

The Role of Digital Promotion in Increasing Participation in Islamic Boarding School Programs

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ABSTRACT

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The main focus of this study is to analyze the role of social media, especially Instagram and Facebook, in attracting the attention of parents and participants, as well as the program's effectiveness in creating an emotional attachment that encourages participants to continue their education to regular programs. The research method used is a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques involving the head of the pesantren and several program participants. The study results show that the optimal use of social media has increased the number of participants by up to 158 people compared to the previous year. In addition, the holiday cottage program has also proven to be effective in building participant satisfaction, which is reflected in more than 50 participants who expressed their satisfaction and desire to continue the program to a regular level. This program has also successfully introduced pesantren values in a more attractive and relevant way for the younger generation. The implications of these findings show that digital promotion strategies, which combine social media and participant testimonials, can increase the attractiveness of pesantren as a modern educational option but still based on religious values. The study also suggests the importance of integrating religious learning and developing social and leadership skills to respond to the demands of modern education.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have a very significant role in shaping the morality and spirituality of society (Anggadwita et al., 2021; Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022; Umar et al., 2021). Currently, over 34,000 Islamic boarding schools are spread throughout Indonesia, serving more than 4 million students (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Durlak et al., 2022; Kuhfeld et al., 2023). However, modernization and globalization bring new challenges for Islamic boarding

schools in attracting the interest of the community, especially the younger generation, who are more interested in the modern education system (Akour & Alenezi, 2022; Spiteri, 2023; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). This phenomenon requires Islamic boarding schools to create new strategies to increase relevance in an increasingly dynamic society. One strategy that emerged was "Pondok liburan", a short program designed to introduce Islamic boarding school life to the community during the holidays.

Previous research has shown that the holiday boarding program effectively builds a positive image of Islamic boarding schools in the community. Sudiapermana and Muslikhah reported that this program was able to attract the attention of the wider community, including those who were previously less familiar with the world of Islamic boarding schools (Altinyelken, 2021; Islam & Stapa, 2021; Pamungkas et al., 2023). Islamic et al. (2024) added that the holiday boarding school also contributed to the formation of a unique spiritual and educational experience for the participants while expanding the social network of the Islamic boarding school.

In addition, Malik's (2024) research shows that boarding schools can increase participants' self-confidence in practising Islamic values in everyday life. Another study by Subair (2024) revealed that the Islamic boarding school promotion program attracted young participants' interest and increased parental trust in Islamic boarding school-based education. Furthermore, Sivakumar et al. (2023) found that boarding schools are one of the effective media in introducing Islamic boarding school learning methods that are more adaptive and relevant to the needs of the younger generation. However, literature that specifically evaluates the effectiveness of holiday boarding schools as a promotional strategy to increase public interest in Islamic boarding schools is still limited.

This study aims to analyze the strategy of holiday boarding schools as a promotional medium to increase public interest in the Al Miftah Islamic Boarding School, Kediri Bureau. This study will also evaluate the program's impact on the image of the Islamic boarding school, increasing the number of participants, and public acceptance of the concept of Islamic boarding schools in the modern era.

Holiday boarding has excellent potential as a promotional medium because it combines elements of education, spiritual experience, and entertainment in one program that is attractive to various levels of society. Implementing holiday boarding at the Al Miftah Islamic Boarding School, Kediri Bureau will increase the number of students. Participants who take part in holiday boarding will better understand the values of Islamic boarding schools, which in turn will increase their interest in Islamic boarding school-based education. This program is also assumed to strengthen society's positive impression of schools as relevant educational institutions in the modern era.

METHOD

This study focuses on the Al Miftah Biro Kediri Islamic Boarding School, especially the holiday boarding program that has been implemented. The study's primary focus is the program's implementation, community participation, and its impact on the image and public enthusiasm for the Islamic boarding school. This study uses a qualitative design with a case study approach to explore in depth the phenomena that occur at the Islamic Boarding School in implementing holiday boarding as a promotional strategy (Priya, 2021; Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Renjith et al., 2021).

