

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION OF SANTRI IN FACING THE AMBIVALENCE OF GLOBAL VALUES IN DIGITAL SPACE

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Abstract : The development of digital space has transformed the communication patterns of santri, particularly in accessing religious knowledge, constructing identity, and responding to global values. Santri no longer engage with pesantren values solely through classical Islamic texts, the guidance of kyai, and Islamic educational traditions; they now do so also through social media, visual content, digital algorithms, and artificial intelligence. This study aims to analyze the intercultural communication accommodation strategies of santri in facing the ambivalence of global values in digital space. This study adopts a library research design with a qualitative-descriptive approach. Data were obtained through a review of journal articles, academic literature, intercultural communication theories, pesantren regulations, and relevant documents on pesantren, santri, digital da'wah, and global culture. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis based on Communication Accommodation Theory, identity negotiation theory, and intercultural communication perspectives. The findings show that santri respond to the ambivalence of global values through value selection, communication convergence, identity divergence, and the internalization of digital adab. This study concludes that santri are active communication actors who adapt, filter, and affirm their Islamic identity in digital space, while pesantren function as value mediators between Islamic tradition and global digital culture.

Keywords: Communication Accommodation, Intercultural Communication, Santri, Pesantren, Digital Space, Digital Adab

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Introduction

Digital space has increasingly transformed the ways Muslim communities access religious knowledge, build social relations, express identity, and produce Islamic messages. Social media no longer functions merely as a medium of entertainment but has become a space for communication, da'wah, education, opinion formation, and the negotiation of religious identity. In digital religion studies, this transformation indicates that contemporary religious practices are increasingly shaped by technological mediation, social media platforms, and digital participatory culture (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Rohmawati et al., 2025). In Indonesia, digital space has also shaped new ways for Muslim communities to understand religious authority, follow da'wah figures, and express Islamic identity in public spaces (Zaid et al., 2022).

This transformation has also affected pesantren life. Pesantren can no longer be understood merely as traditional Islamic educational institutions centered on classical Islamic texts, kyai, halaqah, and the habituation of adab within physical educational spaces. Pesantren are now situated within a digital communication landscape that connects santri with social media, visual content, artificial intelligence, popular culture, and global information flows (Darajat et al., 2022). Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren affirms that pesantren perform educational, da'wah, and community empowerment functions. Therefore, pesantren are not only responsible for preserving the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also need to respond to social and technological changes that affect the lives of santri. Ideally, pesantren are expected to shape santri who are not only strong in religious understanding but also competent in communication, critical in evaluating information, ethical in media use, and capable of selectively filtering global values. Digital literacy in pesantren should not be understood merely as a technical ability to use digital devices or platforms. It should also be directed toward developing critical thinking, information verification skills, ethical awareness, and the strengthening of Islamic identity amid digital cultural flows (Umar et al., 2023). Several studies show that pesantren have the potential to develop value-based digital literacy because pesantren traditions emphasize the habituation of adab, discipline, and moral control in everyday life (Fitria, 2024).

However, the reality of santri's digital life reveals a more complex situation. Santri are situated between two value systems that do not always align (Noviani & Azkar, 2024). The first value system is pesantren culture, which emphasizes adab, discipline, simplicity, respect for scholarly authority, moral formation, and ethical responsibility. The second is the value system of global digital culture, which is characterized by information speed, openness of expression, visual culture, popularity, instant entertainment, and cross-border interaction. The encounter between these two value systems places santri in an ambivalent position: they need digital space for learning, da'wah, accessing information, building networks, and developing creativity, yet at the same time, they must maintain Islamic identity, communication ethics, social boundaries, and pesantren norms (Zaini & Hamidah, 2023). This ambivalence becomes increasingly evident in the growing attention to santri digital literacy. The

Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia stated that more than 70 percent of santri actively use social media every day. This data shows that santri are not a group separated from digital culture but part of a digital society that directly interacts with algorithms, global trends, da'wah content, popular culture, and the risks of online communication. The strengthening of digital literacy for students and santri within religious educational institutions also indicates that the state views pesantren as strategic spaces for developing digital ethics, child protection, and responsible media use. Therefore, the main issue is no longer whether pesantren accept or reject digital technology, but how santri select, adapt, and negotiate global values so that they remain aligned with Islamic values and pesantren traditions (Rohmawati et al., 2025).

