

Islamic Values in Digital Marketing Practices of Pesantren: Toward an Ethical Educational Branding Model

Nilai-Nilai Islam dalam Praktik Digital Marketing Pesantren: Menuju Model Branding Pendidikan yang Etis

Akh. Sulaiman¹

¹ Universitas Bahaudin Mudhary Madura

E-MAIL : sulaimanhasan627@gmail.com

Abstract:

The rapid development of digital technology has encouraged Islamic educational institutions to adopt digital marketing strategies to enhance institutional visibility and competitiveness. However, limited studies have examined how Islamic ethical values shape digital marketing practices within pesantren. This study aims to explore the implementation of Islamic values in the digital marketing practices of Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School and to formulate an ethical educational branding model. This research employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the head of public relations, media team members, and teachers, supported by participant observation and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that digital marketing practices are guided by four core Islamic values: *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *tablīgh* (educational communication), and *faṭānah* (wisdom and creativity). These values are manifested through content validation mechanisms, transparent communication, the integration of promotional and da'wah messages, and adaptive innovation aligned with Islamic ethics. The interaction of these four dimensions forms the Ethical Educational Branding Model, which positions Islamic ethical values as the foundation of sustainable institutional branding. This study contributes theoretically by extending Islamic marketing ethics into the field of educational branding and offers practical guidance for Islamic educational institutions in developing credible, value-based, and ethically responsible digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: Islamic educational branding; Digital marketing; Islamic values; Pesantren; Educational communication

Abstrak:

Perkembangan teknologi digital mendorong lembaga pendidikan Islam untuk mengadopsi strategi digital marketing guna meningkatkan visibilitas dan daya saing institusi. Namun, kajian mengenai bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam membentuk praktik digital marketing di lingkungan pesantren masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam praktik digital marketing di Pondok Pesantren Ummul Quro As-Suyuty serta merumuskan model branding pendidikan yang berlandaskan etika Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-

terstruktur dengan kepala humas, tim media, dan guru, yang didukung oleh observasi partisipatif serta analisis dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik digital marketing di pesantren dibangun atas empat nilai utama, yaitu *ṣidq* (kejujuran), *amānah* (amanah), *tablīgh* (komunikasi edukatif), dan *faṭānah* (kebijaksanaan dan kreativitas). Keempat nilai tersebut diwujudkan melalui mekanisme validasi konten, transparansi informasi, integrasi promosi dengan dakwah, serta inovasi digital yang tetap berlandaskan etika Islam. Interaksi keempat dimensi tersebut melahirkan Model Ethical Educational Branding, yaitu model branding pendidikan yang menempatkan nilai-nilai etika Islam sebagai fondasi utama dalam membangun reputasi institusi secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan memperluas kajian etika pemasaran Islam ke dalam ranah branding pendidikan serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi lembaga pendidikan Islam dalam mengembangkan strategi digital marketing yang kredibel, berbasis nilai, dan bertanggung jawab secara etis.

Kata kunci: Branding pendidikan Islam; Digital marketing; Nilai-nilai Islam; Pesantren; Komunikasi edukatif

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped communication patterns and marketing strategies across various sectors, including education. The rapid advancement of information technology, social media, and digital platforms has encouraged educational institutions to move beyond conventional promotional approaches toward more interactive, adaptive, and engagement-oriented digital marketing strategies. In contemporary educational settings, digital marketing is no longer viewed merely as a promotional tool; rather, it has become a strategic instrument for strengthening institutional branding, enhancing public trust, expanding information dissemination, and fostering sustainable relationships with prospective students, parents, alumni, and the wider community. Amid increasingly competitive educational environments, the ability to establish a credible digital presence has become an essential determinant of institutional competitiveness.

This transformation has also influenced Islamic educational institutions, particularly *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). As one of Indonesia's oldest and most influential Islamic educational institutions, *pesantren* have gradually embraced digital technologies to strengthen institutional communication and public engagement. Many Islamic boarding schools now actively utilize official websites, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and instant messaging platforms to disseminate educational information, promote institutional activities, strengthen da'wah initiatives, and support student recruitment. Consequently, digital platforms have become an effective medium through which *pesantren* communicate their educational vision, religious identity, and institutional values to broader audiences. Within this context, digital marketing extends beyond promotional activities and functions as a strategic mechanism for representing the distinctive identity and educational philosophy of Islamic institutions.

