

Transformation of Religious Behavior of Alumni of Islamic Boarding School Students in the Context of Higher Education

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ARTICLE INFO :

Keywords :

*Transformation;
Religious Behavior;
University Students;
Islamic Boarding School*

Article History:

Received : 2026-01-16

Revised : 2026-02-26

Accepted : 2026-03-10

Online : 2026-03-26

ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of religious behavior among university students who are alumni of Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) after entering the academic context of higher education. Shifts in values, lifestyle, and consistency of worship emerge as prominent phenomena that require scholarly explanation. The purpose of this research is to describe the factors influencing such behavioral transformations and to explore their relevance to social theory. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method, combining library research with questionnaires and online interviews. The findings reveal that campus environment, peer interactions, social media, academic demands, and personal motivation are the primary factors driving the transformation of religious behavior among pesantren alumni in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental aspect of human life. Through the educational process, individuals gain knowledge that makes it easier for them to face the dynamics of life. In the era of modernization, education is seen as the main benchmark in assessing a person's quality. Therefore, the absence of education will make it difficult for individuals to compete in an increasingly complex social environment (Suryani, 2023, p. 540). In Indonesia, there are educational institutions that focus on providing religious education for their students, which we know as Islamic Boarding Schools

Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions that are oriented towards the development of religious sciences, both in formal and non-formal forms. Along with the dynamics of its development, many Islamic boarding schools are no longer limited to religious studies alone, but also integrate religious disciplines with general science proportionally, resulting in a more comprehensive educational model (Anwar & Anam, 2024, p.



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127). The educational process in the pesantren environment is always supported by the application of strict rules, especially in the implementation of daily worship. The students are required to perform congregational prayers in the mosque on time, read the Qur'an consistently, and actively participate in various additional worship practices, such as tahajjud prayers and sunnah fasting (Yudhi Fachrudin, 2025, p. 40).

However, a significant social phenomenon is often observed, many students who graduate from Islamic Boarding School, after entering the world of lectures, show a shift in values and behaviors that no longer reflect the teachings they have learned in Islamic boarding schools. These changes are visible in both their academic and social lives, raising concerns among families and educators (Robbika, 2024, p. 1232). According to Nurcholish Madjid, one of the main challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools is to maintain moral values in the midst of the current of globalization that is present through the development of science and technology. If the pesantren loses its capacity in carrying out its moral function, then its fundamental role as a source of value will be reduced. This is important because the religious teachings studied in Islamic boarding schools essentially serve as the main foundation in moral development and development (Asyari, 2022, p. 136). Social changes that occur in the university environment generally include shifts in attitudes, interaction patterns, values, norms, behaviors, and social organizational structures. Selo Soemardjan explained that social change is a dynamic that takes place in community organizations, which directly affects the social system. This includes the transformation of values, attitudes, and behaviors between groups in society (Huraerah, 2024, p. 223).

A number of previous studies have shown that pesantren alumni do not necessarily experience religious decline after entering college, but rather carry out various adaptation strategies to balance the demands of the new environment with the values they bring. Some alumni are aware of the social stigma attached to them as graduates of Islamic boarding schools. In response, they seek to limit themselves from behavior that is contrary to religious norms, especially those related to promiscuity (Yasin et al., 2025, p. 102). Islamic boarding school alumni students are essentially expected to be able to reflect on behavior in accordance with social norms, based on religious values that they have internalized during their education at the pesantren. However, in the development of time, this behavior often shifts. It is not uncommon to find Islamic boarding school alumni who are less able to display religious and moral examples in the community and the surrounding environment. This phenomenon causes a contradiction, because alumni of Islamic boarding schools who are supposed to have spiritual and ethical excellence sometimes no longer reflect the identity of religious students (Wahyu Eko Pujianto, Alshaf Pebrianggara, Mochamad Rizal Yulianto, 2024, p. 6).

Changes occur not only at the behavioral level, but also at the cultural aspect. The study found a significant change in dress styles, where students who used to wear sharia clothes complete with skirts, ciput, and socks are now replacing them with more pants and hijab "Stylish". In addition, there has been a change in social norms and values, where behaviors such as dating, which were previously thought to hinder the memorization of the Qur'an, are now considered normal and commonplace in the new environment (Muhammad Furqon, Syafruddin, Nursaptini, 2024, pp. 22–23). Significant behavioral changes shown by the alumni students of the lodge made the author interested in conducting this research.

