

Digital Asceticism and Mental Resilience: Recontextualizing Zuhud and Uzlal through the Hidden Curriculum of Pesantren Life

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Abstract

Digital asceticism remains under-theorized despite growing concerns over emotional dependency on digital environments, while Islamic concepts such as *zuhud* and *uzlah* are still largely treated as normative constructs rather than lived educational practices. Purpose: This study examines how these values are recontextualized as digital asceticism through the hidden curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, an Islamic boarding school in Jombang. Methods: A qualitative phenomenological design was employed involving ten female santri and three key informants selected purposively. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis over 120 hours of fieldwork, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis with iterative coding and triangulation. Findings: Five interrelated themes emerged: *zuhud* as detachment from digital validation, *uzlah* as structured routine-based withdrawal, internalization of self-regulation via hidden curriculum practices, emerging mental resilience against digital overstimulation, and rebound effects during periods of unrestricted access. Findings indicate that spiritual routines, role modeling, and peer-based habituation transform external restrictions into internalized self-regulation. Implications: Digital asceticism functions as a pedagogical mechanism for cultivating self-control and resilience, although findings are context-specific and require further cross-institutional validation. Originality: This study advances a phenomenological-theological framework linking classical Islamic ethics with digital behavior regulation through the hidden curriculum in pesantren education.

Keywords: *digital asceticism, mental resilience, zuhud and uzlah, hidden curriculum, pesantren.*

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research has revisited the relevance of sufism amid the pressures of digital life. Studies on *zuhud* and *tazkiyatun nafs* indicate that both remain meaningful as contemporary life becomes increasingly shaped by materialism and hedonism.¹ *uzlah* has also been reinterpreted as a conscious effort to distance oneself from harmful social influences, including pressures arising from digital environments.² an adaptive understanding of *zuhud* does not require an absolute rejection of technology, but emphasizes the ability to set boundaries, clarify purposes, and use it responsibly.³ in pesantren education, character formation likewise extends beyond formal instruction. It also develops through role modeling, habituation, collective routines, and the culture of everyday life.⁴

Despite these developments, the existing literature leaves three interconnected gaps. Studies on smartphone addiction and fear of missing out (FoMO) still rely largely on general psychological approaches.⁵ Although educational interventions for Muslim adolescents in the digital age have begun to receive attention,⁶ Islamic educational perspectives remain underused in explaining how values, learning environments, and spiritual practices shape responses to digital pressures. At the same time, discussions of *zuhud* and *uzlah* remain predominantly normative and conceptual. Their contemporary relevance has been widely discussed, but empirical evidence remains limited regarding how these values are experienced, translated into daily practices, and gradually internalized by *santri*. Studies of the hidden curriculum in pesantren have also tended to address character formation in broad terms, with less attention to how teacher role modeling, dormitory rhythms, spiritual routines, and peer interaction work together as educational mechanisms that support mental resilience in coping with digital pressures.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines how *zuhud* and *uzlah* are recontextualized as digital asceticism at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in Jombang. Digital asceticism is understood here as the

¹ Nurhanipah Harahap, 'Studi Filosofis Terhadap Konsep Zuhud Dan Tazkiyah An-Nafs Dalam Kehidupan Kontemporer', *Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajipp.v6i2.12635>.

² Nur Hadi Ihsan et al., 'Islamic Spirituality and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): Revisiting 'Uzlah in the Thought of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani', *Kalam* 19, no. 1 (2025): 83–104, <https://doi.org/10.24042/202519122271>.

³ Amir Maliki Abitolkha et al., 'Balanced Engagement: Kiai Ihsan Jampes' Adaptive Zuhud Framework for Spiritual Transformation in the Digital Era', *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 13, no. 1 (2025): 39–80, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v13i1.22322>.

⁴ Ahmad Halid, 'Hidden Curriculum Pesantren: Urgensi, Keberadaan Dan Capaiannya', *Tarbiyatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2019): 140, <https://doi.org/10.36835/tarbiyatuna.v12i2.398>.

⁵ Kandamaran Krishnamurthy et al., 'Navigating the Digital Dilemma: Internet and Smartphone Addiction among Children and Adolescents', *Advances in Human Biology* 16, no. 1 (2026): 20–30, https://doi.org/10.4103/aihb.aihb_53_25.

⁶ Yeni Insyirah et al., 'Educational Intervention on Character Gradation of Digital Muslim Adolescents According to Al-Qur'an Surah Adz-Dzariyat Verse 56.', *At-Ta'dib* 18, no. 1 (2023): 43–55, <https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v18i1.9906>.

practice of regulating one's relationship with technology by creating distance from excessive stimulation, clarifying the purposes of use, and reducing emotional attachment to online validation. Restrictions on digital device use are therefore not treated merely as administrative prohibitions. Their educational meaning emerges through spiritual routines, teacher role modeling, collective habituation, and interactions among *santri*.

