



Branding Strategies For Islamic Educational Institutions: The Use Of Digital Marketing And Influencer Marketing To Attract Gen Z Prospective Students To Islamic-Based Schools

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Abstract Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia currently face a complex epistemological and strategic dilemma, situated at the crossroads between maintaining sacred normative traditions and responding to technological disruption in the Society 5.0 era. Generation Z, as the demographic group constituting the largest market share for educational institutions today, displays information consumption behavioral patterns that demand authenticity, transparency, and symmetrical two-way communication interactions. This comprehensive scientific report explores and deeply analyzes the branding strategies of Islamic educational institutions, focusing on the utilization of digital marketing and influencer marketing to attract prospective students from Generation Z. Using a qualitative approach with a multicultural case study method and phenomenological analysis of various educational institutions (such as Aqobah International School, SMPI Al-Azhaar, IAIN Kerinci, and Phatnawitya School), this research deconstructs conventional marketing frameworks. The analysis results indicate that the transformation of the Marketing Mix (7Ps) into the digital ecosystem is an absolute necessity. Furthermore, this report finds that the Islamic Brand Personality model—centered on sharia compliance, sincerity, and transparency—plays a crucial role in mitigating the risk of the commercialization of religion. Through platform comparison, it was found that TikTok, with an average engagement rate of 1.42%, is highly effective for the awareness phase, while Instagram, with an engagement rate of 5.47%, is superior in building community loyalty. The utilization of moderate Muslim influencers has proven capable of amplifying Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and aligning the institution's image with the halal lifestyle of Generation Z. This article concludes that the effectiveness of future Islamic education branding strategies requires a synergy between data-driven technological innovations, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance, and the preservation of *tarbiyah* values and *maqasid sharia* to ensure institutional sustainability without compromising the integrity of da'wah.

Keyword : Digital Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Branding Strategy, Student Recruitment

Abstrak Lembaga pendidikan Islam di Indonesia saat ini menghadapi dilema epistemologis dan strategis yang kompleks, berada di persimpangan antara mempertahankan tradisi normatif yang sakral dan merespons disrupsi teknologi di era Society 5.0. Generasi Z, sebagai kelompok demografis yang merupakan pangsa pasar terbesar bagi institusi pendidikan saat ini, menunjukkan pola perilaku konsumsi informasi yang menuntut autentisitas, transparansi, serta interaksi komunikasi dua arah yang simetris. Laporan ilmiah komprehensif ini mengeksplorasi dan menganalisis secara mendalam strategi branding lembaga pendidikan Islam, dengan fokus pada pemanfaatan digital marketing dan influencer marketing untuk menarik calon



peserta didik dari Generasi Z. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui metode studi kasus multikultural dan analisis fenomenologis pada berbagai institusi pendidikan (seperti Aqobah International School, SMPI Al-Azhaar, LAIN Kerinci, dan Phatnawitya School), penelitian ini mendekonstruksi kerangka pemasaran konvensional. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa transformasi bauran pemasaran (Marketing Mix 7P) ke dalam ekosistem digital merupakan suatu keniscayaan. Selain itu, laporan ini menemukan bahwa model Islamic Brand Personality—yang berpusat pada kepatuhan syariah, keikhlasan, dan transparansi—memiliki peran penting dalam memitigasi risiko komersialisasi agama. Melalui perbandingan platform, ditemukan bahwa TikTok dengan rata-rata tingkat engagement sebesar 1,42% sangat efektif pada tahap awareness, sedangkan Instagram dengan tingkat engagement sebesar 5,47% lebih unggul dalam membangun loyalitas komunitas. Pemanfaatan influencer Muslim moderat terbukti mampu memperkuat Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) serta menyelaraskan citra institusi dengan gaya hidup halal Generasi Z. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa efektivitas strategi branding pendidikan Islam di masa depan memerlukan sinergi antara inovasi teknologi berbasis data, termasuk tata kelola Artificial Intelligence (AI), dengan pelestarian nilai-nilai tarbiyah dan maqasid syariah guna menjamin keberlanjutan institusi tanpa mengorbankan integritas dakwah.

