

## Social Media Marketing Dynamics: Optimizing Consumer Choices in Enhancing Islamic Educational Institutional Competitiveness

Ittaqillah Haitsuma Kunta<sup>1✉</sup>, Hafidatun Nabila<sup>2</sup>, Ida Kusumawati<sup>3</sup>, Moh. Mohlas<sup>4</sup>,  
Muhammad Durrin Ni'am<sup>5</sup>, Zackyl Musthofa<sup>6</sup>

Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

### Abstract:

Social media has transformed educational services into increasingly competitive markets requiring effective digital marketing strategies. This study aims to analyze social media marketing dynamics to optimize consumer choices and enhance the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. A qualitative case study was conducted at an Islamic educational institution, involving 12 purposively selected informants, including institutional leaders, social media administrators, parents, and students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using data condensation, reduction, display, and verification techniques. The findings revealed that interactive content stimulated enrollment intentions; social media accounts maintained communication with 4-5 weekly uploads and responses within 24 hours; and documentary evidence indicated an increase in followers, positive testimonials, and rising student admissions. This study contributes by integrating digital marketing, consumer behavior, and institutional competitiveness within Islamic education. Institutions are recommended to strengthen interactive content, communication consistency, and transparent information dissemination to sustain competitive advantages.

✉Corresponding Author: [itaqillah19@gmail.com](mailto:itaqillah19@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

The expansion of digital communication technologies has transformed the economic landscape, including the marketization of educational services and institutional competition. Social media marketing has become increasingly important because prospective students and their families behave as consumers who actively compare information, evaluate institutional reputations, and make educational



decisions based on online interactions (Alsaleh, 2021; Ramírez et al., 2021; Ray et al., 2021). This phenomenon is particularly significant for Islamic educational institutions that seek to maintain sustainability while competing in an increasingly dynamic educational market. Empirical evidence indicates that social networking platforms influence consumer perceptions, brand awareness, and purchasing intentions across various service sectors, including education (Lyu et al., 2020; Zibarzani et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding social media marketing dynamics is essential, as effective digital promotion strategies can strengthen institutional competitiveness, improve consumer decision-making, and support long-term educational development.

Despite the widespread adoption of social media platforms, many Islamic educational institutions continue to struggle to optimize digital marketing practices to attract prospective students. Numerous institutions still rely on conventional promotional approaches, resulting in limited audience engagement, weak brand positioning, and ineffective communication with stakeholders (Javaid et al., 2021; Suleimankadieva et al., 2022). In practice, prospective students and parents frequently encounter difficulties in obtaining transparent, persuasive, and relevant information regarding academic quality, tuition affordability, facilities, and graduate outcomes. These conditions create information asymmetry that may reduce consumer confidence and affect enrollment decisions (Hafez et al., 2020; Putri, 2025). Furthermore, the growing number of educational providers intensifies market competition, compelling Islamic educational institutions to develop innovative social media strategies to influence consumer preferences and strengthen their competitiveness.

Previous studies have highlighted the strategic role of social media in influencing consumer behavior and organizational performance. Cășvean et al. (2021), Manser et al. (2021), Rather et al. (2021) emphasized that digital marketing activities contribute significantly to consumer engagement and purchasing decisions. Badr (2022), Ngao et al. (2022), and Fadli et al. (2024) argued that social media platforms facilitate interactive communication and relationship building between organizations and consumers. Maulana et al. (2025) and Anggraini et al. (2022) reported that social media campaigns improve brand equity and customer loyalty. Meanwhile, Arafah et al. (2025), Najiburrahman et al. (2025), Hamdan et al. (2021) demonstrated that online consumer interactions affect service evaluations and decision-making processes. However, earlier studies predominantly focused on commercial industries, higher education branding, or general educational services. Limited research specifically examines how social media marketing dynamics shape consumer choices and enhance the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions from an economic perspective.

