

## Paradigm Shift: Addressing Digital Identity Crises through Social Media Marketing for Economic Sustainability

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### Abstract:

Digital transformation has intensified organizational challenges in maintaining a sustainable digital identity while strengthening economic resilience through effective stakeholder communication. This study aims to examine how social media marketing addresses digital identity crises and supports economic sustainability. A qualitative case study was employed involving fifteen informants, including institutional leaders, social media administrators, teachers, students, and alums. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, followed by data condensation, reduction, display, verification, and triangulation. The findings indicate that consistent stakeholder engagement strengthens institutional trust, systematic digital identity management improves organizational recognition, and strategic digital marketing enhances sustainable competitiveness through integrated communication practices. The novelty lies in integrating digital identity, stakeholder engagement, and economic sustainability into a unified qualitative framework. These findings provide practical guidance for organizations in developing sustainable digital communication strategies.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/ifei.v2i2.000>

Cite in APA style as:

Saputra, Y. I., Holidi, M., Rahman, M., Khumairotusshiyamah, U., Firdausiyah, R. J., & Mudarris, B. (2026). Paradigm Shift: Addressing Digital Identity Crises through Social Media Marketing for Economic Sustainability. *Islamic Finance and Economic Insights*, 2(2), 67-79.

### Article History

Received: May 2026

Revised: June 2026

Accepted: August 2026

### Keywords

Digital Identity, Social Media Marketing, Stakeholder Engagement, Economic Sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the way organizations establish their public identity, communicate with stakeholders, and sustain economic performance. In contemporary society, digital identity is no longer limited to organizational recognition but has become a strategic asset influencing trust, legitimacy, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability (Kanukova, 2024; Pangrazio et al., 2021; Załoga et al., 2023). Social media platforms have emerged as dominant communication channels that shape stakeholder perceptions and purchasing behavior through continuous interaction and digital engagement. Organizations unable to



develop a consistent and credible digital identity often experience declining visibility, weakened stakeholder confidence, and reduced economic opportunities (Balcioğlu et al., 2025; Duraes et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding how social media marketing contributes to strengthening digital identity has become increasingly important for achieving sustainable economic development in the digital era.

Despite widespread digital transformation, many organizations continue to experience significant challenges in managing their digital identity effectively. The increasing number of digital communication channels has intensified competition for public attention, making it difficult for organizations to differentiate themselves while maintaining authenticity and stakeholder trust (Newsholme et al., 2022; Tarlani et al., 2022). Numerous institutions still rely on conventional promotional approaches, resulting in fragmented branding strategies, inconsistent online communication, and limited audience engagement. These conditions often reduce customer loyalty, restrict market expansion, and weaken organizational resilience in increasingly competitive digital environments (Fitzsimons et al., 2024; Wondirad et al., 2021). Consequently, the inability to integrate strategic social media marketing with digital identity management has become a critical problem that threatens organizational sustainability and long-term economic growth across various sectors.

Previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between social media marketing, digital branding, and organizational performance. For example, Yu et al. (2022), Potwora et al. (2023), and Qizam et al. (2025) emphasized the strategic role of social media in organizational communication, while Chalghoumi et al. (2022) highlighted social media functionalities that influence stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, Camilleri (2022) and Shields et al. (2021) demonstrated the importance of brand identity in creating organizational value, whereas Lee et al. (2021), Memişoğlu et al. (2021), and Onwude et al. (2024) discussed digital marketing as a key driver of customer relationships and business competitiveness. However, previous studies generally investigate social media marketing, branding, and organizational performance separately, providing limited explanation regarding how digital identity crises can be addressed through integrated social media marketing strategies to achieve sustainable economic outcomes. This conceptual fragmentation indicates a significant research gap requiring comprehensive investigation.