Nevertheless, digital marketing practices within Islamic educational institutions differ fundamentally from those adopted in commercial organizations. The primary mission of *pesantren* is not economic profit but rather the provision of Islamic education (*tarbiyah*), religious propagation (*da'wah*), character development, and community service. Therefore, every aspect of digital communication should be guided by Islamic ethical principles, including *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (transparent communication), *faṭānah* (wisdom), and *iḥsān* (excellence). These values distinguish Islamic educational branding from commercially driven marketing practices

by emphasizing moral responsibility, authenticity, and public benefit rather than solely pursuing market expansion or institutional popularity. Accordingly, the effectiveness of digital marketing in *pesantren* should not be evaluated merely by the number of followers, online engagement, or student enrollment, but also by its ability to cultivate public trust through ethical and value-driven communication.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that digital marketing contributes significantly to institutional visibility, educational branding, public engagement, and students' enrollment decisions. Similarly, research on educational branding has highlighted the strategic role of social media in shaping institutional reputation and strengthening stakeholder relationships. Meanwhile, studies on Islamic marketing have predominantly focused on the application of Sharia principles in business contexts, including halal product promotion, Muslim consumer behavior, and ethical commercial marketing. Research concerning *pesantren* branding, on the other hand, has primarily examined communication strategies, social media utilization, and institutional promotion. Despite these developments, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how Islamic ethical values are systematically integrated into digital marketing practices to construct educational branding within Islamic boarding schools.

This limitation reveals a significant research gap. Existing studies tend to conceptualize digital marketing as a promotional or communication strategy, while the ethical dimensions derived from Islamic teachings remain largely underexplored within the context of educational branding. Consequently, there is still an absence of a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining how Islamic values can guide digital marketing practices in developing authentic, trustworthy, and sustainable educational brands for Islamic educational institutions. Addressing this gap is particularly important, considering that institutional credibility in Islamic education should be built not only through effective communication strategies but also through the consistent implementation of Islamic moral principles in digital interactions.

Against this background, this study aims to investigate the implementation of Islamic values in digital marketing practices at Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School, Pamekasan, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research explores how the principles of *ṣidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, *faṭānah*, and *iḥsān* are embedded in the institution's digital marketing activities and how these values contribute to the development of ethical educational branding. The findings are expected to propose an

Ethical Educational Branding Model that contributes theoretically to the fields of Islamic educational management, educational marketing, and Islamic communication, while also providing practical guidance for Islamic educational institutions seeking to develop digital marketing strategies that are effective, trustworthy, and aligned with Islamic ethical principles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how Islamic values are implemented in the digital marketing practices of an Islamic educational institution. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore meanings, processes, and social practices underlying digital marketing activities within their natural setting. The case study design was adopted to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Islamic values and educational branding practices.

The research was conducted at Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School, Pamekasan, East Java, Indonesia. The institution was purposively selected because it actively utilizes various digital platforms, including its official website and social media accounts, for institutional communication, educational promotion, digital da'wah, and student recruitment. These characteristics make the school an appropriate case for examining the implementation of Islamic value-based digital marketing.

Research participants were selected through purposive sampling, involving individuals directly engaged in managing and implementing the institution's digital marketing activities. The participants consisted of the head of the Islamic boarding school, the public relations or media team, social media administrators, teachers involved in digital publication, and several parents of students to provide insights into public perceptions of the institution's digital branding.

Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on the institution's digital marketing activities across multiple digital platforms to identify communication patterns, content characteristics, audience engagement, and the representation of Islamic values. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives on digital marketing strategies, decision-making processes, and the integration of Islamic ethical principles into digital communication. Documentary evidence included social media posts,

website content, promotional videos, digital brochures, institutional reports, and other relevant documents related to educational branding.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data credibility was established through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from different participants, while methodological triangulation was achieved by cross-validating findings from observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Thematic analysis was subsequently employed to identify how the Islamic values of *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *tablīgh* (transparent communication), *faṭānah* (wisdom), and *iḥsān* (excellence) were embedded in the institution's digital marketing practices. Finally, the findings were synthesized to develop an Ethical Educational Branding Model, a conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between Islamic values, digital marketing strategies, and the development of ethical educational branding in Islamic educational institutions

HASIL

Ṣidq (Truthfulness): Content Validation as the Foundation of Ethical Digital Marketing

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Islamic value of *ṣidq* (truthfulness) constitutes the primary foundation of digital marketing practices at Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School. Rather than prioritizing the quantity or speed of content publication, the institution emphasizes the accuracy, authenticity, and appropriateness of every piece of information disseminated through its digital platforms. Observations conducted on the school's official social media accounts revealed that published content consistently represents actual institutional activities, including religious learning, student development, extracurricular programs, and public events. No exaggerated claims or misleading promotional messages were identified during the observation period.

The interview data further demonstrate that every digital publication undergoes an internal validation process before being released to the public. According to the Head of Public Relations:

"We are given the freedom to promote all boarding school activities through

YouTube, TikTok, and other digital platforms. However, everything we produce is supervised by the school leadership. There was even an occasion when a published post had to be removed because the leadership considered it inappropriate for public dissemination."

Similarly, a member of the media team explained:

"Every digital publication must pass through a screening process conducted by the supervisors, especially content considered sensitive or important. Only routine promotional content is managed more independently."

