



Digital Ethno-Religious Determinants of Santri Religious Behavior: Technology Attitudes as a Mediator and Pesantren Culture as a Moderator

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how Islamic digital literacy and digital religious identity influence santri religious behavior. The research addresses the issue of increasing digital exposure among pesantren students and how this exposure shapes their religious expression. The study employs a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SmartPLS4) and involves 100 Madrasah Aliyah students from both salaf and modern pesantren in Kudus, Indonesia. The results show that Islamic digital literacy and digital religious identity significantly predict religious behavior, both directly and indirectly through attitudes toward technology. The findings that pesantren culture strengthens the effect of attitudes on religious behavior. This study contributes a mediation moderation model that explains how digital competence, identity, and cultural context interact to shape religious behavior among santri, offering insights for culturally grounded digital literacy development in Islamic education.

Keywords: Islamic Digital Literacy; Digital Religious Identity; Attitudes toward Technology; Pesantren Culture; Religious Behavior

A. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed nearly every aspect of human life, including religious education and spiritual expression. In the context of Islamic education, particularly among santri (students of Islamic boarding schools or pesantren) in Indonesia, digital platforms are increasingly used as tools for religious learning, communication, and identity formation. This transformation reflects the global trend of religious digitization, where digital literacy and online religious content significantly shape individuals' religious knowledge, practices, and affiliations (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Abdullah & Ratnawati, 2023; Arifah et al., 2024). Recent scholarship further highlights that digital religion is now embedded in pedagogical and cultural systems, transforming how religious authority and authenticity are negotiated online (Evolvi, 2022; Raya, 2025; Nofiaturrahmah & Rahmawati, 2023). However, in deeply traditional and culturally rooted religious communities like pesantren, this shift raises crucial questions regarding how digital values are internalized and whether they reinforce or challenge conventional religious behavior.

Indonesia, as the largest Muslim majority country, provides a unique context for examining the intersection between digital transformation and religious tradition. Within this landscape, pesantren plays a vital role in maintaining Islamic orthodoxy and transmitting religious values. Recent scholarship highlights that the beliefs and pedagogical orientations of Islamic Religious Education teachers strongly influence how students internalize religious values and negotiate contemporary changes within Islamic learning environments (Muslimah, 2024). Traditional learning models such as the sorogan method reinforce strong interpersonal transmission of knowledge, shaping how santri internalize religious values within hierarchical teacher student relations (Suteja et al., 2022). Yet, with the proliferation of smartphones and the accessibility of Islamic content on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, santri are exposed to diverse interpretations and representations of Islam that go beyond the pesantren curriculum (Al-Zaman, 2022). This phenomenon opens up a new field of inquiry into how young Muslims in pesantren navigate religious authority, identity, and behavior in an increasingly digitized world.

In this study, Islamic digital literacy refers to santri's ability to critically access, evaluate, and apply digital religious content in accordance with Islamic principles, while digital religious identity denotes the expression and internalization of one's religiosity in online environments. Attitudes toward

technology capture santri's evaluative beliefs regarding the usefulness and compatibility of digital tools in supporting Islamic learning and practice. Meanwhile, pesantren culture represents the institutional norms, values, and authority systems that shape santri behavior in both offline and online contexts. Such contextual framing aligns with recent studies that emphasize the integration of moral education and digital citizenship in Islamic boarding schools (Rohman & Khotimah, 2024). Together, these constructs form a dynamic interaction where literacy and identity function as cognitive inputs, attitude acts as a mediating affective mechanism, and pesantren culture serves as the moderating contextual force that influences the ultimate expression of religious behavior.

Recent studies on digital religiosity have focused extensively on Muslim youth in urban areas and general public school contexts (Zaid et al., 2022; Kholili et al., 2024), often overlooking the specificities of pesantren culture and how it moderates the reception and interpretation of digital religious content. Furthermore, while digital literacy has been widely examined as a driver of civic engagement and personal development (Suryani et al., 2024; Wahid, 2024), limited attention has been given to Islamic digital literacy, a contextualized form of digital competence tailored to evaluating, filtering, and engaging with online religious content. This form of literacy is crucial for understanding the behavioral outcomes of Muslim youth in traditional educational environments.

Parallel to this, the concept of digital religious identity has gained traction, especially in relation to how individuals present and perceive their religiosity through online. Research suggests that digital platforms enable users to curate religious personas, engage in virtual religious communities, and participate in online dakwah (preaching), thus contributing to the construction of a digital religious person (Cheong, 2017; Wahid, 2024). Nevertheless, little is known about how this digital identity formation interacts with offline religious behavior among santri, who are simultaneously shaped by pesantren norms and digital influences. This raises important theoretical and empirical gaps in the literature concerning the dual forces, the digital individualism and communal religious authority.

