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Influence of Trust Issues and Social Media Exposure on Duck Syndrome Among Islamic Boarding School Students at Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the influence of *trust issues* and social media exposure on *duck syndrome* among Islamic boarding school students (*mahasantri*) at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga. The phenomenon of *duck syndrome* has recently attracted increasing attention, as many individuals—particularly students—appear calm and content externally while struggling internally with anxiety and emotional distress. The research employed a quantitative approach with 68 respondents selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through validated scales measuring *trust issues*, *social media exposure*, and *duck syndrome*. The statistical analysis revealed that *trust issues* had a significant effect on *duck syndrome* ($t = 4.237$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), while social media exposure showed no significant effect ($p = 0.057 > 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.415, indicating that *trust issues* and social media exposure together explained 41.5% of the variance in *duck syndrome*, with *trust issues* emerging as the dominant predictor. These findings highlight that *trust issues* play a crucial role in shaping the emotional and behavioral responses of students, whereas the influence of social media exposure is limited due to the controlled and religious environment of Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: Duck Syndrome, Trust Issue, social media exposure, mental healthy

Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought about major changes in human life, including social and psychological aspects. Broad access to the internet and

social media has made individuals not only globally connected but also increasingly exposed to various forms of social comparison and new psychological pressures. This condition poses a serious challenge to the mental health of the younger generation, especially among university students and mahasantri (Islamic boarding school students), who are in the stage of self-discovery and adaptation to complex academic and social environments. According to Gani (2020), social media, as part of the advancement of modern communication technology, has transformed patterns of interaction and influenced the way individuals think, behave, and evaluate themselves. This aligns with Akcay and Ohashi (2023), who found that social media exposure encourages the emergence of the effort-reward imbalance phenomenon, where there is a mismatch between one's actual effort and the appearance of success displayed online. Similarly, Nopriyanti, Amellia, and Zeffira (2023) asserted that excessive social media use increases the risk of psychological disorders such as anxiety and self-dissatisfaction due to continuous social comparison. Therefore, in the context of young people, particularly university students and mahasantri, digital technology development not only facilitates communication but also presents serious challenges to maintaining mental and emotional balance.

One of the psychological phenomena arising from modern social pressures is known as duck syndrome. This term is not a medical diagnosis but a metaphor that describes individuals who appear calm, happy, and in control on the surface but are actually struggling internally with emotional tension and hidden anxiety. The term was first used at Stanford University to describe students who appeared to function well outwardly but were, in fact, experiencing severe internal stress (Schiffrin et al., 2019; BetterHelp, 2022). The analogy comes from a duck that glides smoothly on the surface of the water while its legs paddle frantically beneath to maintain balance. Psychologically, duck syndrome represents a discrepancy between internal emotional conditions and external expressions—a phenomenon known as emotional masking or the denial of negative emotions (Curran & Hill, 2019; Rinadi, 2023). Individuals with this tendency often display a perfect self-image to meet social expectations or avoid negative judgments from their environment (Meilindia, 2024). If left unaddressed without sufficient social and emotional support, this condition can develop into chronic stress, anxiety, and even depression. Thus, duck syndrome should be understood as a

reflection of modern psychological dynamics in which individuals strive to maintain an ideal appearance amid overwhelming life pressures.

A 2020 survey conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Health reported that approximately 27.7% of respondents experienced anxiety and 31.5% showed symptoms of depression. Similarly, the 2022 Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey revealed that 34.9% of Indonesian adolescents experienced mental health problems (Marzuki, 2023). Duck syndrome often occurs among individuals who live away from their parents, either to pursue education or work. Living apart from family forces individuals to be responsive and adaptive in facing various situations—ranging from pressure, conflict, to competition requiring them to act quickly in finding solutions (Amanda et al., 2024). This condition can be exacerbated by two main factors: trust issues and social media exposure.

Trust issues arise due to negative experiences in interpersonal relationships, emotional trauma, or betrayal—whether in academic or social contexts—that generate uncertainty or doubt about the intentions and actions of others. This makes individuals reluctant to trust or fully open up to others (Fadila, 2024). Sukmawati and Cahyono (2023) stated that trust issues often occur due to suspicion, betrayal, or past painful experiences, which have a significant impact on one's life. Furthermore, individuals with duck syndrome tend to believe that when they share their problems, they receive responses that do not align with their actual experiences, which diminishes their willingness to trust and express their true emotions.

