

Framing the Trans7 Boycott within Digital Ethics and Santri Community Resistance to Mainstream Media Narratives

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Abstract. The Trans7 boycott phenomenon, triggered by the television program *Xpose Uncensored*, illustrates the tension between mainstream media representation and the cultural sensitivity of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The broadcast portrayed the *kiai-santri* relationship as a form of social inequality, which subsequently generated public criticism and digital resistance movements among the *santri* community. This study aims to examine the construction of media framing, identify violations of digital ethics, and analyze the forms of resistance undertaken by *pesantren* communities against dominant media narratives. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, the analysis draws on Robert M. Entman's framing model and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. Data were collected from the *Xpose Uncensored* broadcast, online news coverage, social media content, and in-depth interviews with *santri*, *kiai*, and media activists, with validity ensured through source triangulation. The findings reveal that Trans7 framed *pesantren* culture in a reductive and biased manner by emphasizing narratives of social inequality while neglecting the contextual meaning of *ta'dzim* (respect and reverence) embedded in *pesantren* traditions. Such framing constitutes violations of key principles of digital ethics, particularly accountability, cultural sensitivity, and participatory verification. In response, the *santri* community engaged in digital resistance through hashtag campaigns, public clarifications, and the production of counter-narrative content that reaffirmed the ethical and spiritual significance of respect within *pesantren* culture. This movement represents a form of semiotic resistance and an expression of Islamic value-based digital literacy. These findings resonate with cultural resistance theory and Habermas's concept of the digital public sphere. The study underscores that biased media framing and weak cultural sensitivity can provoke constructive religious resistance, while highlighting the need for a model of digital ethics grounded in Islamic values and Indonesia's cultural pluralism.

Keywords: Media Framing; Digital Ethics; *Pesantren*; *Santri* Resistance; Islamic Communication

1. Introduction

Ideally, the media function as an ethical, fair, and culturally just bridge of information. From an Islamic perspective, principles of sound public communication are articulated through the values of *qaulan sadīda* (truthful speech), *qaulan ma'rūfa* (appropriate and respectful speech), and *qaulan baligha* (meaningful and impactful communication), as reflected in the Qur'anic injunction: "So fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice" (Qur'an, An-Nisā' [4]: 9) (Munawarah, 2021). These principles resonate with modern journalistic ethics, which emphasize accuracy, balance, and fairness in representation (Dörr & Hollnbuchner, 2017; Laws & Utne, 2019; Roberts, 2019; Rozehnal, 2022). Ideally, mass media – including television – should not only serve as a social watchdog but also act as a moral gatekeeper that safeguards sensitivity toward societal values, cultures, and belief systems.

However, in the digital era, the boundary between freedom of expression and ethical responsibility has become increasingly blurred. Rating competition and social media algorithms often privilege click-based economic logic over the moral integrity of information. Within this context, digital ethics has emerged as a critical testing ground for the media industry, where every public communication product may trigger social resistance if it is perceived as violating community values (Ess, 2021; Floridi, 2013).

Framing studies underscore that media representations are never neutral. Entman (1993) conceptualizes framing as the process of selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient in order to promote particular interpretations. In the Indonesian context, several studies indicate that mainstream media representations of *pesantren* are frequently biased, stereotypical, and insufficient in capturing their cultural complexity (Hefni, 2016, 2017).

This phenomenon is further reinforced by Heryanto's (2017) findings, which reveal that television coverage of *santri* life tends to emphasize exotic elements such as physical simplicity, ritual practices, and hierarchical relations between *kiai* and *santri*, while neglecting the deeper cultural meanings underlying these practices. Such framing patterns generate perceptual gaps between *pesantren* communities and urban audiences, who constitute the dominant viewership of television media (Dawud & Choliq, 2020; Isyroofanaa et al., 2021; Masykuroh & Jannah, 2018).

The Trans7 boycott that erupted on digital platforms in mid-2024 represents a contemporary case illustrating how media framing can provoke socio-religious resistance. The *Xpose Uncensored* program broadcasted selected scenes of *pesantren* activities – such as *santri* crouching while serving a *kiai* and the distribution of envelopes – accompanied by narratives of "feudalism" and "the luxury of *kiai*." These clips went viral on X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram under hashtags such as #BoikotTrans7 and #Trans7HinaSantri, subsequently triggering protests from organizations including Nahdlatul Ulama, LBH Ansor, and the Santri Nusantara Community (Erakini.id, 2025; Jurnal9.tv, 2025; Pojok Satu Sulsel, 2025).

Several studies affirm that *santri* communities possess a high degree of cultural resilience in responding to external narratives. Research by Setyawan et al. (2021)

demonstrates that *pesantren* rely on social capital, alumni networks, *kiai* authority, and religious solidarity to preserve their image and legitimacy when confronted with public opinion pressures. In the digital context, such resilience is manifested through digital activism, including hashtag mobilization, moral campaigns, and media boycotts against outlets perceived as unethical (Arifin & Nurul Anam, 2023; Hidayana, 2021).