Kata kunci : Digital Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Branding Strategy, Student Recruitment

1. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic education ecosystem in Indonesia, historically represented by boarding schools (pondok pesantren), madrasahs, and Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT), is currently navigating a highly dynamic and turbulent transition period. Modern Islamic education faces a complex epistemological dilemma; these institutions are caught between the strong pull of sacred normative traditions and the unstoppable tidal wave of modernity and cultural globalization ("The Construction of Islamic Boarding School Education Ethics", 2026). Amidst the acceleration of information technology advancements, a shift toward a transformative, student-centered pedagogical paradigm is imperative, while simultaneously bringing forth contemporary challenges such as value secularization, a crisis of religious identity among students, and the dominance of profane scientific narratives that often do not align with tawhid values ("Islamic Religious Education Learning", 2026).

This disruption is further accelerated by the generational shift dominating the school-age demographic. Generation Z (Gen Z), the group of individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is now the primary target audience and essential decision-makers in selecting educational institutions (Aimah et al., 2024). This generation grows and develops entirely within a digital ecosystem, granting them limitless accessibility to global information flows. The Indonesia Millennial and Gen Z Report 2025 highlights that this group is not a passive participant in social change, but rather a driving force actively demanding inclusivity, institutional transparency, work-life balance, and support for sustainability and mental health (IDN Research Institute, 2025). As a generation aware of their political and social rights—evidenced by high digital literacy coupled with a critical stance toward traditional institutions—a one-way communication approach is no longer relevant for them (Sukandar et al., 2024).

Historically, Islamic educational institutions have often been perceived by some segments of society as entities that are slow to adapt to changing times, exclusive, and lagging in the adoption of modern managerial strategies. This assumption poses a serious threat to the sustainability of Islamic educational institutions, especially when they have to compete in a hyper-competitive market (red ocean) against general educational institutions, international schools, and technology-based education platforms (EdTech). This increasingly sharp competition forces Islamic educational institutions not merely to be complacent with their

status as da'wah institutions but to transform into professional service providers that prioritize stakeholder satisfaction through systematic marketing management (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Mahmud et al., 2022) while accurately addressing the specific needs of the Muslim market (Abuznaid, 2012).

Referring to this phenomenon, educational branding and marketing strategies can no longer be reduced to merely printing physical brochures, putting up banners on main roads, or conducting face-to-face socialization visits to schools in surrounding areas. The architecture of Islamic education marketing absolutely requires comprehensive renewal through the utilization of digital marketing and influencer marketing (Wardani & Muttaqin, 2022). Virtual spaces such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now serve a dual purpose; they are not only entertainment media but also the main arenas where an institution's credibility is tested, reputation is built, and Generation Z's preferences are shaped through algorithm-based social interactions and influencer dynamics (Akmaliah, 2020; Steils et al., 2022). Therefore, branding for Islamic educational institutions must be understood as the process of articulating authentic Islamic values through digital mediums, aiming to convert the academic identity and spiritual character of the school into a measurable competitive advantage and a strong brand personality (Muttaqin, 2021).

This report aims to explore, analyze, and dissect the anatomy of digital marketing strategies in Islamic educational institutions comprehensively. Through a synthesis of recent literature, phenomenological analysis, and evaluation of social media metric data using a multidisciplinary qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fadjarajani et al., 2020), this report dissects how the implementation of the Marketing Mix (7Ps) evolves in the digital era, how social media algorithms mediate decision-making, the extent to which influencer marketing can catalyze Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and how institutions can maintain the integrity of marketing ethics amidst the threats of religious commercialization and Artificial Intelligence (AI) advancements.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The scientific construction in this report was developed through a qualitative approach with a methodological design combining phenomenological analysis and multicultural case studies based on literature research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fadjarajani et al., 2020). The phenomenological approach was crucially selected because this study aims to understand the profound meaning of how branding strategies are projected as a social and academic process within Islamic educational institutions. Unlike purely commercial marketing research, which relies heavily on quantitative probabilities, analyzing the branding of Islamic education requires an exploration of managerial processes, cultural contexts, and the ethical foundations of da'wah that cannot be entirely reduced to a matrix of numbers ("The Construction of Islamic Boarding School Education Ethics", 2026).

