



The Dynamics of HMI in Medan Post-Covid: Internal, Social, and New Politics

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought structural and functional changes in various aspects of life, including student organizations. This research examines the transformation of the Medan Branch of the Islamic Student Association (HMI) in responding to the challenges of the new normal era after the COVID-19 pandemic. The main focus of the study includes the internal dynamics of the organization, social influence on the campus environment and society, as well as the political role of HMI in the local context. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques involve in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The results show that HMI Medan Branch is able to adapt to the pandemic situation through digitalization of organizational activities, strengthening regeneration, and developing a political education model. Scientific discussion activities and leadership training are conducted online, while social relations are maintained through social media and other digital platforms. HMI also plays a significant role in educating students on post-pandemic social and political issues, while maintaining its ideological relevance in local dynamics. The findings provide a theoretical contribution in understanding student organizations as agents of social change in times of crisis. Practically, the results of this study can be a strategic reference for similar organizations in developing adaptation strategies, strengthening socio-political roles, and innovating regeneration in accordance with the needs of the times. Thus, this article offers a comprehensive picture of the resilience and transformation of student organizations in the face of major post-pandemic changes.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that began sweeping the world in late 2019 and reached its peak in 2020 has had a tremendous impact on the entire fabric of human life, both globally and locally. Not only the health and economic sectors are affected, but also the education, social, and organizational dynamics, including student organizations. The Islamic Student Association (HMI) as one of the oldest and most influential student organizations in Indonesia has also felt the impact of this situation (Rudiyansah, 2024; Bahri & Agustono, 2025; Widiani et al., 2023). In Medan City, HMI faces significant challenges in carrying out its functions as a forum for regeneration, political education, and student leadership development (Azhar & Achiriah, 2023).

Before the pandemic, HMI was known as an organization that was active in organizing public discussions, cadre training, scientific seminars, and social activities. However, the implementation of large-scale social restriction (PSBB) policies, distance learning, and other health protocols caused major disruptions to the work patterns and internal dynamics of the

organization. In this situation, HMI Medan Branch must innovate and adapt quickly in order to continue to play its role in the midst of limited physical activities (Limun, 2022).

These changes require structural and digital transformation, where HMI has begun to utilize information technology to support the regeneration process and organizational communication. In addition, the challenges faced are not only technical, but also ideological and strategic. How HMI maintains relevance in the midst of massive social change is the main question that drives this research (Hasdiansyah, 2017; Mourtzis et al., 2023; Carsten & Martens, 2019).

This research is important because HMI has a strategic position in shaping the mindset and leadership of students who will later contribute to community development. In addition, HMI's social and political roles are highlighted in the dynamics of campus and local communities (Simangunsong, et al., 2019). Thus, understanding how HMI Medan Branch developed and adapted in the post-pandemic period provides an important insight into the resilience of student organizations in the crisis era. HMI historically has strong ideological roots in encouraging social transformation based on Islamic and Indonesian values. As an independent organization, HMI acts as a bridge between the intellectual world and community service. The pandemic situation has become a touchstone for the resilience of these values. On various occasions, HMI cadres in Medan not only remained active, but also showed innovative capacity in responding to the crisis. They initiate online discussion forums, develop digital regeneration platforms, and voice social issues through productive and educative social media channels (Taylor & Gibson, 2017; Mandarano et al., 2010)

In addition to its internal and social roles, HMI's existence is also closely tied to local political dynamics. In various periods, HMI is known as an incubator of student and community political leadership. The pandemic challenge has encouraged HMI cadres to reflect on the organization's position and strategy in influencing public policy, especially on issues of public health, education, and social justice. They began to form networks with local communities, government agencies, and campuses in an effort to build collaborative-based solutions (Reid et al., 2019; Villacis & Ross, 2025)

