

PRACTICING SOCIAL MEDIA *FIQH*: MOTIVES AND FORMS OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM AMONG SANTRI IN ADVOCATING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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Abstract

The rapid mediatization of Islam has shifted religious authority from traditional physical pulpits to digital screens, prompting traditional *santri* (boarding school students) to engage as active digital agents. This qualitative case study investigates how students at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis, West Java, negotiate and practice digital activism on social media to advocate for marginalized communities and environmental issues. Drawing on in-depth interviews and field observations, we find that *santri* activism is driven by profound empathy and a holistic theological synthesis that merges personal piety with social responsibility. The students employ diverse creative forms, including short educational videos, visual infographics, respectful narrative storytelling, and online-to-offline community mobilization. In navigating the ethical hazards of the online attention economy, they practice a lived social media *fiqh* by deliberately slowing down to apply *tabayyun* (verification) and prioritizing *maslahah* (public benefit) over algorithmic reach, while actively preserving human dignity (*hifz al-irḍ*) to avoid exploitative representations. Ultimately, this study contributes to bridging the empirical deficit in digital religion studies by demonstrating how traditional jurisprudence operates on the ground, establishing a hybrid framework of "Digital *Fiqh* Governance" as an ethical compass for contemporary digital spaces.

Keywords: Digital *Fiqh* Governance, Mediatization, Santri Activism, *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*, Social Media Ethics, Pesantren

It is quite fascinating, and perhaps a bit unsettling, to observe how the traditional landscape of religious authority has shifted in recent years. In her foundational study on digital religion, Campbell (2017) explains how religious practices are increasingly reshaped by digital spaces, transforming old hierarchies into relational connections. This mediatization is not just a technological upgrade. As noted by Müller and Friemel (2024), digital platforms reconstruct how faith communities interact, creating a distributed network where authority is continuously negotiated. For centuries, the physical *mimbar*, the quiet walls of the traditional classroom, and the Friday sermon served as the exclusive centers of Islamic instruction and social mobilization. Now, these physical boundaries are rapidly dissolving into glowing smartphone screens. In their exploration of digital Islamic authority, Lohlker and Wahid (2026) describe this as a major shift where traditional legitimacy is contested and remade by new, decentralized actors.

I sometimes wonder if classical scholars ever envisioned a world where a fatwa or a complex theological argument could be condensed into a brief TikTok video. Yet, this is exactly where we find ourselves today. As Ahmed (2025) emphasizes, there is a pressing need

for robust theoretical frameworks that can interpret how these digital platforms mediate religious knowledge and ethical reasoning. Religious discourse is no longer confined to sacred brick-and-mortar institutions; it is happening on social feeds, Instagram, and private chat groups. In their study on how religious guidance is delivered in modern spaces, Ridzuan, Razak, Hassan, Salleh, and Rahman (2025) show how mass media and digital platforms have transformed the delivery of legal rulings, signaling a major departure from classical, face-to-face consultation. This transition brings both massive opportunities and deep, real anxieties. In his analysis of Indonesian digital Islam, As'adi (2026) points out that digital spaces democratize interpretive authority, allowing both progressive and highly conservative voices to compete openly. Consequently, the digital screen has emerged as the new public square. It is a bustling and often chaotic arena where religious arguments are not just explained, but actively contested and used to drive social struggles. We see this play out in how religious messages are packaged, shared, and weaponized, making the digital turn not just a change in medium, but a profound shift in how religious life is felt and practiced.

This digital expansion is particularly visible in places we might least expect, such as the traditional boarding schools, or *pesantren*, of Indonesia. *Pesantren* are historically viewed as isolated sanctuaries of classical Islamic learning, places where students, or *santri*, spend years reading yellow books and detached from modern distractions. Yet, as the observational records at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis (2026) reveal, the quiet morning sounds of Islamic chants now regularly coexist with the soft tapping of smartphones. It is quite a beautiful contrast to see a student holding a physical classical text in one hand while using their smartphone in the other to capture a video of their morning routines.

These young Muslims are not merely passive consumers of digital culture. They have become active digital agents, using their devices to engage with the wider world. However, this transition is not without tension. In their discussion on digital religion, Maulana, Rachmawati, and Mulya (2026) discuss how finding meaning in the modern era requires navigating classical norms within digital spaces. How do these young *santri* reconcile the rigid legal-ethical frameworks of classical *fiqh* with the fast-paced, attention-seeking culture of social media? It is one thing to study ethical duties like *tabayyun* or the avoidance of *ghibah* in a quiet classroom, but it is another thing entirely to apply them when drafting an Instagram post. As Siregar, Andy, Abdurrahman, and Kamal (2025) write, digital *fiqh* governance must constantly negotiate classical normativity against the pull of online narcissism and performative religiosity. The smartphone is no longer just a device for personal entertainment. It has become a site of intense ethical negotiation, where a simple act like clicking a share button becomes a moral decision that requires careful jurisprudential reflection. When these *santri* step onto the digital stage, they are not just posting; they are actively translating ancient juristic principles into modern digital actions.