The present study addresses this limitation by introducing an integrated perspective that positions digital identity crises as a strategic organizational challenge directly associated with economic sustainability through social media marketing. Unlike previous research that primarily evaluates marketing effectiveness or brand performance independently, this study conceptualizes digital identity as an intermediary mechanism connecting social media marketing activities with sustainable economic performance (Rusydia et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2021). This perspective extends existing theoretical discussions by integrating digital communication, identity construction, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability within a single analytical framework. Therefore, the proposed model offers a novel contribution that advances understanding of how organizations can transform digital identity challenges into opportunities for creating long-term economic resilience and sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on the identified research gap, this study seeks to answer several important research questions. First, how does social media marketing contribute to addressing digital identity crises within contemporary organizations? Second, how does a strengthened digital identity influence economic sustainability through enhanced stakeholder trust, organizational reputation, and market competitiveness? Third, what mechanisms explain the interaction between digital communication strategies and sustainable organizational performance? These questions are particularly relevant because organizations increasingly depend on digital ecosystems to maintain stakeholder relationships while responding to rapidly changing technological environments. Addressing these issues is expected to provide empirical evidence supporting more effective strategic decision-making for sustainable organizational development.

This study argues that effective social media marketing serves as a strategic instrument capable of mitigating digital identity crises by enhancing organizational visibility, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and fostering trust that supports sustainable economic performance. The originality of this research lies in integrating digital identity crises, social media marketing, and economic sustainability into a unified conceptual framework that has received limited scholarly attention. The proposed framework contributes theoretically by enriching digital marketing and sustainability literature while providing practical implications for organizations seeking to improve digital competitiveness. Ultimately, the findings are expected to support policymakers, organizational leaders, and marketing practitioners in developing adaptive digital strategies that strengthen resilience and ensure long-term economic sustainability in increasingly dynamic digital environments.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of how social media marketing addresses digital identity crises and contributes to economic sustainability (Kohn et al., 2024). The case study design was selected because it enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within their real-life organizational context, where the boundaries between digital communication practices and institutional environments are often indistinct. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research emphasizes participants' experiences, perceptions, organizational strategies, and social interactions rather than numerical measurements. This design also facilitates comprehensive interpretation of organizational narratives, digital practices, and stakeholder engagement that collectively influence sustainable economic development.

The research was conducted at Manbaul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, Tangsil Wetan, Bondowoso, East Java, Indonesia. This institution was purposively selected because it actively utilizes social media while continuing to develop systematic digital marketing strategies that support institutional sustainability. Furthermore, the pesantren possesses a strong educational tradition, an extensive alum network, and increasing public engagement through digital platforms, making it an appropriate setting for this investigation. The study involved fifteen informants consisting of two

pesantren leaders, three social media administrators, four teachers, three active students, and three alums. Their diverse backgrounds provided multiple perspectives regarding digital identity formation, organizational communication, and economic sustainability initiatives.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding and triangulation (Kekeya, 2023). First, document analysis was conducted by reviewing institutional reports, promotional materials, digital archives, strategic planning documents, and official social media content published through Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and the institution's website. Second, non-participant observations examined social media activities, audience engagement, interaction patterns, and content management practices over the research period. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants using flexible interview protocols that encouraged detailed explanations of their experiences and perceptions. Field notes and supporting documentation complemented the interview findings to strengthen contextual interpretation and enrich empirical evidence.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Cole, 2024). The first stage involved data condensation by selecting, simplifying, coding, and categorizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents according to the research objectives. Subsequently, data reduction organized relevant information into meaningful thematic categories while excluding redundant or unrelated findings. The third stage consisted of data display through matrices, thematic tables, conceptual diagrams, and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation and identify emerging relationships among variables. Finally, data verification was performed by comparing evidence across different sources, identifying recurring patterns, and continuously refining conclusions until coherent and credible interpretations were established.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed several qualitative validation strategies (P. S. Lee et al., 2024). Source triangulation compared information obtained from pesantren leaders, administrators, teachers, students, alums, and institutional documents, while methodological triangulation integrated interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to selected informants for confirmation of interpretation and factual accuracy. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers was undertaken to minimize subjective bias during coding and interpretation. In addition, maintaining an audit trail documenting research decisions, analytical procedures, and data management processes enhanced the dependability, confirmability, transferability, and overall credibility of the research findings.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The findings of this study illustrate how social media marketing contributes to strengthening stakeholder engagement, sustaining institutional digital identity, and enhancing organizational competitiveness. These findings were generated through interviews, observations, and documentation, providing comprehensive evidence regarding the implementation of digital communication strategies within the