The adaptation carried out by HMI during the pandemic is also closely related to digital literacy and mastery of information technology. As stated by (Handayani & Hidayat, 2024), one of the main obstacles in the higher education system during the pandemic is the infrastructure gap and limited digital literacy. This is also felt in student organizations such as HMI, which previously relied more on offline activities. This challenge has actually encouraged a major transformation in regeneration methods, organizational communication, and activity governance. Forums for cadre training, Islamic discussions, and internal meetings now take place in an online format, which requires technical mastery and changes in organizational culture (Supriatna, 2025; Fakhriyah & Rosi, 2025)

In addition to the impact of the pandemic, changes in generational orientation are also a challenge for HMI. The current generation of students is in the vortex of the digital era and information openness is very high. In this context, the organization must be able to align the basic values of HMI with relevant ways of communication and be able to reach new realities. Therefore, this study becomes relevant to dig deeper into the extent to which HMI Medan Branch is able to develop an organizational strategy that is responsive to the changing times without losing its ideological identity.

This research is also expected to contribute to the academic literature on the dynamics of student organizations in times of crisis. By presenting an empirical picture of how HMI faces and manages the impact of the pandemic, this paper provides an important reference for the development of other student organizations. In particular, the results of this study can also be

an input for higher education institutions and policy makers in designing adaptive and transformative student organization development policies.

Based on this context, this research aims to examine the development of HMI Medan Branch after the COVID-19 pandemic by examining three main aspects: internal organizational dynamics, social influence on the campus environment and society, and political role in the local context. It is hoped that the results of this research will not only provide an academic contribution, but also serve as a practical reference for other student organizations in facing the challenges of the times.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method aimed at deeply understanding the social dynamics and structural shifts within the Medan Branch of the Islamic Student Association (HMI) following the COVID-19 pandemic (Fadli, 2021). The research was conducted in Medan City, with participants comprising active members and administrators of HMI Medan Branch. Subjects were selected purposively to ensure they had direct involvement in organizational activities both during and after the pandemic.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with HMI cadres and administrators, participatory observation of both online and offline organizational activities, and analysis of official organizational documents such as meeting minutes, activity reports, and work programs (Azhar & Hasan et al., 2023). These three techniques were applied triangulatively to enhance the validity and reliability of the data. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach involving coding, categorization, and interpretation of patterns emerging from the qualitative data (Fadli, 2021).

Ethical considerations in this study were designed not only to fulfill procedural requirements but also to reflect the socio-political complexity of the research context. While informed consent was obtained and confidentiality of participants' identities was maintained, these steps were insufficient on their own given the internal hierarchies and unspoken norms that often characterize politically engaged organizations like HMI. The study therefore implemented additional safeguards to mitigate power asymmetries between senior and junior members or between leadership and general participants. For example, participants were given the opportunity to review and revise their interview transcripts and had the option to participate anonymously or off the record when requested. Research activities were also conducted in a manner clearly independent from formal organizational processes to minimize implicit coercion or role-based pressure.

Furthermore, recognizing that politically sensitive findings—even when anonymized—could be interpreted in ways that expose internal vulnerabilities or be weaponized by external factions, the research adopted a protective approach to data handling. Data was stored securely, and some information was deliberately excluded or redacted from reporting to prevent reputational or structural harm to the organization or its members. The potential ethical risks in disseminating sensitive insights were explicitly considered during analysis and write-up phases.

Finally, ethical reflexivity was practiced throughout the research process. The researcher continuously evaluated how their identity, positionality, and perceived affiliations may have influenced access, rapport, and the nature of participant disclosures. Special attention was paid to possible self-censorship by informants driven by loyalty, fear of reprisal, or concerns over misinterpretation. This ongoing reflexive engagement ensured that the ethical stance of the study was not merely procedural but responsive to the evolving realities and power dynamics of the field setting.

Results and Discussion

Digital Adaptation and Innovative Strategies

The HMI Medan Branch adopted a hybrid model to sustain its organizational functions during the pandemic, integrating limited offline meetings with an expanded range of online activities. While this approach aligns with broader trends in youth organizational transformation (Rofiq & Khairunnisa, 2023), it is important to critically assess how such digital shifts have impacted internal structures, values, and participation patterns.