This study contributes an empirical account of how *zuhud* and *uzlah* take concrete educational form in pesantren life. It also extends the discussion of the hidden curriculum by showing how everyday practices support the gradual development of self-regulation and mental resilience in coping with digital pressures.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a phenomenological orientation to examine how *santri* at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam experienced, interpreted, and responded to restrictions on digital device use. Rather than measuring policy effectiveness experimentally, the study focuses on their experiences of distancing themselves from digital stimulation, participating in pesantren routines, and returning to more open digital access during school holidays.

The study involved ten female students (*santri*) and three pesantren support informants: two caretakers and one female religious teacher (*ustazah*). The *santri* were selected purposively based on three criteria: having lived in the pesantren for at least one year, having used digital devices before entering the pesantren, and being willing to share their experiences under device-use restrictions. The support informants were selected because of their involvement in the *santri*'s daily lives and their understanding of the rules. To protect confidentiality, participants were assigned codes S-01 to S-10 and G-01 to G-03. Their profiles are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was protected through anonymized codes, and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the pesantren.

Table 1. Profiles of Santri Participants

Code	Age	Educational Level	Length of Stay at the Pesantren
S-01	18	Grade 12, Madrasah Aliyah (MA)	6 years
S-02	18	Grade 12, Madrasah Aliyah (MA)	6 years
S-03	17	Grade 11, Madrasah Aliyah (MA)	5 years
S-04	15	Grade 9, Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs)	3 years
S-05	16	Grade 10, Madrasah Aliyah (MA)	4 years
S-06	19	Higher Education	7 years
S-07	19	Higher Education	7 years
S-08	18	Grade 12, Madrasah Aliyah (MA)	6 years
S-09	14	Grade 8, Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs)	1 year
S-10	16	Grade 10, Madrasah Aliyah (MA)	4 years

Table 2. Profiles of Pesantren Support Informants

Code	Age	Gender	Role at the Pesantren	Length of Involvement in Santri Mentoring
G-01	58	Male	Caretaker	30 years
G-02	55	Female	Caretaker	30 years
G-03	26	Female	Ustadzah	5 years

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews lasted 45–90 minutes and explored the *santri*'s experiences before and during the implementation of device-use restrictions. Interviews with pesantren support informants provided additional perspectives on the rules, daily routines, and observed behavioral changes. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and checked against the recordings. Interview excerpts were translated from Indonesian into English by the authors, with minor adjustments for readability without altering their substantive meaning.

Participant observation was conducted from 18 February to 15 April 2026, totaling approximately 120 hours. It focused on daily routines, spiritual activities, interactions among *santri*, learning practices, teacher role modeling in digital device use, and changing activity patterns during the adjustment period. The documents analyzed included *santri* activity schedules, pesantren regulations, and provisions on device-use restrictions. These documents contextualized the interviews and observations within the broader structure of pesantren life.

All data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.⁷ The analysis was conducted iteratively and recursively. The researcher reread the dataset, manually coded the data using Microsoft Word, and identified patterns of experience, variations in responses, and cases requiring closer attention. Initial codes included anxiety when unable to access a phone, reduced urges to open social media, teacher role modeling, peer support, replacement of screen time with collective activities, and increased device use during school holidays.

Related codes were grouped into patterns of meaning and developed into provisional themes, which were reviewed against interview transcripts, observation notes, and pesantren documents. The concepts of *zuhud*, *uzlah*, *habitus*, and the hidden curriculum were used only after empirical patterns had been established. The analytical process was also discussed with other researchers to challenge initial assumptions and clarify the boundaries between themes. These discussions were part of reflexive theme development, not a measure of inter-coder agreement. Table 3 illustrates the analytical process.

⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (Sage, 2022).

