

The Commodification of Piety: Negotiating *Zuhud* and Consumerist Subjectivities among Students in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

Modern Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia have traditionally instilled the value of *zuhud*—simplicity and detachment from worldly materialism—as a core principle of Islamic spirituality. However, modern *pesantren* increasingly enroll students from upper-middle-class families, who bring exposure to consumer culture, creating a fundamental tension between religious teachings that emphasize *zuhud* and the pervasive influence of consumerism, which celebrates material acquisition and social status. This study examines how female students (*santri*) at modern *pesantren* navigate the tension between Islamic values of *zuhud* and the pressures of contemporary consumer culture. This research addresses a critical gap in understanding how young religious women actively negotiate these competing influences, rather than passively accepting either religious doctrine or consumer messages. It reveals how female students (*santri*) reconstruct their religious identity to create contemporary forms of religiosity relevant to modernity. Using Baudrillard's theory of consumer society and Bourdieu's theory of field, habitus, and social capital, a case study was conducted at Assalaam Modern Islamic Boarding School in Sukoharjo through in-depth interviews with 15 female students who had lived there for 3-6 years and came from upper-middle-class economic backgrounds. The findings identified three negotiation types: Minimalist-Pragmatic Students, who maintain simplicity through structured consumption; Selective Negotiator Students, who develop religious justifications to legitimize consumption; and Adaptive Consumer Students, who are highly influenced by peer groups and social media. All respondents acknowledged the influence of social media, with the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) being the primary driver for purchasing expensive items. Brand dominance (Rabbani hijabs, Adidas, Nike, Corkcicle) creates conformity pressure. The research reveals that female students (*santri*) actively reconstruct religious identity to accommodate modern realities, creating contemporary *zuhud*—a reinterpretation of simplicity as religiously responsible consumption rather than complete material rejection. Female students (*santri*) are active agents constructing a blend of religious-consumer identities, creating a new form of religiosity relevant to modernity.

Article History

Received: 14-09-2025

Revised: 20-11-2025

Accepted: 21-11-2025

Keywords:

Consumerist Culture;
Identity Negotiation;
Modern Islamic Boarding
Schools;
Santri;
Zuhud.



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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, faces an interesting contemporary paradox, according to Usman (2013). On the one hand, *pesantren* continue to maintain their function as bastions of *zuhud* and spiritual simplicity. On the other hand, the development of digital technology and global consumerism culture has penetrated the lives of *santri*, especially female *santri* who are increasingly active on social media and have access to fashion trends and modern lifestyles. This phenomenon becomes even more complex in the context of Islamic modern boarding schools, which institutionally open themselves to the developments of the times, but still strive to maintain the fundamental values of Islam.

The selection of the *Pondok Pesantren Modern Islam* (PPMI) Assalam as the research locus was based on preliminary observations that had been conducted previously. This observation reveals a significant phenomenon of consumerist lifestyles among *santri*, particularly female *santri*. This phenomenon is interesting because it occurs in a *pesantren* environment that institutionally

teaches the values of simplicity and *zuhud*. This contradiction between the teaching of values and daily practice makes PPMI Assalam an ideal site for understanding the negotiation of *santri* identity in the context of modernity. This research has ensured that *santri* possess adequate understanding of the concept of *zuhud*. This understanding is acquired through regular *kajian* (religious studies), periodic Islamic study sessions that discuss Islamic values including *zuhud* and *halaqah*, small group discussion forums that enable deep internalization of religious values.

This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about how female *santri* negotiate their identities amid the tension between the values of *zuhud* taught to them and the pressures of consumerist culture they face on a daily basis. Furthermore, how do they develop justification strategies to legitimize their consumption practices within a religious framework? Preliminary data shows that students develop various narratives such as being grateful for their blessings, using them for worship, sharing with friends, and self-reward, which repeatedly emerge as ways to overcome internal conflicts between consumption desires and values of simplicity. The study of *zuhud* at PPMI Assalam holds profound significance on multiple levels, both theoretically and practically. First, this research addresses a critical gap in contemporary Islamic studies by examining how traditional religious values intersect with modern consumerist culture in educational institutions. *Pesantren*, as bastions of Islamic traditionalism, are increasingly confronted with the challenges of globalization and market economy, yet scholarly attention to how these institutions and their students navigate this tension remains limited. By focusing on the concept of *zuhud*—a fundamental virtue in Islamic spirituality that emphasizes detachment from worldly possessions—this study provides crucial insights into the adaptation and transformation of religious ethics in contemporary contexts.

Falikul Isbah (2020), in his study of Islamic boarding schools in the context of a changing Indonesia, shows that these schools have undergone a significant transformation from traditional educational institutions to institutions that are more open to modernity. Modern Islamic boarding schools have adopted the national curriculum and technology and opened up access for students to the outside world. As a consequence, this has inevitably brought new challenges to the preservation of traditional values. *Pesantren* are no longer seen solely as religious institutions, but also as agents of social status transformation, where economic and cultural capital ownership has become increasingly important in shaping social stratification within the *pesantren* community (Assa'idi, 2021).