A number of previous studies have examined pesantren and digitalization from various perspectives. Darajat et al. (2022) show that pesantren and madrasas have distinctive digital literacy practices because the introduction of technology remains connected to educational needs and Islamic values. Umar et al. (2023) also found that pesantren culture can serve as an important basis for shaping santri digital literacy, especially when santri are encouraged to use digital media productively without abandoning their Islamic identity. Fitria (2024) emphasizes that digital literacy among Generation Z santri is important for supporting learning, da'wah, and competency development within pesantren environments. These studies demonstrate that pesantren digitalization is not merely a technological process but also a cultural and educational process. Other studies position digitalization as both a challenge and an opportunity for pesantren da'wah. Mabur and Hairul (2022) explain that the transformation of digital da'wah provides pesantren with opportunities to expand the reach of Islamic messages, but at the same time presents challenges because digital spaces allow anyone to produce religious messages without adequate scholarly authority (Mabur & Hairul, 2022). Research on the adaptation of pesantren da'wah in the digital era also shows that pesantren can transform conventional da'wah formats into popular digital media in order to remain relevant to contemporary patterns of information consumption (Zamiluddin A & Hadi, 2025). In addition, studies on traditional santri values in the digital era indicate that technological change can influence social relations, self-expression, and the social behavior of santri (Zaini & Hamidah, 2023).

Nevertheless, these previous studies still leave an academic gap. Most research tends to position pesantren as institutions adapting to technology or santri as objects of digital literacy development. Studies that specifically examine santri as intercultural communication actors who actively select, adapt, and negotiate global values in digital space remain limited and need further development (Giles et al., 2023). In digital communication practices, santri do not merely receive messages; they also produce messages, choose symbols, adjust communication styles, manage identity, and determine ethical boundaries in online interaction. Therefore, santri digital practices should not be understood merely as a matter of technological skills. They need to be examined as an intercultural communication process that brings together pesantren values, Islamic values, local culture, and global digital culture. To address this gap,

this article employs Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as its main theoretical framework. This theory explains that individuals can adjust their communication styles through convergence and divergence in social interaction (Zhang & Giles, 2017). Convergence occurs when communicators adapt their communication style to become closer to their interlocutors or target audiences, while divergence occurs when communicators emphasize differences in order to maintain group identity (Elhami, 2020). In the context of santri, convergence can be seen when santri use social media, popular language, visual design, short videos, or digital da'wah formats so that Islamic messages can be more easily received by digital audiences. Conversely, divergence can be seen when santri continue to maintain adab, Islamic symbols, pesantren norms, and moral boundaries in facing global digital trends that are not in line with pesantren values. In addition to Communication Accommodation Theory, this article also uses the perspectives of identity negotiation and intercultural communication. Santri identity cannot be understood as fixed and singular (Ting-Toomey, 2017). Santri carry identities as Muslims, pesantren students, members of religious communities, and part of the digital generation. These identities are negotiated when santri interact with digital culture, which has communication norms different from those of the pesantren environment. In digital space, santri can appear modern without abandoning Islamic values, use global platforms without losing adab, and follow technological developments without neglecting pesantren principles. Therefore, santri strategies in digital space need to be understood as a form of intercultural communication accommodation that is selective, ethical, and identity-oriented.

The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to read santri digital practices through the framework of intercultural communication accommodation. Unlike previous studies that have mostly discussed digital literacy, digital da'wah, or the institutional transformation of pesantren, this article positions santri as active communication subjects in facing the ambivalence of global values. This article argues that santri are not merely users of digital media but actors who engage in value selection, communication convergence, identity divergence, and the internalization of digital adab. In this way, digital space is not viewed solely as a threat to pesantren tradition, but also as an arena of value negotiation that enables santri to express Islamic identity in an adaptive and responsible manner. Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the intercultural communication accommodation strategies of santri in facing the ambivalence of global values in digital space. The focus of the study is directed toward three main questions: what forms of global value ambivalence are faced by santri in digital space, how santri communication strategies respond to these global values, and how pesantren play a role in shaping santri digital communication ethics. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich Islamic communication studies and intercultural communication studies by positioning pesantren as a space of encounter among Islamic values, local traditions, and global digital culture. Practically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of

pesantren digital literacy that is not only oriented toward technical competence but also toward adab, identity, communication ethics, and da'wah responsibility in digital space.

