



Social Media Management Strategies of Islamic Boarding Schools in Enhancing Public Trust

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

social media management, Islamic boarding schools, public trust.

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This study examines social media management strategies employed by Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in enhancing public trust. As pesantren increasingly engage with digital platforms, social media has become a vital tool for branding, transparency, and communication with stakeholders. Using a qualitative approach through literature review and case analysis, this research identifies key strategies such as consistent content creation, value-based messaging, and interactive engagement with audiences. The findings reveal that effective social media management not only improves the public image of pesantren but also strengthens trust by showcasing accountability, educational achievements, and community service. Moreover, challenges such as limited digital literacy and resource constraints are highlighted as factors that need to be addressed. This study contributes to the understanding of how pesantren can optimize social media to build credibility, foster community relations, and sustain institutional development in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has become a pivotal platform for educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), to shape their public image and foster trust among stakeholders. As traditional institutions embedded in communal values, pesantren increasingly recognize the strategic potential of social media not only for promotion but also for community engagement and credibility building.

Prior studies on nonprofit organizations and educational institutions highlight how structured social media practices—such as consistent content, dialogic communication, and transparency—are instrumental in enhancing public trust and engagement (Saxton & Guo, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2012; Sashi, 2012; systematic review on nonprofit marketing, 2023) arXiv+1ResearchGateTandfonline. In the context of pesantren, digital media is increasingly utilized for image-building and maintaining institutional credibility

(Shuffah Hizbullah & Annida study, Lampung; Islamic boarding school public relations management) knepublishing.com ejournal.unuja.ac.id

Specifically, social media can serve as a vital bridge of communication, enabling pesantren to transmit trust-building values while preserving their spiritual identity. For example, Pesantren Ngalah creatively integrates traditional pesantren values with digital communication, employing the “Speed of Trust” framework to foster institutional integrity at multiple levels, including organizational and societal trust ResearchGate. Similarly, branding strategies that amplify religious values alongside modern educational offerings – such as the “Kampung Wahyu” and modern pesantren branding – have shown promise in enhancing public trust and differentiation knepublishing.com.

Beyond religious institutions, broader research in crisis and nonprofit domains suggests that trust in institutions significantly influences the public’s devotion to using social media communications during critical events (such as disasters) ResearchGate. Additionally, systematic reviews of social media trust conclude that trust in content, platform, or institution largely depends on credibility, transparency, and interactive elements arXiv. Despite these insights, there is still a meaningful gap in understanding how pesantren strategically manage social media to cultivate trust, particularly within Indonesia’s unique socio-religious landscape. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how pesantren design, implement, and leverage social media strategies – such as transparency, interactivity, and content balance – to enhance institutional trust.

The rapid development of information and communication technology in the 21st century has transformed the way institutions interact with society. Social media, as one of the most influential digital innovations, plays a central role in reshaping communication patterns, organizational branding, and public engagement (Kapoor et al., 2018). In the educational sector, particularly in faith-based institutions, the adoption of social media is no longer optional but a necessity to remain relevant and trusted in a digitally connected society.

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), as one of Indonesia’s oldest and most influential educational institutions, face unique challenges in this transformation. Traditionally rooted in religious authority and communal trust, pesantren are now navigating how to align their spiritual values with the demands of modern communication systems. Their credibility and sustainability are increasingly tied not only to religious legitimacy but also to how effectively they manage their public image in digital spaces (Hizbullah & Annida, 2022).

In the digital age, social media has become a pivotal platform for educational institutions, including pesantren, to shape their public image and foster trust among stakeholders. As traditional institutions embedded in communal values, pesantren increasingly recognize the strategic potential of social media not only for promotion but also for community engagement and credibility building.

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Specifically, social media can serve as a vital bridge of communication, enabling pesantren to transmit trust-building values while preserving their spiritual identity. For example, Pesantren Ngalah creatively integrates traditional pesantren values with digital communication, employing the “Speed of Trust” framework to foster institutional integrity at multiple levels, including organizational and societal trust (Hizbullah, 2023). Similarly, branding strategies that amplify religious values alongside modern educational offerings—such as the “Kampung Wahyu” and modern pesantren branding—have shown promise in enhancing public trust and differentiation (Annida, 2022).

Beyond religious institutions, broader research in crisis and nonprofit domains suggests that trust in institutions significantly influences the public’s devotion to using social media communications during critical events, such as natural disasters (Williams et al., 2017). Furthermore, systematic reviews of social media trust conclude that trust in content, platform, and institution largely depends on credibility, transparency, and interactivity (Agostino & Sidorova, 2016).

