

Optimizing Digital Marketing in Building the Image and Public Trust of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Era of Educational Technology

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Abstract

The development of educational technology encourages Islamic educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, to innovate in building their image and increasing public trust. One effort is through the implementation of digital marketing strategies that utilize various social media platforms and official websites. This study aims to analyze how digital marketing is optimized in building the image of institutions and increasing public trust in Islamic boarding schools in the era of educational technology. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation of digital marketing activities carried out by Islamic boarding schools. The data obtained are then analyzed descriptively to understand the patterns and strategies applied. The results of this study indicate that digital marketing carried out consistently and planned can increase visibility and shape a positive image of Islamic boarding schools in the community. The use of informative, educational, and religious content is a major factor in building public trust. In addition, transparency of information through digital media also contributes to increasing the credibility of institutions. Practically, this study provides an overview of the importance of optimizing digital marketing in building image and public trust. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of Islamic education marketing in the digital era, particularly in the aspect of the relationship between institutional image and public trust.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has profoundly transformed societal behavior, particularly in the way individuals access information and make decisions. In education, digital platforms such as websites, social media, and mobile applications have become primary sources of information for prospective students and their families (Hikmah & Mudarris, 2026; Shoha, 2026). This

shift has made digital presence a critical determinant of institutional visibility and public perception. Educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), face growing pressure to adapt to these technological changes to remain competitive. Failure to effectively communicate through digital media risks reducing the institution's perceived relevance and attractiveness. Evidence shows that institutions actively utilizing digital channels can enhance public engagement, increase transparency, and foster trust among stakeholders (Hefniy & Alwahedi, 2025; Khofsah, 2025). Therefore, understanding how digital communication strategies influence societal perception is essential, making this study relevant for both the broader community and policymakers involved in educational development.

Despite the growing influence of ICT in education, many Islamic educational institutions face significant challenges in leveraging digital technology effectively (Holidi, 2025; Kusumawati, 2025; Manshur, 2026). While pesantren are traditionally known for strong religious education and moral development, the increasing competition in modern educational markets requires these institutions to also maintain a compelling public image. Parents and students now evaluate schools not only on educational quality but also on the transparency and accessibility of information provided online. However, most pesantren have yet to implement structured digital marketing strategies, limiting their ability to communicate achievements, programs, and institutional values effectively. This gap in communication may hinder prospective student recruitment and reduce public confidence in the institution. Moreover, the lack of digital competence among staff, insufficient content management practices, and limited understanding of online marketing techniques further exacerbate the problem. Addressing these barriers is critical to enhancing public trust and ensuring that pesantren remain competitive and relevant in the digital age.

In practice, many Islamic boarding schools still rely heavily on traditional promotional approaches, such as word-of-mouth or offline community engagement, rather than strategic digital communication (Rahman, 2026; Syafih, 2025). Observations indicate that while some institutions maintain websites or social media accounts, these platforms are often underutilized, with outdated content, inconsistent posting schedules, or low interactivity. Consequently, public perception of pesantren is based more on anecdotal experiences than verified information, limiting prospective families' ability to make informed decisions. Additionally, stakeholders increasingly expect accessible and transparent online information, including curricula, extracurricular programs, student achievements, and alumni success stories. Failure to meet these expectations may weaken the institution's competitive advantage. On the other hand, schools that implement effective digital communication demonstrate higher engagement levels, better visibility, and stronger community trust. This phenomenon highlights a growing disconnect between technological potential and current practices in Islamic educational institutions, indicating a pressing need to explore strategies for optimizing digital marketing to enhance institutional image and credibility (Aini et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2024).

Previous studies have largely focused on integrating technology into the teaching and learning process, emphasizing educational outcomes, instructional efficiency, and pedagogical innovation. Research has consistently shown that digital tools enhance access to learning resources, facilitate communication, and improve student engagement. Valentin et al. (2025) highlight that ICT adoption broadens information accessibility and strengthens stakeholder interaction. While these studies

provide valuable insights into educational technology applications, they offer limited understanding of digital marketing's role in shaping institutional image and building public trust. Specifically, the intersection of digital marketing strategies and Islamic educational institutions remains underexplored. Most literature focuses on conventional marketing or internal quality management, neglecting the strategic deployment of online platforms to enhance visibility and credibility. This gap illustrates the need for research that integrates digital marketing with institutional reputation management, particularly within pesantren, where cultural, religious, and educational values must be communicated effectively alongside promotional objectives.

