

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL BRANDING THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract. This ever-evolving digital age, educational institutions face challenges in maintaining their existence and increasing their competitiveness. The purpose of this study is to analyse strategies for strengthening school branding by optimising digital platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and the school website, at Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton. This study uses a qualitative paradigm with a case study approach. The survey is conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton, based on considerations that facilitate the collection of research information and data. The data sources for this study were primary and secondary. The data collection techniques in this study were participant observation and in-depth interviews. The data analysis techniques consisted of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton strategically used digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and the school website to build a positive image in the community, increase student participation in creative content, and establish interactive two-way communication with the public. The active involvement of the principal, teachers, students, and public relations team is key to the success of the digital branding strategy. The optimisation of digital technology significantly improves the school's image, attractiveness, and public trust, and fosters a strong, sustainable digital identity.

Keywords: Digital Technology, School Branding, Social Media,

Abstrak. Era digital yang terus berkembang, institusi pendidikan menghadapi tantangan untuk mempertahankan eksistensi dan meningkatkan daya saing. Tujuan penelitian adalah menganalisis strategi penguatan branding sekolah melalui optimalisasi teknologi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan paradigma kualitatif dengan jenis pendekatan studi kasus. Lokasi penelitian adalah Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton yang didasarkan atas pertimbangan dan alasan memudahkan mendapatkan informasi dan data penelitian. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini diambil atau diperoleh dari data primer dan data skunder. Teknik pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini adalah observasi partisipan dan wawancara mendalam. Teknik analisis data terdiri dari mereduksi data, menyajikan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton secara strategis menggunakan platform digital seperti Instagram, YouTube, dan website sekolah untuk membangun citra positif di masyarakat, meningkatkan partisipasi siswa dalam konten kreatif, serta menjalin komunikasi interaktif dengan publik secara dua arah. Keterlibatan aktif kepala sekolah, guru, siswa, dan tim humas menjadi kunci keberhasilan strategi branding digital yang dilakukan. Optimalisasi teknologi digital berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap peningkatan citra, daya tarik, dan kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap sekolah, serta menumbuhkan identitas digital yang kuat dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Branding Sekolah, Media Sosial, Teknologi Digital

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INTRODUCTION

This ever-evolving digital age, educational institutions face the challenge of maintaining their existence and increasing their competitiveness. One strategy is to strengthen school branding by optimising digital technology. Strong branding can enhance the school's positive image in the public's eyes, attract prospective students, and build trust among parents. Digital technology offers platforms and tools to strengthen school branding, such as social media, official websites, and other digital marketing strategies (Saputri et al., 2023). However, the implementation of this strategy still faces various obstacles, including human resources, infrastructure, and understanding of the technology itself (Astuti et al., 2025).

Although the potential of digital technology to strengthen school branding is enormous, many educational institutions have not yet fully utilised it. Several studies show that schools still face various challenges in implementing digital marketing strategies. For example, research by Saputri (2023) shows that, even though digital marketing strategies have been implemented, there are still obstacles, such as a lack of a dedicated marketing team and digital marketing skills. Furthermore, research by Robby et al. (2025) emphasises that digital marketing can be an effective branding medium for schools. However, its implementation in practice is constrained by limited human resources and the lack of integration with online promotion systems. This aligns with a systematic review by Anggita & Sulistyorini (2025), which shows that using social media in branding educational institutions requires creative, interactive, and sustainable communication strategies to compete in an increasingly competitive public space. These findings indicate a gap between the potential of digital technology to strengthen school branding and its actual implementation in the field.

Although several studies have discussed the use of digital technology in school branding, there is still a lack of literature that comprehensively outlines strategies for strengthening school branding by optimising digital technology in alignment with the school's vision and mission. Most existing studies focus more on specific aspects or individual case studies, without providing comprehensive strategic guidance that integrates with the school's core objectives. For example, studies by Sudirman et al. (2024) focus on building digital identity through website technology but do not discuss branding strategies as a whole that reflect the school's overarching goals. In addition, research by Ngibad et al. (2023) shows that school branding through websites can help build image and increase public trust, but this research is still limited to technical implementation and does not present a holistic branding strategy framework aligned with the school's vision and mission. Meanwhile, Saputri (2023) emphasises the importance of digital marketing strategies for improving school branding.