Perhaps the most critical challenge in current scholarship is the lack of empirical depth. In his bibliometric review of the field, Wahid (2024) identifies a clear empirical deficit in studies evaluating how digital Islamic practices actually manifest in daily life. This article seeks to address this gap directly by investigating the digital lives of *santri* at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis. To guide our inquiry, we propose three central research questions: (1) *What are the underlying motives behind santri's digital activism on social media?* (2) *What forms of digital activism do they employ to advocate for marginalized communities and environmental issues?* (3) *How do they negotiate and practice classical Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) to navigate the ethical dilemmas of online space, including the pressure of virality, the ethics of representation, and truthfulness?*

By answering these questions, this study attempts to bridge a persistent divide in the literature. While many scholars, such as Lubis, Parinduri, Lubis, and Lubis (2026), offer rich theoretical analyses of Islamic legal thought, their work often remains highly normative and detached from lived experience. By focusing on empirical observations, we show how classical

concepts are not just static rules, but living ethics. When we look at how santri advocate for local traders or create campaigns about local river pollution, we see classical *fiqh* in action. In their systematic literature review on online religious guidance, Ali and Aljahsh (2025) highlight the jurisprudential challenges posed by rapid dissemination and ideological bias in digital spaces, which makes real-world case studies of digital governance all the more critical. This study offers an intimate look at how these challenges are managed on the ground. Additionally, in their study on Gen Z's digital religious habits, Anita, Sarastiani, Wijaya, Hazah, and Rahim (2025) note that mobile applications and digital feeds play an increasingly central role in shaping religious practices, which underscores why understanding santri activism is so vital today.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 3 outlines the theoretical frameworks of mediatization and maqasid-based digital ethics. Section 4 details the qualitative case study methodology. Section 5 presents our findings and discussion. Finally, Section 6 concludes with some brief thoughts on the theoretical implications and future research directions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Reconceptualizing Classical Jurisprudence for the Digital Age

To begin with, we might need to step back and look at how Islamic law itself operates when it is forced to confront something as chaotic and fast-moving as digital technology. In their foundational study, Abdoul-Hamid, Mohd Yusof Wan Chik, and Iqbal Mohd Fadzli (2026) explain that classical Islamic jurisprudence, or *usūl al-fiqh*, was never a frozen monument of historical rules, but rather a dynamic method of continuous interpretation. At the very heart of this system lies *ijtihād*, which represents the rigorous effort of independent reasoning that scholars use to address novel situations. When we look at modern digital practices, *ijtihād* acts as a highly adaptive engine of legal reasoning. As Ahmed (2025) argues, this intellectual flexibility allows contemporary scholars to bridge the gap between ancient textual commands and modern realities, demonstrating that classical legal theory is fully capable of guiding digital life. In this sense, the process of legal derivation is not about forcing modern technology into old boxes, but about using classical tools to understand the underlying ethical structure of our new digital environments.

This brings us to the crucial concept of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, or the higher objectives of Islamic law, which contemporary researchers have begun expanding into a dedicated system of digital ethics. In their analysis of society 5.0, Maulana, Rachmawati, and Mulya (2026) write that *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* provides a vital compass for finding spiritual meaning and ethical guidance in modern technological spaces. Traditionally, these objectives focus on five core protections: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. However, in our noisy and highly connected online spaces, scholars are recognizing that these categories must be reinterpreted to address new types of vulnerability. For instance, in their study on digital social networks, Qaruty, Abokhoza, Albert, Al-Tkhayneh, and Hadi (2025) emphasize that protecting privacy, security, and digital trust is an essential extension of classical legal protections in algorithmic environments. Perhaps the most striking example of this conceptual expansion is the focus on *hifz al-ird*, or the protection of human dignity and honor. As Ilham, Darwis, Munir, and Hasanuddin (2026) argue, in an age dominated by self-commodification and algorithmic visibility, *hifz al-ird* serves as a critical defense against the exploitation of marginalized groups and the reduction of human suffering to digital entertainment. It is not just about whether an action is technically permissible, but whether it honors the sacred dignity of the human subject.

To complement this *maqāṣid* framework, we must also consider the role of *al-ta'līl bi al-hikmah*, which refers to causal reasoning based on the deeper wisdom behind legal rulings rather than just their formal technical causes. In their examination of Islamic digital ethics,

Lokman, Noor, Nadzli, Suyurno, Harun, and Kayadibi (2026) show that applying *al-ta'lil bi al-hikmah* to social media use helps users understand that every online action has real moral and social consequences. This approach is highly practical because it moves us away from a simple list of dos and don'ts. Instead, it invites us to think deeply about the long-term impact of what we share, write, or record. I sometimes find myself thinking that in our rush to share information, we often forget that an online post is a social act with real-world weight. By focusing on the wisdom behind the rules, this framework reminds us that our digital voices are a sacred trust, and that every click is a moral choice.

