

# Transforming Educational Marketing in the Digital Era: Strategies for Utilizing Social Media to Increase the Competitiveness of Secondary Education Institutions

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## Abstract

This research focuses on the implementation of educational marketing strategies through social media at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang, with the aim of analyzing the impact of these strategies on school visibility and competitiveness. This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of education actors related to the use of social media as a marketing tool. The data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of social media content, involving various stakeholders at the school. The results show that the use of social media, particularly the Facebook and Instagram platforms, has significantly increased public engagement and strengthened the school's image in the community. The implications of this study show that marketing strategies through social media can be an effective tool to increase the competitiveness of educational institutions, as long as they are well managed and supported by adequate resources. This research contributes to the education management literature by offering a marketing model that is adaptive to the development of digital technology.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, social media has become an integral part of daily life, not only as a means of communication but also as a strategic tool in various sectors, including education (Herring, 2021; Huggins & Ritzhaupt, 2021; Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021). Data shows that in 2022, more than 80% of Indonesia's population is an active user of social media, with Facebook and Instagram as the most popular platforms (Nasution, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Brown et al., 2022; Rusdi, Suhermanto, & Ali, 2022). In the midst of increasingly fierce competition between educational institutions, especially at the secondary level, the need to differentiate oneself and increase visibility through digital channels is very important (Grosser et al., 2021; Alzahrani & O'Toole, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022).

In this context, the use of social media as an educational marketing tool is not only relevant, but also essential to attract the interest of prospective students and strengthen the image of the institution (Zhang et al., 2021; Ghosh & Kumar, 2021; Rogers, 2021; Susilawati & Astuti, 2022). Modern marketing theories, such as Integrated Marketing Communication Theory, support the idea that consistency and synergy in the use of various communication platforms, including social media, can improve the effectiveness of marketing messages (Eisend et al., 2021; Möller & Eisend, 2022; Valos et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to understand how educational institutions, such as SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang, implement marketing strategies through social media and their impact on institutional competitiveness (Brengman & Karimov, 2021; Merz et al., 2022; Girard et al., 2022; Chuanchen, 2023).

The main problem raised in this study is the lack of understanding of the effectiveness of the implementation of educational marketing strategies through social media in secondary education institutions, especially in Indonesia. Although many institutions have started using social media as part of their marketing strategy, there hasn't been much research that has taken an in-depth look at how these strategies are implemented and what factors affect their success. This phenomenon has become increasingly important given the rapid development of technology and changes in consumer behavior, where the younger generation is increasingly dependent on the information they get from digital platforms (Goh et al., 2022; Kaput, 2022; Alshehri et al., 2021; Norman & Paramansyah, 2024). Without a proper and effective marketing strategy, educational institutions risk losing their competitiveness in attracting new students and maintaining a positive image in the eyes of the public (Geysler et al., 2021; Grewal et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2022; Maulidah et al., 2023; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023).

A literature review shows that research on educational marketing through social media has grown in recent years, but there is still a significant gap. A study by Purnomo (2021) shows that the effective use of social media can increase student participation and parental involvement in school activities, but this research focuses more on higher education than secondary education. Meanwhile, research by Wang and Lee (2022) revealed that marketing strategies through social media can increase brand awareness of educational institutions, but do not provide a detailed picture of the internal factors that support the success of the strategy. Another study by Smith (2020) highlights the importance of content tailored to the target audience, but does not highlight how schools in developing countries, such as Indonesia, manage the challenges in implementing these strategies. These three studies show the importance of digital marketing strategies in the context of education, but do not specifically examine secondary education in Indonesia, which is the focus of this study.

Although there have been many studies that examine marketing through social media in the context of education, previous research has not paid special attention to secondary education institutions in Indonesia. In addition, another gap identified is the lack of analysis of internal and external factors that affect the successful implementation of marketing strategies through social media in these institutions. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating how SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang uses social media as a marketing tool and what are the challenges and opportunities they face. Filling this gap is important to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of education marketing in the digital era, especially in the context of secondary education institutions in Indonesia.

