaching much wider and more heterogeneous audiences.<sup>37</sup> This phenomenon marks a shift of authority from traditional central figures to digital preaching agents who do not necessarily have a *pesantren* background. Those who skillfully package preaching with popular language and appealing visuals often go more viral than those mastering classical texts.<sup>38</sup> From Bourdieu's perspective, this is a form of arena shift—from a homogeneous religious arena to a highly competitive public arena. Religious authority is no longer merely inherited but contested in a highly fluid and dynamic digital symbolic market.

*Mahasiswa NU* who are active on social media often engage in “rebranding” their religious identity. Instead of presenting themselves as conservative *santri*, they construct an image as progressive, open, and creative Muslims—combining religious knowledge with contemporary insights such as psychology, gender, and socio-political issues.<sup>39</sup> This indicates a shift in the type of cultural capital that is valued. Whereas mastery of *kitab kuning* used to be a symbol of prestige, now digital literacy, the ability to speak in front of a camera, and content production skills become new capital that determines one's position in the religious arena. Bourdieu calls this a conversion of capital—where classical cultural capital is replaced by new cultural capital according to the demands of the arena.<sup>40</sup> This phenomenon reflects that *mahasiswa NU* are not just consumers of religious discourse but active producers who redesign Islamic narratives in formats that resonate with digital audiences.

One of the most palpable tensions is the shift of religious authority from a *sanad* basis (chain of knowledge transmission) to media popularity. In the traditional *pesantren* structure, scholarly authority originates from an authentic *sanad* and knowledge collectively recognized by the community of scholars (*ulama*). However, in the digital era, religious figures can gain widespread influence even without a strong *sanad* of knowledge. Popularity, follower counts,

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<sup>37</sup> Zainil Ghulam, Achmad Farid, and Abdul Ghofur, “Da’wah ‘Islam Nusantara’ on NU Online and the Surrounding Argue,” *Dakwatuna: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam*, 2023, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:270853820>.

<sup>38</sup> Afidatul Asmar, “Genealogi Dan Strategi Dakwah Kultural NU,” *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 2018, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:240278671>.

<sup>39</sup> Ican Mandala, Doli Witro, and Juraidi Juraidi, “Transformasi Moderasi Beragama Berbasis Digital 2024: Sebagai Bentuk Upaya Memfilter Konten Radikalisme Dan Ekstremisme Di Era Disrupsi: Digital-Based Religious Moderation Transformation 2024: An Effort to Filter Radicalism and Extremism Content in the Ag,” *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 17, no. 1 (2024): 127–60.

<sup>40</sup> Hasan Sayfullah, “Konversi Agama Pada Masyarakat Perkotaan (Reshaping Pendidikan Muallaf Di Lembaga Sosial YDSF Kota Surabaya),” *Journal Multicultural of Islamic Education* 4, no. 2 (2021): 1–16.

and persuasive presentation skills become new parameters of authority. This creates ambivalence within the *NU* community itself. *Santri* who still uphold the values of *sanad* feel that religious authority has been reduced to social performance.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, *mahasiswa NU* see opportunities to democratize preaching and broaden the reach of religious messages. This shift is not merely technological but epistemological—namely, a shift from tradition-based authority to audience-based authority.

The consequence of this transformation of capital and arena is the emergence of internal fragmentation within the *NU* community. On one side, there is a group that continues to uphold *pesantren* orthodoxy; on the other, a new generation of *mahasiswa NU* carries the spirit of reformulation. The religious arena becomes a battleground between the old and new *habitus*, between preaching based on traditional charisma and preaching based on digital capital.<sup>42</sup> In Bourdieu's terms, this is a struggle among agents with different capital competing for influence in the same arena.<sup>43</sup> This tension can be creative but also potentially conflictual—especially if there is no dialogical space bridging these two poles. Therefore, it is important for the *NU* community to develop reconciliation mechanisms between traditional values and digital innovation, so that this transformation does not trigger polarization but rather strengthens *NU*'s position in facing religious challenges in the era of disruption.

### **The Role of Technology Disruption as a Transformation Factor**

Technological disruption has not only brought changes to the medium of communication, but also created new social arenas where new forms of capital are produced and contested. Within Bourdieu's framework, the digital arena becomes a new field for the distribution of symbolic, social, and cultural capital—domains previously dominated by conventional institutions such as *pesantren* and Islamic civil society organizations. This is where tension arises: technology disrupts the traditional modes of distributing authority, knowledge, and influence.<sup>44</sup> *Mahasiswa NU* are more adaptive in utilizing this arena, leveraging technological capital, popular language, and flexible communication styles. In contrast, many *pesantren* remain in the adaptation phase, resulting in an imbalance in their capacity to reach the public. This transformation is not

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<sup>41</sup> Setyawan Andreas, "Crosscutting Religious Education For A Better Self-Understanding As A Response To Religious Extremism," *International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching* 1, no. 2 (July 31, 2017): 145–55, <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.2017.010204>.

