



Media Framing, Corporate Logic and the Public Image of Pesantren in the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 Controversy

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Abstract

This study examines how pesantren, kiai, and santri were represented in the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy aired on October 13, 2025, and how such representation was shaped by corporate media logic. Employing a critical qualitative case-study design, the research analyzed the pesantren-related broadcast segment using an integrated framework of content analysis, framing analysis, critical discourse analysis, and political economy of media. Primary data were drawn from the broadcast segment, while secondary data included media reports, public responses, institutional statements, regulatory materials, and relevant academic literature. The analysis focused on verbal narration, visual sequencing, diction, camera emphasis, dramatic effects, source positioning, contextual omission, and post-broadcast counter-framing. The findings show that the broadcast constructed pesantren through a selective frame that foregrounded controversy, hierarchy, and symbolic tension, while giving limited attention to the ethical, pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual meanings of pesantren traditions. Kiai-santri relations were intensified through audiovisual dramatization, whereas concepts such as adab, khidmah, barakah, sanad, and moral discipline received insufficient explanatory space. The study further reveals that the segment reflected attention-oriented corporate media logic, in which sensitive socio-religious issues were packaged as visually and emotionally engaging content. Public criticism, pesantren responses, and regulatory reactions subsequently transformed the broadcast into a wider socio-religious communication event. This study contributes to media framing, media representation, and media-religion scholarship by conceptualizing televised religious controversy as an interaction among textual construction, audiovisual meaning-making, commercial media logic, and public counter-framing within Indonesia's hybrid media ecology. It also underscores contextual responsibility in representing religious educational institutions in broadcasting.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary television operates in a media environment where information, entertainment, and commercial interests increasingly intersect. In commercial broadcasting, editorial decisions are often shaped not only by public interest, but also by ratings, advertising value, audience retention, and the need to produce content that can circulate beyond its original airtime. This overlap has become more complex in the digital era, where television segments can be clipped, reposted, debated, and reframed across social media platforms. Recent studies on social media journalism and audience analytics show that platform visibility, engagement metrics, and newsroom strategies increasingly influence how media institutions determine what deserves public attention

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(Allam & Hollifield, 2023; Dodds et al., 2023; Kristensen, 2023). Such pressures are not merely technological; they also reshape the economic and symbolic value of social issues within media production. Religious and educational issues are particularly vulnerable in this environment because they carry emotional proximity, moral significance, and the potential to generate public debate. Therefore, the representation of religious institutions on television needs to be examined not only as a matter of content, but also as a product of corporate media logic, audience competition, and the commodification of public attention.

In Indonesia, this issue is especially important because pesantren occupy a central position in Islamic education, moral formation, and community life. Pesantren are not simply conventional boarding schools; they are socio-religious institutions that combine religious learning, character education, spiritual discipline, communal responsibility, and the transmission of scholarly authority. The relationship between kiai and santri is shaped by adab, khidmah, trust, respect for teachers, and scholarly lineage, which cannot be fully understood through a purely hierarchical or modern-bureaucratic perspective (Novita et al., 2026). These practices may appear unfamiliar to audiences outside pesantren culture, particularly when they are detached from their ethical, pedagogical, and spiritual meanings. When such meanings are not adequately explained, pesantren traditions may be interpreted through simplified categories such as inequality, feudalism, or institutional backwardness. This problem becomes more serious because many viewers encounter pesantren not through direct experience, but through mediated images, news narratives, and fragmented digital discussions. Thus, studying the media representation of pesantren is necessary to understand how Islamic educational traditions are made visible, simplified, contested, or misunderstood in the public sphere.

The controversy surrounding the pesantren-related segment in *Xpose Uncensored Trans7*, aired on October 13, 2025, provides a significant empirical case for examining this problem. Public criticism emerged because the broadcast was perceived to portray pesantren life, kiai-santri relations, and internal traditions through selective narration, dramatic visual arrangement, and limited cultural explanation. Several studies responding to this case suggest that the broadcast tended to frame pesantren practices through themes of feudalism, inequality, and symbolic domination, while giving insufficient space to the ethical and pedagogical meanings embedded in pesantren traditions (Nuryazidi, 2024; Rofiqi et al., 2026; Sofi et al., 2025). The controversy also expanded beyond audience disagreement because it involved pesantren communities, religious actors, public commentators, and broadcasting regulators. Such responses indicate that media representation of pesantren is not merely a textual issue, but also a social event involving dignity, institutional trust, and media accountability. Hence, the case should not be reduced to an isolated broadcasting error. It needs to be read as a media event shaped by framing practices, corporate production logic, and the circulation of meaning within Indonesia's hybrid media ecology.

