

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in Enhancing the Retention of Students, Parents, and Alumni

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ABSTRACT

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a managerial approach that can be applied by Islamic educational institutions to build, maintain, and strengthen long-term relationships with their stakeholders. In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), CRM has a strategic role in increasing student retention, strengthening parents' trust, and maintaining alumni engagement with the institution. This article aims to analyze the implementation of Customer Relationship Management in improving the retention of *santri*, Parents (*walisantri*), and alumni. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation related to the management of relationships between the *pesantren* and its *santri*, *walisantri*, and alumni. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that CRM can be implemented through effective communication, improved service quality, information management, the utilization of digital technology, and active involvement of *santri*, *walisantri*, and alumni. Well-managed relationships can increase stakeholder satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and engagement with the *pesantren*. Therefore, CRM can serve as a strategic management approach to support institutional sustainability by strengthening retention and fostering long-term relationships with all *pesantren* stakeholders.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren are Islamic educational institutions that play an important role in shaping students' knowledge, character, morals, and social skills. The development of societal needs and the increasingly competitive nature of educational institutions require *pesantren* to improve the quality of their management and services to stakeholders. Good relationships between *pesantren* and

students, students' parents, and alumni are one of the important factors in building trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and the sustainability of institutional relationships. Good service quality can also increase stakeholder satisfaction and their tendency to maintain relationships with the institution [1].

One management approach that can be used to manage these relationships is Customer Relationship Management (CRM). CRM is a strategy that integrates people, processes, information, and technology in building and maintaining long-term relationships with stakeholders. In the context of *pesantren*, CRM is not only understood from the perspective of commercial customer relationships, but also as a strategy to improve the quality of interactions and services for students, students' parents, and alumni. The utilization of CRM can be carried out through effective communication, responsive services, information management, the utilization of digital technology, and stakeholder involvement in various institutional activities

Student retention is one of the important aspects of the successful management of relationships between *pesantren* and stakeholders. Retention demonstrates the institution's ability to retain students so that they continue their education and maintain a positive attachment to the *pesantren*. Factors such as service quality, satisfaction, institutional reputation, communication, and students' experiences can influence the decision to continue their education [2]. It shows that service quality, digital marketing, institutional reputation, and other factors are related to students' intention to re-enroll in *pesantren*. Therefore, CRM strategies can be one approach to creating positive experiences and increasing student loyalty.

In addition to students, students' parents are stakeholders who have an important role in the continuity of education in *pesantren*. Students' parents need transparent information regarding educational development, guidance, safety, and children's activities while they are in the *pesantren*. Open communication and responsive services can increase the trust and satisfaction of students' parents toward the institution. On the other hand, alumni are part of the institutional network that can contribute through social and professional relationships, promotion, program support, and the development of *pesantren* resources. Research shows that CRM is related to alumni satisfaction and loyalty, so systematic management of alumni relationships is important for the sustainability of the institution [3].

A problem that can still be found is that the management of relationships between *pesantren* and students, students' parents, and alumni has not always been carried out in an integrated manner. Communication is sometimes still personal in nature and has not been supported by a good stakeholder information management system. The development of digital technology actually provides opportunities for *pesantren* to build CRM through applications, social media, information systems, alumni databases, and various digital communication media. However, its implementation requires support from human resources, service systems, data management, and an organizational culture oriented toward stakeholder needs [4]. Thus, CRM needs to be positioned as a planned and sustainable relationship management strategy.

Based on the above description, the study of CRM in the context of *pesantren* is important because most studies discuss service quality, student satisfaction, loyalty, digital marketing, or alumni separately. Studies that integrate relationships among students, students' parents, and alumni within a single CRM framework to improve retention still need to be developed. This article aims to analyze the implementation of Customer Relationship Management in improving the retention of students, students' parents, and alumni, particularly through the aspects of communication, services, information management, technology utilization, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. This study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic educational management and serve as a consideration for *pesantren* in building more effective and sustainable stakeholder relationships.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was selected because the study aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in building and maintaining relationships between *pesantren* and students, students' parents, and alumni. CRM in this study is understood as a management strategy that includes the management of communication, services, information, technology, satisfaction, trust, and stakeholder loyalty. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to describe CRM conditions and practices naturally based on the experiences and perspectives of the parties involved. Research on *pesantren* service management also uses a qualitative approach to understand service practices, communication with parents, student data management, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors of services [5].

