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Batik Santri: Training, Education, and the Creative Economy Potential of Islamic Boarding School–Based Initiatives in Kudus Regency

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Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) possess strategic potential for advancing the creative economy grounded in cultural and community-based resources, particularly through the batik industry. Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah in Kudus Regency has established a batik business unit since 2018 as part of its *pesantren entrepreneur* program; however, it has not yet demonstrated optimal competitiveness. This study aims to develop a model for strengthening the pesantren-based creative economy through entrepreneurship training, eco-religious–based santri batik product innovation, and digital branding strategies. This study employs an action research approach encompassing the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods. The findings indicate that (1) pesantren possess strong human resource potential for batik industry development, (2) entrepreneurship training and education enhance the technical and managerial competencies of santri, (3) eco-ethnic and eco-religious–based santri batik product innovation generates a distinctive product identity, (4) santri-preneur competencies improve in the domains of production, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing, and (5) digital branding strategies expand market reach and strengthen the position of santri batik within the creative economy ecosystem. This study affirms the strategic role of pesantren as centers for culturally grounded creative economy development and proposes an integrative model for strengthening santri entrepreneurship through education, training, product innovation, and digital branding.

Keywords: santri batik, pesantren entrepreneur, creative economy, santri-preneur, eco-religious batik

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are Islamic educational institutions that play a significant role not only in shaping religious character but also in fostering community-based social and economic self-reliance (Kunaifi et al., 2021). Historically, *pesantren* have functioned not only as centers for the transmission of religious knowledge but also as social institutions engaged in community empowerment and the strengthening of the ummah's economic capacity. Over time, *pesantren* have undergone a transformation by integrating entrepreneurship education into their educational system, known as the *pesantren entrepreneur* concept. This model positions santri as active learning subjects who possess not only religious competence but also productive capacity and economic independence (Riswanto et al., 2020). This development aligns with the community-based economic development approach, which positions educational institutions as key drivers of community-based economic growth.

Within the creative economy context, *pesantren* possess substantial potential as centers of cultural production that can be developed into productive economic resources (Adikara & Yanita, 2021; Saputra, 2024). Culture-based creative economy frameworks emphasize creativity, identity, and symbolic value as primary sources of economic value creation. One creative economy sector highly relevant to *pesantren* is the batik industry, which embodies not only economic value but also cultural significance and local identity. Previous studies indicate that the batik industry constitutes an important component of Indonesia's creative economy, contributing to job creation, cultural preservation, and local economic strengthening. In Central Java, the batik industry contributes approximately 12% of total creative economy sector revenue, highlighting significant opportunities for *pesantren* to participate in the cultural creative

economy ecosystem (BBKB, 2025; Nuraenun et al., 2008).

Several prior studies have demonstrated that *pesantren* possess strategic potential for developing entrepreneurship grounded in religious values (Abumoghli, 2024). A study by Wibowo found that integrating entrepreneurship education in *pesantren* can enhance santri's economic independence and strengthen spiritually grounded entrepreneurial capacity. Similarly, Hasan's research revealed that the *pesantren entrepreneur* model can establish community-based economic ecosystems through the integration of education, production, and distribution. Furthermore, studies on santri entrepreneurship indicate that participation in creative economic activities enhances entrepreneurial competence, creativity, and economic self-reliance. However, these studies also highlight persistent challenges in developing creative enterprises within *pesantren*, including limited technical competencies, insufficient product innovation, and underdeveloped marketing strategies (Maarif, 2024; Saputra, 2024).

Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah in Kudus Regency, established in 2008 by K.H. Sofiyani Hadi, is one example of a *pesantren* that integrates religious education and entrepreneurship through its *pesantren entrepreneur* program initiated in 2018. One of its key business units is the production of santri batik. The *pesantren* is grounded in the philosophy of *Gusjigang* (*bagus, ngaji, dagang*—good character, religious learning, and trade), a cultural value of Kudus society that integrates ethics, spirituality, and entrepreneurship (Pujiyanto et al., 2019). This philosophy aligns with the concept of embedded entrepreneurship, in which entrepreneurial practices are deeply rooted in the social and cultural values of the community. In this context, the development of santri batik represents not only an economic activity but also a cultural and educational practice within

the pesantren environment (Luthfi & Fahrurrozi, 2020).

However, preliminary survey results indicate that the batik business unit in this pesantren has not yet achieved optimal competitiveness. The main challenges include limited technical competencies among santri in batik production, insufficient development of product innovation reflecting religious identity and ecological awareness, and suboptimal marketing strategies, particularly in reaching millennial and Generation Z consumers. Previous research has shown that product innovation and branding strategies are critical factors in enhancing the competitiveness of creative economy products. Moreover, digital transformation within the creative economy requires business actors to integrate digital marketing strategies into their business models. In this regard, the involvement of younger santri represents a strategic opportunity, as this generation demonstrates adaptive characteristics toward digital technology and social media platforms.