pesantren. The following sections present each finding in detail, followed by interpretations based on field evidence to explain how strategic digital marketing supports sustainable economic resilience through integrated institutional digital transformation.

### **Stakeholder engagement improves long-term economic resilience significantly**

Stakeholder engagement in this study refers to the active involvement of pesantren stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, alums, and the surrounding community, in establishing reciprocal communication through social media platforms that supports institutional sustainability. Operationally, stakeholder engagement was identified through continuous interaction between the institution and its audiences, reflected in communication intensity, responsiveness, participation in online activities, and collaborative promotion of institutional programs. Field findings indicate that stakeholder engagement extends beyond digital interaction, contributing to stronger institutional trust, expanded public participation, and wider dissemination of educational information. These interactions gradually create social capital that supports institutional reputation while strengthening opportunities for sustainable economic resilience through broader community support and participation.

Interviews with institutional leaders and social media administrators revealed that stakeholder engagement significantly influences public confidence and organizational sustainability. One social media administrator explained, "We consistently respond to comments and messages because people appreciate direct interaction, making them feel connected to the institution." Likewise, a pesantren leader stated, "Many prospective students first learn about our activities through social media before deciding to visit or register." These statements indicate that interactive communication strengthens public trust by creating accessible and transparent relationships. The researcher interprets these findings as evidence that stakeholder engagement functions not merely as a communication activity but as a strategic process that reinforces institutional credibility and encourages long-term community participation.

Interviews with students and alums further demonstrated that stakeholder engagement extends beyond institutional communication into collaborative promotion and advocacy. An active student stated, "We voluntarily share pesantren activities because we are proud to introduce our learning environment to friends and relatives." Similarly, an alumnus explained, "Social media keeps us connected with the pesantren, encouraging alumni to participate in events and provide various forms of support." These responses illustrate that digital engagement strengthens emotional attachment among stakeholders while encouraging voluntary contributions that benefit institutional development. The researcher interprets these findings as indicating that stakeholder engagement generates sustainable social networks capable of reinforcing institutional resilience through continuous participation and collective responsibility.

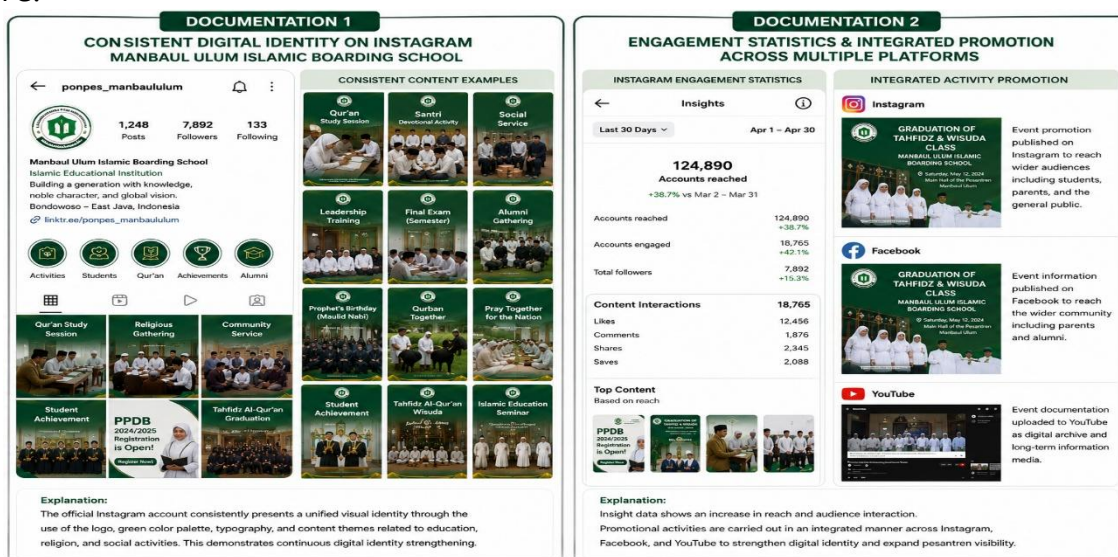
Observational findings confirmed consistent interaction between the pesantren and its stakeholders across multiple social media platforms. Researchers observed regular publication of educational activities, religious events, student achievements, community services, and promotional content accompanied by active responses to public comments and inquiries. Audience members frequently interacted through likes,

