



SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT IN OPTIMIZING THE BRANDING OF ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract:

In the ever growing digital era, Islamic educational institutions are required to be able to adapt to changes in information and communication technology in order to maintain their existence and increase their competitiveness. Social media has become one of the most influential communication instruments in shaping public perception and trust in an institution, including Islamic educational institutions. However, many madrasah have not made optimal use of social media as a planned and systematic means of branding. The purpose of this research is to study the method of optimizing social media as a branding tool for Islamic educational institutions in the midst of competition between educational institutions in the modern era. Social media is considered not only as a source of information but also as a strategic tool to improve the public's image, reputation, and trust in Islamic educational institutions. A qualitative approach to literature is used in this study; Data collection techniques are used to conduct a review of relevant scientific books and journals, which are then analyzed through content analysis. The results show that the consistency of digital identity, educational and religious content, and responsive two-way communication are the factors that determine the success of branding. Therefore, the regular use of social media and based on Islamic principles is the key to strengthening the madrasah brand in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: *Educational Branding; Digital Communication; Public Relations Management; Social Media.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication technology has changed the way educational institutions build their image and reputation in society. Social media has become one of the important tools in building the identity and reputation of the institution. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are now not only useful for communicating personally, but also useful as strategic tools to shape public perception of educational institutions including disseminating information and connecting with stakeholders such as students, parents, alumni, and the general public. Previous research has shown that the use of social media as a marketing tool and branding Schools can increase audience loyalty and engagement when managed effectively through relevant and consistent content and the right strategies (Kumar et al., 2021).

Branding It does not only relate to logos or slogans, but includes the overall image, reputation, value, and excellence. Universities use public relations communication strategies on social media to build branding that are relevant to visual content, stories, message consistency, and the use of popular platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to increase engagement and shape the image of a modern, inclusive, and competitive institution (Utari, 2025). The benefits of social media in increasing school brand awareness are demonstrated by the high quality of visual content, consistent posting frequency, and the use of interactive features such as polls, live meetings, and reels having the ability to expand audiences and strengthen the institution's identity in the digital space (Yaqin & Aini, 2025).

Branding It was originally used in business as a way to differentiate a product from others. However, it is now often used in education as part of a strategy to build an institution's image and reputation. According to (Kotler, Philip., 2009) Branding It is the process of creating an identity, image, and value that distinguishes an organization from its competitors in the minds of consumers. In the context of education, "consumer" can be interpreted as students, parents, alumni, and the wider community (Kotler, Philip., 2009).

Brands is the name, term, symbol, design, or combination of those elements that identifies an organization/product and distinguishes it from others. Branding It includes the process of creating a mental structure in the minds of consumers so that they recognize and choose the brand, as well as provide more value to the organization (Wardhana, 2024). In addition, David Aaker (1991) said that the strength of brands lies in the Brand Equity, which consists of Brand Awareness (brand awareness), perceived quality (quality perception), Brand Association (brand association), and Brand Loyalty. In the context of educational institutions, brand recognition can be in the form of a level of public recognition of madrasas; the quality seen is related to the perception of academic and non-academic quality; brand ties related to the religious image, achievements, and nature of graduates; and brand loyalty is reflected in the trust and advice of parents and alumni (Asri, n.d.).

Branding Schools or madrasas are carried out in educational institutions to build a good name, strengthen the image, and increase brand understanding among students, parents, and other educational stakeholders. Due to their interactive nature and their ability to reach a wider audience, recent empirical research suggests that social media is an important platform for image formation (Eriani, 2025). In the digital age, Branding It is the process of interaction between audiences and organizations through various relevant digital content such as community engagement on social media, institutional narratives, and visual identities (Nardo et al., 2024).

Religious based educational institutions such as madrasas must also be able to adapt to digital dynamics so that they remain relevant and liked by the public. As an Islamic-based secondary education institution, Islamic educational institutions have great potential to utilize social media to improve the image and competitiveness of the institution. However, madrasas still face problems in managing their social media properly. As a result, they are unable to fully utilize social media to meet their branding needs. The limitations of engaging content, the consistency of posts, the accuracy of the target audience, and the capabilities of the social media management team are some of these challenges. Thus, questions arise about how educational institutions, especially Islamic educational institutions, can improve their reputation by using social media optimization

strategies according to a consistent, directed, and analysis-based approach to audience needs.