Documentation collected during the study also confirms the existence of an internal review mechanism involving the school leadership before strategic information is published. This finding suggests that truthfulness is institutionalized through a structured content validation system rather than relying solely on individual responsibility. Therefore, *ṣidq* functions not merely as a moral principle but as an operational standard governing digital communication within the institution.

Amānah (Trustworthiness): Transparency and Accountability in Digital Communication

The second finding demonstrates that the value of *amānah* (trustworthiness) is implemented through transparent information management and institutional accountability. Observation of the school's digital platforms indicates that information regarding educational programs, admission procedures, tuition fees, and institutional services is presented consistently and corresponds to the actual conditions within the boarding school.

The Head of Public Relations emphasized that transparency is considered an essential ethical responsibility:

"To maintain trustworthiness, every piece of information must correspond to the actual situation. Therefore, before content is published, it is verified by the responsible unit. For example, financial information must come directly from the finance department."

Regarding misinformation management, the same informant explained:

"If an error occurs, the content will immediately be removed and evaluated together. However, if the information has already spread widely, we conduct a public clarification (tabayyun) to explain the actual situation."

Document analysis also indicates that official announcements are consistently published through verified institutional accounts, minimizing the risk of

misinformation. These findings illustrate that amānah is reflected not only in transparent communication but also in the institution's willingness to acknowledge and correct mistakes. Consequently, digital marketing is practiced as a form of institutional accountability rather than merely a promotional activity.

Tabligh (Educational Communication): Digital Marketing as a Medium for Da'wah

The third finding reveals that digital marketing at Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School extends beyond institutional promotion and serves as a medium for Islamic education and da'wah. Observation of social media content demonstrates that the institution regularly publishes religious advice, educational messages, parenting content, Qur'anic learning activities, and motivational materials alongside promotional information. One teacher explained the philosophical basis of this strategy:

"Da'wah cannot be effectively carried out without institutional support, and educational institutions also need da'wah. Therefore, promoting the institution is ultimately part of promoting Islamic values."

The Head of Public Relations further explained that every published content undergoes collective validation before dissemination:

"After editing, every content is reviewed together before publication. We never upload content carelessly."

Documentation supports these interview findings, showing that educational and religious content constitutes a substantial proportion of the institution's digital publications. This indicates that *tablīgh* is implemented through educational communication that integrates institutional branding with Islamic moral messages. Accordingly, digital marketing functions simultaneously as an educational, religious, and communication strategy.

Faṭānah (Wisdom and Creativity): Adaptive Innovation within Islamic Ethical Boundaries

The fourth finding concerns the implementation of faṭānah (wisdom and creativity) through continuous innovation in digital content production. Observational data show that the media team actively utilizes various digital platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and short-form video content, to increase audience engagement while maintaining the institution's Islamic identity. A member of the media team stated:

"We continuously improve our skills through self-learning on digital platforms and

by participating in content creator training programs organized by government institutions."

The Head of Public Relations also highlighted the institution's adaptive approach:

"We follow every technological development. We do not reject new trends as long as they do not violate Islamic ethics or moral values."

Supporting documents indicate that the institution has gradually diversified its digital communication formats, including short educational videos, visual storytelling, event documentation, and interactive social media content. These findings demonstrate that **faṭānah** is manifested through adaptive innovation, technological competence, and creative communication strategies while remaining firmly grounded in Islamic ethical principles.

Based on the four major findings, this study proposes an Ethical Educational Branding Model for Islamic educational institutions. The model demonstrates that effective digital marketing in Islamic boarding schools is not primarily determined by technological sophistication or promotional intensity but by the integration of Islamic ethical values into institutional communication practices.

The findings reveal four interrelated ethical dimensions. First, *ṣidq* establishes truthful and validated information, fostering public confidence. Second, *amānah* strengthens institutional credibility through transparency and accountability. Third, *tabligh* transforms digital marketing into an educational and *da'wah*-oriented communication process. Finally, *faṭānah* enables creative adaptation to technological developments while preserving Islamic moral values. Collectively, these dimensions shape an ethical branding strategy that reinforces institutional reputation, public trust, and the distinctive identity of Islamic educational institutions in the digital era.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that digital marketing practices at Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School cannot be interpreted merely as institutional promotional activities. Rather, digital marketing has evolved into a strategic communication system that integrates Islamic ethical values with educational branding. This finding offers a different perspective from the dominant discourse in digital marketing literature, which generally emphasizes market expansion, customer acquisition, engagement metrics, and institutional competitiveness as the primary indicators of success. Within the context of Islamic educational institutions, digital

marketing is positioned as an extension of educational and da'wah missions, where every communication process must reflect Islamic moral values. Consequently, institutional branding is constructed not only through attractive visual design, technological sophistication, or communication intensity but also through ethical consistency in representing the institution's identity. This demonstrates that digital marketing in Islamic boarding schools possesses a dual orientation: strengthening institutional visibility while simultaneously preserving religious authenticity.

