

Optimizing Social Media and School Websites for Promotional Branding in Indonesian Madrasahs: Achieving Competitive Advantage in the Digital Era

M.Zainul*¹, Farida Yulianti², Periyadi³, Dedy⁴, Salahuddin⁵ Ainur Rofiq⁶

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad al Banjari Banjarmasin

⁴ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Widya Praja Tanah Grogot

⁵ Universitas Borneo Tarakan

⁶ Universitas Sunan Drajat Lamongan

Corresponding E-mail: zainul38@yahoo.co.id


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ABSTRACT. In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, transformation in communication, work patterns, and access to information has reshaped how educational institutions present themselves to the public. Effective use of social media and websites can strengthen madrasahs' competitive position amid the rapid flow of information and rising expectations for educational quality. This study explores the utilisation of digital platforms—specifically official websites and Instagram—as promotional tools in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin to enhance their institutional advantage. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with public relations and media administrators, complemented by content analysis of both schools' online channels. The findings show that MAN 1 Banjarmasin is more proficient in managing its website, offering structured, informative, and consistently updated content that boosts institutional credibility. In contrast, MAN 2 Banjarmasin leverages Instagram more actively as an interactive space to engage students, parents, and the broader community through visual storytelling and social interaction. Despite these strengths, both schools encounter challenges related to limited human resources, technical skills, and insufficient institutional backing. This study underscores the need for integrated digital marketing strategies and recommends that madrasahs build stronger cross-platform coordination to solidify their online identity, enhance public trust, and increase student enrollment through sustained engagement on digital media.

Keywords: *Digital marketing, school promotion, competitive advantage, Instagram, educational website, Islamic senior high school*

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, technological transformation has changed the way humans communicate, work, and access information. The rapid development of the internet has had a major impact on various sectors, including the world of education (Fiftiyansyah & Ali, 2024; Leaton Gray et al., 2025; Mua & Heatubun, 2024; Nurdin et al., 2024). Educational institutions, including madrasahs, are required to adapt to technological advances in order to be able to compete and remain relevant (Ahmad Kusaini et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Sabariah et al., 2025). One of the challenges faced by madrasahs amidst competition between educational institutions is how to attract prospective students and build a positive image in the eyes of the public (Amirudin et al., 2024;

Hakim & Salim, 2024; Kurniawan, 2019). One of the social media that is widely used by educational institutions is Instagram, because of its advantages in presenting attractive content visualizations and reaching a wide audience (Imammuddin et al., 2024). Its visual-based platform, with features like multiple posts, stories, and IGTV, allows for engaging content creation and wide audience reach (I. K. A. M. Putra & Astina, 2019). Educational organizations utilize Instagram to build their brand image through a four-step process: creating content, communicating with audiences, collaborating with external partners, and maintaining relationships (Abdullah et al., 2025; Fairuziah et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Suryawati et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, the school website is an official page that contains various important information about educational institutions, ranging from madrasah profiles, excellent programs, registration systems, curriculum, news, to integrated digital services (Juhanaini et al., 2025; Rochman et al., 2020). The website also acts as an official documentation media and a communication bridge between the school and the public in a more formal and comprehensive manner. The website is a digital marketing strategy to promote educational institutions to prospective students and the general public (Arief et al., 2024; Hasanudin et al., 2024; Hidayati, 2021; Maya et al., 2022). Through Instagram, madrasahs can display student activities, academic and non-academic achievements, and convey Islamic values with a contemporary communication style (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Pambayun et al., 2025; Syamsuar et al., 2023; Yusuf, 2023). Social media such as Instagram and digital platforms such as school websites now not only function as a means of communication, but also as an effective marketing tool (Aisyah et al., 2024; Suryaman et al., 2024).

Optimal use of social media and websites can be a strategy to create competitive advantage for madrasahs amidst the rapid flow of information and increasing public expectations for the quality of education (Arif et al., 2025; Hidayati, 2021; Nurdin et al., 2024). Competitive advantage is not only determined by the quality of educational services alone, but also by the institution's ability to build a positive image, reach prospective students widely, and display distinctive values that distinguish madrasahs from other educational institutions (Sukur & Maula, 2021). Competitive advantage in Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasahs, is not solely determined by service quality but also by the ability to build a positive image, reach potential students widely, and showcase distinctive values (Hatija et al., 2025; Husnaeni & Burga, 2024; Sukur & Maula, 2021; Wati et al., 2024). Effective branding strategies can help differentiate madrasahs from competitors and enhance their appeal (Yusuf, 2023). Through interesting, informative, and consistent content on Instagram and the website, madrasahs can strengthen their digital branding and demonstrate the institutional excellence they have, such as excellent Islamic-based programs, extracurricular activities, and learning facilities. (Aufani et al., 2025; Ikhwan et al., 2025).