Previous research has shown that marketing tactics on social media such as Instagram and TikTok have an impact on the public's reputation and perception of educational institutions, including increased engagement and its impact on demand for new student admissions at certain universities (Azim et al., 2024). Success branding Universities in social media are not a coincidence, but rather the result of a measurable and planned content strategy and how social media content strategies can be optimized to strengthen branding college. An important finding is that content in the form of official university news combined with images and links, and posted on weekdays during the day, results in the highest engagement. In contrast, live promotional content and text without visuals performed the lowest (Demirer, 2025). Lehmann, (2024) states in Social Media Theory and Communications Practice that social media is not just a communication channel, but a social space that allows for strategically planned communication (strategic social media presence) (Lehmann, 2024). Social media not only serves as a source of information and learning, but also serves as an effective tool for da'wah and promotion. Branding Madrasas can increase community trust and participation with structured and collaborative management (Qomariyah, 2025). From an awareness and image perspective that social media marketing campaigns have a positive correlation with brand awareness, brand image, and audience attitudes towards educational institutions (Marhareita et al., 2022). Additionally, other research found that Instagram plays a crucial role in fostering trust and brand perception, which impacts students' tendency to choose colleges. The results show that trust serves as an important link between audience decisions towards institutions and social media marketing actions (Sriyanto, 2024).

Digital communication differs from traditional communication in that it is bidirectional, allowing audiences to participate and form shared perceptions. This is important for educational institutions because direct interaction through personal messages, comments, and responses can increase public engagement and trust in the institution (Lengkong et al., 2025). The relevant communication model is interactive communication that creates two-way feedback between the madrasah and stakeholders (students, parents, alumni, and the community), thus forming a Brand image dynamic and participatory (Lehmann, 2024).

According to McQuail, (2010) McQuail's book Mass Communication Theory, the characteristics of new media can be used as indicators in digital communication including: interactivity (the existence of two-way communication), connectivity (the ability to connect widely), accessibility (ease of access to information), speed of information dissemination, user participation. In addition, social media communication is characterized by participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. These characteristics show that social media allows users to actively participate, interact openly, and build a wide social network through digital communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In addition, research on social media management for pesantren or other religious educational institutions found that professional social media management improves the image of pesantren or other religious educational institutions, with an emphasis on good content strategy and good platform management (Habsi & Munawaroh, 2025). Other research confirms that the use of social media is a strategic need to build and strengthen branding. Social media

not only serves as a tool for publications, but it also serves as a tool to build relationships, increase engagement, and increase public trust (Anggita, 2025). In other academic fields, research on social media content optimization shows that informative and engaging content and strong editorial team participation are important components in creating a school's image in digital media (Pranata et al., 2024).

Despite this, most of the research still focuses on large-scale higher education institutions or Islamic boarding schools. As a junior secondary education institution, madrassas have different audiences. This can be seen from the age of the student, the role of parents in decision-making, and the way students communicate. In addition, previous research has tended to emphasize the overall marketing element, but has not studied optimization strategies that are contextual and applicable to specific madrasah needs. Therefore, the focus of this research is the optimization of social media as a means of branding Islamic educational institutions. Taking into account local characteristics and their institutional needs, this is the focus of the new research.

Based on these backgrounds and differences, this study aims to optimize the use of social media as a branding tool for Islamic educational institutions, find elements that affect their performance, and develop optimization methods that can improve the image and competitiveness of madrasas. It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide a theoretical basis for the development of research on digital-based education management, as well as provide practical advice for madrasah managers on how to create a successful social media branding strategy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a literature research method (library research) with a qualitative approach. According to (Zed, 2008), Literature research is a series of activities related to the method of collecting library data, reading, and recording and processing research materials. In line with that, (Sugiyono, 2013) emphasizes that qualitative research aims to understand the phenomenon of what the research subject experiences holistically and by way of description in the form of words and language, in a special natural context. Various written sources, such as books, scientific articles, journals, official reports, policy documents, and other academic sources are used as data sources in literature research. The qualitative approach is used because this research aims to understand in depth the concepts, strategies, and dynamics of the use of social media as a means branding in theoretical and conceptual perspectives, not to test hypotheses statistically.

