

RESEARCH ARTICLE • OPEN ACCESS

Social Media and the Reputation Crisis of Pesantren: Nahdlatul Ulama's Challenge in Sustaining Public Trust

Galih Aji Nugroho^{1*} Anita Safitri¹¹ Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Salatiga, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: galihajiee0105@gmail.com | Co-author: nita78035@gmail.com

Received	Peer Reviewed	Revised	Accepted	DOI
2026-05-28	2026-07-31 & 2026-08-05	2026-08-10	2026-08-12	https://doi.org/10.35672/jnus.v7i2.178-189

Abstract

This study examines how public opinion about pesantren is constructed on social media and analyzes the communication challenges faced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in sustaining public trust in the digital age. The rapid expansion of social media has transformed digital platforms into key arenas in which public perceptions of religious institutions are produced and contested. Viral incidents, particularly cases involving sexual violence in pesantren settings, have generated negative narratives that circulate rapidly across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Such circulation can extend the meaning of an individual case to pesantren as a broader category of Islamic educational institution, thereby weakening social legitimacy and public trust. This study employs a descriptive qualitative design based on digital document analysis. Data comprise social media posts, comments, videos, captions, and user responses concerning pesantren and NU. The material was systematically inventoried, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns in the construction of public opinion. The findings show that emotionally charged, highly viral, and generalized narratives can transform individual incidents into collective stigma toward pesantren, a process intensified by negative framing and limited digital literacy. In addition, the conventional communication practices of pesantren and NU often fail to match the speed and dynamics of digital information flows. The study therefore highlights the need for NU to strengthen official digital communication, improve information transparency, respond promptly to emerging issues, and amplify credible, evidence-based narratives about the social and educational contributions of pesantren. The study contributes to understanding how individual incidents are socially constructed and amplified through digital interaction into collective stigma that affects the reputation and public trust of both pesantren and Nahdlatul Ulama.

Keywords: Reputation Crisis; Pesantren; Social Media; Public Opinion; Nahdlatul Ulama.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konstruksi opini publik mengenai pesantren di media sosial, serta tantangan komunikasi yang dihadapi Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dalam mempertahankan kepercayaan publik di era digital. Perkembangan media sosial telah menjadikan ruang digital sebagai arena utama dalam membentuk persepsi publik terhadap lembaga-lembaga keagamaan, termasuk pesantren. Berbagai kasus yang menjadi viral, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan kekerasan seksual di lingkungan pesantren, telah memunculkan narasi negatif yang menyebar dengan cepat melalui platform seperti TikTok, Instagram, dan YouTube. Situasi ini menyebabkan terjadinya generalisasi terhadap pesantren sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam dan berpotensi melemahkan legitimasi sosialnya di tengah masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode analisis dokumentasi digital. Data penelitian dikumpulkan dari unggahan media sosial, komentar, video, caption, dan tanggapan pengguna yang berkaitan dengan isu pesantren dan NU. Data dianalisis melalui tahapan inventarisasi, kategorisasi, dan interpretasi terhadap narasi publik untuk mengidentifikasi pola pembentukan opini publik mengenai pesantren di ruang digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial memiliki peran signifikan dalam membentuk krisis reputasi pesantren melalui narasi yang bersifat emosional, viral, dan menggeneralisasi. Kasus individual berkembang menjadi stigma kolektif terhadap pesantren secara umum akibat dominasi negative framing dan rendahnya literasi digital masyarakat. Selain itu, pola komunikasi tradisional pesantren dan NU sering kali belum mampu mengikuti kecepatan arus informasi digital. Oleh karena itu, Nahdlatul Ulama perlu memperkuat strategi komunikasi digital dengan mengoptimalkan kanal media sosial resmi, memastikan transparansi informasi, serta memperkuat narasi positif mengenai kontribusi pesantren bagi masyarakat. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan pemahaman tentang bagaimana kasus individual di pesantren dikonstruksi melalui media sosial menjadi stigma kolektif yang memengaruhi reputasi dan kepercayaan publik terhadap pesantren dan Nahdlatul Ulama.