This study aims to develop a model for strengthening the pesantren-based creative economy through batik skills training, entrepreneurship education for santri, innovation of eco-religious-based santri batik products, and the strengthening of digital branding strategies. The eco-religious concept in this study integrates religious values and ecological awareness as core elements of creative product identity. This approach aligns with the concept of cultural sustainability, which emphasizes the integration of cultural and environmental values in creative economy development. Furthermore, this study seeks to enhance santri-preneur competencies and strengthen a sustainable pesantren entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of pesantren-based educational approaches, batik skills training, and eco-religious-based creative product development within a case study-based research framework. Unlike previous studies that generally focus on pesantren entrepreneurship in broader terms,

this research specifically develops a creative entrepreneurship model centered on santri batik, integrating education, product innovation, and digital branding. Santri batik is positioned not merely as an economic commodity but as a representation of religious identity, ecological values, and pesantren-based local wisdom. Additionally, this study incorporates digital branding strategies oriented toward the characteristics of younger consumer generations within the pesantren entrepreneurship context.

The contributions of this research encompass theoretical, practical, and social dimensions. Theoretically, this study develops a pesantren-based creative entrepreneurship model that enriches scholarship on community-based creative economies and religious value-based entrepreneurship education. Practically, this study provides a competency development model for santri in batik production, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing that can be implemented in other pesantren. Socially, this study strengthens the role of pesantren as centers for culturally and community-based creative economy development and as institutions contributing to sustainable economic empowerment of the ummah.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of santri batik as part of a pesantren-based creative economy ecosystem (Djahwasi & Saidon, 2020; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rohidi, 2014). The case study method was selected because it enables a comprehensive exploration of phenomena occurring within their real-life context, particularly in relation to training processes, entrepreneurship education, product innovation, and branding strategies implemented within the pesantren environment. The case examined is the batik business unit at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah in Kudus Regency, one of the

pesantren entrepreneur institutions that integrates religious education with the strengthening of santri economic independence through the creative industry sector. This approach allows the researcher to understand the relationship between pesantren values, entrepreneurial practices, and creative product development in a contextual and systemic manner.

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah, located in Honggosoco Village, Jekulo District, Kudus Regency, Central Java. The research subjects consisted of santri involved in the pesantren batik business unit, totaling 77 santri, comprising 36 male and 41 female students. In addition to the santri, research informants included the pesantren leader and managers of the batik business unit who were involved in planning, implementing, and developing entrepreneurship programs. The subjects were selected purposively, based on their direct involvement in batik production, training activities, and business management.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, documentation, and product analysis (Peshkin, 1993; Ratcliffe, 1983). Observation was carried out to directly examine batik production activities, training implementation, and santri entrepreneurial practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, perceptions, and understandings of both santri and pesantren administrators regarding the development of the batik enterprise. Documentation was used to supplement the data, including activity records, product designs, and archives of the pesantren entrepreneurship program. In addition, product analysis was conducted to identify design characteristics, motif innovations, and the representation of eco-religious and eco-ethnic values in santri batik.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research

objectives, while data display was presented in narrative descriptive form to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn progressively by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the data. To ensure data trustworthiness, this study employed triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, thereby ensuring adequate credibility and validity in explaining the development of santri batik as part of a pesantren-based creative economy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Potential of Santri Batik as a Foundation for the Creative Economy

Kudus Regency is widely recognized as a *kota santri* (city of Islamic students) with strong traditions of religiosity and entrepreneurship. This identity is reflected not only in the community's religious life but also in economic practices grounded in spiritual values and ethical work principles. The philosophy of *Gusjigang*, which serves as a cultural foundation for the people of Kudus, emphasizes the importance of balancing moral character, religious knowledge, and economic activity (Luthfi & Fahrurrozi, 2020; Pujiyanto et al., 2019). In this context, the development of santri batik at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah possesses strong cultural legitimacy as part of a tradition of religious entrepreneurship deeply embedded in the life of the pesantren and its surrounding community.

The batik business unit at Pondok Pesantren Al-Mawaddah demonstrates significant potential as a community-based creative economy foundation. This business unit functions not only as a production facility but also as an entrepreneurial learning space for santri. Batik-making activities serve as an integrative medium connecting educational processes, skills development, and the cultivation of economic independence. Thus, santri batik should be understood not merely as an economic product but also as part of a broader process of character education and

santri empowerment (Fatah, 2023; Mindrut et al., 2015).