Table 3. Examples of Theme Development from Empirical Data

Summary of Empirical Data	Initial Codes	Pattern or Category	Analytical Theme
S-05 explained that she previously compared her life with posts on Instagram, which made her feel inferior. After living in the pesantren, this pressure gradually decreased, and she felt calmer.	Reduced social comparison; release from the pressure of online validation	Release from emotional attachment to digital validation	Recontextualization of <i>Zuhud</i> as Release from Digital Attachment
Observation notes showed that the <i>santri</i> collectively recited the Qur'an, corrected one another's recitation, and discussed the meanings of verses without distraction from digital devices.	Collective activities replacing screen time; shared reflection	Replacement of digital stimulation with meaningful activities	Operationalization of <i>Uzlal</i> through Structured Routines
S-07 felt encouraged to focus more intently after observing a teacher calmly conducting the lesson without using a mobile phone.	Teacher role modeling; self-control learned through everyday example	Role modeling as a mechanism for value internalization	Internalization of Digital Self-Control through the Hidden Curriculum
S-03 explained that during the early period of living in the pesantren, she frequently thought about news and trends on social media. After becoming accustomed to pesantren activities, this urge gradually decreased, and she became more able to focus on her current activities.	Reduced urge to keep up with digital information; improved ability to focus	Reduced anxiety when disconnected from digital information flows	Indications of Developing Mental Resilience in Coping with Digital Pressures
S-09 noticed an increase in her TikTok use during the holidays. After several days, she began setting a limit of approximately one hour of device use per day.	Increased device use when digital access became more open again; emerging awareness; self-imposed limits	Developing self-regulation	<i>Rebound</i> and the Limits of External Restrictions

The trustworthiness of the study was supported through cross-checking across interviews, observations, and pesantren documents; verification of transcripts against recordings; clarification with participants when necessary; and analytical notes documenting theme development and potential interpretive biases. These steps supported credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.⁸

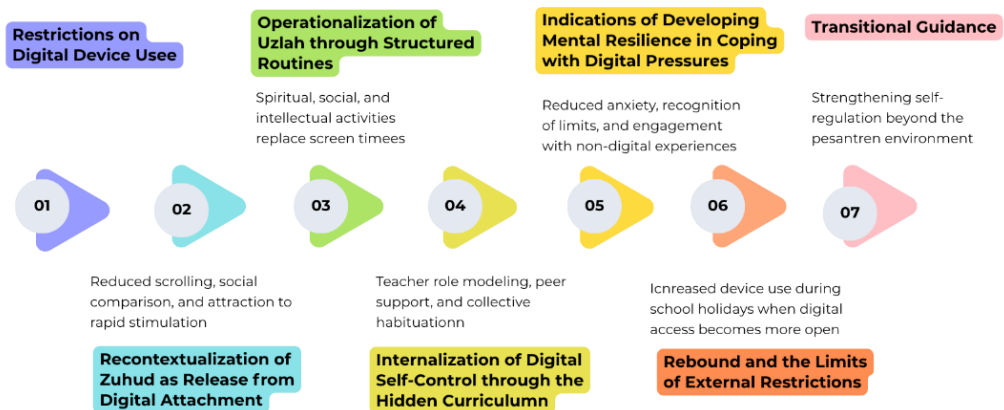
⁸ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Sage Publications, 1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 4. Summary of Thematic Findings

Theme	Main Categories	Key Empirical Evidence	Interpretation
Recontextualization of <i>Zuhud</i> as Release from Digital Attachment	Reduced urge to scroll; reduced pressure from social comparison; reduced appeal of rapid digital stimulation	S-02, S-05, and S-08	<i>Zuhud</i> is recontextualized as the ability to engage with technology proportionately rather than as an absolute rejection of digital devices.
Operationalization of <i>Uzlah</i> through Structured Routines	Productive boredom; replacement of screen time with spiritual activities; strengthened face-to-face interaction	Observations, 18 February–10 March 2026; observation, 22 March 2026	<i>Uzlah</i> is enacted not only by distancing oneself from digital media but also by filling the resulting space with meaningful spiritual, social, and intellectual engagement.
Internalization of Digital Self-Control through the Hidden Curriculum	Teacher role modeling; peer support; collective habituation	Observation, 19 February 2026; S-07 and S-02; pesantren documents	Digital self-control is gradually internalized through everyday practices rather than through written rules alone.
Indications of Developing Mental Resilience in Coping with Digital Pressures	Reduced anxiety when disconnected from digital information flows; emerging ability to recognize limits in device use; shifting attention toward non-digital experiences	Eight of the ten <i>santri</i> : S-01, S-02, S-03, S-04, S-05, S-06, S-08, and S-10; S-03 interview excerpt; G-02 statement	The experiences of the <i>santri</i> indicate a gradual development of mental resilience rather than a fully stabilized condition.
<i>Rebound</i> and the Limits of External Restrictions	Increased device use when digital access became more open again; emerging awareness of behavioral changes; attempts to set self-imposed limits	Four of the ten <i>santri</i> : S-02, S-05, S-08, and S-09; S-05 and S-09	External restrictions play an important role, but the stability of self-regulation is more clearly tested when <i>santri</i> return to environments with more open digital access.

Picture 1. Analytical Relationship among Themes in the Development of Mental Resilience in Coping with Digital Pressures.



Recontextualizing of *Zuhud* as Release from Digital Attachment

One notable change in the *santri*'s experiences is a reduced emotional attachment to digital media. This change does not take the form of a complete rejection of digital devices. Instead, it appears in a diminished urge to scroll continuously, follow information flows, and evaluate oneself through representations of other people's lives on social media.