The research location was determined at a *pesantren* institution that has active students, students' parents, and an alumni network, and that has implemented various forms of stakeholder communication and services. Research informants were selected purposively, based on the consideration that the informants have relevant knowledge and experience regarding the implementation of CRM. The informants may consist of *pesantren* leaders or caregivers, administrators or administrative staff, public relations managers, student mentors, students, students' parents, and alumni. The selection of these informants was intended to obtain data from various perspectives so that the implementation of CRM could be understood more comprehensively. The involvement of various stakeholders is also important because the relationships among institutions, students, parents, and alumni are part of long-term relationship management in educational institutions.

Data collection techniques were conducted through interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants to obtain information regarding communication strategies, forms of service, complaint management, technology utilization, information delivery, involvement of students' parents, and patterns of relationships between *pesantren* and alumni. Observation was conducted by directly observing service activities and communication between the *pesantren* and students as well as students' parents. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complement the research data in the form of *pesantren* profiles, service programs, communication media, alumni activity data, activity documentation, and other relevant documents. These techniques are consistent with qualitative research on *pesantren* services that uses interviews, documentation, and literature review as sources of research data [6].

The focus of the study is directed toward several main aspects of CRM, namely communication and interaction, service quality, information management, technology utilization, stakeholder satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. In terms of student retention, the study examines how service quality and students' experiences can encourage their intention to continue their education at the *pesantren*. This is relevant to the previous study which shows that digital marketing, institutional reputation, location, and service quality are associated with students' intention to re-register at *pesantren* [7]. In terms of students' parents, the study focuses on communication, information transparency, responses to needs and complaints, and service quality that can build trust. Meanwhile, in terms of alumni, the study examines post-education communication, alumni involvement, database management, alumni activities, and forms of alumni contributions to the *pesantren*.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were first grouped according to the research themes, such as communication, services, technology, satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and retention. Relevant data were then presented in narrative descriptions so that patterns of CRM implementation could be systematically identified.

Subsequently, the researcher interpreted the relationship between CRM implementation and student retention, relationships with students' parents, and alumni involvement. The analysis and interpretation processes were conducted repeatedly throughout the study to ensure that the conclusions generated were truly based on field data. Analytical models such as data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing are also used in qualitative research on *pesantren* service management [8].

Data validity was established through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from *pesantren* leaders, administrators, students, students' parents, and alumni. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews with the results of observations and documentation. This step was carried out to reduce the possibility of subjectivity and ensure the consistency of the information obtained. Research on CRM in the educational context shows that data and information management, processes, technology, and human resources are important dimensions in building stakeholder satisfaction and loyalty [9]. Therefore, this study does not only examine CRM from the technological aspect but also from the service process and the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Overall, this research method is directed toward producing a comprehensive description of how *pesantren* manage relationships with students, students' parents, and alumni as part of a stakeholder retention strategy. Retention is not only understood as the ability to retain students, but also as the ability of *pesantren* to maintain the engagement, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty of all stakeholders in the long term. This is important because research on *pesantren* indicates that service quality and satisfaction are related to positive stakeholder responses toward the institution [10]. Thus, the descriptive qualitative method is expected to provide an in-depth explanation of CRM practices while identifying supporting and inhibiting factors in improving student retention, strengthening relationships with students' parents, and maintaining alumni involvement.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Application of Customer Relationship Management in Stakeholder Relationship Management

The research findings show that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in the context of *pesantren* can be understood as a strategy to build, maintain, and develop long-term relationships between the institution and students, students' parents, and alumni. The implementation of CRM is not only related to the use of technology, but also includes the quality of communication, services, information management, responses to stakeholder needs, and their involvement in *pesantren* activities. Thus, the success of CRM is strongly influenced by the institution's ability to create positive experiences for stakeholders [11]. Which shows that CRM optimization in *pesantren* is not only technology-oriented, but also focuses on strengthening human resources, service processes, and relationships with students and students' parents.

In its implementation, CRM can be carried out through planned communication between *pesantren* managers and students and students' parents. Communication is conducted through direct meetings, communication groups, social media, messaging applications, and other information media. Open communication enables *pesantren* to provide information regarding educational activities, student development, *pesantren* programs, activity schedules, and various institutional policies. At the same time, stakeholders are provided with opportunities to ask questions, provide suggestions, and submit complaints. This two-way communication pattern serves as an important foundation for building trust and sustainable relationships.

