

Reconstructing Adaptive Kiai Leadership in Modern Islamic Boarding School Governance: Synergy of Salaf Tradition, Quality Management, and Sharia Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) face the challenge of maintaining their Salaf educational identity while responding to institutional modernization, demands for educational quality, and increasing expectations for public trust. Although previous studies have examined kiai leadership, quality management, and Sharia marketing, these dimensions have largely been discussed separately, leaving limited understanding of how adaptive kiai leadership integrates them into a coherent governance model. This study aims to reconstruct an adaptive kiai leadership model in modern Islamic boarding school governance through the synergy of Salaf tradition, quality management, and Sharia marketing, with Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan, Indramayu, Indonesia, as the case study. A qualitative case study design was employed involving 15 informants selected through purposive sampling, comprising the kiai, pesantren administrators, school principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, alumni, and community representatives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings reveal three interconnected dimensions of the reconstructed model: the preservation and adaptive development of Salaf educational values, the institutionalization of continuous quality management, and the implementation of ethical Sharia marketing through institutional credibility and community engagement. These dimensions do not operate independently; adaptive kiai leadership functions as the strategic mechanism that connects internal educational quality improvement with external ethical communication, thereby strengthening institutional reputation, public trust, and organizational sustainability. The theoretical novelty of the study lies in positioning adaptive kiai leadership as an integrative mechanism that reconciles religious authority with managerial and strategic institutional development. Practically, the model provides a governance framework for pesantren to pursue modernization and competitiveness without compromising their religious identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are among Indonesia's longstanding indigenous educational institutions, functioning not only as centers of Islamic learning but also as institutions for character formation, social development, and community empowerment. Their historical resilience is reflected in their ability to preserve Islamic intellectual traditions while responding to changes in social, educational, economic, and technological environments. The preservation of Salafiyah traditions remains an important characteristic of *pesantren*, particularly through the continuity of classical Islamic learning and the transmission of religious knowledge across generations [1]. At the same time, contemporary *pesantren* face increasing demands for institutional accountability, educational quality, technological adaptation, stakeholder participation, and public trust. These conditions create a governance challenge: *pesantren* must modernize their institutional practices without weakening the religious values that constitute their distinctive identity. In this context, leadership becomes a critical mechanism through which continuity and institutional change can be negotiated.

The specific challenge is particularly evident in the changing role of the *kiai*. In the traditional *pesantren* structure, the *kiai* occupies a central position as a source of religious authority, moral guidance, educational direction, and institutional decision-making. Previous studies characterize *kiai* leadership predominantly through charismatic, traditional, transformational, and, in some contexts, collective forms of leadership [2], [3]. However, the increasing complexity of *pesantren* governance requires leadership that is not limited to maintaining existing practices. The *kiai* must also respond to changes in educational policy, technological development, stakeholder expectations, institutional competition, and organizational demands. Recent research on adaptive leadership in Islamic boarding schools demonstrates that *pesantren* leaders increasingly need to negotiate religious traditions with the demands of modernity and institutional transformation [4], [5]. Thus, the problem addressed in this study is not simply whether the *kiai* can adapt to change, but how adaptive leadership can enable the *pesantren* to manage change while maintaining its religious and educational identity.

This distinction is important because adaptive leadership represents a specific theoretical perspective rather than merely the general ability of a leader to adjust to changing circumstances. Adaptive Leadership Theory, developed principally by Ronald Heifetz and subsequently elaborated with Marty Linsky and Alexander Grashow, distinguishes adaptive challenges from technical problems. Technical problems can generally be addressed through existing knowledge, expertise, procedures, or managerial solutions, whereas adaptive challenges require changes in people's priorities, assumptions, values, relationships, and patterns of action [6], [7]. Adaptive leadership therefore emphasizes the capacity to mobilize individuals and organizations to confront difficult changes, learn from changing circumstances, regulate competing demands, and develop new responses when established practices are no longer sufficient. In the context of *pesantren*, this theoretical perspective is particularly relevant because institutional modernization does not merely require the

adoption of new administrative instruments; it also requires the organization to negotiate the relationship between established religious traditions and emerging institutional demands. Accordingly, adaptive *kiai* leadership in this study refers to leadership that mobilizes institutional members to respond to changing educational and organizational conditions while preserving the core religious values of the pesantren.