Social media plays an important role in people's lives. Through various platforms, individuals can observe, interact, and present their best selves. Social media serves as a means of long-distance communication, connecting individuals not only within Indonesia but also globally (Nopriyanti et al., 2023). Various social media platforms—such as YouTube, Twitter (X), TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp—enable users to share images, videos, and social experiences. Consequently, many people prefer to showcase success while concealing the challenges they face, leading others to see only their achievements rather than their struggles or failures (Akcaay & Ohashi, 2023).

Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani is an Islamic boarding school for female students from various regions across Indonesia. Many of its students are also undergraduate students, referred to as mahasantri, with an average age range of 18–25

years. At this age, they are navigating important developmental tasks such as determining personal goals, managing conflicts, building relationships, deciding whom to trust, and discovering with whom they can be genuine without hiding their vulnerabilities. These mahasantri face various demands from their academic life, religious obligations, and extracurricular activities, including studying, competing academically and non-academically, joining organizations, volunteering, and in some cases, working part-time. Such conditions often compel them to display their best selves, even when internally overwhelmed.

Living far from their parents, relatives, and close friends, many mahasantri choose to keep their problems, pain, pressure, and failures to themselves, showing only their best side to others. This is often done to avoid causing worry or adding burdens to others, or because when they do open up, the responses they receive may not be supportive or understanding. Unknowingly, this pattern contributes to the emergence of duck syndrome. Duck syndrome can be illustrated by Fadus (2018), who describes ducks as appearing graceful on the surface while paddling frantically underwater. In universities and Islamic boarding schools, mahasantri similarly appear to balance academic, religious, social, and family responsibilities effortlessly. Yet, like ducks beneath the surface, their hidden anxiety and self-doubt are not easily visible.

Duck syndrome depicts mahasantri who appear calm outwardly while suppressing emotional tension, difficulties, anxiety, or even depression due to internal doubts and the perception that others are better than themselves. Social media, with its curated highlights and idealized portrayals of success, reinforces the belief that everyone else lives perfectly, fostering feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. This phenomenon is particularly evident in highly competitive academic environments, where the fear of failure and social comparison can intensify psychological pressure and discourage open discussions about mental health.

The dual role of being both a student and a santri living away from family often limits opportunities for emotional expression. Past negative experiences in sharing feelings, combined with constant exposure to others' seemingly perfect lives online, contribute to a loss of trust and a reluctance to disclose one's struggles. Consequently, mahasantri may prefer to present only their best selves, both in real life and on social media.

Based on this background, the present study aims to analyze the influence of trust issues and social media exposure on duck syndrome among mahasantri at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga. This research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological dynamics experienced by mahasantri in dealing with hidden emotional pressures and to serve as a foundation for developing Islamic counseling interventions that emphasize self-confidence, emotional openness, and digital literacy within the Islamic boarding school environment.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal design aimed at examining the effect of independent variables (trust issues and social media exposure) on the dependent variable (duck syndrome). A causal design was chosen because it allows researchers to explain the cause-and-effect relationships between the variables being tested (Uyun & Yoseanto, 2022, p.15). The population of this study comprised all students of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga City, totaling 85 individuals. The sample consisted of 68 students, obtained through purposive sampling with the following criteria: active students aged 18–25 years, residing in the dormitory for at least one year, and actively using at least one social media platform. The number of 68 respondents was determined based on the minimum sample size calculation for multiple regression according to Green's formula (1991), $N \geq 50 + 8m$, where $m = 2$, resulting in a minimum sample of 66 respondents. Therefore, 68 respondents were considered sufficient to represent the study population.