Research Methodology

This study employed a library research design with a qualitative descriptive approach (Snyder, 2019). The design was selected because the study did not involve field data collection through interviews, observations, or surveys; instead, it examined literature, documents, theories, regulations, and scholarly publications related to the intercultural communication accommodation of santri in responding to the ambivalence of global values in digital spaces. Library research is defined as a systematic process of identifying, selecting, reading, classifying, analyzing, and synthesizing written sources to develop a conceptual understanding of a socio-communicative phenomenon (Torraco, 2005; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The research setting was conceptual and documentary rather than site-specific, focusing on pesantren, santri, digital da'wah, digital literacy, social media, intercultural communication, and global values through documentary sources (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2019; Bowen, 2009). Literature searching and source review were conducted between May and June 2026.

Data sources consisted of conceptual primary and secondary sources (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Primary sources included key works on Communication Accommodation Theory, Identity Negotiation Theory, intercultural communication, and pesantren-related regulations. Secondary sources comprised scholarly studies on pesantren digital literacy, digital da'wah, the transformation of santri values in the digital era, and religious practices in digital environments.

Rather than using a human population, the study employed literature and documents as its units of analysis, including ideas, concepts, categories, and arguments concerning santri, pesantren, digital communication, global values, and Islamic communication ethics (Nowell et al., 2017). Source selection followed predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance, credibility, and analytical rigor (Byrne, 2022; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Data were collected through documentation and organized using a document review sheet. Data analysis employed thematic content analysis, involving source familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and synthesis. Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, persistent reading, and an audit trail. Since no human participants were involved, the study relied solely on literature search tools, word-processing software, and reference management applications such as Mendeley or Zotero (Hua, 2015).

Results and Discussion

The literature review shows that digital space has become an important arena in the communicative life of santri. Santri no longer receive religious values only through classical Islamic texts, kyai, ustadz, halaqah, and pesantren educational traditions, but also through social media, short videos, visual content, digital da'wah platforms, and artificial intelligence. This condition indicates an expansion of santri communication space from the physical environment of pesantren to digital space, which is open, fast, visual, and intercultural. In this context, pesantren can no longer be understood merely as traditional Islamic educational institutions that preserve religious values within a closed social space. Rather, pesantren are situated at the intersection of Islamic values, local traditions, pesantren culture, and global digital values. This finding is in line with Darajat et al. (2022), who show that pesantren and madrasas have distinctive digital literacy practices because the use of technology remains connected to Islamic educational traditions. Umar et al. (2023) also explain that santri digital literacy develops through pesantren culture, meaning that the digital competence of santri cannot be separated from the values, rules, and habits that exist within the pesantren environment.

The first finding shows that santri face the ambivalence of global values in digital space. This ambivalence emerges because digital space offers both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, digital media provide santri with opportunities to access knowledge, expand da'wah networks, follow scientific and religious developments, build creativity, and deliver Islamic messages to a wider public. On the other hand, digital space also carries risks such as instant culture, excessive entertainment, unrestricted communication styles, unverified information, the commodification of religion, cyberbullying, data exploitation, and exposure to content that is not always compatible with pesantren adab. In this position, santri cannot be viewed merely as technology users. They are situated within an intercultural communication context because they must encounter different value systems between pesantren culture and global digital culture. Zaini and Hamidah (2023) show that communication technology can influence the transformation of traditional santri values, particularly in social relations and self-expression. Noviani and Azkar (2024) also emphasize that santri character formation is strongly shaped by disciplinary practices and social norms within the pesantren environment. Thus, the ambivalence of global values is not merely a matter of media use, but a matter of value and identity negotiation.

