DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL BRANDING AT AL MAAHIRA ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study investigates public relations management in using social media for school branding at SMP Al Maahira International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Malang, Indonesia. It examines three management functions: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Based on a qualitative descriptive study, data were obtained through interviews with school leaders, public relations personnel, media team members, and other stakeholders, supported by observation and digital documentation. Analysis followed the interactive procedure of data condensation, display, and conclusion verification, with triangulation across sources, methods, and times. Findings show that branding planning emphasizes a modern, international, humane, and Islamic institutional identity. A designated media team translates academic, religious, achievement-related, and residential activities into verified content distributed through Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and the school website. Evaluation uses audience responses, account indicators, feedback, and organizational discussion. Challenges include inconsistent information flow, overlapping responsibilities, and limited outcome measurement. The case demonstrates how coordinated digital communication can make school identity more visible, but audience reach alone does not establish causal effects on enrollment or public trust. Stronger editorial systems and systematic evaluation are recommended.

Keywords: *Public Relations Management, School Branding, Positive Image, Social Media.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji manajemen hubungan masyarakat dalam pemanfaatan media sosial untuk branding SMP Al Maahira International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Malang. Kajian berfokus pada perencanaan, pelaksanaan, dan evaluasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan wawancara kepada pimpinan sekolah, pengelola humas, tim media, dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya, disertai observasi dan dokumentasi digital. Analisis menggunakan proses interaktif berupa kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi kesimpulan serta triangulasi sumber, teknik, dan waktu. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perencanaan branding menonjolkan identitas sekolah yang modern, berwawasan internasional, humanis, dan Islami. Tim media mengolah informasi tentang pembelajaran, prestasi, kegiatan keagamaan, serta kehidupan asrama menjadi publikasi yang melalui tahap verifikasi pada Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, dan situs sekolah. Evaluasi dilakukan melalui respons audiens, indikator akun, masukan pemangku kepentingan, dan koordinasi internal. Hambatan meliputi keterlambatan informasi, perangkapan tugas, dan keterbatasan

pengukuran hasil. Pengelolaan komunikasi digital yang terkoordinasi membantu memperlihatkan identitas sekolah, tetapi jangkauan media sosial belum membuktikan hubungan sebab-akibat dengan penerimaan siswa. Penelitian merekomendasikan penguatan proses editorial dan evaluasi yang lebih sistematis.

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Humas, School Branding, Citra Positif, Media Sosial.

A. INTRODUCTION

Competition among educational institutions has transformed school reputation from a peripheral concern into a central consideration in educational management. Schools are evaluated not only by the formal curriculum but also by the perceived quality of their learning environment, institutional values, achievements, facilities, communication practices, and responsiveness to families. For private Islamic educational institutions, this challenge is particularly complex. They must communicate educational excellence while demonstrating that religious commitments remain integral to institutional practice. In a crowded information environment, public recognition is unlikely to emerge automatically from the existence of good programs. Schools need ways to explain what they do, make educational outcomes visible, and cultivate a relationship of trust with prospective families. Public relations management offers an organizational mechanism for carrying out these responsibilities[1].

School branding should therefore be understood as more than an exercise in designing an appealing logo, slogan, or promotional message. Branding connects the identity an institution wishes to communicate with the impressions formed by its audiences through experience and information. An educational brand is credible when published representations can be traced to actual educational activities. Images of classroom interaction, student accomplishments, religious practices, and everyday residential life offer evidence through which audiences assess institutional claims. The difficulty is that these activities are usually dispersed across multiple school units. A communication system is required to collect information, select material, verify its accuracy, and present a coherent identity. Public relations management links this organizational work to external perception.[2]

[1] Akhmad Nurul Kawakip, *Paradigma Sekolah Unggul dalam Perspektif Teori Multipel Intelligences*, 5, no. 1 (t.t.): 141–55.
[2] Tutut Sholihah, *Strategi Manajemen Humas Dalam Menciptakan School Branding Pada Sekolah Islam Terpadu*, 3, no. 2 (2018): 72–84.