A reduced urge to scroll is evident in S-02's experience. Before entering the pesantren, she could spend hours using her phone. After six years of pesantren life, she still uses her phone when returning home, but no longer feels comfortable spending prolonged periods in front of the screen: "When I go home, I still use my phone, but it feels different. I used to scroll for hours. Now, even half an hour makes me feel dizzy. I would rather chat with my mother or help in the kitchen." (S-02, interview, 25 March 2026)

S-02's experience suggests that the change extends beyond compliance with pesantren rules. Even at home, where direct supervision is absent, she feels less inclined to continue scrolling and begins to redirect her attention toward direct interaction with her family.

Reduced pressure from social comparison is visible in S-05's experience. Before entering the pesantren, she frequently compared her life with images presented on Instagram. This habit made her feel inferior. After living in the pesantren, the pressure gradually weakened: "I used to compare my life with what I saw on Instagram all the

time. It made me feel inferior. Now I no longer open it. I feel much more at peace.” (S-05, *interview*, 28 March 2026)

This account shows that social media functions not only as entertainment but also as a space where social standards are constructed. Reduced exposure enabled S-05 to distance herself from curated representations of other people’s lives and the pressure to use them as a measure of self-worth.

The reduced appeal of rapid digital stimulation is evident in S-08’s experience. When she encountered TikTok again at home, the platform no longer attracted her attention in the same way: “I saw my younger sibling using TikTok and became curious for a moment. But after trying it briefly, I felt dizzy and could not stand it. Eventually, I stopped.” (S-08, *interview*, 5 April 2026)

S-08’s experience illustrates a shift in her response to rapid and repetitive stimulation. Digital content that had previously captured attention easily no longer provided the same sense of satisfaction after she became accustomed to a more structured rhythm of daily life.

These three experiences indicate that restrictions on digital device use do not operate only at the behavioral level. They are also associated with changes in emotional attachment. For S-02, S-05, and S-08, social media no longer occupies the same position as a center of attention, a primary source of entertainment, or a measure of self-worth.

This finding can be interpreted through the concept of *zuhud*. In Al-Ghazali’s thought, *zuhud* does not require the absolute rejection of worldly possessions. It concerns the ability to maintain an inner distance so that possessions do not dominate the heart.⁹ In a digital context, the central issue is therefore not the existence of digital devices, but the emotional attachment that drives individuals to seek constant stimulation, follow information flows, or evaluate themselves through online responses.

This interpretation is consistent with an adaptive understanding of *zuhud*, which balances engagement in worldly life with freedom from inner dependence.¹⁰ The experiences of the *santri* show how this value can take concrete form in daily life. Digital devices are not rejected entirely, but they no longer consistently occupy the center of attention.

The finding also aligns with research showing that intensive self-presentation and social comparison on social media are associated with lower psychological well-being among adolescents.¹¹ In this study, reduced exposure created space for the *santri* to rebuild their self-evaluation through more direct experiences, including family interaction, daily activities, and face-to-face relationships.

⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din*, vol. 4 (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2011).

¹⁰ Abitolkha et al., ‘Balanced Engagement’.

¹¹ Rachana Aryal et al., ‘Online Personas: Associations Between Focus on Self-Presentation and Social Comparison on Social Media and Mental Well-Being in Early Adolescence’, *International Journal of Public Health* 70 (April 2025): 1608425, <https://doi.org/10.3389/ijph.2025.1608425>.

Thus, the recontextualization of *zuhud* in pesantren life is not limited to restricting digital device use. It involves learning to engage with technology proportionately: digital devices may still be used when needed, but they are not allowed to dominate attention or self-perception.

Operationalization of *Uzlah* through Structured Routines

Restrictions on digital device use in the pesantren do more than limit access to digital media. They also reshape how *santri* spend their time and direct their attention. The space previously occupied by scrolling, notifications, and digital content is gradually filled with spiritual, social, and intellectual activities embedded in daily routines.

Productive boredom became visible during the initial adjustment period. Based on the researcher's field observation notes and observations by pesantren support informants from 18 February to 10 March 2026, some *santri* initially spent more time sitting quietly, engaging in brief conversations, or seeking simple activities around the dormitory. By the second and third weeks, this downtime began to be filled with reading, reviewing lessons, chatting with peers, joining spontaneous discussions, and revisiting traditional games.¹²

These observations suggest that boredom is not always a negative condition that must be eliminated immediately. In pesantren life, it can function as a transitional space in which *santri* learn to face periods of inactivity without immediately seeking stimulation from screens.