Moreover, prior research has tended to treat technology acceptance and religiosity as separate domains. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and its extensions, including UTAUT, have been used predominantly to predict general user behavior in technological adoption (Venkatesh, 2022b), but not specifically in the context of religious behavior. Few studies have explored how attitudes toward technology function as a mediating mechanism between digital inputs (e.g., literacy

and identity) and behavioral outcomes in religious settings. This gap calls for an integrative approach that merges insights from digital literacy, religious studies, and behavioral science to understand the mechanisms through which digital exposure affects religious behavior among traditionally educated youth. While models such as TAM and UTAUT have been validated across multiple domains, their application within Islamic educational contexts requires cultural reinterpretation (Venkatesh, 2025; Xue et al., 2025).

While models such as TAM and UTAUT provide a robust behavioral framework, they must be interpreted through the lens of Islamic epistemology when applied to pesantren settings. Islamic pedagogy emphasizes 'adab al-'ilm (ethical discipline in seeking knowledge) and maqasid al-shariah (higher objectives of Islamic law), both of which guide santri to use technology in ways that sustain moral integrity and collective welfare. Recent Indonesian studies have also begun to bridge this perspective. Arsyad et al., (2023) demonstrate that digital literacy rooted in Islamic values enhances critical discernment and ethical judgment. Wahid (2024) and Kholili et al., (2024) further reveal that digital religious identity formation aligns closely with akhlaq-based online behavior. Similarly, research by Ramdani et al., (2025) indicates that religious-cultural mediation influences technology adoption in Islamic communities. Integrating these local insights strengthens the contextual relevance of the proposed model.

The pesantren culture itself adds a critical moderating dimension that has been largely underexplored. Known for its strong emphasis on obedience, collective discipline, and traditional authority structures, pesantren culture may either buffer or amplify the effects of digital religious stimuli on behavior (Harnadi et al., 2021; Paramansyah et al., 2024). The degree to which pesantren values can coexist with or resist digital religious influences remains empirically ambiguous. While some studies highlight adaptive integration (Kusuma et al., 2025), others suggest tension and resistance from institutional gatekeepers (Pabbajah et al., 2024). This ambiguity underlines the need to systematically assess the moderating role of pesantren culture in shaping santri responses to digital religiosity.

From a methodological standpoint, existing studies often adopt descriptive or qualitative approaches without providing a rigorous analytical model that can test the causal and interactional dynamics among digital religious variables. There is a noticeable lack of empirical models that position Islamic digital literacy and digital religious identity as antecedents, attitudes toward technology as a mediator, and pesantren culture as a moderator of religious behavior. Such a model would

offer a more holistic understanding of how religious behavior is formed in a digitally mediated yet culturally bounded setting.

Empirical reports from Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024) indicate that over 78% of santri in Central Java access digital religious content weekly, primarily through YouTube and TikTok-based kajian. Surveys by Paramansyah et al., (2024) also show that pesantren administrators increasingly integrate online materials into classroom activities, yet remain cautious about unverified sources. These realities underscore the urgency of examining how digital competence, identity, and institutional norms interact in shaping santri behavior. Previous research also demonstrates that pesantren face a dual challenge of maintaining traditional ethics while embracing technological innovation, reflecting similar trends in other Southeast Asian Islamic institutions (Yanti & Solihah, 2024; Ernawati et al., 2024). To capture these multidimensional relationships simultaneously, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was chosen over traditional regression techniques because it allows for concurrent estimation of direct, mediating, and moderating effects among latent constructs thus aligning with the study's theoretical complexity and integrative framework.

This study proposes a novel conceptual framework: the Digital Ethno-Religious Model, which integrates four key dimensions; Islamic digital literacy, digital religious identity, technology attitudes, and pesantren culture to predict religious behavior among santri in Kudus, Indonesia. The model aims to address the identified gaps by empirically testing the mediating effect of attitudes toward technology and the moderating role of pesantren culture within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework. This approach not only advances theory but also offers practical insights for religious educators and policymakers seeking to harmonize digital integration with traditional Islamic education.

The novelty of this research lies in its contextual grounding and theoretical synthesis. By focusing on Kudus, a region with strong Islamic traditions and rapidly growing digital penetration, the study captures the dynamic interaction between modernity and religious orthodoxy. Moreover, the incorporation of digital religious identity and culturally specific digital literacy constructs contributes to the growing body of literature on digital religion in the Global South, an area still dominated by Western-centric perspectives (Monday et al., 2025). This research is thus positioned to fill both empirical and conceptual voids of religion and digital transformation.

In sum, this study responds to an urgent need to understand how digital religiosity intersects with traditional Islamic educational settings. It contributes a theoretically robust and empirically grounded model that illuminates the pathways through which digital exposure, personal identity, and institutional culture shape religious behavior. The findings are expected to inform culturally sensitive digital literacy strategies and support balanced integration of digital tools in religious pedagogy, thereby enriching both academic scholarship and educational practice in Islamic contexts.