From a framing perspective, the central issue lies in how media select certain aspects of reality and make them more salient than others. In television, framing does not operate only through spoken narration; it also works through visual emphasis, camera focus, editing rhythm, background music, source selection, evaluative diction, and the omission of alternative explanations. Studies on visual and multimodal framing show that images, sounds, narrative sequencing, and affective cues can influence audience interpretation as strongly as verbal statements (Bateman & Tseng, 2023; Geise & Xu, 2025). In religious representation, this process is particularly sensitive because religious symbols, institutional practices, and teacher-student relations carry meanings that are deeply embedded in communal memory and moral authority. A narrow frame may not directly create public stigma, but it can contribute to partial public imaginaries when audiences are repeatedly exposed to one-sided visual and narrative cues. The political economy of media further reminds us that representation is produced within institutions that compete for attention, visibility, commercial value, and program sustainability. Therefore, the *Xpose Uncensored* controversy requires an integrated analysis that connects textual framing, audiovisual construction, corporate television logic, and public meaning-making.

Existing scholarship has developed three major lines of discussion relevant to this article. The first line examines digital journalism, platform-oriented news production, and audience analytics, showing that newsrooms increasingly negotiate editorial autonomy, platform dependency, engagement metrics, and commercial sustainability (Mayer, 2025; Olsen et al., 2026). The second line

focuses on visual and multimodal framing, demonstrating that media meaning is constructed not only through words but also through images, sound, sequencing, emotional cues, and the interaction between verbal and visual elements (He et al., 2025; Ulu & Kapusızoğlu, 2026). The third line discusses religion, media, and representation, emphasizing that religious groups and institutions may be misunderstood when media narratives detach symbols and practices from their theological, cultural, and institutional contexts (Arıcı, 2025; Brodard, 2026). Taken together, these studies provide an important foundation for understanding media representation as a constructed process rather than a neutral reflection of reality. However, much of the existing literature still tends to examine framing, platformization, religious representation, and political economy as separate analytical domains. As a result, the interaction between corporate media logic, multimodal framing, and religious institutional representation remains insufficiently explained, particularly in the context of Southeast Asian Islamic education.

In the Indonesian context, recent studies have begun to address pesantren representation, media ethics, and public responses to the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy. These studies show that the broadcast was criticized for simplifying pesantren traditions and for presenting kiai–santri relations through limited narratives of hierarchy, feudalism, and symbolic domination (Nisa’u & Karsidi, 2025). Other related studies on pesantren and media have also indicated that mainstream media may contribute to stigma when pesantren are represented through narrow visual and narrative selections (Syafaq et al., 2026). Although these studies are valuable, they tend to focus on ethical violation, public reaction, pesantren image, or the internal response of pesantren communities separately. They have not yet fully explained how corporate television logic, multimodal framing, and post-broadcast digital circulation interact in shaping the public image of pesantren. This gap is important because the controversy cannot be understood only as a problematic broadcast text. It must also be situated as a corporate media product and a socio-religious communication event in which religious symbols, institutional authority, public emotion, and media economics intersect.

Based on this gap, this study aims to examine how pesantren, kiai, and santri were framed in the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy and how such framing was shaped by corporate television logic. Specifically, the study analyzes narrative selection, visual emphasis, diction, source positioning, contextual omission, and the construction of pesantren as a public object within a competitive television environment. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated reading of the controversy not merely as a media ethics problem, but as a case of mediated religious representation produced through the interaction of televisual framing, corporate media logic, and hybrid digital circulation. Theoretically, this study contributes to framing theory, political economy of media, and media–religion scholarship by showing how religious educational institutions can become contested symbolic objects in the attention economy. Practically, the study offers insights for media institutions, broadcasting regulators, pesantren communities, and the wider public regarding the importance of accuracy, balance, cultural sensitivity, and contextual responsibility in representing religious institutions. By situating the Xpose Uncensored case within Indonesia’s hybrid media ecology, this article argues that pesantren should not be reduced to dramatic visual fragments. Rather, pesantren need to be understood through their historical, pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual complexity.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a critical qualitative case-study design to examine how pesantren, kiai, and santri were represented in the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy. The design was selected because the study aims to interpret meaning construction in a specific media event rather than to measure audience attitudes statistically. A qualitative case study is appropriate for investigating a bounded case in depth, particularly when the object involves the interaction between media text, institutional context, and public meaning-making (Anas et al., 2026; Malhotra et al., 2025). This approach treats television content not as a neutral reflection of reality, but as a constructed product shaped by editorial selection, audiovisual arrangement, discourse, and commercial media logic. Content analysis was used to identify recurring verbal and audiovisual patterns in the broadcast (Zhang et al., 2025). Framing analysis was applied to examine how the broadcast defined the issue,

emphasized particular elements, implied causal interpretation, and guided moral evaluation (Parmelee et al., 2025). Critical discourse analysis was used to connect the media text with broader social meanings and power relations surrounding pesantren representation (Widodo et al., 2025). Political economy of media was employed to interpret how rating orientation, market competition, audience attention, and the commodification of socio-religious issues may shape television production and circulation (Fariza et al., 2026).

Research Context and Period

The empirical context of this study is Indonesian commercial television broadcasting and its interaction with the wider digital public sphere. The primary case is the pesantren-related segment in the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 episode aired on October 13, 2025. The broadcast became controversial because it was perceived to represent pesantren life, kiai–santri relations, and internal religious traditions through selective narration, dramatic visual arrangement, and limited cultural explanation. The study was conducted through documentary and media-text analysis rather than fieldwork in a physical pesantren location. The research period covered the broadcast event and the post-broadcast phase in which public responses, media reports, institutional statements, and broadcasting regulatory materials became available. This periodization allowed the broadcast to be examined both as an audiovisual text and as a public communication event. The case was treated as part of Indonesia’s hybrid media ecology, where television programs can be discussed, circulated, and reframed through online platforms after the original airing. Because the research focuses on representation and media logic, the context of analysis includes television production, post-broadcast circulation, public response, and regulatory reaction.

