

Construction of Public Perceptions toward Islamic Boarding schools in the Era of Globalization: A Media Exposure Perspective

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Abstract

As Islamic educational institutions, pesantren play a vital role in shaping the moral values, spirituality, and social character of society. However, the rise of globalization and digital media has transformed the way society perceives pesantren. Public perceptions today tend to be influenced more by media representations than by direct social experiences. This study aims to analyze the construction of public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools in the era of globalization, focusing on the role of media exposure in shaping public opinion and social reality. The study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method. Data were collected from scientific journals, books, academic articles, and relevant media reports spanning the years 2023–2026. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques with a critical descriptive approach through the processes of thematic categorization, theoretical synthesis, and critical interpretation. The results indicate that public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools are shaped through the interaction between media exposure, digital information flows, and collective public interpretation. The intensity of media coverage regarding specific cases in Islamic boarding schools tends to lead to generalizations and social labeling that influence public trust in Islamic educational institutions. Additionally, social media algorithms accelerate the spread of sensational information, thereby reinforcing negative perceptions within society. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools need to strengthen digital literacy, public communication strategies, and institutional transparency to remain relevant and maintain social legitimacy in the digital era.

Keywords: Islamic Boarding School, Media Exposure, Social Perception, Social Construction, Digital Media, Public Opinion

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, play a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of society (Sarwadi & Raihan, 2025). However, the reality of globalization has transformed a change in public perception of this institution (Dewi Siregar, 2026; Mawaddah, 2025). This phenomenon also reflects the broader dynamics of social transformation in modern education, where globalization and digitalization increasingly influence social interaction patterns, institutional legitimacy, and public perspectives toward educational institutions (Marlika et al., 2025). Advances in

information and communication technology, particularly social media, have transformed the way people interact when obtaining and consuming information, so that perceptions are no longer formed from direct experience, but rather from representations filtered through the media (Ali, 2025). Recently, the widespread coverage of certain incidents at Islamic Boarding schools in digital media has helped shape public opinion (Budi & Ashari, 2024). Even though these cases are isolated and do not reflect the reality of Islamic Boarding schools as a whole, the intensity of media coverage often leads to generalizations that result in the formation of negative stigmas (Masthurah, 2026; Pangestu & Shabana, 2024). This situation creates tension between the ideal image of Islamic Boarding school as centers of moral education and the public's often one sided perceptions. Therefore, it is important to conduct an academic study of this phenomenon in order to understand the dynamics of public perceptions of Islamic Boarding school amid the increasingly complex currents of globalization.

Some literature suggests that public perception is a social construct influenced by various factors, including experience, social interaction, and popular media (Peranginangin et al., 2025). The study specifically examining the link between perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools and media exposure remains relatively limited. Social perception theory explains that individuals tend to form judgments based on available information, and these judgments are heavily influenced by context and their frame of reference (Morris et al., 2001). Social construction theory, on the other hand, emphasizes that reality is not objective, but rather is shaped through processes of interaction and collective interpretation within society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Media theory suggests that the intensity and framing of news coverage play a significant role in shaping public opinion (Scheufele, 1999). Even so, the existing literature often discusses these three aspects separately, without integrating them within the context of Islamic Boarding school as the subject of study. As an outcome, there is a theoretical gap in explaining how media coverage of specific cases can shape the broader public's perception of Islamic Boarding schools. Therefore, a study is needed that can synthesize these various theoretical perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the construction of public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools in the era of globalization, with a focus on the role of media exposure as the primary factor shaping these perceptions. Furthermore, this study also aims to examine how information presented by the media, whether in the form of news reports or digital content, influences the public's understanding and perception of Islamic boarding schools. Another objective is to identify the patterns of perception that have emerged in society, both positive and negative, as well as the underlying factors. This study also aims to formulate the implications of these perceptual constructs for the image, credibility, and sustainability of Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of strategies for transforming Islamic boarding schools so that they remain relevant and adaptable to the social changes occurring in the modern era.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between the media and Islamic boarding schools from various perspectives, but have not yet comprehensively explained the process by which public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools are formed in the digital era. (Naufal Muhammad & Nisa, 2026) Using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this study reveals the reproduction of internal Orientalism in the portrayal of Islamic boarding schools on the Trans7 television program *Xpose Uncensored*. Meanwhile, (Azizah, 2026) using Robert Entman's framing analysis, found that the media outlet *Kumparan* framed the issue of feudalism in Islamic boarding schools in a manner consistent with the values of Islamic preaching. On the other side, (Irhamni Muhammad & Fatmawati, 2025) highlight the digital communication strategies of the Daar el-Qolam Islamic Boarding School through Chris Heuer's 4C theory, while (Anas et al., 2025) use Antonio Gramsci's theory of