Media Studies: Mediatization, Authority, and Interpretive Paradigms

When we shift our attention to digital media studies, we find an equally rich set of tools to help us understand these changes. In her analysis of how religion operates online, Campbell (2017) describes mediatization as a process where religious institutions and practices are increasingly shaped by the logic of digital media, changing how authority is felt and expressed. This theory is particularly helpful because it shows that media is not just a neutral channel for transmitting messages. Instead, as Müller and Friemel (2024) explain, the dynamics of digital media use can alter the very structure of religious communities, transforming classical, centralized authority into highly distributed and relational networks. Historically, religious guidance was delivered by institutional figures who held a monopoly on interpretation. Today, however, we see a much more participatory landscape where young digital agents, including the *santri* of traditional *pesantren*, can actively negotiate religious meaning.

This transformation of authority is not just about who gets to speak, but also about how they speak and connect with their audience. In their study on digital Islamic authority, Lohlker and Wahid (2026) write that the rise of new digital channels allows decentralized actors to compete openly with traditional institutions, creating a pluralistic environment where ideas are constantly challenged. I find it fascinating to observe how this decentralization allows ordinary students to become advocates for social justice, using their daily online interactions to build informal networks of solidarity. This is not to say that traditional authority is dead. Rather, it is being renegotiated. As Wahid and Abdulloh (2026) argue, the emergence of digital Islamic authority is a complex phenomenon where traditional qualifications and modern media skills must be balanced to maintain credibility in a highly competitive digital market.

To make sense of how these young agents navigate this competitive landscape, we can turn to interpretive paradigms like phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. In their discussion on modern religious practices, Hartono, Mutia, and Trisakti (2025) note that social media introduces entirely new patterns of religiousness, especially among urban and younger Muslims who use digital tools to express their faith. Through a symbolic interactionist lens, every digital action, from choosing a specific filter to writing a careful caption, is a symbolic gesture through which a *santri* constructs their identity and demonstrates their moral agency. Online spaces are not just virtual playgrounds; they are active sites of meaning-making. In their study on how marginalized groups assert their presence online, Ab Rashid, Al-Ramahi, Al-Smaihyeen, and Al-Smadi (2026) explain that digital platforms offer creative spaces where individuals can negotiate social norms and express their authentic identities. When a *santri* posts about river pollution or local poverty, they are not just sharing news. They are actively interpreting their religious duty through modern symbols, transforming abstract theological principles into concrete digital gestures that speak to their peers. This interpretive perspective helps us appreciate that digital activism is deeply experiential. It is about how young Muslims personally experience their faith and express their ethical commitments in a world dominated by visual storytelling and instant feedback.

Synthesizing Hybrid Frameworks: Digital *Fiqh* Governance

Finally, we need to explore how these two vast fields—classical jurisprudence and modern media studies—can be synthesized into a single, cohesive framework. This synthesis is found in the emerging concept of digital *fiqh* governance, which offers a practical way to bridge the gap between abstract normative ethics and lived online realities. In their groundbreaking study, Siregar, Nofri Andy, Abdurrahman, and Kamal (2025) define digital *fiqh* governance as an active negotiation between classical Islamic normativity and the modern culture of online narcissism. This model is incredibly useful because it recognizes that the digital world is not just a neutral space where we apply pre-existing laws. Instead, the platforms themselves have their own built-in incentives, such as algorithms that reward dramatic, self-promoting, and highly viral content. Under such conditions, individual autonomy can easily slide into empty performance and self-commodification. To counter this, digital *fiqh* governance acts as a structural and moral guide, helping users balance their personal freedom with their collective duties.

This hybrid approach does not simply reject modern technology; rather, it seeks to govern its ethical application. As Kannike and Fahm (2025) argue, establishing robust ethical governance from an Islamic perspective involves embedding deep spiritual values into the design and use of digital systems. By bringing classical principles into the digital workflow, we can move beyond a reactive stance and instead proactively shape how technology is utilized. This is where the core concept of *maṣlaḥah*, or public interest, becomes so critical. In digital spaces, *maṣlaḥah* is no longer just a theoretical tool for high-level legal scholars. It becomes a daily, practical decision made by individual users. When a santri decides to verify a piece of news before sharing it, or when they choose to protect the dignity of a marginalized person instead of exploiting their story for views, they are practicing digital *fiqh* governance.

Similarly, in their discussion of how religious guidance is delivered across modern channels, Ridzuan, Razak, Hassan, Salleh, and Rahman (2025) emphasize that hybrid models which combine jurisprudential rigor with communication theories are vital for ensuring that Islamic ethics remain accessible and relevant to the public. This integration is essential because isolated, purely legalistic decrees often fail to resonate with young, digitally active audiences. To prevent the spread of misleading or poor-quality content in unmonitored digital networks, Ali and Aljahsh (2025) highlight the necessity of combining formal oversight with enhanced grassroots digital literacy among youth.