Technically, data collection was conducted by extracting findings from various reputable national and international journal articles, industry reports (such as data on the Gen Z consumer landscape in Indonesia) (IDN Research Institute, 2025; Sukandar et al., 2024), and third-party social media analytic metrics. This literature study not only mapped conceptual theories but also examined empirical reports using in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and digital footprint observations applied to various research loci.

The locus of analysis or case study objects drawn from empirical studies covers a broad spectrum of the education ecosystem, including: (1) Primary and secondary educational

institutions such as Aqobah International School (AIS) in Jombang, which pioneers the integration of global systems and Islamic values, SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung, which is successful with its integrated marketing management (Mahmud et al., 2022), and Phatnawitya School as a representation of Islamic schools in a sociocultural minority landscape; (2) Higher education institutions such as IAIN Kerinci and State Islamic University Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari; and (3) Digital da'wah dynamics driven by non-formal entities such as Salafi da'wah communities under the guidance of figures like Ustadz Khalid Basalamah or Ustadz Syafiq Riza Basalamah, who actively utilize digital platforms to construct their subculture and reach younger audiences (Akmaliah, 2020).

The theoretical framework used to dissect the marketing instruments is the Educational Services Marketing Mix 7Ps model, elaborated within the digital scope (Kotler & Keller, 2006). To validate the alignment between business strategies and religious ethics, the parameters of the Islamic Brand Personality theory are used (Muttaqin, 2021). Meanwhile, the effectiveness of promotional and communication campaigns is measured using the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model, contextualized with consumer engagement rate trends on social media platforms (Steils et al., 2022). All collected data were then reduced, synthesized, and verified through the principle of conceptual data triangulation, resulting in an explanatory narrative rich in nuance and applicable at the managerial level of Islamic educational institutions (Aimah et al., 2024; Wardani & Muttaqin, 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Paradigm Shift in School Selection and Characteristics of Muslim Generation Z

The success of a branding strategy always begins with precise analytical empathy toward the target audience. In this context, Muslim Generation Z in Indonesia presents a sociological and psychological profile fundamentally different from Millennials and Generation X (IDN Research Institute, 2025). Indonesian Muslim Gen Z integrates a strong level of religiosity with massive digital literacy; a convergence resulting in a demand for "globally connected spirituality". They are no longer entities that blindly accept traditional authority without question. Instead, as reflected by their high access to political information and analytical tendencies toward citizenship, Gen Z processes every institutional claim through a filter of critical thinking (Sukandar et al., 2024).

In the process of searching for and selecting educational institutions, Generation Z prioritizes the value of authenticity. Explicit advertising narratives, overselling facts, or hard-selling styles actually trigger skepticism and cognitive resistance (Aimah et al., 2024). This generation evaluates a school not solely from the written promises in a printed brochure, but from a real digital track record: how the institution responds to audience comments, the extent to which inclusivity is applied in the campus environment, and what sustainability values are actively championed. Therefore, brand positioning strategies can no longer focus on hierarchy and superlative claims but must transform into honest storytelling, showcasing the real challenges of students (student's journey), emotional dynamics, and communal values (Steils et al., 2022).