The sources of information used in this study consist of primary and secondary data (Muhammad Rijal Fadli, 2021; Poltak & Widjaja, 2024). Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with Islamic boarding school managers, holiday boarding school participants, and parents of participants. Meanwhile, secondary data includes internal Islamic boarding school documents, program reports, related publications, and academic literature on Islamic boarding school promotion strategies. Data collection was carried out using various methods, namely in-depth interviews to understand perceptions, experiences, and impacts of the program; participatory observation with direct involvement of researchers in program implementation; and documentation in the form of promotional materials, activity reports, and participant testimonials (Alinsky et al., 2022; Judijanto et al., 2024).

The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which involved several stages. The first stage is data reduction, which is sorting relevant data according to the focus of the research. The second stage is categorization, where data is grouped based on central themes such as the effectiveness of promotion, impact on participants, and community acceptance (Hashanah, 2024). The last stage is drawing conclusions, which is compiling the main findings that support the hypothesis and provide strategic recommendations for the Islamic Boarding School (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024; Sugiono, 2019). With this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of holiday boarding schools as a promotional medium to increase public interest in Islamic boarding schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Promotion Strategy to Increase Participation in the Holiday Boarding Program

Based on an interview with the head of the Al Miftah Biro Islamic Boarding School, it was found that the number of participants in the holiday boarding program had increased by as much as 158 compared to the previous year. This significant increase shows that the holiday boarding program strongly

appeals to the community, especially among parents who want quality religious education for their children. One of the managers explained, "We optimize the use of social media to promote this program, especially Instagram and Facebook, which allows us to reach a wider audience, especially parents who are interested in religious education (I_2024)." Social media allows Islamic boarding schools to introduce their programs to a broader audience, including parents who have school-age children and the millennial generation who are more familiar with digital platforms. Figure 1 describes the Publication of Holiday Dormitories on Social Media.

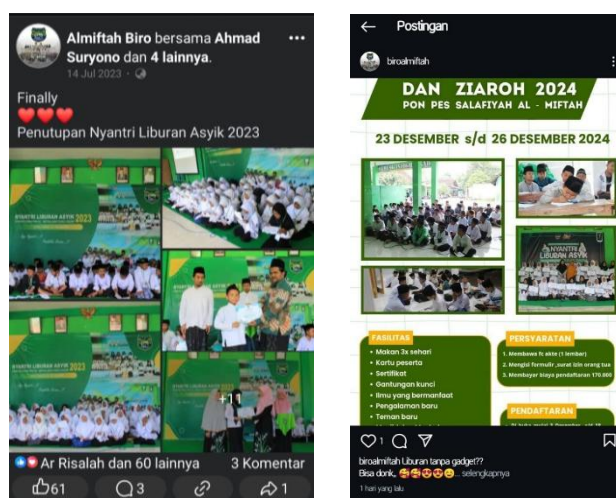
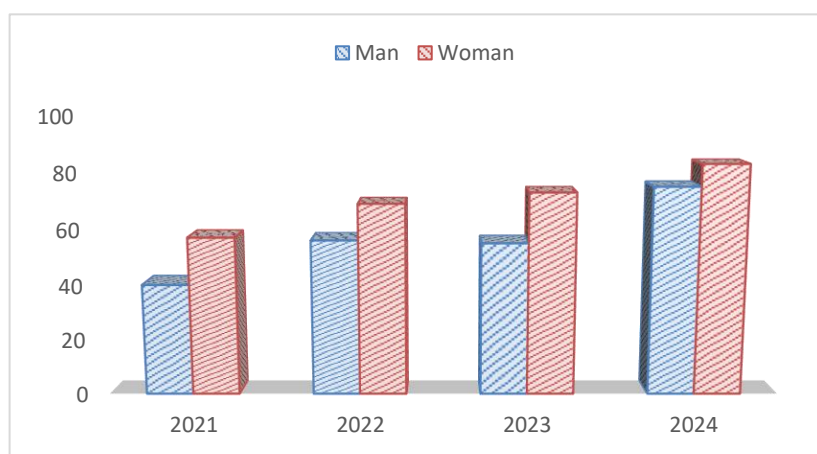