comments, content sharing, and participation in online discussions. These observable practices demonstrate that communication occurred continuously rather than sporadically, indicating systematic efforts to maintain stakeholder relationships. Restating these findings, the field evidence shows that sustained digital interaction has become an integral institutional practice that encourages public engagement, strengthens organizational visibility, and supports broader participation in institutional development initiatives.

Overall, the collected data demonstrate a consistent pattern showing that stakeholder engagement contributes positively to long-term economic resilience through sustained digital interaction and community participation. The interview findings reveal increasing trust, stronger emotional attachment, and voluntary stakeholder involvement, while observational evidence confirms that these interactions occur regularly within institutional communication practices. Together, these findings indicate that continuous engagement fosters supportive relationships extending beyond online communication into tangible institutional benefits. This pattern suggests that effective stakeholder engagement strengthens organizational legitimacy, expands opportunities for collaboration, encourages broader public support, and establishes a sustainable foundation for maintaining institutional resilience in an increasingly competitive digital environment.

### Social media strengthens institutional digital identity sustainability

Social media strengthening institutional digital identity sustainability is operationally defined as the continuous process through which the pesantren develops, maintains, and consistently communicates its institutional identity across digital platforms. In the field, this process is reflected through standardized visual branding, consistent publication schedules, institutional logos, educational narratives, religious values, documentation of activities, and unified communication styles across Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Sustainable digital identity is demonstrated not only by the frequency of content publication but also by the consistency of messages representing the institution's vision, mission, educational values, and organizational culture.



**Figure 1. Documentation Panel of Social Media Strengthens Institutional Digital Identity Sustainability**

Observational findings indicate that the pesantren consistently maintains visual and communication standards across its official social media platforms. Researchers observed that uploaded content predominantly featured educational activities, religious programs, student achievements, community engagement, and institutional announcements presented using similar visual layouts and messaging styles. Institutional logos and identity elements appeared consistently throughout digital publications, while posting schedules were maintained regularly to sustain audience engagement. This consistency suggests deliberate management rather than incidental publication practices. The researcher interprets these observations as evidence that systematic digital content management has become an organizational strategy for preserving institutional identity while strengthening public recognition and long-term digital sustainability.

Restating the findings, the collected documentation demonstrates that the pesantren has successfully transformed social media into a strategic medium for maintaining institutional identity rather than simply disseminating information. Consistent visual branding, coordinated messaging, standardized publication practices, and integrated platform management collectively reinforce how stakeholders recognize and differentiate the institution within digital environments. The documented evidence indicates that digital identity is continuously reproduced through everyday communication activities, creating a recognizable institutional image over time. In other words, the sustainability of digital identity emerges because organizational values and visual characteristics are communicated repeatedly and consistently across different social media platforms.