However, the research focuses more on digital marketing practices than on their comprehensive integration with the school's core values and strategic objectives.

Furthermore, a study by Ayunisa, (2022) discusses the strategies of formal educational institutions to improve school branding during the pandemic. However, it does not explicitly highlight the role of digital technology in these strategies. This gap in the literature indicates the need for more in-depth and comprehensive research on strategies to strengthen school branding through the optimisation of digital technology, which can provide practical guidance for educational institutions as they face challenges in the digital age. The purpose of this study is to analyse the strengthening of school branding through digital technology implemented at Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative paradigm, in which the collected data are in the form of words and images. This type of research is a case study, a qualitative method that seeks to explore a particular case in greater depth by collecting various sources of information. The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton. There were several reasons why the researcher chose Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton as the location for the research, namely, it was easy for the researcher to obtain the data needed for the research.

The data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews and direct observation. In-depth interviews enabled informants to provide more detailed information about their experiences and views on the phenomenon under study. Direct observation provided an opportunity to observe the phenomenon directly in the field. In analysing the data, Huberman's method was used, consisting of three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved sorting and selecting relevant information from the collected data. Data presentation was carried out by compiling the reduced data into an easily understandable narrative. Finally, conclusions are drawn by analysing the patterns that emerge from the data to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

RESULTS

Utilisation of Social Media as a School Branding Platform

Social media is one of the main pillars in the digital branding strategy of Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton. The school actively uses platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok as media for promotion and information. The use of social media is not only for

publishing activities, but also for shaping public perception of the school as an Islamic educational institution that is active, modern, and adaptive to the times. As stated by the school principal, social media is not only a place to share information but also represents the school in the eyes of the community (Huda, 2025).

In addition, the school's Instagram account, for example, documents student activities, academic achievements, religious competitions, tahfidz programs, and social activities. From observations over two months, posts were made consistently with attractive visual designs, using the school's signature colour tone, and accompanied by inspiring narratives. This strategy demonstrates strong branding awareness. According to the Deputy Head of Student Affairs, the school has formed a creative content team consisting of teachers and students. The school involves students in content production, teaching them design, writing captions, and managing posting schedules, which not only benefits branding but also fosters a sense of ownership (Ibrahim, 2025). Student involvement also creates an authentic and fresh impression, as the content displays everyday expressions that are relatable to young audiences.

Interaction with the Community Through Social Media

A means of publication, school social media is actively used to establish two-way communication with the community. This interaction can be seen in the comments section, direct messages, and responses to questions from parents and prospective students. This aligns with what one teacher said: this social interaction adds value, and many parents or alums feel closer to the school because communication can be done through direct messages or comments. Thus, the school can respond more quickly compared to conventional methods (Salsabila, 2025). This interaction increases the community's trust in the school, as it reflects the institution's openness and readiness to respond to public aspirations.

In fact, according to data from social media administrators, the average school Instagram account receives 20-30 interactions per day, including comments, incoming messages, and reactions to content. Students also benefit from active school social media. One 12th-grade student said that when student activities are posted on Instagram, it makes us more enthusiastic about participating (Maulana, 2025). This indicates that branding not only targets external audiences but also strengthens students' internal identity and fosters motivation. Additionally, the school uses live streaming for significant events, including graduations, Santri Day ceremonies, and internal competitions. This allows those who cannot attend in person to follow the school's dynamics still.

