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Pesantren Values in the Digital Age: Shaping Academic Ethics and Social Responsibility among University Students

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Abstract. This study explored how *pesantren* values shaped academic ethics and social responsibility among university students in the digital age. Amid growing concerns over academic dishonesty, misuse of artificial intelligence, and declining social responsibility in higher education, values-based education has gained renewed importance. Using Value Internalization Theory as the analytical framework, this qualitative case study investigated how traditional *pesantren* values were interpreted and enacted within contemporary university settings. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students who had previously studied in *pesantren* institutions and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *ta'dzim* (respect), *ukhuwah* (solidarity), and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility) served as internal moral resources that guided students' academic integrity, ethical use of digital technologies, and commitment to social responsibility. The study further found that value internalization was a dynamic and ongoing process, requiring students to continually reinterpret traditional ethical principles in response to emerging digital challenges. These findings highlight the

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enduring relevance of indigenous moral education in addressing ethical dilemmas in higher education and suggest that integrating culturally grounded values into university learning can strengthen academic ethics and foster responsible digital citizenship. By bridging indigenous Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary debates on digital ethics, this study contributes to the growing global discourse on values-based education in the era of digital transformation.

Keywords: *pesantren* values; academic ethics; social responsibility; value internalization; digital higher education

1. Introduction

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI), digital learning platforms, and networked communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped higher education worldwide (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Panakaje et al., 2024). Beyond improving access to information and learning efficiency, these technologies have transformed how students produce knowledge, complete academic work, and participate in academic communities (Kim et al., 2026; Konstantinidou et al., 2026).

This transformation has also generated new ethical challenges, including AI-assisted plagiarism, contract cheating, algorithmic dependence, weakened academic accountability, and declining civic engagement in digital environments (Abubakari et al., 2026; Algharbawi et al., 2026; Wang & Yu, 2026). While universities have responded through academic integrity policies, digital literacy initiatives, and AI governance frameworks, these interventions primarily regulate students' behaviour rather than explaining how ethical commitments are internally developed and sustained in technology-mediated learning environments (Rahimi & Oh, 2024; Oleksiyenko et al., 2021). Consequently, an important question remains insufficiently addressed: what value systems enable students to exercise ethical judgment when digital technologies increasingly reshape academic practices?

This question has stimulated growing interest in values-based education as a complement to regulatory and technological approaches. Rather than treating ethical conduct as compliance with institutional rules, values-based education emphasizes the formation of moral dispositions that guide responsible decision-making across changing social and technological contexts (Biesta, 2023; Marshall, 2025). However, existing scholarship has largely been developed from Western philosophical and civic education perspectives, giving relatively limited attention to indigenous or religious educational traditions that cultivate ethical responsibility through everyday practice and communal life. As higher education becomes increasingly global and culturally diverse, understanding how local educational philosophies contribute to digital ethics has become an important theoretical challenge.

One educational tradition that offers such a perspective is the Indonesian *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Historically, *pesantren* has emphasized the integration of intellectual learning, spiritual formation, and moral discipline through lived educational practices rather than formal ethical instruction alone (Chanifah et al., 2021; Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Jenuri et al., 2025). Values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ta'dzim* (respect), *ukhuwah* (solidarity), and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility) are cultivated through continuous interaction, communal responsibility, and close relationships between teachers and students. These values shape not only individual character but also ethical accountability within a learning community (Saada & Magadlah, 2021; Barni et al., 2022). Although originally developed within Islamic boarding schools, these principles have increasingly been adopted by Indonesian universities seeking culturally grounded approaches to character education and academic integrity in the digital era (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022; Lumbard, 2025).