The overall pattern emerging from the documentation and observational findings demonstrates that institutional digital identity sustainability depends on consistency rather than publication frequency alone. All documented evidence reveals interconnected practices involving standardized branding, coordinated communication strategies, regular content production, and integrated platform management. These elements collectively establish a recognizable digital presence that strengthens institutional legitimacy and public trust. The pattern further indicates that sustainable digital identity is gradually developed through continuous organizational commitment to maintaining coherent visual representation and institutional narratives. Consequently, social media functions as a long-term strategic asset supporting institutional visibility, credibility, and sustainable organizational development within increasingly competitive digital environments.

### **Strategic digital marketing enhances organizational competitiveness sustainably**

Strategic digital marketing is operationally defined as the systematic implementation of planned digital communication activities that strengthen institutional competitiveness through consistent content management, audience interaction, platform optimization, and promotional integration. In the research setting, this strategy was identified through observable digital marketing practices implemented by the pesantren across its official social media platforms. The operational indicators included posting consistency, diversity of content categories, responsiveness to audience interactions, utilization of hashtags and visual branding, integration of promotional campaigns across multiple platforms, and continuous

dissemination of institutional information. These observable activities collectively demonstrate how digital marketing functions as an organizational strategy supporting sustainable competitiveness within an increasingly dynamic digital environment.

**Table 1. Observation Results of Strategic Digital Marketing Practices**

<b>Observed Digital Marketing Activity</b>	<b>Observation Indicator</b>	<b>Field Observation Result</b>
Content publication consistency	Posting schedule	Educational and institutional content was uploaded regularly throughout the observation period.
Audience interaction	Administrator responsiveness	Comments and direct messages received timely responses from administrators.
Content diversity	Content variation	Posts included education, religious activities, achievements, admissions, alums, and community service.
Visual branding	Identity consistency	Logo, typography, color palette, and content templates remained consistent across publications.
Hashtag utilization	Digital discoverability	Relevant hashtags were consistently applied to improve content visibility.
Cross-platform promotion	Platform integration	Institutional information was simultaneously distributed through Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.
User engagement	Audience participation	Likes, comments, shares, and reposts increased during institutional event promotions.
Promotional strategy	Marketing sustainability	Promotional activities emphasized long-term institutional reputation rather than short-term campaigns.

The observational findings presented in Table 1 indicate that strategic digital marketing was implemented through coordinated and consistent institutional practices rather than isolated promotional activities. The researcher observed that regular content publication, responsive communication, integrated branding, and multi-platform dissemination collectively strengthened organizational visibility within digital environments. Audience participation increased during educational and institutional campaigns, reflecting effective interaction between the institution and its stakeholders. Restating these findings, the observed digital marketing strategy demonstrates an organized communication system designed to enhance institutional competitiveness through continuous audience engagement, recognizable digital identity, and sustained promotional activities. These observations confirm that competitiveness develops through systematic digital management rather than occasional online presence.

Overall, the observational data reveal a clear and interconnected pattern demonstrating that sustainable organizational competitiveness emerges from consistent digital marketing implementation across multiple communication dimensions. Posting regularity supports audience retention, responsive communication strengthens stakeholder relationships, integrated branding improves institutional recognition, and diversified content expands public engagement. Simultaneously, cross-platform promotion broadens information dissemination while strategic hashtag utilization enhances digital discoverability. These activities reinforce one another, creating a comprehensive digital ecosystem that continuously strengthens organizational competitiveness. The observed pattern suggests that sustainability is achieved not through isolated marketing efforts but through coordinated digital strategies maintained consistently over time.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that social media marketing functions as a strategic mechanism for strengthening stakeholder engagement, sustaining institutional digital identity, and enhancing organizational competitiveness. These three dimensions are interconnected, indicating that sustainable economic resilience depends not only on technological adoption but also on the consistency of communication, institutional branding, and stakeholder participation (Gómez et al., 2023; Moustapha et al., 2022; Shipman et al., 2023). The following discussion compares these findings with previous scholarly studies and highlights areas of convergence and divergence. It explains their theoretical and practical implications for organizations seeking to establish sustainable digital strategies within increasingly competitive and dynamic digital environments (Sarlawat et al., 2025; Sgroi, 2022).

