

Article Title	The Western and Islamic Dialectics in the Discourse of Pesantren Feudalism: An Epistemological Study on the Transformation of Islamic Education in the Digital Era.
Abstract in English	The digital era has given rise to increasingly sharp contestations of discourse in interpreting the kiai–santri relationship in pesantren, particularly between narratives of feudalism rooted in Western paradigms and the tradition of tadzim grounded in Islamic epistemology. This study aims to map the dialectic between these two frameworks in relation to the construction, critique, and macynacy of pesantren hierarchy within the digital public sphere. Employing a descriptive qualitative method and Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, this study examines four social media contents as well as in-depth interviews with kiai and santri. The findings indicate that accusations of feudalism in pesantren largely stem from Western readings that emphasize political-economic domination, whereas pesantren tradition situates hierarchy within the framework of adab, blessing, and the transmission of knowledge. The practice of tadzim is shown not to be a form of structural oppression, but rather a mechanism of respect, identity formation, and a means of sustaining values amid social change. The dialectic between Western and Islamic perspectives in this digital discourse ultimately produces a new synthesis, in which pesantren can revitalize tradition while simultaneously adapting to the pressures of modernity and technology. This study affirms the importance of integrating the values of adab and digital innovation for the contemporary relevance of Islamic education.
Keywords	Western–Islamic Dialectics; Western Feudalism; Pesantren Ta’dzim; Educational Modernization; Digital Discourse.

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Commented [A6]: Please clarify the nature of the analyzed corpus. The phrase "four social media contents" is rather vague and does not sufficiently convey the scope or characteristics of the data.

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Commented [A2]: The abstract tends to move from empirical findings to normative conclusions. Several claims, particularly regarding the non-oppressive nature of tadzim and the emergence of a "new synthesis," appear stronger than what can be supported by the limited data presented. Greater analytical neutrality and caution in reporting findings are recommended.

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Commented [A9]: The claim that the dialectic "produces a new synthesis" appears theoretically ambitious and may not be sufficiently supported by the limited empirical corpus analyzed in this study. The authors may consider moderating this conclusion or providing stronger evidence for the emergence of such a synthesis.

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Abstract in Indonesia	Era digital memunculkan kontestasi wacana yang semakin tajam dalam memaknai relasi kiai–santri di pesantren, khususnya antara narasi feodalisme berakar paradigma Barat dan tradisi tadzim berbasis epistemologi Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan memetakan dialektika antara dua kerangka tersebut terhadap konstruksi, kritik, dan legitimasi hierarki pesantren dalam ruang publik digital. Menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan analisis wacana kritis Fairclough, studi ini menelaah empat konten media sosial serta hasil wawancara mendalam dengan kiai dan santri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tuduhan feodalisme di pesantren lebih banyak bersumber pada pembacaan Barat yang menitikberatkan pada dominasi politik-ekonomi, sementara tradisi pesantren menempatkan hierarki dalam kerangka adab, barakah, dan transmisi keilmuan. Praktik tadzim terbukti bukanlah bentuk penindasan struktural, melainkan mekanisme penghormatan, pembentukan identitas, serta sarana keberlanjutan nilai di tengah perubahan sosial. Dialektika Barat dan Islam dalam wacana digital ini akhirnya menghadirkan sintesis baru, di mana pesantren dapat merevitalisasi tradisi sekaligus beradaptasi dengan tekanan modernitas dan teknologi. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya integrasi nilai adab dan inovasi digital untuk relevansi pendidikan Islam masa kini.
Kata Kunci	Dialektika Barat-Islam; Feodalisme Barat; Ta'dzim Pesantren; Modernisasi Pendidikan; Wacana Digital.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the ways in which society constructs, disseminates, and negotiates social meanings. Social media with its fast-paced, massive, and often simplification nature has become a new arena for forming public opinion about various traditional institutions, including Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). In recent months, a popular narrative has emerged portraying the *kiai–santri* relationship as a form of “*pesantren feudalism*.” This narrative originates from netizens who employ Western epistemological frameworks that view hierarchy as a power relation potentially leading to social inequality, oppression, or symbolic domination. Through this lens, the practice of students (*santri*) showing respect to their teachers (*kiai*), as seen in social media content is often reduced to a form of structural subservience deemed incompatible with modern values of freedom and egalitarianism.

Such interpretations do not always align with the intellectual tradition of Islam, as debates for and against the issue of “feudalism” in *pesantren* often arise within the sphere of social media. In the epistemology of Islamic education, the *kiai–santri* relationship is rooted in the concept of *ta'dzim*—a profound respect for knowledge, teachers, and scholarly authority as an integral part of the ethics of seeking truth. This concept does not stand alone; it is closely

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Commented [A16]: The introduction appears to assume from the outset that interpretations of *pesantren* hierarchy as feudalism are primarily the result of Western epistemological misreadings. Such an assumption may compromise analytical neutrality. Consider presenting both perspectives as competing interpretations rather than privileging one framework before the analysis is conducted.

interrelated with the principles of *adab* and *barakah*, which have served as foundational pillars of Islamic knowledge transmission for centuries. Therefore, what is often regarded as “hierarchy” from a Western perspective is, in fact, an epistemic structure imbued with spiritual, pedagogical, and moral significance within the Islamic tradition. Here lies an epistemological dialectic: a meeting between the Western paradigm that emphasizes individual freedom and structural equality, and the Islamic paradigm that upholds *adab*, scholarly authority, and spiritual reciprocity.

The digital era has further intensified this epistemic tension. Social media has become not only a space for the production and reproduction of meaning but also a site for the emergence of new configurations of authority where validity is no longer determined by knowledge, experience, or scholarly lineage (*sanad al-‘ilm*), but by popularity, virality, and algorithms. As a result, criticism of *pesantren* is often detached from its broader socio-intellectual context, leading to a simplification that shifts the original meaning of *ta’dzim*—as an ethical expression of scholarship—into a pejorative image of feudalism. This condition raises important epistemological questions: how is the discourse of “*pesantren* feudalism” actually constructed, in what ways does it differ from the concept of *ta’dzim*, and what are its implications for the transformation of *pesantren* education amid the currents of digitalization?

Based on this phenomenon, the present study is designed to address three main questions: (1) how social media discourse constructs and disseminates the image of “*pesantren* feudalism”; (2) how this discursive construction differs epistemologically from the concept of *ta’dzim* in Islamic education; and (3) what the implications of this semantic tension are for the direction of *pesantren* educational transformation in the digital era. The objectives of this research include describing and analyzing the discourse of “*pesantren* feudalism,” revealing the epistemic differences between the concepts of feudalism (Western) and *ta’dzim* (Islamic), and explaining the epistemological and cultural impacts of this tension on the future of Islamic education.

