



Leveraging Instagram to Boost the Public Image of Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract : This study aims to analyze the role of Instagram in strengthening the image of Islamic boarding schools in the digital era. The focus of this study is on the use of Instagram as a medium to build digital branding of Islamic boarding schools. Although many studies discuss the use of social media in education, this study offers a more in-depth approach to the strategy of using Instagram to improve the image of Islamic boarding schools. The method used is qualitative with a case study approach, which allows researchers to dig up in-depth information about the strategy and impact of using Instagram. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews with the head of the Islamic boarding school, Instagram account managers, students, and the community, as well as documentation. Data analysis was carried out descriptively and qualitatively through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The findings of this study indicate that Instagram is effective in presenting Islamic boarding school life, strengthening positive public perceptions, and increasing student registration. This study provides insight into the importance of implementing effective digital strategies for Islamic boarding schools so that they can be more adaptive to developments in information and communication technology and strengthen their image in the eyes of the public, especially the younger generation. Thus, Instagram can be an optimal tool to boost the image of Islamic boarding schools in the digital era.

Keywords : Instagram; Public Image; Islamic Boarding Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, as one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, have a strategic position in forming a generation with noble character, intelligence, and broad insight (Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Huda, 2024). Its existence has a high urgency in maintaining Islamic values, preserving traditions, and facing the challenges of modernization that can erode the morals of the younger generation (Diana et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2022). In the midst of changing times, Islamic boarding schools have also become centres of educational innovation that integrate religious knowledge with general knowledge, making them relevant to producing a generation that is ready to face global competition without losing its Islamic identity (Hani, 2023; Maula, 2023). In theory, Islamic boarding schools are seen as holistic educational centres that not only instil Islamic values but also prepare students to face the challenges of the times (Hastasari et al., 2022; Muhajir, 2022). However, in social reality, there is a gap between this idealism and the perception of society. Islamic boarding schools are often trapped in traditional stereotypes that are considered less adaptive to the development of the times, especially in utilizing digital technology and social media.

In the era of digital transformation, social media should be one of the main tools for Islamic boarding schools in building an image, conveying information, and reaching a wider audience. Because in the increasingly advanced digital era today, social media is one of the most effective tools in building the image of an institution (Baharun et al., 2021; Munir et al., 2024). However, many Islamic boarding schools have not been able to optimize this platform as a medium for communication and branding. This creates a gap between the great potential that Islamic boarding schools have in strengthening their positive image and their limitations in utilizing technology (Maemonah et al., 2023; Irawan, 2022).

The limitations in utilizing social media also have implications for the lack of exposure to the diversity of activities, quality of education, and innovations that have actually been implemented in several Islamic boarding schools (Tylka et al., 2023; Barnawi, 2022). Although many Islamic boarding schools have modern educational activities based on Islamic values, the lack of visual communication strategies through social media makes these efforts not widely visible (AlKhudari, 2023; Verma & Grover, 2022). Evidence from the use of social media in the education sector shows that consistent and engaging presentation of information can build better relationships with the community, increase understanding of the quality of education provided, and open up space for Islamic boarding schools to be better known widely (Borah et al., 2022; Jacobson et al., 2022). Therefore, social media can be an effective tool to change the image of Islamic boarding schools as long as it is managed with the right communication strategy, including the use of attractive visuals and intense interaction with the audience (Mundiri et al., 2021; Prastyo et al., 2022). Thus, it is important to explore the role of social media, especially Instagram, as a powerful tool to build a more positive, innovative, and relevant image of Islamic boarding schools to the needs of the times.

An important thing that needs to be discussed in relation to the use of social media is how digital platforms can be used to build a positive image of Islamic boarding schools. In this context, a deep understanding of the social media theory that Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) put forward is very relevant. This theory emphasizes that social media plays a vital role in forming two-way communication that allows individuals and organizations to build closer and more interactive social relationships (Kaplan, 2021). Thus, Islamic boarding schools can utilize social media to create a more open dialogue space between the Islamic boarding school and the wider community, including prospective students and their parents. Furthermore, this digital platform can be used to build a positive social identity, introduce superior programs, and demonstrate the contribution of Islamic boarding schools to society and the development of Islamic education. This is important because social media is not only a means of communication but also a strategic tool to build a good image and strengthen the reputation of Islamic boarding schools in the eyes of the public, thus supporting their sustainability and growth in the future (Leli et al., 2023).