The integration of Islamic values into digital marketing practices also illustrates that educational branding in Islamic institutions differs fundamentally from branding strategies commonly adopted by commercial organizations. Commercial branding generally seeks to maximize consumer attention, increase purchasing intentions, and strengthen competitive positioning through persuasive communication. In contrast, the findings of this study reveal that the branding strategy implemented by Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School prioritizes credibility, moral responsibility, and educational value before promotional effectiveness. Every digital communication activity is designed not only to introduce institutional programs but also to represent the ethical identity of the pesantren. This indicates that branding within Islamic educational institutions is value-driven rather than market-driven. Such a perspective broadens the conceptualization of educational branding by positioning ethical values as the central determinant of institutional reputation.

Among the four dimensions identified in this study, *sidq* (truthfulness) emerged as the most fundamental principle governing digital marketing activities. The empirical findings demonstrate that all digital content disseminated through official institutional platforms undergoes a systematic validation process involving school leadership before publication. The presence of an internal review mechanism indicates that truthfulness is institutionalized through organizational procedures rather than depending solely upon the integrity of individual content creators. This institutional mechanism ensures that information published on social media accurately represents institutional realities and avoids exaggeration, manipulation, or misleading narratives. Such findings illustrate that truthfulness is treated as an organizational commitment embedded within the governance structure of institutional communication.

The significance of this finding becomes increasingly apparent when viewed through the perspective of Islamic marketing ethics. Existing literature generally

conceptualizes *ṣidq* as an individual ethical obligation requiring marketers to communicate honestly and avoid deceptive promotional practices. Within commercial contexts, truthfulness is often associated with honest advertising, accurate product descriptions, and fair business transactions. However, the present study demonstrates that the implementation of *ṣidq* within Islamic educational institutions extends beyond individual morality. Truthfulness is transformed into an institutional communication policy supported by leadership supervision, collective decision-making, and systematic content verification. Therefore, the contribution of this research lies in expanding the understanding of *ṣidq* from an individual ethical principle into an organizational governance mechanism regulating digital communication.

This institutionalization of truthfulness has important implications for educational branding. Previous studies have consistently argued that institutional reputation is strongly influenced by stakeholder trust, and trust itself depends largely upon the credibility and consistency of organizational communication. Educational institutions operating in highly competitive environments increasingly rely upon digital platforms to establish public confidence. Nevertheless, trust cannot be sustained solely through frequent content production or sophisticated promotional campaigns. The findings of this study demonstrate that public trust is developed through the alignment between institutional realities and digital representations. By ensuring that every published message reflects actual institutional conditions, Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School minimizes the possibility of expectation gaps between prospective students and their subsequent educational experiences. Consequently, *ṣidq* functions not only as an ethical principle but also as a strategic resource for strengthening institutional legitimacy.

Another interesting implication emerging from this finding concerns the concept of organizational gatekeeping. The validation process conducted by institutional leaders before content publication represents an ethical gatekeeping mechanism that has received limited attention within previous digital marketing studies. In mainstream communication theory, gatekeeping generally refers to the process by which information is selected and filtered before reaching audiences. The present study extends this concept by demonstrating that gatekeeping within Islamic educational institutions serves primarily ethical rather than political or commercial objectives. Institutional leaders do not merely evaluate communication effectiveness but also

assess whether digital content conforms to Islamic moral values, educational objectives, and organizational identity. Accordingly, digital marketing becomes a controlled communication process in which ethical considerations take precedence over promotional interests.

The second major finding concerns the implementation of *amānah* (trustworthiness), which strengthens institutional credibility through transparency and accountability. The findings indicate that strategic information published through institutional digital platforms—including tuition fees, educational programs, student services, and institutional facilities—is verified by authorized departments before dissemination. Such procedures ensure that publicly available information accurately reflects institutional policies and operational realities. Furthermore, when inaccuracies occur, the institution adopts corrective actions involving content withdrawal, collective evaluation, and public clarification through the principle of *tabayyun*. These practices demonstrate that accountability is embedded throughout the communication process rather than being treated merely as a reactive response to public criticism.

Within Islamic ethical thought, *amānah* represents one of the most fundamental principles governing interpersonal and organizational relationships. Trustworthiness implies not only honesty but also responsibility in safeguarding the rights, expectations, and confidence of others. The present findings indicate that Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School operationalizes *amānah* through transparent communication supported by institutional accountability mechanisms. Every piece of strategic information must originate from authoritative sources before publication, thereby minimizing misinformation and ensuring consistency between institutional policy and public communication. This organizational practice illustrates that trustworthiness is institutionalized through systematic administrative procedures rather than depending solely upon personal ethical awareness.