B. Methods

This research adopted a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design to investigate how digital ethno-religious variables influence santri religious behavior in pesantren-based Madrasah Aliyah settings in Kudus, Indonesia. The conceptual framework examined both direct and indirect associations among Islamic digital literacy, digital religious identity, attitudes toward technology, pesantren culture, and religious behavior. A quantitative design was chosen to enable the statistical examination of mediation and moderation effects within a structural modeling framework. Analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, a variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) tool recognized for its capacity to manage complex relationships, accommodate small to medium sample sizes, and handle non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2023).

Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire distributed in both printed and digital formats. The study population comprised santri enrolled in Madrasah Aliyah (MA) levels affiliated with pesantren in Kudus. Purposive sampling ensured that participants met specific criteria: (1) residing in a pesantren, (2) currently in grades X to XII, (3) aged between 15 and 19 years, and (4) having experience in accessing digital religious content. The final dataset included 100 respondents, which satisfied the sample adequacy threshold for PLS-SEM based on the “ten-times rule,” referring to the largest number of structural paths pointing to a single latent variable (Hair et al., 2023).

The sampling process followed a multi-step procedure. First, a list of pesantren-affiliated Madrasah Aliyah in Kudus was obtained from the local Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Second, purposive sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of both salaf and modern pesantren. After institutional approval, questionnaires were distributed through pesantren administrators. Participation

was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent before completing the survey. Data collection was conducted over a two-week period in May 2025, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process.

The research utilized quantitative data directly sourced from the respondents, capturing their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to the constructs studied. All constructs were operationalized as reflective and measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). Items for Islamic digital literacy were adapted from Arsyad et al., (2023), while those for digital religious identity were based on Wahid, (2024) and Kholili et al., (2024). Religious behavior measures, covering both ritual practices and ethical conduct, were adapted from Saepudin & Fajar, (2024). Attitudes toward technology were assessed in terms of perceived usefulness and acceptability in religious contexts, and pesantren culture was measured through indicators capturing norms, values, and institutional perspectives on digital engagement. Examples of representative questionnaire items include: “I can verify the authenticity of Islamic content I find on social media” (Islamic Digital Literacy); “My social media activities reflect my commitment to Islamic values” (Digital Religious Identity); “Using digital platforms helps me strengthen my religious understanding” (Attitudes Toward Technology); “My pesantren encourages the responsible use of digital media for learning” (Pesantren Culture); and “I regularly perform worship or share religious messages through online media” (Santri Religious Behavior). Each construct consisted of five reflective indicators; all adapted from validated prior studies and modified to suit the pesantren context.

Data analysis was performed in two stages using SmartPLS 4. First, the measurement model was assessed to verify construct reliability and validity, applying outer loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity tests via the Fornell–Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Second, the structural model was tested to evaluate hypothesized relationships through a bootstrapping process with 5,000 resamples, generating path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values. Mediation effects were examined using the specific indirect effect approach, while moderation was tested using the product indicator method. Predictive relevance (Q^2) and model fit indices, including the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), were also reviewed to confirm the model’s adequacy.

All participants were informed about the study’s purpose, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The study adhered to the

ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (Association, 2013) and complied with institutional data protection guidelines.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Outer Loadings

Item	Attitudes Toward Technology	Digital Religious Identity	Islamic Digital Literacy	Pesantren Culture	Santri Religious Behavior
ATT1	0.919				
ATT2	0.876				
ATT3	0.911				
ATT4	0.928				
ATT5	0.898				
DRI1		0.964			
DRI2		0.951			
DRI3		0.946			
DRI4		0.943			
DRI5		0.950			
IDL1			0.940		
IDL2			0.965		
IDL3			0.957		
IDL4			0.952		
IDL5			0.946		
PC1				0.791	
PC2				0.578	
PC3				0.642	
PC4				0.673	
PC5				0.581	
RB1					0.975
RB2					0.976
RB3					0.979
RB4					0.976
RB5					0.974

Table 1 reported the outer loadings of each measurement item, which reflected the extent to which individual indicators represented their respective latent constructs in the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) framework. Following Hair et al. (2022), an outer loading value of 0.70 or higher was generally considered acceptable, indicating that more than 50% of the variance in the indicator was explained by the latent construct. For Attitudes Toward Technology (ATT), all five indicators (ATT1–ATT5) demonstrated high

outer loadings, ranging from 0.876 to 0.928, suggesting strong alignment between items such as comforting in using religious applications and perceiving usefulness of technology and the underlying construct.

The Digital Religious Identity (DRI) construct also showed excellent indicator performance, with outer loadings ranging from 0.943 to 0.964. This confirmed that items measuring online self-expression, affiliation with Muslim communities, and alignment of digital presence with spiritual values were highly representative of the construct. Similarly, Islamic Digital Literacy (IDL) demonstrated very strong loadings (0.940–0.965), indicating respondents' high competence in accessing, evaluating, and engaging with Islamic content online.