Data Corpus and Selection Criteria

The population of this study consisted of media texts and public documents related to the representation of pesantren in the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy. The selected corpus included primary broadcast data and secondary documentary data that directly supported the analysis of framing, discourse, corporate media logic, and public meaning-making. Primary data were obtained from the pesantren-related segment of the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 broadcast aired on October 13, 2025. Secondary data consisted of media reports, public responses, institutional statements, broadcasting regulatory materials, and academic literature concerning media representation, pesantren, broadcasting ethics, and the commodification of religious issues. Purposive sampling was applied because the study required sources that were directly relevant to the case and the research objectives. Data were included when they directly discussed the controversy, contained information on pesantren representation or public response, and were publicly accessible for verification. Data were excluded when they were duplicated, unrelated to the pesantren segment, lacked identifiable source information, or contained unsupported personal claims without clear relevance to the case. To prevent overextension, the corpus was used to interpret the public circulation of the controversy rather than to claim direct measurement of audience perception.

Table 1. Data corpus and selection criteria

Data category	Source	Inclusion criteria	Analytical function
Primary broadcast data	Pesantren-related segment of Xpose Uncensored Trans7, October 13, 2025	Contains narration, visual scenes, sequencing, diction, and audiovisual elements related to pesantren, kiai, and santri	Main object for content, framing, discourse, and audiovisual analysis
Media reports	Online news reports discussing the controversy	Published after the broadcast and directly related to the pesantren segment or public response	To trace post-broadcast circulation and media framing
Institutional statements	Statements from regulators, pesantren-related organizations, or public institutions	Contains official response, criticism, clarification, or regulatory position	To analyze institutional accountability and counter-framing
Regulatory materials	Broadcasting ethics and regulatory documents	Relevant to broadcast standards, media responsibility, or public accountability	To contextualize the case within

			broadcasting governance
Academic literature	Studies on framing, political economy of media, pesantren, religious representation, and media ethics	Relevant to theory, method, or contextual interpretation	To support theoretical triangulation and interpretation

Table 1 presents the data corpus and selection criteria used in this study. It clarifies the types of data analyzed, including the primary broadcast segment, media reports, institutional statements, regulatory materials, and academic literature. Each data category is linked to specific inclusion criteria to ensure that only relevant and verifiable materials are used in the analysis. This table strengthens the transparency of the research process by showing how each source contributes to the examination of pesantren representation, public response, and media accountability.

Unit of Analysis and Research Instruments

The units of analysis consisted of verbal narration, visual scenes, image sequencing, diction, camera emphasis, dramatic effects, source positioning, and the relationship between narration and visual presentation. These units were selected because television framing operates through spoken language as well as audiovisual composition, editing rhythm, sound, visual emphasis, and contextual omission. The main research instruments were a documentation protocol and an analytical coding sheet. The documentation protocol recorded the identity of each data item, including source type, title, date, author or institution, medium, and relevance to the controversy. The analytical coding sheet guided the examination of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, contextual omission, corporate media logic, and public meaning-making. The indicators were developed from framing theory, critical discourse analysis, multimodal media analysis, and political economy of media. Each unit of analysis was coded based on observable textual, visual, and contextual features rather than on general impressions. The framework was designed to make the interpretive process transparent, consistent, and replicable for future studies on religious representation in television media.

Table 2. Analytical coding framework

Analytical dimension	Main indicator	Data source	Analytical purpose
Problem definition	How pesantren, kiai, and santri are defined as a social issue	Broadcast narration and visual scenes	To identify the dominant frame of the broadcast
Causal interpretation	How responsibility, cause, or blame is implied	Narration, scene sequencing, and source positioning	To examine how the issue is explained or attributed
Moral evaluation	Evaluative diction, tone, visual emphasis, and dramatic effects	Diction, music, camera focus, and editing rhythm	To analyze how the broadcast guides viewers' moral judgment
Contextual omission	Absence of cultural, pedagogical, or religious explanation	Broadcast content compared with supporting sources	To identify pesantren meanings that are minimized or excluded
Corporate media logic	Sensationalization, dramatization, controversy, and attention orientation	Broadcast format, narrative structure, and post-broadcast circulation	To connect representation with commercial television logic
Public meaning-making	Public responses, institutional statements, and regulatory reactions	News reports, public statements, and regulatory materials	To examine how the broadcast became a wider communication event

Table 2 outlines the analytical coding framework applied to examine the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy. The framework connects key analytical dimensions, such as problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, contextual omission, corporate media logic, and public meaning-making, with observable data indicators. It helps guide the coding process by ensuring that

the analysis is based on specific textual, visual, and contextual evidence rather than general interpretation. This table is important because it makes the qualitative analysis more systematic, transparent, and replicable for future studies on religious representation in television media.