Various studies have discussed the use of social media in education, including in Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools. Kurniawan (2023) showed that people in the digital era currently use online media more to search for information. This shows the importance of social media as an effective means of communication. Hikmah (2023) also found that Islamic boarding schools that actively use social media tend to have a more positive image in the eyes of the public. Through social media, Islamic boarding schools can display the diversity of activities and increase community involvement. However, many Islamic boarding schools still have not utilized social media platforms optimally. This is a challenge, considering social media has great potential in conveying messages and building closer relationships with the broader community.

This study has a more specific focus than previous studies, namely on using Instagram as a medium to strengthen the image of Islamic boarding schools in the current context. Although various studies have discussed the use of social media in education, this study offers a more in-depth approach to the role of Instagram in building effective digital branding for Islamic boarding schools. The main objective of this study is to analyze the strategic function of social media, especially Instagram, in improving the image of Islamic boarding schools in the digital era. This research was conducted at the Nurul Wafa Islamic boarding school in a Situbondo Regency village. The significance of this study lies in its development of the concept of digital branding, which is expected to help Islamic boarding schools adapt to current advances in information and communication technology.

Recently, Islamic boarding schools have become a hot topic that is often discussed in society, considering that there are various views regarding this Islamic educational institution. Some people view Islamic boarding schools as traditional institutions that are less in line with current developments, while others appreciate their role in shaping morals and providing Islamic education. In today's digital era, Islamic boarding schools face increasingly complex challenges, especially in building a positive image in a society dominated by generations Z and Alpha. This

young generation is more interested in visual and interactive content presented through digital platforms.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach to explore the use of Instagram in improving the image of Islamic boarding schools. The qualitative method was chosen because it can dig up in-depth information about the strategies and impacts of using social media in the context of Islamic boarding schools. The case study approach was applied to precisely understand the practices and experiences of certain Islamic boarding schools that use Instagram as a communication and promotion tool. The data in this study were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with Islamic boarding school leaders, Islamic boarding school Instagram account managers, students, and the community to find out perceptions, strategies, and challenges in managing social media. Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes three main stages: (1) data reduction, namely the process of sorting, summarizing, and focusing data according to the research objectives; (2) data presentation, namely the systematic arrangement of information in the form of narratives, matrices, or graphs to facilitate understanding and further analysis; and (3) drawing conclusions/verification, namely the process of interpreting data to find relevant patterns, themes, or relationships and ensuring the validity of the results through repeated verification. The triangulation of sources, methods, and theories strengthens the validity of the data. With these methods, the study aims to provide in-depth insights into how Instagram can be utilized optimally to boost the image of Islamic boarding schools in the eyes of the public, especially in reaching the younger generation in the digital era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted by researchers at Nurul Wafa Islamic boarding schools, researchers have successfully identified various results from the use of Instagram as a medium to strengthen the image of Islamic boarding schools in the digital era. The findings of the researcher's research are as follows:

1. Visualization of Islamic Boarding School Life

Visualization of Islamic boarding school life is one of the main focuses in utilizing Instagram to build a positive image of Islamic boarding schools in the eyes of the public. Based on an interview, the head of the Nurul Wafa Islamic boarding school revealed that Instagram is used to display various student activities, such as the learning process, religious studies, and other social activities. By presenting photos and videos, the Islamic boarding school wants to show that they are an open institution that prioritizes the values of education and togetherness (MHS, 2024). This aims to change the public's perception which tends to be limited about Islamic boarding schools, while also showing the role of Islamic

boarding schools in building the character of the younger generation. In line with that, the public relations team of the Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School emphasized the importance of using Instagram as an interesting communication medium, especially for Gen-Z and Gen Alpha. Through uploads that display the daily lives of students and various extracurricular activities, the Islamic boarding school seeks to portray itself as a place that is modern, dynamic, and relevant to the times. In addition, this platform is also used to introduce and invite the public to support Islamic boarding school programs in order to improve a positive image in the eyes of the public (FMS, 2024).

Meanwhile, the Public Relations Officer explained that Instagram not only functions to describe the life of Islamic boarding schools, but also to strengthen relationships with the audience, especially the younger generation. Through uploading interesting photos and videos, Islamic boarding schools can reach a wider audience, create more intense engagement with the community, and introduce Islamic boarding school values that are relevant to current developments (HMS, 2024). The use of this social media shows that Islamic boarding schools do not only focus on religious education, but are also able to adapt to current technology and media. This provides a great opportunity for Islamic boarding schools to improve their image and draw public attention to the positive contribution they make in shaping the character of the younger generation.