hegemony to explain the contestation of the meaning of pesantren in the mainstream media and the emergence of a counter hegemonic response from the pesantren community. Even though they make an important contribution, these studies generally still focus on analyzing media representation, a specific medium, or the dynamics of discourse production; as a result, they do not yet explain how media information is received, internalized, and constructed into the public's collective perceptions within a digital ecosystem shaped by repeated exposure to information, social media algorithms, and levels of public literacy.

Based on this review, there is a research gap in the form of a lack of studies that comprehensively integrate the process of media message production with the mechanisms of social perception formation among the public. Therefore, this study offers a novel approach through a synthetic critical literature review by integrating Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory, and Howard S. Becker's labeling theory into a single analytical framework. This integration is used to explain how the media externalizes information, determines the dominant issue agenda, and forms symbolic generalizations regarding Islamic boarding schools, which are then reinforced by social media algorithms in the era of globalization. Thus, this study not only discusses media representations of Islamic boarding schools but also explains the mechanisms of public perception formation and their implications for the social legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools in a digital society.

Based on the empirical evidence and theoretical gaps outlined above, this study argues that the construction of public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools cannot be separated from the role of the media as an agent that shapes social reality. Intense media coverage of certain cases has the potential to shape a collective image that does not always reflect the actual situation; therefore, critical analysis is needed to understand the mechanisms behind the formation of that perception. By examining this phenomenon through a literature review, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between the media, public perception, and Islamic educational institutions. This argument also emphasizes that without transformation efforts grounded in an understanding of public perceptions, Islamic Boarding schools risk a decline in public trust. Therefore, this study is crucial as a foundation for formulating strategies to strengthen the image and adaptability of Islamic Boarding schools, ensuring they can continue to fulfill their roles optimally amidst the challenges of globalization.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research to analyze the construction of public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools in the era of globalization through exposure to digital media. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the examination and synthesis of various concepts, theories, and research findings regarding social perception, mass media, the construction of social reality, and the transformation of Islamic Boarding school education. Research data were obtained from secondary sources, including scientific journals, books, academic articles, and media reports relevant to the research focus. Literature searches were conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, and Crossref, covering publications from 2023 to 2026, using keywords such as public perception of Islamic Boarding schools, social media and Islamic Boarding schools, media framing, social construction, and public opinion. The literature was selected purposively based on the relevance of the theme, the recency of the publication, and its connection to media issues, social perceptions, and Islamic Boarding school dynamics in the digital era.

Data collection was conducted through a literature review by identifying, selecting, and categorizing various sources based on the main research themes, including media exposure, the formation of public perception, social generalization, and their implications for the image of Islamic Boarding schools. In addition to academic literature, media reports

were used as supporting data to examine public representations and the intensity of media coverage regarding Islamic Boarding schools in the digital sphere. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques with a descriptive critical approach through the stages of data reduction, theme categorization, comparison across literature, theoretical synthesis, and critical interpretation of the relationship between the media and the construction of public perception. The research analysis is based on Berger and Luckmann’s social construction theory, McCombs and Shaw’s agenda setting theory, and Howard S. Becker’s labeling theory to understand the process of shaping public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools through digital media exposure.

To protect the credibility of the data, this study employs source triangulation by comparing various relevant literature and news reports to ensure consistency in information and interpretation. This study is limited to the analysis of secondary sources and does not involve direct field data collection; consequently, the findings focus on a conceptual interpretation of media representations and the construction of public perceptions regarding Islamic Boarding schools in the era of globalization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Shifting Patterns of Public Perception toward Islamic Boarding Schools

The results of the literature review indicate that public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools in the era of globalization have undergone a significant shift, particularly with regard to the sources shaping these perceptions (Qotrunada et al., 2025). If previously perceptions were largely shaped by direct experience and social interaction, in today’s digital age they tend to be formed through exposure to information from the media, particularly social media. This transformation has led the public to form opinions about Islamic Boarding schools more quickly, even though they often do so without undergoing an adequate verification process (Amalia et al., 2025).