The transparency observed in this study also contributes significantly to strengthening institutional legitimacy. Organizational communication literature consistently suggests that transparency reduces uncertainty, increases stakeholder confidence, and enhances organizational reputation. Within educational institutions, transparent communication becomes particularly important because prospective students and parents often make enrollment decisions based upon information obtained through digital platforms. The findings of this research indicate that transparency is not

merely a communication technique designed to attract public attention but rather an ethical obligation reflecting Islamic educational values. Consequently, institutional credibility is constructed through openness, consistency, and accountability instead of persuasive promotional narratives.

A particularly distinctive contribution emerging from this study concerns the application of *tabayyun* as a digital crisis communication strategy. When inaccurate information reaches the public, the institution prioritizes clarification and verification rather than defensive communication or image protection. This practice differs substantially from conventional reputation management strategies frequently discussed within marketing literature, where organizational responses often focus primarily upon minimizing reputational damage. Instead, Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School emphasizes moral responsibility by acknowledging inaccuracies, withdrawing inappropriate content, and providing public clarification based upon verified evidence. Such findings suggest that Islamic ethical principles provide alternative approaches to digital communication management by prioritizing truth restoration over image preservation.

Collectively, the findings concerning *ṣidq* and *amānah* demonstrate that public trust is not generated by promotional intensity but by ethical consistency throughout institutional communication processes. Truthfulness ensures that institutional messages accurately represent reality, while trustworthiness guarantees that communication remains transparent, accountable, and responsive to public concerns. The interaction between these two values establishes the ethical foundation upon which educational branding is constructed. Rather than functioning as isolated moral concepts, *ṣidq* and *amānah* operate as mutually reinforcing organizational principles that transform digital marketing into a credible communication system capable of strengthening institutional reputation in an increasingly competitive digital environment.

The third major finding of this study concerns the implementation of *tabligh* as the core principle guiding educational communication within digital marketing practices. The empirical evidence demonstrates that the digital platforms managed by Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School are not designed solely to promote institutional programs but also to disseminate educational messages, religious values, parenting guidance, motivational content, and da'wah materials. This finding suggests that digital

marketing is understood by the institution as an educational communication ecosystem rather than merely a promotional instrument. Consequently, institutional visibility is pursued through meaningful communication that simultaneously fulfills educational and religious missions.

This finding provides an important contribution to the growing literature on educational communication. Previous studies have frequently emphasized that educational institutions increasingly utilize social media to strengthen institutional image, enhance stakeholder engagement, and attract prospective students. Social media has become an essential communication channel because it enables institutions to reach wider audiences with relatively low financial investment while facilitating interactive communication between institutions and communities. Nevertheless, many existing studies continue to conceptualize educational social media primarily from the perspective of marketing performance, focusing on indicators such as audience engagement, brand awareness, online visibility, and recruitment outcomes. The present study offers a broader perspective by demonstrating that digital communication within Islamic educational institutions carries educational and spiritual responsibilities that cannot be separated from promotional objectives.

The interviews conducted with teachers and the public relations team clearly indicate that institutional promotion is perceived as an integral component of da'wah rather than an independent marketing activity. Such a perspective reflects a distinctive educational philosophy in which strengthening institutional reputation ultimately supports the broader mission of disseminating Islamic knowledge and values. In other words, digital marketing becomes meaningful because it contributes to the sustainability of Islamic education itself. This orientation differs substantially from commercial organizations whose promotional activities are primarily directed toward increasing sales or expanding market share. Within Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School, institutional promotion is viewed as a strategic effort to introduce educational opportunities that enable broader communities to access Islamic learning.

The integration of branding and da'wah also demonstrates the dynamic adaptation of Islamic educational institutions to contemporary digital culture. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook are not treated merely as technological tools but as spaces for educational interaction and religious engagement. The institution consciously utilizes these platforms to communicate educational

philosophies, student activities, Qur'anic learning, character development, and religious celebrations. Consequently, followers are not only exposed to promotional messages but also continuously encounter educational narratives representing the institution's identity. This finding strengthens the argument that digital transformation within Islamic education should not be understood simply as technological modernization but rather as the expansion of educational communication into digital environments.

From the perspective of communication theory, this finding reflects the transition from transactional communication toward relational communication. Transactional communication generally emphasizes message delivery and audience response, whereas relational communication prioritizes long-term relationships based on shared values, mutual trust, and continuous interaction. The findings indicate that Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School deliberately develops communication capable of nurturing emotional attachment between the institution and its audiences. Religious messages, educational advice, and documentation of students' daily lives contribute to building emotional closeness that extends beyond conventional promotional communication. Consequently, digital marketing functions as a mechanism for strengthening relationships between the pesantren and its stakeholders rather than merely increasing online exposure.