Digital technology creates opportunities for educational institutions to engage audiences beyond traditional geographical boundaries. Social media platforms enable the rapid distribution of videos, photographs, announcements, and narratives, while allowing viewers to comment, share, and ask questions. Their value for schools lies not merely in speed or the potential for extensive visibility, but also in their capacity to show routines that parents would otherwise find difficult to observe. This is important in boarding schools because parents entrust institutions with both the formal education and the everyday care of their children. Digital communication can reduce informational distance between school and family, although posting frequently cannot itself guarantee credibility or satisfaction.[3]

The presence of younger parents and digitally accustomed prospective students intensifies the need for accessible communication. A parent considering a boarding school may wish to know whether students are safe, how religious guidance is practiced, what languages are taught, whether facilities are suitable, and what academic opportunities are available. These questions cannot be answered convincingly through promotional slogans alone. An institution's communication must connect its general promises with observable activities and achievements. Accordingly, management choices about content selection, timing, internal approval, and platform use are closely related to school branding. They shape the evidence available to audiences and the manner in which audiences encounter the school.[4]

Previous research cited in the thesis illustrates the importance of these managerial concerns. Sholihah examined public relations strategies for creating school branding in integrated Islamic schools, while Syafitri discussed school-branding activities on social media. Other studies discussed in the thesis describe constraints arising from inadequate communication planning, limited human resources, and insufficient utilization of technology. Research on digital public relations similarly draws attention to organizational communication and the opportunities presented by online platforms. Together, these works suggest that the mere existence of an institutional account is insufficient: branding must be linked to coordinated management practices. Yet the practical relationship between planning, daily digital publication, and ongoing evaluation deserves closer study in the distinctive setting of an international Islamic boarding school.[5]

[3] Dina Mizanie dan Irwansyah Irwansyah, *Pemanfaatan Media Sosial sebagai Strategi Kehumasan Digital di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0*, 2, no. 2 (2019): 149–64, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21107/komunikasi.v13i2.5099.
[4] *Penggunaan Media Sosial Oleh Digital Native.*, 1, no. 15 (2018): 47–60.
[5] Wenni Syafitri, *Pelatihan Branding Sekolah pada Sosial Media di SMP IT Madani*, 3, no. 1 (2019): 158–66.

SMP Al Maahira International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Malang provides a relevant setting for examining this relationship. The institution seeks to position itself as a modern, prestigious, and humane Islamic school that combines international outlook, academic performance, character formation, and Islamic values. The thesis reports a substantial digital presence across TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and the school website. It also describes the publication of student achievements, facilities, and residential activities, and the use of online publicity alongside open-house activities and other direct engagement. These practices raise an important management question: how does an institution organize a diverse set of school activities into consistent public communication without detaching the resulting image from its educational mission?[6]

The school is especially significant because its brand is not based on one characteristic. An international orientation is communicated through language learning and student achievements, while its Islamic character is expressed through Qur'anic memorization, worship, and moral education. Its boarding-school identity additionally depends on depicting the daily lived environment and the relationship between teachers and students. This multi-dimensional identity requires editorial judgment: excessive attention to achievements could obscure everyday care, whereas reliance solely on residential-life imagery might underrepresent academic rigor. The ability to distribute attention among these elements is therefore part of the management of a coherent institutional identity.

A second reason for examining this case is the existence of a designated media team operating under public relations coordination. Branding is sometimes discussed as a public-facing communication activity, but its production depends on internal organizational systems. A school requires staff who can obtain accurate information from teachers and students, capture appropriate images, edit materials, obtain authorization, select distribution channels, and respond to audience feedback. Understanding these internal processes helps distinguish deliberate institutional branding from an accumulation of disconnected posts. In this study, the school is analyzed as an organization managing communication rather than as a collection of social media accounts.

[6] Ike Mariya Ulfa, "Manajemen Hubungan Masyarakat (Humas) dengan Pemanfaatan Media Sosial sebagai Sarana Branding di SMP Al Maahira International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Malang," Tesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil Kediri, 2026.