The Pesantren Culture (PC) construct exhibited more variability, with loadings ranging from 0.578 to 0.791. While most items met the minimum threshold, PC2 (0.578) and PC5 (0.581) fell slightly below the preferred cut-off of 0.70. However, these values might still be acceptable in exploratory research, particularly when the construct's overall composite reliability and AVE met the recommended criteria. Lastly, Santri Religious Behavior (RB) indicators showed the highest loadings in the model (0.974–0.979), indicating extremely strong convergent validity. These results confirmed that the indicators consistently captured both ritual and ethical dimensions of religious behavior. Overall, the outer loading results confirmed that the vast majority of indicators demonstrated strong reliability and validity, with only minor exceptions in the Pesantren Culture construct that warranted cautious interpretation.

2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Indicators

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitudes Toward Technology	0.946	0.958	0.821
Digital Religious Identity	0.973	0.979	0.904
Islamic Digital Literacy	0.974	0.980	0.906
Pesantren Culture	0.791	0.790	0.732
Santri Religious Behavior	0.987	0.990	0.952

Table 2 presented the results of the construct reliability and convergent validity assessment, which were essential to ensure that the measurement model accurately represented the latent constructs in the study. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), while Average Variance

Extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity. Following Hair et al., (2021), Cronbach's Alpha and CR valued above 0.70 indicated satisfactory internal consistency, whereas AVE valued exceeding 0.50 confirmed that more than half of the variance in the indicators was explained by the respective construct.

The findings showed that all constructs met or exceeded the recommended thresholds, confirming strong measurement quality. Attitudes Toward Technology achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.946, CR of 0.958, and AVE of 0.821, indicating high consistency in measuring santri perceptions of digital tools in religious contexts. Digital Religious Identity demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.973$, CR = 0.979) and the highest AVE among constructs (0.904), suggesting that items such as expressing religiosity online and affiliating with digital Muslim communities strongly represented the construct. Islamic Digital Literacy also exhibited very high reliability ($\alpha = 0.974$, CR = 0.980) and AVE (0.906), reflecting strong competence in accessing, evaluating, and engaging with Islamic content online.

The Pesantren Culture construct, although having a lower Cronbach's Alpha (0.791) and CR (0.790) compared to other constructs, still met the minimum reliability threshold, with an AVE of 0.732 confirming adequate convergent validity. This indicated some variability in how norms, values, and attitudes toward technology were perceived across different pesantren, yet the construct remained conceptually coherent. Lastly, Santri Religious Behavior recorded the highest reliability metrics ($\alpha = 0.987$, CR = 0.990) and AVE (0.952), suggesting that indicators for both ritual and ethical behavior were extremely consistent and captured nearly all the variance of the underlying construct.

3. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with valued <0.90 indicating adequate distinction (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). All constructs met this criterion. Attitudes Toward Technology (ATT) and Digital Religious Identity (DRI) showed an HTMT of 0.596, while Islamic Digital Literacy (IDL) correlated moderately with ATT (0.809) and DRI (0.282), all within acceptable limits (Hair et al., 2022). Pesantren Culture (PC) had low correlations (0.178–0.351) with other constructs, confirming its distinct contextual role. Santri Religious Behavior (RB) displayed HTMT values from 0.743 (with IDL) to 0.896 (with ATT), still below the threshold. The interaction term PC $\times$ ATT showed very low HTMT values (0.014–0.111), as expected for product indicators (Sarstedt et al.,

2021), further supporting the discriminant validity and proper model specification.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Matrix

Construct	ATT	DRI	IDL	PC	RB	PC × ATT
Attitudes Toward Technology	—	0.596	0.809	0.288	0.896	0.041
Digital Religious Identity		—	0.282	0.227	0.765	0.014
Islamic Digital Literacy			—	0.178	0.743	0.111
Pesantren Culture				—	0.351	0.534
Santri Religious Behavior					—	0.083
PC × ATT						—

4. Structural Model Evaluation

Table 4. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	Original Sample (β)	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
ATT → RB	0.313	0.310	0.067	4.69	0.000	Supported
DRI → ATT	0.388	0.390	0.060	6.51	0.000	Supported
DRI → RB	0.449	0.447	0.048	9.44	0.000	Supported
IDL → ATT	0.670	0.670	0.051	13.05	0.000	Supported
IDL → RB	0.329	0.330	0.057	5.78	0.000	Supported
PC × ATT → RB	0.110	0.096	0.051	2.18	0.029	Supported
DRI → ATT → RB	0.122	0.121	0.034	3.58	0.000	Supported
IDL → ATT → RB	0.210	0.207	0.048	4.34	0.000	Supported