The replacement of screen time with spiritual activities is also evident in the daily rhythm of pesantren life. Qur'anic recitation, *dhikr*, memorization, collective recitation, and the study of religious texts form part of the *santri*'s routines. An observation conducted on 22 March 2026, from 20:00 to 21:30 WIB, at the female dormitory showed a group of *santri* sitting in a circle in the study room. One *santri* recited the Qur'an, while the others listened, corrected the recitation, and discussed the meaning of the verses. No digital devices or notifications interrupted the activity.¹³

This observation shows that spiritual routines do more than fill the schedule. They cultivate a different pattern of attention from the rapid consumption of digital content. The *santri* practice listening, focusing, and participating in a shared learning process.

Strengthened face-to-face interaction is another important part of this process. Conversations among *santri*, spontaneous discussions, discussion forums, and traditional games create spaces for social interaction that might otherwise be displaced

¹² Researcher's field observation notes and observations by pesantren support informants, 18 February–10 March 2026, Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, Jombang.

¹³ Researcher's field observation notes, 22 March 2026, 20:00–21:30 WIB, at the female dormitory of Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, Jombang.

by digital device use. These activities do not merely fill idle time; they also foster a sense of community without dependence on screens.

Together, these categories show that distancing oneself from digital media is not achieved through restrictions alone. Productive boredom, spiritual routines, and direct social interaction shape a daily rhythm distinct from the rapid patterns of digital consumption.

This finding can be interpreted through the concept of *uzlah*. In the Sufi tradition, *uzlah* does not necessarily imply complete withdrawal from social life. It can be understood as a conscious effort to distance oneself from influences that disturb inner clarity. This interpretation is consistent with studies that position *uzlah* as a spiritual resource for responding to FoMO by creating distance from harmful social pressures.¹⁴

In a digital context, distance is insufficient if the space previously occupied by digital activities remains empty. Studies on digital detox indicate potential benefits for attention, self-reflection, emotional regulation, social connectedness, and habit formation.¹⁵ However, technical restrictions do not produce uniform changes. Research on disabling notifications shows that such interventions may reduce the perceived strength of phone-checking habits without necessarily changing checking frequency or screen time.¹⁶

The findings at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam suggest that the educational value of restrictions lies in the availability of structured alternatives. Spiritual routines and direct social interaction form a supportive ecosystem, consistent with studies emphasizing the importance of spiritual practices and social-emotional support in pesantren education.¹⁷ Participatory discussion spaces can further strengthen dialogic learning.¹⁸

Thus, the operationalization of *uzlah* in pesantren life does not stop at distancing oneself from digital media. It takes a concrete educational form through the organization of daily routines: creating distance from digital stimulation, filling the resulting space with meaningful activities, and rebuilding attention through spiritual practices and face-to-face interaction.

Internalization of Digital Self-Control through the Hidden Curriculum

¹⁴ Ihsan et al., 'Islamic Spirituality and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)'.

¹⁵ Durgeshwary Kolhe and Abdul Raffie Naik, 'Digital Detox as a Means to Enhance Eudaimonic Well-Being', *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 7 (July 2025): 1572587, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2025.1572587>.

¹⁶ Cynthia A. Dekker et al., 'Beyond the Buzz: Investigating the Effects of a Notification-Disabling Intervention on Smartphone Behavior and Digital Well-Being', *Media Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2025): 162–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2024.2334025>.

¹⁷ Suryadi Nasution et al., 'Empowering Santri Well-Being: Integrating Spiritual Practices and SEL in Pesantren Mental Health', *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 23, no. 1 (2025): 121–41, <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v23i1.10526>.

¹⁸ Devi Rahma Islami et al., 'Strategi Group Discussion Untuk Meningkatkan Kemampuan Berpikir Kritis Santri Pondok Pesantren', *Jurnal Kolaboratif Sains* 8, no. 12 (2025): 9036–40, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56338/jks.v9i1.9685>.

Restrictions on digital device use in the pesantren are not enforced solely through written rules. Digital self-control is also learned through teacher role modeling, peer support, and collective habituation embedded in everyday life.

Teacher role modeling is visible in classroom practice. Based on field observation notes from 19 February 2026, the observed teacher carried a phone but did not use it during the lesson. The phone was used only when an urgent matter could not be postponed. In such circumstances, the teacher briefly explained the reason and asked the *santri* for permission before using it.¹⁹

This practice does not represent an absolute rejection of technology. Instead, it demonstrates how digital devices can be positioned proportionately: they remain available for essential needs but are not allowed to disrupt the learning process. S-07 described how this role modeling prompted self-reflection: “I often think about my phone at home and want to use it. However, when I see the teacher teaching calmly without using a phone, I feel ashamed of myself.” (S-07, interview, 20 February 2026)

The quote captures the educational meaning perceived by the *santri*. The important point is not the complete absence of a device, but the teacher’s ability to maintain attention and demonstrate restraint during the lesson.