Despite this growing interest, current research provides only a partial understanding of the educational significance of *pesantren* values in higher education. Studies on *pesantren* have primarily examined religious education, character formation, social moderation, or institutional development within boarding-school contexts (Chanifah et al., 2021; Brooks & Ezzani, 2022). In contrast, research on digital ethics has concentrated on academic misconduct, digital citizenship, responsible AI use, and institutional governance, generally without considering how culturally embedded value systems influence students' ethical reasoning (Abubakari et al., 2026; Wang & Yu, 2026). As a result, these two bodies of scholarship have largely developed independently, leaving limited understanding of how *pesantren* values are translated into contemporary university settings and how they shape students' responses to ethical dilemmas arising from AI-supported learning and digital academic practices.

This disconnect creates three important gaps in the literature. First, little is known about how university students reinterpret and internalize *pesantren* values after they are transferred from traditional boarding-school environments into modern higher education institutions. Second, although responsible AI use and academic integrity have become central concerns in contemporary universities, few studies have examined how *pesantren* values influence students' ethical decision-making regarding AI-assisted learning, plagiarism, and digital academic responsibility. Third, previous research has rarely investigated whether these values extend beyond personal morality to shape students' broader social responsibility, including empathy, civic participation, and ethical engagement within digital communities. Furthermore, most existing studies employ quantitative designs that identify statistical relationships but provide limited insight into the processes through which students negotiate ethical values in their everyday academic experiences.

This study addresses these gaps by qualitatively examining how *pesantren* values are interpreted, internalized, and enacted by university students in shaping both academic ethics and social responsibility in the digital age. Rather than treating *pesantren* values simply as elements of Islamic character education, this study

conceptualizes them as a culturally embedded ethical framework through which students interpret emerging challenges associated with AI use, digital learning, and online social participation. In doing so, the study makes two principal contributions. Theoretically, it bridges the literature on indigenous Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary scholarship on digital ethics by demonstrating how locally rooted moral traditions can inform ethical behaviour in technologically mediated higher education.

Empirically, it provides qualitative evidence of the mechanisms through which students translate *pesantren* values into ethical academic practices and socially responsible engagement within digital and offline communities. These contributions offer a more culturally contextualized understanding of values-based education while informing higher education institutions seeking approaches to academic integrity that extend beyond procedural compliance. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How are *pesantren* values interpreted and internalized by university students in shaping their academic ethics in the digital age? and (2) How do *pesantren* values influence university students' social responsibility and ethical engagement in both digital and real-world communities?

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Value Internalization Theory, which explains how external moral principles are gradually adopted, interpreted, and transformed into individuals' personal beliefs, guiding their attitudes and behaviours (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2025). In educational contexts, value internalization refers to the process through which learners move beyond merely understanding moral concepts toward integrating those values into their identity and daily practices (Barni et al., 2022; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for examining how *pesantren* values influence university students' academic ethics and social responsibility in the digital age, where ethical decision-making is increasingly shaped by complex technological environments (Abubakari et al., 2026; Algharbawi et al., 2026).

Value Internalization Theory is rooted in broader educational and psychological traditions that emphasize moral development and character formation (Biesta, 2023; O'Connor, 2022). It assumes that values are not automatically transferred through formal instruction but are cultivated through continuous interaction between individuals and their social environments (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2025). Learners internalize values through repeated exposure, reflection, social modelling, and lived experience, eventually transforming external norms into self-regulating ethical principles (Barni et al., 2022). This process enables individuals to act ethically not merely because of institutional rules or external pressure, but because those values have become part of their personal moral framework (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018).

Within the *pesantren* tradition, value internalization occurs through a holistic educational process that combines instruction, habituation, mentorship, and communal practice (Chanifah et al., 2021; Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023). Core values

such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ta'dzim* (respect), *ukhuwah* (solidarity), and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility) are embedded not only in formal teaching but also in everyday interactions and institutional culture (Saada & Magadlah, 2021; Jenuri et al., 2025). Students learn to embody these values through observation of teachers, participation in collective rituals, disciplined routines, and social accountability within the *pesantren* community (Talukder, 2021; Brooks & Ezzani, 2022). Such processes create a strong moral environment where values are lived rather than merely taught (Karwadi et al., 2025).