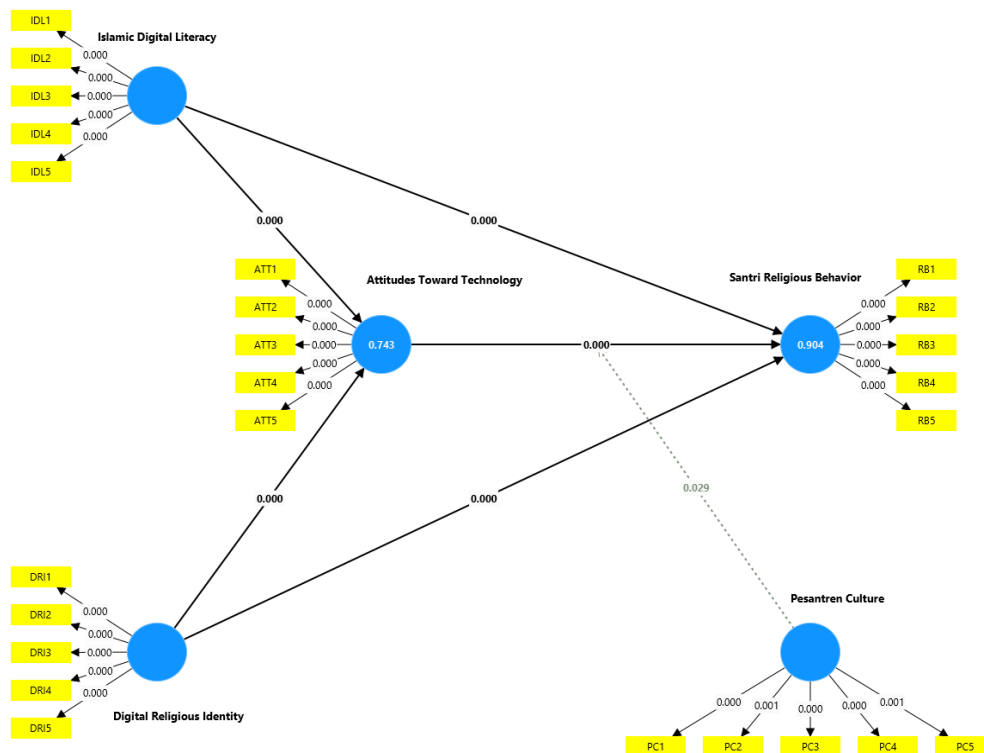


Figure 1. Output analysis

The structural model was evaluated through analysis of the path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. As shown in Table 4, all hypothesized direct, indirect, and moderating relationships were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating strong support for the proposed conceptual model.

The direct effect of Attitudes Toward Technology (ATT) on Santri Religious Behavior (RB) was significant ($\beta = 0.313$, $t = 4.691$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that positive attitudes toward digital technologies were associated with higher levels of religious expression among santri. Likewise, Digital Religious Identity (DRI) exerted significant influence both directly on Attitudes Toward Technology ($\beta = 0.388$, $t = 6.506$, $p < 0.001$) and directly on Santri Religious Behavior ($\beta = 0.449$, $t = 9.440$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that digital identity formation strengthened both technological receptiveness and religious expression. Similarly, Islamic Digital Literacy (IDL) was a strong predictor of both Attitudes Toward Technology ($\beta = 0.670$, $t = 13.047$, $p < 0.001$) and Santri Religious Behavior ($\beta = 0.329$, $t = 5.775$, $p < 0.001$). These results emphasized the pivotal role of digital literacy in shaping both

cognitive engagement with technology and value-driven religious actions in digital spaces.

The moderating effect of Pesantren Culture (PC) on the relationship between Attitudes Toward Technology and Santri Religious Behavior was also found to be significant ($\beta = 0.110$, $t = 2.184$, $p = 0.029$), suggesting that the influence of attitudes on religious behavior was stronger when pesantren culture was actively embedded. This confirmed the contextual importance of pesantren norms and values in channeling technology usage toward religious expression.

The mediation analysis further revealed significant indirect effects. Digital Religious Identity significantly influenced Santri Religious Behavior through Attitudes Toward Technology ($\beta = 0.122$, $t = 3.578$, $p < 0.001$), confirming a partial mediation pathway. Likewise, Islamic Digital Literacy also showed a significant indirect effect on religious behavior via attitudes ($\beta = 0.210$, $t = 4.335$, $p < 0.001$). These results underscored the central role of attitudes as a cognitive-affective bridge between personal digital capacity/identity and religious action.

Overall, all eight hypotheses were supported, confirming that Islamic digital literacy and religious digital identity influenced santri's religious behavior both directly and indirectly through attitudes toward technology, with pesantren culture enhancing the strength of these relationships. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with valued < 0.90 indicating adequate distinction (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). All constructs met this criterion. Attitudes Toward Technology (ATT) and Digital Religious.