This study offers a novel perspective by integrating social media marketing, consumer choice behavior, and institutional competitiveness into a comprehensive framework for Islamic educational institutions. Existing research commonly investigates these variables separately, emphasizing either marketing effectiveness, educational quality, or organizational competitiveness without considering their interrelationships (Meepung et al., 2021; Mukti et al., 2022; Souto, 2022). Moreover, previous studies often overlook educational institutions as economic entities that compete for consumers, financial resources, and market recognition. Addressing this

limitation is important because Islamic educational institutions increasingly depend on strategic marketing initiatives to sustain enrollment growth and operational performance. By examining the interaction between digital promotional activities and consumer decision-making, this study advances current knowledge and responds to contemporary challenges in the educational service economy (Kumar et al., 2024; Lavoye et al., 2022).

Based on the aforementioned issues, several research questions emerge regarding the effectiveness of social media marketing in supporting institutional competitiveness. It remains unclear how social media content, interactivity, accessibility, and online engagement influence prospective students' preferences when selecting Islamic educational institutions. In addition, insufficient empirical evidence exists to determine whether optimized social media marketing practices can strengthen institutional positioning and create competitive advantages in educational markets. The lack of integrated studies examining these relationships hinders the development of evidence-based marketing strategies for educational managers. Consequently, this research seeks to analyze the dynamics of social media marketing, examine its role in optimizing consumer choices, and evaluate its contribution to enhancing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions.

This research argues that effective social media marketing is a strategic economic instrument that can influence consumer choices and enhance the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. Interactive communication, attractive content presentation, and responsive online engagement are expected to increase consumer trust, strengthen institutional reputation, and encourage enrollment intentions among prospective students. The originality of this study lies in positioning students and parents as consumers in the educational service market and conceptualizing Islamic educational institutions as organizations competing in a digital-economy environment. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the marketing and educational competitiveness literature and, practically, by providing recommendations for institutional leaders on designing data-driven social media marketing strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantages.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the dynamics of social media marketing in optimizing consumer choices and enhancing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions (Kohn et al., 2024). A qualitative approach was selected because the research aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding digital marketing practices and their influence on educational decision-making. The case study design was considered appropriate, as it enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena in their real-life contexts and examine complex interactions among social media activities, consumer behavior, and institutional competitiveness.

The research was conducted at an Islamic educational institution that has actively used social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, for promotional and communication purposes. The institution was purposively selected because it has implemented digital marketing strategies for student recruitment and

institutional branding, making it relevant to this study's objectives. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in and experience with social media management and educational decision-making processes. A total of 12 informants participated in the study, comprising three institutional leaders responsible for strategic planning, three social media administrators involved in content creation and online engagement, three parents of enrolled students, and three students who selected the institution after accessing information on social media platforms.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Cole, 2024; Kekeya, 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions regarding social media marketing strategies, consumer preferences, and institutional competitiveness. Participant observation focused on examining social media interactions, promotional activities, audience engagement, and digital communication practices. Document analysis involved reviewing institutional reports, promotional materials, social media analytics, and enrollment records to support and enrich the findings obtained from interviews and observations.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, encompassing four stages: data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification (Fadli, 2021; Lee et al., 2024). Data condensation was undertaken by selecting and simplifying relevant information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Data reduction involved categorizing data according to emerging themes related to social media marketing dynamics, consumer choices, and institutional competitiveness. Subsequently, data were organized and presented in matrices and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Finally, data verification was conducted continuously by comparing findings across multiple sources and confirming the consistency of identified patterns before concluding.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed several data validity checks, including source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from institutional leaders, social media administrators, parents, and students. Technique triangulation involved cross-checking findings derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was performed by returning interview summaries to selected informants for confirmation and clarification. At the same time, peer debriefing was undertaken through discussions with fellow researchers to minimize subjective interpretation and enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research results.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The findings demonstrate that social media marketing substantially shapes consumer preferences and strengthens the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. Interactive content, continuous online communication, and consumer trust emerged as interconnected dimensions influencing enrollment decisions, institutional visibility, and sustainable growth. These results are further discussed by comparing them with existing literature and highlighting their implications.

## Interactive Content Encourages Student Enrollment Intentions

Interactive content that encourages student enrollment intentions refers to digital promotional materials distributed via social media platforms that motivate prospective students and parents to consider, evaluate, and ultimately select an Islamic educational institution. In this study, interactive content was operationally defined as respondents' recognition of informative videos, student activity highlights, testimonials, comment interactions, question-and-answer sessions, and visual storytelling uploaded to institutional social media accounts. Enrollment intention was reflected in participants' expressions of interest, willingness to seek further information, motivation to visit the institution, and readiness to complete registration procedures. The concept was observed through participants' experiences regarding how digital content influenced their perceptions, preferences, and decision-making processes before officially enrolling in the institution.