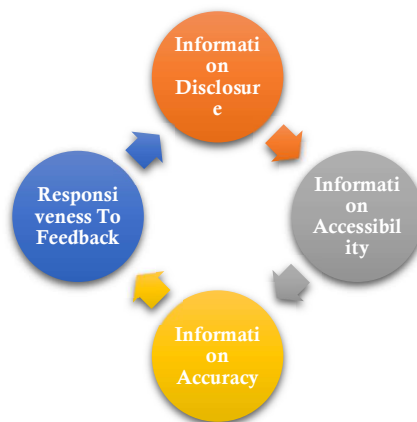


Figure 1: Elements of Findings in Research

Based on the findings above, the use of Instagram by Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School has had a significant positive impact on building the image of the Islamic boarding school in the community. Through this platform, the Islamic boarding school can display various student activities that show the positive side, which is often overlooked by the public. By posting photos and videos depicting daily activities, such as the learning process, religious studies, and other social activities, the Islamic boarding school has succeeded in changing the negative views attached to it. Many people still consider Islamic boarding

schools as closed and outdated institutions, but through Instagram, Islamic boarding schools can show that they are open and modern educational institutions.

Furthermore, Instagram is also a very effective tool in expanding the reach of Islamic boarding schools to a broader audience, especially the younger generation. By presenting interesting and relevant visual content, Islamic boarding schools can reach more people, both students and the general public, to better understand the values contained in Islamic boarding schools. In addition, through social media, Islamic boarding schools show that they are focused on religious education and can adapt to technological developments and the demands of the times. Instagram allows Islamic boarding schools to build closer relationships with the community, improve their image, and introduce their positive contributions in shaping the character of the younger generation who are ready to face future challenges.

2. A More Positive Perception of Islamic Boarding Schools

Positive perception can be interpreted as a good view or assessment of a person, group, or institution based on experience or information received. In this context, the Instagram platform effectively builds a positive image of Islamic boarding schools. Based on an interview with the social media admin of the Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School, Instagram is used to introduce daily life at the Islamic boarding school, including various religious, educational, and social activities. With features such as Stories, Reels, and uploads on the feed, Islamic boarding schools can show a positive side that is often less known to the public (MN, 2024). In addition, Instagram helps change the public's view that Islamic boarding schools may be considered conservative and closed religious educational institutions. Through visual and relevant content, Islamic boarding schools can interact directly with the community, mainly the main target of the younger generation. The social media admin also mentioned that Islamic boarding schools are trying to show their commitment to integrating traditional values with the development of the times, such as the use of technology in learning and preaching. In addition, this platform allows students to share experiences, show the diversity of activities at Islamic boarding schools, and eliminate negative stereotypes. By sharing inspiring stories from an academic and social perspective, Islamic boarding schools hope to foster a sense of pride and love for Islamic boarding schools, especially among the community and parents who consider them an educational option for their children.

Based on the interview presented above, Nurul Wafa's Instagram admin explained that Instagram is the primary medium through which Pesantren's life is introduced to the general public. Through this platform, the pesantren can display various religious, educational, and social activities not widely known by the public. Instagram utilizes features such as Stories, Reels, and feed posts to convey messages and show the positive side of the pesantren, including technological advances and a combination of tradition and innovation.

This step aims to change the public's view that pesantren were previously only seen as a limited religious educational institution. In addition, Instagram provides space for students to share experiences and show various activities in the pesantren to reduce the development of opposing views. Through this approach, the pesantren hopes to build public pride and attract parents to choose the pesantren as a more modern and relevant educational institution.



Figure 2 : The Process of Improving the Image of Islamic Boarding Schools with Instagram

The use of Instagram as a branding tool for the image of Islamic boarding schools plays a vital role in forming a positive perception of Islamic boarding schools in the eyes of the public. The image illustrates how consistent follow-up in content management, such as uploads about student activities and Islamic boarding school facilities, can provide a clearer picture of Islamic boarding school life. The findings show that this increases customer satisfaction, especially among parents of students, who feel more satisfied and confident with the quality of education offered after seeing the achievements and activities of Islamic boarding schools published on social media. In addition, the image also reflects the importance of continuous improvement in the quality of uploaded content to ensure that Islamic boarding schools remain relevant and continue to strengthen their image. Thus, the use of Instagram helps Islamic boarding schools build a better picture and makes it easier for parents to choose education for their children.