Another interesting implication emerging from this finding concerns stakeholder engagement. Contemporary digital marketing literature frequently emphasizes engagement as one of the most important determinants of communication effectiveness. However, engagement is often measured quantitatively through likes, comments, shares, impressions, or viewing duration. The findings of this study suggest that engagement within Islamic educational institutions possesses a broader meaning. Audience interaction is valuable not merely because it increases algorithmic visibility but because it reflects meaningful participation in educational and religious discourse. Therefore, the effectiveness of digital marketing cannot be evaluated solely through digital analytics but should also consider its contribution to strengthening Islamic educational communities.

The implementation of *tabligh* also reinforces institutional authenticity. Educational branding literature consistently argues that institutional identity becomes stronger when communication accurately reflects organizational values and missions. In the present study, promotional messages are consistently integrated with educational

narratives, thereby preventing the separation between institutional branding and educational philosophy. Such consistency contributes to the development of authentic branding because audiences encounter the same institutional values across different communication channels. Authenticity therefore emerges not from sophisticated marketing techniques but from the consistency between organizational identity and public communication. This finding supports the argument that authentic branding constitutes one of the most sustainable sources of institutional competitiveness in contemporary higher education and educational management.

The fourth major finding relates to the implementation of *faṭānah*, which represents wisdom, intelligence, and creativity in responding to rapid technological developments. The findings indicate that the media team continuously develops its competencies through independent learning, participation in professional training programs, and continuous observation of emerging social media trends. Rather than relying solely on traditional communication practices, the institution actively explores innovative approaches to visual storytelling, short-form video production, graphic design, and interactive digital communication. Such initiatives demonstrate that creativity is considered an important organizational capability for maintaining institutional relevance within rapidly changing digital environments.

Nevertheless, the findings simultaneously reveal that technological adaptation is always accompanied by ethical consideration. The institution does not automatically adopt every emerging digital trend but evaluates whether such practices remain compatible with Islamic moral values and the educational identity of the pesantren. This selective adaptation illustrates that innovation within Islamic educational institutions is guided by ethical judgment rather than technological enthusiasm alone. Such an approach challenges the common assumption that digital transformation necessarily requires unrestricted imitation of commercial marketing strategies. Instead, innovation is interpreted as the ability to creatively utilize technology while preserving institutional values and religious identity.

This finding contributes significantly to innovation theory within educational organizations. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory explains that organizational innovation depends upon the willingness to adopt new ideas capable of improving institutional performance. However, innovation adoption is generally explained through factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and

observability. The present study introduces an additional consideration by demonstrating that Islamic educational institutions evaluate innovation according to ethical compatibility. New technologies are accepted not merely because they increase communication effectiveness but because they remain consistent with institutional values. Ethical compatibility therefore emerges as an additional determinant influencing innovation adoption within faith-based educational organizations.

The emphasis placed upon continuous competency development also illustrates the importance of human capital in digital transformation. Technological infrastructure alone cannot guarantee successful digital marketing unless supported by competent human resources capable of producing meaningful content. The interviews indicate that media personnel regularly improve their skills through formal training programs and independent learning using online resources. Such findings reinforce previous studies emphasizing that digital competency has become one of the most strategic organizational resources within educational institutions. More importantly, competency development within Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School is directed not only toward mastering technology but also toward understanding ethical responsibilities associated with digital communication.

Creativity implemented within the institution also differs from commercial content creation strategies that frequently prioritize sensationalism and audience attraction. Instead, creativity is directed toward presenting educational activities in attractive formats without sacrificing informational accuracy or religious propriety. Short videos, visual documentation, storytelling techniques, and interactive communication are utilized to increase audience interest while preserving educational substance. Such findings demonstrate that creativity and ethical responsibility are not contradictory concepts. On the contrary, the integration of both elements produces communication capable of attracting audiences without compromising institutional credibility.

Collectively, the findings regarding *tablīgh* and *faṭānah* indicate that effective digital marketing within Islamic educational institutions depends upon the harmonious integration of educational communication and ethical innovation. While *tablīgh* ensures that communication consistently fulfills educational and da'wah objectives, *faṭānah* enables institutions to adapt creatively to technological developments without abandoning their religious identity. The interaction between these two principles allows Islamic boarding schools to maintain institutional relevance within increasingly

competitive digital environments while preserving their distinctive educational philosophy. Consequently, digital transformation should not be interpreted as a process of replacing traditional educational values with technological efficiency but rather as an opportunity to communicate those values more effectively through contemporary digital platforms.

The four dimensions identified in this study—*ṣidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, and *faṭānah*—should not be interpreted as independent variables operating separately within the digital marketing activities of Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School. Instead, the findings demonstrate that these dimensions interact dynamically to establish an integrated ethical communication system that underpins institutional branding. The implementation of *ṣidq* ensures that all information disseminated through digital platforms reflects institutional realities, thereby creating public trust. *Amānah* strengthens this trust through transparency, accountability, and organizational responsibility in managing information. *Tablīgh* broadens the function of digital marketing by transforming promotional communication into educational and da'wah-oriented engagement, while *faṭānah* enables the institution to remain adaptive and innovative without compromising Islamic ethical principles. Together, these values create a coherent communication framework in which every stage of digital marketing is governed by ethical considerations rather than merely promotional objectives.