This article addresses three related questions. First, how is social-media-based school branding planned by the public relations unit at SMP Al Maahira IIBS Malang? Second, how are branding activities implemented through editorial coordination, platform selection, content production, and publication? Third, how are outcomes evaluated, what challenges emerge, and what improvements follow from the results? By connecting these questions within one empirical case, the article contributes a process-oriented account of digital public relations management in an Islamic educational institution. Its particular contribution is to show how religious identity, educational quality, organizational workflow, and audience engagement become linked across planning, implementation, and evaluation.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This article is based on the qualitative descriptive research reported in the master's thesis by Ike Mariya Ulfa. The research took place at SMP Al Maahira IIBS Malang, located within the Tirtasani Royal Resort complex, Kepuharjo, Karangploso, Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research sought to understand management decisions and communication processes in their institutional context rather than calculate the isolated statistical effect of social media exposure. The school constitutes a bounded case in which organizational arrangements, official digital content, and stakeholder interpretations can be considered together.

The original thesis describes data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation. Interview sources included school leadership, the vice principal responsible for public relations, members of the media team, administrative personnel, students, and parents or prospective parents. These participants supplied perspectives on both the production of school information and its reception. The combination is important: managers can describe planned objectives, media personnel can explain actual workflows, while families and students can indicate how the resulting messages are understood. Observation and documentation were used to contextualize statements and examine how school activities appeared in public communication.[7]

In the interview process, questions concerned the main duties of public relations, target audiences, choice of platforms, organizational responsibility, approval of content,

[7] Ike Mariya Ulfa, "Chap 3," dalam *Manajemen Hubungan Masyarakat (Humas) dengan Pemanfaatan Media Sosial sebagai Sarana Branding di SMP Al Maahira International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Malang* (t.t.).

interdepartmental coordination, the treatment of negative responses, collaborations, operational constraints, and evaluation indicators. These categories corresponded to the thesis's three research questions and helped compare strategic intentions with routine practices. The analysis reported here preserves the study's descriptive orientation: it identifies processes and explanations grounded in the original account, without recasting interview perceptions as controlled evidence of causal effects.

The original study employed the interactive model associated with Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data reduction or condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Interview statements, observations, and documentation were organized around planning, implementation, and evaluation. Material relevant to each question was selected, compared across sources, and presented as thematic findings. The thesis also describes triangulation across sources, techniques, and times as a procedure for increasing the credibility of interpretations.[8]

For the present article, the thesis was restructured into the introduction, method, results and discussion, and conclusion specified by the An-Nadzir template. The underlying research participants and field findings remain those of the thesis; no new interviews, platform analytics, or survey responses have been added. Numerical indications of audience reach and school achievements are reported as figures documented in the thesis, not as independently verified current statistics. Similarly, claims of effectiveness are interpreted as participants' assessments and descriptive indicators, not as causal estimates produced by an experimental or longitudinal research design.

Ethical interpretation is important when presenting material concerning schoolchildren and residential education. The analysis therefore emphasizes institutional processes rather than identifying individual students, and it paraphrases stakeholder statements when exact quotations are unnecessary. The study's evidentiary strength lies in the convergence of managerial accounts, observations, and institutional documentation. Its limitations include the single-school setting, differences between social media exposure and actual enrollment decisions, and the absence of an independently measured comparison group. These limits are considered explicitly in discussing the findings.

[8] Matthew B. Miles dkk., , *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook, 3rd ed.* (Thousand Oaks, 2014).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Planning a multidimensional institutional brand

The first finding concerns the deliberate formulation of the identity to be communicated. SMP Al Maahira IIBS Malang sought to present itself as a modern, prestigious, and humane international Islamic boarding school. According to the vice principal for public relations, the intended image is that of an institution capable of developing globally oriented female students while maintaining Islamic principles. The orientation is connected to the school's mission of academic excellence, friendly education, character development, and guidance grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Rather than presenting religious and international education as opposing identities, the school treated them as complementary components of the same brand.

This intended identity gave direction to the selection of content. The thesis identifies four principal content areas: academic and foreign-language learning; academic and non-academic achievements; Islamic character development, including worship and Qur'anic memorization; and school facilities and residential life. Each category addresses a potential concern among parents or prospective students. Language practice and achievements provide evidence of academic ambition; worship and memorization demonstrate religious formation; and depictions of classrooms, dormitories, dining facilities, and supportive interactions offer a view of day-to-day student welfare. These categories translate abstract branding statements into recognizable institutional activities.