One relevant study was conducted by Surojudin et al. (2023), entitled "*Website Creation for Madrasah Aliyah Al-Lathifah as Information and Promotion Media*." This study emphasizes the importance of the role of websites as effective media in disseminating information and promoting the school's image to the public. Researchers noted that traditional promotional methods such as pamphlets are considered less efficient in reaching a wider audience in the digital era. The results of this service indicate that the presence of a website has a positive impact on increasing the effectiveness of school communication with the public. Another relevant study was conducted by Hidayati (2021), entitled "*Utilization of School Websites as a Digital Marketing Strategy at the Leading Madrasah Aliyah Amanatul Ummah Surabaya*" This study uses a qualitative approach and aims to describe in depth how websites are utilized as a digital marketing strategy by a leading madrasah. The results of the study show that school websites play a significant role in building the image of the madrasah through the presentation of school profiles, digital brochures, and other attractive visual content. Researchers emphasize the importance of the symbolic communication aspect built through digital media as a form of implementation of the New Media and New Wave Marketing theories (Connect and Conversation), which strengthen the interaction between institutions and society. However, although this study has comprehensively discussed the role of websites as digital marketing tools, its

focus is still limited to a single media (website) and has not integrated the potential of social media such as Instagram as part of an integrated marketing strategy.

However, although previous studies have examined the role of websites as digital marketing tools, most remain limited to a single medium and have not integrated the broader potential of social media-particularly Instagram-as part of a unified marketing strategy. Research on Islamic educational institutions in countries such as Malaysia and Turkey shows that effective digital branding typically relies on cross-platform synergy, where websites function as official information hubs while social media provides interactive engagement to strengthen institutional visibility. Such comparative insights highlight a significant gap in Indonesian madrasah research, which has yet to fully explore how multiple digital platforms can operate cohesively to build a stronger competitive position. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how madrasahs optimize both social media and websites as strategic promotional tools to enhance their competitive advantage. This investigation is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do madrasahs utilize Instagram and websites to support their promotional activities? (2) What strategies contribute most effectively to strengthening their digital presence? (3) What challenges hinder the development of competitive advantage through integrated digital media?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach as described by Creswell (2018) which allows researchers to explore a bounded system in depth and within its real-life context. The case in this research focuses on the strategy of optimizing social media and websites as promotional tools to build competitive advantage at MAN 1 Banjarmasin and MAN 2 Banjarmasin. The study was conducted over a period of four months, from May to August 2025, when the schools were actively utilizing digital platforms for promotional and branding purposes. The qualitative case study approach was chosen because it enables a holistic understanding of phenomena by capturing the perspectives, practices, and challenges experienced by the institutions.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques to ensure methodological triangulation. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with five key informants, consisting of two public relations staff, two IT administrators, and one school principal, all of whom play direct roles in managing or overseeing the madrasahs' digital media operations. Second, non-participant observation was carried out over a two-week period to closely examine how digital content was planned, produced, and disseminated through the official websites and Instagram accounts, including patterns of posting, interaction, and workflow coordination. Third, document analysis involved a systematic review of digital artifacts, such as website structures, visual layouts, Instagram posts, and basic engagement indicators, to understand the consistency and effectiveness of the schools' online presence.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (2018), consisting of three key stages. The first stage was data reduction, which involved organizing, simplifying, and categorizing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. The second stage was data display, where findings were presented in descriptive narratives supported by excerpts and visual documentation. The third stage was conclusion drawing and verification, in which patterns, strategies, motivations, and challenges of digital media utilization were interpreted and validated. This analytic process ensured that the findings accurately reflect the ways in which MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin employ social media and websites as part of their educational marketing strategy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

From interviews with the public relations team and digital media managers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin, it was obtained that both madrasahs have begun to gradually develop digital strategies. One form of planning that is implemented is a monthly content calendar that displays the madrasah's activity agenda, PPDB information, student achievements, and religious moments. A media manager at MAN 1 stated, "*We compile content based on important activities that we want to publish to the public, such as student competitions, excellent programs, and alumni testimonials.*"

Meanwhile, the team from MAN 2 emphasized the power of Instagram as a fast media to reach the community. "We are more active on Instagram because it is easier to access and many students help spread content," said one of the public relations staff. They also added that the use of Instagram Story and Reels is a means to reach students and parents interactively.