Kata Kunci: Krisis Reputasi; Pesantren; Media Sosial; Opini Publik; Nahdlatul Ulama.

How to cite: Galih Aji Nugroho, & Anita Safitri. (2026). Social Media and the Reputation Crisis of Pesantren: Nahdlatul Ulama's Challenge in Sustaining Public Trust. *Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama Studies*, 7(2), 178–189. <https://doi.org/10.35672/jnus.v7i2.178-189>

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1. Introduction

In the digital era, institutions and organizations are increasingly expected to communicate in adaptive, transparent, and proactive ways. Social media enables rapid and extensive interaction with the public, yet it also allows reputational crises to emerge and escalate within hours or even minutes (Indrabudi & Ayuningtyas, 2026). Crisis communication is therefore not merely a matter of responding quickly; the appropriateness, credibility, and strategic consistency of the response are equally important because communication failures can damage organizational reputation and public trust (Aini & Salisah, 2025). This challenge has become increasingly salient across public-service, educational, and religious institutions, where misinformation and rapidly circulating digital narratives can erode institutional credibility. Religious organizations are particularly vulnerable because allegations of abuse or institutional scandal can spread quickly and weaken their legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Osuna, 2025).

In Indonesia, pesantren, particularly those historically and culturally associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), occupy a strategic position within Islamic education. Government data indicate that tens of thousands of pesantren operate across the country, underscoring their significant place within the national education system (el-Saha et al., 2025). An Alvara survey also reported continuing interest among NU communities in sending their children to pesantren, suggesting that these institutions retain substantial public trust (Survei Alvara, 2025). Beyond religious instruction, pesantren function as centers of character formation, local cultural continuity, religious moderation, and grassroots social engagement (Khoeron et al., 2026). In recent years, however, the public reputation of pesantren and NU has increasingly been contested in social media environments, particularly when sensational incidents become viral.

Several recent incidents have generated substantial negative public reaction. In October 2025, the television program "Xpose Uncensored" on Trans7 was criticized for content perceived as demeaning Lirboy Pesantren and NU religious scholars (RG, 2025). Shortly afterward, video footage of the collapse of a prayer hall at Al-Khoziny Pesantren triggered broader debate about safety standards in

pesantren environments (Faisol, 2025). A more recent alleged sexual-abuse case involving a pesantren in Pati also attracted national attention (Liputan6.com, 2026). Drone Emprit reported that approximately 62% of social-media posts concerning pesantren in October 2025 carried a negative tone (Sentimen Publik terhadap Pesantren, 2025). Criticism concerning feudalism, opposition to public support for problematic pesantren, and threats against journalists formed part of this wider negative sentiment.

The rapid circulation of these issues is reinforced by platform mechanisms that tend to privilege controversial and emotionally engaging content over less sensational narratives. Viral dynamics can therefore shape public opinion through the intensity and visibility of a case rather than through complete contextual information (Azmi, 2025). As a result, misconduct involving particular individuals may be generalized into the assumption that NU-affiliated pesantren are collectively problematic. Negative stories, misinformation, and provocative content may further intensify this process. Online discussions often concentrate on scandals while giving considerably less attention to the many pesantren that function effectively as educational and community institutions (Mawaddah, 2025). Institutions that operate without controversy consequently receive less digital visibility than sensational individual cases. Concerns have also been raised that misinformation about pesantren may discourage parents from enrolling their children in these institutions (Ketua MUI Bidang Fatwa Desak Trans 7 Segera Minta Maaf Secara Langsung ke Ponpes Lirboy, 2025). The reputational problem, therefore, lies not only in the incidents themselves but also in the dominance, repetition, and amplification of negative interpretations in digital spaces.

Existing studies have examined crisis management in individual pesantren settings. Research on As-Sunnah Pesantren in Lombok, for example, highlights the use of persuasive public relations and cooperation with legal authorities as mechanisms for reassuring the community and rebuilding trust (Nuraenun, 2024). Research on post-crisis communication at Multazam Islamic Boarding School in Semarang likewise reports the use of restrained communication and familial approaches in addressing public anxiety and restoring institutional image (Safitri, 2025). More broadly, the public-relations literature

emphasizes prompt responses, transparency, and credible spokespersons as core elements of reputational crisis management (Nurlaila et al., 2025). Nevertheless, limited attention has been paid to the processes through which public perceptions of pesantren and NU are constructed through social-media interaction and to the communication strategies required to sustain public trust in such environments.