Various sources indicate that public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools are not uniform but fall along a diverse spectrum (Hisniati et al., 2025). On other aspects, Islamic Boarding schools are still viewed as institutions that play a vital role in fostering moral character, discipline, and religious values. However, on the other hand, negative perceptions have emerged, influenced by certain information widely circulated in the media. These negative perceptions generally do not stem from direct experience, but rather from information that the public has repeatedly been exposed to.

Media Exposure and the Formation of Public Narratives

This phenomenon has been amplified by media coverage of specific cases within Islamic Boarding schools that have garnered widespread public attention (Andhara et al., 2025). Several national media reports have highlighted cases of violence or misconduct occurring in Islamic Boarding schools, which have been widely circulated through digital media (Quinawaty Pasaribu, 2026; Salamah Harahap, 2025).

Case	Impact on Public Opinion
Trans7's "Xpose Uncensored" (Oct. 13, 2025)	Judged to have violated the kiai's dignity; MUI condemns it; Trans7 apologizes
The collapse of the Al-Khoziny Islamic Boarding school (September 29, 2025)	Caused significant loss of life; the public debates safety standards

Case of sexual abuse of students (May 5, 2026)	Sparked public outrage against Islamic Boarding schools
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While these cases are isolated incidents involving individual perpetrators, the intense media coverage tends to create the impression that they represent the general conditions at Islamic Boarding schools. This suggests that exposure to specific cases plays a role in shaping the public's collective perception.

Social Media Algorithms and Perception Reinforcement

Analysis results show that social media plays a dominant role in accelerating the spread of information while reinforcing existing perceptions. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize content with high levels of engagement. The dominance of digital media in shaping patterns of information consumption also reflects the broader challenges of maintaining critical awareness in the digital era, particularly amid the increasing intensity of online interaction and media dependency within society (Husein et al., 2024). Such as comments and shares, making sensational or controversial information easier to spread than educational content (Wahyuni & Balqis, 2025). As a result, the public is more frequently exposed to information that highlights the negative aspects, which ultimately shapes their perception of Islamic Boarding schools.

In addition to media factors, the research findings also indicate that the public's ability to filter information influences the perceptions that are formed. People with low media literacy tend to generalize the information they receive more readily, whereas those with firsthand experience or critical thinking skills tend to be more objective in their assessment of Islamic Boarding schools. This suggests that public perceptions are shaped by the interaction between external factors (the media) and internal factors (experience and literacy).

Public Trust and Social Legitimacy

The impact of these perceptions is not limited to the cognitive dimension of public understanding but also potentially influences public attitudes toward Islamic boarding schools (Zakiyah et al., 2025). Social interaction between pesantren and surrounding communities also contributes significantly to shaping collective attitudes and moral evaluations toward Islamic educational institutions (Munir et al., 2025). Several studies indicate that intensive exposure to negative information may contribute to shifts in public trust and shape how society evaluates the credibility of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions. However, because this study is based on literature analysis rather than direct field investigation, these findings should be understood as conceptual indications rather than definitive empirical conclusions (Hasan, 2025). Therefore, the relationship between media exposure, perception formation, and public trust reflects a socially constructed tendency that requires further empirical examination.

The results of this study indicate that the construction of public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools in the era of globalization is the result of a complex interplay between media exposure, individual experiences, and the public's ability to process information (Trisnani et al., 2026). Exposure to certain cases, reinforced by media coverage patterns, contributes to shaping perceptions that tend to lead to generalizations. The impact of these perceptions is not limited to cognitive aspects but also influences public attitudes and beliefs regarding Islamic Boarding schools (Mokodenseho et al., 2024). This research indicates a gap between the ideal values of Islamic Boarding schools and the perceptions that have taken root in society, which ultimately calls for transformative efforts to ensure the continued relevance and survival of these institutions in the era of globalization.

The findings above demonstrate that public perceptions toward Islamic boarding schools are shaped not only by direct social interaction but also by mediated representations circulating within the digital public sphere. These findings further indicate

that media exposure plays a significant role in influencing how society interprets and evaluates Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, a deeper theoretical interpretation is necessary to understand the mechanisms through which media representations construct collective perception and social legitimacy in contemporary society.