In general, previous research emphasized on the description of changes in religious behavior of pesantren alumni, this study specifically examined this transformation using Travis Hirschi's social control theory approach combined with the perspective of Islamic values. This approach was chosen to explain the relationship between the weakening of social control, the dynamics of the campus environment, and the religious resilience of Islamic boarding school alumni students. Based on the focus of this analysis, this study is directed to examine the form of religious behavior changes in Islamic boarding school alumni after entering the university environment, the factors that influence these changes, and how the transformation of religious behavior can be analyzed within the framework of social control theory and Islamic values. In line with this focus, this study aims to describe changes in religious behavior of pesantren alumni students, identify the causative factors, and provide a theoretical analysis of this phenomenon in the study of the sociology of religion. Thus, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of the sociology of religion as well as a practical contribution to the development of student development of pesantren alumni in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Dimension of Religiosity

Religiosity in this study is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes individual beliefs, practices, and commitments to religious teachings. Referring to Glock & Stark's theory, it emphasizes that individual religiosity is multidimensional. In Islam, this is very relevant because religion is not only understood as a ritual activity, but a comprehensive system of life. Islam requires its adherents to be religious in totality, where the belief in the heart must be in line with worship and social behavior (Subiyantoro, 2018, p. 35). Glock and Stark (1968) formulated five main dimensions of religiosity that are important instruments in the analysis of the sociology of religion. The five dimensions are described as follows:

- a. The *Ideological Dimension*: This dimension relates to an individual's commitment to fundamental theological doctrine or truth. In this context, individuals are expected to fully believe in the basic teachings that have been established in their religion.
- b. The *Ritualistic Dimension*: This dimension includes the involvement of individuals in the practice of formal worship. This realm emphasizes worship activities carried out both privately and collectively within the religious community.
- c. The *Experiential Dimension*: Focuses on the affective aspects or subjective feelings of the individual. It involves personal spiritual experiences, such as feelings of closeness to God or transcendent experiences that touch one's religious emotions.
- d. The *Intellectual Dimension*: Refers to the mastery of religious insight and knowledge. Sociology sees this dimension as an expectation that religious adherents have an adequate understanding of the history, sacred texts, and moral principles taught by their religion.
- e. *Consequential Dimension (The Consequential Dimension)*: This dimension measures the implementation of religious values in social life. The main focus is on how religious beliefs and practices have a real impact on ethical behavior and individual interactions in everyday life (Hayat, 2021, pp. 16–17).

For students of Islamic boarding school alumni, the main challenge arises in the ritualistic and consequential dimensions; Where the absence of structural supervision in universities often tests whether their religious commitments have been internalized independently or only performative while in the pesantren.

B. Behavioral Transformation as an Impact of Social Change

Behavioral shifts in pesantren alumni students are a logical consequence of the dynamics of social change. Selo Soemardjan provides limitations on social change as a transformation that occurs in social institutions. These changes systemically have an impact on the social order, which includes shifting values, attitude orientation, and the reconstruction of behavioral patterns in various social groups (Azizurrahman, 2023, p. 249). When a student transforms into a student, he moves from a social system of pesantren that tends to be closed and homogeneous to an open, heterogeneous, and plural social system of higher education. This process requires a renegotiation of identity. Religious behavior transformation occurs when old values (pesantren culture) clash with new values (liberal and digital campus culture), so that individuals are encouraged to adapt to achieve a new balance in these different social structures.

C. Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory and Moral Resilience

To explain *Why* some pesantren alumni experienced behavioral shifts while others remained consistent, this study uses Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory. Hirschi argues that an individual's conformity to social norms is determined by the significance of social bonds (*Social Bonds*) (Wijanarko, 2022, p. 163). The four elements of the bond serve as a preventive instrument against deviant behavior, which include:

1. Attachment: Refers to the depth of an individual's emotional attachment to his or her social environment, such as family, peers, and educational institutions (pesantren). Intense attachment creates sensitivity to other people's expectations, so individuals tend to avoid actions that can damage those social relationships.

2. **Commitment:** It is a form of rational investment in the future and social reputation. Individuals who have invested time and energy in conventional paths—such as education and career—will consider the great losses (*costs*) if they violate the norm.
3. **Involvement:** Refers to the intensity of participation in structured positive activities. Sociologically, high engagement in beneficial activities automatically reduces the opportunity and availability of time for individuals to initiate deviant actions.
4. **Confidence (*Belief*):** Involves the internalization of moral values and legitimacy to the rules of society. A firm belief in the validity of religious and legal norms allows individuals to autonomously obey the rules without the need for strict external supervision (Dewi, 2025, pp. 84–85).