The first dimension connected to this adaptive leadership process is the Salaf tradition. In this study, Salaf tradition refers to the continuity of the pesantren's classical Islamic educational orientation, particularly the preservation of religious scholarship, *kitab kuning* learning, moral formation, and established patterns of religious knowledge transmission. Research on Salafiyah pesantren demonstrates that classical Islamic learning remains an important foundation of traditional pesantren education even as these institutions encounter contemporary educational developments. Therefore, the Salaf tradition should not be understood merely as resistance to modernization. Rather, it constitutes the normative foundation from which institutional change is negotiated. Adaptive leadership becomes relevant because modernization must be introduced without displacing the values that define the institution's religious identity.

The second dimension is quality management. Quality management in Islamic education emphasizes systematic planning, continuous improvement, stakeholder involvement, evaluation, accountability, and the development of organizational processes that support educational effectiveness. Recent studies demonstrate that Total Quality Management principles, particularly continuous improvement, stakeholder participation, customer or service-user orientation, and systematic evaluation, are applicable to Islamic educational institutions and pesantren [8], [9]. Within pesantren, quality management does not necessarily imply the replacement of traditional educational values with bureaucratic managerial practices. Instead, it can provide organizational mechanisms through which the institution evaluates its educational services, improves administrative processes, develops human resources, and responds systematically to stakeholder expectations. The empirical findings of this study similarly demonstrate that quality assurance, curriculum development, organizational management, and stakeholder participation function as mechanisms for improving institutional quality while maintaining the Salaf educational foundation.

The third dimension is Sharia marketing. In this study, Sharia marketing refers to the communication and institutional positioning of pesantren based on Islamic ethical principles, including honesty, transparency, social responsibility, credibility, and value-oriented relationships with stakeholders. Unlike marketing that primarily emphasizes promotional intensity or transactional outcomes, Islamic marketing ethics emphasize ethical conduct and credibility in building long-term relationships [10]. Recent research also indicates that Islamic marketing ethics are associated with institutional or brand credibility and can strengthen stakeholder trust when communication is grounded in ethical consistency [11]. In the context of pesantren, Sharia marketing is therefore not conceptualized merely as a strategy for increasing student enrollment. It represents an external dimension of institutional governance through which educational quality, religious credibility, community engagement, and institutional identity are communicated to parents, students, alumni, and

the wider community. This conceptualization is consistent with the findings of the present study, in which ethical communication, institutional branding, community engagement, and public trust are interconnected elements of institutional sustainability.

The theoretical connection among these three dimensions can be explained through the function of adaptive leadership as an integrative mechanism. The Salaf tradition provides the normative and cultural foundation that defines what must be preserved within the *pesantren*. Quality management provides internal organizational mechanisms for translating institutional values into systematic educational improvement, accountability, and sustainable organizational practices. Sharia marketing, in turn, provides an ethical external communication mechanism through which the institution communicates its values, educational quality, and institutional credibility to stakeholders. These dimensions consequently address different but interconnected aspects of governance: the Salaf tradition safeguards institutional identity, quality management strengthens internal institutional capacity, and Sharia marketing develops ethical external relationships and public trust. Adaptive *kiai* leadership connects these dimensions by determining how the institution responds to change without separating modernization from its religious foundation. The relationship is therefore not additive but synergistic: preservation of tradition provides the institutional identity, quality management strengthens the capacity to deliver that identity through quality educational services, and Sharia marketing communicates the resulting institutional value to stakeholders.

Previous studies provide important but fragmented explanations of these issues. Research on *kiai* leadership has predominantly examined charismatic, transformational, collective, or adaptive leadership within *pesantren* and Islamic educational institutions [12]. Other studies have examined quality management as a mechanism for improving educational effectiveness, continuous improvement, stakeholder participation, and institutional sustainability in Islamic education. Meanwhile, research on Islamic or Sharia marketing has focused primarily on ethical marketing practices, credibility, customer satisfaction, and stakeholder relationships. These studies establish the relevance of each concept, but they do not adequately explain how adaptive *kiai* leadership can connect the preservation of Salaf educational traditions, internal quality management, and ethical institutional marketing within one governance framework. Recent research on adaptive leadership in *pesantren* has similarly focused on the capacity of leaders to navigate modernity, but has not sufficiently incorporated quality management and Sharia marketing as interconnected components of the leadership process [13].