This study addresses that gap by examining the social-media narratives surrounding pesantren and the communication challenges faced by NU. It has two specific objectives: (1) to identify dominant sentiment patterns and major issues circulating about NU-associated pesantren across social-media platforms; and (2) to assess public communication initiatives undertaken by NU and pesantren in responding to reputational crises. By connecting digital public-opinion formation with institutional communication, the study seeks to contribute both to the literature on religious-institution reputation and to practical crisis-management strategies capable of strengthening the position of pesantren as important institutions of Islamic education in Indonesia.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a digital document analysis design. The approach was selected to examine reputational crises surrounding pesantren through online narratives, opinions, and public responses (Nadzifah, 2025). A qualitative design was appropriate because the study focused on the meanings, perceptions, and social dynamics that emerge in digital environments rather than on statistical measurement alone. The primary data sources were Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Data included posts, videos, comments, captions, hashtags, and user responses related to pesantren and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Materials were purposively selected according to their relevance to the research focus, particularly content expressing public evaluations of pesantren reputation, social criticism, institutional defense, or issues generating negative perceptions of NU and pesantren (Dafittra & Rakhmawati, 2025). Data were collected through systematic digital documentation and web-based searches using keywords such as "pesantren," "NU," "Islamic boarding school," and other terms related to the reputation of religious institutions. Retrieved material was recorded and classified by platform,

content format, and the orientation of public opinion. Analysis proceeded through inventorying, categorizing, and interpretively examining public narratives. Opinions and conversations were grouped into positive, negative, and neutral categories and then analyzed to identify patterns in public-opinion formation and the relationship between social-media discourse and reputational crisis (Mursidah & Aimah, 2026). To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, information and narrative patterns were compared across multiple platforms.

3. Results and Discussion

The Social Construction Paradigm in Digital Spaces

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of the Social Construction of Reality starts from the premise that social reality does not simply exist as an objective world external to individuals; rather, it is continuously produced through social interaction. Individuals and society are linked through a dialectical relationship: people create social worlds through their actions and interactions, while the social worlds that emerge subsequently shape how individuals understand, interpret, and act upon reality. What is treated as "reality" in everyday social life is therefore the outcome of collectively produced meanings that become stabilized and taken for granted as objective features of the social world (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

Berger and Luckmann conceptualize the construction of social reality through three interconnected dialectical processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization refers to the process through which individuals express their ideas, values, experiences, and interpretations in the social world through action and communication. These human products subsequently undergo objectivation, whereby they acquire an existence that appears relatively independent of the individuals who initially produced them and come to be perceived as objective reality. Norms, institutions, routines, bodies of knowledge, and social categories can consequently appear natural or self-evident even though they originated in human activity (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, pp. 69-92).

Internalization is the process through which objectivated social reality is reabsorbed into individual consciousness and becomes part of subjective understanding. Through socialization,

individuals encounter and learn the norms, values, knowledge, symbols, and definitions of situations that circulate within society. These interpretive frameworks are then used to understand both the self and the surrounding social world. For Berger and Luckmann, social reality therefore contains two inseparable dimensions: an objective reality embedded in institutions and social structures, and a subjective reality embedded in individual consciousness. Internalization enables socially produced meanings to be maintained and reproduced across individuals and generations (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, pp. 149-182).