Peer support also reinforces digital self-control. S-02 explained: “If a *santri* is daydreaming, as if thinking about her phone, her friends do not scold her. Instead, they invite her to recite the Qur’an together.” (S-02, interview, 25 March 2026)

This account shows that self-control is not treated solely as an individual responsibility. Peers help redirect attention by inviting one another back into shared activities rather than using reprimands that may cause embarrassment. Collective habituation strengthens this process. Analysis of *santri* activity schedules, pesantren regulations, and provisions on device-use restrictions shows that digital rules are not implemented as isolated policies. They operate within a broader rhythm of learning, worship, mentoring, and daily interaction.²⁰ Repeated routines gradually normalize a way of life that is not centered on digital devices.

Together, these three categories show that digital self-control does not develop through prohibitions alone. Teacher role modeling provides an observable example, peers offer social reinforcement, and collective habituation creates an environment in which proportionate technology use can be learned gradually.

These findings can be interpreted through the concept of the hidden curriculum. In pesantren education, the hidden curriculum operates beyond formal lesson content through role modeling, habituation, social relationships, and the culture of communal life.²¹ This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that value internalization

¹⁹ Researcher’s field observation notes, 19 February 2026, Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, Jombang.

²⁰ Pesantren documents containing the *santri* activity schedule, pesantren regulations, and provisions on device-use restrictions at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, Jombang.

²¹ Ahmad Halid, ‘Hidden Curriculum Pesantren: Urgensi, Keberadaan dan Capaiannya’, *Tarbiyatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2019): 140, <https://doi.org/10.36835/tarbiyatuna.v12i2.398>.

in pesantren education is shaped by pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and educators' role modeling.²²

The educational significance of role modeling is particularly important in pesantren life because authority is communicated not only through instruction but also through daily conduct. Research on pesantren in the digital age indicates that religious authority remains relevant to the transmission of values.²³ In this study, that authority appears through a modest but concrete practice: demonstrating that a phone may be available without becoming the center of attention.

The process can also be understood through habitus. Repeated experiences within a social structure gradually shape dispositions.²⁴ Device-use rules, daily schedules, teacher role modeling, and peer support provide an environment in which new responses to digital impulses can develop. This does not guarantee that self-regulation has become fully stable, but it creates conditions that support its gradual internalization.

Peer support further shows that value internalization occurs through participation in a community, not only through vertical relationships between educators and *santri*.²⁵ Studies of value education in non-formal programs also indicate that role modeling, habituation, reflection, and discussion can work together in the internalization process.²⁶

Thus, the hidden curriculum in pesantren life operates through mutually reinforcing practices. Teacher role modeling, peer support, written rules, and collective habituation create an educational environment that supports the gradual internalization of digital self-control.

Indications of Developing Mental Resilience in Coping with Digital Pressures

Changes in the *santri*'s relationship with digital media are evident not only in their patterns of device use but also in their responses when disconnected from information flows and digital stimulation. In this study, mental resilience in coping with digital pressures is used as an analytical category for interpreting indications of change in the *santri*'s experiences, rather than as the result of clinical or psychometric measurement. Three patterns are particularly visible: reduced anxiety when disconnected from

²² Alhamuddin Alhamuddin et al., 'Bridging Faith and Knowledge: Reframing Holistic Islamic Education for Integrity-Based Character Formation', *At-Ta'dib* 20, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v20i2.37>.

²³ Dodik Harnadi et al., 'Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age', *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik* 34, no. 3 (2021): 272–80, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V34I32021.272-280>.

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford University Press, 1990).

²⁵ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 1991), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355>.

²⁶ Salamah Sa'diatul Wafa et al., 'Integration of Moral Values in the Keputrian Program: An Effort to Strengthen the Character of Muslim Girls at Muhammadiyah Boarding School Jetis.', *At-Ta'dib* 20 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v20i2.14788>.

digital information flows, an emerging ability to recognize limits in device use, and a shift of attention toward non-digital experiences.

Reduced anxiety when disconnected from digital information flows was one of the most notable changes. Based on the interview coding matrix, eight of the ten *santri* reported reduced anxiety about not having access to their phones, not keeping up with trends, or missing information. These informants were S-01, S-02, S-03, S-04, S-05, S-06, S-08, and S-10.²⁷

S-03 described how this change emerged gradually:

“When I first started living in the pesantren, I often wondered what was happening outside and what people were discussing on social media. Sometimes, I wanted to use my phone just to check briefly. However, after becoming accustomed to the activities here, those thoughts gradually decreased. Now, I do not worry too much about missing information, and I can focus more on the activities here.” (S-03, interview, 22 February 2026)

This account shows that reduced anxiety did not emerge immediately. S-03 experienced a period of adjustment before becoming more able to accept that not every piece of information needed to be accessed instantly. The change does not indicate a complete loss of interest in the digital world, but a reduced urge to follow information flows continuously.