I think about how difficult it is to maintain this balance on social media, where the pressure to be visible is so intense. Yet, the work of these young digital agents suggests that it is indeed possible. By integrating values like *taqwā* (mindfulness of God) and *amānah* (trustworthiness) into their daily posting habits, they show that digital tools can be used to serve the community rather than just the self. This hybrid framework allows us to see that the tension between individual self-presentation and communal responsibility is not an impossible barrier, but a creative space where new forms of Islamic morality are constantly being forged.

Method

To understand how Islamic jurisprudence is actively lived and negotiated in digital spaces, I chose a qualitative, single-site case study design. This study is centered on Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis, a prominent traditional boarding school in West Java. While some might think of traditional pesantren as isolated spaces cut off from modern life, this particular site represents a unique intersection of classical study and active digital engagement. In her discussion on contemporary religious training, Anita, Sarastiani, Wijaya, Hazah, and Rahim (2025) note that modern institutions must actively engage with digital habits to remain relevant to younger generations. Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis does exactly this. It does not simply ban smartphones or ignore the digital deluge; instead, as our

observations show, the school works to equip its santri with what we might call a digital moral compass. In his analysis of how religious values are embedded into modern systems, Ferenc (2026) discusses how ethics must act as a dual compass in the technological age. By selecting this site, we can examine a community where classical juristic training is not treated as a relic of the past, but is actively used as an active ethical framework for digital behavior.

The empirical material for this study was gathered through a combination of in-depth interviews and close field observations. Over a period of eight days, spanning from February 12 to March 15, 2026, I immersed myself in the daily routines of the pesantren. During this time, I conducted semi-structured interviews with key administrators and educators, including Ustadz Sidik, Ustadz Deni, and Ustadzah Juju, who provide the theological and pedagogical guidance for the students. To capture the lived experience of the youth, I also interviewed eleven key santri activists, designated as Santri 1 through Santri 11, who are actively involved in online campaigns.

These interviews were closely coupled with participant observations. I followed the santri as they engaged in physical community work, such as cleaning up local riverbanks and conducting social interviews with marginalized local traders. I then tracked how these physical experiences were translated into digital content. This involved sitting with them in their work areas, observing their debates over scriptwriting, watching them edit video clips, and examining their graphic design choices for digital posters. In their study on digital literacy and identity, Astuti and Attaymini (2026) show how modern Muslim youth use digital tools to access and share knowledge, making this close observation of their actual workflows highly necessary to understand their agency. By watching their content creation from draft to upload, I was able to see the exact moments where ethical choices were made.

The analysis of the interview transcripts and observation notes followed a thematic approach, allowing me to identify recurring patterns of meaning across the data. I coded the transcripts to uncover how the participants define their motives, what creative media formats they choose, and how they navigate specific online challenges. In their review of digital research methods, Ali and Aljahsh (2025) point out that qualitative analysis of digital practices must look beyond superficial online text to understand the deeper motivations of the actors. The coding process focused on how classical legal concepts like *tabayyun* (verification) and *maslahah* (public interest) are operationalized as coding categories.

Ethical considerations were central to every stage of this research. Because our observations involved recording the lives of vulnerable and marginalized community members, we had to be incredibly careful. I obtained informed consent from all interviewees and community subjects, ensuring they understood how their stories and images would be used. In their discussion of digital ethics, Ilham, Darwis, Munir, and Hasanuddin (2026) argue that protecting the dignity and honor of subjects is a fundamental Islamic duty that must be preserved in digital spaces. This principle was put into practice by the santri themselves. As our field notes show, the students made a conscious effort to avoid exploitative content, often called poverty porn, by asking for explicit permission and ensuring that their posts did not humiliate their subjects. Privacy was strictly protected by using pseudonyms for the student participants, allowing them to speak openly about their experiences and ethical struggles without fear of exposure.

Findings and Discussion

Motives of Santri Digital Activism: Synthesizing Personal Piety, Empathy, and Social Responsibility

When we look closely at how the santri at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis operate in digital spaces, we quickly see that their online actions are driven by a deep desire to overcome a common divide in religious life. For a long time, there has been a lingering tension in Muslim communities between focusing solely on personal salvation through ritual

devotion and engaging in active social justice. Some traditional views might suggest that a student's primary job is to retreat into quiet study, leaving social and political struggles to others. However, in our conversations with the teachers and students at the pesantren, it became clear that this division is being actively dismantled. As Hartono, Mutia, and Trisakti (2025) note, modern social media platforms have introduced entirely new patterns of religiousness among young Muslims, allowing them to express their faith through active social engagement. For these young digital agents, posting online is not a departure from their religious training; rather, it is a direct extension of it, transforming ancient juristic principles into daily digital practices.