<sup>42</sup> Harnadi, Siahaan, and Hilmy, "Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age."

<sup>43</sup> Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices."

<sup>44</sup> Thohir et al., "From Disruption To Mobilization: Ire Teachers' Perspectives On Independent Learning Policy."

merely about platforms, but about how religious agents reposition themselves within an arena governed by the logic of algorithms, virality, and visualization—dynamics that differ significantly from traditional logics based on charisma, *sanad* (transmission chains), and institutional legitimacy.<sup>45</sup>

As digital technology continues to evolve, some *pesantren* have begun to recognize the importance of adapting in order to remain relevant. This adaptation is reflected in the use of social media by younger *kiai*, live-streaming of religious lectures (*pengajian*), and the digitization of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*). However, this transition does not always proceed smoothly. The traditional *habitus*, shaped by contemplative, structured, and sacred learning cycles, often clashes with the fast-paced, instant, and visual nature of the digital world.<sup>46</sup> There is a concern that the *barakah* (blessing) of knowledge may be diminished if one becomes too absorbed in the culture of “content.” Nevertheless, some innovative *pesantren* have demonstrated that digital transformation can be pursued without sacrificing the substance of Islamic scholarship. They utilize media to expand the reach of *dakwah* while preserving the values of *adab* (etiquette) and *sanad* (chain of transmission).<sup>47</sup> In this regard, *pesantren* as traditional institutions are undergoing a process of capital conversion: transforming symbolic authority that was once exclusive into an inclusive form through technology, while still maintaining their credibility.

Student organizations widely joined by *mahasiswa NU*, such as *PMII* (*Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*), serve as transformative agents that bridge the traditional world of *pesantren* and the modern world of the university.<sup>48</sup> With access to digital literacy and extensive intellectual networks, they occupy a strategic position to redefine *dakwah* and religious praxis. They create educational content, host online discussions, and raise social issues from a progressive Islamic perspective. Within this digital arena, *mahasiswa NU* expands their social capital and reproduces symbolic capital through new approaches—framing Islam as an inclusive, contextual, and relevant discourse. This illustrates how traditional *habitus* can be reformulated within a new field

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<sup>45</sup> Koss et al., “Training Community Clergy in Serious Illness: Balancing Faith and Medicine.”

<sup>46</sup> Yusoff, “Challenges and Tensions in Enacting Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – A Case Study in Teaching International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts at an Islamic School in Australia.”

<sup>47</sup> Pratama and Annuha, “Digital Da’wah Transformation of *Nahdlatul Ulama*: Religious Moderation Strategies in the Technological Era.”

<sup>48</sup> Akhmad Afnan Fajarudin, “Asimilasi Paradigma PMII Syarifuddin Dengan Kultur Pesantren,” *Risalatuna: Journal of Pesantren Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 15, 2021): 215, <https://doi.org/10.54471/rjps.v1i2.1252>.

without losing its core identity.<sup>49</sup> These student organizations serve as concrete examples of how adaptation to disruption does not rely solely on capital conversion, but also on the creative praxis of forging synergy between traditional heritage and contemporary challenges.

Despite efforts at adaptation, technological disruption has also amplified internal polarization within the *NU* community, particularly in styles of *dakwah* and expressions of religiosity.<sup>50</sup> Polarization emerges when some groups—from both *pesantren* circles and university students—perceive that digital *dakwah* styles, which are overly popular, have compromised scholarly substance and spiritual depth. Conversely, younger, media-savvy groups feel that traditional methods are no longer effective in reaching Generation Z. This divergence gives rise to a latent conflict between textual-normative *dakwah* and contextual-visual *dakwah*. In Bourdieu's terms, this is a struggle for symbolic dominance within a new field, where each actor brings different logics and forms of capital.<sup>51</sup> This polarization presents a serious challenge if not properly managed, as it may hinder the regeneration of *NU* cadres capable of constructively bridging the old and new worlds.