The research instruments were designed as closed-ended questionnaires using a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). Measurements were conducted using three scales: the trust issues scale, the social media exposure scale, and the duck syndrome scale. The trust issues scale was developed based on the theories of Fadila (2024) and Sukmawati & Cahyono (2023), consisting of 12 items with three main indicators: suspicion toward others, fear of betrayal or rejection, and difficulty in opening up or trusting others. The social media exposure scale was adapted from the Uses and Gratification theory by Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitch (as cited in Sitompul et al., 2021) and the study by Safitri & Trianita (2023), consisting of 10 items covering four indicators: frequency of use, daily access duration, types of content consumed, and motivations for using social media, whether for entertainment, information, or social relationships. Meanwhile, the duck syndrome scale was developed based on the theory

of Curran & Hill (2019) and the study by Rinadi (2023), consisting of 14 items representing four indicators: perfectionism and ideal self-image, discrepancy between outward condition and inner feelings, reluctance to seek help, and hidden feelings of stress and anxiety.

These three scales were adapted from relevant theoretical and empirical sources and then adjusted to the pesantren context through content validation by two experts in psychology and Islamic guidance and counseling. The adaptation process involved translation, language simplification, and comprehension testing with ten student respondents before broader use. Item validity was tested using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique with a minimum r coefficient of ≥ 0.30 (Azwar, 2022). Items that did not meet the validity criteria were eliminated from the final scale. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ as the acceptable reliability threshold (Saifuddin, 2020). The results indicated that all scales had high reliability, with α values ranging from 0.79 to 0.88, making them suitable as measurement tools in this study.

The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to examine the effects of trust issues and social media exposure on duck syndrome. Before the main analysis, a series of classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality testing (Kolmogorov–Smirnov), linearity testing, and heteroscedasticity testing, to ensure the data met the requirements for parametric analysis. Subsequently, a T-test was conducted to determine the partial effect of each independent variable, an F-test to examine the simultaneous effect of both variables, and a coefficient of determination (R^2) test to assess the extent to which the independent variables contributed to explaining the dependent variable. All data analyses were performed using the SPSS program.

Theoretical Review

Duck Syndrome

The phenomenon of duck syndrome was first introduced at Stanford University to describe students who appear calm and successful externally but are actually experiencing significant psychological stress (Schiffirin et al., 2019). In clinical

psychology, this condition is similar to the concept of emotional masking, which refers to the tendency of individuals to conceal their stress and anxiety through behavior that appears controlled or perfectionistic (Curran & Hill, 2019). Duck syndrome is not a formally recognized clinical disorder; rather, it is a psychological metaphor representing a combination of perfectionistic pressure, social anxiety, and difficulties in emotion regulation.

Individuals with duck syndrome generally strive to maintain a positive self-image to be accepted by their social environment, even though they experience emotional exhaustion and feelings of inadequacy internally. According to Meilindia (2024), students experiencing this phenomenon often exhibit two layers of behavior: high external functioning (active, diligent, high-achieving) and vulnerable internal feelings (anxious, fear of failure, feeling not good enough). In the context of pesantren, this pressure can be even greater, as students face not only academic demands but also moral and religious expectations that must be upheld in front of the community (Zaini & Febriantika, 2023).

From a counseling psychology perspective, duck syndrome reflects a dissonance between the ideal self and the real self, as proposed by Carl Rogers. When the gap between these two concepts is too wide, individuals experience anxiety and display a “social mask” to maintain self-acceptance (Rogers, 1961, as cited in Meilindia, 2024). Thus, duck syndrome can be understood as a form of self-defense mechanism against social demands that exceed an individual’s personal capacity.

According to Rinadi (2023), duck syndrome can emerge due to several interrelated factors. First, environmental pressure, such as high expectations from family, friends, or society, which push individuals to consistently present an image of success and composure. Second, internal factors, including the desire for perfectionism, low self-esteem, and past traumatic experiences that compel individuals to strive for perfection in order to gain acceptance from their surroundings. Third, mental conditions, such as anxiety disorders, depression, prolonged sadness, loss of energy, and eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, which arise as a result of psychological stress that is not expressed in a healthy way.

In line with this perspective, Curran and Hill (2019) emphasize that duck syndrome is characterized by three main aspects. First, perfectionism, which is the belief that life must appear perfect in thoughts, behaviors, and appearance to avoid feelings of

guilt, shame, or negative evaluation by others. Second, the tendency to compare oneself with others, which reinforces dissatisfaction with the self. Third, reluctance to seek help, as individuals fear being perceived as weak or incapable of handling their problems independently. Thus, duck syndrome reflects a complex psychological dynamic in which external pressure, internal perfectionism, and social anxiety interact to create a hidden emotional burden for the individual.