I was particularly moved by how the teachers themselves encourage this perspective, framing digital action as a moral imperative rather than a distraction. As Ustadz Deni argues in his explanation of what true religious devotion looks like in the modern world, piety should not be understood only as a vertical relationship between an individual and God, but must also include horizontal relationships with other human beings and with the natural world. This is a profound point. It suggests that a person cannot truly be pious if they ignore the suffering of others or the destruction of the environment. In a quiet, traditional classroom where classical texts are studied, these words serve as a powerful reminder that religious knowledge must have practical, compassionate consequences in the real world. This holistic view of faith helps the santri see their smartphones as tools for digital worship, transforming a simple screen into a platform for active ethical responsibility.

This theoretical integration becomes even more vivid when we look at the raw empathy that drives the students to speak out. In their daily lives, the santri are surrounded by the struggles of ordinary people, and they feel a strong sense of care for those who are often ignored by mainstream, click-driven media. When describing what first motivated him to start posting, Santri 2 explains that they often see difficulties and struggles right in their local communities, where ordinary people find themselves without a voice. He notes that having access to social media made them feel a collective responsibility to use their platform to share these hidden stories with a wider audience. This is not about chasing viral fame or seeking personal validation. It is about a quiet, steady empathy that refuses to look away. In a similar vein, Santri 3 explains that while mainstream media is often obsessed with whatever topic happens to be viral at the moment, the quiet struggles of ordinary people, or "*orang kecil*," are frequently left in the dark. This realization led him to believe that social media could be used to cultivate genuine care and encourage others to pay attention to these overlooked struggles. Through these testimonies, we see that digital activism is born from a desire to amplify the voices of the underrepresented, turning the smartphone into a tool for social solidarity and communal care.

It is quite beautiful to observe how this process of empathy is nurtured in their daily routine. As we saw during the field observations, a group of students sat together to look at their social media feeds and discuss local issues of poverty and environmental decay. Rather than scrolling mindlessly, they were debating how to translate these heavy social realities into accessible digital narratives. I find myself thinking that this collective reflection is a crucial part of their training, as it prevents their activism from becoming a solitary, self-promotional endeavor. Instead, it remains anchored in a shared communal responsibility that is continually reinforced by their mentors and teachers.

This brings us to a highly compelling ethical question regarding the moral weight of silence in the face of injustice. In a noisy digital world where everyone is shouting, we often think about the ethics of speaking, but we rarely consider the ethics of remaining silent. In his discussion on this very issue, Ustadz Deni emphasizes that when a person witnesses an injustice and possesses the capacity to speak out in a constructive and responsible manner, choosing to remain silent becomes a moral decision that must be carefully scrutinized. This perspective completely reshapes how we think about online participation. From an Islamic

viewpoint, silence is not always a neutral stance; in some cases, it can be a form of complicity. As Lokman, Noor, Nadzli, Suyurno, Harun, and Kayadibi (2026) explain in their discussion of Islamic digital ethics, applying the concept of *al-ta'lil bi al-hikmah* allows individuals to evaluate their digital conduct based on the deeper wisdom and social consequences of their actions. When the santri choose to post about social issues, they are responding to a moral obligation to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, a classical duty known as *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, which they now practice online.

By synthesizing these empirical insights, we can see how the traditional concept of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* is being actively lived on the ground as a form of digital governance. In their exploration of how contemporary Muslim youth find spiritual meaning in modern technological spaces, Maulana, Rachmawati, and Mulya (2026) show that maqāṣid-based ethics can guide digital conduct by ensuring that our online interactions are directed toward public welfare and the preservation of human dignity. For the santri of Darussalam Ciamis, this means that their digital activism is not an optional hobby, but a form of digital worship, or ibadah, that bridges the gap between normative theology and contemporary social struggles. They are practicing what Siregar, Nofri Andy, Abdurrahman, and Kamal (2025) describe as digital *fiqh* governance, where classical norms are used to negotiate the temptations of online narcissism and redirect digital tools toward collective communal benefit. By framing their online work in this way, the santri show that a smartphone, when guided by a strong moral compass, can become a sacred instrument for advocating for those who have been left behind. I find myself thinking that this integration is precisely what makes their work so resilient, because it is anchored in a tradition that values the human soul just as much as the physical world.

Forms of Digital Activism: From Storytelling to Environmental Stewardship

When we look at the actual content produced by the santri at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis, we see a fascinating variety of media practices that move far beyond simple text posts or traditional religious lectures. Rather than relying on a single, rigid format, these young digital agents have developed a diverse toolkit of creative content styles, each tailored to different audiences and goals. In their theoretical model of digital media dynamics, Müller and Friemel (2024) explain that communities use multiple communication layers to reinforce their internal values and connect with the external world. The santri do precisely this by organizing their digital activism into four distinct but connected forms of creative expression: digital education, visual infographics, narrative storytelling, and online-to-offline mobilization. Through this multifaceted approach, they are able to transform abstract Islamic ethics into lively, engaging, and highly visual digital campaigns.