Despite the noticeable tensions and polarization, technological disruption also opens up promising spaces for synergy between *pesantren* and *mahasiswa NU*. Several innovative collaborations have begun to emerge, such as digital *dakwah* training involving both *kiai* and young activists, or the development of online learning platforms based on classical Islamic texts (*kitab klasik*).<sup>52</sup> This indicates that traditional symbolic capital does not need to be sacrificed in the digital arena, but can instead be converted and disseminated more broadly with the aid of technology. Through Bourdieu's lens, this represents a convergence point between traditional *habitus* and the new *habitus* shaped by the digital field.<sup>53</sup> With the right strategies, such synergy can generate more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable forms of religious praxis. The challenge ahead lies not only in confronting disruption, but in shaping a new *habitus* capable of creatively and critically bridging old and new forms of capital.

### **Pierre Bourdieu's Theoretical Analysis**

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<sup>49</sup> Wijaya, "Islamic Education Model in Madrasah in The Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy."

<sup>50</sup> Thohir et al., "From Disruption To Mobilization: Ire Teachers' Perspectives On Independent Learning Policy."

<sup>51</sup> Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices."

<sup>52</sup> Nasruddin and Fauziah, "Digitization Of Islamic Religious Education Learning In Enhancing Student Learning Motivation At Smp Nu Sunan Giri Kepanjen."

<sup>53</sup> Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices."

Pierre Bourdieu defines *habitus* as a system of dispositions shaped through social experience, which functions as a guide for action across various fields.<sup>54</sup> In the context of *santri* and *mahasiswa NU*, there is an intersection between two *habitus*: the traditional-*santri habitus*, shaped within a *pesantren* environment rooted in ritual, obedience, and spiritual charisma; and the student *habitus*, which develops within a rational, reflective, and egalitarian academic field. Tension arises as each brings a distinct system of practice into an increasingly complex social field shaped by technological disruption.<sup>55</sup> The *santri habitus* tends to uphold conservative and hierarchical values, while the student *habitus* promotes renewal and critical dialogue. When these two interact—both within the *NU* community and in digital spaces—internal conflicts and mismatched social expectations often emerge. Bourdieu refers to this condition as the *hysteresis effect*—a state in which an old *habitus* no longer aligns with the new conditions of the field, thereby triggering identity crises and the search for new adaptive strategies.<sup>56</sup>

Within Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the religious arena is not a neutral space but a battleground where various agents strive to maintain or seize dominance through the capital they possess. This arena is populated by actors with different backgrounds and types of capital: *pesantren* bring symbolic capital in the form of *sanad*, blessings (*keberkahan*), and traditional charisma, while *mahasiswa NU* bring new capital in the form of digital literacy, online popularity, and discursive capacity.<sup>57</sup> In an arena experiencing technological disruption, the internal logic also changes—traditional capital no longer automatically generates authority. *Mahasiswa NU* who are able to articulate ideas well in the digital public space can become new points of reference, even without a strong *pesantren* background. This competition creates new dynamics in the religious arena, showing how actors with new capital are able to challenge old symbolic dominance and demand a redefinition of religious legitimacy.

Religious actors who wish to maintain symbolic dominance in a changing arena will employ strategies of symbolic reproduction. In this context,

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<sup>54</sup> Jeane Marie Tulung et al., "Study About Social Habitus Piere Bourdieu In Relations Of The Christian And Islamic People In Manado."

<sup>55</sup> Yusoff, "Challenges and Tensions in Enacting Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – A Case Study in Teaching International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts at an Islamic School in Australia."

<sup>56</sup> Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices." and Emzaed, Kamsi, and Bahiej, "Saprah Amal, Democratization and Constitutional Rights The Habitus of Philanthropy Practices for the Banjar Muslim Society in South Kalimantan."

<sup>57</sup> Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community."

*pesantren* and *mahasiswa NU* organizations strive to continue old values through transforming the modes of delivery.<sup>58</sup> For example, *pengajian kitab kuning* is broadcast online, or religious content is packaged with popular aesthetics. This is a form of symbolic adaptation that attempts to preserve the essence while adjusting the medium. However, symbolic reproduction does not always succeed if it is not accompanied by changes in *habitus*. Digitally active *mahasiswa NU* often not only adopt new styles but also produce new meanings about religiosity—more inclusive, reflective, and critical.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, symbolic reproduction is negotiative: actors not only inherit old capital but also remodel the structure of meaning to maintain relevance. This shows that symbolic dominance in the religious arena can no longer rely solely on continuity but also requires innovation and dialog between *habitus*.

The change in the arena's structure due to technological disruption causes a shift in the dominance of capital. Whereas previously religious authority was held by those who mastered traditional symbolic capital, now the shift is towards actors who control digital and social capital. *Mahasiswa NU* who are fluent in social media, inclusive narratives, and popular communication styles often gain public legitimacy faster than conventional *kiai*. Bourdieu explains that when the arena's structure changes, the dominant type of capital will also change.<sup>60</sup> This means that religious authority is no longer the prerogative of old institutions but becomes the result of open competition within the digital arena. This phenomenon disrupts the old orthodoxy order because it raises questions about who deserves to be called a religious authority. This struggle reflects a process of restructuring the field—where the configuration of power in the arena is redefined by new actors bringing different types of capital.