Applying Value Internalization Theory to higher education allows this study to explore how these *pesantren*-derived values continue to influence students after they transition into university settings (Chanifah et al., 2021; Supriyono et al., 2025). Unlike traditional *pesantren* environments, universities, particularly in the digital era, present students with more diverse social interactions, greater autonomy, and increased exposure to ethical ambiguity (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Rahimi & Oh, 2024). Students must navigate challenges such as digital plagiarism, misuse of artificial intelligence, online communication ethics, and declining social responsibility, often without the same structured moral supervision found in *pesantren* life (Faizin et al., 2025; Wang & Yu, 2026). This context raises important questions about whether and how previously internalized values continue to shape ethical decision-making and social engagement (Algharbawi et al., 2026; Ching Cheung et al., 2025).

The theory also provides a useful lens for understanding variations in students' ethical behaviour. Internalized values may function as internal moral resources that help students resist unethical academic practices and maintain social responsibility despite digital pressures (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of such values may depend on how deeply they have been internalized and how students reinterpret them in response to new technological realities (Barni et al., 2022). Thus, value internalization is not viewed as a static outcome but as an ongoing and dynamic process of negotiation between inherited moral traditions and contemporary social contexts (Wu et al., 2025; Biesta, 2023).

By employing Value Internalization Theory, this study aims to examine how university students interpret, sustain, and enact *pesantren* values in their academic and social lives. The theory helps illuminate the pathways through which traditional educational values shape ethical consciousness, guide responsible behaviour, and contribute to the development of morally grounded digital citizens (Saada, 2023; Rahimi & Oh, 2024). Ultimately, this framework supports the broader argument that culturally rooted moral education remains highly relevant in addressing the ethical and social challenges of higher education in the digital age (Khoo, 2026; Marshall, 2025).

3. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore how *pesantren* values were interpreted and internalized by university students in shaping their academic ethics and social responsibility in the digital age (Wu et al., 2025; Vansteenkiste et

al., 2018). A qualitative design was considered most appropriate because the study sought to understand student's lived experiences, personal reflections, and ethical meaning-making rather than to quantify relationships among variables (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022). The research was framed as a case study, allowing for an in-depth examination of how traditional *pesantren* values were enacted and negotiated within a contemporary higher education setting influenced by rapid digital transformation (Chanifah et al., 2021; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). This approach enabled the researcher to capture the complexity of students' ethical experiences as they navigated academic demands and social interactions in both online and offline contexts (Rahimi & Oh, 2024).

This qualitative single-case study aims to examine how *pesantren*-based values shaped students' ethical perspectives and social responsibilities within an Indonesian Islamic higher education institution where *pesantren* traditions were institutionally embedded through curricular, co-curricular, and campus cultural practices (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Karwadi et al., 2025). The case was bounded by one Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia, undergraduate students who had experienced or actively engaged with *pesantren*-based education, and the period during which the data were collected. These boundaries enabled an in-depth investigation of how *pesantren* values were experienced and interpreted within a specific institutional and cultural context. A total of 15 undergraduate students participated in the study.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on two inclusion criteria: (1) having previously received education in a *pesantren* before entering university or (2) actively participating in university programmes that explicitly promoted *pesantren* values (Chanifah et al., 2021). These criteria ensured that participants possessed rich experiential knowledge relevant to the research objectives and could provide meaningful reflections on the influence of *pesantren* values on their ethical perspectives and social responsibilities (Saada, 2023).

Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was reached, with no substantially new themes emerging from the final interviews (Wu et al., 2025). The 15 participants represented diverse demographic and academic backgrounds, including students from different years of study and academic disciplines, thereby capturing a broad range of perspectives on the enactment of *pesantren* values in higher education. A summary of participants' demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Characteristic	Description
Total participants	15
Gender	Male = 7 Female = 8
Age range	18-23 years
Year of study	First (3) Second (4) Third (4) Fourth (4)
Academic disciplines	Islamic Education Islamic Education Management
Educational background	Former <i>pesantren</i> students (12) Active participants in <i>pesantren</i> -based campus programmes (3)

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which provided flexibility for participants to describe their experiences while allowing the researcher to explore specific themes related to academic ethics, digital behaviour, and social responsibility (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022). The interviews focused on participants' understandings of *pesantren* values, their experiences applying these values in academic life, the ethical challenges they encountered in digital learning environments, and their perceptions of responsibility toward others in both virtual and real-world communities (Faizin et al., 2025; Algharbawi et al., 2026).

Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes and was conducted in Indonesian. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and depth of analysis. To enrich the contextual understanding of the study, institutional documents such as academic integrity policies, student character education guidelines, and university programs related to ethical development were also examined (Bhuiyan, 2026; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022).

The collected data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following a systematic and iterative procedure that enabled the identification of recurring patterns and the construction of theoretically informed themes across participants' narratives (Wu et al., 2025). The analysis comprised six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents; (2) generation of initial open codes by identifying meaningful segments related to students' experiences of value internalization, ethical decision-making, digital learning practices, and social responsibility; (3) constant comparison of codes across participants to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns; (4) clustering conceptually related codes into preliminary categories; (5) reviewing, refining, and defining overarching themes; and (6) interpreting the final themes in relation to the study's theoretical framework and research questions (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018; Barni et al., 2022).

Coding was conducted inductively during the initial stage to remain grounded in participants' accounts, followed by a deductive interpretation informed by Value Internalization Theory. For example, participants' statements describing the avoidance of plagiarism because "academic honesty reflects Islamic character" were initially coded as *academic honesty*, *religious responsibility*, and *ethical self-regulation*. These first-order codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories such as *internalized moral commitment*, which ultimately contributed to the overarching theme of *ethical value internalization in digital academic practices*. Similarly, narratives concerning the responsible use of artificial intelligence, critical verification of AI-generated information, and transparency in academic work were integrated into the theme of *ethical digital citizenship*. Throughout the analysis, an analytical matrix was employed to document the relationships among raw data excerpts, initial codes, categories, emerging themes, and supporting evidence, thereby providing a transparent audit trail of analytical decisions.

The analysis was guided by Value Internalization Theory, which served as an interpretive framework for examining how externally transmitted *pesantren* values became integrated into students' personal beliefs, moral reasoning, and behavioural commitments within digitally mediated learning environments (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2025). Rather than treating values as static norms, the analysis explored how students sustained, reinterpreted, and negotiated *pesantren* values when encountering ethical challenges such as plagiarism, responsible use of artificial intelligence, digital accountability, and online academic collaboration (Abubakari et al., 2026; Wang & Yu, 2026). Data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently, allowing emerging themes to be continuously refined. Data saturation was considered achieved when successive interviews generated no substantially new codes or conceptual categories and when the relationships among existing themes became stable across participants, indicating sufficient depth and richness to address the research questions.

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the research, several strategies were employed. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, in which participants were invited to review and confirm key interpretations of their interview responses. Triangulation was achieved by comparing insights derived from interviews with relevant institutional documents, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the educational context. In addition, peer debriefing with academic colleagues was used to enhance analytical consistency and minimize researcher bias. Detailed descriptions of the research setting, and participants' backgrounds were also provided to support the transferability of findings to similar higher education contexts (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022).

The ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. All participants received clear information regarding the purpose and procedures of the research and provided informed consent before participation. Their confidentiality and anonymity were protected through the use of pseudonyms, and all research data were securely stored. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any

negative consequences. Through this qualitative case study, the research aimed to generate a deeper understanding of how *pesantren* values continued to shape students' academic ethics and social responsibility, highlighting the enduring relevance of indigenous moral education in responding to the ethical complexities of higher education in the digital era (Saada, 2023; Marshall, 2025; Khoo, 2026).