Moreover, existing research often overlooks practical constraints faced by Islamic boarding schools in executing digital marketing strategies. Studies indicate challenges such as insufficient human resources, limited technical skills, and suboptimal content management systems that prevent consistent and engaging online communication (Arifin, 2024; Islamiah & Maulidiah, 2024). Although evidence suggests that structured digital marketing can enhance public engagement and institutional positioning, few studies provide actionable models or frameworks tailored to pesantren contexts. Latifah (2022) underscores that transparency and accessibility of information significantly influence public trust, yet implementation practices in Islamic educational settings remain fragmented. By situating this research within the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, this study contributes to knowledge on optimizing digital marketing in religious educational institutions. The research seeks to bridge this gap by offering evidence-based strategies that align marketing objectives with pesantren values, ultimately advancing both academic literature and institutional practice.

This research introduces a novel approach by explicitly linking digital marketing optimization with public image enhancement and trust-building in Islamic boarding schools, a perspective rarely addressed in existing studies. Unlike prior research that emphasizes classroom technology or general institutional management, this study investigates how digital platforms can strategically communicate values, achievements, and programs to external audiences. It considers both technological and human resource dimensions, evaluating constraints in staff capacity, content management, and engagement practices. The study's originality lies in contextualizing marketing strategies within the pesantren framework, ensuring that digital communication does not compromise religious and cultural integrity. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial, as effective digital marketing enables pesantren to enhance visibility, build credibility, and compete sustainably in a digital society. Thus, the study contributes a practical, culturally sensitive, and empirically grounded approach to educational marketing in Islamic institutions.

Based on the identified challenges, this study aims to analyze how Islamic boarding schools can optimize digital marketing to strengthen institutional image and increase public trust in the era of educational technology. The research addresses key questions: How can pesantren leverage digital platforms to communicate effectively? What strategies enhance credibility while respecting religious values? Preliminary evidence suggests that consistent, interactive, and transparent digital communication fosters higher engagement, trust, and reputation. By investigating these dynamics, the study provides actionable guidance for pesantren managers, offering frameworks to overcome resource limitations, improve content management, and align digital marketing with institutional objectives. Theoretically, the research expands Islamic

education marketing literature, providing empirical support for the integration of ICT and strategic communication. Practically, it equips institutions with tools to enhance visibility, credibility, and competitive positioning, ensuring sustainable development in an increasingly digital educational landscape.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology with a case study design, chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of how digital marketing strategies are optimized to enhance institutional image and foster public trust in Islamic boarding schools (Niam et al., 2024; Okoko et al., 2023). The case study approach allows for detailed, context-specific investigation, enabling researchers to explore phenomena within their real-life environment (Gojali et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2025). This design is particularly appropriate because it captures the complex interplay between digital communication practices and stakeholder perceptions, allowing the study to examine both processes and outcomes within a specific institutional context. By focusing on a single institution that actively implements digital marketing, the study can generate rich, comprehensive insights into the practical application and impact of digital strategies, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of educational marketing.

The research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) selected through purposive sampling based on its active digital presence. The institution maintains consistent communication via social media platforms and the official Reismi website, demonstrating a commitment to transparent and strategic digital marketing. This location was chosen to ensure that data collection would yield relevant, high-quality information about real-world digital practices and their role in shaping public perception and trust. Selecting an institution with a demonstrable digital strategy allows the study to capture nuanced operational practices, content management processes, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms that may otherwise remain undocumented in less digitally active schools.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to provide a holistic understanding of digital marketing practices. Primary data were obtained through interviews with key informants, including school leaders and members of the social media management team, who are directly involved in designing and implementing digital marketing strategies. Secondary data comprised supporting documents such as archived social media posts, website content, official publications, and records of institutional activities. This combination ensures triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and depth of the research findings by providing multiple perspectives on the same phenomena.

Data analysis followed a systematic qualitative approach, consisting of data reduction, data display, and verification processes. First, data reduction involved condensing and summarizing the collected information to focus on core patterns and insights relevant to digital marketing optimization (Nurfajriani et al., 2024; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). Next, data display was conducted using matrices, tables, and thematic categorizations to visualize relationships and facilitate interpretation. Finally, verification ensured the credibility and validity of findings through triangulation, member checking, and cross-referencing with secondary data sources. This structured analytical framework enables a rigorous examination of how digital marketing practices contribute to institutional image enhancement and the cultivation of public

trust in Islamic educational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Islamic Boarding School Digital Marketing Strategy

Observations, interviews, and documentation reviews indicate that the Islamic boarding school has implemented a digital marketing strategy through content planning, social media utilization, and official website management as a means of conveying information to the public. These activities are structured by assigning tasks to a digital media management team responsible for content creation, publication, and evaluation.