A number of previous studies have examined hierarchical structures within *pesantren* through social and political approaches. Afandi and Jailani highlight how *kiai* leadership shapes power relations that some perceive as a form of feudalism (Jailani, 2020). Similarly, Ilahi emphasizes the position of *kiai* as elite figures within the *pesantren* who possess strong symbolic capital (Ilahi, 2014). Meanwhile, Sari’s study clarifies that *kiai* authority is often perceived by the public as a form of domination, especially when viewed through a Western epistemological lens that tends to interpret hierarchy as oppression (Sari et al., 2025). These studies provide important insights into the structure of power, yet they have not explored how the construction of “*pesantren* feudalism” is formed and reproduced massively on social media as a new discursive arena. On the other hand, research on *ta’dzim* emphasizes that the *kiai*–*santri* relationship cannot be separated from the epistemology of *adab* and the transmission of *barakah*. Suryanto explains that *ta’dzim* constitutes an ethical framework of scholarship that serves to maintain the legitimacy of *pesantren* tradition (Suryanto, 2021). Afandi and Ulum assert that the obedience of *santri* to their *kiai* is not a coercive structure but a pedagogical value that supports the internalization of knowledge (Ulum, 2020). Furthermore, Mushthofa and Aminah show that

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programs of *khidmah* (service), obedience, and learning ethics function as mechanisms of character formation (Mushthofa et al., 2023). However, all of these studies remain within the context of direct (offline) relationships and have not yet examined how *ta'dzim* is perceived, questioned, or transformed when entering the digital sphere, which is saturated with competing narratives.

Based on these various studies, it appears that research on *pesantren* feudalism and *ta'dzim* has developed along two separate trajectories: socio-political studies tend to focus on power relations, while Islamic pedagogical studies emphasize *adab* and *barakah*. To date, no research has directly linked these two discourses within the framework of a dialectical epistemology between Western and Islamic thought, nor has any examined how both are reconstructed through social media in the digital era. This study focuses on integrating these two epistemic domains by analyzing how the narrative of “feudalism” intersects with, and even conflicts against, the concept of *ta'dzim* within digital spaces. Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the existing literature but also offers a new analytical framework for understanding the transformation of *pesantren* education and Islamic scholarly authority in the era of information disruption.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This method is selected because it fundamentally views language not merely as a tool of communication but also as a practice of power that reproduces ideology and power relations within social structures. In this research, Fairclough's CDA model serves as a means to move beyond surface-level textual descriptions and to uncover the underlying social hegemonies embedded within the discourse related to the study's focus. The three-dimensional model—comprising text, discursive practice, and social practice—provides a comprehensive and objective framework for examining the dominant systems of knowledge (epistemologies) operating within the transformation of Islamic education (Munfarida, 2014).

The instrument used in this research is a discourse analysis checklist designed to align with Norman Fairclough's theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This checklist serves as a guide for identifying linguistic elements within news texts and for categorizing data based on themes relevant to issues of power and ideology (Der, 2019). In data collection, this study focuses on content disseminated through mass media and social media platforms. The research data consist of four texts: two from mass media (*omongomong.com*) and social media discussing the discourse of feudalism in *pesantren*, and two from TikTok addressing the discourse of *ta'dzim* within *pesantren*, all published during 2025. The selection of texts is limited to these four posts circulating in 2025 to maintain the study's focus. The chosen texts explicitly address the *kiai-santri* relationship—either in a critical sense or as a form of legitimization (counter-narrative)—and are considered representative of the research objectives. These texts were then analyzed using Norman Fairclough's CDA method.

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Commented [A23]: The methodological section requires substantial strengthening. The limited corpus (four digital contents and two interview participants), unclear sampling strategy, insufficient description of analytical procedures, and lack of transparency regarding data validation raise concerns about the credibility and transferability of the findings.

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Commented [A25]: The “discourse analysis checklist” is mentioned as the research instrument, but its dimensions, indicators, and analytical categories are not described. More methodological detail is required to ensure transparency and replicability.

Commented [A26]: The manuscript does not sufficiently justify the selection of only four digital contents as the primary corpus. The rationale for considering these materials representative of broader digital discourses on *pesantren* feudalism requires further elaboration.

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The primary data (digital corpus) consist of four social media contents (videos, texts, and comment interactions) that discuss *feudalism* and *ta'dzim* within Indonesia's digital sphere. Meanwhile, the secondary data are derived from in-depth interviews that serve as contextual narratives from two key informants: one *kiai* (representing dominant authority and ideology) and one critical *santri/alumnus* (representing resistance and transformative consciousness). The inclusion of the *kiai*'s narrative is specifically intended to validate the data by identifying social determinants—that is, the historical, cultural, or power relations that profoundly shape the discourses emerging on social media.

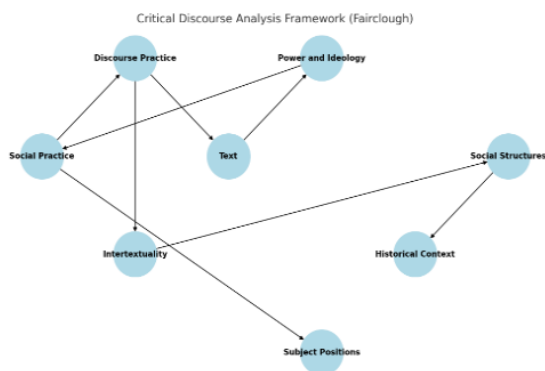


Figure 1. The main framework of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in an integrated manner through the application of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model. The first stage, Micro: Textual Analysis (Description), focuses on linguistic aspects (vocabulary, grammar, and misrepresentation) to examine how the discourses of *feudalism* and *ta'dzim* are represented. The second stage, Meso: Discursive Practice Analysis (Interpretation), analyzes the processes of text production and consumption in both social and mass media, including how intertextuality shapes debates within digital spaces. The third stage, Macro: Socio-Cultural Practice Analysis (Explanation), connects the findings to broader social contexts, focusing on the identification of determinants (power relations that shape discourse) and the effects of discourse (such as the emergence of new critical awareness). This explanatory stage addresses the epistemological inquiry—namely, how Western and Islamic dialectics influence knowledge systems and education within *pesantren* in the digital sphere (Der, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fairclough discusses the concept of “language as a social practice” and the idealism of the media as conveyed through news and its representation in written texts (Fiveable, 2024). The data consist of four pieces of content: three from social media platforms (TikTok and Instagram) and one from the online media outlet *omongomong.com*, all of which explicitly

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Commented [A31]: The manuscript states that interviews were conducted to “validate” the social media data. However, the procedures used to establish credibility, triangulation, and trustworthiness are not sufficiently explained.