Planning was also related to the intended audience. School officials described parents from digitally active generations and prospective students as important recipients of online information. They considered social media useful for making school life visible to families who could not readily visit the campus. This relevance was particularly strong for prospective families outside East Java and beyond Indonesia. Digital channels could bring the school's image into the initial information-search process before any direct contact or physical visit. In this respect, the planned brand was not only an external projection of values but also an attempt to answer specific questions likely to arise during school selection.

The media team was established in 2021 and placed under the coordination of the vice principal responsible for public relations. The thesis records an organizational arrangement recognized by school leadership and accompanied by a formal assignment of responsibilities. The presence of a dedicated team indicates that content production was treated as an

organizational function rather than an occasional task assigned informally whenever a school event occurred. The planning process included decisions about resources, audience identification, content themes, communication channels, design responsibilities, and publicizing school achievements.

A central feature of planning was alignment between brand messages and institutional substance. Staff did not simply choose images that might attract attention; they were expected to source material from actual academic, religious, and residential activities. This practice matters because a school brand has to remain accountable to the education provided. For example, the use of English and Arabic in school routines serves as an observable expression of international orientation. Likewise, documentation of Qur'anic activities indicates the continuing presence of Islamic values. Material about facilities and dormitory routines helps make residential conditions more concrete for parents. The combination produces a broader narrative than any one promotional claim could provide.

Planning nevertheless involved a tension between systematic thematic priorities and unpredictable news. Major student achievements, competitions, or school events may occur outside a fixed editorial calendar. The school therefore needed a structure flexible enough to incorporate unexpected accomplishments while maintaining recognizable thematic continuity. This distinction is essential: the absence of an inflexible daily schedule does not mean the absence of planning. Planning in this setting includes a stable institutional identity, agreed categories of evidence, a responsible team, and procedures through which current events can be transformed into publishable materials.

2. Implementation through coordinated media production

The second finding is the translation of branding plans into an operational workflow. Information commonly originated with teachers, students, and units responsible for activities and competitions. It was transferred to the media team, which prepared visual or written materials for publication. Designs and important information were then forwarded to the vice principal for public relations for review, revision, and approval. Communication through WhatsApp enabled staff to share drafts rapidly and discuss corrections without waiting for physical meetings. This process made publication both decentralized in information gathering and centralized in editorial authorization.

The media team undertook complementary tasks associated with reporting, photography, video recording, editing, information technology, and uploading material. The thesis describes

a team of approximately eight members with designated roles, although some tasks overlapped in practice. Such functional division is significant because digital branding involves different production competencies. Capturing a school event requires on-site presence; editing requires technical and narrative choices; approval requires institutional judgment; and uploading requires knowledge of the format and audience of each platform. When these activities are organized sequentially, a school can publish diverse content while preserving a consistent voice.

Institutional support was provided through equipment and workspaces. Interviews and observations cited in the thesis describe laptops, cameras, computer-room access, and spaces for editing and recording. The availability of these resources allowed the media team to carry out production activities within the school rather than depend exclusively on ad hoc external services. Material support also signaled that communication was recognized as a continuing responsibility. Nevertheless, resources alone were not sufficient: staff had to coordinate around school schedules, obtain timely information, and maintain standards during busy periods.

The school used several distribution channels. Instagram and Facebook carried visual information and brief announcements, while TikTok was used for short-form videos designed for broader circulation. YouTube helped preserve longer audiovisual documentation, and the school website functioned as a more durable information archive. WhatsApp groups also supported internal communication and redistribution. In the thesis, the platform landscape includes TikTok with approximately 176,600 followers, Instagram with approximately 43,000 followers, and YouTube with approximately 9,000 subscribers at the reported period. These figures illustrate scale in the source material but should not be understood as a live audit of current accounts.

Platform differentiation supported the overall branding objective. The format of a school event might vary across channels without requiring the school to change the underlying message. A brief Instagram post could highlight a student's achievement; a TikTok video could show a lively moment from daily life; a longer YouTube upload could provide more extended documentation; and a website article could preserve the information for future readers. This strategy uses format to match audience attention and informational depth. The value of multi-platform communication therefore lies not simply in increasing the number of accounts but in adapting presentation while retaining a common institutional identity.