Figure 1. Publication of Holiday Dormitories on Social Media

Figure 1 explains that uploads from Facebook and Instagram display various photos of participants' activities during the holiday cottage program. This upload includes information related to the "Nyantri Fun Holiday 2023" program's closure and the announcement for the "Pilgrimage 2024" program. The image shows how social media is being used to attract more potential participants by including practical information regarding registration and requirements to join the program. In this case, social media serves as a promotional tool and a means to build closeness with the community, including parents who want to ensure the quality of religious education their children will receive.

In addition, the number of participants has increased from year to year, with data separating male and female participants, which shows the success of this program in attracting interest from various circles. This graph clearly shows the increase in students enrolled and continuing their education at Islamic boarding schools, as shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Increase in the Number of Students from Year to Year

Chart 1 shows data on the increase in the number of participants in the Al Miftah Biro Islamic Boarding School holiday cottage program from 2021 to 2024. This graph separates the number of participants by gender, with blue representing male students and red representing female students. It can be seen that the number of participants continues to increase every year, both for male and female students. This increase reflects the growing appeal of the holiday cottage program, which has managed to reach more participants from different backgrounds. This success shows that promotion through social media and participant testimonials are important in attracting public interest. In addition, this graph also illustrates that both male and female participants show increased interest in this program, which has the potential to show balance and inclusivity in attracting the attention of prospective students from both groups.

Departing from the above presentation, it shows that the holiday cottage program at the Al Miftah Bureau Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in increasing the number of participants, with social media as the primary promotional tool. Testimonials from previous participants also played a crucial role in increasing the attractiveness of this program among the public. This increase in participants illustrates the effectiveness of digital promotion and the importance of direct recommendations in attracting parents and potential participants. This holiday cottage program not only introduces pesantren as a religious, educational institution but also strengthens the positive image of pesantren as an educational institution that is relevant and adaptive to the needs of modern education. With the increasing number of participants, pesantren can continue to innovate and meet more complex educational needs.

Participant Satisfaction as the Success of the Holiday Boarding Program

This study showed that more than 50 holiday boarding participants were satisfied with their experience and wanted to continue the program. One participant stated, "I feel delighted, not only learning about religion, but also getting the opportunity to develop other skills such as social and leadership skills (I_2024)." This statement reflects high satisfaction with the diversity of activities offered during the program. The satisfaction of these participants shows that the holiday boarding program can meet their expectations, both in terms of education and the social experiences provided. This shows that this program has succeeded in answering the needs of participants who want religious learning and want to develop social and leadership skills relevant to their daily lives.

This holiday cottage program is designed to provide a more comprehensive experience, including religious learning, interactive discussions, and creative activities such as arts and sports. These activities deepen participants' understanding of religion and shape their character, social skills, and creativity. One participant stated that the program provides a more well-rounded experience that focuses on the spiritual aspect and develops their social and personal aspect. This program is particularly relevant because today's young generation needs an education that teaches religious knowledge and valuable skills in an increasingly complex social life. By incorporating aspects of self-development, pesantren can attract participants who want to obtain a more holistic education, balancing religious teachings and the skills needed to adapt to modern society. Where this is as the imam shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Activity Photos

Figure 2 shows activities during the holiday cottage program, such as awarding outstanding participants. This image reflects the diversity of activities organized, which not only include aspects of religious learning but also provide opportunities for participants to develop socially and creatively. This supports the finding that the program has successfully provided participants with a more comprehensive and relevant educational experience.

Apart from the above, it is known that the holiday cottage program has succeeded in meeting participants' expectations in terms of religious learning and developing social and leadership skills. With over 50 satisfied participants, the program piqued their interest and encouraged them to continue with the regular program. The diversity of activities offered, such as religious learning, discussions, art, and sports, provides participants with a more complete and relevant educational experience. This confirms that pesantren can adapt to the needs of modern education, which includes not only spiritual aspects but also practical skills that are important in daily life. This holiday cottage program is proof of the success of Islamic boarding schools in answering contemporary educational challenges with a more holistic approach and in accordance with the needs of today's young generation.