This potential is further strengthened by the involvement of Generation Z santri, who possess adaptive characteristics toward digital technology and social media. This generation tends to learn quickly, think creatively, and remain open to innovation. Their involvement in managing the batik business unit, both as producers and digital marketing actors, reflects the presence of social and cultural capital that supports the development of a pesantren-based creative economy. This adaptive capacity is a critical factor in responding to the increasingly competitive and technology-driven dynamics of the creative industry.

In addition to human resource potential, the development of santri batik is supported by the strength of pesantren identity as an institution possessing moral and social legitimacy. The batik products created embody not only aesthetic value but also symbolic meaning representing the religious and cultural identity of the pesantren. This symbolic dimension provides added value that distinguishes santri batik from other batik products within the creative industry market.

Therefore, santri batik holds strategic potential as a foundation for developing a pesantren-based creative economy. The integration of religious values, youthful human resources, and entrepreneurial traditions establishes a strong foundation for building a sustainable creative economy ecosystem. This potential represents a critical asset in strengthening pesantren economic independence while expanding the role of pesantren as centers of culturally grounded economic innovation.

Strengthening Entrepreneurship Training and Education

Entrepreneurship constitutes a critical component in the development of santri batik as part of the pesantren creative economy. This training is designed to enhance santri competencies in technical production, managerial, and entrepreneurial aspects.

Through this training, santri gain practical experience in the batik-making process, ranging from motif design and the use of tools and materials to dyeing techniques. This process enables santri to comprehensively understand batik production as both a creative skill and an economic activity.

In addition to technical skills, the training also strengthens santri entrepreneurial capacity. Santri are introduced to fundamental entrepreneurship concepts, such as value proposition, market segmentation, and basic business management. This understanding helps santri perceive batik not merely as an artistic creation but also as a product with economic value and market potential. Consequently, santri begin to understand the relationship between creativity, production, and business sustainability.

Entrepreneurship training also plays an important role in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset of santri. They are encouraged to develop creativity, independence, and problem-solving abilities in addressing production and marketing challenges. This transformation reflects a shift in the role of santri from passive learners to active participants in the creative economy. This process strengthens their capacity as santri-preneurs who possess both technical and entrepreneurial competencies.

Furthermore, this training reinforces the integration between religious education and entrepreneurship. Religious values such as honesty, responsibility, and diligence serve as the foundation for santri entrepreneurial practices. This integration creates an entrepreneurial model that is oriented not only toward economic profit but also toward ethical and spiritual values.

Thus, entrepreneurship training in pesantren plays a vital role in strengthening santri competencies as creative economy actors. This training enhances not only technical skills but also the intellectual, managerial, and entrepreneurial character of santri. This serves as a crucial foundation for the sustainable development of a pesantren-based creative economy.

Eco-Religious Product Innovation

Product innovation represents a crucial aspect in enhancing the competitiveness of santri batik within the creative industry. In this study, innovation is implemented through an eco-religious approach, namely the integration of ecological and spiritual values into batik design. This approach aims to create products that possess not only aesthetic value but also reflect religious identity and environmental awareness. This concept serves as the foundation for developing santri batik designs as products with distinctive characteristics and clear differentiation (Couger et al., 1990; OECD, 2016).

Santri batik motifs are developed by incorporating religious symbols, spiritual values, and the local wisdom of Kudus. These motifs represent the pesantren identity and religious traditions that form an integral part of santri life. In addition, the use of environmentally friendly approaches in the production process reflects ecological awareness as part of eco-religious values. The integration of religious and ecological values provides symbolic meaning that strengthens product identity (Selamet, 2018; Sugiarto et al., 2020, 2025).

This innovation also creates product differentiation that distinguishes santri batik from conventional batik. Santri batik functions not only as a fashion product but also as a medium representing the religious and cultural identity of the pesantren. This differentiation constitutes added value that enhances the product's attractiveness within the creative industry market.

Beyond design aspects, innovation also encompasses creative processes that actively involve santri. Their participation in the design process enables them to develop creativity and artistic identity. This process strengthens the role of santri as creators rather than merely producers (Sugiarto, 2019).

Thus, eco-religious product innovation becomes a strategic approach for strengthening the competitiveness of santri batik. The

integration of religious, cultural, and ecological values creates a unique and high-value product identity. This reinforces the position of santri batik as part of a value-based and culturally grounded creative economy (Blanco et al., 2025; Malik et al., 2019).

Digital Branding and Youth Market Segmentation

Digital branding has become a strategic approach in enhancing the competitiveness of santri batik in the digital economy era. The use of social media enables santri batik products to reach broader markets, particularly millennial and Generation Z consumers. Digital media serve as effective tools for introducing product identity and building a strong brand image.