The first major form of digital activism we observed is digital education, which focuses on simplifying complex theological and jurisprudential concepts for a younger, social-media-savvy audience. As Santri 8 notes in his interview, several of his peers specialize in creating short educational videos that break down classical teachings into bite-sized, accessible clips. These short videos, often shared on platforms like TikTok or Instagram reels, use engaging animations, clear audio explanations, and modern aesthetic designs to make classical jurisprudence relevant to contemporary youth. Instead of presenting *fiqh* as a dusty list of dry regulations, these videos frame it as a living, breathing guide for daily decision-making, discussing how principles of modesty, honesty, and responsibility apply to things like online communication and daily consumption.

To complement these video formats, the santri also produce visually stunning infographics, which represent their second major form of activism. In her discussion on how modern youth navigate information-rich digital environments, Astuti and Attaymini (2026) explain that visual media plays a critical role in enhancing digital literacy and enabling quick access to verified knowledge. This is exactly what Santri 9 describes when explaining that

they use carefully designed infographics to present verified data on social and environmental issues in a clean, easily understandable format. These posters and graphics often combine relevant Qur'anic verses or classical legal maxims with empirical facts about local issues, such as statistics on river pollution or the challenges faced by local, small-scale traders. By blending theological principles with empirical facts, these infographics act as a visual bridge that helps viewers see the direct connection between religious duty and social reality.

While educational videos and infographics are highly effective for sharing information, the santri also recognize the power of narrative storytelling, which constitutes their third and perhaps most emotionally resonant form of activism. As Santri 10 beautifully puts it, stories have a unique capacity to touch people's hearts in ways that raw data or abstract lectures simply cannot. Rather than merely presenting problems, they write character-driven narratives that document the lives of ordinary people, local laborers, and marginalized community members. However, they are incredibly careful about how they construct these stories. In their study on how marginalized groups are represented online, Ab Rashid, Al-Ramahi, Al-Smaiheen, and Al-Smadi (2026) emphasize the critical importance of protecting the dignity and agency of subjects rather than reducing them to objects of pity. This concern is deeply shared by the santri. As Santri 5 explains, they want their narrative content to make people think deeply about the systemic causes of social issues, rather than just provoking superficial sympathy or pity. They ask questions like why a local trader is struggling and what the wider community can do together to help, transforming digital storytelling into an exercise in mutual respect and structural awareness.

The fourth and final form of activism is online-to-offline mobilization, which bridges the gap between digital words and physical action, ensuring that their online presence is backed by concrete community service. As recorded in my field notes from the environmental observation days, I watched how the santri physically cleaned up local rivers, collected waste, and planted trees around their community. These physical activities are not kept separate from their digital lives; instead, they are deliberately integrated. As Santri 7 explains, they do not want to be hypocrites who only talk about change online without doing anything in the physical world, which is why they document their environmental and social campaigns to inspire their online audience to take action too. This approach is further supported by Santri 11, who describes how they use their social media channels to actively invite their peers and local community members to join their physical cleanup campaigns and social projects. By documenting their own physical labor and inviting others to participate, they show that digital tools can be used to drive real, tangible changes in the local ecosystem.

It is highly rewarding to analyze these dynamic forms through the lens of interpretive media paradigms, which show how these young activists make sense of their agency. In their exploration of digital religious habits, Hartono, Mutia, and Trisakti (2025) note that modern social media practices allow younger generations to actively negotiate religious meaning and construct authentic, lived religious identities. Each creative format the santri choose is not just a strategic communications decision, but a symbolic gesture through which they define what it means to be a modern Muslim in an algorithmic world. Rather than accepting the passive role of media consumers, they become active interpreters of their tradition, translating classical juristic obligations into contemporary visual codes. Through this creative process, they are able to demonstrate that traditional pesantren values are not static or outdated, but are highly adaptable and capable of speaking directly to the anxieties of modern digital life.

By analyzing these diverse practices, we can see how the santri are successfully challenging the secular-sacred divide that so often dominates digital spaces. Through their daily efforts, they are effectively creating what we might call a sacred digital space, where social action, environmental care, and religious devotion are woven into a single, cohesive practice. As Campbell (2017) argues in her study of digital religion, the mediatization of

religious life can allow communities to re-sacralize technological spaces, transforming them into areas of deep moral reflection and ethical engagement. By refusing to separate their spiritual identity from their social and environmental campaigns, the santri demonstrate that social media can be reclaimed as a space for genuine moral growth. I often find myself thinking that this is perhaps the most hopeful aspect of their work. At a time when digital networks are so often dismissed as spaces of noise, narcissism, and superficiality, these young activists show that with the right intention and a strong moral framework, these very same platforms can be used to cultivate deep empathy, protect human dignity, and care for the earth.