Interviews with students and parents revealed that attractive and informative content significantly influenced their initial interest in the institution. One student explained, "I first followed the institution's Instagram account because the videos showed classroom activities and student achievements, making me curious to know more." A parent similarly stated, "The testimonials uploaded by previous parents convinced me because they explained the learning environment and religious programs clearly." These statements indicate that interactive content not only provides information but also fosters emotional engagement among audiences. The researcher interprets these findings as evidence that prospective consumers tend to respond positively to visual and experiential representations that reduce uncertainty regarding educational quality.

Additional interviews demonstrated that online interactions encouraged participants to continue exploring institutional information before making enrollment decisions. A student reported, "I asked several questions through direct messages and received quick responses from the administrator, which made me feel appreciated." Another parent mentioned, "Watching live sessions and reading comments from other parents helped me understand the institution better before registering my child." The findings suggest that responsiveness and audience participation strengthen consumers' confidence during the selection process. The researcher interprets these experiences as indicating that two-way communication facilitates trust-building mechanisms, enabling prospective students and parents to perceive the institution as transparent, approachable, and capable of meeting educational expectations.

Observations of institutional social media accounts showed frequent uploads featuring short videos, student competitions, religious activities, and promotional posters accompanied by interactive captions. Administrators regularly responded to comments, provided additional information, and encouraged audiences to participate in discussions through polls and question stickers. Several posts generated substantial engagement, including likes, shares, and positive comments from followers. These observations confirm the interview findings that digital interactions influence enrollment considerations among prospective consumers. In other words, social media content functions not only as a promotional medium but also as an engagement mechanism that simplifies information acquisition, strengthens emotional attachment, and increases audiences' willingness to pursue registration.

The data pattern demonstrates that enrollment intentions emerge through a gradual process beginning with exposure to attractive content, followed by audience interaction, information seeking, and finally decision-making. Participants who actively engaged with videos, testimonials, and interactive communication features appeared more motivated to gather further information and eventually register. The consistency between interview responses and observational findings suggests that content attractiveness and communication responsiveness are essential determinants of consumer preferences when selecting Islamic educational institutions.

### Online Communication Improves Institutional Competitive Advantage

Online communication that enhances institutional competitive advantage involves using social media platforms as strategic channels to disseminate information, maintain relationships with audiences, and differentiate institutional services from competitors. In this study, online communication was measured operationally through observable activities, including posting frequency, administrator responsiveness, use of live-streaming features, publication of reels and stories, and audience engagement indicators. Competitive advantage was reflected in the institution’s ability to maintain visibility, attract wider audiences, strengthen its reputation, and present unique educational characteristics compared with competing institutions. The phenomenon was examined through direct observations of institutional social media activities and the consistency of communication practices conducted during the research period.

**Table 1. Observation of Online Communication Improves Institutional Competitive Advantage**

Observation Activity	Indicator	Researcher Findings
Posting educational content	Upload frequency	Posts uploaded 4–5 times weekly
Responding to comments	Response speed	Replies are generally provided within 24 hours
Utilizing Instagram Stories	Daily updates	Stories are shared almost every day
Conducting live sessions	Audience participation	Live sessions attended by numerous viewers
Publishing short videos	Engagement level	Reels received higher interactions than static posts
Sharing student achievements	Branding efforts	Positive audience reactions frequently appeared