Based on this interaction, the present study proposes an Ethical Educational Branding Model (EEBM) as its principal conceptual contribution. Unlike conventional educational branding models that frequently emphasize institutional visibility, competitive differentiation, and marketing effectiveness, the proposed model positions Islamic ethical values as the primary drivers of branding development. Within this framework, branding is not understood as an effort to construct a desirable institutional image disconnected from organizational reality. Instead, branding emerges naturally from the consistent implementation of ethical communication practices that reflect the authentic identity of the institution. Consequently, institutional reputation becomes an outcome of ethical consistency rather than promotional intensity.

The proposed model begins with the internalization of Islamic ethical values within the organizational culture. The findings indicate that digital marketing does not originate from technological decisions alone but is rooted in institutional values established by the leadership of the pesantren. These values subsequently shape

organizational policies governing content production, communication procedures, public interaction, and technological innovation. Such findings reinforce the perspective of values-based management, which argues that organizational culture significantly influences communication behavior and institutional performance. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, ethical values function as strategic organizational resources capable of guiding communication decisions in increasingly complex digital environments.

The second component of the proposed model concerns ethical governance. One of the most distinctive findings of this study is the existence of a structured content validation mechanism involving institutional leaders before information is disseminated through digital platforms. This governance mechanism demonstrates that digital marketing is managed through collective ethical responsibility rather than individual discretion. Leadership supervision ensures that communication remains consistent with institutional missions, educational objectives, and Islamic moral principles. Therefore, governance becomes an intermediary mechanism connecting organizational values with communication practices. This finding contributes to the literature by introducing ethical governance as a central component of digital marketing within Islamic educational institutions, an aspect that has received limited scholarly attention in previous educational branding research.

The third component involves value-based digital communication practices. The findings consistently demonstrate that every communication activity undertaken by the institution seeks to integrate informational accuracy, transparency, educational content, religious messages, and creative presentation. Unlike promotional communication dominated by persuasive commercial language, value-based communication prioritizes authenticity, educational benefit, and moral responsibility. Consequently, audiences encounter communication that simultaneously informs, educates, inspires, and strengthens institutional identity. Such communication contributes to deeper emotional relationships between institutions and stakeholders because audiences perceive organizational sincerity rather than promotional manipulation.

These ethical communication practices subsequently generate several strategic outcomes. First, truthful and transparent communication strengthens public trust by reducing uncertainty regarding institutional quality and credibility. Trust becomes particularly important within educational contexts because parents and prospective

students often make enrollment decisions based upon institutional reputation and online information. Second, educational communication enhances stakeholder engagement by encouraging continuous interaction between institutions, students, parents, alumni, and wider communities. Unlike engagement driven solely by entertaining content, engagement within Islamic educational institutions is strengthened through meaningful educational experiences shared via digital platforms. Third, creative yet ethically grounded communication enhances institutional visibility while preserving organizational authenticity. Consequently, digital marketing contributes simultaneously to institutional competitiveness and educational sustainability.

The relationship among these components illustrates that ethical branding within Islamic educational institutions follows a substantially different developmental trajectory from branding within commercial organizations. Commercial branding frequently seeks to influence consumer perceptions through persuasive communication designed to increase market preference. The present study demonstrates that educational branding within pesantren is constructed through organizational authenticity. Institutional image is therefore not manufactured through symbolic representation but develops gradually through consistent ethical communication that accurately reflects institutional realities. Such findings extend educational branding theory by suggesting that authenticity represents one of the most important determinants of long-term institutional reputation within faith-based educational organizations.

The theoretical contribution of this study is therefore threefold. First, it extends Islamic marketing ethics beyond commercial settings into the domain of educational management. Previous studies have predominantly examined Islamic marketing within business organizations, focusing on halal products, consumer behavior, and ethical selling practices. This research demonstrates that Islamic ethical principles also provide a comprehensive framework for managing institutional communication within educational organizations. Consequently, Islamic marketing should not be understood merely as a commercial concept but as a broader ethical communication paradigm applicable across various organizational contexts.

Second, this study contributes to educational branding literature by integrating ethical dimensions into branding theory. Existing branding frameworks generally

emphasize differentiation, reputation management, communication effectiveness, and stakeholder engagement. Although these dimensions remain important, the present findings indicate that ethical consistency constitutes an equally significant determinant of branding sustainability. Institutional reputation becomes more resilient when communication consistently reflects organizational values and educational missions. Therefore, ethical values should be positioned not as complementary branding attributes but as foundational elements shaping institutional identity.