Based on this synthesis, the research gap can be distinguished into three dimensions. First, a theoretical gap exists because Adaptive Leadership Theory has not been sufficiently developed in the context of *pesantren* governance as an integrative framework connecting religious authority with organizational quality and ethical institutional development. Existing studies tend to apply adaptive leadership primarily to explain organizational responsiveness to change, while the specific role of the *kiai* in connecting religious values and modern governance remains underdeveloped. Second, an empirical gap exists because limited empirical studies have examined how adaptive *kiai* leadership simultaneously

operates through Salaf tradition, quality management, and Sharia marketing within the same institutional setting. Existing research tends to examine these dimensions independently rather than through their interaction. Third, a contextual gap exists because the integration of traditional Salaf education with systematic quality management and Sharia-based institutional communication has received limited attention in the context of a pesantren undergoing institutional modernization while retaining its traditional religious identity.

Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan, Indramayu, West Java, provides a relevant empirical context for addressing these gaps. Under the leadership of Prof. Dr. KH. Abdul Syakur Yasin, M.A., the pesantren has maintained its classical Islamic educational heritage while developing formal education, organizational management, human resource development, and community-oriented educational services. The institutional context therefore provides an opportunity to examine how modernization is negotiated through adaptive leadership rather than through the replacement of traditional educational values. The findings of this study indicate that the institution maintains classical Islamic learning while simultaneously implementing systematic management, continuous evaluation, stakeholder participation, organizational development, and ethical institutional communication.

The novelty of this study lies in reconstructing adaptive *kiai* leadership as an integrative governance mechanism rather than treating adaptive leadership merely as a leader's responsiveness to environmental change. The proposed model positions the *kiai* as the strategic actor who connects three mutually reinforcing dimensions: the preservation and adaptive development of Salaf educational values, the institutionalization of continuous quality management, and the implementation of ethical Sharia marketing. This reconstruction extends the application of Adaptive Leadership Theory to Islamic educational institutions by explaining how adaptive leadership can simultaneously preserve normative identity, strengthen internal organizational capacity, and develop ethical external relationships. The model therefore moves beyond the conventional dichotomy between religious authority and managerial modernization by demonstrating that both can be integrated through adaptive governance.

Accordingly, this study aims to reconstruct an adaptive *kiai* leadership model in modern Islamic boarding school governance through the synergy of Salaf tradition, quality management, and Sharia marketing, using Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan, Indramayu, Indonesia, as the case study. The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Adaptive Leadership Theory to the governance of Islamic boarding schools and by conceptualizing the relationship between religious authority, quality management, and Sharia-based institutional development as an integrated leadership process. Practically, the study provides a governance framework for *kiai*, pesantren administrators, educators, and relevant stakeholders to pursue institutional modernization, educational quality, public trust, and organizational sustainability without compromising the religious identity and Salaf educational foundations of the pesantren.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to reconstruct adaptive *kiai* leadership in modern Islamic boarding school governance [14]. The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan, Indramayu, West Java, Indonesia, in May 2026. The site was purposively selected because of its integration of Salaf educational traditions with modern educational management under the leadership of Prof. Dr. KH. Abdul Syakur Yasin, M.A. The study involved 15 informants selected through purposive sampling, consisting of one *kiai*, two pesantren administrators, one school principal, four teachers (*ustadz*), two administrative staff members, two students, one alumnus, and two community representatives. Informants were selected based on their direct involvement, knowledge, or experience concerning pesantren governance, leadership, educational activities, and institutional development. Individuals without sufficient knowledge or direct involvement in the research context were excluded [15].