Instrument Validity and Analytical Trustworthiness

Instrument validity was strengthened through content validity and theoretical alignment. Content validity was established by ensuring that each coding category corresponded to the research objectives and to the theoretical concepts used in the study. The coding categories were aligned with framing dimensions such as problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment implication, as well as with indicators of media commodification and corporate television logic. Analytical trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, audit-trail documentation, and researcher reflexivity. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the broadcast segment with media reports, public responses, institutional statements, regulatory materials, and relevant academic literature. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by combining content analysis, framing analysis, critical discourse analysis, and political economy analysis. An audit trail was maintained by documenting data selection, coding decisions, emerging categories, interpretive notes, and revisions during analysis. As this is a qualitative media study, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were pursued through transparent procedures and traceable interpretation rather than through statistical reliability testing (Ahmady et al., 2026).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in five stages. First, the researchers identified and documented the pesantren-related segment of the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 episode aired on October 13, 2025. Second, the segment was watched repeatedly to identify verbal narration, visual scenes, sound effects, camera emphasis, scene sequencing, diction, and the relationship between narration and visual presentation. Third, the relevant segment was transcribed descriptively by recording spoken narration and writing audiovisual notes on scene transitions, visual emphasis, tone, and dramatic effects. Fourth, secondary data were collected from media reports, public responses, institutional statements, broadcasting regulatory materials, and academic literature related to the controversy. Fifth, all data were organized into a corpus matrix based on source type, date, relevance, and analytical category. Duplicated, irrelevant, or unverifiable materials were removed before analysis to maintain corpus consistency. This procedure ensured that the broadcast was analyzed not only as an isolated television text, but also as a public communication event shaped by post-broadcast circulation, regulatory response, and pesantren counter-narratives.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis followed a qualitative coding and interpretive procedure. First, data reduction was conducted by screening all collected materials and retaining only those directly related to pesantren representation, kiai–santri relations, media framing, corporate television logic, and public image. Second, open coding was used to identify textual and audiovisual elements such as evaluative diction, dramatic visual cues, source selection, contextual omission, sequencing, and narrative emphasis (Starr & Braun, 2024). Third, axial coding was used to group initial codes into broader analytical categories, including selective framing, visual dramatization, contextual omission, corporate media logic, and public counter-framing. Fourth, framing interpretation was conducted by examining how the broadcast defined the issue, assigned meaning, emphasized certain elements, and minimized alternative explanations. Fifth, critical discourse interpretation was applied to connect representational patterns with broader meanings concerning pesantren, religious authority, and public communication. Sixth, political economy interpretation was used to relate the observed framing patterns to commercial television logic, especially attention orientation, controversy, rating pressure, and commodification. The final interpretation was produced by comparing broadcast analysis with secondary data, including media reports, public responses, institutional statements, regulatory materials, and previous studies on pesantren representation and media ethics.

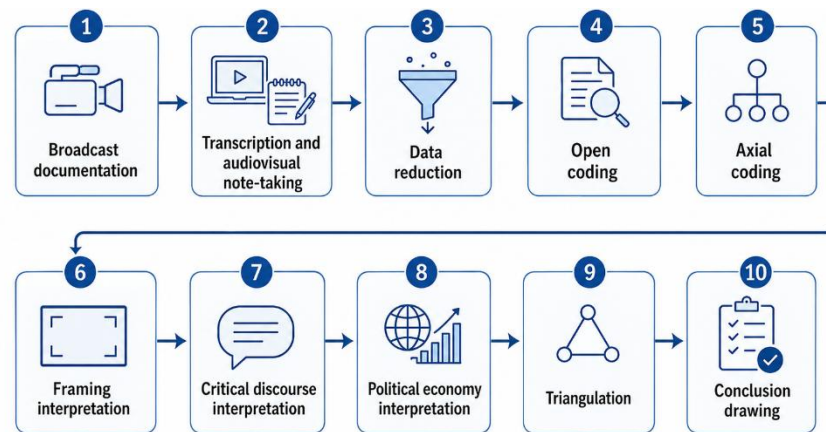


Figure 1. Analytical procedure

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical procedure followed in this study, beginning with broadcast documentation and ending with conclusion drawing. The figure shows that the analysis was conducted through sequential stages, including transcription, data reduction, open coding, axial coding, framing interpretation, critical discourse interpretation, political economy interpretation, and triangulation. This visual procedure helps clarify how raw media data were transformed into analytical categories and final interpretations. By presenting the research process visually, the figure enhances methodological clarity and supports the credibility of the qualitative analysis.