School Website as an Information Hub

In addition to social media, Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton has also developed an official school website as its primary information hub. This website not only contains the school profile, organisational structure, and flagship programs, but also provides menus for online registration, academic announcements, student article publications, and an activity gallery. The principal emphasised the importance of the website as the school's official showcase. While social media is fast-paced and dynamic, the website must be a place where all information is collected neatly and professionally (Huda, 2025).

Based on observations, the website's design features an easy-to-understand navigation structure. There is also a download feature for brochures, academic calendars, and admissions guidelines for new students. Visitors can access information at any time without having to come to the school. This is very helpful, especially for prospective students from outside the city. The Vice Principal for Student Affairs added that the website is also used as a medium for data integration and formal communication, where the public is directed to find official information on the website. In addition, for inspirational content, they can follow social media (Ibrahim, 2025). One teacher mentioned that students are also involved in developing website content through assignments to write articles and activity reports. This enriches the content and trains students in digital journalism skills (Salsabila, 2025). Some students also mentioned that they often use the website as a reference when participating in writing competitions or when they want to show their school to friends from outside the area.

DISCUSSION

School branding is a strategic process to shape positive public perceptions of the identity, quality, and excellence of educational institutions. In the digital age, the success of branding is primarily determined by an institution's ability to manage modern information media, particularly social media and websites (Maresova et al., 2020). Based on the results of research conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton, it was found that this school has shown significant progress in utilising digital technology to strengthen its image and competitiveness. Social media has now become the primary communication medium, not only among individuals but also among institutions. According to the theory of integrated marketing communication, social media enables fast, efficient, and widespread two-way communication (Eger & Gangur, 2024; Ye & Li, 2024; Hermawan & Carnawi, 2024). At Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton, the use of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube is no longer merely reactive (merely publishing). Still, it has entered a proactive and strategic stage.

The school's social media accounts not only showcase activities but also construct a visual and emotional narrative that reinforces its brand positioning as an Islamic, active, and high-achieving madrasah (Sitorus & Khatibah, 2024). The content posted is consistently and creatively produced with a professional visual design approach, indicating that digital branding has been consciously integrated into the institution's strategy. Student involvement in content production is a significant added value (Ramadhani & Setyowati, 2023; Meutia et al., 2023). This approach not only supports a participatory spirit in organisational communication but also strengthens students' identity as part of the school's brand. This aligns with the concept of brand co-creation in brand management, where the internal community is involved in shaping and conveying the institution's image (Siregar & Rasyid, 2023).

Furthermore, consistency and visual aesthetics on social media create a strong perception of professionalism, which, in turn, psychologically builds public trust. In the world of education, public trust is an essential asset to an institution's success, especially when accepting new students. This aligns with the findings of (2025), which emphasise that social media plays a vital role in strengthening the branding of educational institutions through creative, interactive communication. One of the main strengths of digital technology, especially social media, is its ability to create two-way communication. Whereas in the past, communication between schools and the community was one-way (through brochures, circulars, or announcements), it is now dialogical and real-time. Munawwaroh et al. (2025) add that social media also expands the reach of education marketing, thereby increasing prospective students' interest.

This study shows that Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton has successfully established an interactive communication pattern with parents, alums, prospective students, and the general public through social media. Interactions across comment sections, direct messages, and live-streaming features create an inclusive and responsive communication ecosystem. This is in line with the findings of (2025), which emphasise the importance of two-way communication strategies in community relations in educational institutions. From a public relations perspective, this interaction reflects the principle of two-way symmetrical communication, which emphasises a balance between conveying and listening. Hamzah (2015) adds that social media supports collaborative communication that strengthens public engagement. Schools not only convey information, but also receive feedback, answer questions, and respond to criticism or suggestions openly. This pattern creates an image of an institution that is democratic and open to public participation, as emphasised by Faliyandra (2020) in a study of social media-based educational communication.