In the context of *santri* consumption behavior, research on the consumptive behavior of *santri* at An-Najah Denanyar Jombang Islamic Boarding School reveals that even though the *pesantren* instills values of simplicity, the modernization of the *pesantren* system has contributed to excessive consumption patterns (Putra & Fadhli, 2025). The study found that peer attachment, self-control, and religiosity influence the consumptive behavior of *santri*. Meanwhile, studies on Muslim women's identity and consumption have produced important insights. Beta (2014) revealed that young urban Muslim women in Indonesia redefine their identity through hijab fashion, where the hijab has transformed from a symbol of religiosity to a medium of self-expression and lifestyle. Farhan et al. (2025) reinforced this finding by showing that the hijab has evolved into a lifestyle symbol associated with contemporary fashion trends. Shin et al. (2025) explored how hijab influencers and religious communities play a role in the socialization of Indonesian Muslim consumers, finding that Muslim women negotiate between piety and fashion through various strategies. The phenomenon shows that religiosity and class existence intersect in Muslim fashion consumption practices on Instagram, where Muslim consumers develop justifications to legitimize consumption despite tensions with religious values (Apriantika, 2023).

Theoretically, studies on Muslim consumption have used various approaches. Baudrillard (1998) in *The Consumer Society* emphasizes that in a consumer society, objects are no longer consumed based on their utility value, but rather as a system of signs that distinguish social status. Baudrillard (2019) also argues that postmodern society lives in a world of simulacra, where representation precedes reality. Meanwhile, Bourdieu (1984) in *Distinction* explains that social

class and cultural capital shape tastes and consumption practices. Bourdieu (1990) also developed the concepts of habitus, field, and social capital to understand how dispositions embedded through socialization shape individuals' social practices in various arenas.

Although previous studies have provided important insights into Muslim consumption behavior, significant gaps remain that this research addresses through its multi-dimensional novelty. First, existing research has predominantly focused on urban Muslim populations outside religious institutions or university students in secular settings, systematically overlooking the unique dynamics within female *santri* communities in Islamic modern boarding schools. This represents a critical empirical gap because modern *pesantren* like PPMI Assalam create a distinctive paradox: they maintain strict regulations emphasizing simplicity and *zuhud* while simultaneously providing *santri* with access to smartphones, social media, and consumer culture. This paradoxical context—where religious values and consumerist pressures collide within a regulated institutional environment—has not been explored in depth, particularly regarding how female *santri* develop adaptive strategies and justification narratives (such as being grateful for blessings, using possessions for worship, sharing with friends, and self-reward) to negotiate between institutional demands for simplicity and the pervasive influence of consumer culture. The gendered dimension adds further significance, as young Muslim women face specific pressures regarding appearance, modesty, and competing models of Muslim femininity that differ fundamentally from their male counterparts.

Second, this research offers theoretical novelty by becoming the first study to synthesize Jean Baudrillard's theories of sign consumption and simulacra with Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital specifically within *pesantren* contexts. This integrated framework addresses a crucial theoretical gap: while Baudrillard's theory illuminates what *santri* consume (signs, symbols, and identities through social media) and why consumption becomes central to identity construction, Bourdieu's framework explains how social structures, embodied dispositions, and various forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) shape consumption practices under institutional constraints. No previous *pesantren* research has employed this dual theoretical lens, which enables multi-level analysis capturing both the semiotic complexity of contemporary consumption and the structural-dispositional factors that shape *santri*'s negotiation strategies. This theoretical synthesis, combined with the unique empirical focus on female *santri* in modern Islamic boarding schools, positions the research to make significant contributions not only to understanding contemporary Islamic education but also to broader theoretical discussions about how religious institutions and actors adapt traditional values in late modern consumer societies, with practical implications for Islamic education policy and pedagogy in navigating the challenges of value transmission in globalized contexts.

Based on the background and research gap above, this study formulates the main question: How do female students in Islamic modern boarding schools negotiate their identities amid the tension between the values of *zuhud* taught to them and the consumerist culture in their daily lives? In line with this research question, this study aims to: (1) Identify and categorize the typology of identity negotiation strategies developed by female students in facing the contestation between *zuhud* values and consumerist culture; (2) Analyze how female students use religious narratives to legitimize their consumption practices within the framework of Islamic values; (3) Explore the social arenas in which identity negotiation takes place, including the dynamics of public-private spaces, the role of social media, and the influence of peer groups; (4) Conceptualize contemporary *zuhud* as a form of reinterpretation of the value of simplicity that is compatible with the realities of modernity.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze how female students (*santri*) in Islamic modern boarding schools negotiate their identities amid the tension between the values of *zuhud* taught to them and the consumerist culture in their daily lives. A qualitative approach was chosen

because it allows researchers to understand phenomena comprehensively by identifying, analyzing, and interpreting contextual and complex issues. Specifically, this approach was used to answer the research questions that had been formulated previously. This study used a case study strategy because the research object met the case criteria outlined by Yin (2018), namely: (1) contemporary phenomena; (2) occurring in a real-world context; and (3) the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not entirely clear. This strategy allows researchers to reveal the processes and dynamics that occur intensively in a particular setting, in this case a modern Islamic boarding school, namely Islamic Modern Boarding School of Assalaam Sukoharjo, Central Java.