Research Ethics and Methodological Limitation

This study followed ethical principles in qualitative media research. Since the data consisted of publicly accessible broadcasts, media reports, public statements, academic literature, and regulatory documents, the study did not involve direct human participants or private personal data. Nevertheless, ethical caution was applied because the topic concerns religious institutions, communal dignity, and sensitive socio-cultural meanings. The analysis avoided exposing private individuals, making unsupported accusations, or attributing intention without sufficient evidence. Public responses were treated as contextual data rather than as evidence for judging individual motives. All sources were documented and cited according to academic standards to ensure transparency, traceability, and research integrity. The study is limited to one televised controversy and therefore does not claim to represent all media portrayals of pesantren in Indonesia. Therefore, the findings should be understood as an in-depth interpretation of a specific media event, while future studies may strengthen the topic through newsroom interviews, audience reception analysis, social media comment analysis, or comparative research across television and digital platforms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis revealed that the pesantren-related segment in Xpose Uncensored Trans7 did not merely present pesantren as a topic of public information, but constructed it through selective narrative and audiovisual choices. Pesantren, kiai, and santri were represented within a frame that emphasized controversy, hierarchy, and symbolic tension rather than the broader educational, ethical, and spiritual complexity of pesantren life. This construction appeared through the interaction of narration, diction, visual sequencing, dramatic effects, source positioning, and contextual omission. The findings are organized into five main themes: selective construction of pesantren, dramatization of kiai-santri relations, contextual omission, corporate media logic, and public counter-framing.

Selective Construction of Pesantren as a Controversial Social Space

The first finding shows that the broadcast constructed pesantren through a selective representational frame. Rather than presenting pesantren as a complex Islamic educational institution, the program emphasized aspects that could be read by general audiences as unusual, hierarchical, or socially problematic. This selective emphasis made pesantren appear primarily as a space of tension rather than as a community of learning, discipline, moral formation, and religious transmission. The broadcast did not completely erase the identity of pesantren as an educational

institution, but it gave stronger narrative weight to elements that supported a controversy-oriented reading. As a result, the audience was invited to interpret pesantren life through a limited frame shaped more by visible behavior than by its internal cultural meaning.

This pattern was particularly visible in the treatment of pesantren traditions involving respect for the kiai, santri discipline, and teacher–student relations. Practices that are usually understood within pesantren culture through the concepts of adab, khidmah, barakah, sanad, and moral education were presented with limited explanatory context. The issue was not that the broadcast raised critical questions about pesantren, because religious educational institutions can also be examined critically. The more important problem was that the program did not provide sufficient interpretive space to explain why such practices exist and how they are understood within pesantren communities. This selective construction produced a partial image in which pesantren practices were more easily associated with hierarchy and domination than with ethical and pedagogical formation.

Narrative and Audiovisual Dramatization of Kiai–Santri Relations

The second finding indicates that the broadcast relied strongly on audiovisual dramatization to frame kiai–santri relations. The meaning of the segment was not produced only through spoken narration, but also through visual order, camera emphasis, editing rhythm, sound atmosphere, and dramatic arrangement. These elements worked together to strengthen the impression that kiai–santri relations were primarily relations of power. In this arrangement, the kiai appeared as a dominant symbolic figure, while santri were positioned through images and narrative cues that emphasized obedience and subordination. The relation between narration and visuals therefore played a central role in shaping the possible interpretation of pesantren life.

The analysis also shows that the broadcast arranged pesantren scenes into a storyline that highlighted tension and moral urgency. When verbal narration pointed to hierarchy or problematic tradition, the visual sequence reinforced that interpretation by presenting pesantren practices in a dramatic order. This combination made the broadcast appear more like a constructed televisual narrative than a neutral presentation of institutional life. The issue became more sensitive because the program gave limited space to pesantren actors or cultural explanations that could clarify the internal meaning of the practices shown. Consequently, dramatization became one of the main mechanisms through which pesantren was transformed into a controversial media object.

Table 3. Data-to-theme matrix of the findings

Data focus	Observed representational pattern	Initial code	Final theme
Broadcast narration	Pesantren practices were presented through problem-oriented language and selective emphasis	Selective narration	Selective construction of pesantren
Visual arrangement	Scenes were ordered to strengthen impressions of hierarchy and tension	Visual dramatization	Dramatization of kiai–santri relations
Diction and tone	Evaluative wording and dramatic tone guided moral judgment toward pesantren practices	Sensational diction	Moral framing of pesantren traditions
Missing explanation	Limited discussion of adab, khidmah, barakah, sanad, and pesantren pedagogy	Contextual omission	Reduction of pesantren meanings
Program structure	Sensitive religious issues were packaged through a controversy-oriented format	Attention-oriented packaging	Corporate media logic
Post-broadcast response	Criticism and institutional reaction challenged the broadcast representation	Counter-framing	Public and regulatory response

Table 3 presents the movement from data focus to analytical themes. It shows how specific representational patterns in the broadcast were coded and then grouped into broader findings. The table makes the qualitative analysis more transparent by showing that the results were derived from recurring patterns in narration, visual arrangement, diction, contextual omission, program structure, and post-broadcast response. It also helps distinguish empirical findings from the theoretical interpretation that will be developed in the discussion section.

Contextual Omission and the Reduction of Pesantren Meanings

The third finding shows that contextual omission was a major factor in the controversy. The broadcast displayed pesantren practices but did not sufficiently explain the ethical, pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual meanings that shape those practices from within pesantren life. Concepts such as adab, khidmah, barakah, sanad, respect for teachers, and moral discipline were not given adequate interpretive space. This omission caused pesantren practices to appear detached from their internal meaning system. As a result, visible behavior became easier to interpret through external categories such as feudalism, inequality, or symbolic domination.