This research focuses on the literature related to branding theory, digital communication, and educational public relations management. The qualitative approach in literature research allows researchers to study various theories and findings of previous research. The purpose of this study is to build a comprehensive conceptual framework on the optimization of social media as a means of branding Islamic educational institutions.

The data collection technique in this study uses documentation. According to (Sugiyono, 2013), documentation is a record of events that have passed, can be in the form of writings, drawings, or monumental works of a person. Meanwhile, (Arikunto, 2013) Explains that the documentation method is to find data about things or variables in the form of notes, transkrip, books, newspapers, magazines, inscriptions, meeting minutes, and so on. Identifying, collecting, and reviewing various written documents related to research topics is the method used to

conduct documentation. Reliable theory books, previous research results, scientific journals from the last three to five years, and other academic references related to digital-based public relations management, strategies branding education, and social media are included in the document. Additionally, documentation can also include digital archives, institutional reports, and social media content that is relevant for conceptual analysis. This method was chosen because documents are the main source of data that is thoroughly analyzed in literature research.

The data analysis technique in this study uses Content Analysis (content analysis). Content analysis is an analysis method used to analyze and understand the meaning of the content of a document in a systematic, objective, and in-depth manner. (Mayring, 2000) Expand the concept of content analysis into a qualitative approach that emphasizes the interpretation of meaning in depth. Content analysis is an analysis method used to analyze and understand the meaning of the content of a document in a systematic, objective, and in-depth manner. In the case of branding Educational institutions, researchers use content analysis to perform processes such as data reduction, coding, categorization, and withdrawal of important topics. Researchers can identify patterns, ideas, and trends in the literature reviewed through this analysis. The result is a theoretical synthesis that is relevant to the research subject. By using literature research methods, documentation techniques, and content analysis, this research is expected to provide an in-depth and systematic conceptual understanding of social media optimization strategies as a means of branding Islamic educational institutions and provide a strong theoretical foundation to build a strategy branding digital in Islamic educational institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on content analysis (content analysis) against various literature of the last five years that is relevant to the optimization of social media as a means of branding educational institutions, obtained a number of findings that are grouped into three main indicators, namely: (1) content strategy, (2) Audiens commitment, and (3) digital public relations management. Success branding Not only does it depend on the number of social media accounts, it is more important that the account is managed strategically so that it is in accordance with the vision of the institution. According to (Kotler, Philip., 2009) branding It is the process of creating an identity, image, and value that distinguishes an organization from its competitors in the minds of consumers. In the context of education, "consumer" can be interpreted as students, parents, alumni, and the wider community.

The results of the analysis show that content consistency, visual quality, and two-way interaction with the audience greatly influence success branding social media educational institutions. These results are in line with research conducted by (Azim et al., 2024) which states that social media marketing strategies can significantly increase brand awareness and the reputation of educational institutions. In addition, according to research conducted by (Sriyanto, 2024) Trust or belief is an important mediating factor between public decisions about educational institutions and social media activities. To clarify the results of the analysis, here is a summary of the relevant results of previous research. In addition, David Aaker (1991) said that the strength of brands lies in the brand equity, which consists of brand awareness (brand awareness),

perceived quality (quality perception), brand association (brand association), and brand loyalty.