Data collection was carried out using two methods: observation and interviews. Direct observation was conducted by observing the consumptive behavior of female students at PPMI Assalaam Sukoharjo for six months. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of key informants, consisting of fifteen female students who had studied at the Islamic boarding school for around 3-6 years and had engaged in impulsive buying. This research analyzes data using the integration of two main theoretical frameworks: Baudrillard's theory of consumer society, which views consumption as a system of signs where objects are consumed not for their usefulness but for their symbolic value in communicating status and identity, and Bourdieu's theory of practice, which includes the concepts of field (the structure of rules and hierarchies of the *pesantren*), habitus (dispositions formed from the *santri's* social background), and capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources that can be converted). Operationally, the researcher identifies and catalogs the objects consumed by the *santri*, analyzes their sign value and symbolic meaning within the *pesantren* context, maps the *santri's* position within the *pesantren* field structure, traces their habitus through biographical data and daily practice patterns, inventories their possessed capital and conversion strategies, and analyzes the tension between consumerist dispositions and the norms of *pesantren* piety. Data from participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation were coded using theoretical categories and then analyzed at three levels: comprehensive individual profiles, cross-case patterns based on class background and type of capital, and structural analysis to explain the mechanisms linking habitus, position in the field, and capital ownership with the consumption negotiation strategies developed by *santri* in the face of tension between modern consumption logic and traditional piety logic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 15 female students (*santri*) at the Modern Islamic Boarding School of Assalaam in Sukoharjo with upper-middle-class economic backgrounds, who had been living at the boarding school for between 3 and 6 years. Informants' monthly consumption expenditures ranged from Rp200.000. to Rp2.000.000. with an average of Rp1.200.000. per month. The data shows that even though the boarding school teaches the values of asceticism and simplicity, female students develop various complex identity negotiation strategies in the face of consumerist cultural pressures.

Understanding the Value of *Zuhud* in the Context of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

Findings show that Islamic modern boarding schools implement rules aimed at instilling the value of simplicity, such as restrictions on the use of jewelry (a maximum of one ring and one pair of earrings), a ban on the use of makeup, recommendations to limit the price of shoes to a maximum of Rp1.000.000. and sandals to Rp500.000. and restrictions on the ownership of clothing and headscarves to a maximum of five sets. Teachers routinely give advice on living frugally, especially before students leave the complex—students are given time to leave the boarding school complex, where they can shop for daily necessities. The time to leave the complex is from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The policy of leaving the complex has also been reduced from twice a month to once a month in an effort to reduce exposure to consumerist culture. This finding is in line with research showing that modern boarding schools face challenges in maintaining traditional values while opening up to modernity. Boarding schools try to maintain control through formal regulations, but

their effectiveness is limited when faced with the structural penetration of global consumerist culture (Falikul Isbah, 2020).

The understanding of *santri* about simplicity shows variations in interpretation. Zvn defines simplicity as “Wearing something sufficiently, not excessively,” while other respondents tend to interpret simplicity in the context of obeying to *pesantren* rules, rather than as an internalized principle of life. Nbl explained that, “This *pesantren* also has several rules aimed at instilling a simple life in its students, namely limiting the use of jewelry (only one ring and earrings are allowed.” Ynk added, “Some rules regarding appearance, such as not being allowed to wear jewelry, the maximum amount of cash allowed is determined, and makeup is not permitted. There is also an appeal not to buy sandals above 500 thousand, and not to buy shoes above 1 million.”

This indicates that the value of *zuhud* is understood more as external regulation than internal disposition, aligning with Bourdieu's concept of habitus. He emphasizes that habitus is formed through accumulated experiences over the long term and tends to persist even when objective conditions change (Bourdieu, 1990). In the context of this research, students bring with them the consumerist habitus from their families (mostly upper-middle class), which is not in line with the habitus of simplicity that is a character trait instilled by *pesantren*. Arn admitted, “I come from a wealthy family, and I'm easily influenced by my friends,” while Rnt stated, “I'm a consumer because I'm easily influenced by my friends to buy things.” Adt even explicitly stated, “I often FOMO and going along with my friends when shopping for consumer goods,” and Almira added, “When I'm with my friends, I don't look at the price, I just buy it because I like to follow my friends and they encourage me to buy.”

The findings of this study reveal a deeper complexity than previous studies that focused on curriculum modernization and technology integration (Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025; Alid et al., 2022). Unlike Ubaidillah and Faiz (2025), who demonstrated the success of the epistemological transformation of *pesantren* at the institutional level, this study reveals that at the individual level of *santri*, the transmission of ascetic values faces resistance from the ingrained consumerist habitus. Edgerton and Roberts (2014) proved that the habitus of family conditions tends to persist even when individuals are in different fields. This research confirms the proposition but identifies important nuances: the phenomenon of surface compliance where students show conformity to formal rules but internal dispositions remain consumerist, demonstrating that habitus is not only persistent but also adopts complex adaptive strategies.