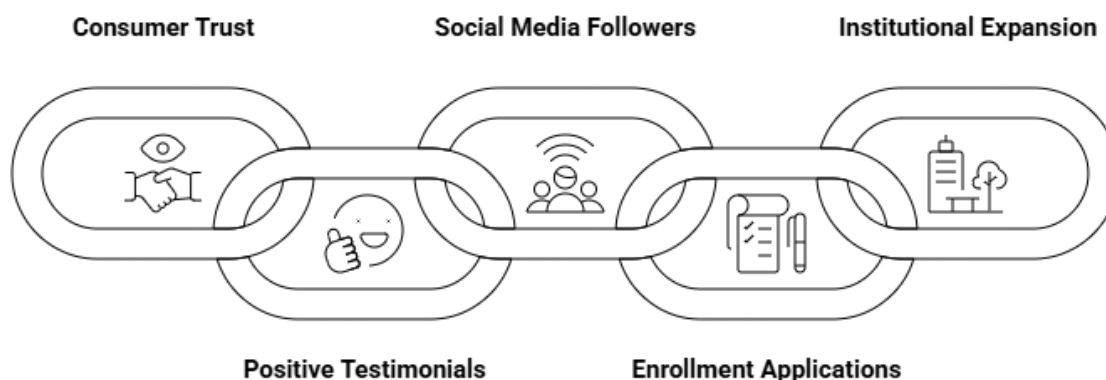
The observations indicate that the institution consistently implemented diverse communication strategies to sustain audience engagement. Frequent uploads enabled followers to access up-to-date information, while timely responses to comments demonstrated attentiveness to prospective consumers. The use of stories and live sessions created opportunities for real-time interaction, enabling audiences to experience institutional activities virtually. Reels attracted higher engagement than conventional images, suggesting that audiences preferred dynamic, visually appealing content formats. Restating these findings, online communication practices help maintain institutional visibility and strengthen market positioning.

The observational data reveal a consistent communication pattern characterized by regular content dissemination, rapid audience responses, and the strategic use of

multiple social media features. Institutions demonstrating intensive online communication appeared capable of sustaining stronger relationships with followers and presenting themselves as more active and adaptive organizations. Dynamic content formats generated broader engagement, while real-time communication mechanisms facilitated greater accessibility for prospective students and parents. Overall, the findings suggest that competitive advantage is determined not only by educational quality but also by institutions' ability to communicate effectively in digital environments. Sustained communication practices, therefore, become essential components that support institutional differentiation and long-term competitiveness.

### Consumer Trust Supports Sustainable Educational Growth

Consumer trust supporting sustainable educational growth refers to stakeholders' confidence in an institution's credibility, transparency, and educational performance, which, in turn, contributes to sustained enrollment and organizational development. In this research, consumer trust was operationalized through documentary evidence of public appreciation, parental satisfaction, and institutional recognition. Sustainable educational growth was reflected in increasing student enrollment, expanding online audiences, and consistent participation in institutional activities. Documentary materials included social media posts, screenshots of testimonials, digital brochures, photographs of academic events, achievement certificates, and annual enrollment reports. These documents were used to understand how trust manifests in visible achievements and how it contributes to the maintenance of institutional growth over time.



**Figure 1. Building Institutional Growth**

Document analysis demonstrated that the institution regularly uploaded photographs depicting religious celebrations, student competitions, community service programs, and graduation ceremonies. Testimonials from parents frequently highlighted satisfaction with educational services and students' character development. Enrollment records indicated a gradual increase in student admissions over several academic years, while social media analytics revealed steady follower growth and high engagement rates. The researcher interprets these findings as indications that trust has been successfully established through transparent communication and visible educational achievements. Documentation materials provide tangible evidence that stakeholders recognize institutional credibility and contribute positively to sustaining educational development and maintaining organizational stability.

Restating the documentary evidence, consumer trust is reflected not only in verbal expressions of satisfaction but also in observable indicators demonstrating institutional progress. Testimonials reflect stakeholders' confidence, whereas increases in followers and enrollment numbers indicate broader public recognition. Achievement certificates and event photographs further strengthen perceptions regarding institutional quality and accountability. The researcher interprets this relationship as indicating that trust serves as a strategic asset that supports institutional continuity. When stakeholders consistently observe positive outcomes and transparent communication practices, they become more willing to recommend the institution to others, thereby generating opportunities for sustained educational expansion and reinforcing the institution's position within competitive educational environments.