5. Discussion

a. Attitudes Toward Technology and Santri Religious Behavior

The results confirm that attitudes toward technology significantly influence santri religious behavior, supporting the hypothesis that cognitive-affective evaluations of technology predict behavioral outcomes. This finding is in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), where attitudes are recognized as a proximal determinant of intention and behavior. Santri who hold favorable beliefs about the usefulness, relevance, and compatibility of digital tools are more likely to engage in digital religious activities, such as participating in virtual dhikr sessions, listening to online sermons, or sharing religious content on social media. Prior studies have also shown that positive attitudes toward technology facilitate deeper engagement in online

communities and religious platforms (Venkatesh, 2022a; Campbell & Tsuria, 2022), reinforcing the connection between mindset and action.

Moreover, the pesantren environment, which historically emphasized analog and textual learning, is now intersecting with digitally mediated practices. In this context, the internalized belief that digital media can support Islamic values becomes crucial for behavioral transformation. Muslim, (2024) emphasizes that santri who see technology not as a disruption but as a facilitator are more active in integrating Islamic ethics in their online behavior. Thus, attitudes serve as a psychological bridge that aligns digital means with spiritual ends. This suggests that strengthening santri's perceptions about the religious utility of technology can enhance not only their digital skills but also their commitment to religious practices in modern settings. This finding resonates with recent work by A. Wahid & Wardatun, (2023) and Larson, (2024), who find that digital literacy combined with religiosity fosters moral resilience and responsible online behavior among Muslim youth in Southeast Asia.

b. Digital Religious Identity and Attitudes Toward Technology

The influence of digital religious identity on attitudes toward technology demonstrate that how santri perceive themselves in online religious spaces shapes their openness to using digital tools. When individuals internalize a religious identity that is actively expressed and maintained online, they are more likely to adopt favorable attitudes toward the platforms and technologies that support such expression. This supports Campbell and Tsuria's (2022) notion that digital religion is not just about content but also about identity construction in mediated environments. A strong digital religious identity can promote the perception that technology is congruent with one's values, thus reducing resistance and increasing acceptance (Abubakari et al., 2023; Ramdani et al., 2025).

In pesantren contexts, this means that santri who frequently engage in posting Islamic quotes, participating in digital da'wah, or curating Islamic content are likely to develop more constructive and favorable attitudes toward digital tools. This is consistent with findings by Mustaffa & Ibrahim, (2025), which suggest that perceived identity alignment enhances technology acceptance. Therefore, fostering a strong digital religious self-concept among santri may serve as an antecedent to digital readiness and openness,

contributing to broader institutional goals of digital literacy and religious engagement.

c. Digital Religious Identity and Santri Religious Behavior

The direct influence of digital religious identity on religious behavior reinforces the idea that identity formation in digital spaces is not superficial but deeply consequential. When santri define themselves in terms of their online religious roles such as being a promoter of Islamic values or a participant in virtual religious communities they are more inclined to exhibit consistent religious behaviors, both online and offline. This is supported by the work of Campbell & Tsuria, (2022), who argue that digital environments allow for sustained identity enactment, which, in turn, reinforces behavioral consistency. Abubakari et al., (2023) also find that digital religious identity predicts spiritual engagement and pro-social behavior among youth in Islamic settings.

This finding is particularly relevant in pesantren, where religious identity is cultivated traditionally, but now finds new dimensions through digital representation. When digital tools are used not merely for entertainment but as platforms to enact and affirm religious identity, they become instrumental in shaping religious behavior. Muslim, (2024) suggests that such internalization can lead to greater participation in religious learning, adherence to rituals, and propagation of values. Consequently, strengthening digital religious identity becomes a vital strategy for sustaining behavioral adherence among santri in the digital era. Similar findings by Suhilmiati et al., (2024) also indicate that integrating akhlaq-based curricula with digital identity formation reinforces moral stability and mitigates online ethical risks among Islamic students.

d. Islamic Digital Literacy and Attitudes Toward Technology

The relationship between Islamic digital literacy and attitudes toward technology shows that skillful navigation of Islamic content in digital environments leads to more positive perceptions of technology itself. Santri who are literate in evaluating Islamic sources, verifying authenticity, and using digital platforms for learning are less likely to see technology as a threat. This is in line with Ramdani et al., (2025) and Muslim, (2024), who argue that domain-specific literacy (in this case, religious) increases not just competence but also confidence and trust in the digital medium. Hair et al., (2022) further

support the view that perceived control, often enhanced through literacy, is a significant driver of positive attitudes.