Theoretically, these four elements operate simultaneously and reinforce each other (*synergism*) in forming a solid internal social control. In the context of this study, the weakening of external control from the kyai and dormitory rules makes the stability of the religious behavior of pesantren alumni completely dependent on the strength of the four elements of internal bonds. Transformation of negative behavior usually begins with a weakening of *attachment* to the religious community and an increasing influence of *peer groups* that have different values.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a type of library *research* that is equipped with field data through the distribution of questionnaires and online written interviews to students of Islamic boarding school alumni. The primary data source came from the results of student questionnaires and interviews describing their experiences and changes in religious behavior after entering the university environment. The secondary data were obtained from the literature on the sociology of religion, social change theory, social control theory, and relevant previous studies on the religious behavior of Islamic boarding school students and alumni. Data analysis was carried out in a descriptive-comparative manner, namely by examining the concept of changing the behavior of modern society, then comparing it with field findings to see the factors that cause changes in worship behavior in Islamic boarding school alumni. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, namely matching social theories, supporting literature, and interview results so that the conclusions obtained are objective, consistent, and in accordance with scientific principles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Changes in Religious Behavior of Alumni of Islamic Boarding School Students

Changes in the religious behavior of pesantren alumni after entering college is a phenomenon that is widely discussed in the study of the sociology of religion. The pesantren environment that has a strict control system ranging from worship schedules, supervision of ustadz, to collective culture forms an orderly and stable rhythm of worship. When entering a freer and less supervised campus life, the rhythm is often disturbed. With the weakening of social control, it has led to a decrease in the consistency of worship in students who were previously accustomed to the strict structure of pesantren (Maulida, 2024, p. 388).

In addition to social control factors, modernization and the development of digital technology also contribute to changes in religious behavior. The heterogeneous campus environment opens up new social spaces that are not always in line with the religious values of the pesantren. Furthermore, exposure to popular culture and social media can distract students from worship activities due to the high level of digital distractions. (Anwari, 2023, p. 97). The transition from a homogeneous environment (pesantren) to a plural environment (campus) forces students to make value adjustments. Alumni of Islamic boarding schools often experience "*Cultural Shock*" when facing a new environment, so that the discipline of worship depends on their ability to internalize the values of the pesantren independently (Sari & Faza, 2024, p. 21). In this context, the consistency of worship is not only a matter of religious knowledge, but is also influenced by spiritual motivation, self-management skills, and social environmental support. Students with a network of religious friends are more able to maintain their worship habits than those who do not have similar social support (Bissalam et al., 2025, p. 135).

Thus, changes in the religious behavior of pesantren alumni can be understood as the result of the interaction between changes in the social environment, the dynamics of modernity, and the ability of

individuals to adapt. The literature shows that these changes are not merely religious regressions, but part of a process of self-adaptation to more complex social structures.

B. Factors Causing Changes in Religious Behavior of Alumni of Islamic Boarding Schools

The change in worship behavior of pesantren alumni cannot be separated from the changes in the social environment they experience after entering the campus world. Based on the results of the interviews, there are several main factors that affect the consistency of worship, both in students who remain istiqomah and those who experience a decline. Some of these factors are as follows:

First, the campus social environment is the most dominant factor. The plural campus atmosphere encourages the emergence of a tendency to follow the pattern of peer association who pay less attention to worship practices. One of the respondents admitted that he rarely prayed on time because he was "*often carried away by the circumstances and atmosphere of society on campus*" (RAP, Interview, November 20, 2025). This suggests that changes in the social environment have a central role in shifting the religious practices of individuals, in line with symbolic interaction theory that emphasizes that behavior is formed through interaction and situational definition.

Second, the loss of social control that was previously present in the pesantren environment. While in the pesantren, students are accustomed to a structured schedule, strict worship rules, and supervision from the ustadz. However, when entering higher education, the supervision system no longer applies so that the implementation of worship is completely determined by personal awareness. Some respondents revealed that they "*no longer have anything to remind like in the past*" so that there is a tendency to postpone the implementation of worship (NK, Interview, November 25, 2025). These findings are in line with social control theory which states that adherence to norms decreases when external supervision is weakened.

Third, there is a clash between worship schedules and academic activities. A number of respondents said that they had difficulty balancing their college obligations with the implementation of worship. One of the respondents said that delays in performing prayers often occurred because "*courses clashed with prayer times*" so that the consistency of worship decreased (FK, Interview, November 20, 2025). Academic demands, assignments, organizational activities, and the rhythm of student life have made some pesantren alumni experience a change in priorities.

Fourth, the influence of social media and popular culture. The findings of the study show that respondents' interest tends to be directed towards digital entertainment, so that the allocation of time for worship is reduced. One of the respondents said that the lifestyle changes he experienced were influenced by "*seeing too much content that makes you forget time*" (RAP, Interview, November 20, 2025). This phenomenon is in line with the findings of many studies that digital media can shift the orientation of the values and worship habits of the younger generation.

Fifth, personal motivation and individual spiritual condition. The findings of the study show that there is a strong internal awareness in some respondents who try to maintain the consistency of worship by "*looking for an environment and friends who can remind each other*" so that they remain consistent (D, Interview, November 20, 2025). On the other hand, there are other respondents who admitted a decline in worship practices due to "*laziness and lack of motivation*", despite knowing the obligation to worship (FK, Interview, November 20, 2025).