Trust Issue

Trust issues refer to a condition in which an individual experiences a loss of trust in others, whether in their actions or intentions, often stemming from past traumatic experiences. Fadila (2024) states that trust issues are a condition characterized by a loss of trust in a person or group due to negative past experiences and a lack of ability to resolve problems effectively. Meanwhile, Lamongbuka & Luma (2024) explain that trust issues arise from serious conflicts that impact an individual's psychological state and social condition.

Sukmawati and Cahyono (2023) further elaborate that trust issues can reduce a person's ability to express emotions and seek social support, which in turn increases the risk of internal stress. In the context of Islamic counseling, the loss of trust in oneself and others has the potential to weaken an individual's spiritual relationship with Allah, as trust (*tsiqah*) is considered an aspect of faith in His will and mercy.

When related to duck syndrome, trust issues serve as an initial factor that encourages individuals to conceal their emotional state. Students with trust issues may feel that sharing personal problems carries the risk of negative judgment or criticism from their surrounding environment. This sense of insecurity triggers anxiety, which then drives them to present a strong and calm self-image while being emotionally fragile. This aligns with Fadila's (2024) study, which found that students with high trust issues tend to engage in self-withdrawal and have difficulty establishing open communication—conditions that are also key characteristics of duck syndrome.

Social Media Exposure

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (as cited in Gani, 2020) state that social media is a group of internet-based applications built on the ideology and technology of

Web 2.0, which enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Additionally, in 1973, Katz, Gurevitch, and Blumer (as cited in Wakas & Wulage, 2021) introduced the uses and gratification theory, which posits that individuals seek out media and its content to achieve certain satisfactions or outcomes.

This theory suggests that individuals are fully aware when choosing media to fulfill their desires and needs. Social media serves as a way for many people to connect with others, enabling the exchange of information and communication. Social media exposure refers not only to the frequency of access but also to how openly individuals receive the messages conveyed, actively selecting and using media to satisfy their needs or desires.

According to Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitch (as cited in Safitri & Trianita, 2023), an individual's exposure to social media is influenced by specific needs they wish to fulfill. Within the framework of Uses and Gratification theory, individuals actively select media according to their personal motivations and interests. Katz et al. (as cited in Sitompul et al., 2021) explain that these needs include cognitive needs, which refer to the drive to acquire information, knowledge, and new understanding; affective needs, which relate to seeking pleasurable emotional experiences or aesthetic satisfaction; personal integrative needs, which involve the desire to enhance credibility, status, and self-confidence through online interaction; social integrative needs, which function to strengthen communication with family, friends, or the broader community; and tension release needs, which involve efforts to relieve life stress through entertainment, relaxation, or imaginative activities in the virtual world. Thus, social media use is not merely a consumptive activity but also serves as a means of fulfilling diverse psychological and social needs, which, to some extent, can affect an individual's emotional balance.

Result

Duck syndrome has become a phenomenon that is increasingly attracting attention, as nearly every individual has either experienced it or is currently experiencing it. Appearing to be fine, having no problems, remaining calm, and appearing happy are some of the signs that an individual may be experiencing duck syndrome. A study conducted on 68 students at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga City, found that trust issues have a significant effect on the students' experience of duck syndrome. This is evidenced by the results of the T-test, which

yielded a significance value of 0.000, less than 0.05, and a calculated t-value greater than the t-table value, with $t\text{-calculated} = 4.237 > t\text{-table} = 1.997$ at a 5% significance level.

Table 1. Results of the T-Test (Significance)

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	25.545	6.391		3.997	.000
	Trust Issue	.353	.083	.490	4.237	.000
	Paparan Media Sosial	.234	.121	.224	1.935	.057

a. Dependent Variable: Duck Syndrome

Table 1 shows that the higher the level of trust issues experienced by the students, the higher the level of duck syndrome they exhibit, which can negatively affect their mental health. Conversely, the results of the test on the social media exposure variable indicate that there is no significant effect on duck syndrome, with a significance value of $0.057 > 0.05$ and a t-calculated value of $1.935 < t\text{-table value of } 1.997$. Thus, the level of duck syndrome among students is not directly influenced by the intensity or duration of social media use.