The reduction of context also appeared in the limited presence of interpretive voices from within the pesantren tradition. The broadcast foregrounded external impressions more strongly than internal explanations from pesantren actors, educators, or cultural authorities who could clarify the meaning of kiai–santri relations. This imbalance created an interpretive gap between what viewers saw and what those practices mean within pesantren culture. The broadcast therefore did not only select certain elements of pesantren reality, but also limited the cultural tools needed to understand them. This finding suggests that the controversy was intensified not merely by what was shown, but also by what was left unexplained.

Corporate Media Logic and the Packaging of Socio-Religious Issues

The fourth finding indicates that the pesantren segment was shaped by the logic of commercial television. The issue of pesantren carries strong symbolic value because it combines religion, education, tradition, authority, and public sensitivity. When such an issue is presented through dramatic narration and visual tension, it has the potential to generate public attention and post-broadcast debate. The broadcast therefore can be read as part of an attention-oriented media practice in which sensitive socio-religious issues are selected and packaged because they contain high emotional and symbolic resonance. This does not mean that commercial interest was the only factor behind the broadcast, but the pattern of presentation shows that corporate media logic was present in the construction of the issue.

The analysis also found that the broadcast converted pesantren from an Islamic educational institution into a visual object of controversy. The program's format, narrative rhythm, and limited contextual explanation made pesantren traditions appear more suitable for spectacle than for careful public understanding. In this process, religious and educational symbols were transformed into media material that could attract attention, discussion, criticism, and digital circulation. The controversy gained wider significance after the broadcast because the segment became part of public debate beyond television airtime. Thus, the case demonstrates that the representation of pesantren cannot be separated from the production and circulation logic of contemporary television.

Table 4. Framing matrix of pesantren representation in the broadcast

Framing element	Pattern found in the broadcast	Representational effect
Problem definition	Pesantren practices were presented as controversial and socially problematic	Pesantren was positioned as an institution requiring public scrutiny
Causal implication	Kiai–santri relations were associated with hierarchy and symbolic inequality	The issue was implied to originate from internal pesantren culture
Moral evaluation	Dramatic narration, evaluative diction, and visual emphasis produced a critical tone	Viewers were guided to judge pesantren traditions through a problem frame
Contextual omission	Limited explanation was provided about pesantren ethics, pedagogy, and spiritual values	The cultural meaning of pesantren practices became incomplete
Public implication	The broadcast generated criticism, institutional response, and regulatory attention	Pesantren representation became a matter of public accountability

Table 4 summarizes the main framing elements identified in the broadcast. It shows how the program defined the problem, implied causes, guided moral evaluation, omitted important context, and generated public implications. The table strengthens the Results section because it presents the empirical pattern of framing in a concise and systematic form. It also helps readers understand how

pesantren was constructed as a controversial object through the interaction of narrative, visual, and contextual elements.

Public Counter-Framing and Institutional Response

The fifth finding shows that the broadcast did not remain an isolated television text. After airing, the segment developed into a wider public communication event involving pesantren communities, religious actors, public commentators, media audiences, and broadcasting regulators. These responses functioned as counter-framing because they challenged the broadcast's representation and demanded a more balanced treatment of religious educational institutions. The controversy therefore produced two layers of meaning: the initial frame constructed by the television program and the corrective frame produced by public and institutional responses. This dynamic indicates that pesantren communities and public actors were not passive recipients of media representation.

The public response also shows that pesantren identity is closely connected to communal dignity, religious authority, and moral legitimacy. When pesantren was represented through a narrow frame, the broadcast was interpreted by many respondents as a symbolic injury to pesantren communities. At the same time, the controversy opened space for pesantren actors and supporting publics to explain their traditions, defend institutional dignity, and strengthen public communication. The case therefore produced not only representational tension, but also a moment of corrective communication. This finding confirms that pesantren representation in contemporary media is shaped by interaction among television production, public interpretation, institutional regulation, and community-based counter-narratives.