However, in terms of human resources and technical capacity, there are obstacles, because most social media admins also serve as teachers, dapodik operators, or documenters. Limited training and support from the parent agency is one of the obstacles in the development of madrasah digital media. A teacher at MAN 1 said, "*We are still learning on our own in terms of design and account management. If there is training from the Ministry of Religion, it will definitely be very helpful.*"

From in-depth interviews with the public relations team and digital media managers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin, it was obtained that both madrasahs have begun to develop digital strategies gradually and contextually according to their respective capacities. Both showed a strong awareness that digital presence is a necessity, not just a complement. One form of planning that has been carried out is the preparation of a monthly content calendar, which is designed to display routine madrasah activities, information on new student admissions (PPDB), student achievements, religious programs, and documentation of external collaborations. A media manager at MAN 1 explained,

"We usually choose moments that have publication value, such as competitions participated by students, the school's flagship programs, and visits from external agencies. Then we arrange when to upload them, so that they remain consistent even though the activities are not every day."

He also added that the school has started to think about long-term branding, not only reporting on activities, but also highlighting Islamic values and the school's unique advantages, such as the integration of religious knowledge and science.

Meanwhile, the team from MAN 2 conveyed a slightly different approach. They emphasized the role of social media, especially Instagram, because it is considered to reach the community faster, including active students and prospective students. "If it's through Instagram, we can directly greet followers with easy language. Many children also help repost, so the promotion of the madrasah spreads more organically," said the public relations staff. They actively use the Instagram Story, Reels, and carousel features to display madrasah activities visually and narratively. Some teachers even use the polling or question box features to open up more personal interaction space with students and alumni.

However, both MAN 1 and MAN 2 admit that digital media management is not yet supported by a special team structure. Most social media admins also have other tasks, such as subject teachers, dapodik operators, activity documentation, and student affairs. This results in content management sometimes being inconsistent, especially when the workload increases during exam periods or big activities. A teacher at MAN 1 said, "*We are actually enthusiastic, but sometimes there is not enough time and energy. Moreover, we have never participated in content design or social media strategy training. We learned everything ourselves from YouTube.*"



Figure 1. Website MAN 1 Banjarmasin

Based on the results of observations on the official website of MAN 1 Banjarmasin (<https://man1banjarmasin.sch.id/>), it was found that this website has been managed professionally and has an informative display structure. The main menu on the front page contains a number of important information such as Madrasah Profile, Vision-Mission, GTK and Student Data, Curriculum, and Extracurricular information. There is also a special menu for PPDBM Online which makes it easier for prospective students to register independently. In addition, the Announcement and Info at a Glance sections appear dynamically, displaying updates such as invitations to the Integrity Zone (WBK/WBBM), GTK meeting information, to the latest academic and student activities.

This website is also equipped with a News Documentation feature that is updated regularly. Some of the latest articles displayed include: the implementation of teacher service meetings, socialization of AKMI follow-up, Gelar Karya activities with the theme of local wisdom, to Japanese language learning by native speakers from the Japan Foundation. The diversity of this content shows that the website functions not only as an information medium, but also as a means of institutional image building.

However, in terms of interactivity, this website still has limitations. There are no features such as question and answer forms, discussion forums, or live chats that the public can use to interact directly with the madrasah. Likewise, integration with social media such as Instagram or YouTube has not been seen in a unified manner on the main display of the site. Although there is a Complaints menu, its function tends to be one-way and has not shown any systematic response.