Overall, the field findings show that the change in the worship behavior of Islamic boarding school alumni is not solely due to a weakening of faith, but is a complex adaptation process in facing new social realities. The heterogeneous campus environment, academic demands, weakening social control, and the influence of social media are the main factors that shift religious practices. Meanwhile, students who remain istiqomah generally have strong spiritual motivation and are able to create a social space that supports their religious obedience.

C. Analysis of Changes in Religious Behavior of Alumni of Islamic Boarding School Alumni Western Theory and Islamic Theory

To answer various problems of changing the worship behavior of Islamic boarding school alumni, Travis Hirschi's Social Control theory can be used as a comprehensive approach that is at the same time in harmony with Islamic values. This theory explains that the consistency of a person's behavior is determined by the strength of the social bonds he has, namely proximity to a good environment, commitment to life goals, involvement in positive activities, and belief in the values adhered to. When these bonds are strong, a person's behavior tends to stabilize; However, when the bond is weakened, such as when students enter a less structured

campus environment, changes in behavior, including a decrease in the intensity of worship, are easier to occur (Hirschi, 1969, p. 89). Therefore, the first solution that this theory offers is to re-strengthen the bonds of the social environment that underpin religious behavior. Alumni of Islamic boarding schools on campus are encouraged to choose a good friendship environment, join religious organizations, or form a small group of worship reminders so that the atmosphere of the pesantren that used to support worship can be reconstructed on a smaller scale.

This solution is in line with Islamic guidance that emphasizes the importance of a pious environment. In the Qur'an Allah SWT says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

It means: "O you who believe, fear Allah, and be with the righteous." (QS. At-Taubah: 119) (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019)

This is a signal that the social environment has a direct influence on the stability of faith. In addition to the environment, Hirschi also emphasizes the importance of commitment to life goals. In the context of worship, this commitment is reflected in the awareness that prayer and other worship are not only ritual obligations, but also moral fortresses, as Allah says that:

...إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ....

It means: "...Indeed, prayer prevents from (deeds) vile and unrighteous..." (QS. Al-Ankabut: 45) (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019)

By strengthening this commitment through daily worship targets, time planning, and self-awareness, pesantren alumni students will have a stronger internal foundation to maintain their worship habits.

Hirschi also explains the importance of engagement (*Involvement*) in positive activities to reduce the chances of deviant behavior. In the context of the campus, pesantren alumni can maintain the stability of worship by including themselves in productive activities such as routine studies, religious mentoring, or Islamic social activities (Hirschi, 1969, p. 96). This approach is in line with the words of the Prophet PBUH in a hadith that affirms that the most beloved practices of Allah are those that are done consistently, even if they are few. This hadith emphasizes that consistency is key, and that habituation of positive activities is able to maintain one's spiritual rhythm.

Finally, social control theory emphasizes the element of belief (*belief*) as the main foundation of moral behavior. In Islam, faith is strengthened through dhikr, recitation, and understanding the meaning of worship, as affirmed in the words of Allah:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Meaning: "(i.e.) those who believe and their hearts are at peace in remembrance of Allah. Remember, it is only by remembering Allah that the heart becomes at peace." (QS. Ar-Rad: 28) (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019)

This verse explains that spiritual stability depends not only on the environment, but also on internal efforts to maintain a relationship with God. Thus, solutions based on the theory of social control and Islamic values complement each other: strengthening the religious environment, building a commitment to worship, engaging in positive activities, and maintaining faith through religious rituals. If these four aspects are carried out simultaneously, pesantren alumni students will have stronger religious resilience in maintaining the consistency of worship behavior. This resilience allows them to remain steadfast in facing various challenges that arise in the modern campus environment, both in terms of academics, social, and culture.

Thus, solutions based on the theory of social control and Islamic values complement each other: strengthening the religious environment, building a commitment to worship, engaging in positive activities, and maintaining faith through religious rituals. If these four aspects are carried out simultaneously, pesantren alumni will have stronger resilience in maintaining their worship behavior in the midst of the challenges of the modern campus environment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that changes in the religious behavior of pesantren alumni students when entering the university environment are a process born from a shift in the social environment. The campus is freer, heterogeneous, and less controlled, making some pesantren alumni experience a decrease in worship discipline.



Factors such as association, academic demands, and the influence of social media are the main causes of these changes. However, some students are able to maintain the consistency of worship thanks to strong internal motivation and the support of the religious environment that they continue to build on campus. Through the analysis of Social Control theory, this study emphasizes that the strength of social bonds, both environmental, commitment, positive involvement, and spiritual beliefs are the main determinants of the stability of the worship behavior of pesantren alumni. As the bond weakens, religious behavior changes; On the other hand, when bonds are strengthened through religious community, good time management, and spiritual awareness, students are still able to maintain pesantren values in the midst of the dynamics of modern campus life.

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