Navigating *Fiqh* in Digital Spaces: *Tabayyun*, *Maslahah*, and the Protection of Dignity

When we look at the actual application of Islamic jurisprudence on social media, we find ourselves at a very busy and complicated intersection. It is here that abstract legal rules must be translated into split-second online actions. The digital world has its own built-in logic, one that values speed, dramatic reactions, and constant visibility. For a young Muslim trying to navigate this landscape, the pressure to conform is incredibly intense. Yet, the empirical observations at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis reveal that the santri do not simply yield to these algorithmic pressures. Instead, they use their classical training as a tool to negotiate and sometimes actively resist the worst tendencies of online culture. This process of negotiation is what we call the practical practice of social media *fiqh*, where ancient concepts are remade into a living, daily digital ethic.

The first and perhaps most visible area of tension is the conflict between the fast-paced nature of social media and the deliberate Islamic requirement of *tabayyun*, or careful verification. On platforms like Instagram or TikTok, the first person to share a piece of news is often rewarded with massive visibility and algorithmic reach. But this drive for speed directly clashes with the ethical demands of Islamic law. As Ustadz Sidik explains during his classes, the principle of *tabayyun* is highly relevant in our contemporary digital life because it requires us to ask whether a piece of information is actually true and whether our way of sharing it is constructive. It is not enough for a post to be engaging or popular; it must first be verified as authentic.

This teaching clearly has a profound impact on how the students view their own online behaviors. In his personal reflections on this ethical struggle, Santri 1 admits that they often feel a strong temptation to upload content quickly when a social issue is actively trending online. However, through their study of classical ethics, they have learned to deliberately slow down, check their facts, and verify their sources before pressing the upload button. This self-restraint is an active practice of moral control. By taking the time to verify their information, the santri are actively working to prevent the spread of *fitnah*, which refers to slander, and *ghibah*, or gossip, in unmonitored digital networks. I find it quite remarkable to think that in an environment designed to make us react instantly, these young students are choosing to pause, reflect, and verify. It shows that practicing *tabayyun* is not just an intellectual exercise, but a form of spiritual discipline that directly challenges the algorithmic demand for instant gratification.

This deliberate slowing down is closely connected to how the pesantren redefines the very metrics of digital success. In a typical social media campaign, success is measured by quantitative metrics, such as the number of likes, shares, comments, and views a post receives. But inside the moral world of the pesantren, these metrics are viewed with a healthy amount of skepticism. As Ustadz Deni emphasizes to his students, the ultimate goal of a santri's digital presence should never be to chase viral fame. Instead, he teaches that a post's true value must be evaluated by its capacity to bring about *maslahah*, or genuine public benefit. A post that receives millions of views but spreads confusion or division is considered a failure, while a

quiet, unviral post that brings comfort or useful knowledge to a small community is seen as a profound success.

This shift in perspective completely changes how the santri approach content creation. In their theoretical discussion on Islamic digital ethics, Lokman, Noor, Nadzli, Suyurno, Harun, and Kayadibi (2026) explain that applying the concept of *al-ta'lil bi al-hikmah* allows social media users to evaluate their online actions based on the deeper wisdom and long-term social consequences of their words. This is exactly what we observed in the students' workflows. When debating whether to share a post, the santri do not ask if it will go viral. Rather, as our field notes show, they discuss whether the content will serve the public interest and help their local community solve real-world problems. By prioritizing *maslahah* over visibility, they are able to resist the pull of online narcissism and performative religiosity, which Siregar, Nofri Andy, Abdurrahman, and Kamal (2025) identify as the primary moral hazards of modern digital self-presentation. It is a quiet form of rebellion against the attention economy, one that replaces individual vanity with collective care.

Perhaps the most sensitive ethical boundary the santri must navigate is the protection of human dignity, known in classical Sharia as *hifz al-ird*, when advocating for marginalized groups. When we document the lives of those who are struggling—such as local small-scale traders or laborers—there is a very thin line between compassionate advocacy and exploitative voyeurism. The internet is full of content that exploits the suffering of the poor for clicks and emotional engagement, a phenomenon often described as poverty porn. The santri are acutely aware of this danger. In his discussions with the students, Ustadz Sidik emphasizes that having good intentions is never enough on its own; the methods we use to help others must also be ethically correct. He warns that we must never allow our desire to help marginalized communities to result in their public embarrassment or humiliation, because in the Islamic tradition, preserving human dignity is an absolute obligation.