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discuss *pesantren* feudalism and *ta'dzim* toward the *kiai*. There are noticeable differences in the presentation of information between these two categories of online media. The data used in this study are as follows:

Content 1

ID	M1
Platform	Instagram/Konde.co
Date	2025-10-16
Type	Post/Quote/Illustration
Text / Quotation	"Feodalisme spiritualistik ini kokoh karena adanya kebergantungan ekonomi-spiritual masyarakat pada figur. Narasi 'ngalap berkah' adalah eksploitasi. Pesantren harus ajarkan cara berpikir kritis."
Main Keywords	Spiritual feudalism; exploitation; ngalap berkah; critical reason
Metaphors	Sacral power; veil / exploitation
Modality	High
Agen (Subjek)	Yuniyanti Chuzaifah/Aktivis
Public Reaction	Many likes and shares, but with one comment responding in antithesis to the statement about pesantren feudalism
Discursive Practice	Structural and ethical critique
Brief Interpretation	Critique: feudalism is wrapped in spiritual/economics; urges critical reasoning to counter symbolic domination.

Content 2

ID	M2
Platform	Article/omongomong.com
Date	2025-10-16
Type	Critical essay
Text / Quotation	"Feodalisme dibalut atas nama adab, dibumbui agama... Ini pendisiplinan pikiran dan tubuh. Santri melakukan kerja tanpa bayaran tanpa merasa dieksploitasi."
Main Keywords	Symbolic feudalism; adab; Foucauldian disciplining; Panopticon; culture of silence
Metaphors	Veil of power; docile body; transcendent Panopticon
Modality	High
Agen (Subjek)	Critical / academic writer
Public Reaction	Many likes and shares, but with one comment responding in antithesis to the statement about pesantren feudalism
Discursive Practice	Foucauldian analysis and critique of the genealogy of power
Brief Interpretation	Adab is framed as a cultural mechanism for maintaining the <i>kiai</i> 's absolute authority; the <i>santri</i> 's body is disciplined voluntarily.

Content 3

ID	M3
Platform	Tiktok
Date	2024-11-10
Type	Video (ulama quotation)
Text / Quotation	"Santri harus mempunyai ketawadhu'an dan ta'dzim yang tinggi terhadap guru. Hal ini tidak bisa dibantah, karena kemanfaatan ilmu tergantung pada ta'dzim dan hormat santri kepada gurunya." –KH. Masbuhin Faqih

Main Keywords	Ta'dzim; humility; respect for teacher; benefit of knowledge
Metaphors	Teacher–student relationship as a source of the blessedness of knowledge
Modality	High
Agen (Subjek)	Santri as those obliged to show respect; teacher as holder of scholarly authority
Discursive Practice	Da'wah and spiritual education on santri adab
Public Reaction	Strong support from santri and pesantren alumni
Brief Interpretation	Strengthens the discourse of pesantren as an institution that makes adab an epistemic foundation; legitimizes teacherly authority on the basis of spirituality and barakah.

Content 4

ID	M13
Platform	Tiktok
Date	2024-04-14
Type	Ustadz video (sermon)
Text / Quotation	<i>“Bahkan Ali bin Abi Thalib berkata: Siapa pun guru yang mengajarkan saya satu huruf Al-Qur'an dan saya paham, maka saya siap menjadi budaknya. Artinya ta'dzim kepada guru yang telah mengajar kita sampai paham, pahalanya luar biasa dan penuh barakah.”</i>
Main Keywords	Ta'dzim; teacher; barakah; Ta'lim al-Muta'allim; Ali ibn Abi Talib
Metaphors	Teacher as holder of spiritual authority and source of the barakah of knowledge
Modality	High
Agent (Subject)	Santri as recipients of knowledge; teacher as holder of authority
Discursive Practice	Da'wah and epistemic legitimization of teacherly authority in pesantren
Public Reaction	Strong support from the pesantren community
Brief Interpretation	Reinforces the belief that the blessedness of knowledge is tied to respect for the teacher, framing scholarly hierarchy as a spiritual relation rather than social domination.

Table 1. Coding of CDA Data for Social Media Content

Norman Fairclough’s discourse analysis is one of the analytical approaches that can be used to examine speech or text, whether on a small or large scale. The discourse analysis in this study focuses on the emerging texts. This discourse is discussed in detail through both micro and macro perspectives based on the conflicts reported by the media. Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis method is employed to examine how the media construct the discourse surrounding *pesantren* feudalism and its counter-narratives. The stages of discourse analysis are as follows (Munfarida, 2014):

Microstructural Analysis

The analysis of text production practices (microstructural analysis) is carried out in several stages. Fairclough discusses coherence, cohesion, and how words and sentences generate meaning. The text is examined through three main components: representation, relations, and identity. In the representation component, the text functions to describe a person, situation, or condition, as well as social relations and the identity of individuals or figures. In the relations component, the text serves to analyze the relationship between the audience depicted in the text and the individuals represented within it.

The coding of data M1 and M2 simultaneously articulates the thesis that *adab* and *ta'dzim* within *pesantren* culture have been reduced in their function to an ideological framework that perpetuates a vertical power structure, explicitly framing feudalism as a symbolic and cultural narrative of the *pesantren*. This discourse carries a high level of modality, indicating a strong certainty and urgency to dismantle the idealization of the *guru-santri* (teacher-student) relationship and to demand institutional accountability. In the M1 data, the author defines the *pesantren* phenomenon as a form of “structural feudalism,” exploiting two dimensions—economic dependence and spiritual dependence of the community on the *kiai* figure. In this context, the practice of *ngalap berkah* (seeking blessings), which traditionally serves as a means of spiritual transmission, is rearticulated as a form of hidden “exploitation” of children (*santri*). This reinterpretation justifies excessive reverence, as the *kiai* is regarded as the “center of knowledge” or the “heir of the Prophet,” while simultaneously affirming that the *kiai*'s authority fundamentally derives from an unquestionable power relation.

In the M2 data, the author employs Foucault's framework to explain how subordination occurs internally within the *pesantren*, making it more insidious than overtly authoritarian forms of feudalism. In this discourse, feudalism hides behind the guise of *adab* and operates doctrinally through the disciplining of both mind and body. Consequently, *santri* voluntarily engage in unpaid service “without feeling exploited.” They become docile subjects because the norms of indoctrination have been internalized, rendering them unconsciously complicit in feudalistic practices according to this discourse. Furthermore, the concept of *barakah* is interpreted as a mechanism of control functioning like a transcendent panopticon. Within this discourse, *santri* are compelled to discipline themselves out of fear that their knowledge will not be *blessed* (*barakah*) if they fail to serve or show devotion to their *kiai*. This creates a form of spiritual threat that enforces continuous internal surveillance and self-discipline among the *santri*.