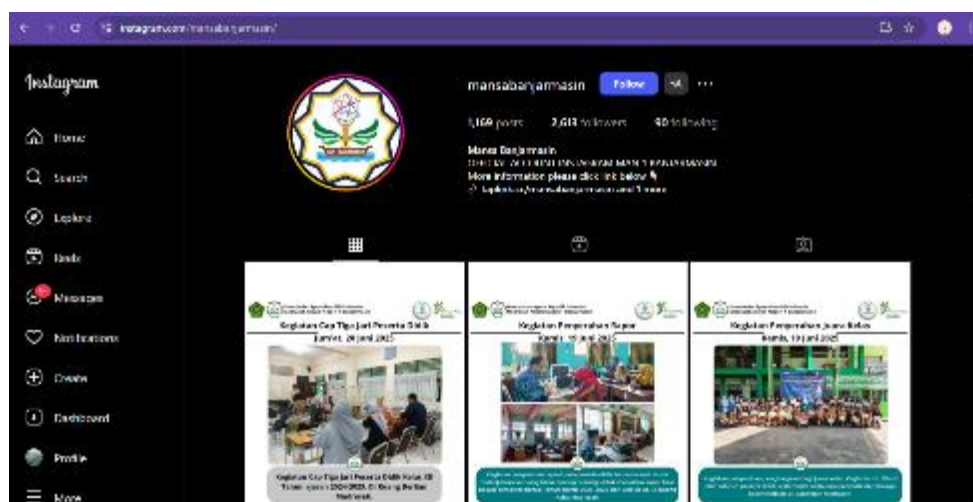


Figure 2. Instagram MAN 1 Banjarmasin

The Instagram account @mansabanjarmasin is used to convey information about madrasah activities. The content consists of photos of teacher and student activities, seminars, celebrations of big days, and PPDB promotions. However, the frequency of uploads is still inconsistent and the visual style tends to be formal. User interaction is also still limited, indicating that the content approach can be maximized with storytelling, dialogic captions, and the use of features such as Reels and Live.

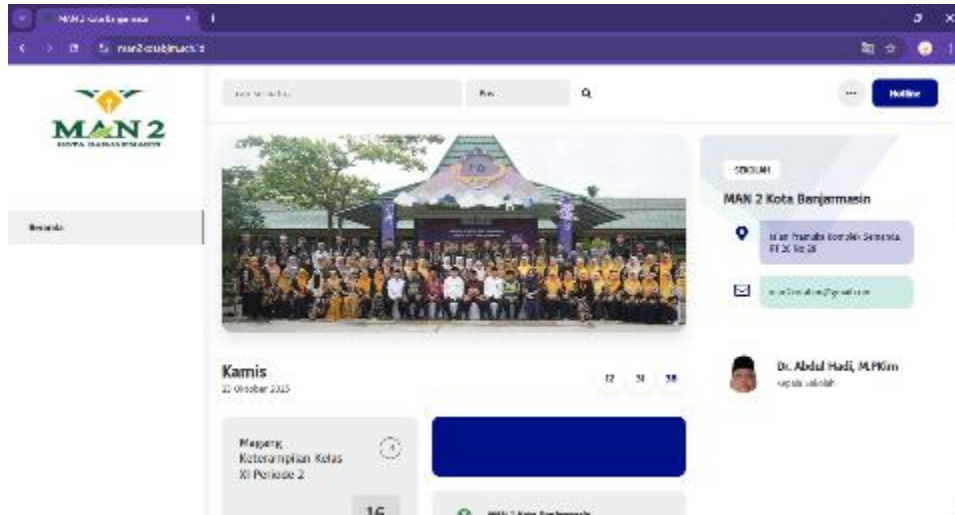


Figure 3. Website MAN 2 Banjarmasin

The Instagram account @mansabanjarmasin is used to convey information about madrasah activities. The content consists of photos of teacher and student activities, seminars, celebrations of big days, and PPDB promotions. However, the frequency of uploads is still inconsistent and the visual style tends to be formal. User interaction is also still limited, indicating that the content approach can be maximized with storytelling, dialogic captions, and the use of features such as Reels and Live.

Some of the latest news that was successfully displayed included the announcement of the achievement and Mahad pathway graduation for the 2025/2026 academic year (April 28, 2025), disaster mitigation education by the Banjarmasin City BPBD (April 28, 2025), and the implementation of the APAT skills program UKK (April 10, 2025). In addition, there was information on the opening of PPDBM on March 17, 2025, which indicated an effort to convey important information online. However, the frequency and diversity of content were still limited. In the activity agenda section, for example, no active agenda was found in the near future. Likewise with visual and multimedia documentation, which although there is a Video menu, does not display the latest content updates massively.