4. Findings

The thematic analysis of the interview data generated four interrelated themes that addressed the two research questions of this study: (1) internalizing *pesantren* values as ethical foundations for academic conduct, (2) negotiating digital ethical dilemmas through moral self-regulation, (3) cultivating social responsibility through communal values, and (4) adapting traditional values to contemporary digital realities. These themes revealed how university students drew upon deeply internalized *pesantren* values to navigate ethical challenges and social responsibilities in higher education. Participants consistently described these values not merely as inherited religious principles but as practical ethical resources that informed their daily academic decisions and social engagement.

4.1 Internalizing *pesantren* values as ethical foundations for academic conduct

This theme reflected how students understood values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *ta'dzim* (respect) as essential guides for academic integrity. Participants consistently described honesty and responsibility as moral commitments rooted in their *pesantren* upbringing rather than simply institutional obligations.

One participant explained:

"In pesantren, we were taught that amanah means being trustworthy in everything, including knowledge. So even when no one checks whether I use AI or copy someone's work, I still feel responsible for what I submit."
(Participant 3)

Another student reflected:

"Technology makes plagiarism easier, but my conscience always reminds me that academic dishonesty is a betrayal of trust, not only to the lecturer, but also to myself." (Participant 7)

A third participant emphasized the spiritual dimension of academic honesty:

"For me, cheating is not just breaking university rules. It feels like violating a value that has been part of me since pesantren, where honesty was connected to faith." (Participant 10)

Several participants described *ikhlas* as a source of motivation for authentic learning rather than grade-oriented performance.

One participant stated:

"Pesantren taught us to seek knowledge sincerely. That is why I try not to study only for grades. Even when assignments feel difficult, I remind myself that learning itself is part of worship." (Participant 11)

Another explained:

"Sometimes I feel pressured to compete, but sincerity helps me focus on improving myself rather than comparing myself to others." (Participant 5)

The value of *ta'dzim* also shaped how students approached relationships with lecturers and peers.

One participant noted:

"Respect in pesantren was not only about obeying teachers, but about honoring knowledge. That is why I feel uncomfortable when students communicate carelessly with lecturers online." (Participant 2)

Another added:

"Even in digital classrooms, I believe manners matter. The way we write messages, ask questions, or respond to feedback should reflect ta'dzim." (Participant 14).

4.2 Negotiating digital ethical dilemmas through moral self-regulation

The second theme highlighted how students used *pesantren* values to manage ethical tensions arising from digital learning environments, especially regarding AI, plagiarism, and online communication. Participants described digital technology as both a helpful tool and a moral challenge requiring self-discipline.

One participant admitted:

"There are moments when using AI feels tempting because it saves time, especially when deadlines are close. But I always ask myself whether I am learning or simply escaping responsibility." (Participant 4)

Another explained:

"AI can support learning, but pesantren taught us that knowledge should come through effort. I use technology, but I try not to let it replace my own thinking." (Participant 6)

A participant described this as an internal moral struggle:

"Sometimes I think that no one will know if I use shortcuts. But then I remember how pesantren trained us to be honest even when no one is watching." (Participant 15)

Students also reflected on ethical behaviour in digital communication.

One participant shared:

"Before posting something online, I often ask myself whether it will benefit others or create harm. Pesantren taught us that words have consequences." (Participant 9)

Another remarked:

"Social media can encourage emotional reactions, but I try to practice patience and restraint because maintaining dignity is also part of our values." (Participant 1)

A third student emphasized accountability:

"Even in anonymous digital spaces, I feel responsible for what I say. My pesantren experience taught me that ethical behaviour does not depend on visibility." (Participant 8).

4.3 Cultivating social responsibility through communal values

The third theme demonstrated how *ukhuwah* (solidarity) and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility) shaped students' commitment to helping others and contributing positively to their communities. Participants frequently described their education as preparing them not only for personal success but for collective benefit.

One participant explained:

"In pesantren, we learned to live together and care for one another. At university, I feel naturally responsible for helping friends who struggle academically or emotionally." (Participant 8)

Another reflected:

"Even though university life can be competitive, I still believe success should be shared. Helping classmates or mentoring juniors feels like part of my responsibility." (Participant 12)

A participant emphasized emotional support:

"Sometimes social responsibility means simply being available for others. Pesantren taught us to notice when someone is struggling and not ignore it." (Participant 4)

Students also connected their values to broader civic engagement.