The Effectiveness of the Holiday Boarding Program in Increasing the Number of Students

Based on the existing findings, many participants of this year's holiday cottage program continued to the regular student program, around 25 participants. This figure shows that the holiday cottage program effectively builds participants' emotional attachment to the values of the pesantren, which ultimately encourages them to join as permanent students. One of the participants' parents revealed, "After participating in the holiday hut, my child became more open and motivated to study harder. We feel that this pesantren offers holistic education. (I_2024)" This statement confirms that the holiday cottage program provides benefits not only in religious learning but also in the development of character and motivation of participants. The program successfully met participants' expectations regarding religious learning and the development of social and leadership skills relevant to their lives.

The holiday cottage program provides a more authentic life experience at the boarding school, increasing participants' interest in continuing their education there. The program not only focuses on religious learning but also accommodates the needs of participants in developing social skills and character. This creates a more holistic experience, allowing participants to deepen their religious teachings and hone skills relevant to their social lives. In this case, pesantren has succeeded in offering education that is not only religious-based but also supports the development of social skills, character, and leadership that are needed in daily life.

The holiday cottage program has successfully created a strong emotional bond between participants and the pesantren. A total of 25 participants who participated in this year's holiday cottage continued their education in the regular program, which shows that the experience they gained was very influential in their decision to join permanently. The program introduces participants to religious learning and provides them with social experiences and character development that enrich their lives. This shows that the holiday cottage program has successfully combined religious education with relevant social and leadership skills, encouraging participants to continue their education at the pesantren.

The success of the Holiday Boarding Program as a Promotional Media in Increasing Public Enthusiasm in the Modern Era

The findings above show that the holiday boarding program is effective as a promotional tool and has a direct impact on increasing the number of regular students and the image of Islamic boarding schools in society. The success of this program can be explained by the holistic approach applied, which integrates various aspects of education, from spiritual to educational and social. This program not only meets the needs of religious education but also adapts to the development of the times and the needs of an increasingly dynamic society. The vacation boarding program provides participants with the opportunity to develop themselves not only in spiritual aspects but also in social and leadership skills that are very relevant in facing the challenges of the modern world.

In addition, this holiday boarding program shows that Islamic boarding schools that can adapt to the needs and expectations of modern society and prioritize a flexible and dynamic approach to religious education can remain relevant. This approach responds to the wishes of parents and participants who are looking for a religion-based education that is not rigid but still rooted in traditional values. The success of this program also shows the importance of utilizing digital technology and social media in promotion. Using platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, Islamic boarding schools can reach a wider audience, including millennials who are more active in the digital world.

This vacation boarding program offers more than just a spiritual experience; it also shows how Islamic boarding schools can transform into modern, innovative educational institutions that still adhere to strong religious values. Islamic boarding schools that combine traditional approaches with digital technology and programs relevant to the community's needs, such as vacation boarding schools, have the potential to grow and attract more public interest. Therefore, this vacation boarding program's success also reflects Islamic boarding schools' progress in modernizing themselves to remain an attractive and meaningful educational choice for today's young generation.

Discussion

The present study examined the effectiveness of digital promotion strategies in increasing participation in the holiday boarding program at the Al Miftah Biro Islamic Boarding School. In light of the evolving digital landscape and the growing role of social media in education, this research sought to investigate how social media platforms, particularly Instagram and Facebook, have influenced the visibility and appeal of religious educational programs. Given the importance of adapting educational institutions to modern technologies and meeting the expectations of parents seeking quality education for their children, the study aimed to provide insights into the intersection of traditional educational practices and digital marketing strategies.