Interestingly, this website provides a teacher blog column and principal editorial, which carries a religious and reflective theme, such as the article entitled *Qurban: When We Must Slaughter What is Inside Ourselves and It's Time to Perform Hajj with Reason and Conscience*. This shows an effort to build a narrative of Islamic values and critical thinking in the middle of the madrasa community, although the coverage and updates are not evenly distributed across all pages. Institutional contacts such as email (man2kotabjm@gmail.com) and telephone number (081521515513) have been clearly listed at the top of the page, but no interactive form or live chat was found for direct communication with users.

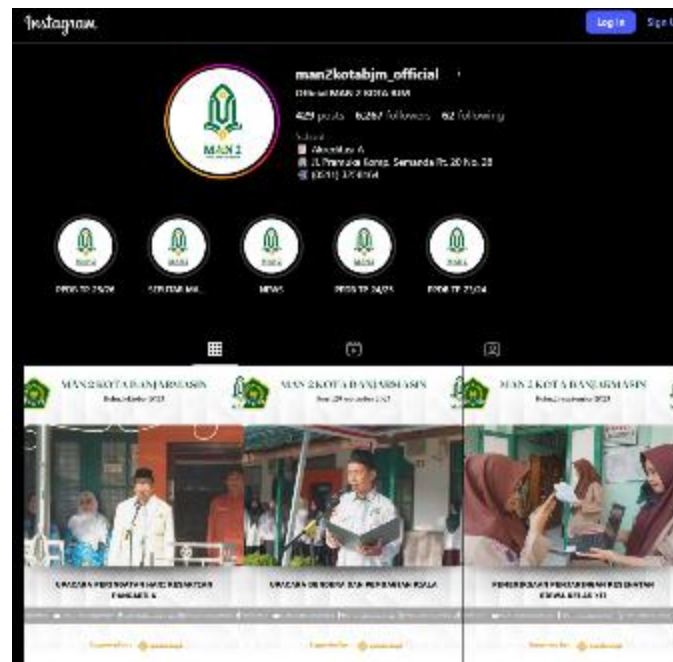


Figure 4. Instagram MAN 2 Banjarmasin

The @man2kotabjm_official account is quite active and varied. Its content displays PPDB activities, seminars, preaching activities, commemorations of big days, to photos of students who won competitions. The visual display is brighter and more communicative.

Table 1. Key Findings of Digital Media Management at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin.

Theme	MAN 1 Banjarmasin	MAN 2 Banjarmasin	Key Finding
Digital Strategy	Uses a monthly content calendar; focuses on school events and achievements.	Prioritizes Instagram for fast and wide outreach.	Both schools are developing digital strategies gradually.
Content Management	Content highlights activity reports and early branding efforts.	Uses Stories, Reels, and interactive features to engage students.	Content is developing but still inconsistent.
Website Use	Website is well-structured, updated, and informative.	Website is informative but less updated and less interactive.	MAN 1 is stronger in website management.
Instagram Use	Upload frequency is inconsistent; visual style formal.	More active, colorful, and communicative content.	MAN 2 has stronger Instagram engagement.
Human Resources	Admins double as teachers or operators; limited training.	Same issue: no dedicated team; self-learning.	HR limitations affect digital media performance.
Public Interaction	Website lacks interactive features.	Some narrative features, but interaction is still low.	Public interaction remains limited.
Branding	Starting to build identity through Islamic values and programs.	Builds image through achievements and religious activities.	Branding exists but is not yet consistent.

Discussion

Madrasahs are increasingly utilizing websites and social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to enhance brand awareness, attract prospective students, and compete with other institutions (Hawanur et al., 2024; Hidayati, 2021; Mujiyati & Aimah, 2024). This digital approach reflects a paradigm shift from conventional, one-way communication to a more modern, participatory, and strategic model (Balqis et al., 2025; Khoiruddin & Takhmid, 2024; Mujiyati & Aimah, 2024; Murniati et al., 2024). While digital marketing has proven effective, challenges persist, including limited human resources, infrastructure, and budgets (Rahman et al., 2025). In this case, the approach used by the madrasah is no longer just conveying information, but also building ongoing interactions with the public, forming positive perceptions, and instilling institutional values through digital media (Diana et al., 2023; Rohmah et al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2025; Srinio et al., 2025). In the New Media Theory study put forward by Pierre Lévy in 2001, new media such as the internet and social media have radically changed the structure of social communication, by opening up a wider space for interactivity and allowing the audience not only to be recipients of messages, but also to participate in shaping the communication narrative itself (I. G. N. Putra, 2020). This shift has led to changes in communication patterns, with new media offering more features than traditional media (Aina & Devianty, 2025; Siregar & Sapri, 2025).