This finding differs significantly from Zulmuqim et al. (2020), who reported successful curriculum integration in West Sumatra *pesantren* but did not examine whether this integration transformed internal dispositions or merely resulted in formal compliance. The dimensions of consumerism also differ from the study by Dash et al. (2024), which found religious values to be a moderator of extreme consumption behavior among Saudi millennials. In the context of Indonesian *santri*, despite their high religious commitment, this does not automatically reduce consumerist tendencies, creating a religious-consumerist hybrid disposition. Nabila et al. (2024) demonstrate the potential of modern Islamic boarding schools to integrate 21st-century skills while maintaining Islamic values, but this research reveals a paradox: integration with modernity actually brings students closer to consumerism, which contradicts traditional values such as *zuhud*. Furthermore, Reay (2004) emphasizes that habitus connects the past with the present, but this research shows that family trajectories not only connect but also dominate the present despite intensive institutional interventions. This phenomenon challenges the assumption in research on *pesantren* transformation (Alid et al., 2022; Zulmuqim et al., 2020) that curriculum modernization automatically leads to the holistic transformation of students. This research proves that structural-institutional transformation is not always followed by individual habitus transformation—*pesantren* successfully changed the field but failed to transform the pre-existing habitus.

This study found that students' understanding of the value of *zuhud* in modern *pesantren* tends to be superficial—simplicity is understood as adherence to rules, not an internalized principle of life, indicating that the value of asceticism is understood more as an external regulation than an

internal disposition, in line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). This phenomenon occurs because, although *pesantren* function as a field that shapes habitus through the transmission of cultural values (Harnadi et al., 2021), students from upper-middle-class families bring a consumerist habitus that tends to persist even when objective conditions change (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Young Muslim adults reinterpret religious guidelines in different ways in their consumption practices (Jafari & Süerdem, 2012), so they outwardly adhere to formal rules but consumerist values remain dominant in their internal dispositions. Additionally, this research indicates that consumerist habitus has greater resilience and can adopt adaptive strategies that allow for coexistence with religious commitment – a 'religious-consumerist hybrid disposition' which is a novel finding. Realizing the values of asceticism in the millennial generation requires an adaptive approach while maintaining the core spiritual values of Islam (Hamidi, 2024).

Consumption Practices and Sign Systems

Baudrillard (1998) in *The Consumer Society* emphasizes that in a consumer society, objects are no longer viewed based on their utility value, but rather as sign systems that distinguish social status. The findings of this study support Baudrillard's argument, in which female students consume certain items as markers of social identity within the *pesantren* community. When asked about the most important items they owned, respondents mentioned shoes (6 respondents), skincare (2 respondents), sandals (3 respondents), and Rabbani headscarves (1 respondent). Interestingly, one respondent explicitly stated, “*Rabbani hijab. Because here, if you don't wear the Rabbani brand, you are considered strange. And here, almost no one wears hijabs other than the Rabbani brand.*” This statement shows that consumption is no longer about the function of the hijab as a cover for the aurat, but as a sign of membership in the community and a way to avoid social stigma.

This finding reinforces the research of Beta (2014) and Farhan et al. (2025), which shows that the hijab has transformed from a religious symbol into a symbol of lifestyle and fashion. However, this study reveals a new dimension: in the context of closed Islamic boarding schools, certain brands (Rabbani) become hegemonic, creating stronger pressure to conform than in more diverse urban contexts. Baudrillard (in Farhan et al., 2025) argues that in consumer societies, identity is formed through the appropriation of signs and symbols. This shows that even though Islamic boarding schools limit access to the outside world, the system of consumerism signs continues to operate by creating a hierarchy in the use of certain brands. The consumption of branded skincare and shoes by female students also reflects this practice. Arn states that shoes are important to her “*Because I bought them in Sydney,*” which shows that the value of goods does not lie in their function, but in the symbolism they contain. Similarly, Ghd's purchase of a bag worth Rp2.000.000. because “*it's cute*” indicates that symbolic aesthetic value outweighs functional considerations or the value of *zuhud* taught by the *pesantren*. Although *pesantren* ideologically uphold egalitarianism, consumption practices create hidden stratification based on economic capital. Respondents' monthly expenditures, which varied from Rp200.000. to Rp2.000.000. reflect differences in economic capital, which are then translated into differences in consumption capacity and access to branded goods. Bourdieu (2011), in his concept of forms of capital, explains that economic capital can be converted into symbolic capital that provides prestige and social recognition.

The findings of this research present both significant and paradoxical contributions when compared to existing studies. From Sandıkcı to Ger (2010), it is demonstrated how the hijab in Turkey transformed from a stigmatized practice to a fashionable one through a gradual destigmatization process, where middle-class urban women could negotiate religious identity and modernity. Conversely, this study found different dynamics: instead of destigmatization and diversification, there was re-stigmatization and homogenization of consumption. Female students who do not wear Rabbani face stigma as weird, creating strong pressure to conform. This indicates that in a closed community with a strong hierarchy, the consumption of Islamic fashion is not moving toward pluralism, but rather creating a new, more rigid hegemony.