CRM in Improving Student Retention at Islamic Boarding Schools

Student retention is one of the important indicators of the success of managing relationships between Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and their stakeholders. The findings indicate that

students' willingness to remain at and continue their education in a *pesantren* is influenced not only by learning-related aspects but also by service quality, environmental comfort, relationships with caregivers and *ustaz*, attention to students' needs, and the experiences gained throughout their educational journey. Therefore, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can serve as an approach to understanding students' needs while ensuring that these needs receive appropriate responses.

Service quality is an essential component in creating positive experiences for students. Friendly, prompt, fair, responsive, and needs-oriented services can increase students' satisfaction with the institution [12]. It shows that service quality has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction at *Pondok Pesantren Ibnu Syam Cilegon*. This finding strengthens the argument that relationship management with students should be positioned as an integral part of an institution's management strategy.

From a CRM perspective, student satisfaction can subsequently serve as a foundation for developing loyalty and retention. Students who have positive experiences tend to develop stronger attachment to the *pesantren*. This can be reflected in their willingness to participate in *pesantren* programs, maintain relationships with the institution, provide positive recommendations, and remain part of the *pesantren* community. Thus, retention does not merely refer to retaining students administratively, but also to maintaining their emotional and social attachment to the institution.

CRM in Maintaining Relationships with Alumni

Alumni are stakeholders with significant potential to support the sustainability of *pesantren*. Relationships with alumni should not end when students complete their education; rather, they need to be maintained through continuous communication and various forms of engagement. The findings indicate that alumni management can be carried out through alumni databases, communication via digital media, reunions, alumni forums, involvement in *pesantren* activities, the provision of information about institutional programs, and opportunities for alumni to contribute to the development of the *pesantren*.

Alumni data management is an important aspect of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as well-organized data enables *pesantren* to identify alumni's current locations, professions, competencies, and potential contributions [13]. The study found that manual alumni management can lead to problems such as data fragmentation, inefficient communication, and limited interaction between alumni and the institution. The development of a mobile-based *Alumni Relationship Management* system represents one potential solution for increasing alumni engagement through digital platforms.

Well-managed alumni relationships can provide benefits for both parties. For *pesantren*, alumni can serve as sources of networks, program partners, mentors, donors, resource persons, and institutional ambassadors. For alumni, sustained relationships provide opportunities to remain part of the *pesantren* community [14]. It shows that CRM dimensions, including data and information, processes, technology, and human resources, are associated with alumni satisfaction, while satisfaction has an influence on alumni loyalty.

Utilization of Digital Technology in CRM Implementation

The development of digital technology provides significant opportunities for *pesantren* to develop Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The use of WhatsApp, social media, websites, *pesantren* applications, academic information systems, and stakeholder databases can accelerate communication processes and facilitate information management. Technology also enables

pesantren to provide faster and better-documented services. Thus, technology can serve as a supporting instrument for building more effective relationships with *santri*, parents or guardians of *santri*, and alumni.

However, technology is not the only factor determining the success of CRM. The use of technology must be supported by human resources who possess the ability to manage data, communicate professionally, provide services, and maintain the security and confidentiality of stakeholder information. Studies on CRM in education indicate that CRM continues to develop alongside digital transformation, increased student engagement, and the institutional need to establish more integrated relationships with stakeholders [15].

Therefore, *pesantren* need to develop CRM gradually by integrating technology, human resources, service procedures, and organizational culture. Technology should be used to strengthen human relationships rather than replace them. Direct interaction among caregivers, *ustaz*, administrators, *santri*, parents or guardians of *santri*, and alumni remains necessary because relationships in Islamic education involve emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions that cannot be fully replaced by technology.

CRM as a Strategy to Enhance Stakeholder Retention and Loyalty

Based on the overall findings, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can be positioned as a strategy that connects service quality, satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and stakeholder retention. This relationship can be illustrated as follows: good service creates positive experiences; positive experiences increase satisfaction; satisfaction builds trust and loyalty; while loyalty strengthens stakeholders' tendency to maintain their relationships with the *pesantren*. In the context of *santri*, this relationship can be manifested through their willingness to continue their education at the *pesantren*. For parents or guardians of *santri*, retention is reflected in the continuity of their trust and support for the institution. Meanwhile, among alumni, retention can be observed through their continued engagement and contributions after completing their education.