On the other hand, the discourse on *ta'dzim* toward teachers that emerges in data M3 and M4 shows that the value of respect for teachers remains the fundamental foundation of *pesantren* education, persisting even within digital spaces. In a statement by KH. Masbuhin Faqih, for example, it is emphasized that “the benefit of knowledge depends on the *santri*'s reverence and respect for their teacher.” This assertion situates the teacher-student (*guru-santri*) relationship not merely as a pedagogical one but as a spiritual bond believed to have a direct impact on the blessings (*barakah*) of knowledge. The epistemology of the *pesantren* indeed integrates rationality with a transcendent dimension, where knowledge is valued not only by the mastery of material content but also by its benefit and blessedness. Thus, *ta'dzim* is positioned as a moral prerequisite for the *santri*'s intellectual and spiritual success—something not explicitly found within modern educational systems (Zahroh, 2025).

This discourse is reinforced in data M4 through a popular quotation attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, who stated that he was willing to become a “servant” to anyone who taught him a single letter of the Qur'an. This quotation functions as a historical-theological legitimization that elevates the status of the teacher as a central figure within the hierarchy of Islamic scholarship. Through this narrative, *ustadz* or *pesantren* content creators reaffirm that respect

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for teachers has deep roots in the scholarly tradition of the *ulama* and is not merely a local *pesantren* custom. Within Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, this practice demonstrates processes of *intertextuality* and *recontextualization*, wherein classical texts are reused to reinforce the traditional ideology of the *pesantren* amid the onslaught of modern values such as egalitarianism and rationality. In this discourse, the teacher plays not only the role of an instructor but also that of a guardian of *barakah*, a spiritual intermediary, and a holder of epistemic authority—one that cannot be reduced to the role of a mere learning facilitator (Silaswati, 2019).

a. Representation

In the data presented above, the text published on the *omongomong.com* page entitled "Unveiling Feudalism Behind the Veil of Pesantren" represents a phenomenon that illustrates the claims and framing of feudal practices within the *pesantren* environment. In this case, these practices encompass the processes through which the *kiai* as a figure holds relations of power over the actions and thoughts of the *santri*. This phenomenon, in discourse M1, depicts the group of *santri* or students in the *pesantren* institution as a group disciplined through the autonomy of power and rationality. The *santri* are enclosed within a veil of reverence that involves the *kiai*'s power relations, compelling them to submit to practices referred to as "adab". This phenomenon is also a consequence of an educational pattern in *pesantren* that is grounded in Islamic values regarded as absolute.

However, this phenomenon is not merely about a group of *santri* obeying commands, but is also related to the values held by the *santri*, namely in terms of *adab*, respect for knowledge, and also the sense of *ta'dzim*. The critical discourse (M1 and M2) intentionally employs a lexicon rooted in political theory and critical social theory to desacralize the *kiai*–*santri* relationship. M1 uses the diction "feudal", "king", and "commoners" to represent the structure of the *pesantren* through the metaphor of a monarchy, which implicitly accuses the *kiai*'s authority of being an absolute political and class domination. M1 further extends its critique by using the terms "spiritual feudalism" and "exploitation" to portray the practice of *ngalap berkah* as a material transaction that is detrimental. M2 continues this deconstructive effort by specifically targeting the ritual of *ta'dzim*, representing it as a "feudal practice!" and employing the metaphor of a "ritual of power" to assert that acts of reverence, which are claimed to be ethical conduct (*adab*), are in fact instruments for reinforcing hierarchical status.

In data M3, the discourse constructed represents the teacher–*santri* relationship as a sacred spiritual relation rather than a relation of power. Through the quotation of KH. Masbuhin Faqih, *santri* are depicted as subjects who obtain the benefits of knowledge only if they possess a high degree of *ta'dzim* and humility toward their teacher. The teacher is represented as a figure who holds epistemic authority and serves as a conduit of *barakah*, so that reverence toward the teacher is positioned as an epistemic prerequisite for successful learning. This representation situates the hierarchical structure of the *pesantren* as an ethical and moral mechanism, rather than

a form of social domination. Thus, M3 constructs the image of pesantren as an institution that evaluates knowledge not only in cognitive terms, but also through the depth of adab and spirituality.

In data M4, the representation of the teacher–santri hierarchy is reinforced through a historical reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib, who is constructed as an ideal symbol of a student’s reverence toward the teacher. The teacher is portrayed as a figure possessing high spiritual authority and therefore deserving of total reverence from the santri, even described with the metaphor of “becoming a slave” as a form of spiritual, rather than socio-economic, submission. The santri are represented as recipients of knowledge who require adab in order to obtain barakah, while the teacher appears as the guardian of sanad and epistemic authority. Through this representation, M4 seeks to affirm that hierarchy within the pesantren is part of a legitimate and noble Islamic scholarly tradition, and therefore cannot be equated with feudal structures as understood in Western social theory.

b. Relations

The relationship between kiai and santri is constructed at the micro level as a vertical relation of subordination and absolute control. Critical discourse collectively employs high modality, with high modality in M1 and medium modality in M2, in order to assert the claim that this hierarchy is an undeniable social fact. M1 constructs the relationship on the basis of class inequality, in which the kiai is the ruler and the santri the subordinate. Meanwhile, M2 focuses on the mechanisms of everyday control, where the practice of hand-kissing is positioned as a “tool of control”. This critique emphasizes that such structural domination is concealed because feudalism is “wrapped in the name of adab, seasoned with religion”, making adab an ideological veil for power.

In the digital sphere, the discourse of ta’dzim also functions as a counter-discourse to critiques that equate pesantren hierarchy with feudalism. Many modern critiques view absolute reverence for teachers as a form of uncritical submission. However, through content such as M3 and M4, pesantren reframe this meaning by emphasizing that hierarchical relations in pesantren are part of the ethics of thalabul ‘ilmi, not social domination. The digital narratives produced by santri and ustadz seek to shift the frame from power relations toward ethical–spiritual relations. This constitutes a form of discursive practice that serves to maintain the legitimacy of pesantren ideology, in line with Fairclough’s explanation that discourse can become an arena for reproducing social structures through language, symbols, and narratives that are accepted as cultural truths. Thus, digital discourse on platforms such as TikTok is not merely a medium of da’wah, but also a battleground of meaning to preserve the authority of teachers within the traditional Islamic education system.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the emergence of ta’dzim discourse on social media demonstrates the capacity of pesantren to adapt to digital culture without sacrificing its traditional values. Short videos, casual delivery styles, and visual adjustments become new strategies for disseminating classical pesantren values to

younger generations living in a fast-paced culture. Positive responses from santri and alumni, visible in comments, likes, and public support, serve as evidence that this discourse is not only accepted but also reproduced by the pesantren community itself. This shows that ta'dzim is not merely a norm, but a collective identity that is continually maintained as a distinctive marker of pesantren amid modernization. Through digital platforms, values that previously existed only within the physical environment of the pesantren are now projected as part of the digital identity of the Muslim community.