3. Increasing Student Registration

An interview with the Head of Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School conveyed that social media, especially Instagram, is vital in introducing Islamic boarding schools and improving their positive image. Through attractive visual content, Instagram is used to showcase various positive activities, such as religious studies, social activities, and students' achievements. The head of the Islamic boarding school emphasized the importance of the visual quality of the uploads to represent the values of the Islamic boarding school well and show the Islamic boarding school as a modern institution that is in line with the times. In addition, interaction with prospective students and parents through comments and direct messages is an effective way to build closeness and trust. The head of the Islamic boarding school also added that they implement marketing strategies, such as using relevant hashtags and collaboration with influencers or successful alums, to emphasize that the Islamic

boarding school not only teaches religious knowledge but also provides skills, character, and global insight to students. This approach contributes to the annual increase in Islamic boarding school registrants, including those from outside the region (MHS, 2024).

Some Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School students said that Instagram content was very helpful in introducing Islamic boarding school life to the public. They were proud to see their Islamic boarding school appear on Instagram with fascinating photos and videos, which then attracted their friends' interest in asking about life at the Islamic boarding school. Instagram, according to the students, not only functions as a promotional tool but also a medium to showcase their achievements in academic and non-academic fields (AQM, 2024).

One of the guardians of Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School students explained that he found it easier to get information about life at the Islamic boarding school through Instagram. He stated that seeing various posts about Islamic boarding school activities on social media provided a clearer picture of the atmosphere and facilities at the Islamic boarding school. According to him, this was an essential factor in the decision to send his child to the Islamic boarding school. The guardian also added that seeing students' achievements on Instagram strengthened his belief that the Islamic boarding school could provide quality education. Promotion through Instagram has proven successful in increasing the registration of new students, with many prospective students and parents seeking information through direct messages. Some ended up registering after seeing content that depicted Islamic boarding school life, including from outside the region, which shows that Instagram has succeeded in expanding its reach and strengthening the positive image of Islamic boarding schools.

The interview revealed that Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School's use of Instagram significantly increased student registrations. By uploading photos and videos showing positive activities such as religious studies, social activities, and student achievements, the Islamic boarding school managed to attract the attention of prospective students and parents. This strategy was reinforced by using relevant hashtags, interesting content management, and active interaction through comments and direct messages on Instagram. Prospective registrants who previously only searched for information through social media finally registered after seeing a picture of life at the Islamic boarding school. This promotion reached the local community and successfully attracted prospective students from outside the area, showing that Instagram effectively expands the reach of Islamic boarding schools in attracting applicants.

Table 1: Interview Results

Aspect	Explanation
Instagram's Role in Registration	Instagram is used as the main media to increase new student registrations
Promotional Content	Displaying photos and videos of Islamic boarding school activities, including students' achievements, to attract the interest of prospective students
Interaction with Prospective Students	Direct communication through comments and private messages builds closeness and trust, encouraging signups
Hashtag Usage and Collaboration	Relevant hashtags and collaboration with influencers and alumni of Islamic boarding schools help attract the attention of prospective students
Impact on Registration	This approach has succeeded in attracting more applicants, especially from outside the area, and increasing enrollment each year
Parental Involvement	Increased interest of parents to register their children after seeing Islamic boarding school content on Instagram

The table above explains how Instagram plays a role in increasing student registration at Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School. Through interesting visual content, such as photos and videos of Islamic boarding school activities, Islamic boarding schools can introduce various positive activities and achievements of students. This content helps build the image of Islamic boarding schools that are modern and relevant to current developments, which attracts the attention of prospective students and parents. Direct interaction with prospective students through comments and private messages also plays a vital role in building closeness and trust, encouraging them to register. Using appropriate hashtags and collaborating with influencers and alums of Islamic boarding schools expands the reach of Islamic boarding school promotions. These strategies have proven successful because the number of Islamic boarding school registrants continues to increase yearly, including from outside the region. Thus, Instagram is an effective means of introducing Islamic boarding schools and increasing new student registrations.

Based on several research findings above, it was found that the use of Instagram in Islamic boarding schools has significant implications for their public image. This social media can be an effective tool in increasing the visibility of Islamic boarding schools, which have so far been considered closed or less well-known to the wider community. The interview results also showed that most informants considered the presence of Islamic boarding schools on Instagram to give a modern and open impression. This has the potential to change the existing negative perceptions of Islamic boarding schools, such as stereotypes of being out of date or conservative. In this evidence, Instagram functions as a communication channel that carries positive messages. However, without the right strategy, this can also create an impression that is not in accordance with the values of the Islamic

boarding school (Susilawati, 2022). Therefore, it is important to understand how Instagram is used strategically to achieve these goals. Based on these findings, it is clear that Instagram can be a tool that strengthens the image of Islamic boarding schools, but it needs careful management to avoid dysfunction.