Branding strategies are implemented through strengthening visual identity and product narratives. Santri batik is positioned as a product that integrates religious values and modernity. This narrative serves as a distinguishing factor that differentiates santri batik from other batik products. This identity strengthens the product's positioning within the creative industry market.

The involvement of santri in the branding process also enhances their digital literacy. Santri function not only as producers but also as digital marketing actors. They develop an understanding of visual communication strategies, digital promotion, and consumer engagement.

Digital branding also enables closer relationships between producers and consumers (Keller, 2009; Lückenbach et al., 2023). Social media platforms serve as interactive spaces where consumers can understand the values and meanings embedded in the products. This strengthens consumer loyalty toward santri batik products. Therefore, digital branding becomes a strategic instrument in enhancing competitiveness. The utilization of digital media enables pesantren to develop creative enterprises that are adaptive to technological and market developments.

The Pesantren Creative Economy Ecosystem Model

The findings indicate that the development of santri batik does not merely produce handicraft products but also establishes a structured and sustainable pesantren-based creative economy ecosystem. This ecosystem represents an integrated system that combines education, production, innovation, and entrepreneurship into a mutually reinforcing framework. Pesantren function not only as religious educational institutions but also as creative economy incubation centers that equip santri with cultural, technical, and entrepreneurial competencies. Thus, pesantren serve as spaces for learning as well as production and distribution of culturally grounded economic value (Casals Alsina, 2025; Maarif, 2024; Ta'rif & Adhim, 2021).

This ecosystem is rooted in value-based education as the primary foundation for santri character development. Religious values such as discipline, trustworthiness (*amanah*), diligence, and responsibility serve as the ethical foundation of production and entrepreneurial activities. The internalization of these values shapes not only moral orientation but also strengthens integrity and commitment in economic engagement. This value-based education forms the foundation for developing a productive mindset, ensuring that economic activities are oriented not solely toward profit but also toward social benefit and spiritual fulfillment. Thus, pesantren education serves as both an ethical and cultural foundation for creative economy development (Adebisi, 2022; Alanazi, 2016; Zakiyah et al., 2022).

The next stage involves strengthening competencies through skills training and product innovation. At this stage, santri acquire technical batik-making skills, from motif design and production processes to product completion. In addition to technical competence, santri develop creativity in designing motifs that represent pesantren identity and local cultural values. This process fosters the creation of batik products that

possess not only aesthetic value but also symbolic and economic significance. Product innovation becomes a strategic factor in enhancing competitiveness by enabling product differentiation within the increasingly competitive batik industry.

Subsequently, digital branding becomes a crucial component in expanding market reach and strengthening product positioning within the creative economy ecosystem. The use of digital media, such as social media and online marketing platforms, enables santri batik products to reach broader consumer markets beyond the geographical boundaries of the pesantren. Digitalization functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a medium for building brand identity that reflects religious values, cultural authenticity, and product uniqueness. Through digital branding strategies, santri batik gains greater visibility and stronger opportunities for sustainable growth.

Overall, this santri batik development model demonstrates that pesantren possess strategic potential as centers for culturally and religiously grounded creative economy development. The integration of value-based education, skills enhancement, product innovation, and digital marketing strategies creates an economic system oriented not only toward production but also toward empowerment. This model enhances the economic capacity of santri while strengthening independence, cultural identity, and the sustainability of the pesantren economic community. Thus, pesantren can be positioned as key actors in community-based creative economy development that holistically integrates educational, cultural, and entrepreneurial dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that santri batik possesses significant strategic potential as a

foundation for developing a pesantren-based creative economy rooted in cultural, religious, and community values. The integration of entrepreneurship training, batik skills development, eco-religious product innovation, and digital branding strategies has strengthened santri competencies in technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial domains. These processes not only enhance production capacity but also cultivate santripreneurs who embody creativity, economic independence, and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, eco-religious batik innovation provides a distinctive product identity that integrates religious symbolism, ecological awareness, and local cultural values, thereby increasing the competitiveness of santri batik within the creative industry ecosystem.

Moreover, the development of santri batik contributes to the formation of a sustainable pesantren-based creative economy ecosystem that integrates value-based education, production, innovation, and digital entrepreneurship. Pesantren function not only as religious educational institutions but also as creative economy incubation centers that empower santri and strengthen community economic resilience. The proposed model highlights the importance of aligning religious values, human resource development, creative production, and digital market engagement to ensure long-term sustainability. Therefore, pesantren-based creative entrepreneurship represents a viable and replicable model for strengthening cultural economy development while reinforcing the socio-economic empowerment and cultural identity of pesantren communities.

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