In communication and media studies, this framework is particularly useful because media do not merely transmit information; they also

participate in the production, circulation, and reproduction of social meaning. Information about an event can be selected, interpreted, repeated, and redistributed until a particular understanding becomes socially recognizable as reality. This process becomes especially dynamic on social media because users simultaneously function as audiences, producers, interpreters, and distributors of meaning through posts, comments, videos, captions, hashtags, and other forms of digital interaction. From a Berger-Luckmann perspective, digital reality can therefore be understood as the outcome of a dialectic among individual action, collective meaning-making, the objectivation of recurring narratives, and their subsequent internalization by users (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

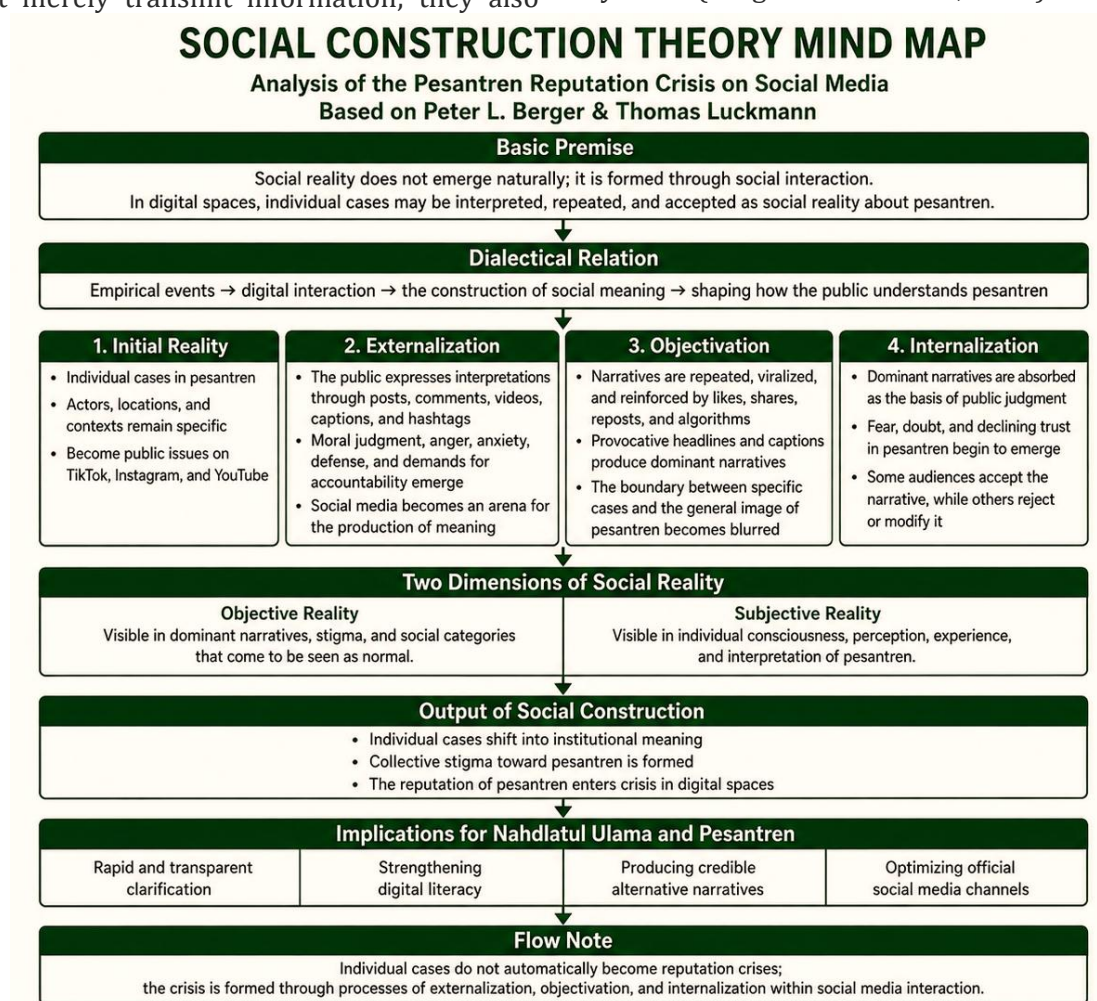


Figure 1. Social Construction Process of Pesantren Reputation in Digital Spaces

The Construction of Public Opinion about Pesantren on Social Media

Social media have become central arenas for the formation of public opinion. Information circulating through digital platforms influences how users interpret and evaluate social events, and viral issues concerning pesantren can

consequently shape perceptions of these institutions far beyond the locations in which particular incidents occur. Public opinion develops through the continuous production and circulation of posts, comments, videos, and digital news, making social media not only channels of information but also environments in which institutional meaning is negotiated.