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis [16]. Fifteen interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, with interviews recorded and transcribed with participants' consent. The interview protocol covered adaptive leadership practices, responses to institutional change, preservation of Salaf traditions, quality management, Sharia marketing, stakeholder participation, community engagement, and institutional sustainability. Participant observation was conducted for approximately two weeks during May 2026, with the researcher acting as an observer-as-participant and focusing on leadership interactions, decision-making, educational activities, management practices, quality improvement, and stakeholder engagement. Document analysis covered 12 institutional documents, including regulations, organizational structures, strategic plans, quality assurance documents, promotional materials, and official publications. The researcher served as the principal research instrument, supported by interview guidelines, observation notes, and a document-analysis framework.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification [17]. Coding combined deductive and inductive approaches. Initial codes were developed from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents, then grouped into categories and broader themes. The analysis examined not only the individual dimensions of adaptive leadership, Salaf tradition, quality management, and Sharia marketing, but also the relationships among them. The reconstructed model was developed through iterative comparison of empirical findings and theoretical interpretation, positioning adaptive *kiai* leadership as the central mechanism connecting the preservation of Salaf values, continuous quality improvement, and ethical institutional communication. Coding was conducted manually without qualitative analysis software. The adequacy of the data was assessed through comparison across informants and data sources until recurring patterns and sufficient explanatory information were obtained.

Trustworthiness was established through source and method triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. Transferability was supported through contextual

description, while dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic documentation of data collection, coding, and analytical procedures [18]. Ethical principles were observed through institutional permission, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and responsible use of interview and documentary data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. RESULTS

This section presents the findings obtained from interviews, participant observation, and document analysis concerning adaptive *kiai* leadership at Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan. The findings are organized into three interconnected themes: adaptive leadership practices, the integration of Salaf tradition and quality management, and Sharia marketing as a mechanism for institutional sustainability. The study involved 15 informants representing the *kiai*, pesantren administrators, school leadership, teachers, administrative staff, students, alumni, and community representatives. Overall, the findings indicate that adaptive *kiai* leadership functions as a central mechanism connecting religious tradition, internal institutional improvement, and external stakeholder engagement.

3.1.1. Adaptive Leadership Practices of the Kiai in Modern Pesantren Governance

The findings indicate that adaptive leadership has become a central foundation of institutional transformation at Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan. Interviews, observations, and documentary evidence show that the *kiai* exercises leadership beyond traditional religious authority by combining visionary direction, strategic decision-making, organizational adaptation, human resource development, and institutional innovation. The findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Findings on the Adaptive Leadership Practices of the Kiai

Leadership Dimension		Empirical Findings
Visionary Leadership		The <i>kiai</i> formulates long-term institutional development while maintaining the philosophical values of Salaf education.
	Strategic Decision-Making	Institutional decisions involve collaboration with pesantren administrators while maintaining the <i>kiai</i> 's strategic authority.
Organizational Adaptation		The pesantren adapts to educational policies, technological developments, and community needs without changing its religious identity.
	Human Resource Development	Teachers and administrators participate in training, academic development, and organizational capacity building.
	Innovation	Modern educational programs, digital administration, and institutional partnerships are gradually introduced to strengthen organizational development.

An administrator (Informant A1) explained that institutional decisions are not determined solely through administrative procedures but remain directed by the *kiai*, while administrators contribute to their implementation and operational development. This pattern indicates a combination of central religious authority and collaborative institutional management.

A teacher (Informant T1) further described that institutional changes are introduced gradually, particularly in educational programs, administrative practices, and teacher development. The gradual approach allows modernization to take place without disrupting the pesantren’s established religious orientation.

These findings demonstrate that adaptive leadership is reflected in the *kiai*’s ability to balance religious authority with managerial effectiveness. Institutional decision-making involves administrators and educational personnel, while the *kiai* continues to provide strategic direction. This combination enables the pesantren to respond to educational reforms, technological developments, and changing stakeholder expectations without compromising its religious identity.

3.1.2. Integration of Salaf Tradition and Quality Management

The second major finding concerns the integration of Salaf educational traditions with modern quality management. The evidence indicates that classical Islamic learning remains the foundation of education, while systematic management practices are introduced to strengthen educational and organizational performance. The principal findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Integration of Salaf Tradition and Quality Management

Aspect	Empirical Findings
Salaf Learning Tradition	Classical Islamic texts (<i>Kitab Kuning</i>) remain the foundation of religious education.
Curriculum Development	Religious studies are integrated with formal education and competency-based learning.
Quality Assurance	Continuous evaluation and quality improvement are implemented in academic and managerial activities.
Organizational Management	Administrative systems are structured while maintaining pesantren values.
Stakeholder Participation	Parents, alumni, and the community support institutional development.