Regarding religious identity, Muslim Gen Z in Indonesia is driven by the Halal Lifestyle concept (Abuznaid, 2012). An in-depth regression study on the purchasing behavior of local Muslim fashion products on the TikTok app—which has a highly equivalent pattern to selecting educational services—found an interesting paradox. The research proved that Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), the influence of Muslim influencers, and the Halal Lifestyle have a positive and significant impact on Generation Z's decisions (Steils et al.,

2022). However, the indicator of Halal Awareness purely in a traditional sense quantitatively showed a negative, insignificant impact on the final decision. This phenomenon reveals that for Gen Z, a static or doctrinal sharia label is no longer the main attraction if it is not accompanied by the relevance of a contemporary lifestyle and social validation from their peers (Akmaliah, 2020). Islamic educational institutions are thus required to represent their branding not as rigid dogmatic institutions, but as dynamic platforms that equip their graduates to succeed in modern careers while remaining firmly rooted in Islamic lifestyle and ethics ("The Construction of Islamic Boarding School Education Ethics", 2026).

Furthermore, Gen Z suffers from content fatigue due to exposure to thousands of micro-information pieces every day. To penetrate this noise of attention, they demand highly visual, interactive, and neatly structured content formats—such as short-form vertical videos, infographics, or interactive broadcasts (Wardani & Muttaqin, 2022). Their engagement is not a passive reception of information, but a two-way dialogue; they are co-creators who participate in growing the brand name through interactions, trend modifications, and word-of-mouth dissemination within their digital networks (Muttaqin, 2021).

3.2 Construction of Islamic Brand Personality

Branding is the effort to provide human characteristics to an institution so that it can build emotional resonance with the public. In the educational domain bearing the name of Islam, adopting purely Western marketing theories is often incompatible or can distort the moral essence. Therefore, Muslim marketing scholars developed the Islamic Brand Personality framework. This model deconstructs conventional dimensions and incubates sharia principles as absolute quality indicators (Abuznaid, 2012).

Conceptually, an Islamic Brand Personality is not reduced merely to the use of Arabic calligraphy or superficial visual attributes. This personality manifests in a series of holistic dimensions: Shariah Compliance, Trustworthiness, Sincerity, Justice, Openness, Competence, Ruggedness, and Emotion. Structural equation modeling (SEM) statistical analysis testing the influence of these dimensions proved that Shariah Compliance and Trustworthiness provide the most significant positive impact on customer satisfaction, far exceeding superficial promotional attributes (Muttaqin, 2021).

When these dimensions are translated into the management of Islamic educational institutions, the marketing strategy becomes a manifestation of institutional da'wah. Sincerity is projected through the pedagogical dedication of educators and manipulation-free customer service. Openness is applied by providing accurate public information regarding the educational fee structure, open fund allocation, and a real profile of the institution's capabilities—instead of trapping prospective students with hidden fees that clearly violate Islamic business ethics. Competence is represented through student achievements and the integration of modern academic curricula (such as STEM curricula or talent acceleration) with the tahfidz curriculum (Mahmud et al., 2022).

A solid Islamic Brand Personality construction becomes a strategic foundation to ward off the trap of educational commercialization. Madrasahs and Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) should not stray from their philosophical roots as spiritual entities but must use marketing management to expand the reach of goodness (maslahah). By having a consistent Brand Personality, all built digital initiatives will feel authentic to the Gen Z audience, minimizing cognitive dissonance between online-built expectations and the reality of offline academic services (Wardani & Muttaqin, 2022).

3.3 Transformation of the Digital-Based Marketing Mix (7Ps)

The operation of a branding strategy will not materialize without structured technical instruments. The Educational Services Marketing Mix (7Ps) model provides a systematic framework for Islamic educational institutions to manage strategies from conception to market realization. Entering the era of technological integration, the understanding of these seven basic elements undergoes a drastic revolution and must be specifically adapted for Generation Z.

The comparative analysis in Table 1 below illustrates the synthesis of the 7Ps Marketing Mix transformation adopted from various case studies of top school implementations in Indonesia and its surroundings (such as IAIN Kerinci, SMP NU Darul Falah, and SMPI Al-Azhaar).