The Construction of Social Reality through Media Exposure

The results of this study indicate that the construction of public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools is the result of a complex social process, which cannot be separated from the role of the media as an agent of reality formation. These findings can be understood through the perspective of social construction theory, which explains that social reality is not merely objective but is shaped through processes of interaction and the internalization of meaning within society. As stated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, “social reality is the result of human construction through the processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization.” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this research, information about Islamic Boarding schools disseminated through the media becomes part of a process of externalization, which is then objectified as social reality and internalized by the public as truth. This explains why the public’s perception of Islamic Boarding schools is influenced more by media representations than by direct experience.

Agenda Setting and the Generalization of Public Perception

The role of the media in determining which issues the public considers important can be explained through agenda setting theory. According to Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, “the mass media may not succeed in telling us what to think, but they are very successful in telling us what to think about.” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This statement indicates that the media has the power to shape the public’s focus of attention. In the context of Islamic Boarding schools, the intensity of media coverage regarding certain cases—especially those of a negative nature—makes these issues stand out more prominently in the public consciousness. As a result, the public is more likely to associate Islamic Boarding schools with these issues rather than with the positive aspects that are actually more prevalent.

Labeling and Symbolic Stigmatization of Islamic Boarding Schools

Labeling theory explains how social labels can form and become attached to a group. Howard S. Becker states: “deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions” (Howard S. Becker, 1963). Deviance is not always inherent in the act itself, but rather in how society labels that act. In this study, one or more cases involving individuals at Islamic Boarding schools can give rise to a specific label that is then generalized to the institution as a whole. This process is reinforced by repeated media coverage, causing the label to become increasingly entrenched in public perception.

Representational Generalization in the Digital Public Sphere

The findings of this research also show that the rapid formation of public perception is inextricably linked to the characteristics of modern society, which lives amid a fast paced and massive flow of information. Under these conditions, the public tends to accept available information without undergoing a thorough verification process. The media, particularly social media, acts as a provider of ready to consume reality, while the public acts as a recipient that internalizes this information. Furthermore, social media algorithms reinforce this phenomenon by prioritizing content with high engagement rates, making sensational information easier to spread widely and influence public perception.

The implications of this perception are evident in the level of public trust in Islamic Boarding schools. Negative perceptions formed through the media have the potential to erode public trust, which could ultimately undermine the social legitimacy of Islamic Boarding schools as educational institutions. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed to manage public perception, including through increased transparency, the strengthening of internal oversight systems, and more effective public communication management. Islamic

Boarding school also need to develop digital literacy and utilize the media as a means to convey positive narratives more widely.

Overall, the integration of social construction theory, agenda setting, and labeling in this study indicates that public perceptions of Islamic Boarding schools are not formed in a straightforward manner, but rather through complex interactions between the media, information, and the public's cognitive processes. This study also confirms that media exposure to specific cases, even if they are isolated incidents, can shape broad collective perceptions through mechanisms of generalization and social labeling. Therefore, the transformation of Islamic Boarding school must not only focus on internal educational aspects but also on external aspects, particularly in information management and public relations, to remain relevant in the era of globalization.

The Transformation Challenge of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Digital Era

The phenomenon of public perception formation regarding Islamic boarding schools cannot, in essence, be understood solely as a consequence of the dissemination of neutral digital information. Behind the intensity of media coverage and the constant flow of information lies a symbolic mechanism that gradually shapes a hierarchy of meaning within the public consciousness. Media no longer functions merely as a communication channel but has transformed into an arena for the production of social reality, determining which events are deemed representative and which are marginalized from public attention. In this context, specific cases occurring in Islamic boarding schools undergo a process of symbolic amplification, thereby securing a dominant position in shaping the collective imagination of society even though, empirically, these cases do not always represent the entirety of the Islamic boarding school's reality.

This situation indicates that the construction of public perception in the digital age operates through the logic of representational generalization that is, when partial realities are reproduced on a massive scale until they are accepted as a general portrayal of an institution. The constant repetition of information through digital media leads the public to form understandings based on the visibility of information, rather than on the proportionality of facts. Consequently, the image of Islamic boarding schools is more easily shaped by viral narratives than by the substantive educational practices taking place within them. In this situation, social media algorithms indirectly help shape the structure of public perception by prioritizing content with sensational, emotional, and conflict driven value over reflective, educational narratives.

The results of this study indicate that the construction of public perception of Islamic boarding schools in the era of globalization is shaped by the interaction between media representations, digital algorithms, and the public's limited literacy in verifying information. These findings support the research by (Naufal Muhammad & Nisa, 2026), which states that television media reproduces internal Orientalism through the portrayal of Islamic boarding schools as an exotic and suspicious "Other." This study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that biased media representations do not stop at the message production stage but continue into the processes of objectification and internalization, as described by Berger and Luckmann, thereby allowing partial narratives to be accepted by the public as a seemingly objective social reality. Thus, this study both supports and expands upon previous findings, moving from media text analysis toward an explanation of the social reception process of media messages.