This research offers novelty by focusing on the implementation of educational marketing strategies through social media in secondary education institutions, an area that has not been widely explored in the literature. Uniquely, this study not only evaluates the success of the strategy in terms of increasing the visibility and competitiveness of the institution, but also examines internal factors such as creative team management, as well as the use of technology in digital content management. In addition, this study proposes a new approach that integrates content analysis with in-depth interviews to identify best practices in the use of social media by educational institutions. This novelty is expected to provide new insights and contribute to the development of more effective and adaptive marketing strategies in secondary education institutions in Indonesia.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the implementation of marketing strategies through social media at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang and evaluate its impact on the visibility and competitiveness of schools. By understanding the mechanism and effectiveness of marketing strategies through social media, this research is expected to make a positive contribution to improving the quality and attractiveness of educational institutions in Indonesia, especially in this increasingly competitive digital era.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a type of phenomenological research. The phenomenological approach was chosen because the main focus of this study is to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of education actors at Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang Junior High School in implementing marketing strategies through social media (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2020; Smith, 2021; Bevan, 2021). This approach allows researchers to explore the meaning behind the actions and decisions taken by the institution, which cannot be explained in depth through a quantitative approach (Finlay, 2021; Zahavi, 2021; Giorgi, 2020). This qualitative research is more appropriate to use than quantitative methods because the main goal is to gain in-depth and interpretive insights into phenomena that have not been widely researched, especially in the context of secondary education institutions in Indonesia (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Lester, 2021; Vagle, 2021).

The data collection techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The location of the research is Fadhilatul Qur'an Junior High School Ketapang which is located at Jalan Raya Ketapang, Ketapang Village, Ketapang District, Sampang Regency, Madura, East Java. The selection of this location is based on the characteristics of schools that have implemented marketing strategies through social media intensively, making it a relevant case to be researched. Interviews were conducted with various parties directly involved in the implementation of this strategy, including the principal, creative team, teachers, and several students who are actively involved in promotional activities through social media. The number of respondents interviewed was 10 people, who were selected by purposive sampling based on their role and involvement in the school's marketing process. In addition to interviews, researchers also conduct direct observations of school social media activities, as well as analyze content uploaded to platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis, which allows researchers to identify the main themes that emerge from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2020; Maguire & Delahunt, 2021). This thematic analysis involves several stages, namely data transcription, coding, grouping code into themes, and interpretation of emerging themes (Clarke et al., 2022; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2021; Terry et al., 2021). This approach is effective for understanding the complexity of qualitative data because it allows researchers to explore deep patterns and relationships among the identified themes, thus providing rich and structured insights into the phenomenon being studied. The data obtained from interviews and observations were processed and analyzed using triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the research results. Triangulation was carried out by comparing data from various sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents, to obtain a more holistic understanding of the implementation of marketing strategies through social media at Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang Junior High School. The results of this analysis are then presented in a narrative form that describes in detail how the strategy is implemented and what factors affect its success.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of an educational marketing strategy through social media is one of the solutions that helps educational institutions at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang to make marketing changes, which used to be in a conventional way by distributing pamphlets, brochures, and information through alumni of educational institutions. Currently, it is turning to social media so that the goals and information about education are conveyed more quickly and in a targeted manner.

### Use of Social Media

Social media has many platforms that can be used as an educational marketing strategy (Feroza, 2020; Cindie Sya'bania, 2020; Desy Misnawati, 2020). The options used by SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang are Facebook and Instagram platforms. This is done because Facebook and Instagram are one of the social media that are very easy to access login and access their use.

*KA as the principal, he stated that "SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang needs to carry out education in various aspects of the education system, starting from the form of exams carried out by utilizing the google drive application, learning media using projectors to utilizing social media as a means so that the vision, mission and quality of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang can be seen, monitored and followed by the development of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang by the wider community, for this reason, I as the principal of Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang Junior High School requested that this school have a special team that will take care of our social media platform and editing process" (I\_KA).*

This interview shows that SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang is undergoing a transformation in their educational approach, especially in adopting modern technology to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of the school. The principal emphasized the importance of updates in various aspects, including in student evaluation methods and learning media, by utilizing technologies such as the Google Drive app and the use of projectors.