A teacher (Informant T2) explained that the use of *Kitab Kuning* remains an important foundation of religious learning, while formal educational programs are developed alongside it. This indicates that educational modernization is implemented through integration rather than replacement of the traditional curriculum.

An administrative staff member (Informant S1) described the implementation of more structured administrative procedures and regular evaluation as part of institutional development. The practice demonstrates that quality management is incorporated into daily organizational activities while remaining aligned with pesantren values.

The findings show that modernization is therefore implemented through integration rather than replacement. *Kitab Kuning* and classical Islamic learning continue to shape the religious foundation of education, while modern management contributes to planning, evaluation, administrative effectiveness, and educational services. Continuous evaluation and stakeholder participation further strengthen coordination among educational units.

Consequently, quality management functions not as a substitute for Salaf education but as an organizational mechanism that supports its continuity and institutional development.

3.1.3. Sharia Marketing as a Strategy for Institutional Sustainability

The third major finding concerns the implementation of Sharia marketing as an ethical mechanism for strengthening institutional reputation and public trust. Rather than relying primarily on commercial promotion, the pesantren develops its institutional image through educational quality, religious credibility, ethical communication, and community engagement. The findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Implementation of Sharia Marketing in Pesantren Governance

Marketing Dimension	Empirical Findings
Ethical Communication	Institutional communication emphasizes honesty, transparency, and Islamic values.
Institutional Branding	Educational achievements and religious credibility strengthen institutional reputation.
Community Engagement	Religious, educational, and social programs strengthen relationships with the community.
Public Trust	Parents value educational quality, Islamic values, and leadership credibility.
Institutional Sustainability	Positive institutional reputation supports student enrollment and broader institutional networks.

A community representative (Informant M1) explained that the community's confidence in the pesantren is closely related to its religious credibility, educational activities, and consistency in serving the surrounding community. This indicates that institutional reputation is developed through actual institutional performance rather than promotional activities alone.

An alumnus (Informant AL1) similarly emphasized that the credibility of the *kiai*, religious values, and quality of education influence the positive perception of the pesantren. This finding illustrates how institutional reputation is communicated and reinforced through stakeholder experience.

The findings indicate that Sharia marketing operates beyond promotional activities and functions as part of institutional governance. Ethical communication, institutional credibility, educational performance, and community engagement reinforce one another in establishing public confidence. The combination of quality educational services and credible leadership contributes to institutional reputation and competitiveness while maintaining the pesantren's religious identity.

3.1.4. Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the findings reveal that adaptive *kiai* leadership at Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan operates through three mutually reinforcing dimensions. First, adaptive leadership enables the pesantren to respond to institutional and environmental changes while preserving its Salaf educational identity. Second, quality management translates this adaptive orientation into continuous educational, administrative, and organizational

improvement. Third, Sharia marketing communicates institutional quality and religious credibility through ethical engagement with stakeholders, thereby strengthening public trust and institutional sustainability. The three dimensions therefore form an integrated governance process rather than independent practices. This relationship provides the empirical basis for the reconstructed adaptive *kiai* leadership model discussed in the following section.

3.2. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that adaptive *kiai* leadership operates not merely as a response to institutional change but as a mechanism for negotiating continuity and transformation within pesantren governance. Three dimensions emerged as interconnected: preservation and adaptive development of Salaf traditions, continuous quality management, and ethical Sharia marketing. The central finding is that these dimensions are not independent managerial practices. Rather, adaptive leadership connects the internal development of educational and organizational quality with the external development of institutional credibility and stakeholder trust.

The findings extend the application of Adaptive Leadership Theory to the pesantren context. Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow conceptualize adaptive leadership as a process for mobilizing people to confront challenges that cannot be resolved through technical solutions alone [19]. In Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan, modernization involves precisely this type of challenge because the adoption of new educational and managerial practices may affect established authority structures, traditions, and institutional expectations. The *kiai* therefore does not simply introduce innovation but determines which changes can be incorporated without weakening the institution's religious identity.