7P Elements	Conventional Education	Definition in	Digital Transformation & Innovation in Islamic Education Services
Product	Linear curriculum packages, conventional academic syllabi, passive memorization methods.		Construction of "Corporate Educational Production". Integrated curriculum innovation, comprehensive Tahfidz curriculum, soft-skill character development programs, and specific acceleration programs (e.g., Class Gazebo).
Price	Single tuition setting, cash/physical payments, conventional scholarship systems.		Valuation based on perceived value. Provision of transparent fee structures on the website, user-friendly, accountable, and competitive financial service (fintech) support.
Place	Physical campus area, travel distance, classroom facilities, availability of boarding.		Presence on all digital screens (Omnichannel). Virtual campus navigation, centralized online registration portals, and expansion through sister school programs to overcome geographical limitations.
Promotion	Physical brochures, banners, socialization visits to elementary/junior high schools, and conventional word-of-mouth.		Implementation of the AIDA Model via TikTok/Instagram Reels, influencer collaborations, live streaming dialogue programs (e.g., AIS Fortnight), targeted ads, and empowerment of community-based e-WOM networks.
People	The ratio of teachers and educational administrators.		Digitalization of educators as micro-influencers (spiritual teachers). Active involvement of students, principals, administrative staff, and alumni as empathetic and dynamic brand representation agents on social media.
Process	Manual registration administration flow, long waiting periods for admission information.		Service automation. Registration through a boarding school management system, online learning trials, fast-response social media Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to Gen Z interactions.
Physical Evidence	Grand buildings, park cleanliness, laboratory quality, safe dormitories.		Construction of Digital Aesthetics. Intuitive website User Interface, consistent color palette/logo, visual aesthetics of social media feeds, high-quality graphic content design, and publicly published track records of achievements.

The evolution of the *People* and *Physical Evidence* elements becomes the most striking distinguishing variable. An Islamic educational institution may not yet have the most luxurious architectural facilities, but with smart investment in digital *Physical Evidence*—such as high-class visual communication design, high-resolution promotional videos, and professional website interfaces—they are able to project an exceptionally high image of global credibility in the eyes of remote applicants. At SMPI Al-Azhaar, the management intentionally involves student organizations (OSIS) and parents as organic promotion

elements through a parenting talk program (MAJELAS), transforming the *People* element into the backbone of branding success.

The *Promotion* cycle is also executed using the AIDA Analysis structure. In the *Attention* stage, schools capture Gen Z's attention through creative promotional videos (e.g., cinematic teaser formats on visual platforms) that do not resemble traditional school ads. In the *Interest* and *Desire* stages, schools publish content narrating the joy of daily dormitory life, testimonials of successful alumni, and virtual tours of clean dormitories. The peak of this funnel is *Action*, which facilitates audiences to click direct hyperlinks to digital registration forms with just a thumb tap on their smartphones.

3.4 Dynamics of the Social Media Platform Ecosystem: A Comparison of TikTok, Instagram, and Interaction Algorithms

Educational institutions often fall into the managerial error of passive cross-posting, which is sharing the exact same type of promotional material across every social media channel. In fact, the digital ecosystem has distinct algorithmic sociologies. Understanding the Engagement Rate (ER) and platform tendencies is key to optimizing marketing budgets. As a macro comparison baseline, industry research reports that the average Engagement Rate of mid-tier influencer accounts (Top 200) in Indonesia is at a phenomenal figure of 4.62%, making it one of the most socially reactive digital markets in the world, far exceeding the global average of around 1.66%.

A highly comprehensive cross-platform analysis of the dissemination of da'wah content and Islamic lifestyles provides sharp insights into the functionality of TikTok and Instagram for Islamic education branding.

Marketing Evaluation Indicator	Performance on TikTok Platform	Performance on Instagram Platform
Average Engagement Metric (Da'wah Case Study)	1.42%	5.47%
Algorithmic Architecture	Interest-graph, content distribution is push-distributed to mass audiences.	Social-graph, distribution is centered on the loyalty of connections among existing followers.
Ideal Content Format	Short-form vertical videos, spontaneity, use of humor, participation in audio trends.	Visual Exploration. Single image, educational carousels, detailed infographics, aesthetic designs.
Primary Function in the Marketing Funnel	Awareness. Capturing exponential new audience attention at the top of the funnel.	Loyalty & Deep Engagement. Long-term attention retention and the formation of discursive communities.