This difference can be explained through Verter's (2003) concept of spiritual capital, which argues that religious knowledge and preferences function as positional goods in a competitive symbolic economy. In the context of *pesantren*, Rabbani consumption becomes a marker of spiritual capital—a way of demonstrating conformity with community norms. Those who can consume the right brands receive higher social recognition, creating a stratification based on economic ability that is hidden behind the rhetoric of piety. This finding confirms Verter's argument that spiritual capital is contextual—what is valuable in one religious setting can differ drastically in another. When compared to Shin, Lew, and Seo (2025) on hijab influencers in Indonesia, this study reveals a complex dialectic between agency and structural pressures. Shin et al. (2025) found that religious community involvement has a negative effect on the adoption of commodified hijab styles. However, the findings of this study indicate that in *pesantren*, the community actually forces the consumption of certain brands to avoid social sanctions. This suggests that the type of community is very determining: open communities tend to limit commodification, while closed communities actually create a segmented market with dominant brands. Paradoxically, in an effort to avoid materialism, *pesantren* communities create a highly structured and exclusive consumption system.

The findings on the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital also challenge Gökarıksel and Secor's (2010) conceptualization of Islamic-ness in commodities. They show that Islamic-ness in the Turkish hijab fashion industry is unstable—continuously negotiated between producers and consumers. Turkish women face a moral ambivalence between the demands of modesty (*tesettür*) and the spectacle of fashion, and are constantly engaged in mediation. However, in this study, that ambivalence was minimized by community pressure. Female students do not have the freedom to negotiate Islamic-ness individually; they must adhere to the community-defined definition – consumption of Rabbani. This shows that in a closed community, Islamic-ness is no longer an arena for individual negotiation, but is codified by community authorities. Certain brands become proxies for piety, creating a system where economic capability is disguised as religious commitment.

This practice creates the pious consumerism paradox—the contradiction between the teachings of Islamic simplicity and the reality of expensive branded consumption. Gökarıksel and Secor (2009) demonstrate how the hijab fashion industry has grown within the context of neoliberal restructuring and the rise of global Islamic identity, enabling Muslim women to participate in the global market while maintaining their religious identity. However, this research reveals a dark side: in closed communities, the commodification of piety creates class-based exclusion. Students with an expenditure of Rp200.000. do not have the same ability to demonstrate piety through consumption as those with an expenditure of Rp2.000.000. creating a hidden hierarchy that contradicts Islamic egalitarianism but is legitimized through community narratives.

This research demonstrates how economic capital is converted into spiritual capital with an uneven exchange rate—those with high economic capital can easily accumulate spiritual capital, while those with low capital must seek alternative, less effective strategies (Verter, 2003; Bourdieu, 2011). Unlike Turkish studies that show women have agency in choosing their hijab style (Sandıkçı & Ger, 2010; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2012), this research reveals that in Islamic modern boarding schools, the question is not whether to wear a hijab? but rather which brand to wear? This shifts the analysis from the process of destigmatization to differentiation and stratification within the practice of wearing the hijab itself—demonstrating that even within egalitarian normative practices, market mechanisms create new hierarchies legitimized through religious narratives. While existing literature focuses on how global markets influence religious practices (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2009; Sandıkçı & Ger, 2010), this research shows the opposite process: how the structure of religious communities shapes and limits markets, creating bounded markets with religiously legitimized consumption hierarchies. This raises the question: To what extent is this pattern specific to Indonesian *pesantren*? Do other closed religious communities show a similar pattern? And how does this dynamic change with the penetration of social media and e-commerce?

The Influence of Social Media and Consumption Simulacra

The findings of this study confirm that FOMO is a primary driver of impulsive consumption among *santri*, aligning with the comprehensive study by Tandon et al. (2021), which found that FOMO is a significant predictor of excessive social media platform use and consumer behavior. However, the *pesantren* context adds a unique dimension not yet explored in global literature: digital access hierarchies create more complex consumption paradoxes. While Nyrhinen et al. (2024) identified low self-control as a primary factor in impulsive buying among Finnish youth, this study found that institutional power hierarchies—where managers have greater access to social media—actually exacerbate consumption pattern disparities. This phenomenon reflects what Singh et al. (2023) call social media community effects, but in the context of *pesantren*, these digital communities are fragmented based on structural status, not just personal preferences.

The findings of this study strengthen and expand upon Apriantika's (2023) argument about middle-class Muslim fashion consumption on Instagram, where social media serves as a platform for both religious identity construction and participation in consumer culture. However, this research reveals additional complexities: while Apriantika found that middle-class Muslim consumers actively use Instagram for negotiating religious and consumerist identities, *santri* in this study experienced FOMO even with limited access. This shows that participation in consumer culture doesn't always require full access—simulacra produced by social media can operate even with minimal exposure. Baulch and Pramiyanti (2018) also researched how Indonesian hijabers use Instagram to construct a consumerist modern Muslim identity, showing that visual representation serves as both *da'wah* and participation in consumer culture. The findings of this study expand on both previous studies by revealing that *santri*—who are theoretically more isolated from consumerist influences—are not immune to the allure of social media simulacra. The consumption of cute items such as stickers and diaries by *santri* demonstrates how digital visual aesthetics are penetrating even religious institutions that restrict access.