This phenomenon reveals a new dimension of digital ethics in Indonesia, extending beyond issues of hate speech or disinformation to encompass the rights of cultural communities to receive fair representation in digital public spaces. As Floridi (2013) argues, digital ethics seeks to balance informational power between information producers and information subjects. In the Trans7 case, this power asymmetry is evident when a national media outlet re-narrates *pesantren* symbols without the participation or clarification of the *pesantren* community itself.

Although numerous studies have examined media representations of Islam (Fahmi, 2016; Pamungkas & Octaviani, 2017; Sari & Syas, 2023; Yahya et al., 2020), most have focused on ideological discourse or radicalism coverage. Empirical research addressing how mainstream media framing triggers digital resistance among *pesantren* communities—particularly within the context of television broadcasting ethics—remains limited.

Previous research has also tended to position *pesantren* as objects of discourse rather than as active communication actors negotiating meaning within digital spaces. Moreover, digital ethics literature in Indonesia remains fragmented, largely confined to information technology and legal studies, with limited engagement with local religious and cultural contexts. Consequently, this study occupies a distinctive position by integrating framing theory, digital ethics, and analyses of *santri* community resistance to mainstream media.

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of Islamic communication and critical media studies in Indonesia by integrating framing theory (Entman, 1993) with the concept of ethical digital citizenship (Ess, 2017). The findings are expected to elucidate how media meaning construction influences public perceptions of religious groups while highlighting the mechanisms of cultural resistance employed by *pesantren* communities. Practically, the study offers policy-relevant insights for broadcasting institutions and regulatory bodies such as the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) and the Press Council, particularly in strengthening cultural sensitivity checks prior to airing content involving religious groups (Baskoro, 2021; Hutabarat et al., 2023; Yeti Andrias et al., 2023). For *pesantren*, this research underscores the importance of developing digital literacy and alternative content production capabilities, enabling them to move beyond being passive subjects of framing toward becoming active participants in the public communication ecosystem.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the construction of Trans7's media framing in news coverage and broadcasts that triggered the Trans7 boycott by employing Robert M. Entman's framing theory. It seeks to uncover how narratives,

linguistic choices, and visual representations shape public perceptions of the *santri* community. Furthermore, the study aims to identify forms of digital ethics violations in the processes of content production and distribution, particularly concerning editorial responsibility, representational fairness, and cultural sensitivity that are often neglected in broadcasting practices. Finally, the study endeavors to explain patterns of *santri* community resistance to mainstream media narratives, manifested through digital reactions such as hashtags, online commentary, and counter-content production, as well as through offline social actions including demonstrations and moral appeals by religious institutions. Ultimately, this research seeks to formulate principles of ethical communication grounded in Islamic values that may serve as guidelines for media institutions in covering religious issues in a fair, balanced, and human dignity-oriented manner within culturally plural societies.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm to understand how social reality is constructed through media representation and how the *santri* community negotiates meaning in response to that reality. This approach is selected because the Trans7 boycott is not merely an empirical issue, but also involves complex questions of meaning, interpretation, and cultural communication dynamics. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of the symbolic contexts embedded in media texts, as well as the subjective dimensions underlying the resistance of *santri* communities. The constructivist paradigm positions media institutions, audiences, and religious communities as actors that mutually produce social reality (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2009). Accordingly, this study focuses not only on what is reported, but also on how messages are constructed, interpreted, and responded to within *pesantren* communities.

The primary method applied in this research is framing analysis based on Robert M. Entman's (1993) model, which consists of four key elements: *define problems*, *diagnose causes*, *make moral judgments*, and *suggest remedies*. This analytical framework is used to examine how the Trans7 *Xpose Uncensored* program frames *pesantren* and the *santri* community within a specific context, and how visual, narrative, and linguistic elements are mobilized to reinforce particular perspectives. Each framing element is analyzed through textual units such as voice-over narration, lexical choices, visual structures, and supporting narratives disseminated through Trans7's online platforms. This technique allows the researcher to unpack the process of media reality construction while identifying bias, symbolism, and implicit meanings embedded within the representations.

In addition to framing analysis, this study also applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as proposed by Norman Fairclough (1997, 2013) to deepen the examination of power relations and ideological structures operating within media texts. This approach is employed to analyze how mainstream media position themselves as authorities of knowledge in defining social meanings, and how *pesantren*, as the subject

of news coverage, respond through counter-discourses in digital spaces. By combining framing analysis and critical discourse analysis, this study seeks to connect the micro-level of textual analysis with the macro-level of social structures and ideology, thereby producing a comprehensive understanding that moves beyond purely textual interpretation.