Table 2 F Test Results (Simultaneous)

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1822.375	2	911.187	23.034	.000 ^b
	Residual	2571.317	65	39.559		
	Total	4393.691	67			

a. Dependent Variable: Duck Syndrome

b. Predictors: (Constant), Paparan Media Sosial, Trust Issue

The F-test results showed a significant simultaneous effect, with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and $F\text{-calculated} = 23.034 > F\text{-table} = 3.132$, indicating that trust issues and social media exposure together have an effect on duck syndrome. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.415 indicates that 41.5% of the variation in duck syndrome is explained by these two variables, while the remaining 58.5% is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this study.

Overall, these results show that trust issues are the most dominant factor influencing the occurrence of duck syndrome among the students, whereas the effect of social media exposure is relatively small. The pesantren environment, which has strong rules and social control, is suspected to be one of the factors mitigating the negative impact of social media on the students' mental health.

Table 3 Results of the Determination Coefficient Test

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.644 ^a	.415	.397	6.290

a. Predictors: (Constant), Paparan Media Sosial, Trust Issue

Based on Table 3, the results of the coefficient of determination (R^2) test conducted on the students of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga City, show that 41.5% of duck syndrome among the students is influenced by the variables of trust issues and social media exposure. The remaining 58.5% is affected by other factors that may occur in students but were not identified in this study. This indicates that these two factors have a significant relationship with the symptoms of duck syndrome experienced by the students.

Discussions

The results of this study indicate that trust issues have a significant effect on duck syndrome, whereas social media exposure does not have a significant impact. These findings suggest that trust issues are a primary psychological factor contributing to the emergence of duck syndrome symptoms. Psychologically, trust issues reflect an individual's inability to trust others due to negative past experiences, emotional trauma, or insecure attachment patterns. According to Erikson (1963), the first stage of psychosocial development involves establishing basic trust in the surrounding world. When this stage is not successfully achieved, individuals are more prone to social anxiety and difficulties in forming healthy interpersonal relationships.

Trust issues among the students may arise from adverse emotional experiences, past trauma, or less supportive parenting. These conditions make it difficult for individuals to trust others in both social and personal contexts, leading them to suppress emotions and present a strong outward self-image. This aligns with Fadila (2024), who

found that individuals with high trust issues often fear being hurt again, resulting in emotional distancing and reluctance to form close emotional connections.

In the context of students at the pesantren, trust issues cause them to be reluctant to express their inner pressures. Students with high trust issues tend to present themselves as strong and calm, while internally carrying emotional exhaustion. This mechanism is explained by Higgins' (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory, which posits that discrepancies between the ideal self (how individuals wish to be perceived) and the actual self (their true state) trigger negative emotions such as anxiety, shame, and helplessness. Students with trust issues strive to present their ideal self to gain social acceptance, which leads to repeated emotional suppression and increases the risk of developing duck syndrome symptoms.

These findings are also consistent with Curran & Hill (2019), who describe duck syndrome as characterized by perfectionism, reluctance to seek help, and maladaptive social comparison. Trust issues exacerbate these aspects because individuals with fragile trust find it difficult to accept their own weaknesses and feel threatened by potential rejection or judgment. Consequently, they withdraw from social support, attempt to appear perfect, and bear psychological pressures individually. Clinically, this condition can be associated with ego defense mechanisms such as reaction formation and denial, as described by Freud (1936), where individuals deny their vulnerabilities by projecting an image of false strength to others.

Moreover, Bowlby's (1988) Attachment Theory explains that individuals with insecure attachment have weak emotional bonds and a tendency to avoid intimate relationships. When this pattern persists into adulthood, individuals are more vulnerable to loneliness, social anxiety, and emotional masking, which involves hiding inner pressures behind a stable outward appearance. In this study, this phenomenon is reflected in students who outwardly show calmness and obedience but internally experience unresolved academic, social, and religious stress. Thus, trust issues serve as a primary predictor of duck syndrome because they are rooted in fundamental psychological structures that influence interpersonal trust and emotional regulation.