In addition, the use of social media is identified as a strategic tool to expand reach and strengthen the school's image in the eyes of the public. To optimize this strategy, the principal has taken the initiative by forming a dedicated team responsible for the management of social media platforms and the content editing process, demonstrating the school's commitment to innovation and greater engagement with the wider community.

### **Facebook**

Facebook is a social media used as a service and website that was launched in February 2004 and is owned by Facebook, Inc. Social media that can be used by everyone with a wider target market and various ages (Rahmanita Yayang, 2023). Facebook itself was founded by Mark Zuckerberg with his roommate and fellow Harvard University students, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes (Kartini, 2022; Ineke Maili Ningrum, 2022; June Ersiva, 2022).

*AS as one of the creative editing team stated that "the use of social media is very necessary for the progress of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang, because everything starting from product sales, offering certain services and many other things are posted on social media, this aims to make people know the product or service. Likewise, SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang also needs to have a social media platform which will certainly provide greater benefits to SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang itself, because the audience reach will be wider, saving costs and energy compared to promotions carried out in the past, namely with pamphlets and brochures, there are many more benefits obtained through social media, The main thing is Facebook, because Facebook is not only easy and efficient to use, but also the available features are also interesting" (I\_AS).*

This interview shows that the use of social media at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang is considered a crucial step in advancing the school. The creative team emphasized that social media has an important role to play in expanding the reach of the audience, allowing the school to be better known to the public in a more efficient and cost-effective way than traditional promotional methods such as flyers and brochures. Facebook, in particular, is seen as an effective platform due to its ease of use and attractive features. The use of social media is expected to bring significant benefits to schools in terms of promotion and interaction with the public.



**Figure 1. Facebook SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang**

On the Facebook page of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an has 1,000 followers with 1,000 likes from its followers. In this platform, information such as the principal's mobile phone number, the location of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang is also included, and uploads of various kinds of annual activities, interesting activities, important announcements, and even the participation of students and teachers in certain events are also uploaded on the Facebook page of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang.

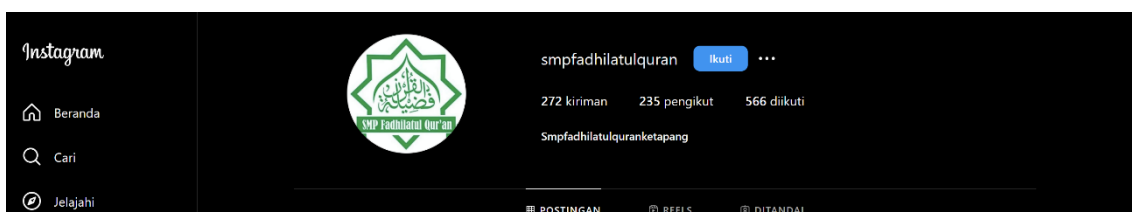
### **Intagram**

Instagram is one of the social media used in distributing information. The presentation presented on social media is in the form of photos and short videos with a maximum duration of 1 minute (story), and also a reels feature. Instagram is a social media based on sharing photos and videos, uploading photos or videos equipped with captions and hashtags (Dameria Girsang, 2021; Nova Lusnia, 2021). Instagram social media is a marketing strategy by the promotion team at IPB International. This has been planned since 2015, which is evident from the date of IPB International's joining Instagram social media, which is in May 2015 (Yayang Rahmanita, 2023).

*The researcher conducted an interview with KA as the principal of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang he stated that "SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang has just started posting activities and uploading our achievements on Instagram in 2021, so we are a new player in terms of the Instagram platform, but because Instagram has interesting features that are easy to use such as the feature of adding music and the existence of reels that make the video algorithm reach the audience faster" (I\_KA).*

*In addition, MT as one of the social media creator teams at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang also added that, "each platform has its own rules or algorithms that really need to be learned, so that the content or photos uploaded can quickly spread to the right audience. For example, on Instagram there is a reels feature, but in this feature we have to use popular or trending music, have to post every day, either videos or photos, have to post every day, either reels, insta stories or posts on the homepage. This makes it possible for Instagram to still read that IG SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang is active and not yet so that it deserves to be seen by more viewers" (I\_MT).*

Intagram was chosen because of its easy use because login access can be done through a Facebook account, although the audience is also wider and easier since the reels feature on Instagram. This is the reason why the followers are only 230, but for content and information about activities, 245 have been uploaded.