To obtain accurate and in-depth data, this study utilizes a triangulated data collection strategy comprising three primary sources: (1) primary data in the form of documentation of the Trans7 *Xpose Uncensored* broadcast that triggered the boycott movement, as well as digital content from social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube representing public reactions; (2) secondary data consisting of online news articles from portals such as *republika.co.id*, *jatimtimes.com*, *mui.or.id*, *lampung.nu.or.id*, and *jurnal9.tv* covering the incident; and (3) in-depth interviews with key informants, including journalists, *kiai*, *santri*, and Islamic media activists. This triangulated approach enables verification between media constructions, community perceptions, and on-the-ground social realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Table 1. List of Online News Coverage on the Framing of the Trans7 Boycott

No	Media	News Title	Link
1	mui.or.id	<i>Warganet Serukan Boikot Trans7, Imbas Singgung Pesantren Lirboyo dan Pengasuhnya KH Anwar Manshur</i>	https://mui.or.id/baca/berita/warganet-serukan-boikot-trans7-imbasinggung-pesantren-lirboyo-dan-pengasuhnya-kh-anwar-manshur
2	lampung.nu.or.id	<i>Trans 7 dan Framing Negatif Tentang Kearifan budaya Pesantren</i>	https://lampung.nu.or.id/opini/trans-7-dan-framing-negatif-tentang-kearifan-budaya-pesantren-rQt0
3	infomu.co	<i>Bahaya Penyederhanaan Narasi : Refleksi Atas Tayangan yang Memicu Boikot Trans7</i>	https://infomu.co/bahaya-penyederhanaan-narasi-refleksi-atas-tayangan-yang-memicu-boikot-trans7/
4	jurnal9.tv	<i>Melihat Tradisi Pesantren dalam Gelombang #BoikotTrans7</i>	https://jurnal9.tv/melihat-tradisi-pesantren-dalam-gelombang-boikottrans7/
5	sulsel.pojoksatu.id	<i>Boikot Trans7: Pelajaran dari Persimpangan Media, Agama, dan Identitas Pesantren</i>	https://sulsel.pojoksatu.id/insight/1146704790/boikot-trans7-pelajaran-dari-persimpangan-media-agama-dan-identitas-pesantren
6	islami.co	<i>Mitos Feodalisme Pesantren: Kritik atas Framing Media dan Komentar Negatif Netizen</i>	https://islami.co/mitos-feodalisme-pesantren-kritik-atas-framing-media-dan-komentar-negatif-netizen/

7	erakini.id	<i>Gerakan Boikot Trans7: Ketika Media Massa Gagal Memahami Realitas Pesantren</i>	https://www.erakini.id/gagas/era-3BOdS/gerakan-boikot-trans7--ketika-media-massa-gagal-memahami-realitas-pesantren
8	republika.co.id	<i>Aliansi Santri Nusantara se-Jateng Desak Izin Trans7 Dicabut Buntut Tayangan Xpose Uncensored</i>	https://rejogja.republika.co.id/berita/t48c36282/aliansi-santri-nusantara-sejateng-desak-izin-trans7-dicabut-buntut-tayangan-xpose-uncensored
9	jatimtimes.com	<i>Trans7 Ramai Diboikot Para Santri hingga Masyarakat Pesantren, Ada Apa?</i>	https://tulungagung.jatimtimes.com/baca/347560/20251014/091000/trans7-ramai-diboikot-para-santri-hingga-masyarakat-pesantren-ada-apa

The collected data were analyzed interactively and thematically following the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Hashimov, 2015; Lotto, 1986). During data reduction, the researcher selected and focused on data relevant to the themes of media framing, digital ethics, and community resistance. Data display was conducted through tables, matrices, and selected excerpts from media discourse representing Entman's framing elements. The final stage involved drawing conclusions by interpreting the relationship between media constructions and community responses, which were then linked to Islamic communication ethics theory and principles of moral responsibility in digital spaces. Data validity was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and source triangulation to enhance interpretive reliability and objectivity.

The methodological design adopted in this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media shape the public image of *pesantren* communities and how these communities renegotiate their identities through digital resistance. The combined use of framing analysis, critical discourse analysis, and digital ethics renders this study not only descriptive but also reflective and solution-oriented. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic communication theory and to promote journalistic practices that are more sensitive to cultural values and public ethics within the fast-paced and meaning-laden digital media environment.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Trans7 Media Framing and the Construction of Reductive Representations of Pesantren Culture

The first major finding of this study demonstrates how the *Xpose Uncensored* program aired by Trans7 employed media framing that produced a biased representation of *pesantren* culture. Analysis based on Robert M. Entman's (1993)

framing model indicates that, at the *defining problems* stage, the media positioned the *kiai-santri* relationship not as a spiritual and educational bond grounded in the value of *ta'dzim* (respect and reverence), but rather as a form of social inequality. The broadcast depicted *santri* squatting while serving a glass of milk to a *kiai*, accompanied by narration that directed viewers toward interpretations of “feudalism” and “inequality.”

Within *pesantren* cultural contexts, however, squatting is not a symbol of humiliation but an embodied expression of etiquette (*adab*) and respect toward teachers. When the media fail to understand such symbolic meanings, the message conveyed to the public becomes distorted, resulting in cultural stigmatization of *pesantren*. This finding highlights how misinterpretation of cultural symbols can lead to epistemic misrepresentation and the erosion of cultural dignity.