The second finding shows that santri respond to this ambivalence through the strategy of value selection. Value selection refers to the process of choosing digital elements considered beneficial and rejecting digital elements viewed as contradictory to pesantren values. Digital values that support learning, da'wah, creativity, and self-development are accepted in a limited and controlled manner. Conversely, values that encourage consumptive behavior, excessive self-expression, violations of adab, or weakened self-control are filtered and avoided. This strategy indicates that santri are

not passive recipients of global culture. They act as active subjects who interpret, choose, and limit digital influences based on Islamic values and pesantren traditions. This finding strengthens Fitria's (2024) argument that digital literacy among Generation Z santri should not be directed only toward technical competence, but must also be linked to ethics, responsibility, and character formation. Fikri (2023) also emphasizes that Islamic education plays an important role in developing social media literacy through critical thinking, digital ethics, and communication responsibility.

The third finding reveals the existence of communication convergence strategies. In Communication Accommodation Theory, convergence occurs when communicators adjust their communication style to become closer to their interlocutors or target audiences. In the context of santri, convergence appears when santri use popular language, visual design, short videos, brief da'wah quotations, motivational narratives, and social media platforms to convey Islamic messages. This strategy enables da'wah messages to enter the communication space of the digital generation without relying solely on conventional da'wah models. In other words, santri adjust the form of communication without changing the substance of Islamic values. This finding is consistent with Elhami (2020), Zhang and Giles (2017), and Giles et al. (2023), who explain that communication accommodation allows individuals or groups to adapt communication styles based on social context, interactional goals, and identity relations. In the context of digital da'wah, Mabur and Hairul (2022) also show that the transformation of pesantren da'wah in the digital era opens opportunities to expand Islamic messages through new media. However, communication convergence does not mean that santri completely merge into global digital culture.

The fourth finding shows the presence of identity divergence strategies. Divergence occurs when santri continue to affirm the boundaries of pesantren values amid digital flows. This can be seen in their caution in following trends, emphasis on media adab, limitation of self-expression, selection of content aligned with Islamic values, use of Islamic symbols, and rejection of content that contradicts moral values. This strategy is important because digital space often encourages speed, popularity, self-exposure, and freedom of expression, whereas pesantren emphasize politeness, self-control, respect for scholarly authority, and moral responsibility. Thus, identity divergence becomes a way for santri to preserve the distinctiveness of pesantren values. This finding is consistent with the principles of Communication Accommodation Theory, which not only discusses adjustment but also the affirmation of differences to maintain group identity (Giles et al., 2023; Elhami, 2020). From the perspective of intercultural communication, this divergence indicates that santri do not reject modernity, but negotiate boundaries so that digital modernity does not erase pesantren identity.

The fifth finding shows that santri strategies in digital space also take the form of identity negotiation. Santri carry more than one identity in digital space: as Muslims, pesantren students, members of religious communities, and part of the

digital generation. These identities are negotiated when santri attempt to remain relevant to social media culture while maintaining Islamic and pesantren values. In practice, santri can use global platforms while still delivering da'wah messages; follow popular communication formats while maintaining ethics; and use technology while placing it within an ethical framework of akhlak. This finding is in line with Ting-Toomey's (2017) identity negotiation theory, which views identity as something constructed, negotiated, and maintained in intercultural interaction. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) also show that contemporary religious practices are increasingly influenced by digital media, so religious identity does not only exist in worship spaces but also appears in digital communication spaces. Therefore, santri identity in digital space is dynamic rather than static.

The sixth finding indicates that the internalization of digital adab becomes the core of santri communication strategies. Digital adab can be understood as the extension of pesantren values into online communication spaces. Adab does not only apply to the relationship between santri and kyai, ustadz, or fellow santri in the physical environment of pesantren, but also to the ways santri create content, comment, share information, protect privacy, verify news, and respond to differences of opinion. Thus, pesantren digital literacy should not consist merely of skills in using social media or digital applications. It also needs to include communication ethics, algorithmic awareness, data protection, information verification, self-control, and da'wah responsibility. This finding reinforces Darajat et al. (2022), Umar et al. (2023), and Fitria (2024), who similarly show that digital literacy in pesantren must be connected to value formation, not merely technical skills. In this context, pesantren function as spaces for shaping digital ethics that place technology under the guidance of Islamic values.