Content included classroom activities, literacy, scientific achievements, Qur'anic memorization, religious events, school celebrations, facilities, and daily residential routines. The source thesis reports notable student achievements, including a total of 1,380 medals for the 2024–2025 period and an occasion on which students reportedly received 100 medals in a national competition. In the institution's branding narrative, such accomplishments served as concrete signs of academic and non-academic performance. The analytical point is not that medal counts independently measure educational quality, but that documented achievements supplied material for an evidence-based public narrative.

The thesis describes frequent publication, including approximately one to three Instagram items daily and several TikTok videos weekly in its introductory account. It also reports that operational publishing could be event-driven, particularly when student achievements required rapid dissemination. These observations are not necessarily contradictory. Routine communication can establish audience familiarity, while flexible treatment of breaking school news makes the account relevant to ongoing activities. The ability to combine these rhythms reflects coordination between the people who hold information and the staff responsible for transforming information into public materials.

Review before publication was an important internal control. According to the reported workflow, materials such as posters, competition announcements, activity documentation, and banners were checked by public relations leadership. Approval enabled revisions where designs were unclear or details needed confirmation. This step has special importance in an educational institution because the accuracy of names, achievements, programs, and event details affects institutional credibility. It also reduces the risk that a hurried upload might conflict with the values or official position of the school. Editorial verification should thus be understood as a management function as well as a technical publishing step.

The institution also drew on networks beyond its official social media channels. The thesis mentions collaboration with online news outlets, including Radar Malang, and previous engagement with print media. Teachers and students helped circulate official information through their own networks. Open houses and education exhibitions complemented digital publicity. These practices suggest that digital branding was embedded within a broader public relations strategy that moved between online representation and offline contact. People who encountered the school on social media could gain further information during an institutional

visit, while direct experiences could later reinforce or qualify the impressions first formed online.

The practical workflow can be summarized as information generation, preliminary documentation, media production, internal review, publication, redistribution, and archiving. These steps are analytically important because each introduces a potential source of strength or breakdown. Strong source reporting creates accurate content; efficient editing improves accessibility; leadership review protects institutional coherence; channel selection increases relevance; and archiving enables the school to retain evidence of its activities. The process explains why digital branding is best examined through public relations management rather than treated as an isolated promotion function.

3. Evaluation, feedback, and barriers

The third finding concerns evaluation. Public relations leaders and media personnel monitored reactions to published content and discussed operational improvements. Evaluation was not limited to rigidly scheduled formal meetings. The study describes flexible discussions after draft preparation, immediately after publication, and when particular issues arose. Staff considered likes, viewing figures, followers, audience comments, positive responses, and apparent growth in interest from prospective families. In this way, evaluation occurred within the continuing cycle of content development instead of only at the end of a campaign.

Participants interpreted high levels of recognition and positive online response as signs that the school's image was reaching the intended public. The thesis records accounts of increased interest from families outside Java, more visits from external institutions, and positive reactions from school stakeholders. One interviewee assessed the success of branding in highly favorable terms, including an approximate 90 percent figure. The figure is reported as the speaker's impression rather than a statistically established awareness rate. Without a defined denominator, sample, or measurement procedure, it cannot serve as a precise population estimate. The significance of the statement lies in the respondent's perception of progress and the kinds of feedback used to support that assessment.

Follower totals and viewer counts were also regarded as encouraging indicators. The thesis describes a sizable TikTok audience, a substantial Instagram following, and continuing public interaction. These measures indicate exposure or engagement with the accounts, but they do not by themselves demonstrate trust, educational quality, or the effectiveness of social media in generating applications. A follower may never seek enrollment information, and a

prospective family may decide to enroll only after discussing the school with acquaintances or visiting in person. Accordingly, the observed relationship between digital reach and public interest is a plausible descriptive association, not an established causal sequence.

Evaluation uncovered organizational constraints as well. Some information was not promptly forwarded or redistributed by members of the school community. Editing tasks sometimes competed with other responsibilities, and irregular delivery of raw material slowed publication. Technical difficulties or differences in staff availability created additional pressure. These issues show that a successful digital account depends on a much broader internal communication system. Even where capable editors and good equipment exist, the timeliness and breadth of publicity can be limited by weak information flow or inconsistent cooperation across units.