Such framing practices illustrate how mainstream media often construct reality according to market-driven logic rather than cultural considerations. Visual elements perceived as “unusual” by urban audiences are selectively highlighted to create shock value and sensational appeal. This strategy aligns with agenda-setting theory, which posits that media direct public attention toward visually striking issues regardless of their cultural substance (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Consequently, *pesantren*, which should be represented as institutions of moral and ethical education, are instead framed as sites of social backwardness and inequality. This finding reinforces Hefni’s (2016) argument that television media frequently portray cultural Islam through stereotypical lenses, using traditional symbols as entertainment commodities rather than educational resources.

At the *diagnosing causes* stage of Entman’s model, Trans7 guided audiences to believe that social inequality within *pesantren* stemmed from the allegedly extravagant or materialistic lifestyle of *kiai*. This was evident in narrative choices and visual excerpts emphasizing luxury vehicles and large residences associated with *kiai*. Contextually, however, many of these assets belong to *pesantren* institutions rather than individuals. The absence of verification processes results in the construction of an image of *pesantren* as exploitative and opaque institutions. Such framing potentially generates moral panic, particularly among netizens lacking direct experience with *pesantren* culture. In this sense, the media produced a biased moral judgment by reducing a complex social reality to a single negative narrative.

Furthermore, at the *making moral judgment* stage, the media implicitly invited viewers to evaluate *pesantren* social practices through the moral lens of secular modernity rather than Islamic ethical values. Respectful behavior by *santri* was interpreted as servitude, while the charisma of *kiai* was framed as domination. This reflects an epistemological clash between modern paradigms emphasizing formal egalitarianism and *pesantren* paradigms grounded in spiritual reverence. As Entman (2022) argues, such framing constitutes a form of “ideological framing,” wherein media impose particular value systems as universal standards. The consequence is a public perception that *pesantren* are incompatible with contemporary humanitarian values.

In terms of *suggesting remedies*, Trans7's framing positioned the media as a moral savior tasked with exposing social inequality behind *pesantren* walls. This stance reflects media paternalism – the belief that media institutions possess superior moral authority over the public. Ironically, rather than fostering accountability, such narratives weakened trust between *pesantren* communities and mainstream media. *Santri* and alumni increasingly perceived national media as lacking empathy and cultural understanding of traditional Islamic institutions. This erosion of trust directly contributed to digital resistance, manifested through hashtags such as **#BoikotTrans7** and public criticism directed at the broadcaster.

From an ethical perspective, this reductive framing violates the principles of *information accuracy* and *cultural fairness* as articulated by Ess (2017) in *Digital Media Ethics*. Information accuracy encompasses not only factual correctness but also fidelity to the cultural context of the subjects being reported. Cultural fairness, meanwhile, demands respect for the value systems and meaning structures of represented communities. Ignoring these principles exposes media practices to the risk of *epistemic injustice*, whereby a community's worldview is marginalized by dominant narratives (Efendi et al., 2023; Martino et al., 2021). The Trans7 boycott case thus demonstrates that violations of digital ethics do not solely take the form of disinformation or hate speech, but can also occur through symbolic simplification that undermines the cultural dignity of social groups.

Table 2. Analysis of Framing Elements in the Trans7 Xpose Uncensored Program

Framing Element	Framing Element	Framing Element	Framing Element
Define Problems	Kiai–santri relations portrayed as social inequality through images of squatting santri	Pesantren perceived as hierarchical and feudal	Neglect of ta'dzim cultural context
Diagnose Causes	Inequality linked to allegedly luxurious lifestyles of kiai	Public assumes kiai exploit santri economically	Lack of verification and tabayyun
Make Moral Judgment	Moral narrative frames pesantren as non-modern and non-egalitarian	Reinforcement of negative stereotypes toward pesantren	Ideological and moral bias
Suggest Remedies	Media positions itself as exposé of social injustice	Heightened tension between media and santri communities	Violation of cultural fairness and accountability

Table 2 systematically illustrates how the four framing elements in Robert M. Entman's (1993) model operate in constructing meaning within the *Xpose Uncensored*

broadcast. At the *define problems* stage, the media defined *kiai-santri* relations as social inequality through the visualization of squatting *santri*, leading the public to perceive *pesantren* as feudal and hierarchical institutions without understanding the cultural context of *ta'dzim* as an expression of respect.

At the *diagnose causes* stage, the source of the problem was attributed to the allegedly luxurious lifestyle of *kiai*, creating the impression that their welfare resulted from the exploitation of *santri*, despite the absence of verification or *tabayyun* by the media (Islami.co, 2025).

In the *make moral judgment* element, the narrative directed audiences to view *pesantren* as outdated and non-egalitarian, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes toward *santri* communities – a form of ideological and moralistic bias rooted in urban media perspectives. Finally, in the *suggest remedies* element, the media positioned itself as a moral authority exposing social inequality, which ultimately intensified tensions between mainstream media and *pesantren* communities while violating the principles of cultural fairness and accountability in digital ethics.