Ultimately, the analysis of M3 and M4 shows that the discourse of ta'dzim toward teachers in pesantren social media functions not only as an ethical guideline but also as a strategic mechanism for preserving traditional Islamic epistemology. Social media becomes an important means for pesantren to revitalize the values of adab, barakah, and teacher authority in the midst of an educational world that increasingly emphasizes technical competence and rationality. By asserting that the success of knowledge depends on reverence for the teacher, pesantren construct a counter-narrative to modern educational paradigms while simultaneously re-projecting traditional values into the digital landscape. This discourse not only maintains the continuity of pesantren values, but also illustrates how traditional institutions are able to employ technology to safeguard their epistemic and spiritual identity amid rapid social change.

c. *Identity*

Critical discourse polarizes the identities of subjects in order to support its thesis of feudalism. The identity of the kiai is reduced from a spiritual figure to one who is excessively sacralized (M3 in the feudalism context: “regarded as sacred”), functioning as a source of domination. The kiai is identified as a “king” (M1), acting as a “figure of absolute authority who is often beyond contestation”. Conversely, the identity of the santri is constructed as subordinate—“commoners” (M1) or passive subjects. The use of “personal testimonies” in M2 is a crucial strategy that transforms the identity of santri from silent recipients of tradition into critical voices that provide empirical legitimacy to the claim that they are subjects trapped in a feudalistic system.

In data M3, the identity of santri is shaped as subjects who ideally possess high levels of humility and ta'dzim as prerequisites for gaining the benefit of knowledge. Santri are positioned as students whose moral and intellectual identities depend on the quality of adab they cultivate toward their teachers. The identity of santri here is not merely that of learners, but of seekers of knowledge who submit spiritually and ethically to the traditional structure of the pesantren. Meanwhile, the teacher is represented as a figure with unquestionable epistemic and spiritual legitimacy. The teacher appears as a source of barakah and holder of scholarly authority, so that this identity construction places the teacher as a guardian of the transmission of knowledge, respected not because of social domination, but because of moral depth, expertise, and the role in preserving sanad.

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In data M4, the identity of santri is shaped through the metaphor of “becoming a slave” in the context of Ali ibn Abi Talib’s statement, which underscores that the ideal santri is portrayed as a person who wholeheartedly honors the teacher as a form of spiritual commitment. The identity of santri is not built solely on intellectual aspects, but on the depth of respect and the awareness that knowledge is only beneficial through adab. The teacher in M4 is constructed as a figure who not only imparts knowledge but also acts as a mediator of blessing and scholarly legitimacy with deep historical roots in the Islamic tradition. Thus, the teacher’s identity emerges as noble, spiritually authoritative, and a central point of moral orientation for the santri. These two identities point to a relation that is mutual-spiritual rather than a power relation in a feudal framework, thereby reinforcing the notion that pesantren hierarchy is ethical rather than structurally dominative.

Mesostructural analysis

The analysis at the mesostructural level shows how these two opposing discourses are produced, distributed, and interact in the public sphere, which is key to shaping forms of social perception. In this case, they make use of digital spaces to interact and respond to each other regarding the meaning of pesantren authority. The debate, which initially took place at an internal level, has shifted into the public arena facilitated by non-hierarchical digital media (TikTok, Instagram, writing platforms). The discourse criticizing pesantren feudalism is produced by agents who carry external legitimacy and critical reasoning. In data M1, which comes from omongomong.com, the genre is a semi-academic popular essay rooted in Foucauldian analysis, while M2 is distributed through the Instagram account of Konde.co in the form of carousels or infographics by activist Yuniyanti Chuzaifah. The choice of these platforms is deliberate, aiming to bring the issue of pesantren hierarchy into the domain of public and socio-political accountability, demanding a reassessment of kiai-santri relations from the perspective of critical reason.

By choosing these platforms and genres, the critics seek to intervene in the non-pesantren public sphere. This is an effort to push for public accountability over internal pesantren practices, rather than confining discussion to internal spaces (such as study sessions or mudzakah). Both discourses interact in open social media. The critiques (M1, M2) are distributed through online media known as platforms for social and gender discussions (Konde.co) and critical essays (omongomong.com), which strategically bring the issue of kiai-santri relations into the domain of public accountability.

At the mesostructural level, data M3 and M4 show that the legitimizing discourse is produced by internal authorities of the pesantren, namely kiai or ustadz who possess scholarly and spiritual legitimacy. This content is disseminated through TikTok, a platform characterized by speed, simplicity, and strong visuality, enabling pesantren traditions to be adapted into formats easily consumed by younger generations. The choice of genre in the form of sermon clips and quotations from ulama figures reinforces an impression of authenticity as well as authority, because it relies on individuals highly respected in the Islamic tradition. This distribution strategy indicates that pesantren make use of digital media both to extend the reach

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of da'wah and to maintain their symbolic authority amid competing discourses in the modern public sphere.

Meanwhile, the legitimizing discourse (M3, M4) employs TikTok as an effective tool for rearticulating traditional values and distributing the narrative of ta'dzim to young audiences in an easily digestible format, demonstrating the pesantren's ability to adapt to the modern media landscape. The discursive practice they employ is Da'wah/Spiritual Education through video formats on TikTok, which functions as a mechanism of ideological reproduction aimed at transmitting the values of ta'dzim and humility to digital audiences.

The critiques (M1, M2) operate as discourses that explicitly carry out ideological re-semanticization. They transform the meanings of adab and barakah into mechanisms of control and symbolic exploitation, demanding that hierarchy be read as a feudal power relation. The legitimizing discourse (M3, M4) acts as a strategic defence, responding to accusations of feudalism by reaffirming that ta'dzim is an ethic of thalabul 'ilmi and a spiritual relation, not social domination. Through this strategic digital distribution, pesantren display their capacity to consciously manage meaning, authority, and spiritual values in the face of modern criticism, while at the same time reinforcing their collective identity.

Macrostructural analysis

At the ideological level, data M1 and M2 jointly challenge the hegemony of traditional spiritual authority, with their discourse rooted in the ideology of egalitarianism and Western rationality. Their critique focuses on the figure of the kiai as an unquestionable authority and exposes the symbolic domination of teachers who use adab as an instrument of feudal practice. In data M2, a Foucauldian framework is explicitly employed to explain how this ideology operates as a disciplining force upon mind and body, so that the internalization of power discourse results in santri performing services (working without pay) without feeling exploited. Thus, the macrostructural discourse aims to dismantle the subjectivation that compels santri to submit voluntarily and reproduce that power.