The establishment of a digitalization division and the provision of digital literacy training signify a formal commitment to technological integration. However, this structural change also raises concerns about the emergence of new forms of hierarchy within the organization. By centralizing technological competence within a specialized division, there is a risk of consolidating decision-making power among a subset of tech-savvy members. This could inadvertently reproduce elitist structures that prioritize digital fluency over inclusive participation, contradicting HMI's commitment to egalitarianism and grassroots empowerment.

Moreover, the rapid embrace of digitalization appears to have been more reactive than deliberative. While it was a necessary response to the crisis, the speed of implementation may have sidelined collective dialogue and excluded those less digitally literate—particularly older cadres or members with limited access to technology. The digital divide, both generational and infrastructural, is largely overlooked in the current narrative. This omission masks the uneven experiences of members and calls into question whether digital innovation within HMI was genuinely participatory and democratic. Were any mechanisms put in place to ensure that all members could engage equally? Or did digitalization merely shift exclusion from physical to virtual spaces?

The transformation of activist culture also demands scrutiny. Traditional forms of in-person activism—rallies, meetings, and public forums—carry embodied and symbolic power that fosters solidarity and legitimacy. In contrast, the migration to digital platforms risks reducing activism to symbolic gestures or performative acts, particularly on social media. While HMI engaged in online seminars, discussions, and health campaigns, the extent to which these digital engagements translated into tangible social or political change remains underexplored. As Putri & Fauzan (2021) argue, collaboration and visibility do not inherently equate to impact. Were these online activities substantive in altering public discourse, or were they largely representational?

Furthermore, the reorganization of regeneration processes through project-based training and digital coordination deserves critical reflection. While the experiential approach (Anggraini & Ramadhan, 2020) is commendable for developing social competencies, its delivery through online mediums may lack the depth and immediacy of in-person mentorship. It is essential to evaluate how these methods affected long-standing traditions of cadre development within HMI, and whether digital formats redefined what it means to be an active, committed member.

Finally, there is little discussion of the long-term sustainability of these innovations. Were digital practices institutionalized into HMI's post-pandemic operations, or were they temporary measures during a time of crisis? Without addressing these questions, the narrative risks

framing the pandemic as a catalyst for unproblematic progress, rather than as a disruptive moment that necessitated difficult trade-offs and revealed structural vulnerabilities.

In sum, while HMI Medan Branch responded to the pandemic with notable digital initiatives, a more critical lens reveals that these transformations were neither uniformly inclusive nor necessarily democratizing. They reconfigured internal power dynamics, potentially marginalized certain groups, and altered foundational aspects of activist culture. Recognizing these tensions is crucial to understanding how organizational reform truly unfolds—not just through innovation, but also through negotiation, contestation, and reflection.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Islamic Student Association (HMI) Medan Branch demonstrates strong adaptability and innovation in responding to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the crisis, HMI maintained its identity as a value-based student organization while successfully implementing structural and functional transformations. Internally, HMI adapted its leadership, regeneration, and work programs to online formats, reflecting organizational flexibility and readiness to respond to global disruptions. Socially, HMI continued its intellectual and humanitarian missions through digital educational and social initiatives aligned with health protocols. Politically, HMI remained active in advocacy, especially in campus and local community issues. The organization employed various innovative strategies, such as digital media utilization, project-based regeneration, and cross-organizational collaboration. These efforts not only ensured its survival but allowed the organization to grow within the altered social environment. The findings support the relevance of organizational change theory and student social role theory, demonstrating how value-based organizations like HMI can adapt while maintaining their ideological foundation. Using an interpretive approach, this research shows that HMI's response is not merely reactive but strategic, allowing it to contribute significantly to local socio-political development during a crisis. Thus, HMI exemplifies how student organizations can remain relevant, resilient, and impactful when they combine adaptability with commitment to core values.

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