However, research has found that digital marketing strategy planning is not fully based on audience data analysis. This results in some content being poorly targeted and unable to optimally reach all segments of society.

One media manager stated, "We have planned the content, but not all of it is based on audience analysis, so sometimes the response is not optimal."

These findings indicate that digital marketing strategies have been implemented, but still need to be strengthened in the data-driven strategy aspect.

Table 1. Implementation of Islamic Boarding School Digital Marketing Strategy

Strategic Aspect	Findings	Evidence	Strategic Meaning
Planning	Content schedule exists	Content calendar	Audience analysis is needed
Content Production	Varied content	Social media posts	Increases attractiveness
Publication	Consistent	Instagram & website	Improves visibility
Evaluation	Not yet optimal	No reports available	Evaluation system is needed

Utilization of Digital Platforms in Marketing

The use of digital platforms in Islamic boarding schools demonstrates a fairly effective multi-platform strategy. Instagram is used as the primary medium for delivering visual content such as photos of activities and infographics. YouTube is utilized for video documentation and testimonials, while the official website serves as a formal information center.

However, research has found that not all platforms are being utilized to their full potential, particularly in terms of content consistency and variety. Some platforms still tend to be passive and less interactive.

One teacher stated, "Sometimes the content is only active on Instagram, and the other platforms aren't fully utilized." This finding suggests that digital platforms are already being utilized, but the integration between them isn't fully optimized.

Integration of Educational Technology in Supporting Institutional Image

The research results show that Islamic boarding schools have integrated educational technology into the learning process, such as the use of WhatsApp and Google Classroom. This facilitates communication between teachers and students and supports the distribution of learning materials.

This integration has had a positive impact on the image of Islamic boarding schools as modern and adaptive educational institutions. The community believes that Islamic boarding schools not only maintain traditional values but also keep pace with technological developments.

However, there are still obstacles in utilizing technology, such as limited facilities and human resource capabilities.

Stakeholder Perceptions of Digital Marketing

Stakeholder perceptions of digital marketing in Islamic boarding schools tend to be positive. Islamic boarding school leaders view this strategy as a crucial step in improving the institution's image, while teachers and students find it easier to convey information.

The community and students' guardians also responded positively to the transparency of information conveyed through digital media. This transparency is a key factor in building public trust.

One student's guardian stated, "Now information is easier to obtain, so we have more confidence in this Islamic boarding school." However, there are concerns about the potential erosion of traditional values if technology use is not properly controlled.

Evaluation of Digital Marketing Effectiveness

Evaluations of digital marketing show increased visibility and audience engagement. This is evident in the increase in followers, comments, and interactions on social media.

However, research has found that the evaluation process has not been conducted systematically and has not used measurable indicators. This makes it difficult to accurately measure the effectiveness of the implemented strategies.

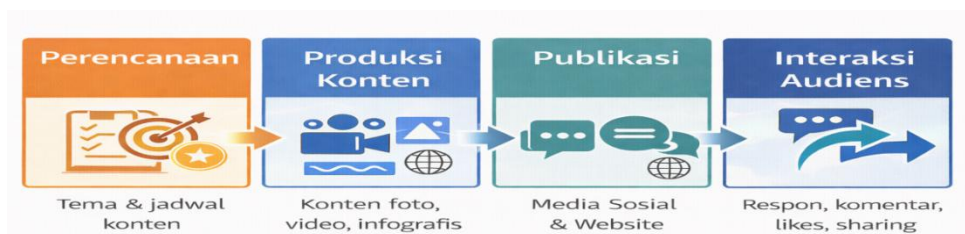


Figure 1. Islamic Boarding School Digital Marketing Strategy Pattern

This diagram shows the flow of digital marketing strategy starting from content planning, production, publication, to interaction with the audience.

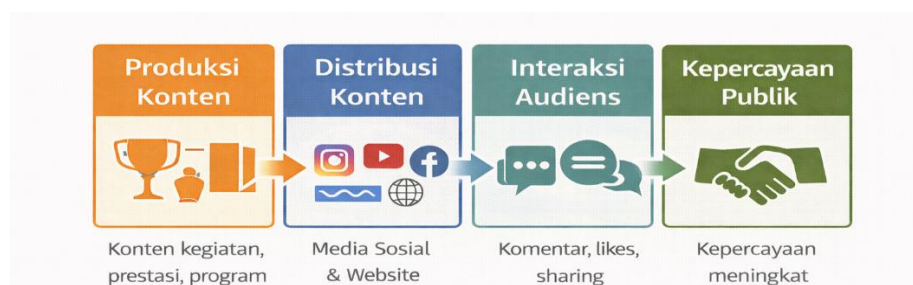


Figure 2. Flow of Image Formation and Public Trust

This diagram illustrates the process of forming public image and trust, starting from digital content, audience interaction, perception formation, and increasing public trust in Islamic boarding schools.