The thesis further indicates that media materials were retained in digital folders and the school website. Archiving served a documentary function, preserving a record of activities that might otherwise disappear from immediate social media feeds. It also offers potential support for evaluation, because archived items can be compared with communication plans and used to identify which program areas have received adequate public attention. A systematic archive can help distinguish an institution's enduring identity from content that is temporarily popular. In a school, that distinction is important because educational achievement and formation are sustained processes, not only moments of virality.

The evaluation practices in the case reveal both responsiveness and a need for stronger measurement. Flexible meetings allow rapid correction, but they may result in uneven documentation of why a decision was taken. Engagement counts provide readily available feedback, but without categories that distinguish prospective families, current parents, alumni, and the general public, they can obscure strategic outcomes. The findings therefore suggest the usefulness of a simple reporting system combining publication records, the kinds of audience inquiries received, qualitative parent feedback, and the stages at which interested families request additional information. Such a system would complement rather than replace the relational judgment already practiced by school staff.

Discussion

The overall pattern demonstrates a linked cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Planning established the school's desired identity and selected material capable of representing it. Implementation organized the collection, editing, authorization, distribution,

and storage of content. Evaluation generated information about reception and operational obstacles, which could then inform subsequent choices. The case therefore supports understanding public relations management as an ongoing organizational process rather than a succession of individual promotional activities. The coherence of the process is especially consequential for boarding schools, where the stakes of parental trust extend beyond academic instruction to daily care and character formation.

This finding is compatible with the account of public relations advanced by Bernays, in which communication and the relationship between organizations and publics are central concerns. It also complements contemporary discussions of electronic public relations, including the importance of organizational adaptation to digital media. In the school setting, however, public communication cannot be reduced to persuasion. Institutional credibility depends on the relationship between the images being circulated and experiences actually available within the educational environment. The Al Maahira case illustrates this dependence by constructing content largely from ongoing school programs rather than exclusively from promotional claims.[9]

The findings also extend the discussion of school branding presented in research by Sholihah and Syafitri. Rather than focusing only on the selection of attractive publicity channels, they illuminate the internal arrangements needed to make communication sustained and coherent. The presence of a defined media team, recurring approval procedures, and a thematic content framework helps explain how an institution can manage multiple messages without losing its intended identity. In this respect, organization and editorial governance appear as critical, but sometimes underemphasized, components of school branding.[10]

The four content domains reveal an integrative form of identity management. Academic accomplishments supply performance-based evidence; languages and international programs convey global aspiration; Islamic and Qur'anic practices communicate moral and religious commitments; and residential content addresses comfort, care, and everyday conditions. These components can reinforce one another when their claims are consistent. A school that publishes only spectacular achievements risks presenting a narrow image, while one that describes values without illustrating their implementation may appear abstract. Balanced publication offers audiences a fuller basis for making judgments.

[9] Edward L. Bernays, *Public Relations* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).
[10] Tutut Sholihah, *Strategi Manajemen Humas Dalam Menciptakan School Branding Pada Sekolah Islam Terpadu*, 3, no. 2 (2018): 72–84.

Another analytical implication relates to transparency. The possibility of showing activities in near real time enables boarding schools to communicate the ordinarily less visible aspects of institutional life. For parents considering residential education, the visibility of routines may reduce uncertainty. Yet public visibility is not the same as accountability. A carefully selected video cannot capture all experiences, and the audience's ability to ask questions or obtain accurate responses remains essential. The school can therefore strengthen its branding by linking attractive visual content with responsive two-way communication, clear information about programs, and opportunities for direct engagement.

The case further shows how platform-specific design works alongside institutional consistency. Short videos are suited to moments of everyday student activity, photographs and captions can summarize achievements, and websites can support more durable documentation. A multi-channel strategy can be effective when the message remains consistent across formats and the audience can move easily from initial exposure to detailed information. Conversely, widespread copying of identical materials across every platform might neglect audience expectations and reduce the explanatory value of the message. Editorial decisions should therefore weigh both coherence and the communicative strengths of each channel.

Public relations management also has an internal cultural dimension. In this case, teachers, students, administrators, and leaders were contributors to the school's communication system, even if not all of them held formal media positions. The media team depended on their willingness to share achievements, explain activities, and distribute accurate information. Delays therefore reflected organizational coordination as much as technical capacity. Improving digital branding is partly a matter of fostering the expectation that relevant school activities will be documented responsibly and reported promptly to the authorized communication team.