Theoretical debates arise when comparing these findings with the literature on adolescent consumer behavior in general. Wilska et al. (2023) found that Finnish adolescents use social media to express diverse consumer identities, ranging from brand-conscious to sustainable consumers. Contrary to their findings, and even different from the context of the urban Muslim middle class studied by Apriantika, the *santri* in this study exhibited a more paradoxical consumption pattern: they adopted consumerist behaviors (buying Vespas, iPhones, Labubu blind boxes) while remaining within the framework of *pesantren* values that limited their access. This challenges the dichotomy proposed by Wilska et al. and shows that the identity of contemporary Muslim consumers is more hybrid and complex than mainstream literature assumes. This finding also enriches our understanding of what Baudrillard (1970) called the response to "signs produced by the media"—in the context of *pesantren*, these signs are not only about secular social status or religious identity construction as found by Apriantika, but also about negotiating modernity in conditions of limited access but intensified desire.

The novelty of this research lies in three critical aspects that distinguish it from Apriantika's study and related literature. First, this research is the first to document how institutional hierarchies in *pesantren* create digital access stratification that subsequently reinforces consumption disparities—a dimension absent in both mainstream FOMO literature and in studies of middle-class Muslim consumers, which tend to assume relatively equal access. Second, this research reveals how FOMO operates in the context of restricted access: the fact that *santri* still experience FOMO despite limited access suggests that this phenomenon is more a structural condition of hyperreal society than simply a problem of excessive use. Third, this research bridges the gap between studies of urban Muslim consumers (such as Apriantika, Baulch & Pramiyanti) and the context of traditional religious institutions—demonstrating that even in settings that actively restrict digital access, the logic of capitalist hyperreality can still penetrate and influence consumption patterns.

The theoretical implications of these findings challenge the deterministic view of technology, which assumes that restricting access will reduce the influence of social media. Conversely, this

study indicates that under conditions of restricted access, FOMO can actually intensify because students compare the reality of their *pesantren* life with the idealized representations they see limitedly on social media—a phenomenon not found in Apriantika's study of urban Muslim consumers with full access. This strengthens Baudrillard's argument about simulacra: it's not the quantity of exposure that determines desire, but the quality of representation that creates it. This finding also contributes to the debate about the role of religious institutions in the digital age: instead of being a bulwark against consumerism, *pesantren* have become an arena where negotiations between traditional values and consumerist modernity take place—often with paradoxical and unexpected results.

Typology of Female *Santri* Identity Negotiation

Based on the interview data, which was then analyzed using Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus, this study identified three typologies of *santri* in negotiating their identities between ascetic values and consumerist culture. These typologies are a new contribution to the literature because previous studies have not systematically categorized the identity negotiation strategies of female *santri* in the context of consumerism.

First, Minimalist-Pragmatic *Santri*. Minimalist-pragmatic *santri* have a habitus that is closer to *pesantren* values, possibly due to family socialization that emphasizes thriftiness and control over financial management or more limited economic capital. Bourdieu emphasizes that habitus is a system of durable, transposable dispositions that shape how individuals perceive and respond to the social world (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These *santri* develop practical strategies to minimize impulsive consumption and optimize limited resources. The finding that personal values can influence sustainable consumption behavior, even though social pressure remains present (Sugiyanto et al., 2024). In this study, Tys represents this typology with the lowest monthly expenditure (Rp200,000) and a more structured decision-making strategy, “*I usually think about it for a week. If after a week I still want to buy it, then I will buy it.*” She also applies a buy-sell strategy to overcome consumption regret, “*Often, my way of dealing with it is to sell it to someone else.*” This respondent tends to uphold the principle of simplicity despite acknowledging its difficulties in the modern era. Although *santri* with this typology are a very small minority, they still exist.

Second, Selective - Negotiator *Santri*. Bourdieu explains that social agents develop strategies to maximize symbolic gains in certain fields (Bourdieu, 1984). Selective negotiator *santri* have cultural capital that allows them to manipulate religious discourse to legitimize consumption practices, while maintaining their identity as devout *santri*. This is in line with Apriantika's (2023) findings that middle-class Muslim consumers develop justifications to legitimize consumption despite tensions with religious values. Shin et al. (2025) found that Indonesian Muslim women negotiate between fashion and piety through various strategies. This study expands on these findings by showing that in the context of Islamic boarding schools, negotiation does not only occur in the realm of fashion, but encompasses all consumption practices, and religious justification strategies become more explicit due to stronger normative pressure. Based on the results of the study, the majority of respondents fall into this category. They develop various religious and psychological justifications to legitimize consumption. Zvn uses the term self-reward, Arn and Nbl justify purchases with the concept of being grateful for blessings, while Snd develops a strategy of giving alms to neutralize feelings of guilt. These respondents do not completely reject the value of *zuhud*, but reinterpret it to make it more acceptable with their consumption practices. This type of *santri* also has limits on what is permissible for consumption as long as they use halal money and do not go into debt.