An emerging ability to recognize limits in device use becomes more visible when the *santri* return home. G-02 explained:

“Santri who have lived in the pesantren for three years still check their phones when they go home. However, they become bored more quickly. They know when to stop.” (G-02, interview, 8 April 2026)

This statement suggests that self-control does not necessarily require complete abstinence from digital devices. A more realistic indication of change is the ability to recognize when device use needs to stop. The experience of S-08, discussed in Theme 1, reinforces this pattern: after briefly using TikTok again, she recognized her discomfort and chose to stop.

A shift toward non-digital experiences is also evident. As described in Theme 1, S-02 began redirecting time previously spent scrolling toward conversations with family and household activities. S-05 also reported reduced pressure to evaluate herself through images displayed on Instagram. These experiences suggest that screens no longer occupy the same position in the *santri*'s daily lives.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that mental resilience in coping with digital pressures develops gradually. Reduced anxiety, the ability to recognize personal limits, and greater engagement with non-digital experiences reflect changes that

²⁷ Coding results from interviews with ten *santri* informants at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, Jombang, February–April 2026. The informants who showed reduced anxiety about not having access to their phones, not keeping up with trends, or missing information were S-01, S-02, S-03, S-04, S-05, S-06, S-08, and S-10.

extend beyond compliance with pesantren rules. However, these changes are not uniform and have not yet become fully stable among all *santri*.

These findings can be read alongside research on mindfulness and digital media use. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that higher levels of trait mindfulness were associated with lower problematic internet use and nomophobia, as well as slightly lower screen time.²⁸ Another study identified an association between dispositional mindfulness, digital life balance, and lower smartphone addiction.²⁹ These findings cannot be applied directly to the context of Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, and spiritual routines in the pesantren should not be equated with clinical mindfulness interventions. Nevertheless, they provide a useful conceptual comparison: self-regulation involves the ability to tolerate pauses, recognize urges, and redirect attention.

Within pesantren life, spiritual routines operate as part of a broader supportive ecosystem rather than as an automatic solution. Research on psychological stress among *santri* also emphasizes the relevance of Islamic spiritual responses within pesantren-based support.³⁰ The findings at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam similarly suggest that the observed changes are related not only to individual spiritual activities but also to communal routines, teacher role modeling, and peer interaction.

Thus, mental resilience in coping with digital pressures is better understood as a developing capacity rather than a fully stabilized condition. The *santri* are becoming less consumed by anxiety about missing information, more able to recognize limits in device use, and more willing to direct their attention toward experiences that do not depend entirely on screens or online validation. The sustainability of these changes becomes more clearly tested when digital access becomes more open again.

Rebound and the Limits of External Restrictions

Changes in the *santri*'s relationship with digital devices do not always develop linearly. In the pesantren, device-use restrictions are supported by structured routines, meaningful alternative activities, teacher role modeling, and peer support. During school holidays, however, these structures are not always present with the same intensity. In this study, the term *rebound* is used descriptively to refer to increased device use when digital access becomes more open again. It is not used as a clinical diagnosis.

²⁸ Johannes C. Fendel et al., 'The Relationship between Trait Mindfulness and Problematic Usage of the Internet, Screen Time, and Nomophobia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 14, no. 2 (2025): 590–610, <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2025.00052>.

²⁹ Aamer Aldbyani et al., 'Dispositional Mindfulness Is Associated with Lower Smartphone Addiction through Digital Life Balance among Chinese University Students', *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (October 2025): 1653620, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1653620>.

³⁰ Hengki Yandri et al., 'An Islamic Spiritual Response to the Psychological Effects of Loneliness, Academic Stress, and Bullying on Students in Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren)', *Psikis : Jurnal Psikologi Islami* 11, no. 1 (2025): 137–49, <https://doi.org/10.19109/psikis.v11i1.27855>.

Based on the interview coding matrix, four of the ten *santri*—S-02, S-05, S-08, and S-09—reported increased device use during school holidays.³¹ This does not mean that the changes developed in the pesantren disappeared entirely. Rather, it shows that habits formed within a structured environment are not always maintained consistently when the *santri* return home with more leisure time and more open digital access.