The findings of this study reinforce theoretical perspectives such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) and New Wave Marketing, which emphasize digital capabilities and relational engagement as strategic assets. MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin demonstrate concrete efforts to use digital platforms as channels for two-way communication and institutional positioning. MAN 1 strengthens its advantage through a well-managed website that not only archives information but also projects a credible and professional institutional identity. MAN 2, meanwhile, leverages Instagram's agility to engage the digital-native audience through visual storytelling, interactive features, and narrative-driven posts that cultivate emotional connection and strengthen community attachment.

This pattern is consistent with studies showing that digital storytelling and multimedia content improve value transmission among young learners, though technological limitations remain a challenge (Musthofa et al., 2025). Similar trends can be seen in Islamic schools in Malaysia and Turkey, which integrate websites with social media campaigns to enhance branding and parent-school interaction. However, unlike US public schools that increasingly use TikTok to reach broader youth demographics, Indonesian madrasahs remain more cautious and rely primarily on Instagram due to cultural, regulatory, and institutional considerations. This contrast highlights that digital marketing strategies are shaped not only by platform affordances but also by institutional norms and sociocultural expectations.

The findings also align with participatory culture theory, where users act as both consumers and co-creators of content. Student involvement in managing social media at the two madrasahs reflects the emergence of a constructive participatory environment that strengthens collective identity and deepens school-community relations (Wibowo et al., 2019). Yet, the analysis also reveals gaps: the absence of integrated cross-platform coordination, limited digital literacy, and insufficient institutional support constrain the ability of both madrasahs to convert their digital initiatives into sustainable competitive advantages. These limitations suggest that while digital media serve as extensions of institutional identity and strategic resources, their full potential has not been optimized within the current operational capacity.

The website of MAN 1 Banjarmasin plays a crucial role in demonstrating how digital media can be utilized to strengthen a professional and credible institutional image, while simultaneously serving as the primary channel for disseminating official information to the wider public. This finding aligns with Kotler and Fox (1995) in *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions*, who argue that building a strong, trustworthy image is a vital form of competitive advantage, particularly in the context of increasing competition among schools and madrasahs (Saidin et al., 2024). The MAN 1 website showcases a variety of well-organized and comprehensive content, including the

institution's vision and mission, flagship programs, online student admissions (PPDB), teacher and student profiles, as well as thorough documentation of academic and extracurricular activities. In addition to being informative, the consistent updates of the website illustrate the institution's commitment to transparency, accountability, and service orientation toward stakeholders. By presenting accurate and timely information, MAN 1 not only reinforces its credibility in the eyes of parents, students, and the community but also demonstrates how digital platforms can be strategically positioned as a medium to build public trust and foster long-term institutional reputation.

However, when examined through the lens of Relationship Marketing Theory developed by Berry in Muchtar & Sulistyowati (2024), the effectiveness of digital platforms in fostering long-term relationships with the public depends not only on the availability of complete and accurate information, but also on the presence of sustainable interaction and two-way dialogue. In this regard, the MAN 1 Banjarmasin website still demonstrates notable limitations, particularly in terms of its interactive features. The absence of facilities such as discussion forums, live chat services, or responsive question-and-answer forms indicates that the website currently functions more as a "digital storefront" rather than as a platform for meaningful engagement. Tuhana et al. (2022) also emphasize that although government and educational institution websites can serve as effective instruments for online public relations, their potential is often constrained by minimal interactive features, which reduce opportunities for public participation and limit the development of reciprocal communication. For MAN 1, this becomes a strategic challenge: while the website has succeeded in presenting a professional and transparent image, it has yet to optimize its role as a space for building emotional connections, loyalty, and active involvement from prospective students, parents, alumni, and the broader community. To strengthen these relationships, a more interactive digital strategy is required—one that allows stakeholders to not only receive information but also actively participate in conversations, provide feedback, and feel included in the institution's communication ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the strength of MAN 2 Banjarmasin's Instagram can be further understood through the framework of New Wave Marketing, as proposed by Heras & Godin, which highlights two fundamental principles in modern marketing strategies: connect, the ability to build emotional bonds with the audience, and conversation, the creation of continuous two-way interactions that foster engagement (Hidayati, 2021). This perspective reflects a paradigm shift from conventional, one-directional promotional practices toward a more ethical, authentic, and participatory approach, where digital platforms are utilized not merely as tools for information dissemination but as arenas of interaction and community building. In this regard, the official Instagram account @man2kotabjm_official functions as more than just an institutional noticeboard. It operates as a dynamic dialogue space that brings the madrasah into the everyday digital experiences of students, parents, alumni, and the broader public.