From a social-construction perspective, such reality does not emerge naturally; it is produced through communication and interaction. Social media allow ordinary users to become producers of information and interpretation, enabling narratives about pesantren to circulate widely without necessarily passing through rigorous verification. Research on the digital transformation of pesantren communication similarly indicates that social media play an important role in shaping institutional identity and image through continuous digital interaction. Pesantren therefore function not only as educational institutions but also as objects of public evaluation within digital environments (Irhamni & Fatmawati, 2025).

The construction of public opinion is further intensified by the speed and openness of digital communication. Controversial information generally attracts greater attention than institutional clarification, allowing negative narratives about pesantren to circulate more rapidly than corrective explanations issued by the institutions concerned. Research on media framing of pesantren likewise suggests that repeated framing can contribute to the formation of durable social stigma (Azizah, 2025).

These dynamics indicate that reputational crises involving pesantren cannot be attributed solely to the misconduct of particular individuals or institutions. They are also shaped by a reactive digital communication culture in which fragmented, emotionally charged, and viral information may be interpreted without sufficient contextualization. Consequently, incidents that are empirically limited to specific actors can expand into collective stigma toward pesantren as an institutional category. This pattern resembles a form of "digital judgment" in which public legitimacy is weakened through accelerated, repetitive, and socially reinforced interpretations (Nadzifah, 2025).

Observations of public conversations on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube indicate that sexual-abuse cases involving pesantren generated predominantly negative constructions of the institution. As these cases became viral, users moved beyond discussing the alleged perpetrators and began questioning educational systems, power relations, and institutional oversight. Comments, translated from Indonesian, included: "Why would someone who is supposed to understand religious rules behave like that?" (JTVcom, 2026); "If this is what happens, every parent will hesitate to send their

child to a pesantren. There must still be many cases that have not been revealed" (Patroli, 2026); and "Nowadays it is becoming increasingly frightening to send children to a pesantren" (beritasatu, 2026). These responses indicate a shift in perception from pesantren as institutions conventionally associated with moral and religious formation toward institutions increasingly evaluated through the lens of risk, accountability, and safety.

Instagram discussions also contained responses that both condemned perpetrators and defended pesantren as institutions. Examples included: "The problem is not the pesantren, but the person" (destafavot.s, 2025); "Investigate it thoroughly and impose the maximum penalty" (ruang_ggelap, 2026); and "Those who damage the reputation of pesantren and religious scholars must be punished" (batang.info, 2026). These narratives demonstrate that social-media users do not produce a single, uniform interpretation. Rather, digital spaces become arenas in which institutional responsibility, individual culpability, power imbalance, and transparency are simultaneously debated.

A broader pattern of institutional generalization is visible in comments on YouTube. Users argued, for example, that "this should become a lesson for everyone; pesantren must be transparent because every educational institution belongs to the public" (tribunnews, 2026), while another comment asked, "Kiai teach noble character, yet some kiai behave immorally. What is wrong with pesantren?" (metrotvnews, 2026). Other users demanded stronger state intervention (tribunnews, 2020). Such comments illustrate how individual incidents are discursively connected to the overall image of pesantren. The speed and scale of digital circulation intensify this generalization, allowing an incident in one institution to affect perceptions of other pesantren that were not involved in the original case.

Collective emotion also plays a significant role in this process. Comments on national-news videos included statements such as "Religious figures are becoming increasingly immoral" (tvOneNews, 2026), "Public anger can no longer be contained over the growing number of sexual-abuse cases involving female students in pesantren" (tvOnenewscom, 2026), and "Public trust can collapse because of cases like this" (Indonesia, 2025). These comments show that anger toward alleged perpetrators is frequently

accompanied by anxiety about the broader social image and moral authority of pesantren.