The seventh finding shows that pesantren function as value mediators between Islamic tradition and global digital culture. This role can be seen in the ability of pesantren to preserve scholarly traditions, adab, and religious authority while also opening space for adaptation to technological developments. Pesantren do not stand outside digital globalization, but they also do not dissolve entirely into the logic of digital culture. Their position is better understood as a hybrid space, namely a space that brings together tradition and modernity, local and global values, Islamic education and communication technology. This is in line with Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren, which affirms the functions of pesantren in education, da'wah, and community empowerment. In the digital context, these functions require pesantren not only to teach religious knowledge but also to guide santri to communicate ethically, critically, and responsibly in digital space.

The following table summarizes the relationship between research findings, literature bases, theoretical interpretations, and research implications.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Santri Intercultural Communication Accommodation in Digital Space

Finding Theme	Form of Finding	Relationship with Theory	Supporting Literature	Implication
Ambivalence of global values	Santri face two sides of digital space: opportunities for da'wah, learning, and creativity, as well as risks of instant culture, unethical content, and invalid information.	Digital space becomes an intercultural communication arena because it brings together pesantren values and global values.	Zaini & Hamidah (2023); Noviani & Azkar (2024); Campbell & Tsuria (2021).	Pesantren need to understand digitalization as a value-related issue, not merely a technological issue.
Value selection	Santri accept digital elements that support da'wah and learning, but reject elements that damage adab and akhlak.	Value selection demonstrates santri's ability to interpret digital culture critically.	Darajat et al. (2022); Umar et al. (2023); Fitria (2024).	Pesantren digital literacy must be based on ethics, information verification, and self-control.
Communication convergence	Santri use popular language, short videos, visual design, and social media to convey Islamic messages.	In accordance with CAT, communicators adjust their communication style to become closer to digital audiences.	Zhang & Giles (2017); Elhami (2020); Giles et al. (2023); Mabur & Hairul (2022).	Pesantren da'wah can be expanded through digital media without losing the substance of Islamic values.
Identity divergence	Santri continue to maintain adab, Islamic symbols, social boundaries, and pesantren	In accordance with CAT, communicators emphasize differences to maintain group	Giles et al. (2023); Elhami (2020); Zaini & Hamidah	Santri need ethical boundaries so that they do not dissolve into digital popular

	norms.	identity.	(2023).	culture.
Identity negotiation	Santri appear simultaneously as Muslims, pesantren students, and members of the digital generation.	Identity is negotiated in intercultural interaction and digital space.	Ting-Toomey (2017); Campbell & Tsuria (2021); Rohmawati et al. (2025).	Santri identity needs to be understood as a dynamic identity formed through digital interaction.
Internalization of digital adab	Pesantren adab is extended into the practices of creating content, commenting, sharing information, and protecting privacy.	Communication accommodation does not only occur in language, but also in ethics, symbols, and digital behavior.	Darajat et al. (2022); Umar et al. (2023); Fitria (2024); Giles et al. (2023).	Pesantren need to formulate a digital literacy model based on adab, akhlak, and da'wah responsibility.
Pesantren as value mediator	Pesantren filter digital culture and guide santri so that technology remains aligned with Islamic values.	Pesantren become hybrid spaces that bring together Islamic tradition and global digital culture.	Republik Indonesia (2019); Mabrur & Hairul (2022); Darajat et al. (2022).	Pesantren can become centers for shaping Islamic communication ethics in the digital era.

Based on the table, santri communication strategies in facing the ambivalence of global values can be formulated into four main patterns. First, santri engage in value selection, namely choosing beneficial digital elements and limiting elements that contradict pesantren adab. Second, santri engage in communication convergence by adjusting the form of Islamic messages to the characteristics of digital communication. Third, santri engage in identity divergence by maintaining pesantren symbols, values, and boundaries amid global digital culture. Fourth, santri internalize digital adab by bringing pesantren moral values into online communication practices. These four patterns indicate that santri communication accommodation does not only occur at the level of language, but also in media choice, da'wah format, expressive style, identity symbols, and communication ethics.