The account's strength lies in its ability to translate institutional identity into relatable and engaging content tailored to the digital habits of its audience. The strategic use of visual elements—ranging from documentation of school activities, student achievements, and educational campaigns, to reels, short videos, and motivational quotes—ensures that the content resonates emotionally while remaining easy to consume and share. Moreover, the active utilization of Instagram features such as stories, polls, comment sections, and direct interactions demonstrates that MAN 2 recognizes the digital audience's preference for fast, interactive, and visually appealing communication. This level of engagement not only enhances visibility but also cultivates a sense of belonging and loyalty, as stakeholders feel that their voices and participation matter. In this way, MAN 2's Instagram presence embodies the essence of New Wave Marketing: shifting from transactional promotion toward relational and community-centered communication that strengthens the institution's position in an increasingly competitive educational landscape (Arief et al., 2024; Hasanudin et al., 2024).

This strategy not only enhances the digital visibility of MAN 2 Banjarmasin but also fosters a deeper emotional connection with stakeholders through the presentation of authentic and human-centered narratives that reflect the daily life and values of the madrasah. Such an approach transforms the institution's Instagram presence into more than a publicity channel—it becomes a living showcase of culture, achievements, and identity that resonates with both internal and external audiences. The relatively high level of engagement—evident in the form of likes, views, comments, and user interactions—indicates that the content is able to capture attention and stimulate responses at a higher rate compared to similar educational accounts. From the perspective of educational marketing, this represents a strategic advancement, as the process of selecting a school is no longer determined solely by technical considerations such as accreditation, curriculum, or facilities. Instead, parents and students are increasingly influenced by the intangibles they perceive—impressions, values, atmosphere, and institutional personality as projected through digital media (Tatinggulu et al., 2025).

By consistently curating visual and interactive content that highlights student activities, academic achievements, and positive school culture, MAN 2 is effectively reinforcing Instagram's dual role as both a promotional platform and a branding instrument. This dual function is critical in shaping the public's perception, as branding today goes beyond logos and slogans to encompass the ongoing stories and lived experiences of the institution shared online. In this sense, the Instagram strategy of MAN 2 does not merely advertise the school; it communicates its ethos and nurtures a sense of belonging, trust, and pride among stakeholders. Ultimately, such a strategy strengthens the institution's competitive advantage in an era where digital presence significantly influences educational choices and long-term institutional reputation.

This finding reinforces the concept that the excellence of educational institutions in the 21st century is not only shaped by internal aspects such as academic programs or physical facilities, but also by how the identity and uniqueness of the institution are creatively and consistently communicated to the public (Ceballos et al., 2026; Mardatillah et al., 2025; Zamroni & Barnoto, 2024). Effective school branding strategies involve developing a strong identity through consistent visual elements, emphasizing core values, and showcasing academic excellence (Indah et al., 2024). These strategies extend beyond visual identity to include community engagement, social media utilization, and collaboration with stakeholders (Zarastri et al., 2024). For Islamic educational institutions, branding focused on values, identity, and excellence can significantly enhance their competitive advantage and public trust (Hermawan & Carnawi, 2024). Successful implementation of these strategies has led to increased student enrollment, improved reputation, and strengthened alumni loyalty (Indah et al., 2024; Zarastri et al., 2024). Integration of Islamic boarding school values in curriculum and operations can provide a unique identity for Islamic universities (Faizin et al., 2024). In this case, MAN 2 shows that openness to new communication approaches based on narrative, emotion, and interaction is a relevant and effective strategy to answer the challenges of competition in the digital era.