On this basis, there are socio-structural implications perceived as harmful, including: a culture of absolute obedience that creates the taboo of su'ul al-adab, thereby obstructing critical reasoning and making santri afraid to ask questions or even express opinions. As a result, the system becomes oriented merely toward content-knowledge and obscures the construction of knowledge. In addition, this feudalism strengthens a "culture of silence" that becomes an obstacle to justice. M1 and M2 implicitly argue that this culture of silence prevents santri from voicing injustice, symbolic violence, or cases of sexual violence, due to fear of being labelled disobedient or losing barakah. Therefore, the critiques in M1 and M2 constitute an ideological project aimed at forcing structural transformation, demanding that pesantren integrate principles of accountability, equality, and human rights into their practices.

At the macrostructural level, the discourse in M3 and M4 is rooted in the value system of traditional Islamic education that places ta'dzim as the foundation of scholarly ethics. In the socio-cultural context of pesantren, the teacher-santri hierarchy is not a product of material power relations as in feudalism from a Western perspective, but rather a moral and spiritual structure that governs how knowledge is understood, received, and practiced. This discourse operates within the ideology of adab and barakah, which emphasizes that intellectual success

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Commented [A43]: The manuscript repeatedly treats "Western rationality" as a singular ideological position. Greater theoretical precision is required, as Western intellectual traditions are highly diverse and cannot be reduced to a single orientation toward hierarchy.

Commented [A44]: The manuscript attributes concerns regarding symbolic violence and sexual violence to the analyzed discourse, yet no empirical evidence is presented beyond the selected texts. Please clarify whether these are findings from the corpus or broader societal concerns introduced by the authors.

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is determined by the purity of heart, intention, and the santri's reverence for the teacher as guardian of the chain of transmission of knowledge (sanad). Hence, M3 and M4 are not merely ethical exhortations, but a reproduction of an ideology deeply rooted in Islamic education, intended to preserve the continuity of scholarly tradition and the collective identity of pesantren.

At a broader social level, M3 and M4 form part of a contestation of meaning in the digital age, in which pesantren seek to maintain their epistemic authority amidst currents of modern criticism that frequently construe religious hierarchy as a form of feudalism. Through the narrative of ta'dzim reproduced on social media, pesantren both respond to and challenge such negative representations by demonstrating that the teacher-santri relationship is spiritual rather than structurally dominant. At the macro level, these two discourses reveal the dynamics of pesantren transformation in responding to contemporary demands: how traditional institutions adapt to digital platforms in order to maintain their social legitimacy. Thus, M3 and M4 not only reflect the internal values of pesantren but also show how pesantren negotiate with global discourses on freedom, egalitarianism, and authority in education.

Western and Islamic Dialectics in the Discourse of Pesantren Feudalism

In Karl Marx's view, feudalism is one stage in the historical development of society, marked by the domination of the landlord class over the peasantry through ownership of the principal means of production, namely land (Putri, 2023). Feudalism, according to Marx, is not merely an economic system, but also a socio-political structure that sustains class inequality and preserves the power of the feudal class. Within the framework of historical materialism, this phase is understood as a transitional form toward capitalism, when ownership of land shifts into ownership of capital and relations of production are transformed into relations between capital owners (the bourgeoisie) and wage labourers (the proletariat). Thus, feudalism reflects the dynamics of class struggle that, for Marx, constitute the driving motor of human history.

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Engels, 1884), Friedrich Engels explains feudalism as a historical socio-economic formation that emerges after the development of private ownership of land and other means of production, when the nobility and landlords monopolize economic resources and subjugate the peasantry through relations of personal dependence. Engels emphasizes that social relations in feudalism centre on land-based class domination, in which the surplus labour of peasants is exploited through systems of tribute and forced service institutionalized within traditional and religious structures of power (Perwitasari, 2009).

The relevance of these theories appears in social media discourses that stigmatize pesantren as closed, hierarchical, and anti-critical institutions, because they place the kiai in the position of highest authority. This narrative is heavily influenced by a Western-style feudal paradigm which assumes that vertical authority necessarily coincides with exploitative power relations, and which understands obedience as a form of "irrational submission".

From the perspective of Islamic scholarship, Imam al-Ghazali understands adab as a set of behavioural norms arising from purity of heart and spiritual orientation in the pursuit of knowledge, in which knowledge is not merely intellectual information but a means of purifying the soul and drawing closer to God. In al-Ghazali's view, adab is a body of moral rules,

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interactional ethics, and inner discipline that must be upheld by teacher and student so that the knowledge acquired becomes blessed and brings guidance, rather than mere intellectual pride (Aryanti et al., 2022). Accordingly, adab has two dimensions: first, internal adab relating to sincerity, humility, and orienting knowledge toward the hereafter; and second, external adab in the form of reverence for the teacher, discipline in study, and obedience to scholarly norms. For al-Ghazali, knowledge without adab will give rise to arrogance and moral corruption; thus adab functions as the guardian of the authority of knowledge, ensuring that it is transmitted through an authentic sanad and with the right intention. In this way, adab becomes the foundation of scholarly authority, the blessedness of knowledge, and the authentic transmission of learning within the Islamic educational tradition.

In the thought of Imam al-Ghazali as articulated in Ayyuha al-Walad, barakah is understood as a divine, unseen energy: a gift from God that brings goodness, ease of life, and happiness to a person even when it is not materially visible. Al-Ghazali stresses that barakah is part of a metaphysical reality that can only be experienced, not fully described, so its presence is measured by the enduring beneficial effects generated by righteous deeds and the sincerity of the actor (Widura et al., 2021). Etymologically, barakah signifies “an increase in goodness”, such that knowledge or deeds accompanied by barakah produce multiplied and sustained benefits that far exceed their physical measure. Thus, in al-Ghazali’s perspective, barakah is the spiritual foundation that animates knowledge and action, making them valuable in the sight of God and bringing welfare in this world as well as salvation in the hereafter.

The discourse of ta’dzim toward teachers in data M3 and M4 becomes particularly interesting when placed within the framework of Western feudal theory and Islamic epistemology. Both data sets affirm the importance of a student’s adab toward the teacher as a prerequisite for the blessedness of knowledge, but this is often misunderstood when read through Western social theory. In M3, KH Masbuhin Faqih emphasizes that “the benefit of knowledge depends on ta’dzim and respect for the teacher”, which aligns with al-Ghazali’s epistemology that views adab as purification of the soul prior to receiving knowledge (Aryanti et al., 2022). The quotation in M4 from Ali ibn Abi Talib further reinforces that reverence for the teacher is an ethic of scholarship, not structural subjugation, consistent with the concept of sanad as spiritual legitimacy in the pesantren tradition (Mcdonald, 2023).