Overall, the table underscores that the framing constructed by Trans7 not only failed to provide contextual understanding of *pesantren* culture, but also neglected the moral responsibility of media institutions to uphold fairness in cultural representation within the digital public sphere.

3.2. Digital Ethics Violations and Weak Cultural Sensitivity in Content Production

The second major finding of this study indicates that the production and distribution processes of the *Xpose Uncensored* program aired by Trans7 violated several fundamental principles of digital ethics and culturally just public communication. Based on interviews with media observers, broadcasting activists, and *pesantren* figures, it was revealed that the production team failed to conduct *tabayyun* – direct field verification – prior to airing culturally sensitive visual excerpts. No consultation was undertaken with *pesantren* representatives to verify the accuracy of the narrative, either in terms of content or visual context.

The principle of *tabayyun*, as explicitly articulated in the Qur'an (Qur'an 49:6), emphasizes that unverified information may generate misperceptions and damage the reputation of individuals or social groups (Munawarah, 2021). In this context, the absence of verification constitutes not only a violation of journalistic ethics but also a breach of Islamic communication principles that emphasize honesty, caution, and moral responsibility.

Beyond verification failures, the study also identified weak accountability in both the broadcasting process and post-broadcast handling. When the program triggered widespread public criticism, Trans7 did not immediately provide a comprehensive clarification, issuing an apology only after social pressure intensified on digital platforms. This delay suggests that the broadcaster remained reactive rather than proactive in managing the social consequences of its content. According to Indonesia's Broadcasting Code of Conduct and Program Standards (*Pedoman Perilaku Penyiaran dan*

Standar Program Siaran / P3SPS KPI), broadcasting institutions are obligated to ensure balance, fairness, and diversity of perspectives in their programming (Kurniawati, 2019; Putri et al., 2024). Failure to fulfill this responsibility transforms the social function of media from a public moral guardian into a producer of sensationalism that is insensitive to cultural values.

In terms of cultural sensitivity, the Trans7 broadcast revealed a lack of adequate understanding of religious symbols and social ethics within *pesantren* environments. The *santri*'s squatting posture toward the *kiai*, for instance, was superficially interpreted as a form of "servitude," disregarding the spiritual meaning of *ta'dzim* embedded in Islamic pedagogical traditions. This reflects a broader failure to comprehend the cultural dimensions of Indonesian Islam, where social hierarchy does not signify domination but rather embodies respect, ethical formation, and the transmission of spiritual blessing (*barakah*). As Ess (2021) argues, cultural sensitivity is a core component of digital ethics, particularly within a global information ecosystem in which content must account for religious, cultural, and normative diversity to avoid social fragmentation and cultural bias. In this sense, the misrepresentation of *pesantren* culture indicates weak cultural literacy among mainstream media producers.

Furthermore, these ethical violations extend to the absence of *participatory verification*, namely the involvement of news subjects in the verification process prior to publication. In the era of two-way communication, media institutions should no longer function as unilateral authorities of information but instead provide participatory spaces for the communities they report on. In the Trans7 case, no mechanism was identified that allowed *pesantren* representatives to offer clarification, commentary, or counter-perspectives. As a result, *pesantren* were positioned as passive objects of media narratives rather than dialogical partners in public communication. This condition produced *asymmetrical information power*, reflecting an imbalance between media institutions and religious communities. Such dynamics align with Floridi's (2013) critique that one of the most serious violations of digital ethics is *moral negligence*—the failure of content producers to anticipate and account for the social consequences of the information they disseminate.

The downstream effects of these digital ethics violations became evident in social media spaces. Video clips containing provocative narratives circulated widely without contextual explanation, amplified by platform algorithms that prioritize high-engagement content. This process generated a *snowball effect*, in which initial misperceptions escalated into collective outrage and a large-scale digital boycott movement. As media institutions failed to manage the circulation and interpretation of this information, public trust in broadcast credibility eroded. Within *santri* communities, discourses emerged suggesting that mainstream media no longer represented traditional Islamic values. This condition underscores the urgency of integrating contemporary digital ethics with Islamic communication principles to maintain social harmony in an era of informational disruption.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital ethics violations in the Trans7 boycott case extend beyond technical issues of content production to deeper epistemological problems—namely, the inability of media institutions to understand and respect the meaning systems of religious communities. Contemporary media must adopt communication approaches grounded in *cultural empathy* and *ethical reflexivity*, whereby every narrative is produced with careful consideration of diverse perspectives and potential social impacts (Clarke et al., 2015; Rambaree et al., 2023). The integration of the Islamic principle of *tabayyun* with modern concepts of digital accountability is therefore essential for fostering a healthy, ethical, and mutually respectful public sphere within Indonesia’s multicultural context.