Increased device use when digital access becomes more open again is visible in S-05's experience:

"During the holidays, I do use my phone more often. At home, I have more free time, unlike in the pesantren, where activities are scheduled. Sometimes, I intend to check my phone only briefly, but before I realize it, I have been using it for quite a while. Once I noticed this, I began trying to reduce my use on my own." (S-05, interview, 28 March 2026)

S-05's account shows that increased device use does not always result from a deliberate decision to remain in front of a screen for a long period. Brief use can extend unnoticed when daily routines become less structured.

Emerging awareness of behavioral changes is also evident in S-09's experience. S-09 is a 14-year-old *santri* who had lived in the pesantren for one year. After returning home, she noticed that her TikTok use had increased:

"During the holidays, I noticed that I was opening TikTok quite often. I did not use it until late at night, but I felt that I was holding my phone more often than before. After a few days, I became aware of it and began setting a limit, for example, one hour a day." (S-09, interview, 22 March 2026)

The experiences of S-05 and S-09 show that *rebound* does not necessarily involve extreme device use or a complete loss of control. Instead, it reveals the tension between externally regulated routines and the emerging capacity for self-regulation when direct supervision decreases.

Attempts to set self-imposed limits are an important part of both accounts. S-05 began reducing her phone use after recognizing that brief checking could continue longer than intended. S-09 adopted a more concrete limit of approximately one hour per day. These efforts do not mean that self-regulation has become fully stable. However, they indicate that experiences developed in the pesantren continue to serve as a reference when the *santri* encounter more open digital access.

These findings do not contradict Theme 4. Eight of the ten *santri* reported reduced anxiety when disconnected from digital information flows, while four still reported increased device use during school holidays.³² A *santri* may become less anxious about

³¹ Coding results from interviews with ten *santri* informants at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam, Jombang, February–April 2026. The informants who showed increased device use during school holidays were S-02, S-05, S-08, and S-09.

³² Compare the coding results presented in footnotes 27 and 31. Eight informants showed reduced anxiety when disconnected from digital information flows, whereas four informants showed increased device use during school holidays.

missing information or trends while still using a phone more frequently when access and leisure time increase. Reduced anxiety therefore does not automatically indicate stable self-regulation in every context.

The findings should be interpreted cautiously alongside studies on digital restrictions. An experimental study found that blocking mobile internet access on smartphones for two weeks was associated with improvements in sustained attention, mental health, and subjective well-being.³³ Although the context differs from pesantren life, the study provides a useful comparison: reduced connectivity may be associated with psychological changes, but its effects remain context-dependent.

Studies on digital detox similarly indicate potential benefits for attention, self-reflection, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being.³⁴ The present findings add an educational implication: the transition from externally regulated routines to more open digital access should be treated as part of the learning process rather than as a separate issue.

Thus, *rebound* reveals both the value and the limits of external restrictions. Pesantren rules create an initial space for distancing oneself from digital stimulation, but the sustainability of change depends on the gradual internalization of self-regulation. The educational challenge is not only to limit device use within the pesantren, but also to support *santri* in using technology consciously, proportionately, and responsibly when external supervision decreases.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that restrictions on digital device use at Pondok Pesantren Babussalam function not merely as administrative rules. Their educational value emerges when they are integrated with spiritual routines, meaningful alternative activities, teacher role modeling, peer support, and collective habituation. Within this process, *zuhud* is recontextualized as a reduction in emotional attachment to digital stimulation and online validation, while *uzlah* takes concrete form through structured routines that fill the space previously occupied by digital activities. These values are gradually internalized through the hidden curriculum of pesantren life.

The findings indicate the development of mental resilience in coping with digital pressures. Eight of the ten *santri* reported reduced anxiety when disconnected from digital information flows, while four still reported increased device use during school holidays. This *rebound* does not negate the changes that emerged in the pesantren. Instead, it shows that self-regulation develops gradually and becomes more clearly tested when external supervision decreases.

For pesantren education, the findings suggest that digital device restrictions should be designed as part of a broader educational process rather than as isolated

³³ Noah Castelo et al., 'Blocking Mobile Internet on Smartphones Improves Sustained Attention, Mental Health, and Subjective Well-Being', *PNAS Nexus* 4, no. 2 (2025): pgaf017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgaf017>.

³⁴ Kolhe and Naik, 'Digital Detox as a Means to Enhance Eudaimonic Well-Being'.

prohibitions. Structured alternatives, proportionate technology use, peer support, and transitional guidance when *santri* return home are essential for strengthening the internalization of self-regulation.

This study was conducted in a single pesantren with a limited number of participants. Its findings are not intended to establish causal relationships or generate broad generalizations. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that pesantren traditions offer relevant pedagogical resources for responding to digital pressures. Digital asceticism in pesantren is therefore not merely a practice of staying away from digital devices, but a value-based educational process that helps *santri* engage with technology more consciously, proportionately, and responsibly.

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