Affective & Cognitive Response of Gen Z	Fast consumption (hedonic), viral participation, instant scrolling, initial emotional impression.	Cognitive reflection, deep discussions through the comment section, saving posts, sharing via direct message.
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Quantitative data shows a surprising phenomenon: although TikTok is glorified for its viral potential (reach), deep interactions (such as comprehensive comments and saving information for careful consideration) actually occur much stronger on Instagram. Empirical research using the ANOVA test on 18,026 posts from various popular Islamic community accounts in Indonesia proves that, contrary to mainstream assumptions, **single-photo and carousel formats consistently receive significantly higher engagement rates (likes and comments) compared to video content on Instagram**. This can be explained through a cognitive lens: narratives of Islamic education, Quranic verses, registration fee details, or school curriculum infographics require a slow and reflective reading process, which is highly unfacilitated by fast-moving videos.

On the other hand, TikTok dominates the Attention stage. Gen Z views TikTok as a fun recreational escape medium. A promotional initiative (e.g., "A Day in My Life as a Santri" peppered with light humor or trendy visual transitions) can explode virally on TikTok and instantaneously bring tens of thousands of profile visits to the institution's account, before finally being redirected to Instagram for more substantial academic literacy processes. An empirical study at UIN Antasari proved that social media activities combining elements of entertainment, interactivity, and trendiness have a visible impact on the enrollment intention of high school graduates. Therefore, a hybrid marketing architecture is an absolute recommendation: TikTok as a mass-catching instrument (top-funnel) and Instagram as a loyalty incubation instrument (mid-funnel).

3.5 The Strategic Role of Influencer Marketing, Digital Preachers, and e-WOM Amplification

In a digital economy running on the trust economy principle, credibility can no longer be bought with advertising budgets; credibility must be borrowed through authoritative figures loved by the community. Influencer Marketing has revolutionized the landscape of educational promotion. For Islamic educational institutions, influencers are not limited to lifestyle content creators but also include ustadzs, popular preachers (cool ustadz), academics, and contemporary hijab fashion figures who actively reproduce religious discourse (Steils et al., 2022).

The contemporary sociology of religion in Indonesia notes the emergence of the repackaging of ulama phenomenon to be more aligned with urban youth subcultures. The most representative case is the emergence of Salafi da'wah communities driven by figures such as Ustadz Khalid Basalamah and Ustadz Syafiq Riza Basalamah. Unlike traditional religious authorities who are rigid or use confrontational diction, their da'wah approach has been adapted to be highly structured, personal, dialogical, and actively utilizes contemporary visual trends favored by Generation Z. These da'wah figures and Muslim lifestyle influencers play a fundamental role in reducing the cognitive barrier between youth and religion; they foster an attitude of openness, inclusivity, and a strong religious identity among their massive followers (Akmaliah, 2020).

When an Islamic educational institution collaborates with influencers or affiliates their brand with relevant moderate da'wah figures, a brand association transfer phenomenon

occurs. A religious figure's visit to the campus, a joint workshop with Muslim creative industry influencers, or a mere appreciative shout-out on social media will become highly potent ammunition for Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM). Research confirms that Generation Z's decision to choose an institution, Islamic financial service, or Muslim fashion product on platforms is heavily influenced by collective peer support ethically engineered by influencer figures. Through influencers, school marketing transforms from dry B2C (Business-to-Consumer) promotion into highly trusted P2P (Peer-to-Peer) recommendations (Aimah et al., 2024).

In addition to massive external macro-influencers, the activation of micro-influencers from the school's internal ecosystem—such as high-achieving students, student council presidents, inspiring alumni, and teachers who actively produce literacy on blogs or YouTube—becomes an effective grassroots community strategy. The utilization of real digital track records from the school community stimulates school brand pride while simultaneously validating promises of educational quality without the burden of exorbitant advertising budgets (Wardani & Muttaqin, 2022).