Within Western feudal theory, Marx, Engels, and Hegel see hierarchy as a structure of domination based on land ownership, labour exploitation, and class inequality (Parlan & Bahar, 2024). However, the narratives in M3 and M4 show that the teacher–santri hierarchy does not arise from economic logic, but from the structure of Islamic knowledge. Through Fairclough’s discourse analysis, this hierarchy of ta’dzim functions to disarticulate accusations of feudalism and to rearticulate teacherly authority as epistemic rather than dominative. Even from a Hegelian perspective, the teacher–santri relation is not a form of alienation comparable to that of serf to lord, but an attitude of humility believed to be a condition for attaining wisdom. Likewise, Engels’s theory of class domination is inapplicable here because no surplus value is transferred from santri to teacher; what is transmitted is knowledge, adab, and barakah.

The concept of barakah in al-Ghazali is clearly foregrounded in M3–M4, where both link the benefits of knowledge to the attitude of ta’dzim. This underscores that the narrative is

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not constructing teacher domination, but rather creating spiritual conditions for knowledge to function optimally. As an ethic of scholarship, ta'dzim actually facilitates intellectual humility rather than obstructing critical thought, because the teacher is positioned as a mediator toward truth. Thus, the content in M3–M4 functions as a counter-discourse against the stigma of pesantren feudalism. At a time when modern media foregrounds egalitarianism that often rejects any form of hierarchy, pesantren employ short video formats—such as TikTok—to clarify the meaning of ta'dzim and highlight the fundamental difference between spiritual hierarchy and oppressive hierarchy characteristic of Western feudalism.

Conversely, the Critical Discourse of Feudalism (M1, M2) rejects this distinction. It operates on the assumption of egalitarianism, explicitly reducing spiritual claims to the political language of power. For these critics, the kiai's authority, construed as “sacred” (M3 in the feudalism context), is inherently a form of domination. M2 sophisticatedly employs Foucault rather than Marx/Engels to show that barakah and adab in fact function as disciplinary mechanisms that lead santri to accept labour exploitation voluntarily (without coercion). This critique demands that pesantren abandon such ethical structures if they close off spaces for critique and reason that are central to modern education.

Through this comparison, three key points emerge that distinguish pesantren structures from the Western concept of feudalism:

- a. Power structure vs. epistemic structure: The ta'dzim narratives in both contents (M3 and M4) are discursive practices that disarticulate accusations of feudalism and rearticulate the teacher–student hierarchy as an epistemic, not dominative, structure. This hierarchy is normative and theological rather than material. Here, an epistemological clash occurs, as described in (Khofifah, 2019), when Western concepts are used to interpret structures grounded in Islamic epistemology, resulting in dislocation of meaning and misunderstanding. This stands in contrast to M1 and M2, which explicitly reject this epistemic framing, reducing hierarchy to feudal power relations: M1 through monarchical metaphor, and M2 by focusing on rituals of reverence (hand-kissing) as legitimations of feudal practice and rituals of power that equate sacrality with domination that must be resisted through critical reason.
- b. Ethical function vs. dialectic of history: From a Hegelian standpoint, feudalism is a stage that has not yet attained universal rationality. However, pesantren hierarchy does not operate within a Hegelian dialectic of history; it is not a “delayed” phase on the way to modern freedom, but an ethical structure with a spiritual telos. This is reflected in M3–M4, which portray the teacher as a guardian of knowledge rather than a ruler who suppresses the autonomy of santri. The student's submission is not “self-alienation” as in Hegelian feudalism, but an expression of humility believed to be a prerequisite for attaining wisdom (Rahman et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in the critical discourses M1 and M2, ta'dzim is read as a practice that narrates irrational and dogmatic submission.
- c. Barakah vs. surplus value: Engels's theory of class domination in feudalism cannot be applied to pesantren because the teacher–santri relationship does not involve control of the means of production or exploitation of labour. No surplus value is transferred from santri to teacher. Instead, what is transmitted is knowledge, adab, and barakah. In this

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context, M3–M4 show that the teacher’s authority is spiritual, grounded not in economic ownership but in scholarly legitimacy and moral depth. This aligns with al-Ghazali’s notion of barakah, which emphasizes that blessedness arises only when the teacher–student relationship is framed by proper adab. The Critical Discourse (M1 and M2) directly attacks this concept of barakah, labelling ngalap berkah as “spiritual and economic exploitation” (M1). M2 details a subtler mechanism, drawing on Foucault, in which barakah is transformed into a transcendent Panopticon: fear that one’s knowledge will lack barakah compels santri to perform work (such as driving, farming) “without pay and without feeling exploited”, demonstrating that barakah has been instrumentalized to reproduce power and secure voluntary service rather than mere spirituality.

Accordingly, an analysis that links the M3–M4 discourse with Western feudal theory and Islamic epistemology shows that the allegation of “pesantren feudalism” essentially arises from an epistemological dislocation. While Western feudalism is rooted in economic–political domination, the pesantren structure is rooted in adab, barakah, and the chain of transmission of knowledge (sanad). The narratives in M3–M4 demonstrate that hierarchy in pesantren is not a constraint on freedom, but a prerequisite for the blessedness of knowledge in the Islamic tradition. Ultimately, this comparison concludes that epistemological dislocation is the root of the conflict: the Critical Discourse (M1, M2) views pesantren hierarchy through the lens of economic–political domination (Western feudalism), whereas the Legitimizing Discourse (M3, M4) views it through the lens of adab, barakah, and sanad (Islamic epistemology). The success of pesantren in disseminating this counter-discourse through digital media (such as TikTok) indicates an adaptive effort to reproduce ideology and maintain the symbolic authority of teachers in the face of modern rationality, while simultaneously strengthening collective identity in an era dominated by cross-interpretations.

Epistemological Implications for the Transformation of Islamic Education in the Digital Era

The discourse of “pesantren feudalism” that has developed on social media and in the digital public sphere often adopts a Western paradigm, in which the hierarchical relationship between kiai and santri is reduced to a form of domination or symbolic oppression. In such critiques and framings, visible in digital contents M1 and M2, the reverence of santri is narrated as a form of spiritual as well as economic exploitation. Within this logic, the authority of the kiai is viewed as a source of power that must be resisted through critical reason, so that rituals such as ngalap barokah or ta’dzim are recast as instruments for reproducing social power. In the dynamics of “pesantren feudalism” discourse on social media, the kiai–santri hierarchy is frequently constructed reductively as domination and symbolic violence. Yet the fragmented narratives in these digital spaces in fact reveal a sharp polarization between a Western paradigm that foregrounds egalitarianism and scepticism and the pesantren tradition that places ta’dzim as the basis of respect and the transmission of spiritual values.