This study also agrees with (Azizah, 2026), who found that the media outlet *Kumparan* frames issues related to Islamic boarding schools in a balanced manner and in accordance with the values of Islamic *da'wah*. This study does not refute those findings but rather demonstrates that balanced framing is often overshadowed by sensational content, which is more easily amplified by engagement based social media algorithms. This finding supports McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory, which posits that the media has the

ability to determine which issues receive the most public attention. In the digital context, this agenda setting function is not only carried out by the mass media but is also reinforced by digital platform algorithms that continuously reproduce content with high levels of engagement, including negative narratives about Islamic boarding schools.

The results of this study support the findings of Irhamni Muhammad & Fatmawati (2025) regarding the importance of pesantren digital communication strategies in building a positive public identity. This study shows that Islamic boarding schools that actively build their own digital narratives have a greater chance of counterbalancing negative representations in mainstream media. From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, such efforts constitute a form of externalization that enables Islamic boarding schools to play a role in shaping social reality in the digital space. Therefore, this study reinforces the argument that strengthening digital literacy and public communication is a critical need for Islamic boarding schools in the era of new media.

This study also supports and refines the findings of (Anas et al., 2025) regarding media hegemony and the contestation of the meaning of pesantren. While Anas et al. emphasize the symbolic power of the media, this study adds that the stigmatization of pesantren is intensifying because Howard S. Becker's labeling mechanism works synergistically with agenda setting and social media algorithms. Consequently, negative labels that initially emerged from specific cases can become generalized and take root in the collective consciousness of society. This finding indicates that the dominance of media narratives is influenced not only by the power of media institutions but also by the cognitive and social processes through which the public receives and internalizes information. Thus, this study does not refute previous research but rather expands and deepens it by integrating social construction theory, agenda setting, and labeling to explain the mechanisms shaping public perceptions of pesantren in the digital era.

This phenomenon shows a shifting epistemic authority in modern society. Where as in the past the social legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools was built through cultural ties, social experiences, and religious authority embedded within the community, in the digital age that legitimacy increasingly depends on media representations. Thus, the digital space has become not only a medium for the dissemination of information but also an arena for the contestation of symbolic legitimacy that determines how religious institutions are understood, evaluated, and even judged by the public. Under these conditions, Islamic boarding schools face challenges that are no longer limited to internal educational issues but also extend to their ability to manage social representation within a society increasingly governed by the logic of digital media.

That is why the transformation of Islamic boarding schools in the era of globalization cannot be understood merely as the modernization of the curriculum or the strengthening of internal educational systems. This transformation must also be directed toward fostering digital communication awareness that can respond to the dynamics of public opinion formation in a more adaptive and strategic manner. Without the ability to build a strong public narrative, Islamic boarding schools risk remaining in a passive position as objects of media representation, rather than as subjects possessing the authority to define their own identity and reality in the contemporary public sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools in the era of globalization are socially constructed through the interaction between media exposure, digital information circulation, and collective interpretation within society. The findings indicate that the increasing dominance of digital media has shifted the formation of public perception from direct social experience toward mediated representation, where public understanding is increasingly shaped by repetitive and highly visible information circulating in digital spaces. The study also reveals that intensive media coverage of specific

cases involving Islamic boarding schools contributes to processes of generalization and symbolic labeling, which potentially influence public attitudes and social legitimacy toward Islamic educational institutions. In the context of digital society, social media algorithms further reinforce this phenomenon by prioritizing sensational and emotionally driven content over reflective and educational narratives. As a result, public perception is often formed based on representational visibility rather than proportional social reality.

Furthermore, this study confirms that the challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in the contemporary era are no longer limited to internal educational transformation but also involve the ability to manage social representation and public communication within an increasingly digitalized public sphere. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, adaptive communication strategies, and institutional transparency becomes essential for maintaining public trust and reinforcing the social legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools in the era of globalization. Nevertheless, because this research is based on library research and secondary data analysis, the findings remain conceptual and interpretative in nature. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ empirical approaches, such as field research, interviews, or public perception surveys, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media exposure, public perception, and the social legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools in contemporary society.

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