The study is situated within a broader research context on using digital tools in education. Previous research demonstrated that social media is a powerful tool in promoting educational programs, particularly in attracting younger and more digitally engaged audiences (Farsi, 2021; Obermayer et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Ibáñez et al., 2023). This study adds to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of how Islamic boarding schools, traditionally seen as conservative institutions, can successfully integrate modern marketing techniques to appeal to contemporary families and millennials.

The findings of this study reveal several important trends and outcomes. First, using social media to promote the holiday boarding program at Al Miftah Biro Islamic Boarding School resulted in a significant increase in the number of participants, with an increase of 158 compared to the previous year. This growth underscores the effectiveness of digital promotion strategies in attracting participants, particularly among parents seeking religious education for their children. The high level of satisfaction among participants, with over 50 participants expressing a desire to continue with the program, further supports the program's positive impact on its target audience. Additionally, the program's design, which integrates religious learning with social and leadership skills, resonates well with participants, offering them a more holistic educational experience.

Moreover, 25 participants transitioned from the holiday boarding program to the regular program, indicating the success of the holiday program in fostering emotional connections with the values of the Islamic boarding school. The promotional power of testimonials from previous participants was particularly notable, with these testimonials playing a crucial role in shaping public perception and enhancing the credibility of the program (Bustos, 2021; Han & Balabanis, 2024; Lim & Young, 2021).

The significant increase in participation and satisfaction can be attributed to the effective use of social media, as evidenced by the findings of this study and supported by previous research. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook provide a low-cost, high-reach promotional tool, enabling Islamic boarding schools to reach a wider audience, including millennials and parents of school-aged children (Gunnlaugsson et al., 2021; Keysar & Kress, 2021; Robinson, 2022). These platforms allow the school to connect directly with potential participants, giving them the information they need to make informed enrolment decisions.

However, the holiday boarding program's success extends beyond the digital promotion strategies. The program's ability to offer a well-rounded educational experience combining religious studies with social, leadership, and creative activities aligns with the growing demand for education that balances traditional knowledge with practical skills (Subair et al., 2024). This blend of spiritual and personal development is particularly appealing in a society where young people increasingly seek education that prepares them for their spiritual and social lives. In line with the work of Aldboush (2023), who emphasized the importance of testimonials in building trust, this study highlights how participant testimonials serve as a powerful promotional tool. The positive experiences shared by previous participants helped build credibility and trust, likely contributing to increased participation rates. These results also reflect the growing importance of experiential marketing, where real-life experiences significantly influence consumer decisions (Júnior et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023; Robinson, 2022).

This research presents a theoretical contribution which lies in a deeper understanding of how digital promotion strategies, especially social media, can increase participation in religion-based education programs, such as Islamic boarding schools. These findings enrich the existing literature on the role of social media in education, showing that pesantren can leverage digital platforms to reach a wider audience, including parents and millennials, without sacrificing the traditional values upheld within the institution.

In addition, this research emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach in education that focuses not only on religious knowledge but also on social and leadership skills, which aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize holistic self-development. Overall, these findings contribute to the development of educational models that integrate technology and value-based learning and offer insights into how religious education institutions can adapt to the needs of an increasingly dynamic society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study results, the holiday boarding program at the Al Miftah Biro Kediri Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in increasing public interest in Islamic boarding schools, with an increase in participants of up to 158 compared to the previous year. In addition, 23 participants in this program finally registered as regular students, demonstrating the success of the holiday boarding school as an effective promotional medium. The main lesson from this study is the importance of program innovation based on the needs of modern society in strengthening the image of Islamic boarding schools.

This study provides scientific contributions in the form of a conceptual framework that explains the effectiveness of the holiday boarding program as a promotional strategy for Islamic boarding schools. The results of this study also expand the literature related to marketing strategies based on religious education in a modern context, which previously had minimal discussion. This study shows that a holistic approach that integrates spiritual, educational, and social aspects significantly impacts public perception. The limitations of this study lie in its scope, which covers only one Islamic boarding school, namely the Al Miftah Biro Kediri Islamic Boarding School. In addition, the qualitative method used has limitations in generalization.

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