One participant stated:

"Pesantren taught us that learning is not only for personal achievement but for serving others. That is why I joined a community program teaching digital literacy to children." (Participant 1)

Another explained:

"For me, education should make us useful to society. Participating in volunteer activities feels like applying what pesantren taught us." (Participant 13)

One participant highlighted responsibility in digital citizenship:

"Social responsibility today also means being careful online, not spreading false information, not humiliating others, and using digital platforms to contribute something positive." (Participant 6)

4.4 Adapting traditional values to contemporary digital realities

The fourth theme revealed that internalizing *pesantren* values was an ongoing and dynamic process. Students acknowledged that maintaining these values in modern university environments often required conscious reinterpretation and effort.

One participant reflected:

"University life is very different from pesantren. There is more freedom, but also more temptation. Sometimes I feel like I have to consciously protect the values I learned before." (Participant 13)

Another described the challenge of balancing tradition and modernity:

"Pesantren values do not always give direct answers to digital problems, but they provide principles that help me decide what feels ethically right." (Participant 5)

A third participant emphasized adaptation:

"I do not practice pesantren values exactly as before, but I reinterpret them in ways that fit university life and digital culture." (Participant 2)

Some students also described moments of tension.

One participant admitted:

"Sometimes I feel isolated when trying to maintain ethical standards that others do not seem to prioritize. It can be difficult to stay consistent." (Participant 7)

Another reflected:

"Digital culture often promotes speed and convenience, while pesantren taught patience and discipline. Balancing these two worlds is not always easy." (Participant 11)

These reflections suggested that students were not simply preserving inherited values but actively reconstructing their meaning in response to changing academic and technological environments.

Overall, the thematic analysis demonstrated that *pesantren* values remained deeply influential in shaping students' academic ethics and social responsibility in the digital age. Through values such as *amanah*, *ikhlas*, *ta'dzim*, *ukhuwah*, and *mas'uliyah*, students developed internal ethical resources that guided their academic integrity, digital behaviour, and social engagement. At the same time, the findings highlighted that value internalization was not static but required continuous reflection, adaptation, and moral negotiation within the ethical complexities of contemporary higher education.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that *pesantren* values continued to function as significant ethical resources for university students navigating academic and social life in the digital age (Chanifah et al., 2021; Saada, 2023). Through the lens

of Value Internalization Theory, these findings suggest that moral values cultivated in earlier educational experiences did not remain as passive cultural inheritances but were actively internalized, reinterpreted, and enacted as self-regulating ethical commitments (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2025). This confirms the central premise of the theory that values become meaningful when individuals transform external moral norms into internal principles that guide behaviour autonomously (Barni et al., 2022).

In this study, values such as *amanah*, *ikhlas*, *ta'dzim*, *ukhuwah*, and *mas'uliyah* were not merely recalled as religious concepts; they operated as practical ethical frameworks through which students evaluated academic choices, managed digital temptations, and negotiated responsibilities toward others (Saada & Magadlah, 2021; Jenuri et al., 2025). However, the findings also revealed that the enactment of these values was neither uniform nor effortless. Several participants described moments of uncertainty, particularly when technological convenience conflicted with their ethical aspirations, suggesting that value internalization remained an ongoing and sometimes contested process rather than a fixed personal attribute.

These findings contribute to the first research gap concerning the limited understanding of how *pesantren* values are interpreted beyond traditional boarding school settings. Previous studies have largely emphasized moral formation within institutional environments characterized by collective discipline and close supervision (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022; Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023). The present findings suggest that participants continued to draw upon these values after entering the comparatively autonomous and ethically complex context of higher education (Karwadi et al., 2025; Supriyono et al., 2025).