The adaptive mechanism observed in this study operates through gradual change, collaborative decision-making, and preservation of the *kiai*'s strategic authority. Participation by administrators and educational personnel does not eliminate religious authority; instead, authority is redistributed at the operational level while strategic direction remains concentrated in the *kiai*. This arrangement helps reduce potential resistance because institutional members are involved in implementing change while the normative boundaries of the pesantren remain clear. The finding is consistent with Mahmudi and Aimah's study of adaptive leadership in Indonesian pesantren, which shows that modernity encourages pesantren leadership to become more participatory and responsive while maintaining their Islamic foundations [20].

Nevertheless, this relationship should not be interpreted as entirely harmonious. Participatory governance can potentially create tension with the traditional concentration of authority in the *kiai*. Greater participation may generate different interpretations of institutional priorities, particularly when managerial efficiency conflicts with established educational practices. In the present case, this tension appears to be managed through a distinction between strategic religious authority and operational participation. The *kiai* retains responsibility for institutional vision and normative direction, while administrators and educational personnel participate in implementation and organizational development.

Thus, adaptation occurs not through the abandonment of traditional authority but through its functional reconfiguration.

The integration of Salaf tradition and quality management demonstrates that modernization does not necessarily require the displacement of traditional educational practices. The continued use of *Kitab Kuning* and classical Islamic learning provides the normative foundation of the institution, while evaluation, planning, documentation, human resource development, and stakeholder participation strengthen its organizational capacity [21]. This finding supports the principle of continuous improvement in quality management, but extends it by demonstrating that the institution's religious identity mediates quality improvement in pesantren.

The mechanism can be understood as follows: Salaf tradition establishes the values and educational identity that should be preserved, whereas quality management provides organizational instruments through which those values can be maintained and developed under changing conditions. Consequently, quality management becomes an enabling mechanism rather than a bureaucratic replacement for traditional education. This interpretation is consistent with previous research showing that quality management and organizational development can strengthen Islamic educational institutions without necessarily eliminating their religious characteristics [22].

However, the integration also contains a potential tension. Standardized evaluation, administrative documentation, and formal quality procedures may introduce bureaucratic expectations that are not always compatible with the flexibility of traditional pesantren education. If quality management is applied solely through administrative indicators, it may reduce educational quality to measurable outputs and weaken dimensions such as moral formation, religious depth, and teacher-student relationships. The findings suggest that this risk is mitigated when quality management remains subordinate to the pesantren's educational mission. Thus, the relevant principle is not the adoption of managerial standards without modification, but the contextual adaptation of quality management to the values of Salaf education.

The findings also indicate that Sharia marketing operates differently from conventional promotional marketing. Institutional reputation is developed primarily through educational performance, religious credibility, ethical communication, and community engagement. The four commonly recognized characteristics of Islamic marketing *rabbaniyyah*, *akhlaqiyyah*, *al-waqi'iyah*, and *al-insaniyyah* provide an ethical basis for this orientation [23].

The important mechanism is therefore a credibility pathway: institutional values shape leadership behavior and educational services; consistent institutional performance generates stakeholder experience; and positive stakeholder experience strengthens institutional reputation and trust. Sharia marketing consequently functions not merely as an external promotional activity but as an extension of internal governance. The credibility communicated externally must first be produced through institutional conduct internally [24].

This relationship also creates an ethical tension. When marketing becomes strongly oriented toward institutional competitiveness, there is a risk that religious values may be transformed into promotional commodities. A pesantren may emphasize religious identity, achievements, or public image without ensuring that promotional claims correspond to actual educational quality. The findings of this study suggest that such tension can be reduced when communication remains grounded in honesty, transparency, educational performance, and community service. In this sense, Sharia marketing is sustainable only when institutional branding is supported by substantive institutional quality.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in clarifying the relationship among the three dimensions. They should not be understood as three parallel variables. Instead, the reconstructed model identifies adaptive *kiai* leadership as the central integrative mechanism, with the three dimensions functioning as mutually reinforcing components of governance [25].

The relationship can be expressed as a sequential and reinforcing process. Salaf tradition provides the normative foundation → adaptive leadership determines how this foundation is negotiated under changing conditions → quality management converts the adaptive orientation into internal institutional improvement → improved educational quality and institutional credibility strengthen ethical Sharia marketing → stakeholder trust and community engagement reinforce institutional sustainability → these outcomes provide feedback for further adaptive leadership. Thus, the model is simultaneously sequential and recursive rather than strictly hierarchical.