Negative framing is also visible in provocative titles and captions. TikTok content examined in this study used expressions such as "The dark side of pesantren" (Liza, 2024), "These Are the People Damaging the Good Name of Magelang" (Panji, 2024), and "Pesantren Kiai Allegedly Abuses 50 Female Students" (Bogor, 2026). Such dramatic diction can prime negative evaluation before users encounter the full context of a case. Platform algorithms may subsequently extend the visibility of emotionally provocative content because it generates higher levels of engagement.

The data also contain explicit expressions of declining public trust. Comments on Instagram and YouTube included: "Pesantren used to be trusted as places for building character" (Reset.Feeds, 2026), "This disgraces religious scholars and destroys the dignity of pesantren" (fakta_hub, 2026), and "It may be better not to send children to a pesantren if kiai behave this way toward female students" (brianbicara, 2026). These statements suggest that reputational damage is not confined to a specific institution but can extend to the social legitimacy of pesantren as a broader educational and religious category.

At the same time, public opinion remains polarized. Some users explicitly distinguish individual perpetrators from pesantren as institutions. Comments included: "It is only an individual case; not every kiai makes the same mistake" (TribunSumselVideo, 2026), while other responses emphasized that religious leaders should be judged according to the ethical and legal standards they teach (metrotvnews, 2020). Nevertheless, defensive comments received less interaction than negative and emotionally charged responses. This pattern suggests that controversial interpretations tend to achieve greater visibility and influence within the attention economy of social media.

Some users also connected sexual-abuse cases to perceived weaknesses in external oversight. Comments called for stronger supervision by religious and government authorities and for accessible reporting mechanisms through which students could report inappropriate conduct (JTMadiun, 2026; metronews, 2026). Others demanded stronger legal or religious sanctions against offenders (PortalVIVAcoid, 2026). These narratives demonstrate that reputational crises may generate demands not only for individual

accountability but also for institutional and regulatory reform in pesantren governance.

Taken together, these findings show that social media function not only as channels for disseminating information but also as arenas in which the social meaning of pesantren is produced and contested. Repeated, emotional, and highly visible user responses contribute to a public construction of pesantren as institutions experiencing a crisis of trust. Their digital reputation is therefore shaped by the interaction among event visibility, user interpretation, narrative repetition, and platform circulation.

This environment creates a substantial challenge for Nahdlatul Ulama in sustaining the social legitimacy of pesantren. NU must not only respond to emerging controversies but also develop digital communication capacities capable of competing with rapidly circulating viral narratives. Strengthening digital literacy and producing credible alternative narratives are therefore necessary to prevent public understanding of pesantren from being shaped exclusively by sensational or decontextualized framing.

Nahdlatul Ulama's Communication Challenges and Strategies in Managing Pesantren Reputation Crises

The development of social media has created new challenges for Nahdlatul Ulama in protecting the public image of pesantren. Given NU's historical and cultural relationship with pesantren, the organization faces not only institutional issues within Islamic education but also a fundamental transformation in the structure and pace of public communication. Information about pesantren can circulate widely and shape public opinion before the institutions concerned have issued complete clarification.

A central challenge is the dominance of negative narratives in social media. Controversial and emotionally charged content is generally more likely to become viral than educational material or formal clarification. Consequently, incidents involving particular actors can develop into collective stigma toward pesantren and, by association, toward NU. Research on religious communication in social media similarly demonstrates the capacity of digital media to shape perceptions of religious institutions through framing and rapid opinion circulation (Fakhruroji, 2020).

A second challenge concerns uneven levels of digital literacy. Many users encounter and

redistribute information without adequate verification, enabling misinformation, decontextualized video fragments, and provocative narratives about pesantren to circulate rapidly. Under such conditions, institutional reputation becomes vulnerable to digital stigma that is difficult to correct once a dominant interpretation has become established.

NU also faces an institutional communication gap. Pesantren and religious organizations have traditionally relied heavily on cultural, interpersonal, and community-based communication, whereas social media require rapid, open, and real-time communication capable of reaching heterogeneous audiences. This mismatch means that official clarification from pesantren or NU may arrive only after viral narratives have already shaped public interpretation.