Table 3. Forms of Digital Ethics Violations in the Trans7 Xpose Uncensored Broadcast

Digital Ethics Aspect	Description of Violation	Social and Cultural Impact	Violated Ethical Principles
Accountability	Absence of early clarification and delayed public apology	Erosion of public trust in media credibility	Accountability and Transparency
Cultural Sensitivity	Misinterpretation of <i>ta’dzim</i> practices between santri and kiai	Stereotypes portraying <i>pesantren</i> as feudal and backward	Cultural Fairness and Empathy
Participatory Verification	No consultation or interviews with <i>pesantren</i> prior to broadcast	<i>Pesantren</i> positioned as passive objects of media narratives	<i>Tabayyun</i> and Right to Respond
Social Responsibility	Emphasis on sensationalism over educational value	Distortion of <i>pesantren</i> meaning in the public sphere	Public Interest and Ethical Journalism
Moral Negligence	Failure to anticipate the social impact of viral content	Polarization between mainstream media and santri communities	Digital Ethics (Floridi, 2013)

Table 3 comprehensively outlines the various forms of digital ethics violations present in the *Xpose Uncensored* broadcast and their social and cultural implications. In terms of accountability, the media failed to demonstrate moral responsibility by delaying clarification and apology, resulting in diminished public trust. Violations of cultural sensitivity were evident in the misinterpretation of *ta’dzim* practices, which were framed as feudalism and thus generated negative stereotypes portraying *pesantren* as rigid and outdated institutions.

The absence of participatory verification further reduced *pesantren* communities to passive objects lacking the opportunity to clarify or respond. From the perspective of social responsibility, the broadcast prioritized sensational and commercial value over educational content, leading to distorted representations of *pesantren* in the public sphere. Finally, the category of moral negligence highlights Trans7's failure to consider the broader social consequences of viral content dissemination, which ultimately intensified polarization between mainstream media and *santri* communities. Collectively, these violations underscore that core principles of digital ethics—such as transparency, cultural fairness, *tabayyun*, and public interest—were insufficiently upheld, reinforcing the urgency of implementing media ethics grounded in local moral and cultural values as emphasized by Floridi (2013) and Ess (2021).

3.3. Santri Community Resistance as a Digital Literacy Movement and Identity Repositioning

The third key finding of this study reveals that the response of the *santri* community to Trans7's media framing did not merely constitute a spontaneous emotional reaction, but rather evolved into a social movement grounded in digital literacy and cultural identity awareness. This resistance reflects a paradigmatic shift from *pesantren* communities that were once perceived as passive recipients of media narratives into actors that are critical, communicative, and strategic in utilizing digital spaces. Through platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok, *santri* and *pesantren* alumni employed hashtags such as **#BoikotTrans7**, **#Trans7HinaSantri**, and **#SantriBermartabat** as symbolic tools to defend the dignity (*marwah*) of *pesantren*.

This movement demonstrates that digitalization not only facilitates the dissemination of dominant narratives, but also provides religious communities with opportunities to renegotiate and reclaim their identities. In this sense, *santri* resistance in cyberspace constitutes evidence that social media function as a *counterpublic sphere* in which marginalized communities articulate their own truths and values (Bella & Ogiermann, 2019; Haugh, 2024).

Within the framework of cultural resistance theory articulated by Ali (2024) and Fernandes (1988), these *santri* actions can be classified as a form of *semiotic resistance*—an effort to counter the domination of meaning imposed by mainstream media through the production of alternative interpretations. When media framed *pesantren* as feudal and closed institutions, *santri* communities responded by producing counter-narrative content explaining the meanings of *ta'dzim*, *adab*, and respect for teachers within Islamic pedagogy. Numerous *santri*-managed social media accounts disseminated theological and cultural explanations of daily *pesantren* practices, often supported by references to classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) or the ethical teachings (*dawuh*) of *kiai*.

This strategy represents a form of *digital reframing*, through which control over meaning and symbols—initially monopolized by mainstream media—is reclaimed by the community itself. Accordingly, *santri* resistance extends beyond protesting

inaccurate narratives; it actively reconstructs the meaning of *pesantren* culture in the language of new media that is accessible to broader audiences.

This phenomenon also indicates the emergence of increasingly mature and strategic digital literacy among *santri*. Whereas in previous decades *santri* tended to be passive media consumers, they have now become active and creative content producers. Many *pesantren* and Islamic educational institutions have established *santri* media divisions or digital public relations teams to manage information flows and respond to public issues. For instance, *Pesantren Lirboyo*, *Tebuireng*, and *Sidogiri* promptly issued official clarifications and educational content to correct public misunderstandings. These actions demonstrate *santri*'s growing awareness of the importance of *strategic communication* in navigating public opinion within algorithm-driven media environments. In this context, their resistance constitutes a practical application of Islamic value-based media literacy, emphasizing *adab*, honesty, and moral responsibility in digital communication.