This moral boundary is actively operationalized by the santri in their daily media production. When describing their fieldwork, Santri 4 explains that they make a conscious effort to obtain explicit consent from their subjects before taking any photos or recording any videos. He notes that they take the time to truly sit with the people, understand their complex situations, and ensure that their final digital posts do not reduce these individuals to objects of mere pity. This is a beautiful application of *hifz al-ird* in a digital context. As Ilham, Darwis, Munir, and Hasanuddin (2026) argue, in our modern era of algorithmic visibility, protecting human dignity must serve as a primary guide for digital modesty and representation, ensuring that marginalized people are treated as agents of their own stories rather than spectacles for online entertainment. By listening to their subjects and respecting their privacy, the santri ensure that their digital advocacy remains a collaborative and deeply respectful act, rather than an exploitative one.

Finally, we must examine how the santri manage the inevitable conflicts, disagreements, and hate speech that arise in digital spaces. Anyone who has spent time on social media knows that the comment section can quickly become a toxic environment of anger and mutual condemnation. When the santri post about sensitive social or environmental issues, they frequently encounter dissenting opinions and harsh criticisms. Yet, instead of responding with equal anger, they try to practice what classical scholars call *fiqh al-ikhtilaf*, or the jurisprudence of managing differences. In his explanation of how they handle hostile comments, Santri 3 explains that they have learned to accept that not everyone will agree with their perspective. He emphasizes that the most important thing is to never reply with hatred or malice, choosing instead to practice patience and maintain a polite, respectful dialogue.

This peaceful approach is not a sign of weakness, but a conscious moral choice that is deeply rooted in their theological training. In their analysis of interpretive pluralism, Baedah and Musolin (2026) explain that *fiqh al-ikhtilaf* provides a robust framework for managing

diverse perspectives within Islamic law, supporting a culture of mutual respect and dialogue rather than dogmatic conflict. By translating these classical rules of juristic disagreement into digital decorum, the santri are able to treat the comment section as a space for genuine conversation rather than an arena for ideological warfare. They show that it is possible to stand firmly for one's principles while still treating those who disagree with gentleness and respect.

I often think that this is perhaps the hardest part of their digital work. It is easy to be polite when everyone is praising you, but maintaining your moral composure in the face of online hostility requires a very deep level of spiritual maturity. Through their daily efforts, these young digital agents demonstrate that social media *fiqh* is not just a collection of abstract rules, but a lived, practical path of self-control, empathy, and deep responsibility to both God and the human community

Conclusion and Future Directions

In looking back at the journey of these young activists, we find a powerful demonstration of how ancient wisdom can breathe life into modern screens. The santri at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis have shown us that social media is not just a digital playground or a simple tool for personal self-expression. For them, every tweet, every video edit, and every post is handled as an *amanah*, a sacred trust that carries deep moral weight. They do not see online participation as an absolute right to say whatever they please, but rather as a quiet duty to serve others and care for the world around them. This is what we mean by a lived social media *fiqh*. It is an everyday practice of faith where students translate abstract legal ethics into practical digital choices, negotiating the temptations of the internet in real time. By advocating for marginalized local traders and documenting their physical efforts to clean local rivers, these young students have shown that a smartphone can be reclaimed as a tool of compassion. They have bridged the old divide between personal devotion and active social responsibility, proving that digital activism can be a profound form of contemporary worship that connects the soul directly to the needs of the community.

This empirical study offers some vital contributions to how we think about religion and digital media. To be quite honest, much of the current scholarship in this field has suffered from a persistent empirical deficit. We have many beautiful, complex theories about how Islamic law should address technology, but we rarely get to see how these rules are actually practiced on the ground by ordinary believers in their daily routines. By providing an intimate look at the daily lives of these students, this study helps bridge that gap, turning abstract normative ethics into living, breathing examples of digital morality. Practically, the concept of digital *fiqh* governance that we have explored here offers a highly valuable model for other Islamic educational institutions facing similar challenges. It shows that *pesantren* do not need to choose between banning technology or letting it run wild without supervision. Instead, they can actively equip their students with an internal moral compass, helping them navigate the digital world with confidence and grace. This framework provides a path for other schools to help youth become active, ethical agents of change in an increasingly connected world, proving that tradition can actively shape technology instead of merely reacting to it with fear or absolute prohibition.

Of course, we must be honest about the boundaries of our own work. This study is a single, qualitative case study focused on one specific *pesantren* in West Java, which means we cannot easily generalize these findings to every Islamic school or community across the globe. The deep, rich context we gained here is valuable, but it is only one piece of a much larger puzzle that spans across different cultural, national, and digital landscapes. Looking ahead, I hope to see other researchers build on this work by using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to evaluate the long-term sociotechnical impact of digital *da'wah* across wider populations and diverse age groups. We also need to dig deeper into the challenges posed

by algorithmic bias and the rapid integration of artificial intelligence in Islamic education. Perhaps the most exciting direction for future research lies in exploring collaborative regulatory frameworks where religious scholars, ethicists, and platform developers can work together. By combining theological wisdom with technological design, we might find new ways to combat online misinformation, reduce polarization, and build digital spaces that truly honor human dignity and foster collective well-being.

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