This mechanism represents the principal novelty of the study. Previous approaches tend to examine religious leadership, organizational quality, and Islamic marketing as separate dimensions. The present study demonstrates that adaptive *kiai* leadership can function as the organizational bridge connecting internal quality development with external ethical communication. The novelty therefore lies not simply in combining three concepts, but in identifying the leadership-mediated pathway through which religious identity, organizational quality, and stakeholder trust reinforce one another [26].

The model also has identifiable boundary conditions. It is most likely to operate effectively when the *kiai* possesses sufficient religious legitimacy, organizational capacity, openness to participation, and the ability to distinguish core religious values from practices that can be adapted. Conversely, the model may be less effective where leadership remains entirely authoritarian, organizational resources are insufficient, stakeholders are excluded from decision-making, or institutional marketing becomes detached from actual educational quality. These conditions indicate that adaptive leadership is not automatically produced by modernization; it requires institutional capacity and leadership willingness to negotiate change.

Theoretically, the study extends Adaptive Leadership Theory into the governance of Islamic boarding schools by demonstrating that adaptive leadership can operate as a bridge between normative continuity and organizational transformation [27]. The findings suggest that adaptive leadership in pesantren should not be conceptualized merely as responsiveness to environmental change. It should also include the capacity to determine which institutional

elements must be preserved, which practices can be modified, and how organizational members can be mobilized around those changes. The reconstructed model therefore adds an institutional and religious dimension to the application of adaptive leadership in educational organizations.

Practically, the findings suggest that *kiai* and pesantren administrators should pursue modernization through selective and gradual adaptation rather than wholesale institutional transformation. Quality management should be designed to support, rather than replace, the Salaf educational mission. Likewise, institutional communication should be based on actual educational performance and ethical conduct rather than promotional intensity alone. Pesantren administrators should therefore strengthen participatory decision-making, continuous quality improvement, teacher development, transparent communication, and community engagement while maintaining the *kiai*'s strategic role in defining institutional direction [28].

This study is limited to one pesantren, Pondok Pesantren Cadangpinggan, and therefore does not support statistical generalization across all Islamic boarding schools. Its contribution is primarily analytical and contextual transferability, allowing the reconstructed model to provide a conceptual basis for comparison with other pesantren. The findings are also based on qualitative interpretations of 15 informants and institutional documents within a specific period of observation. Future research should therefore examine the model across different types of pesantren, particularly comparisons between Salaf, modern, and hybrid pesantren. Comparative qualitative or mixed-method research could further examine whether the proposed relationships remain consistent across different leadership structures, organizational resources, levels of modernization, and socio-cultural environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to reconstruct adaptive *kiai* leadership in modern Islamic boarding school governance by examining the relationship between Salaf tradition, quality management, and Sharia marketing. The study concludes that adaptive *kiai* leadership functions as the central mechanism through which pesantren negotiate institutional change while maintaining their religious identity. The reconstructed model consists of three mutually reinforcing components: Salaf tradition provides the normative foundation of institutional identity, quality management strengthens internal educational and organizational capacity, and Sharia marketing translates institutional quality and religious credibility into ethical stakeholder relationships and public trust. Their relationship is therefore not merely additive; adaptive leadership connects and continuously aligns these dimensions in response to changing institutional conditions.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the application of Adaptive Leadership Theory in Islamic educational governance by showing how leadership can mediate between normative continuity and organizational transformation. This contribution should be understood as a context-specific theoretical proposition rather than a universally validated model, given the qualitative single-case design. Practically, the findings suggest that *kiai* and pesantren administrators should pursue gradual and selective modernization, strengthen continuous quality improvement and participatory governance, and ensure that institutional

communication remains grounded in actual educational performance and Islamic ethical principles.

The study is limited by its single institutional context, reliance on qualitative interpretation, context-specific cultural and organizational characteristics, and the potential for researcher and participant bias. These limitations restrict statistical generalization but allow analytical insights that may inform comparison with other pesantren. Future research should therefore refine the proposed model through multiple-case and comparative studies across different pesantren typologies, as well as mixed-method research that can examine the consistency of the proposed relationships across broader contexts. More broadly, the study demonstrates that adaptive leadership can serve as a conceptual bridge between preservation of religious identity and responsible institutional transformation in contemporary Islamic education.

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