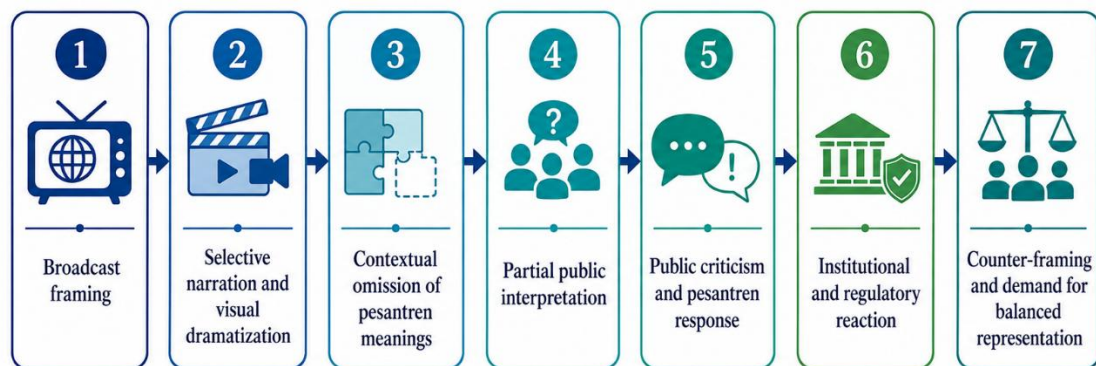


Figure 2. From broadcast framing to public counter-framing

Figure 2 illustrates the movement of the controversy from the initial broadcast frame to public counter-framing. The figure shows that the controversy emerged through the interaction of selective narration, visual dramatization, and contextual omission. Public criticism and institutional response then transformed the broadcast from a television segment into a broader socio-religious communication event. This figure is useful in the Results section because it summarizes the empirical flow of the controversy without adding theoretical discussion.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings show that the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy operated through three interconnected layers. At the textual level, the broadcast constructed pesantren through selective framing, dramatic narration, visual emphasis, evaluative diction, and contextual omission. At the production level, the broadcast reflected corporate media logic, in which sensitive socio-religious issues can be packaged as content capable of generating attention and debate. At the social level, the broadcast triggered public response, pesantren counter-framing, and regulatory attention. These three layers demonstrate that pesantren representation in television cannot be understood only by analyzing what appears on screen, but also by examining how the broadcast is produced, circulated, and publicly contested.

The findings should be read carefully within the methodological scope of this study. This research does not claim to measure audience perception statistically because it does not use surveys or audience interviews. Instead, it shows how the broadcast contributed to the construction of a partial public image through representational choices and the public responses that followed. This

distinction is important because the study analyzes media framing and public meaning-making, not direct psychological effects on viewers. The results indicate that pesantren representation becomes problematic when religious educational traditions are presented as dramatic fragments without adequate cultural, pedagogical, and spiritual explanation.

Discussion

The first finding shows that the broadcast constructed pesantren through a selective representational frame that foregrounded controversy, hierarchy, and symbolic tension. This finding indicates that the public meaning of pesantren in the program was shaped not only by the topic being presented, but also by which aspects of pesantren life were selected, emphasized, and made visible. The broadcast did not remove pesantren's identity as an educational institution, yet it narrowed that identity by giving stronger narrative weight to elements that could be read as socially problematic. This pattern is consistent with recent studies showing that media meaning is produced through the interaction of narrative emphasis, visual arrangement, evaluative language, and public salience (Bateman & Tseng, 2023; Geise & Xu, 2025; Parmelee et al., 2025). It also corresponds with studies on pesantren representation which suggest that pesantren may be misunderstood when obedience, discipline, and religious authority are presented without adequate cultural explanation (Nisa'u & Karsidi, 2025; Syafaq et al., 2026). However, this study extends previous research by showing that selective representation in the Xpose Uncensored case operated as part of a wider controversy-oriented media construction, not merely as an isolated narrative choice. The implication is that media criticism of religious institutions should be assessed not only by whether criticism is allowed, but also by how such criticism is framed, contextualized, and made meaningful to the public.

The second finding demonstrates that *kiai*-*santri* relations were intensified through narrative and audiovisual dramatization. The broadcast's meaning was not produced only through spoken narration, but through the combination of camera emphasis, visual sequencing, editing rhythm, sound atmosphere, and dramatic arrangement. These elements created an interpretive direction in which *kiai*-*santri* relations appeared closer to domination and subordination than to ethical, pedagogical, and spiritual formation. This finding supports recent scholarship on multimodal media, which argues that images, sounds, sequencing, and affective cues can shape interpretation as strongly as verbal statements (Bateman & Tseng, 2023; Geise & Xu, 2025; He et al., 2025). It also resonates with studies on moral framing, where media narratives guide public judgment by arranging emotional cues and evaluative signals around a contested issue (Parmelee et al., 2025). Compared with studies that focus mainly on textual discourse, this study shows that the representational force of television lies in the integration of verbal and audiovisual elements. Therefore, the ethical evaluation of religious broadcasting should include not only factual accuracy and verbal balance, but also the visual and affective strategies through which religious communities are represented.

The third finding reveals that contextual omission was a central factor in the reduction of pesantren meanings. Practices related to *adab*, *khidmah*, *barakah*, *sanad*, respect for teachers, and moral discipline were displayed without sufficient explanation of their ethical, pedagogical, and spiritual foundations. This absence of context made visible practices easier to interpret through external categories such as feudalism, inequality, or symbolic domination. Such a pattern is consistent with studies showing that omitted information can strongly shape inferential meaning-making because audiences interpret not only what is present in a text, but also what is absent or backgrounded (Starr & Braun, 2024; Widodo et al., 2025). In the context of pesantren, this omission is especially consequential because pesantren traditions are embedded in distinctive systems of religious learning, embodied discipline, authority, and social reproduction (Nuryazidi, 2024; Rofiqi et al., 2026; Sofi et al., 2025). The present study therefore clarifies that the controversy was intensified not simply because pesantren was criticized, but because the broadcast limited the interpretive resources needed to understand pesantren practices fairly. This finding contributes to media-religion studies by showing that contextual absence can become a powerful mechanism of representational reduction.