At the same time, professionalization introduces resource demands. Capturing, editing, checking, and distributing school content can be labor-intensive, particularly when a school maintains several active channels. The thesis documents staff with overlapping roles and competing duties. Clear editorial priorities can help prevent overload by distinguishing essential information from optional publicity. A realistic publishing schedule, a shared content calendar, routine submission procedures, and access to basic equipment would help manage these demands. These recommendations follow from the operational challenges identified in the source rather than from assumptions about the latest platform algorithms.

The apparent success of branding should be interpreted with care. Interviewees associated social media activity with stronger recognition, external interest, and prospective student attention, while the thesis described substantial audience numbers. These are meaningful descriptive observations. However, a single qualitative case cannot isolate the separate effects of social media, educational achievement, parental recommendation, institutional facilities, location, or direct outreach. It would be methodologically unsound to conclude that increased online followers caused higher enrollment without systematically examining alternative explanations. The contribution of this case is stronger when framed as an explanation of how the institution organizes branding and perceives its outcomes.

The distinction between reach and educational reputation deserves emphasis. Reach answers whether content was encountered; engagement measures observable reactions; reputation concerns more durable judgments of credibility and quality; and enrollment decisions involve practical considerations as well as image. An effective evaluation model should not collapse all four into one metric. The findings indicate that Al Maahira already monitors immediate digital responses and records stakeholder feedback. Extending this practice to structured inquiry tracking and periodic perception assessments could provide a more complete account of branding performance and prevent popularity metrics from dominating institutional judgment.

The research has implications for other Islamic schools seeking to develop their digital communication. It suggests that a recognizable identity should precede choices about platforms, because platforms are channels for communication rather than substitutes for the institution's purpose. It also suggests that a designated team should work with academic and student affairs units to obtain authentic, varied material. Finally, evaluation should ask whether communication helps families understand the school, not merely whether a post attracts attention. These lessons may be transferable conceptually, although implementation will depend on each school's staff, resources, educational profile, and audience.

Several limitations qualify the analysis. The evidence originates from one institution and largely reflects the period investigated in the original thesis. Reported account statistics may change and should not be treated as current figures. The study does not present a standardized survey measuring the awareness or trust of a representative group of parents, nor does it offer a counterfactual comparison that could establish a causal effect on enrollment. Interview narratives may also emphasize positive institutional experiences. Triangulation strengthens

interpretive credibility, but it does not remove all selection or reporting bias. More extensive comparative and longitudinal designs would be needed to test relationships among communication strategy, parent trust, enrollment inquiries, and institutional reputation.

The relationship between religious educational values and public communication also deserves specific consideration. Islamic identity in this case is not limited to the visual presence of religious symbols. It is articulated through routine worship, Qur'anic learning, character formation, and interactions among students and educators. This is an important distinction for branding research. Where institutional values are central to parents' educational choices, communication gains depth by showing how values shape everyday experiences. A digital public relations team therefore needs access to authentic practices, and not only to ceremonial events. Repeated representations of ordinary educational activities can make the intended institutional identity more understandable than a sequence of isolated promotional statements. At the same time, publication should not transform religious activities into performances staged solely for publicity. The credibility of the school's image depends on preserving the educational purposes of these practices.

The residential context introduces further management questions. Boarding education requires families to assess arrangements that are difficult to observe continuously, including supervision, student interaction, dining arrangements, living spaces, and pastoral support. Communication about residential facilities may reduce uncertainty during the search for a school, but published material remains selective. A responsible strategy would distinguish between general depictions of school life and the individualized information that parents may need to discuss privately. For instance, a video showing a dormitory environment can illustrate facilities, while questions about the care of an individual student require an appropriate direct communication channel. Digital branding thus complements, rather than replaces, established relationships between the school and its families. This implication is consistent with the institution's use of both public accounts and WhatsApp-based communication.