The relationship between the findings and the literature shows that this article expands studies on pesantren and digitalization. Previous studies have largely

emphasized digital literacy, da'wah transformation, and pesantren adaptation to new media. This article continues those discussions but gives new emphasis to santri as intercultural communication actors. Santri are not merely objects of digital literacy development, but subjects who adjust, filter, and affirm identity in digital space. By using Communication Accommodation Theory, this article shows that santri digital practices can be read through two simultaneous movements: moving closer to digital culture through convergence and maintaining distance from contradictory values through divergence. Meanwhile, identity negotiation theory helps explain that santri identity is not singular, but is formed through the relationship between Islam, pesantren identity, and the digital generation. The theoretical implication of this study lies in the expansion of Communication Accommodation Theory within Islamic communication and pesantren studies. So far, the theory has more often been used to explain adjustments in language, accent, speech style, or interpersonal interaction in specific social contexts. Through this study, Communication Accommodation Theory can also be used to examine the communication strategies of religious groups in facing global digital culture. Santri communication accommodation is not only visible in ways of speaking, but also in platform selection, da'wah message formats, identity symbols, ethical boundaries, and ways of presenting the self in digital space. Thus, this article contributes to the development of digital Islamic communication studies and intercultural communication studies.

The practical implication of this study shows that pesantren need to develop a digital literacy model based on adab. Pesantren digital literacy should not be limited to the ability to operate devices, create content, or use social media. It should include the ability to verify information, understand algorithmic risks, protect privacy, avoid hate speech, manage self-expression, and use digital media as a responsible means of da'wah. Pesantren also need to guide santri to distinguish between adaptation and imitation. Adaptation means using digital technology to strengthen da'wah and learning, while imitation means following digital culture without value-based filtering. Thus, pesantren can become strategic spaces for the formation of Islamic communication ethics in the digital era. Overall, the results and discussion affirm that santri are active communication actors in facing the ambivalence of global values. Santri neither completely reject digital culture nor accept it freely. They select values, adjust communication styles, maintain identity, and internalize digital adab. Pesantren function as value mediators that help santri manage the relationship between Islamic tradition and global digital culture. Therefore, digital space is not merely a threat to pesantren values, but can also become an arena for da'wah, learning, and strengthening Islamic identity when managed through strong communication ethics.

Conclusion

This study shows that digital space has become an important arena for communication, identity formation, and value negotiation among santri. Santri no longer encounter pesantren values only through classical Islamic texts, kyai, ustadz,

and Islamic educational traditions, but also through social media, visual content, popular culture, digital algorithms, and artificial intelligence. This condition produces value ambivalence because digital space provides opportunities for learning, da'wah, creativity, and network expansion, while at the same time presenting risks such as instant culture, invalid information, excessive self-expression, cyberbullying, data exploitation, and content that is not always aligned with pesantren adab. The strategies of santri in facing the ambivalence of global values can be understood through intercultural communication accommodation. Santri engage in value selection by accepting digital elements that support da'wah, learning, and self-development, while limiting elements that contradict akhlak and pesantren norms. Santri also perform communication convergence through the use of social media, popular language, visual design, short videos, and digital da'wah formats so that Islamic messages can be received by digital audiences. At the same time, santri engage in identity divergence by maintaining adab, Islamic symbols, social boundaries, pesantren norms, and moral responsibility. These strategies show that santri are not passive recipients of global culture, but active communication actors who adapt, filter, and affirm their identity in digital space.

The findings of this study confirm that pesantren function as value mediators between Islamic tradition and global digital culture. Pesantren do not only preserve Islamic scholarly traditions and adab, but also need to guide the use of technology so that it remains aligned with Islamic values. Theoretically, this study expands the use of Communication Accommodation Theory in Islamic communication and intercultural communication studies by showing that accommodation does not only occur in speech style, but also in media choices, message formats, identity symbols, and digital communication ethics. Practically, this study recommends strengthening pesantren digital literacy based on adab, including the ability to verify information, protect privacy, understand algorithmic risks, manage self-expression, and use digital media as an ethical and responsible means of da'wah. Future research is encouraged to use field-based approaches, interviews, digital observation, or netnography so that santri communication practices in digital space can be understood more empirically and contextually (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

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