Third, this study enriches the discourse on digital transformation within Islamic education. Contemporary discussions frequently portray digital transformation primarily as technological modernization involving digital infrastructure, online learning, and social media utilization. The findings presented here demonstrate that successful digital transformation requires ethical transformation as well. Technological innovation without ethical guidance may increase institutional visibility but simultaneously weaken organizational authenticity. Conversely, integrating ethical principles into digital transformation enables institutions to utilize technological opportunities while preserving religious identity and educational philosophy. Accordingly, digital transformation should be conceptualized as the harmonization of technological capability and ethical responsibility.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study also offers important practical implications for educational leaders and policymakers. For Islamic boarding schools, the findings provide evidence that effective digital marketing does not necessarily require extensive financial resources or sophisticated technological infrastructure. More importantly, successful institutional branding depends upon organizational commitment to truthful communication, transparent governance, educational engagement, and responsible innovation. Islamic educational institutions should therefore prioritize developing communication policies grounded in Islamic ethical principles before investing in advanced promotional technologies. Such priorities will enable institutions to establish sustainable public trust while maintaining educational authenticity.

The findings also suggest the importance of strengthening institutional capacity in digital communication management. Continuous professional development for media teams should include not only technical competencies such as content production, graphic design, video editing, and social media analytics but also ethical competencies

concerning Islamic communication principles, digital responsibility, and institutional accountability. Integrating these competencies into leadership training and institutional management programs will contribute significantly to improving the quality of digital communication across Islamic educational institutions.

From a policy perspective, ministries, educational organizations, and pesantren associations may consider developing ethical digital communication guidelines specifically designed for Islamic educational institutions. Existing digital marketing guidelines generally emphasize communication effectiveness and technological utilization without adequately addressing ethical dimensions rooted in Islamic educational philosophy. The proposed Ethical Educational Branding Model offers an initial conceptual foundation for designing such guidelines, thereby encouraging more responsible and value-oriented digital communication practices across the Islamic education sector.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. This research was conducted as a single case study within one Islamic boarding school, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Different pesantren may exhibit varying organizational cultures, leadership styles, technological capacities, and communication strategies that influence the implementation of Islamic ethical values in digital marketing. Future studies may therefore employ multiple-case study designs involving different categories of pesantren, Islamic schools, or Islamic universities to examine whether the proposed model remains applicable across diverse institutional settings.

Future research may also expand the proposed model through quantitative validation. The four ethical dimensions identified in this study may be operationalized into measurable indicators capable of explaining public trust, stakeholder engagement, institutional reputation, student enrollment decisions, and organizational sustainability. Such investigations would provide stronger empirical evidence regarding the causal relationships among Islamic ethical values, digital marketing practices, and educational branding outcomes.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that digital marketing within Islamic educational institutions should not be understood merely as a technological communication strategy but as an ethical educational practice grounded in Islamic values. The integration of *ṣidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, and *faṭānah* establishes a

comprehensive communication framework capable of strengthening institutional credibility, educational engagement, and public trust while preserving the religious identity of the institution. The Ethical Educational Branding Model proposed in this study therefore provides a new perspective for understanding how Islamic educational institutions can successfully navigate digital transformation without sacrificing their moral and educational foundations. As digital communication increasingly shapes public perceptions of educational quality, embedding Islamic ethical principles into institutional branding offers a sustainable pathway toward strengthening the reputation, legitimacy, and long-term development of Islamic education in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital marketing practices at Ummul Quro As-Suyuty Islamic Boarding School are not merely institutional promotional activities but constitute an ethical educational communication system grounded in Islamic values. The findings reveal that the integration of *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *tablīgh* (educational communication), and *faṭānah* (wisdom and creativity) shapes digital marketing practices that emphasize authenticity, transparency, educational engagement, and responsible innovation. These four ethical dimensions collectively strengthen institutional credibility, public trust, and educational identity while simultaneously supporting the pesantren's mission of da'wah in the digital era. Based on these findings, this study proposes the Ethical Educational Branding Model, which positions Islamic ethical values as the primary foundation for developing sustainable digital branding in Islamic educational institutions. This model extends the application of Islamic marketing ethics beyond commercial settings by demonstrating its relevance in educational management and institutional communication.

The proposed model provides both theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of Islamic education, educational branding, and digital marketing. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on Islamic educational management by integrating ethical values into digital branding strategies. Practically, it offers a conceptual guideline for Islamic boarding schools and other Islamic educational institutions seeking to develop digital communication that is innovative, credible, and aligned with Islamic principles. Nevertheless, this study was conducted within a single Islamic boarding school, limiting the generalizability of its findings. Future research is

therefore encouraged to validate and refine the Ethical Educational Branding Model through comparative case studies or quantitative investigations involving diverse Islamic educational institutions, while also examining its influence on stakeholder trust, institutional reputation, student recruitment, and the long-term sustainability of Islamic education in the digital era

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