From the results of the interview, it is known that the main obstacle in the management of digital media is limited human resources and technical capabilities. The Resource-Based View (RBV), developed by Barney (1991), posits that organizations can achieve sustainable competitive advantage by possessing valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organized resources (Muharam, 2017). This perspective emphasizes internal factors over external ones in strategic management. RBV enables organizations to formulate strategies aligned with their capabilities, focusing on identifying and managing both tangible and intangible resources for long-term competitive advantage. The theory suggests that accumulating resource stocks with these characteristics can be a source of relational rents and competitive advantage (Rengkung, 2015). In madrasahs, competent human resources in digital media management are a strategic asset (Afkari et al., 2022). However, currently, the function of digital content management is still carried out by teachers or staff with other workloads. This means that the resources available are not sufficient to drive sustainable competitive advantage.

From the perspective of educational marketing communication, these findings refine the idea proposed by Wahyudi (2018) that modern educational institutions must implement marketing strategies that are not only informative but also aligned with institutional identity, core values, and distinctive character. In this regard, MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin demonstrate initial progress through the presentation of digital content that showcases academic excellence, religious values, and various student achievements. Their use of Instagram’s visual narratives and the website’s formal information functions as an early branding effort to position the madrasah as a relevant and competitive institution.

However, the data also indicates that digital media will not evolve into a sustainable competitive advantage without a more structured and integrated cross-platform communication strategy. The current fragmented approach—where each platform operates independently—limits the cumulative impact of promotional activities. The findings suggest the need for an interconnected communication ecosystem in which content on one channel strengthens and directs audiences to another. Instagram should not only attract attention through visual storytelling but also act as a gateway leading users to the website for more complete information. Likewise, website articles can be repurposed into concise, visually appealing formats such as carousels or reels to broaden audience reach through social media.

A broader platform integration would further enhance strategic communication. A dedicated YouTube channel may support long-form content such as event documentation, alumni testimonials, and thematic storytelling, while WhatsApp Business can be optimized as both a PPDB support tool and a direct engagement channel for parents and prospective students. Linking these platforms within a coherent system supports the formation of a dynamic digital ecosystem that increases visibility, fosters trust, and sustains stakeholder engagement.

To introduce a new analytical dimension, the following table summarizes the key patterns identified in the research:

Table 1. Cross-Platform Communication Practices of MAN 1 and MAN 2 Banjarmasin

Platform	Current Use	Observed Weakness	Strategic Potential
Instagram	Visual storytelling, student achievements, event highlights	Limited linkage to website; content not standardized	Gateway to detailed information; visual branding consistency
Website	Formal announcements, academic information, news articles	Low engagement; long-text formats underutilized for social media	Source for repackaged content (infographics, reels, carousels)
YouTube	Not systematically used	Absence of long-form documentation	Storytelling on programs, alumni success, digital archives
WhatsApp Business	PPDB services, general inquiries	Reactive rather than proactive communication	Direct engagement, micro-targeted messaging to parents/students

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that MAN 1 Banjarmasin is more advanced in managing its website as an informative and representative institutional profile, while MAN 2 Banjarmasin demonstrates greater strength in utilizing Instagram for visual, immediate, and interactive engagement. These results suggest that digital media contribute more significantly to promotional effectiveness and institutional image-building than traditional methods, offering new insights into how online presence can function as a source of competitive advantage for Islamic educational

institutions. At the theoretical level, this research supports earlier studies on the role of digital platforms in education while emphasizing the importance of structured governance, digital literacy, and sustained capacity building. It also introduces the notion of integrated digital strategies in madrasah promotion, expanding academic discourse on marketing practices within faith-based schooling contexts. Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its focus on only two state madrasahs in Banjarmasin, which restricts the diversity of institutional characteristics and contextual conditions. The reliance on interview and digital observation data further constrains the breadth of analysis. To address these limitations, future research should involve larger and more varied samples across different provinces, institutional categories, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on the findings, practical recommendations include encouraging madrasahs to allocate dedicated budgets for digital training workshops, strengthening IT and public relations units, and implementing cross-platform management guidelines to ensure consistent branding. Developing collaborative digital teams involving teachers, students, and administrative staff would also enhance content quality and operational stability. For long-term advancement, longitudinal studies examining digital return on investment (ROI), audience growth patterns, and the sustainability of digital engagement strategies in madrasahs are needed to provide deeper and more generalizable insights into the evolving landscape of Islamic educational marketing.

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