Rather than simply reproducing *pesantren* norms, many participants described adapting them to contexts shaped by digital learning, academic competition, and the increasing availability of artificial intelligence (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Panakaje et al., 2024). At the same time, these adaptations were not always straightforward. Some participants acknowledged uncertainty about applying traditional ethical principles to new technological contexts, indicating that internalized values required continual interpretation rather than automatic application. This finding suggests that the influence of moral education may depend not only on the transmission of values but also on learners' capacity to reinterpret those values across changing circumstances (Biesta, 2023; O'Connor, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Value Internalization Theory by illustrating that internalization can be understood as an ongoing process of reinterpretation rather than a completed endpoint (Wu et al., 2025; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Participants frequently described ethical tensions when digital tools, particularly artificial intelligence, created opportunities for convenience that conflicted with commitments to honesty and authentic learning (Faizin et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2026). These accounts suggest that internalized values remained subject to negotiation in situations where external monitoring

was limited and ethical boundaries were less explicit (Barni et al., 2022; Abubakari et al., 2026; Algharbawi et al., 2026). Nevertheless, it should be noted that this study examined participants' self-reported experiences rather than observed behaviour. Consequently, the findings provide insight into how students understood and articulated their ethical reasoning, but they do not establish the extent to which these values consistently shaped actual behaviour across different contexts.

The findings also address the second research gap concerning the relationship between *pesantren* values and academic ethics in response to emerging digital challenges. Existing discussions of academic integrity often emphasize institutional regulations, deterrence, and technological surveillance (Bhuiyan, 2026; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). By contrast, participants in this study frequently explained academic honesty in terms of personal moral responsibility rather than fear of institutional sanctions (Biesta, 2023; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Many described *amanah* as encouraging responsible engagement with academic work, including careful consideration of AI use (Wang & Yu, 2026; Ching Cheung et al., 2025). However, participants also acknowledged that technological convenience sometimes complicated these commitments, indicating that moral values did not eliminate ethical dilemmas but instead provided a framework through which those dilemmas were interpreted. Accordingly, the findings suggest that values-based education may complement, rather than replace, institutional approaches to academic integrity.

These findings have broader relevance for higher education systems that are increasingly addressing questions surrounding generative AI and academic integrity (Abubakari et al., 2026; Ching Cheung et al., 2025). Rather than suggesting that culturally grounded moral traditions provide a universal solution, this study indicates that internal moral commitments may represent one important dimension of responsible AI use alongside institutional policy, technological safeguards, and academic support (Kim et al., 2026; Konstantinidou et al., 2026). While rooted in the Indonesian *pesantren* tradition, the findings invite further comparative research examining how different cultural and educational traditions contribute to ethical decision-making in digitally mediated learning environments (Khou, 2026; Lombard, 2025; Rahimi & Oh, 2024).

The study also contributes to the third research gap concerning the relationship between *pesantren* values and students' social responsibility in digital society. Participants commonly associated their educational experiences with empathy, solidarity, and communal responsibility, suggesting that these values informed not only academic conduct but also their understanding of digital citizenship (Barnes & Marlatt, 2022; Saada, 2023). Values such as *ukhuwah* and *mas'uliyah* were frequently linked to supporting peers, contributing to community welfare, and engaging responsibly in online interactions (Marshall, 2025). At the same time, participants varied in the ways they described translating these ideals into everyday practice, reflecting differences in personal experience and context. These variations caution against viewing value internalization as a uniform outcome while reinforcing the importance of understanding digital citizenship as involving

both technical competence and ethical reflection (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021; Algharbawi et al., 2026).

More broadly, these findings suggest that indigenous educational traditions such as *pesantren* may offer useful perspectives for contemporary discussions of ethics in higher education (Khoo, 2026; Lumbard, 2025). However, this implication should be interpreted cautiously given the qualitative design and context-specific nature of the study. The participants were drawn from a particular educational and cultural setting, and the findings are intended to provide analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future research involving different institutional contexts, religious traditions, and national settings would help determine the extent to which similar patterns emerge elsewhere. Moreover, studies incorporating classroom observations or longitudinal designs could further examine how expressed ethical commitments are translated into actual practices over time.