The challenge is therefore not limited to education or institutional management; it also concerns adaptation to a fast-moving communication culture structured by visibility and virality. Previous research on pesantren communication in the digital era indicates that Islamic educational institutions need more active and adaptive communication practices if they are to sustain a positive public image in rapidly changing media environments (Sari, 2025).

In response, NU needs a more proactive and adaptive digital communication strategy. Digital literacy should be strengthened within pesantren communities and among wider publics so that users are better equipped to evaluate and verify social-media information. At the same time, NU and pesantren need to produce credible counter-narratives that communicate their educational, social, and religious contributions without minimizing legitimate concerns or institutional accountability.

Official social-media channels should also be strengthened as instruments of public communication. Active and credible institutional accounts can provide timely clarification, communicate corrective action, and sustain a more balanced representation of pesantren in digital spaces. Research on digital religious communication suggests that active and dialogical use of social media can help Islamic institutions develop closer public relationships and maintain social legitimacy (Rustandi, 2020).

Social Construction Analysis of Pesantren Reputation in Digital Spaces

The reputational crisis surrounding pesantren can be interpreted through Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction, which treats social reality as the outcome of a dialectical relationship between individuals and society. In this study, sexual-abuse allegations and other forms of misconduct involving particular actors initially constitute empirically bounded events with specific locations, participants, and contexts. Once these events enter TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, however, they no longer circulate solely as factual incidents; they become objects of social interpretation. Users connect them to pesantren morality, power relations, systems of supervision, and the credibility of Islamic educational institutions. The analytical shift is therefore from an event-specific reality to a socially produced reality about pesantren generated through digital interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Irhamni & Fatmawati, 2025). The findings demonstrate that viral issues can move public discourse from the conduct of individual actors toward broader judgments concerning educational systems, authority relations, and institutional oversight.

The first stage is externalization, in which individuals express subjective interpretations of an event within the social world. In this study, externalization occurs through the production and circulation of posts, videos, captions, comments, and user responses to cases involving pesantren. These expressions do more than transmit information: they articulate moral judgment, anger, anxiety, institutional defense, and demands for accountability. Some comments reveal parental concern about entrusting children to pesantren, while others question inconsistencies between religious authority and the behavior of particular actors. Counter-narratives simultaneously emphasize that misconduct is attributable to individuals and should not be generalized to all pesantren. This diversity shows that social media operate as arenas in which users externalize competing definitions of pesantren, morality, safety, and institutional responsibility (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Nadzifah, 2025).

The second stage is objectivation, whereby repeatedly produced subjective meanings acquire the appearance of shared social reality. In digital environments, this process is strengthened by narrative repetition,

provocative headlines and captions, user interaction, and the viral logic of platform circulation. Expressions such as "the dark side of pesantren," repeated reporting of sexual-abuse cases, and comments connecting individual conduct to the morality of pesantren as a whole can establish a relatively consistent narrative pattern. As these narratives accumulate attention, comments, likes, shares, and reposts, the boundary between facts about a particular pesantren and representations of pesantren generally becomes increasingly blurred. The perception that "pesantren are problematic" may consequently become objectivated as an apparently self-evident social reality even when it originates in the generalization of specific incidents. Repetition and visibility are therefore central mechanisms through which subjective interpretations are transformed into socially accepted knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Azizah, 2025; Azmi, 2025).

The third stage is internalization, in which objectivated reality is absorbed into subjective consciousness and used as a framework for evaluating the social world. In this study, internalization becomes visible when recurring narratives about violence, weak supervision, abuse of authority, or institutional opacity begin to influence how users assess pesantren. Statements expressing fear about sending children to pesantren or claiming that the image of religious scholars and pesantren has been damaged indicate that digital construction has moved beyond conversation and begun to affect institutional trust. Internalization, however, is not uniform. Some users continue to distinguish individual misconduct from the identity of

pesantren as a whole, demonstrating negotiation and resistance to dominant narratives. The social construction of pesantren reputation is therefore dialectical: users may accept, reject, or modify circulating digital realities according to their experiences and interpretive frameworks (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Mawaddah, 2025).