Table 1. Results of Previous Research on Social Media Branding

Yes	Researcher & Year	Research Focus	Key Findings	Research Gap
1	Muhammad Azim & Uddin Sarder (2024)	Social media marketing in college	Increase <i>brand awareness</i> and reputation	Focus on college
2	Sridevi (2024)	Instagram and institutional trust	Trust mediates the decision to choose an institution	There is no specific madrassa
3	Qomariyah (2024)	MAN Public Relations	Digital PR improves image	Haven't discussed content strategy optimization yet
4	Eriani et al (2025)	<i>School branding</i> through social media	<i>Storytelling</i> and visuals consistently reinforce the image	Not yet contextual in madrassas

Table 1 shows that most studies place social media as a tool for promotion and image formation. However, most of the research concentrated at the college or public school level. There has been no research that specifically analyzes social media optimization in madrasah using a comprehensive conceptual approach. This is what causes the research gap.

In addition, the results of the literature categorization conducted for content analysis show that there are three main successful approaches to promoting education through social media: (1) Visual content quality and consistency, (2) active and responsive interaction with audiences, (3) incorporating institutional values into every digital story. Content strategy is a key component in creating an image of an educational institution. This confirms Kotler's branding theory, which emphasizes how important value creation and differentiation are in determining public perception. In addition, the two-way communication method proposed by Grunig in contemporary public relations theory also seems relevant in the context of educational social media.

The results of the study show that social media optimization as a strategy branding affects the frequency of uploads, the quality of messages, the relevance of the content to the audience, and the consistency of visual identity. Strategy branding based on social media should be focused on improving its reputation as

a madrasah that excels in academic achievement and Islamic character development. This study supports the conclusions made (Azim et al., 2024) that social media can help companies become more known. Social media optimization as a method branding will succeed if it is based on three main interrelated principles. The first principle is the same digital identity. The digital identity of an educational institution includes not only the use of a uniform logo or color of the institution, but also the consistency of the institution's message, values, and image in each upload. This concept helps the audience gain brand recognition. When Islamic educational institutions use visuals, taglines, and stories that consistently reflect Islamic values and academic excellence, the public will find it easier to associate madrasahs with a strong and trusted identity. The dissemination of stories for educational and religious purposes is the second principle. Social media not only disseminates government information, they must also convey messages through inspiring stories that raise the principles of Islamic education. Students will build an emotional bond with the audience by narrating religious activities, student achievements, character habituation, and madrasah culture in an engaging way. Symmetrical two-way interaction is the third principle. Social media optimization requires a quick, friendly, and informative response to audience messages, comments, and questions. This two-way communication increases engagement and builds long-term relationships and trust between madrasahs and the community. Madrasah responds to parents of prospective students, alumni, and the surrounding community can increase a positive perception of the institution's openness and professionalism. To create a strategy branding digital that is successful, the three principles must work together. With identity consistency, consumers can more easily understand brands, stories build emotional closeness, and consistent relationships are formed through symmetrical interactions. If all three are used simultaneously, social media will become a strategic tool to build the image and reputation of the madrasah in a sustainable manner other than just being a publication medium.

In the context of Islamic educational institutions, it shows that social media can function as a strategic tool to strengthen the image of madrasahs as competitive and superior Islamic educational institutions. The results of the literature analysis show that the success of social media optimization as a means of madrasah branding is influenced by several main elements that are interrelated, namely content quality, human resource competence, and institutional management support. First, the quality of content published through social media is content that is informative, educational, relevant, and has attractive visuals that tend to be more able to attract the attention of the audience and increase user engagement. These results are in line with research (Eriani, 2025) which states that consistent stories and visualizations can improve the perception of educational institutions. Student outcomes, religious activities, excellent programs, and Islamic values can distinguish madrasahs from other educational institutions. Second, is the human resources of social media managers. Successful digital branding depends not only on the platform used, but also on how its managers design communication strategies, create innovative content, understand audience needs, and make good use of social media. These findings support research (Ramadhani, 2023) which emphasizes that managing social media an educational institution requires an experienced editorial team. Support for policy and institutional management is the third goal. Madrasah leaders must support the optimization of social media through policies, facilities, resources, and collaboration between departments. Without institutional

commitment, social media management tends to be directional and difficult to achieve branding goals. Therefore, social media should not be used only to record activities, but should be included in the organization's public relations and development strategy.