A closely related issue is editorial responsibility toward students. School achievements and student activities are valuable sources of information, but the subjects of school content are children. The existence of a review process provides a foundation for appropriate decisions about what should be circulated. Schools can strengthen this process by establishing clear procedures for obtaining permission where appropriate, protecting sensitive personal details, and ensuring that a student's dignity is not sacrificed for attention. Such procedures should

encompass photography, live updates, captions, and responses to public comments. Although the thesis does not evaluate a comprehensive child-protection policy for social media, its account of approval and verification indicates where safeguards can be incorporated into existing routines. Ethical publication is therefore not separate from branding: it helps sustain the trust on which educational reputation relies.

The study also suggests an approach to editorial prioritization. Not every activity must be uploaded immediately, and high posting volume is not necessarily synonymous with meaningful communication. The four content categories identified by staff could be used to review the balance of material across an academic term. If posts concentrate heavily on competitions, the team can examine whether parents are still receiving adequate information about classroom learning, spiritual development, and residential life. If posts focus largely on facilities, the team can ask whether the intellectual and character-forming dimensions of the institution are sufficiently represented. Periodic thematic review would make the school's identity more coherent without requiring the same volume of publication each week. This recommendation follows directly from the intended multidimensional image and the challenge of handling unpredictable events.

Another useful distinction is between reactive and reflective evaluation. Reactive evaluation occurs when an editor adjusts a design after a leader's comment or when the team modifies a post in response to audience feedback. This is valuable because it prevents avoidable mistakes from persisting. Reflective evaluation, by contrast, asks whether a series of publications is helping the institution meet its longer-term communication objectives. It may compare content themes, inquiries from prospective families, questions raised during open houses, and recurring concerns among current parents. Combining the two approaches can preserve the flexibility found in the case while generating more systematic institutional learning. Such evaluation would not require complex software at the outset. A shared spreadsheet of dates, content themes, channels, common inquiries, and lessons learned could make the process more transparent and reproducible.

From a management perspective, the case also raises the question of continuity. Digital channels depend on employees with specialized production and communication skills, and staff changes may disrupt workflows when procedures exist only as tacit knowledge. The thesis documents a designated team and differentiated responsibilities, which provide a basis for institutional continuity. Written editorial guidelines, a shared archive, and periodic training

could extend that foundation. This is particularly important when school achievements need to be reported quickly or when unexpected events generate questions from the public. Consistent processes can help new staff recognize institutional priorities and avoid repeating earlier mistakes. Leadership should therefore see investment in communication capacity as support for organizational memory as well as for promotional output.

Future research could compare several Islamic boarding schools with different organizational structures and levels of digital activity. It could trace inquiry and enrollment pathways over time, separating initial exposure to social media from subsequent campus visits and recommendations. Researchers could additionally examine how parents interpret specific kinds of digital evidence, including academic results, facilities, and religious activities. Such research would deepen understanding of the mechanisms through which public communication contributes to reputation. For now, this case indicates that the management of content, verification, coordination, and feedback is central to making the school's digital identity both visible and credible.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates that social-media-based branding at SMP Al Maahira IIBS Malang is organized through three interconnected managerial activities. In the planning stage, the public relations unit defines the intended institutional identity as a modern and internationally oriented Islamic boarding school, identifies prospective families as important audiences, and organizes content around academic learning, achievements, Islamic character formation, and residential life. During implementation, a designated media team transforms information generated across the school into verified and platform-appropriate materials. Coordination with school leaders, routine documentation, multi-channel publication, and archiving help keep branding messages connected to actual educational practices.

Evaluation is undertaken through flexible discussion, audience responses, account-performance indicators, and perceived interest from families and external stakeholders. These sources suggest that school personnel view the digital strategy positively, although the evidence does not establish that social media independently causes enrollment growth or a precise level of brand awareness. The most significant difficulties concern the regular flow of information, the timely redistribution of content, overlapping staff responsibilities, and the need for more systematic measurement. The principal contribution of the case is therefore an organizational

explanation of how digital public relations and school branding are connected, rather than a claim of quantified promotional impact.

The findings recommend strengthening internal reporting procedures, maintaining thematic and visual consistency, developing staff capacity, and establishing an evaluation record that distinguishes reach, engagement, inquiries, and parent perceptions. Other Islamic educational institutions may adapt these practices to their own priorities and resources. Further comparative and longitudinal research is needed to determine whether, and under what conditions, sustained digital communication produces enduring institutional trust and influences school choice.

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