Moreover, this resistance functions as a process of cultural identity repositioning for the *santri* community within the digital public sphere. For decades, *pesantren* have frequently been stereotyped as traditional, backward, and resistant to modernity. Through this digital movement, *santri* projected a renewed image that is modern, rational, and open, while remaining rooted in Islamic values. The hashtag **#SantriBermartabat** serves simultaneously as a symbol of resistance and an affirmation of identity, asserting *santri* as morally grounded citizens who are also technologically literate. In this regard, digital spaces operate as arenas of identity transformation, enabling *santri* to reconstruct themselves as social actors who are not only religious, but also intellectual and progressive. As Hjarvard (2016) argues, the *mediatization of religion* has fundamentally altered how religious communities represent themselves and engage with broader society through digital media.

This resistance movement further exemplifies the practice of communicative democracy as conceptualized by Habermas (2006), wherein the digital public sphere becomes a site of deliberation between religious communities and the wider public. *Santri* utilized online platforms not merely to criticize, but also to engage in dialogue, educate audiences, and invite broader society to reconsider *pesantren* values. In many online discussions, non-*santri* users expressed solidarity with the boycott movement or directly sought clarification from Trans7. This development indicates that *santri* resistance strengthened internal community solidarity while simultaneously expanding cross-class and cross-professional social networks. Consequently, digital spaces have emerged as new arenas of social mediation in which *pesantren* negotiate modernity without relinquishing their spiritual foundations.

Ultimately, *santri* resistance to mainstream media narratives can be interpreted as a form of *epistemic autonomy* and the emergence of Islamic digital literacy. The *santri* community demonstrated that within contemporary communication ecosystems, the power to shape meaning no longer resides exclusively with large media institutions, but can be reclaimed by communities equipped with solidarity, social networks, and digital

intelligence. They affirmed that Islamic values such as *tabayyun*, *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive presumption), and *qaulan sadīda* can be contextually applied within online communication practices. This movement thus marks the emergence of a new paradigm in contemporary Islamic communication, positioning *pesantren* not at the margins of information flows, but as active centers of meaning production that contribute to maintaining moral balance within Indonesia's digital public sphere.



Figure 1. Video Excerpt Triggering the Trans7 Boycott Movement

Figure 1 presents a still image from the *Xpose Uncensored* Trans7 program that served as the primary trigger of the Trans7 boycott movement. The image depicts a *santri* squatting while offering a glass of milk to a *kiai* seated on a chair within a *pesantren* setting. This visual was accompanied by a voice-over narration suggesting social inequality between *kiai* and *santri*, guiding viewers to interpret the scene as an expression of feudalism and exploitation.

In *pesantren* tradition, however, the squatting posture represents *ta'dzim*, or deep respect toward a teacher, rather than social subordination. The production and circulation of this visual without cultural and theological context led to widespread dissemination on social media, provoking indignation within *pesantren* communities and generating hashtags such as **#BoikotTrans7** and **#SantriBermartabat**. The figure thus exemplifies how flawed visual framing can produce cultural misunderstanding with far-reaching consequences for relations between mainstream media institutions and religious communities.

3.4. Framing the Trans7 Boycott and Digital Resistance of the Santri Community

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Trans7 boycott case constitutes a concrete example of how media framing not only shapes public perception but also

triggers social resistance grounded in cultural and religious values. In this context, Entman's (1993) framing theory is particularly relevant in explaining how media selectively highlight certain aspects of social reality in order to construct specific interpretations in the minds of audiences. Entman argues that framing functions to "define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies" (Scheufele, 2022). Through the *Xpose Uncensored* broadcast, Trans7 employed a framing strategy that emphasized the *kiai-santri* relationship as a form of social inequality, while neglecting the cultural context of *ta'dzim* that underpins such practices.

As a result, what Hall (2020) describes as the *misrepresentation of cultural codes* occurred, whereby local symbols were translated through a modern ideological framework that was incongruent with their original meanings. This mismatch produced a distortion of meaning with broad social consequences, particularly for audiences unfamiliar with *pesantren* culture.

Beyond framing analysis, this phenomenon can also be examined through the lens of digital ethics as articulated by Floridi (2013) in *The Ethics of Information*. Floridi emphasizes that in the digital era, every communicative act must consider its moral dimensions and social consequences within the *infosphere*—the shared informational ecosystem in which contemporary societies operate. In the Trans7 case, the production team's failure to conduct *tabayyun*, or proper verification, reflects a form of *moral negligence*, whereby the media failed to anticipate the social impact of their representations. Once the video fragment circulated virally without adequate context, the broadcaster effectively lost control over the distribution of meaning, opening space for social polarization. Thus, violations of digital ethics occurred not only at the level of content accuracy, but also at the level of moral responsibility in managing the broader consequences of information circulation in the public sphere.