This research produces a social media optimization strategy to improve the image and competitiveness of madrasas. This method is based on the concepts of public relations management, digital communication, and educational branding. It consists of four main stages, namely digital identity planning, strategic content production, strengthening audience interaction, and continuous evaluation. The first stage is digital identity planning, which is determining the main characters and values that the madrasah wants to display to the public. This identity can be realized through the use of logos, colors, slogans, and messages that reflect academic excellence and Islamic values consistently on every social media platform. The consistency of digital identity will help build brand awareness and strengthen the position of madrasas in the midst of competition from educational institutions. A strong digital identity will increase brand awareness and strengthen the position of madrasas in the midst of competition from educational institutions. The second stage is the creation of content that is specifically planned to meet the needs of the audience. In addition to information about school activities, the content includes student achievements, featured programs, religious activities, alumni testimonials, and inspiring stories about madrasah culture. The use of photos, short videos, infographics, and interactive social media features can make the message more engaging and make it more receptive to the public. The third stage is strengthening audience interaction and engagement. Good social media should help madrasas communicate with parents, students, alumni, and the community. In addition to increasing public trust, a prompt response to audience questions, comments, and messages will build closer relationships with stakeholders. High audience engagement enhances the reputation of the institution. In the fourth stage, continuous evaluation and development are carried out. Madrasas should monitor their social media activity by looking at metrics such as account reach, engagement rate, follower growth, and community response to published content. The results of the evaluation are the basis for creating a content strategy that is more in line with the target audience. This optimization method is believed to improve the image of the madrasah because it displays the excellence of the institution consistently, transparently, and easily accessible to the public. In addition, the competitiveness of madrasas will increase because social media can help promote superior programs, student achievements, and the unique characteristics of the institution compared to other educational institutions. Therefore, social media not only serves as an information medium, but can also be used as a strategic tool to improve the reputation and competitive advantage of madrasas in the digital era. Therefore, the findings of this study are relevant to the initial hope that social media can be used strategically to improve the image of madrasas. The study also shows that success relies heavily on professional planning and management rather than just having social media accounts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a literature review conducted with a qualitative approach through content analysis, it can be concluded that the optimization of social media as a means of branding for Islamic educational institutions is a relevant and strategic strategy to deal with the dynamics of competition in

educational institutions in the digital era. Social media has developed into a tool that functions to create public image, reputation, and trust in educational institutions, not just as a means of disseminating information. This optimization will be successful if it is carried out in a planned, consistent, and in accordance with the school's vision and values. The results show that the consistency of digital identity, content packaging in the form of educational and religious stories, and the implementation of responsive and participatory two-way communication are factors that determine the success of branding through social media. These three principles increase the role of madrasas in increasing brand awareness and public trust, especially parents, who are the main decision-makers in choosing schools for students.

The madrasah branding strategy is influenced by three main elements, namely high-quality content, human resource capabilities, and institutional management support. Building a positive image and increasing audience engagement can be achieved through content that is informative, educational, relevant, and visually appealing. Social media managers are also very important to create communication strategies that suit the community. In contrast, professional social media management survives because of good policies, resources, and coordination. As long as these three components are managed properly, social media can function as an effective tool to strengthen the image, reputation, and competitiveness of madrasas in the digital era.

Social media optimization as a madrasah branding strategy can be developed in four main stages: digital identity planning, strategic content production, strengthening audience interaction, and continuous evaluation and development. These four stages form an integrated framework to build an image and increase the competitiveness of madrasas in the market. Interacting with an active and responsive audience also helps build trust and establish ongoing relationships with various stakeholders. Through periodic evaluations, madrasas can continue to adjust the way they communicate with their audiences. Social media can not only be used to disseminate information, but it can also be used as a strategic tool to improve the reputation of the madrasah, increase public trust, and maintain the competitive advantage of the madrasah in an ongoing manner. This finding also answers the research question that social media optimization can be an effective method to strengthen the image and competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions if done professionally and based on the right digital branding strategy. Therefore, this study shows that social media plays an important role in building the reputation of madrasas as a superior, flexible, and reliable Islamic educational institution. In the era of digital transformation, continuous optimization is expected to help improve the organization's reputation and increase the reach of promotions.

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