3.6 Ethical Challenges, Commercialization of Religion, and the Transparency Paradox

The modernization strategy of marketing management in Islamic educational institutions is like a double-edged sword. If not based on the epistemology of *maqasid sharia* and sincerity of intention (*nawaitu*), the exploitation of digital marketing tools has the potential to spawn a highly dangerous ethical reduction: the commercialization of religion.

Commercialization in this educational context refers to the practice of positioning an institution solely as an economic profit-generating factory, where Islamic symbols (such as memorization obligations, sharia jargon, or dormitory facilities) are engineered as advertising gimmicks to justify skyrocketing fees without being balanced by the substance of education and adequate transfer of *adab* (manners/ethics). The marketing of educational services should not distance the institution from its essence as a forum for community building. Overselling practices on social media—such as claiming manipulated state university acceptance ratios, or exaggerating dormitory conditions visually to deceive the perception of reality—are forms of fatal violations against the principle of honesty (*Shiddiq*) in muamalah.

Furthermore, collaborations with preachers or influencer content creators give rise to what is known as the Transparency Paradox among Generation Z. Generation Z is highly responsive and sensitive in distinguishing an honest opinion from an influencer versus a scripted endorsement. If a school uses the services of an ustadz or influencer to promote the institution but hides the financial affiliation behind it, it will actually harm brand authenticity and trigger a collapse in credibility that is difficult to recover from (cancel culture). Moreover, institutions must be highly selective and not get trapped with influencers who have provocative, emotional, or exclusive track records. Influencers who like to polarize religious identities will only damage the reputation of schools based on the values of community unity and Islam *wasathiyah* (moderation). Communication practices must prioritize the consistency of institutional behavior as a reflection of pure da'wah manifestation.

3.7 The Future of Islamic Education Branding: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Governance

The final frontier of educational disruption in the Society 5.0 era does not stop at social network algorithms. The competitive landscape of the coming decade will be

intervened and dictated absolutely by the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. The utilization of AI is not merely marketing automation for sending registration emails, but touches the deepest essence of academic service processes (Wardani & Muttaqin, 2022).

On the marketing and Customer Experience (CX) side, AI enables schools to analyze massive databases (big data) to understand the track record, learning preferences, and economic potential of prospective student families, allowing for high-precision hyper-personalized marketing without slow manual intervention. Advanced AI-based chatbots on websites or instant messaging apps can serve parents' Q&A comprehensively, multi-lingually, and in real-time 24/7, reflecting absolute success indicators of the Process element (Mahmud et al., 2022).

Deeper still, AI-based learning innovations (adaptive learning systems) have become the most revolutionary Product instruments that can be highlighted as brand campaign materials. Progressive elementary schools and madrasahs are beginning to use AI to support STEM-based learning, adaptive feedback in curriculum assessments, and digital assistant programs that facilitate Quranic memorization and ethical discussions for students in a personalized manner. Islamic educational institutions that promote these cutting-edge AI capabilities will exhibit a Brand Personality of solid competence, completely eroding the perception of religious schools being left behind (Muttaqin, 2021).

However, AI penetration harbors a black hole regarding governance and anthropological philosophy issues. There are sharp data privacy ethical challenges; the extent to which third-party systems mine psychological data and student biometric histories without violating boundaries of *mahremiyyah* (Islamic privacy) and family data security. The infrastructure gap between metropolitan schools and traditional boarding schools (digital divide) presents the risk of deeper marginalization. The most important thing serving as a philosophical reflection is that AI is highly capable of transferring technical cognitive skills (hard skills), but is fundamentally stuttering in teaching moral reasoning, empathy, and prophetic leadership (soft skills) ("The Construction of Islamic Boarding School Education Ethics", 2026).