Findings from interviews with pesantren leaders in Purwokerto affirm that feudal terminology and characteristics are not relevant for assessing social relations in pesantren.

According to the kiai, accusations of feudalism often come from outsiders who have never experienced or understood pesantren culture and are more influenced by viral trends or social sentiments about pesantren. Media framings that problematize traditions such as walking in a crouched position or carrying food with lowered hands are, from the kiai's perspective, manifestations of ta'dzim—sincere reverence rooted in tasawuf and pesantren adab, not relations of power—and the kiai's authority itself, he stresses, is neither absolute nor coercive, but grounded in adab, morality, and spirituality (Interview with M. Roqib, 13 November 2025). The kiai applies adab in treating santri with respect; the santri's respectful attitude emerges from adab and esteem toward the kiai, not from coercion by the kiai. In other words, the feudal label imposed by netizens in social media is refuted and shown to be baseless once the underlying epistemological dislocation is taken into account.

Santri likewise stress that ta'dzim is an obligation and a foundational character trait shaping their behaviour and spirituality. Their respect and obedience toward the kiai are not driven by coercion or oppression, but serve as a medium for instilling adab, loyalty, and life lessons. Santri firmly reject stereotypes that portray kiai as luxurious figures or santri as slaves; negative comments on social media are generally seen as coming from those with no lived experience in pesantren. Another implication is that digital sources of knowledge such as YouTube and social media are regarded as complementary, not as substitutes for kiai authority, because "the tradition of receiving knowledge from the kiai remains central and irreplaceable," as one santri stated (Interview with M. Nabil Abdullah, 13 November 2025).

According to both kiai and santri, negative framings on social media more often reflect misunderstanding or even hidden motives, including social jealousy toward the growing structural role of pesantren in Indonesia. This is further countered by examples of the simple lifestyles of many kiai—even when serving as officials or rectors, they continue to live close to santri, engage in mutual assistance, and reject luxurious treatment that is often projected from outside the pesantren (Interview with M. Roqib, 13 November 2025). The value of al-musawah (equality) is an important context, in which a kiai may personally drive santri, repair a mosque roof, and mingle without absolute hierarchy. From a reflective standpoint, the empirical experiences of kiai and santri indicate that feudalism claims are not only misguided but also dangerous when used to discredit a distinctive educational system that has been passed down for generations. At the same time, the criticism that emerges offers pesantren an opportunity for internal evaluation so that traditional practices do not give rise to abuses. The kiai even underscores the need for checking and re-checking prospective pesantren leaders to safeguard continuity of original values. Authoritative pesantren figures and religious elites more broadly must embody the values they deem good, rather than exploiting santri's reverence to act arbitrarily or in ways that depart from those values.

Epistemic tensions in the post-truth digital era underscore that the validity of narratives about pesantren is highly vulnerable to popular perception and framing, rather than being the result of rigorous empirical evaluation. Pesantren are therefore confronted with the challenge of value adaptation—not only preserving adab, but also filtering and selecting potential innovations in digital-based education. A major implication of this synthesis, as expressed in several interviews and supported by critical discourse analysis, is that the dialectic of feudalism

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and ta'dzim is shaping a new collective identity within the digital pesantren environment. The transformation of education in pesantren demands integration between sensitivity to tradition, prudence in responding to social media, and technological adaptability, without losing grounding in adab, barokah, and spiritual relations that have long served as the epistemological foundation of pesantren. In this way, the continuity of Islamic education in the digital era can be secured not merely through technological sophistication, but above all through a re-interpretation of traditional values in ways that are contextual and meaningful for today's and future generations of santri (Interview with M. Roqib, 13 November 2025; Interview with M. Nabil Abdullah, 13 November 2025).

These findings affirm that the dialectic between Western epistemology (which emphasizes power relations and criticality) and Islamic epistemology (which emphasizes adab, barokah, and spiritual reciprocity) within the discourse of pesantren feudalism has generated a new configuration in the transformation of Islamic education in the digital era. Rather than losing meaning, pesantren are in fact adapting and strengthening their epistemic and spiritual identity in the digital arena, demonstrating that educational transformation is grounded not only in technology, but also in the revitalization of traditional educational values and meanings in a contextual manner.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that the dialectic between narratives of feudalism and ta'dzim in pesantren discourse in the digital era reflects a clash between two epistemological paradigms: the Western paradigm, which interprets hierarchy as power domination, and Islamic epistemology, which understands hierarchy as the foundation of adab, barakah, and the transmission of scholarly authority. The accusation of "pesantren feudalism" in digital spaces is shown to rest on an epistemological dislocation, namely the tendency to interpret pesantren structures through a politico-economic lens that distorts the original meaning of the teacher-santri relationship. Critical discourse analysis and in-depth interviews indicate that the practice of ta'dzim in pesantren is not a form of oppression, but an ethical-spiritual mechanism that has been internalized within the Islamic educational tradition.

Pesantren have successfully adapted to the dynamics of social media, using digital spaces to reinforce symbolic authority, transmit the values of adab, and build the collective identity of santri and kiai amid modernization. The scholarly implications of this research underscore the importance of synthesizing traditional spiritual values and technological innovation in Islamic education so that pesantren can maintain epistemic authenticity and their social role in an era of information disruption. The dialectic mapped in this study not only encourages the revitalization of adab and barakah, but also offers a conceptual contribution to the development of theories on pesantren educational transformation in the face of global challenges. It is recommended that further research explore the mechanisms of value transfer and the adaptation processes of pesantren that have integrated digital technology, in order to ensure the continuity of a humanistic, contextual, and meaning-oriented Islamic education for future generations.

Commented [A52]: The conclusion extends beyond the empirical evidence presented in the study. Several statements are framed as definitive judgments—particularly regarding the alleged distortion of pesantren traditions, the non-oppressive nature of ta'dzim, and the successful adaptation of pesantren to digital environments—despite the limited empirical corpus analyzed. A more cautious and evidence-based conclusion is recommended. Please replace all

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Commented [A53]: The manuscript relies on a limited number of recent sources and would benefit from a stronger engagement with contemporary literature. The authors are advised to incorporate at least 25 references published since 2021 to better reflect current developments in the fields of Islamic education, digital discourse, and critical discourse analysis. In addition, the reference list and in-text citations should be thoroughly revised to comply with APA Style requirements. Particular attention should be given to capitalization, italicization, consistency of author names, journal titles, volume/issue formatting, and DOI presentation. The current inconsistencies reduce the overall scholarly presentation of the manuscript.

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