Meanwhile, the resistance of the *santri* community that emerged in response to the broadcast can be explained using cultural resistance theory as proposed by Ali (2024). From this perspective, audiences are not entirely passive recipients of dominant meanings produced by media institutions; rather, they are capable of engaging in *semiotic resistance*—rejecting and renegotiating meanings imposed by dominant systems. The emergence of hashtags such as **#BoikotTrans7** and **#SantriBermartabat** on social media represents a concrete manifestation of this form of resistance. The *santri* community, which has often been positioned as subordinate within public discourse, utilized digital media to reclaim narrative control over its identity. This movement demonstrates that *pesantren* communities possess not only spiritual capital but also strong *cultural capital* (Fernandes, 1988), enabling them to actively participate in the public discursive arena and challenge the symbolic dominance of mainstream media.



Figure 2. Hundreds of Participants from the Central Java Santri Nusantara Alliance (ASN)

Figure 2 depicts a protest involving hundreds of *santri* affiliated with the Central Java branch of the Santri Nusantara Alliance (*Aliansi Santri Nusantara*, ASN), organized in response to media coverage perceived as undermining the dignity of *pesantren*. This action reflects the collective awareness of *santri* in safeguarding the honor of Islamic boarding schools while simultaneously illustrating their transformation into critical social actors within the public sphere. Wearing traditional attributes such as sarongs and caps, and carrying morally framed banners, the *santri* expressed cultural resistance in a peaceful and dignified manner. The protest reaffirmed the values of *ta'dzim* and Islamic communication ethics in advocating for fair and respectful media representation of *pesantren* communities.

From the perspective of public communication, *santri* digital resistance also illustrates how the *digital public sphere* has become a new arena for articulating religious identity in the modern era. Habermas (2006), in *Communication Theory*, conceptualizes the public sphere as a discursive space in which citizens participate in the formation of rational and critical public opinion in relation to power structures. In this case, digital platforms functioned as arenas of contestation between mainstream media and religious communities over meaning, morality, and cultural representation. *Santri* were no longer passive media consumers, but active digital citizens who employed moral language to challenge the epistemic authority of media institutions.

This dynamic reinforces Hjarvard's (2016) argument that the *mediatization of religion* has transformed religious communities from mere objects of media coverage into producers of meaning capable of influencing public opinion in digital environments.

Overall, this discussion underscores the necessity of balancing media ethics with Islamic local wisdom within Indonesia's multicultural communication landscape.

Mainstream media must recognize that communities such as *pesantren* possess distinct value systems and symbolic orders that cannot be reduced to market logic or visual sensationalism. Conversely, *pesantren* communities must continue to strengthen their digital literacy in order to participate critically and constructively within increasingly competitive public spaces. In line with McConnell's (2022) argument in *Ethical Journalism in a Populist Age*, ethical journalism should uphold universal human values while respecting cultural pluralism without sacrificing objectivity. Under such conditions, the relationship between media institutions and *pesantren* communities need not remain antagonistic, but can evolve into an ethical partnership aimed at cultivating a dignified, inclusive, and morally grounded digital public sphere.

4. Conclusion

This study finds that the *Xpose Uncensored* program aired by Trans7 constructed a reductive representation of *pesantren* culture through media framing that emphasized the *kiai-santri* relationship as a form of social inequality. Analysis based on Entman's framing model demonstrates that the media defined problems, made moral evaluations, and suggested remedies from the perspective of secular modernity, without adequately considering the value of *ta'dzim* as an Islamic tradition of respect and moral education. Such framing generated interpretive bias, reinforced stereotypes portraying *pesantren* as feudal institutions, and weakened public trust in mainstream media. From a digital ethics perspective, these practices violate core principles of *information accuracy*, *cultural fairness*, and *accountability*, which should constitute the moral foundation of media responsibility in the digital communication era.

The discussion further shows that *santri* community resistance to mainstream media narratives did not remain at the level of emotional reaction, but evolved into a movement of digital literacy and identity repositioning. Through hashtag campaigns such as **#BoikotTrans7** and **#SantriBermartabat**, *pesantren* communities successfully utilized the digital public sphere as an arena for articulating values and constructing alternative meanings. These findings support Fiske's (2011) theory of cultural resistance, which argues that subordinated groups are capable of engaging in *semiotic resistance* against dominant media discourses. Moreover, this movement exemplifies the formation of a *digital counterpublic* (Fraser, 1990), wherein religious communities actively participate in meaning-making processes and the democratization of public communication. Within the framework of Islamic ethics, such resistance also represents the practical application of *tabayyun* and *qaulan sadīda* in responding to biased information flows.

This study has several limitations. First, the scope of data is confined to a single television media case and a specific time period, and therefore does not capture variations in framing across online media or other platforms. Second, interviews were conducted primarily with *santri* and media observers, without including producers or editorial staff from Trans7, which limits access to internal perspectives on content production and decision-making. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the

empirical scope through *comparative framing analysis* across multiple media outlets or by integrating *digital ethnography* (netnography) to more comprehensively examine online discourse dynamics within *santri* communities. Further studies may also explore more contextually grounded models of *Islamic Digital Ethics* as conceptual alternatives for media regulation and ethical frameworks in Indonesia.

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