Discussion

Optimizing digital marketing in Islamic boarding schools requires a planned, data-driven approach to ensure strategies align with community needs. Research indicates that while many pesantren have established social media accounts and websites, their content management is often not informed by systematic audience data analysis. As a result, some communications are poorly targeted, reducing engagement and limiting the effectiveness of marketing efforts. This observation is consistent with findings that structured, data-informed digital marketing significantly enhances the impact and efficiency of educational institutions' outreach efforts (Fernandez & Uy, 2023; Wang et al., 2026). Proper audience analysis allows schools to tailor content that resonates with prospective students, parents, and the broader community, strengthening institutional visibility and public trust.

In addition to promoting programs and achievements, digital marketing in Islamic boarding schools functions as a medium for communicating the institution's values and identity. The integration of Islamic principles with contemporary marketing strategies is crucial for maintaining relevance in a digitally connected society. Research emphasizes that marketing for Islamic educational services must carefully balance the promotion of institutional quality with adherence to religious values, ensuring that digital content reflects both educational excellence and moral integrity (Bulqis & Fachri, 2025; Munif & Sulaiman, 2023; Sailin & Masbahuddin, 2024).

Consistency in digital content publication is another vital factor in shaping public perception. Islamic boarding schools that regularly share updates on educational activities, achievements, and community programs tend to enjoy higher recognition and credibility. Evidence suggests that continuous engagement through digital channels expands information dissemination, strengthens stakeholder awareness, and enhances the institution's overall appeal (BR & Tarmidiyono, 2023; Rozi et al., 2025; Saleha & Sholihah, 2024). By maintaining a regular and coherent content schedule, pesantren can foster familiarity and reliability, which are essential components of institutional trust.

Despite these benefits, several challenges persist in the implementation of digital marketing within Islamic educational institutions. Many pesantren face constraints such as limited human resources, insufficient training in digital strategy, and inadequate management of online platforms. These limitations often result in sporadic or inconsistent digital marketing efforts, undermining the potential impact on institutional image and public trust. This aligns with prior research indicating that systematic planning and management are critical barriers in the digital transformation of Islamic educational marketing (Fatmasari & Windiyani, 2025; Naningsih et al., 2024; Suhermanto, 2024).

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates strategic planning, content consistency, and optimization of digital media channels. By leveraging data analytics, pesantren can better understand audience preferences, refine content targeting, and enhance engagement effectiveness. Simultaneously, structured content calendars and proactive management practices ensure that digital marketing activities are sustained over time, preventing lapses that could diminish public confidence.

The optimization of digital marketing in Islamic boarding schools is not merely

about maintaining an online presence but about implementing a strategic, culturally aligned, and sustainable communication framework. When data-driven planning, consistent content production, and systematic evaluation are combined, digital marketing can strengthen the institution's public image and foster long-term trust among stakeholders. Such an approach positions Islamic boarding schools to compete effectively in the modern educational landscape while preserving their core religious and moral values (Khomsiah et al., 2024; Khusnuridlo & Fauzi, 2024; Thohir, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that optimizing digital marketing is pivotal in shaping the image and enhancing public trust of Islamic boarding schools in the era of educational technology. Effective use of social media and websites not only increases institutional visibility but also broadens the dissemination of information to prospective students, parents, and the wider community. Consistent, well-planned digital marketing strategies featuring educational, informative, and religious content can cultivate positive public perceptions, while transparent communication through digital platforms strengthens credibility and trust. A key lesson learned is that digital marketing in Islamic educational contexts must integrate both strategic planning and cultural alignment to achieve sustainable engagement and reinforce the institution's values and identity.

From a scholarly perspective, this research contributes to the literature on Islamic education marketing by elucidating the connection between digital communication strategies, institutional image, and public trust. It offers empirical insights for managers to design more effective, data-driven marketing frameworks and content strategies. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single case, which may constrain generalizability across diverse pesantren. Future research could expand to multiple institutions, incorporate quantitative measures of engagement, and examine long-term impacts of digital marketing on enrollment, stakeholder perception, and community trust to further validate and extend these findings.

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