The finding that stakeholder engagement contributes to long-term economic resilience supports previous studies arguing that interactive digital communication strengthens organizational trust and stakeholder commitment. Earlier studies emphasized that continuous engagement encourages stronger organizational legitimacy through reciprocal communication and relationship building (Comi et al., 2022; Mafarja et al., 2023). The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that stakeholder engagement not only reinforces institutional credibility but also generates collective participation that supports long-term organizational sustainability. Unlike previous discussions that primarily focused on customer satisfaction or communication effectiveness, this study highlights stakeholder engagement as a strategic organizational resource directly contributing to economic resilience (Dorokhova et al., 2023; Hanif et al., 2022). Theoretically, this broadens stakeholder engagement literature, while practically encouraging organizations to prioritize continuous digital interaction.

The findings regarding institutional digital identity sustainability are consistent with previous literature explaining that consistent branding and integrated communication enhance organizational recognition and public trust. Existing research generally considers digital identity as a branding outcome shaped through visual consistency and communication quality (Budayan et al., 2022; Crespi et al., 2022). However, this study demonstrates that digital identity also functions as a dynamic organizational capability continuously reproduced through systematic digital activities and institutional narratives. This finding expands existing theoretical perspectives by positioning digital identity as an essential determinant of organizational sustainability rather than merely a communication asset (Amoako et al., 2023; Herlina, 2024; Said et al., 2022). Practically, institutions should implement standardized branding guidelines and integrated content management systems to maintain consistent digital representation across multiple platforms.

The observation that strategic digital marketing enhances sustainable organizational competitiveness aligns with studies emphasizing digital marketing as a driver of organizational performance and competitive advantage. Nevertheless, the present findings indicate that competitiveness emerges not simply from promotional intensity but from coordinated implementation involving content consistency, audience

responsiveness, platform integration, and strategic communication planning. This interpretation differs from earlier marketing perspectives that often emphasize campaign outcomes or technological adoption independently. Theoretically, the findings integrate digital marketing with organizational competitiveness and sustainability into a unified framework. Practically, institutions should develop comprehensive digital marketing strategies emphasizing long-term relationship building instead of isolated promotional campaigns targeting immediate visibility.

Collectively, the three findings reveal that stakeholder engagement, institutional digital identity, and strategic digital marketing operate as complementary organizational capabilities supporting sustainable economic resilience. Previous studies frequently examined these constructs independently, whereas this research demonstrates their interconnected nature within a comprehensive digital transformation process. This integrated perspective contributes theoretically by proposing a holistic understanding of sustainable organizational competitiveness in digital environments. From a practical perspective, educational institutions and other organizations should formulate digital governance policies integrating stakeholder communication, identity management, and strategic marketing into unified operational frameworks. Such integration enables organizations to strengthen public trust, maintain institutional relevance, and achieve sustainable competitiveness over time.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that strategic social media marketing effectively addresses digital identity crises by strengthening stakeholder engagement, sustaining institutional digital identity, and enhancing long-term organizational competitiveness, thereby supporting economic sustainability. The principal insight is that digital transformation requires integrated communication, consistent branding, and active stakeholder participation rather than technological adoption alone. The study contributes theoretically by integrating digital identity, stakeholder engagement, and economic sustainability into a unified qualitative framework. Nevertheless, the findings are limited to a single Islamic boarding school case. Future research should examine multiple institutions using comparative or mixed-method approaches to improve generalizability and explore broader organizational contexts.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The authors sincerely express their gratitude to the management, teachers, students, alums, and social media administrators of Manbaul Ulum Islamic Boarding School for their valuable participation and cooperation throughout this research. Appreciation is also extended to all individuals who contributed to data collection, discussion, and the successful completion of this study.

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