From a counseling psychology perspective, unresolved trust issues can lead to high levels of interpersonal anxiety. Individuals conceal feelings of insecurity through perfectionism and excessive self-control, which Curran and Hill (2019) identify as core

characteristics of duck syndrome. In the pesantren context, these pressures are further compounded as students must adapt simultaneously to academic, religious, and social demands. Many students come from out of town and are separated from family, losing trusted figures who typically serve as outlets for sharing personal problems. As a result, they choose to internalize their emotions and maintain a facade of calmness to avoid being perceived as weak.

The finding that social media exposure does not significantly affect duck syndrome differs from some previous studies. For example, Nawafi, Dwiyan, & Huda (2024) found a negative relationship between social media intensity and students' mental health, while Desfiana & Karsa (2021) reported that social media can increase individuals' informational needs. However, in the pesantren context, this result can be explained by high levels of supervision and religiosity. Social media use in pesantren is typically limited by time and content and is often directed toward educational and spiritual purposes. This aligns with Nurdin & Septiati (2024), who suggest that social media can be neutral when used to seek positive information, including mental health literacy.

Furthermore, much social media content is educational and informative. Priana et al. (2022) found that approximately 72.7% of social media users access information about mental health, while Pretorius et al. (2022) (as cited in Nurdin & Septiati, 2024) reported that 23.57% of TikTok content and 7.27% of Instagram content contain mental health literacy. This explains why social media does not necessarily negatively affect the students' psychological well-being, but can serve as a source of knowledge and emotional support.

Nevertheless, when trust issues and social media exposure occur simultaneously, the study shows a significant effect on duck syndrome. Students who struggle to trust others while being exposed to social media that portrays others' achievements tend to experience higher psychological pressure. This phenomenon reflects the psychological mechanism of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), where individuals compare their lives with the accomplishments of others and feel inadequate.

From an Islamic counseling perspective, this condition highlights the need for guidance that fosters *tsiqah* (trust) in oneself, others, and Allah SWT. Self-confidence built on spiritual values can help students manage anxiety and accept themselves holistically. In line with Zaini & Febriantika (2023), pesantren environments that

emphasize respect, brotherhood, sincerity, and independence can serve as protective factors for students' mental health. Therefore, it is crucial for Islamic educational institutions to create safe spaces where students can express their feelings and receive social support without fear of judgment.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the understanding that trust issues are the primary predictor of duck syndrome, rooted in the failure to establish psychological security and interpersonal support. Meanwhile, the influence of social media exposure depends on the context of its use. The combination of both, if not managed properly, can exacerbate students' mental well-being and lead to the "appearing fine" behavior that conceals significant emotional stress.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that trust issues have a significant effect on duck syndrome among students at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Madani Pulutan, Salatiga City, whereas social media exposure does not have a significant impact. Based on the multiple linear regression analysis, the combination of these two variables explains 41.5% of the variation ($R^2 = 0.415$) in duck syndrome symptoms, with the largest contribution coming from trust issues, which proved to be the primary predictor. This suggests that the higher the level of interpersonal distrust experienced by students, the greater their tendency to experience hidden psychological stress, characterized by appearing calm while being emotionally fragile. Meanwhile, social media exposure does not have a significant effect due to religiosity and social control within the pesantren, which serve as protective factors against the negative effects of digital media.

Psychologically, trust issues play a dominant role because they are directly related to an individual's ability to regulate emotions, build trust, and maintain healthy social relationships. An inability to trust others causes students to suppress emotions, avoid openness, and strive to maintain an idealized self-image, thereby exacerbating duck syndrome symptoms. The insignificant influence of social media exposure can be attributed to the strong social control and religious values in the pesantren, which mitigate the potential negative impact of digital media on mental health.

Practically, these findings emphasize the importance of strengthening interpersonal trust, developing emotional regulation skills, and providing

psychologically safe spaces for students to express themselves without fear of judgment. Islamic educational institutions should design counseling programs and community-based mentoring initiatives within the pesantren that promote openness, trust, and social support. For future research, it is recommended to examine other factors that may contribute to duck syndrome, such as academic stress, social support, religiosity, or coping strategies. Additionally, mixed-method approaches are encouraged to gain deeper insights into students' subjective experiences in managing psychological pressures within the pesantren environment.

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