For pesantren-based santri, who are often exposed to traditional learning modes, acquiring digital Islamic literacy transforms the way they view digital media from being potentially harmful to being strategically useful. This shift in perception enhances their willingness to engage with technology as a tool for religious growth. The educational implications are profound, suggesting that pesantren should integrate digital literacy components into their curricula not merely for skill development, but also to reshape attitudes and encourage purposeful technology use (Mustaffa & Ibrahim, 2025).

e. Islamic Digital Literacy and Santri Religious Behavior

Islamic digital literacy directly influencing religious behavior affirms that knowledge, skills, and confidence in using Islamic digital content translate into action. Santri who can critically assess, apply, and disseminate digital religious information are more likely to engage in behaviors that reflect their understanding such as sharing verified hadiths, participating in online halaqah, or avoiding digital sin (fitnah, hoax, etc.). This supports the argument by Ramdani et al., (2025) that literacy enhances not only knowledge acquisition but also the ethical enactment of religious values online. Muslim, (2024) add that religious literacy in digital contexts fosters self-regulation, which is essential for behavior consistency.

In the pesantren context, where religious authority is central, digital literacy empowers santri to maintain doctrinal integrity while navigating decentralized and unregulated digital spaces. This behavioral manifestation is not accidental but rooted in their competence and confidence to filter and apply religious content. The implication is that digital literacy is not just an educational goal but a behavioral catalyst that enhances religious observance in the modern era (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022; Hair et al., 2022).

f. Digital Religious Identity, Attitudes Toward Technology, and Santri Religious Behavior

The mediating role of attitudes toward technology in the relationship between digital religious identity and religious behavior provides compelling evidence for a cognitive-affective mechanism through which identity translates into action. When santri strongly identify with religious values in the digital realm, this identity positively shapes their attitude toward

technology. In turn, this positive attitude facilitates greater engagement in religious behaviors. This sequential process aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes that beliefs and identity influence behavior through attitudinal pathways. Previous studies by Campbell & Tsuria, (2022) and Abubakari et al., (2023) similarly confirm that a digitally formed religious identity enhances receptivity to technology, which then promotes consistent behavioral patterns.

While the Theory of Planned Behavior provides a useful psychological lens, santri behavior in pesantren cannot be fully understood without considering Islamic educational principles grounded in *akhlāq* (moral virtue) and *adab* (ethical discipline). Within this framework, attitudes toward technology are not only cognitive evaluations but also moral reflections shaped by the values of sincerity (*ikhlas*), self-discipline (*mujāhadah*), and inner purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). This perspective positions digital engagement as both a spiritual and ethical practice where technology becomes a means of *ibadah* and social responsibility, not merely an instrumental tool. Practically, pesantren administrators can apply these insights by embedding *akhlāqul karimah* modules into digital literacy curricula, emphasizing critical and ethical content evaluation alongside religious purpose. Furthermore, establishing supervised digital platforms guided by *ustadz* or *kyai* can promote responsible online interaction while preserving the pesantren's moral ecosystem. This integrated approach ensures that digital religiosity among santri aligns not only with behavioral theory but also with Islamic moral pedagogy, thereby harmonizing cognitive readiness with spiritual consciousness.

The pesantren setting, traditionally wary of modern media, gains a new pathway to influence student behavior when attitudes serve as mediators. It allows the institution to align digital identity construction with behavioral goals without directly controlling digital behavior. Santri who internalize religious roles online often reinterpret technology as an Islamic instrument rather than a secular distraction, thereby increasing its behavioral utility. This supports findings by Mustaffa & Ibrahim, (2025) and Ramdani et al., (2025) that underscore the indirect but powerful role of digital identity in behavior formation when filtered through attitudinal dispositions. Consequently, pesantren can leverage this mechanism to foster pious digital citizens.

g. Islamic Digital Literacy, Attitudes Toward Technology, and Santri Religious Behavior

The mediating effect of attitudes toward technology on the link between Islamic digital literacy and religious behavior highlights the role of perceptions in transforming knowledge into practice. Santri with high digital literacy skills are capable of engaging critically with religious content online. However, their actual behavior is significantly enhanced when these skills are accompanied by a favorable attitude toward the tools they are using. This echoes the assertion by Hair et al., (2021) that technological literacy must be channeled through positive perceptions for behavioral change to occur. (Muslim, 2024) further emphasizes that competent users who distrust technology may still avoid religious engagement online.

By serving as a bridge, attitude converts literacy into meaningful behavior, particularly within structured religious environments such as pesantren. This mediating role affirms earlier findings by Ramdani et al., (2025) and Mustaffa & Ibrahim, (2025), which suggest that skills alone do not guarantee ethical or value-aligned action unless guided by internalized appraisals of technology. The findings imply that pesantren digital curriculum must not only focus on competency training but also on shaping positive affective orientations toward technology. Doing so will multiply the behavioral impact of existing literacy programs, leading to more active and reflective religious engagement among santri.

h. Pesantren Culture × Attitudes Toward Technology and Santri Religious Behavior

The significance of pesantren culture as a moderating variable in the relationship between attitudes and religious behavior reflects the enduring influence of institutional norms on individual actions. In environments where pesantren culture supports or even encourages the integration of digital tools into religious life, the positive effect of attitudes on behavior becomes stronger. This aligns with the cultural moderation theory proposed by Sanguinetti & Maran, (2024), where organizational values enhance or suppress the translation of intention into action. In pesantren with progressive outlooks, santri may feel more empowered to act on their digital attitudes, thereby exhibiting higher religious engagement online.