The fourth finding indicates that the pesantren segment reflected corporate media logic in the packaging of socio-religious issues as attention-generating content. Pesantren carries strong symbolic value because it combines religion, education, tradition, authority, and public sensitivity, making it highly suitable for dramatic media treatment. In a competitive media environment, such

issues may gain additional value when they stimulate public attention, digital circulation, and post-broadcast debate. This finding is in line with studies showing that contemporary newsrooms increasingly negotiate editorial autonomy, audience metrics, platform visibility, and commercial sustainability (Allam & Hollifield, 2023; Dodds et al., 2023; Kristensen, 2023; Mayer, 2025; Olsen et al., 2026). It also corresponds with research showing that religious rhythms, symbols, and meanings can be drawn into commercial media strategies when they are considered capable of attracting attention and public engagement (Fariza et al., 2026). Nevertheless, this study does not claim that commercial interest was the only cause of the broadcast; rather, it shows that the structure of selection, dramatization, and circulation reflected attention-oriented production logic. The contribution of this finding is that it explains commodification not only as an economic process, but also as a representational process in which religious educational symbols are transformed into televisual controversy.

The fifth finding shows that the broadcast developed into a wider public communication event through public criticism, pesantren response, institutional reaction, and counter-framing. This means that pesantren communities and related public actors were not passive recipients of media representation, but actively contested the meanings produced by the broadcast. The controversy therefore involved two layers of framing: the initial frame produced by the television program and the corrective frame produced through public and institutional response. This finding is consistent with studies on digital public communication which show that media controversies can move beyond the original text and generate new struggles over meaning, credibility, and authority across platforms (Dodds et al., 2023; Mayer, 2025; Syafaq et al., 2026). It also strengthens studies on pesantren and religious authority by showing that pesantren communities can defend symbolic dignity through public communication, institutional response, and digital circulation, not only through traditional authority (Nisa'u & Karsidi, 2025; Rofiqi et al., 2026; Sofi et al., 2025). The novelty of this study lies in positioning the Xpose Uncensored controversy as a mediated religious controversy shaped by the interaction of televisual framing, corporate media logic, and public counter-framing. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that pesantren representation in contemporary television should be understood as a complex intersection of media construction, religious meaning, commercial production, and public contestation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pesantren-related segment in Xpose Uncensored Trans7 was not merely a television text presenting a religious educational institution, but a constructed media event shaped by selective framing, audiovisual dramatization, contextual omission, and corporate media logic. Pesantren, kiai, and santri were represented through a frame that emphasized controversy, hierarchy, and symbolic tension, while the ethical, pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual meanings of pesantren traditions received limited explanatory space. Practices related to adab, khidmah, barakah, sanad, respect for teachers, and moral discipline therefore became vulnerable to external interpretation through categories such as feudalism, inequality, and domination. This finding confirms that media representation becomes problematic not simply when religious institutions are criticized, but when criticism is organized through partial framing and insufficient contextual explanation.

The study further shows that the controversy operated through three interconnected layers. At the textual level, the broadcast constructed pesantren through selective narration, evaluative diction, visual emphasis, dramatic rhythm, and contextual omission. At the production level, the broadcast reflected corporate media logic, in which sensitive socio-religious issues can be packaged as attention-generating content. At the social level, the controversy triggered public criticism, pesantren response, institutional reaction, and counter-framing. These layers demonstrate that pesantren representation in contemporary television cannot be understood only by examining what appears on screen, but must also be read through the interaction between media construction, commercial production logic, and public contestation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to media framing, media representation, and media-religion scholarship by positioning televised religious controversy as an integrated process involving textual construction, audiovisual meaning-making, corporate media logic, and post-broadcast public

response. The novelty of this study lies in its argument that pesantren representation is not only a matter of media ethics or institutional image, but also a case of mediated religious meaning produced within Indonesia's hybrid media ecology. Practically, the findings underline the need for television producers, journalists, creative teams, and broadcasting regulators to apply stronger standards of accuracy, balance, cultural sensitivity, and contextual responsibility when representing religious educational institutions. Pesantren communities also need to strengthen public communication, media literacy, and the documentation of their educational values so that their traditions are not easily reduced to dramatic fragments in commercial media.

This study is limited to one televised controversy and therefore does not claim to represent all media portrayals of pesantren in Indonesia. Because it does not use audience surveys, interviews, or large-scale social media analytics, its claims about public image are based on media-text analysis, public responses, institutional statements, and regulatory materials rather than direct measurement of audience perception. Future research should expand this topic through comparative analysis across television programs, newsroom interviews, audience reception studies, and digital discourse analysis. Such studies would provide a broader understanding of how religious educational institutions are represented, contested, and defended within contemporary media systems.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Mahfudz conceptualized the study, developed the research design, collected and organized the primary and secondary data, and conducted the initial content, framing, and discourse analysis of the Xpose Uncensored Trans7 controversy. Khazri bin Osman contributed to the refinement of the theoretical framework, methodological validation, critical interpretation of the findings, and supervision of the overall academic direction of the manuscript. Farhan supported the literature review, data verification, organization of supporting documents, and the development of the results and discussion sections.

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