From a branding perspective, strong social interaction becomes brand engagement, which is the emotional closeness between users and the institution. This has an impact on loyalty and trust and ultimately influences parents' decisions in choosing a school (Eriani et al., 2025). The fact that many parents consider social media as one of the primary references in choosing Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum shows how important this medium is in the institutional branding process (Marhareita et al., 2022). In addition, the active involvement of students in school social media is also a means of character building and 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and media literacy. Activities such as creating content, writing narratives, and conducting live broadcasts provide students with opportunities to grow in a positive digital ecosystem (Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023).

If social media is dynamic and interactive, then the school website functions as a large repository for formal, structural, and historical information about the institution. The existence of a well-structured website reflects professional information management (Purnamawati et al., 2023). Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton has utilised its website not merely as an institutional showcase, but also as a comprehensive and integrated information centre (Asrin & Utami, 2023). In educational management information system theory, websites serve as digital documentation tools that cover various aspects: academic, administrative, public services, and curriculum innovation (Sumbaryani et al., 2023).

From a branding perspective, an informative and well-structured website functions as a key indicator of institutional credibility and professionalism. Educational institutions that are able to manage information transparently and digitally tend to be perceived by the public as adaptive, trustworthy, and prepared to compete in the digital era (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Rowley, 2003). A school website is no longer merely a source of information, but also a strategic communication tool that shapes public perception and institutional image (Pertiwi & Kurniawan, 2020).

In practice, the Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum website presents comprehensive and relevant information, including academic schedules, organisational structure, online new student admission forms, teacher profiles, student articles, and school activity news. The availability of an online admission system is particularly beneficial for parents and prospective students from outside the city, as it reduces geographical barriers and administrative complexity. This aligns with findings by Constantinides (2014), who noted that digital service efficiency significantly influences users' trust and satisfaction. Consequently, such features contribute to a professional and efficient institutional image.

Moreover, supporting features such as downloadable digital brochures, documentation of academic and non-academic achievements, and alumni testimonials play a significant role in strengthening brand trust and reputation. Achievement displays and alumni narratives function as social proof, reinforcing the credibility of the institution in the eyes of prospective stakeholders (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). These elements help prospective students and parents form positive expectations about school quality and outcomes.

Interestingly, the website also serves an academic function by publishing student articles and teachers' scientific works. This practice reflects an open, technology-based academic culture and positions the school as a learning organisation that values knowledge production and dissemination (Selwyn, 2016). The publication of student work fosters a sense of pride and recognition among learners, which can positively influence motivation and engagement. Research by Graham and Perin (2007) supports this view, showing that authentic publication opportunities enhance students' confidence, writing skills, and academic self-concept. Overall, the integration of branding, administration, and learning functions through the school website adds substantial value to the institution's digital presence and educational quality.

CONCLUSION

Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton has successfully utilised digital technology, particularly social media and websites, as strategic tools in strengthening the institution's image and identity. Social media is used not only to share information but also to foster interactive communication with the public through attractive visual content, positive narratives, and the direct involvement of students and teachers. This strategy creates an emotional closeness between the school and the community and fosters a sense of pride among school members towards their institution. On the other hand, the school website serves as a structured, informative, and official information centre that supports digital services such as online registration for new students. The integration of social media with the website demonstrates that the school has a strong awareness of the importance of consistent, sustainable digital branding. This success has a direct impact on improving the school's reputation, community trust, and the competitiveness of Madrasah Aliyah Darul Ulum Paiton in attracting the attention of prospective students and parents in today's competitive era.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, this study was only conducted in one school, so the results may not necessarily represent the conditions of other schools with different backgrounds and resources. Second, most of the respondents involved were from within the school environment, such as the principal, teachers, public relations officers, and students. In contrast, external perspectives, such as parents, alums, and the general public, have not been fully explored. In fact, the perceptions of external parties are critical in measuring the effectiveness of school branding in the public sphere. Third, this study has not explored quantitative data from the school's digital media performance, such as visit statistics, interaction rates, and follower growth, which could strengthen the conclusions. Therefore, for future development, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted comparatively and using a mixed-methods approach to produce more accurate and comprehensive findings that can serve as a basis for applicable digital branding policies in the educational environment.

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