Third, Consumer-Adaptive *Santri*. This type represents students who are highly susceptible to being influenced by friends and social media in their consumption behavior. Arn, Adt, and Amr represent this category. Arn states, “*If I'm with friends, I buy immediately because I'm often influenced by them.*” Amr admits, “*When I'm with friends, I don't look at the price, I just buy*

because I like to follow my friends and they encourage me to buy.” Adt has even developed an economic strategy by selling to younger students, taking advantage of his position as a senior, “*The older students have more access to online shopping.*” From Bourdieu's perspective (1984), adaptive-consumer *santri* have an upper-middle-class habitus that is more compatible with consumerist culture. They use greater economic capital to accumulate symbolic capital through the ownership of branded goods. Bourdieu explains that in certain fields, agents with different capital will adopt different strategies to maintain or improve their position (Adib, 2012). Interestingly, some of them (such as Adt) also develop additional economic capital through entrepreneurial activities, creating a micro-economy of consumerism within the *pesantren*. The finding about Adt selling to junior students is significant because it shows that senior students with greater access to online shopping function as consumerism brokers, similar to the role of influencers in Shin et al (2025), research. This creates a hierarchical structure in which senior students not only have greater cultural and economic capital but also become agents of consumption socialization for junior students. Furthermore, this typology shows that identity negotiation is not a binary process of accepting or rejecting *zuhud* values, but rather a complex adaptation strategy. This is in line with Bourdieu's theory of practice, which emphasizes that social agents do not passively follow rules, but actively negotiate their position in the field based on the capital they possess. Previous research has also found variations in the consumptive behavior of *santri* based on factors such as self-control and religiosity, but has not developed a systematic typology such as the one produced by this study (Putra & Fadhli, 2025).

Negotiation Arena: Public versus Private Space

Bourdieu uses the concept of field to describe the social space in which agents compete using various forms of capital. In this study, *santri* create various arenas for negotiating identity by distinguishing between public spaces (formal *pesantren*) and private spaces. Respondents acknowledged that there is a difference in appearance between inside and outside the *pesantren*. Zvn stated, “*Just normal, not too old-fashioned but also not too hedonistic. It's different because there are dress codes here.*” Rnt explains, “*Actually, when I see my friends with nice outfits, I want that too. But I reflect on myself. So I just want to be normal.*” In the public space of the *pesantren*, they conform to expectations of simplicity, while in private spaces or outside the *pesantren*, they are freer to express their consumer identities. This differs from previous research findings on urban Hijabers who are more free to express their fashion in public spaces, indicating that the institutional context of the *pesantren* creates different constraints (Beta, 2014).

Social media has become an important arena for identity negotiation, in line with Kusuma's (2023) findings on Instagram as a platform for religious and class identity construction. Although access to social media is restricted, respondents—especially those who are administrators—have greater access. Zvn acknowledges, “*Yes, quite often, because administrators have access to open social media.*” Social media allows students to construct alternative identities that are not entirely restricted by *pesantren* regulations, creating what Goffman (2004) refers to as a backstage where they can express themselves more freely. This also reflects the power hierarchy within the *pesantren*, where students in higher structural positions (administrators) have greater access to technology, which in turn gives them greater access to global consumerist discourse. In Bourdieu's terminology, this creates an uneven distribution of capital within the *pesantren* field, where structural position determines access to symbolic resources (information capital and connections with the outside world).

Meanwhile, the strategy of separation is also evident in the practice of hiding certain items. Atk recounts his experience of being reprimanded for wearing a bracelet, “*Once, when I wore a bracelet, I hid it.*” Adt bought a new cell phone with his own money “*Because my previous phone was confiscated and I didn't want my parents to know it had been confiscated,*” demonstrating a strategy of hiding consumption from the *pesantren* authorities and family. The practice of storing (rather than discarding) prohibited items is very significant. This shows that reprimands from

pesantren authorities do not change the desire for consumer objects, but only change their visibility. *Santri* demonstrate performative obedience (storing bracelets in public spaces) while retaining ownership for use in private spaces or outside the *pesantren*. Bourdieu (1990) explains that in fields with strict rules, agents develop strategies to maximize their position without openly violating the rules. The segmentation of public and private spaces is one such strategy, whereby *santri* can maintain their symbolic capital as obedient *santri* in public spaces while accumulating symbolic capital as trendy consumers in private spaces.

The findings of this study show a different pattern compared to the literature on young Muslim women and consumption. Baulch and Pramiyanti (2018) found that Indonesian Hijabers are free to express their consumer identity in digital public space. Conversely, female students negotiate their identities more carefully due to the structural limitations of *pesantren*, highlighting the importance of institutional context in shaping consumption practices. Beta (2014) identifies young Muslim women as religious influencers who conflate commercial, religious, and political elements with gender conformity. The concept of contemporary *zuhud* we found was more nuanced—students didn't simply adopt or reject consumption, but rather reinterpreted Islamic simplicity to accommodate modernity, creating a more flexible hybrid religiosity.

This research enriches Bourdieu's theory in the context of religion. Franceschelli and O'Brien (2014) developed Islamic capital for the transmission of Muslim family values. We expand by showing how female students actively negotiate symbolic capital in various contested fields. Three typologies (Minimalist-Pragmatic, Selective-Negotiative, Consumer-Adaptive) challenge the assumption of a rigid habitus, proving that young agents develop dynamic adaptive strategies. Kavakci and Kraeplin (2017) found that hijabistas negotiate their identities in a temporal-contextual manner. We added a spatial-structural dimension: the separation of public and private space to manage dual identities. This strategy is more complex than switching online-offline personas (Nisa, 2018). Findings on social media reveal unequal access based on *pesantren* hierarchy, creating an uneven distribution of information capital—a dimension of power overlooked in the literature. Social media is not only empowering but also an arena for reproducing or challenging socio-religious hierarchies.