These findings are consistent with research on CRM in educational institutions, which indicates that CRM strategies can be used to create more personalized and responsive student experiences, thereby supporting loyalty and retention. Research on CRM and student loyalty also shows that the management of data, processes, technology, and human resources plays an important role in building satisfaction and loyalty [16]. Therefore, CRM in *pesantren* should be directed not merely toward retaining *santri*, but also toward building a relationship ecosystem that involves parents or guardians of *santri* and alumni.

Supporting and Hindering Factors in CRM Implementation

The implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in *pesantren* is supported by several factors, including leadership commitment, human resource quality, open communication, technological support, the availability of stakeholder data, and a service-oriented culture. Leadership commitment is essential because CRM requires coordination across different departments and consistency in service delivery. In addition, the ability of administrators to communicate effectively and manage information also determines the quality of relationships with stakeholders.

On the other hand, several inhibiting factors may hinder CRM implementation, including the lack of integration of data on *santri*, parents or guardians of *santri*, and alumni; limited technological competencies; inconsistent communication; and the absence of specific procedures for handling complaints and evaluating stakeholder satisfaction. A study of CRM implementation at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School indicates that CRM implementation has not yet been optimal and still requires improvements in information technology systems, human resource professionalization, and

periodic evaluation of CRM effectiveness. This condition demonstrates that CRM implementation requires continuous planning and evaluation.

Overall, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can serve as a strategic approach to increasing *santri* retention, strengthening parents' or guardians' trust, and maintaining alumni engagement. Effective CRM is built through the integration of communication, services, information, technology, human resources, and stakeholder participation. The success of CRM is determined not merely by the availability of applications or digital systems, but primarily by the *pesantren's* ability to understand stakeholder needs and provide appropriate responses. Good-quality relationships can create satisfaction and trust, which ultimately strengthen stakeholder loyalty toward the *pesantren*.

Thus, CRM in *pesantren* management can be developed into a sustainable stakeholder relationship system. *Santri* are positioned not only as recipients of educational services but also as members of the educational community, parents or guardians of *santri* as partners in the educational process, and alumni as part of the institution's long-term network. This approach is consistent with developments in educational management, which increasingly emphasize service quality, stakeholder engagement, and the utilization of technology. Recent research on educational service management also indicates that service planning, implementation, and evaluation play important roles in improving student satisfaction [17]. Therefore, the implementation of integrated CRM can serve as one of the management strategies for *pesantren* to enhance retention, loyalty, institutional reputation, and organizational sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a relevant management strategy for improving the retention of *santri*, parents or guardians of *santri*, and alumni in *pesantren*-based educational institutions. CRM is not merely oriented toward the utilization of technology, but also encompasses communication management, service quality, information provision, responsiveness to stakeholder needs, and the development of long-term relationships. The planned and sustainable implementation of CRM can increase stakeholder satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and engagement with the *pesantren*.

In terms of *santri* retention, CRM can be implemented through responsive services, open communication, attention to students' needs, and the creation of a comfortable and supportive educational environment. Positive educational and service experiences can increase *santri* satisfaction and loyalty, thereby encouraging them to maintain their relationship with the *pesantren*. In terms of parents or guardians of *santri*, CRM plays a role in building trust through effective communication, information transparency, administrative services, and the regular provision of information regarding the educational development and guidance of *santri*. Thus, parents or guardians can be positioned as strategic partners of the *pesantren* in supporting the success of *santri* education.

Meanwhile, in terms of alumni, CRM can be implemented through alumni database management, regular communication, the establishment of alumni communities, reunion activities, and the involvement of alumni in various *pesantren* programs. Systematic alumni relationship management can maintain alumni engagement with their alma mater while creating opportunities for collaboration in education, social affairs, economic development, and institutional development. The use of digital technology further strengthens the processes of data management, communication, and alumni engagement effectively.

Therefore, the success of CRM in improving the retention of *santri*, parents or guardians of *santri*, and alumni is influenced by leadership commitment, human resource competence, service

quality, communication effectiveness, the availability of stakeholder data, and the utilization of digital technology. CRM should be understood as a culture of relationship management that is implemented consistently and sustainably, rather than merely as the use of applications or communication media. *Pesantren* that are able to optimally integrate services, communication, technology, and stakeholder engagement will have greater opportunities to build loyalty and long-term relationships. Therefore, CRM can serve as an important management strategy for strengthening stakeholder retention while supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of *pesantren*-based educational institutions amid the evolving dynamics of education.

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