Within Bourdieu's framework, religious authority is not something absolute but is formed through social recognition within the arena. The current redefinition of religious authority occurs due to the transition from a system of inheritance to a system of production.<sup>61</sup> Previously, authority was granted to those who inherited *sanad* and specific religious institutions. However, in the digital era, authority is produced through symbolic work that can be directly accessed by the public—through content, narratives, or open debates. *Mahasiswa NU* take advantage of this gap to produce new authority that is not based on

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<sup>58</sup> Nasruddin and Fauziah, "Digitization Of Islamic Religious Education Learning In Enhancing Student Learning Motivation At Smp Nu Sunan Giri Kepanjen."

<sup>59</sup> Newman et al., "Use of Policy, Education, and Enforcement to Reduce Binge Drinking among University Students: The NU Directions Project."

<sup>60</sup> Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices."

<sup>61</sup> Pratama, Rohmawati, and Sya'roni, "Studi of the History and Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago, Case Study: Analysis of Al-Musthofa Mosque Bogor."

inheritance but on the ability to influence public opinion and offer alternative discourse.<sup>62</sup> This process shows that religious authority is no longer stable but fluctuates and is competitive. In this context, the religious arena becomes an open field for various symbolic strategies, and the redefinition of authority is a consequence of changes in the arena's structure as well as shifts in the *habitus* of its actors.

## CONCLUSION

This research found that the tension between *santri* and *mahasiswa NU* is not merely a difference in lifestyle or educational institutions, but a reflection of symbolic conflict between two different systems of *habitus*: *santri* shaped by the *pesantren* environment with values of tradition, collectivism, and *adab*, and *mahasiswa NU* constructed by the academic system emphasizing rationality, autonomy, and intellectual openness. Another important finding is that digital media has become a new arena where symbolic capital and culture are contested anew. *Mahasiswa NU* who are fluent in social media successfully and popularly reproduce religious authority, although often clashing with *pesantren* values prioritizing *sanad* and *kharisma kiai*. The shift of the arena to the digital space creates a condition of hysteresis—a mismatch between old *habitus* and new conditions—which drives the emergence of identity crises and epistemological clashes within the contemporary *NU* community.

The main contribution of this article lies in integrating Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework with the local context of religious education in Indonesia, particularly within the *Nahdlatul Ulama* environment. This research enriches the discourse on *habitus* and capital by demonstrating that the transformation of religious culture within the *NU* community does not occur neutrally but involves symbolic contestation and a restructuring of authority. The article also provides new insights into how digital *dakwah* is not merely a medium but an arena that redistributes symbolic power based on new capital such as popularity, inclusive narratives, and communication aesthetics. Focusing on *mahasiswa NU* as actors positioned between two worlds—*pesantren* tradition and campus modernity—this research offers significant contributions to the study of Islamic education, sociology of religion, and digital religious communication studies.

Although offering strong theoretical and empirical contributions, this research has several limitations. First, its scope remains limited to the *NU* community segmented geographically and culturally, thus not capturing the

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<sup>62</sup> Harnadi, Siahaan, and Hilmy, "Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age."

complexity of similar tensions in other Islamic organizations or outside Java. Second, the predominantly qualitative approach results in a lack of quantitative data that could measure the extent of technological disruption's influence on *habitus* change broadly. Third, although this article uses digital media as a data source, an in-depth analysis of algorithms, content performativity, and audience engagement through statistical means has not yet been conducted. These shortcomings present opportunities to strengthen methodology in future digital *habitus* studies, especially by combining virtual ethnography and big data analysis approaches.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct a comparative approach among Islamic organizations to reveal whether similar *habitus* tensions also occur within the *Muhammadiyah* environment or *Salafi* groups. Quantitative research using national surveys could also be employed to statistically measure changes in the religious *habitus* of Indonesian *mahasiswa* in facing digital disruption. Furthermore, in-depth studies on the role of social media algorithms and the conversion of digital capital in religious legitimacy could enrich our understanding of contemporary *dakwah* dynamics. Future research may also explore resistance practices by *pesantren* against digital dominance, as well as potential collaborative forms between *pesantren* traditions and *mahasiswa* innovations. This is important so that the ongoing transformation is integrative rather than destructive to the intellectual heritage of *Islam Nusantara*.

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