Unlike studies on *pesantren* that focus on curriculum (Asrohah, 2011; Lukens-Bull, 2001), we focus on the microdynamics of *santri* life. The practice of storing prohibited goods demonstrates performative compliance while maintaining autonomy—a subtle resistance that has not yet been explored. The concept of contemporary *zuhud* differs from ethical consumption (Sandikci & Ger, 2010)—it's not just about halal products, but a transformation of the relationship with material objects through debt restriction, halal money, and sharing. This is a new piety that accommodates modernity while preserving core Islamic values. The findings challenge secularization theory—religion is not disappearing but transforming (Mahmood, 2005). In contrast to Mahmood, who rejected secular feminism, female students negotiated the religious-feminist-consumerist discourse without completely rejecting it, reflecting Indonesia as a democratic Muslim-majority country.

This research makes a significant theoretical and practical contribution to understanding the dynamics of religious identity in the era of global consumerism by introducing the innovative concept of contemporary *zuhud* – a reinterpretation of Islamic values of simplicity, shifting from traditional rejection of materialism to religiously responsible consumption with limitations on debt, using halal money, and sharing with others. Theoretically, this research productively integrates the theory of consumer society and Baudrillard's simulacra with Bourdieu's theories of field, habitus, and social capital to identify three typologies of female students identity negotiation strategies (Minimalist-Pragmatic, Selective-Negotiator, and Consumer-Adaptive) that challenge the assumptions of secularization theory by proving that modernity does not eliminate the influence of religion, but rather transforms it through creative adaptation. Practically, this finding provides important insights for Islamic educational institutions and other religious institutions that formal regulatory approaches have limitations in dealing with the penetration of consumer culture, thus requiring alternative strategies such as open dialog, critical media literacy, and facilitating the

development of responsible consumption aligned with religious values. The main significance of this research lies in proving that female students are active agents who construct a hybrid religious-consumer identity, not passive victims of consumerism, creating a new form of religiosity relevant to the challenges of modernity – a finding with potentially wide-ranging implications for future studies in the sociology of religion, cultural anthropology, and Muslim gender studies, and which can be applied to other religious institutions facing similar dilemmas between maintaining fundamental values and remaining relevant to young generations in the digital and globalization era.

CONCLUSION

This research successfully achieved all four established objectives. First, the research identified three typologies of identity negotiation strategies among female students: Minimalist-Pragmatic students who maintain simplicity with structured financial management; Negotiator-Selective students (the majority) who develop religious justifications; and Consumer-Adaptive students who are highly influenced by peer groups and social media. Second, the research reveals that *santri* use religious narratives such as being grateful for sustenance, self-rewarding, and sharing with friends as mechanisms to legitimize consumption while maintaining their religious identity. Third, the research successfully explored the arena of identity negotiation, including the segmentation of public and private spaces, the role of social media as a platform for constructing alternative identities, the dominant influence of peer groups in driving consumption conformity, and the hierarchy of technology access based on structural position within the *pesantren*. Fourth, the research produced the concept of contemporary *zuhud* as a reinterpretation of simplicity, shifting from rejecting materialism to religiously responsible consumption with limitations on not being in debt, using halal money, and sharing with others. Research reveals that *santri* consume objects not based on their utility value but as a system of signs to form social identity and create distinction within the *pesantren* community. The dominance of the Rabbani brand, competition for ownership of goods, and the phenomenon of FOMO confirm that consumption functions as a response to social media simulacra. *Santri* develop strategies to sacralize consumption through narratives of gratitude for blessings, self-reward, and sharing with friends as mechanisms to legitimize consumptive practices while maintaining religious identity. The main theoretical contribution of this research lies in the idea of contemporary *zuhud*, which is a reinterpretation of the value of simplicity in line with the context of modern life. Unlike classical *zuhud*, which emphasizes the rejection of materialism, contemporary *zuhud* is religiously responsible consumption with the limitations of not going into debt, buying halal goods, and sharing with others. This concept shows that the transformation of religious values in the face of modernity is not merely an erosion of values but a reinterpretation that produces new forms of religiosity. The limitations of this study include: (1) focusing on a single modern *pesantren*, so the findings may not be generalizable to *pesantren* with different characteristics (traditional/*salaf pesantren* or *pesantren* with students from lower-middle economic backgrounds); (2) the number of respondents is limited to 15 female students, so the variation in negotiation strategies may not be comprehensively represented; (3) the study did not deeply involve the perspectives of the caregivers/*ustāzah* to understand the dynamics of contestation from the perspective of the *pesantren* authorities; and (4) the limited research period, which did not capture changes in negotiation strategies over a longer time frame. Future research is suggested to: (1) conduct a comparative study between modern, *salaf*, and semi-modern *pesantren* to understand how institutional type influences identity negotiation strategies; (2) explore the perspectives of male students to identify gender differences in consumer identity negotiation; (3) use a longitudinal approach to investigate how negotiation strategies change over time spent in *pesantren* and after alumni return to society; (4) examine the role of female teachers and the *pesantren*'s authority structure in shaping consumption discourse; and (5) study students from lower to middle economic backgrounds to understand how limited economic capital shapes different negotiation strategies.

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