The documentary data exhibit a sequential pattern in which trust emerges from institutional transparency, develops through repeated positive experiences, and ultimately contributes to sustainable growth. Testimonials, social media expansion, and increasing enrollment collectively indicate that consumer trust evolves gradually and becomes an important resource for maintaining institutional competitiveness. The consistency of documentary evidence suggests that educational institutions capable of preserving stakeholder confidence are more likely to achieve long-term development and adapt successfully to changing market conditions.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that interactive content significantly encourages student enrollment intentions by stimulating prospective students' and parents' interest, reducing uncertainty, and strengthening emotional attachment toward Islamic educational institutions. These results are consistent with the arguments of Kotler and Keller, who emphasized that digital marketing communication influences consumer decision-making through access to information and opportunities for engagement. Likewise, Marcos et al. (2022) and Castiglione (2023) suggested that social media enables organizations to establish interactive relationships with audiences, thereby increasing participation and attention. However, the present study extends prior research by demonstrating that videos showcasing religious activities, testimonials, and direct communication not only disseminate information but also facilitate trust-building. In practice, educational managers should prioritize developing attractive visual content and responsive communication systems to improve the effectiveness of student recruitment.

The results also reveal that continuous online communication contributes to institutional competitive advantage through frequent content dissemination, prompt responses, and strategic utilization of social media features. These findings support the work of Heru et al. (2024) and Gustiningsi et al. (2024), who argued that consistent digital engagement strengthens organizational visibility and brand positioning. Similarly, Hennig-Thurau and colleagues highlighted that online interactions influence consumers' evaluations and perceptions regarding service quality. Nevertheless, unlike previous studies that focus mainly on commercial organizations, this research demonstrates that Islamic educational institutions can employ online communication practices to distinguish themselves in highly competitive educational markets (Bednar et al., 2020; Ortega et al., 2021; Vetter et al., 2023). In practice, institutions should

maintain communication consistency and diversify content formats to preserve audience engagement and institutional relevance.

Another important finding concerns the role of consumer trust in supporting sustainable educational growth. Documentary evidence showed that testimonials, growing social media followings, and rising enrollment figures collectively reflect stakeholders' confidence in institutional performance. This observation aligns with previous marketing studies suggesting that trust serves as a valuable intangible asset that influences consumer loyalty and long-term organizational sustainability (Avazpour et al., 2024; Fei et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that trust within Islamic educational institutions develops through repeated exposure to transparent communication and visible educational achievements rather than through transactional experiences alone. This distinction broadens the understanding of trust formation by emphasizing moral credibility, educational accountability, and social recognition as essential determinants (Córdoba et al., 2021; Patel, 2022; Samper et al., 2021). Practically, institutional leaders should continuously communicate achievements and maintain transparency to preserve stakeholder confidence and support sustainable growth.

The three findings collectively indicate that social media marketing dynamics operate through an integrated process that begins with exposure to interactive content, continues through online communication practices, and culminates in the development of consumer trust. This sequence differs from earlier studies that commonly examined social media activities, consumer behavior, and competitiveness as independent constructs. The current study demonstrates that these dimensions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, particularly within the context of Islamic educational institutions functioning in an increasingly market-oriented environment. Theoretically, the study contributes to the educational marketing literature by proposing a comprehensive framework that links digital engagement, consumer choice behavior, and institutional competitiveness. Such a framework provides a more holistic understanding of educational institutions as service organizations competing for consumers and financial sustainability.

Overall, the findings imply that social media should no longer be perceived merely as a promotional instrument but rather as a strategic economic resource capable of creating competitive advantages and sustaining institutional development. Institutions that invest in high-quality content production, responsive communication mechanisms, and transparent information dissemination are more likely to attract prospective students and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders. The study, therefore, contributes practically by offering evidence-based recommendations for administrators of Islamic educational institutions seeking to optimize digital marketing initiatives. Furthermore, the findings suggest that adapting to evolving consumer expectations and digital communication trends is essential to ensuring institutional resilience and maintaining competitiveness in contemporary educational markets.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that social media marketing is a strategic means of optimizing consumer choices and enhancing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. The most important finding is that interactive content, continuous online

communication, and consumer trust function as interconnected dimensions that influence enrollment intentions, institutional visibility, and sustainable growth. The lesson learned from this research is that educational institutions should no longer perceive social media merely as a promotional tool but as an economic resource capable of generating competitive advantages and strengthening stakeholder relationships. Academically, this study contributes by integrating digital marketing, consumer behavior, and institutional competitiveness into a comprehensive framework within the context of Islamic education. Nevertheless, the study was limited to a single institution and a relatively small number of informants. Future studies should involve multiple institutions, larger sample sizes, and mixed-methods approaches.

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