Conversely, in more conservative environments, the same attitudes may not result in behavioral change due to cultural resistance or lack of institutional support. This explains why the presence of a supportive culture significantly strengthens the attitude-behavior link. As emphasized by Mustaffa & Ibrahim, (2025) and Muslim, (2024), cultural values serve as an enabling or constraining context that must be aligned with individual readiness for optimal behavioral outcomes. Therefore, cultivating a pesantren culture that embraces ethical digital engagement is essential to ensure that the cognitive and affective gains of santri translate into observable, value driven behaviors.

The findings suggest that pesantren can leverage their institutional culture to develop structured digital literacy programs grounded in Islamic ethical values. One practical approach is the integration of akhlaqul karimah into digital curricula through halaqah-style workshops that teach santri how to critically evaluate online religious content, identify misinformation (*fitnah digital*), and engage in responsible dakwah through social media. Digital ethics modules can be co-taught by ustadz and IT instructors, emphasizing both technical skills and moral reasoning guided by principles such as amanah (trustworthiness), tabayyun (verification), and maslahah (social benefit). Pesantren can also establish supervised online learning communities where digital interactions are monitored within an educational framework, ensuring that technological engagement aligns with Islamic virtues. This echoes the argument of Rubini et al., (2025), who conceptualize Islamic digital ethics as an educational framework where responsible media use is guided by religious values of amanah and maslahah. These practices operationalize the study's findings by showing how a supportive cultural environment can amplify santri's positive attitudes toward technology into observable, ethical behavior.

While this study provides valuable insights into the interaction between digital religiosity and pesantren culture, several limitations warrant reflection. The sample was confined to pesantren in the Kudus region, which may not represent the diversity of pesantren traditions across Indonesia. Furthermore, the study employed a cross-sectional design, limiting causal inference and the observation of behavioral changes over time. Future research could adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to capture the dynamic evolution of santri digital engagement and explore additional moderating factors such as gender, socio-economic background, or digital

infrastructure. Expanding the scope of respondents and combining quantitative modeling with ethnographic observation would deepen understanding of how digital ethics are negotiated within varying pesantren ecosystems.

Despite the positive associations found between digital literacy, identity, and religious behavior, the digital transformation within pesantren life remains neither uniform nor uncontested. Several ethnographic studies indicate that kyai and senior teachers often express ambivalence toward digital media, perceiving it as both an opportunity for dakwah expansion and a potential source of moral distraction (Harnadi et al., 2021; Pabbajah et al., 2024). This institutional caution can create uneven patterns of technology adoption across pesantren types where modern pesantren may actively integrate digital learning platforms, while traditional salaf institutions rely primarily on face-to-face transmission. Moreover, disparities in digital access, such as limited connectivity and low-end devices, may constrain santri participation in online religious engagement (Paramansyah et al., 2024). Beyond technical barriers, the moral tension between virtual religiosity and embodied piety also shapes behavioral outcomes. As Ramdani et al., (2025) observe, santri often navigate a paradox between maintaining akhlaq in digital spaces and responding to the performative pressures of social media visibility. Recognizing these ambivalent dynamics enriches the current findings, suggesting that digital religiosity in pesantren should be viewed not as a linear progression but as a negotiated process shaped by authority, access, and ethics.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic digital literacy and digital religious identity play significant roles in shaping santri religious behavior, both directly and through attitudes toward technology, while pesantren culture strengthens the translation of technological attitudes into value-oriented actions. These findings affirm that digital religiosity within pesantren is not merely a functional adoption of technology but a moral process shaped by institutional norms and Islamic ethical principles such as adab, akhlaq, and tazkiyah al nafs. The study contributes theoretically by positioning pesantren as an important site for understanding digital religious ethics and by integrating behavioral models with Islamic epistemology, and it offers practical implications for developing culturally grounded digital literacy programs, strengthening the role of ustadz as digital

mentors, and promoting supervised digital engagement among santri. Nonetheless, this research is limited by its focus on pesantren in Kudus and the use of a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal interpretation and generalizability; therefore, future studies should employ longitudinal, comparative, or qualitative approaches to capture variations in digital religiosity across diverse pesantren ecosystems. Overall, the study underscores the need for Islamic educational institutions to approach technology not only as a tool for dissemination but as an ethical domain requiring guidance, ensuring that digital engagement fosters digital piety aligned with iman and amal.

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