Taken together, the findings suggest that *pesantren* values remained meaningful for many participants as they navigated academic integrity, social responsibility, and digital citizenship. Rather than indicating a uniform or deterministic influence, the study highlights the dynamic and negotiated nature of value internalization in technologically mediated educational environments. The findings therefore point to the potential contribution of culturally grounded moral education while also emphasizing that ethical development is shaped by ongoing interpretation, contextual challenges, and individual variation. This more nuanced understanding may inform future discussions on how higher education can balance technological innovation with sustained attention to moral and social responsibility.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how *pesantren* values shaped academic ethics and social responsibility among university students in the digital age, with particular attention to how these values were interpreted, internalized, and enacted within contemporary higher education contexts. Drawing on Value Internalization Theory, the findings demonstrated that *pesantren*-derived values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *ta'dzim* (respect), *ukhuwah* (solidarity), and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility) continued to function as significant moral resources guiding students' ethical decision-making, academic integrity, and civic engagement. These values were not merely preserved as inherited traditions but were actively recontextualized by students as they navigated the ethical ambiguities and social complexities of digitally mediated academic life.

The study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on values-based education by showing that moral education remains highly relevant in addressing emerging ethical challenges associated with digital transformation. While higher education institutions worldwide have increasingly focused on technological adaptation and policy-based regulation of academic misconduct, this research suggests that sustainable ethical behavior depends more fundamentally on the internalization of moral principles than on external enforcement alone. Students' narratives

revealed that deeply internalized values enabled them to exercise ethical self-regulation, resist technological temptations such as plagiarism and inappropriate use of artificial intelligence, and maintain a sense of responsibility toward others in both physical and digital communities.

A key conclusion of this study is that value internalization should be understood as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a fixed educational outcome. Participants continuously negotiated the relevance and application of *pesantren* values within new academic and digital environments, demonstrating that traditional moral frameworks can remain adaptable and meaningful when students are encouraged to critically reinterpret them in response to contemporary realities. This finding reinforces the importance of educational approaches that foster reflective ethical reasoning rather than mere compliance with institutional norms.

The study also highlights the broader significance of indigenous educational traditions in contributing to global educational discourse. *Pesantren* values, while rooted in a specific Indonesian Islamic context, offer universally relevant insights into how higher education can balance technological advancement with moral and social responsibility. In an era marked by rapid digital innovation, increasing academic individualism, and growing concerns over ethical disengagement, local systems of moral education may provide valuable frameworks for re-centering human dignity, relational ethics, and communal accountability within university learning.

Several practical implications emerge from these findings. Universities should move beyond procedural models of academic integrity by integrating values-based ethical education into curriculum design, student development programs, and institutional culture. Educational policies addressing artificial intelligence and digital conduct should be complemented by pedagogical strategies that cultivate moral awareness, empathy, and reflective responsibility. Furthermore, higher education institutions should recognize students' cultural and educational backgrounds as important ethical assets that can enrich academic communities and strengthen collective responsibility.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. As a qualitative case study conducted within a specific institutional and cultural context, the findings may not be directly generalizable to all higher education settings. Future research may expand this inquiry by exploring comparative perspectives across institutions, examining how different cultural traditions contribute to ethical development, or investigating how values-based education can be integrated into broader digital citizenship initiatives. Longitudinal studies may also provide deeper insights into how value internalization evolves over time as students transition from education into professional and civic life.

In conclusion, this study underscores the enduring relevance of *pesantren* values in shaping ethically grounded and socially responsible university students in the digital age. More importantly, it suggests that the future of higher education

should not be defined solely by technological capability, but by its capacity to cultivate morally reflective individuals who are prepared to use knowledge responsibly and contribute meaningfully to society. As universities worldwide confront the ethical consequences of digital transformation, reconnecting education with moral purpose may be one of the most urgent and necessary tasks of contemporary higher education.

7. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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