Taken together, these three processes show that a pesantren reputation crisis is not simply a direct consequence of an incident; it is also the outcome of a social-construction process through which individual cases acquire institutional meaning. The process moves from empirical events to public expression, narrative reproduction and reinforcement, social acceptance, collective stigma, and declining trust. Social media function as arenas of reality production because users simultaneously consume and produce meaning. This dynamic also clarifies the communication challenge facing Nahdlatul Ulama: delayed institutional clarification may encounter a social reality that has already been constructed and internalized through viral narratives. Reputation management therefore requires more than post-crisis rebuttal. NU and pesantren need to participate proactively in digital knowledge production through transparency, prompt clarification, digital literacy, and credible alternative narratives. In this sense, reputational recovery is fundamentally a process of reconstructing social reality so that individual incidents do not become the enduring basis for collective stigma toward pesantren (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Fakhrurroji, 2020; Rustandi, 2020).

Table 1. Social Construction of Pesantren Reputation on Social Media

Stage	Primary Phenomenon	Construction Process	Reputational Effect
Initial Reality	An individual incident in a pesantren becomes publicly visible	The event remains specific and context-bound	Potential reputational risk emerges
Externalization	Users express opinions through posts, videos, comments, captions, and hashtags	Users assign meaning, moral judgment, criticism, defense, and emotional responses to the incident (Berger & Luckmann, 1991)	The incident acquires social meaning
Objectivation	Negative narratives are repeated, amplified, and circulated across platforms	Subjective interpretations develop into dominant narratives that appear to represent pesantren as a whole (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Azizah, 2025)	Individual incidents begin to be generalized
Internalization	Users adopt dominant	Digital perceptions are	Stigma, doubt,

Stage	Primary Phenomenon	Construction Process	Reputational Effect
n	narratives as a basis for evaluating pesantren	incorporated into public understanding and attitudes (Berger & Luckmann, 1991)	and declining trust emerge
Reconstruction of Reality	NU and pesantren provide clarification, transparency, digital literacy initiatives, and credible positive narratives	Institutions produce counter-meanings to correct or rebalance previously constructed reality	Social legitimacy and public trust may be restored

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media play a substantial role in constructing public opinion about pesantren in the digital era. Across TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X/Twitter, sexual-abuse cases involving individual actors can become widely circulated public events and develop into reputational crises for pesantren as an institutional category. Digital narratives do not remain focused on the alleged conduct of perpetrators but expand into criticism of oversight mechanisms, power relations, and institutional transparency. As a result, digital spaces become arenas in which collective stigma is produced and public trust is renegotiated. The findings further show that the speed, openness, and viral logic of social media give emotionally charged narratives a structural advantage over institutional clarification. Anger, disappointment, and generalized judgments can consequently transform an individual incident into broader delegitimation of pesantren. Social media therefore function not only as channels of information but also as environments in which the social image and legitimacy of religious institutions are produced. Nahdlatul Ulama faces a particular challenge in this context because conventional, culturally embedded communication practices often cannot match the speed of digital circulation. Official clarification may therefore reach audiences only after viral interpretations have already shaped public perception, while limited digital literacy further facilitates misinformation, decontextualized video fragments, and provocative framing. Strengthening digital communication is consequently an urgent institutional requirement. NU and pesantren need to improve digital literacy, optimize official social-media channels, ensure transparency in the handling of cases, and produce credible alternative narratives about the contributions of pesantren. Such measures can help sustain social legitimacy

and rebuild public trust through communication that is responsive, open, and credible.

This study recommends that Nahdlatul Ulama and pesantren strengthen prompt, transparent, responsive, and digitally literate communication to prevent individual incidents from being generalized into collective stigma and to sustain public trust.

5. Declaration

Author Contributions: G.A.N. contributed to the conceptualization, research design, methodology, literature review, data collection and analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript drafting. A.S. contributed to supervision, methodological refinement, critical evaluation, interpretation of findings, and manuscript review and editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the integrity of the work.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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