Field observations also show that Islamic boarding schools that are active on Instagram are able to attract more attention from various groups, especially parents and prospective students. This social media helps Islamic boarding schools promote the positive values they instil, such as discipline, learning ethics, and a harmonious spiritual life (Haris et al., 2024; Kunaifi et al., 2021). Observations show that content that displays daily activities, alum successes, and Islamic boarding school social events successfully arouses the interest of the audience. Thus, Instagram functions as a platform that introduces Islamic boarding school life in a more interesting and humanistic way. In addition, observations also revealed that inactivity on Instagram could cause Islamic boarding schools to lose the opportunity to introduce themselves to the wider community. These findings indicate that dependence on social media can affect the registration rate and public trust in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, the role of Instagram is very important in maintaining a positive image of Islamic boarding schools in an increasingly connected world.

(Nikmatullah (2023) said that the interaction of Islamic boarding schools with audiences on Instagram plays an important role in building closer relationships between Islamic boarding schools and the community. When Islamic boarding schools frequently interact with followers through comments, likes, or direct messages, followers feel more appreciated and tend to have stronger ties with the Islamic boarding school (Budiharso et al., 2023; Zakaria et al., 2022). This creates a sense of closeness that was not previously established, especially for prospective students and parents who are considering choosing an Islamic boarding school as a place of education. Based on research, interactive relationships through social media can strengthen follower loyalty and improve the image of an institution (Muid et al., 2024; Susanto & Dwijayanto, 2022). In addition, this interaction increases the sense of trust and credibility of the Islamic boarding school, which is directly related to parents' decisions to choose an Islamic boarding school as a place of education for their children. Therefore, active involvement on Instagram has a direct effect on improving the reputation of Islamic boarding schools.

(Hanafi (2021) showed that inappropriate or inconsistent use of Instagram can cause dysfunction in the goal of improving the image of Islamic boarding schools. When Islamic boarding schools do not update content regularly or do not answer questions and comments from the audience, this can create the impression that the Islamic boarding school does not care about community interaction. This dysfunction can worsen the image of Islamic boarding schools, which should be better known and closer to the audience. Not only that, errors in content management, such as irrelevant or less informative posts, can reduce audience interest and damage the reputation of Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, it is

important for Islamic boarding schools to have a special team responsible for managing Instagram accounts to stay relevant and maintain good relationships with the audience. A study by Adiyono and Anchor (2024) shows that poor social media management can result in a decline in the image of educational institutions. Content that is educational, inspiring, and relevant to everyday life can attract the attention of the younger generation (Mas' ula & Hakim, 2023; Mundiri et al., 2021). This strategy can create a strong relationship with young audiences who will become future students. Recent research shows that young audiences are very responsive to visual and engaging content, which can be delivered via Instagram (Muhajir, 2022; Barnawi, 2022).

Therefore, Islamic boarding schools need to adopt a more innovative and creative approach to presenting content on Instagram. With the right strategy, Islamic boarding schools can build a more modern and relevant image, which in turn will strengthen the appeal of Islamic boarding schools in the eyes of prospective students and their parents.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Instagram can be used effectively to improve the public image of Islamic boarding schools. Through an interesting visual and narrative approach, Islamic boarding schools can introduce educational programs, religious activities, and the values they uphold. Relevant and authentic content on Instagram can attract the attention of the younger generation, especially Gen Z and Alpha, who are increasingly connected to social media. The wisdom of this study is the importance of strategic social media management to build a positive image that can attract public interest and introduce Islamic boarding schools as modern educational institutions.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to updating perspectives on the role of social media in religious education. This study introduces a new method of understanding how platforms such as Instagram can be used to influence public perception of Islamic boarding schools. By using content analysis and engagement on Instagram, this study provides new insights into the context of managing the image of religious-based educational institutions. In addition, this study also tests the relevance of mass communication theory in the world of religious education, which is increasingly developing in the digital era.

However, this study has limitations in terms of scope and method. This study only focuses on one Islamic boarding school and uses Instagram as the only social media. These limitations suggest that further research is needed to explore the influence of other social media, such as TikTok or YouTube, as well as to expand the geographical scope in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of pesantren branding strategies across cultural contexts.

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