Therefore, the governance of technological ethics in Islamic education (Ethical AI Governance) is a prerequisite before promotional campaigns are carried out massively. Smart technology must be positioned solely as a supporting utility (complementary) to human teachers. Educational institution marketers must exploit this phenomenon by re-narrating humanistic values: that despite being equipped with the most advanced algorithmic intelligence infrastructure, the heart of civilization offered by the school is emotional connection, the transfer of *barakah*, and the touch of human-to-human *tarbiyah* that will never be replaced by machines ("Islamic Religious Education Learning", 2026).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall conclusion of this research affirms that the wave of sociocultural disruption brought by Generation Z—combined with the industrial revolution of digital technology—has deconstructed the conventional management foundations of Islamic educational institutions. To maintain operational competitiveness amidst the increasingly sharp competition in educational services, educational institutions (pesantrens, madrasahs, and

Islamic schools) are required to transcend core sharia values into comprehensive, strategic, and visually empathetic digital marketing and influencer marketing blueprints.

The implementation mechanism of the Services Marketing Mix (7Ps), which historically relied on physical brochures and passive building infrastructure, must now be substituted with a virtual ecosystem architecture, encompassing aesthetic digital interface engineering (Physical Evidence), response automation (Process), and the integration of a global-spiritual curriculum (Product). This strategy heavily relies on a symmetrical two-way communication model. Exploration of social media algorithms reveals a functional analytical dichotomy: TikTok, with its mass interest distribution metric (interest-graph), holds absolute supremacy in the upstream stage (building brand awareness through relevant and recreational storytelling), while Instagram, with a significantly higher loyalty-based engagement structure (5.47%), takes full control in the downstream stage (communal incubation, cognitive attention retention, and structured discussions).

On the e-WOM execution side, influencer marketing—especially through contemporary moderate da'wah figures and Muslim lifestyle influencers—serves as an exceptionally essential hyper-credibility catalyst. They act to bridge the cognitive gap between institutional religious authorities and the urban subculture language of Generation Z. Nevertheless, all these managerial modernization initiatives must continuously be verified through the lens of Islamic Brand Personality to prevent the commercialization of educational entities that reduces da'wah institutions to mere transactional commodity factories.

Moving from the elaboration of these findings, macro strategic recommendations (follow-up suggestions) for policymakers, foundation leaders, and practitioners of Islamic education management are formulated as follows:

1. **Adoption of Specialized Hybrid Marketing (Omnichannel Blueprint):** School leaders must allocate human resources specifically to separate platform-based content production strategies (stop generic cross-posting). Use authentic, grounded, and educational vertical video narratives on TikTok to invite public traffic visits, while cultivating leadership discourse and aesthetically structured academic information (photo/carousel) on Instagram.
2. **Value-Aligned Influencer Matrix Management:** Integrate a due diligence process when selecting external figures to become brand ambassadors. Ensure influencers uphold the values of Islam wasathiyah, voice messages without exclusive confrontational bias, and communicate commercial involvements openly to elegantly navigate Generation Z's transparency paradox.
3. **Cultivation of an Organic Advocacy Ecosystem (Micro-Influencer Grassroots):** Optimize internal appreciation programs to encourage the continuous activation of User-Generated Content. Facilitate, educate, and motivate the board of teachers, educational staff, leaders, student council groups, and alumni association networks to act as brand representation agents who honestly document progressive behind-the-scenes routines.
4. **Integration of AI with Mahremiyyah Policies (Digital Privacy Ethics):** Immediately formulate a committee or operational guidelines for transparent Artificial Intelligence governance (Ethical AI Governance) within the foundation. The implementation of AI in student admission assistants (chatbots) or learning must be strictly filtered to protect *mahremiyyah* (data privacy), with a firm commitment that

algorithmic innovations function to serve and lighten educators' bureaucratic duties, not take over their sacred role in instilling spiritual *tarbiyah* and leadership soft-skills.

Through the application of this strategic synthesis manned by moral sincerity and adaptive agility, Islamic educational institutions will undoubtedly be able to transform the threat of open competition in the era of disruption into a space for preserving civilizational identity, attracting the young demographic in a culturally relevant manner while maintaining the purity of da'wah integrity.

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