**Figure 2. Instagram SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang**

This image shows the official Instagram account of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang. This account has 272 posts, with 235 followers and follows 566 other accounts. This shows that the school is already quite active on the Instagram platform, although the number of followers is still relatively small. The activity on this account, such as the sheer number of posts, shows the school's efforts to engage with its community through social media. However, the ratio between followers and followed accounts suggests that schools may still be in the early stages of building a wider follower base on this platform. The school's use of Instagram also shows awareness of the importance of social media in supporting marketing strategies and communication with a wider audience.

The use of social media with various uploads that the Facebook and Instagram platforms of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang contain content of activities at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang or important information. Content is the principal, type, or unit of digital information. Content can be in the form of text, images, graphics, videos, sounds, documents, reports, and others. In other words, content is all things that can be managed in an electronic format (Mahmudah, 2020; Siti Muslichatul, 2020; Muthia Rahayu, 2020). Social media means providing feedback on information that can significantly affect a person's characteristics, invitations, views and opinions through the content of the message on social media itself (Mochammad Maulana Ibrahim, 2021; Rahmat Edi Irawan, 2021). Social media content is information and entertainment presented on a social networking media platform such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and so on created by a person or individual, a company and organization, placement on the social networking media platform allows more direct interaction with users, so that in realizing the full effect of social media content must also be carefully oriented to the target group (Huang, 2020). The content on Facebook or Instagram is more or less the same, which contains activities carried out by students at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang, achievements achieved, important information such as holidays, uploads for national holidays and others.

**Table 1 : Social Media Platforms of Fadhilatul Qur'an Junior High School Ketapang in the Last 3 Months**

NO	Social media	followers	Number of contents	Like	Audience
1.	Facebook	1.000	420	5.068	2.510
2.	Instagram	230	245	1.438	580

From the table above, it shows that in the last three months Facebook accounts have experienced more views compared to Instagram accounts, this happens because SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang joined Facebook longer, namely in 2017, compared to Instagram, which only joined in 2021. Although Instagram accounts currently have a reels feature that helps for a wider audience, Instagram has its own logarithm so that videos or uploads can be seen by more people besides their own followers. The indirect reach over the past three months is quite large compared to the use of information dissemination using conventional methods, such as the distribution of brochures and pamphlets.

This research makes a significant contribution to education management by highlighting the implementation of social media-based marketing strategies as an innovative approach to increase the visibility and competitiveness of educational institutions in the digital era.

Through a case analysis of SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang, this study illustrates how social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram can be effectively integrated in educational marketing strategies, replacing conventional methods such as pamphlets and brochures that are less efficient. The results of this study offer practical guidance for other educational institutions in adopting digital technologies to promote their quality and achievements, as well as demonstrate the importance of forming a dedicated team skilled in digital content management to achieve a wider and impactful audience reach. Thus, this study enriches the education management literature by providing a relevant and adaptive marketing model to technological developments, while underlining the important role of social media in supporting the strategic goals of educational institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study found that the implementation of educational marketing strategies through social media at SMP Fadhilatul Qur'an Ketapang has had a significant positive impact on increasing the visibility and reputation of the school. The use of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram allow schools to reach a wider audience efficiently, replacing conventional promotion methods that are limited and less effective. These findings underscore the importance of digital technology adoption in education management, providing new insights into how social media can be utilized as a strategic tool to strengthen communication and interaction between educational institutions and the wider community. From a practical perspective, this study provides concrete guidance for other educational institutions in implementing similar strategies to promote their quality and achievement more effectively in the digital era.

This research makes a significant contribution by introducing new approaches in educational marketing that are relevant to current technological developments. By showing how social media can be integrated into education management strategies, this study enriches the existing literature by offering a more adaptive and modern marketing model. However, this research also has limitations, especially related to the limited scope of one specific educational institution. These limitations open up opportunities for further research that can include different types of educational institutions, geographic variation, and analysis of impact differences based on audience demographics, such as gender and age. Further research is needed to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth picture, so that it can become a stronger basis for the development of more effective and inclusive education marketing policies and strategies in the future.

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