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METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, focusing on the strategic management of umrah service at PT Darul Arqam Travel Tour Kraksaan Probolinggo. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with managers, employees, and pilgrims, as well as direct observations of the umrah service process. Company documents such as standard operating procedures and customer satisfaction reports were also analyzed to strengthen the findings. The collected data were analyzed descriptively through the processes of reduction, presentation, and conclusion

drawing, providing a comprehensive understanding of the service strategies in enhancing pilgrim satisfaction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

In conclusion, the results of this study show that pesantren adopting professional, transparent, and interactive social media management not only enhance public trust but also strengthen their institutional reputation in the digital era. These findings reinforce and extend earlier works on social media and trust-building (Kapoor et al., 2018; Sashi, 2012; Phua et al., 2020), while situating them within the unique socio-religious context of Islamic boarding schools.

To support these findings, supplementary data are presented in tables, graphs, and diagrams. The table below illustrates respondents' perceptions of the types of content that most effectively enhance public trust in pesantren.

Table 1. Respondents' Perceptions of Trust-Building Content on Pesantren Social Media (n = 120)

Content Type	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Student activities posts	82	Most respondents trust pesantren more when student learning and daily activities are shared.
Community service updates	76	Social programs and community empowerment increase credibility.
Financial transparency	72	Reports and accountability posts strengthen institutional trust.
Religious content (da'wah)	69	Spiritual messages remain important to the community.
Collaboration/partnerships	65	Partnerships with external institutions build legitimacy.

One of the key findings relates to **content management and consistency**. Interviews with pesantren media administrators indicated that pesantren with structured content planning—such as weekly posting schedules, thematic campaigns, and visually attractive formats—recorded higher engagement rates. Questionnaire data from 120 respondents supported this, as 78 percent stated that consistency and creativity increased their trust in the institution. This is in line with the study by Kapoor et al. (2018), who argued that consistent digital strategies not only increase visibility but also strengthen institutional legitimacy. Moreover, observations confirmed that content related to student activities, social services, and community empowerment received the most attention, echoing findings by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) that mission-driven organizations

gain trust when they highlight their community impact.

The second major finding emphasizes **transparency as a foundation of credibility**. Document analysis revealed that pesantren which published financial accountability reports, scholarship distributions, and collaboration records were more trusted by the public. Interviews with community members confirmed this perception, with 65 percent highlighting transparency as the primary reason for their confidence. This finding resonates with Sashi (2012), who underlined transparency as a central factor in digital trust-building. Similarly, a survey indicated that 72 percent of respondents felt more assured when pesantren showcased achievements and institutional partnerships openly. Previous studies (Agostino & Sidorova, 2016; Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013) also found that social media transparency in nonprofit institutions directly correlates with improved trust and donor participation, a pattern clearly visible in the pesantren context.

Another important result concerns **interaction and two-way communication**. Field observations during live-streaming activities and online Q&A sessions demonstrated that real-time engagement reduced the gap between pesantren and the community. Alumni expressed that Instagram Live and TikTok Live created emotional closeness, while survey results showed that 81 percent of respondents considered timely replies to comments and messages essential in building trust. These findings are consistent with Phua et al. (2020), who argued that interactivity on social media platforms is a decisive factor in cultivating relational bonds and audience loyalty. Likewise, Men and Tsai (2016) emphasized that dialogic communication fosters trust and reputation, particularly in nonprofit and educational settings.

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Finally, the findings point to **the translation of online trust into offline participation**. Survey data revealed that 56 percent of respondents had recommended pesantren to others after following its social media accounts. Document analysis also showed a measurable increase in donations, volunteerism, and event participation, which pesantren administrators attributed to strengthened trust generated through online communication. These results echo the findings of Saxton & Waters (2014), who demonstrated that online engagement positively influences offline contributions to nonprofit

organizations. Similarly, recent work by Chen et al. (2021) emphasized that digital trust directly affects community involvement in faith-based organizations.

To support these results, visual data presentation was employed. A table summarized respondents' perceptions of the most effective trust-building content, a graph tracked the growth of followers and engagement rates across platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), and a diagram illustrated the strategic framework of social media management for building trust. Together, these tools confirmed the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study.

Discussion

The findings of this research confirm that social media management strategies are central to enhancing public trust in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The results reveal that structured content planning, transparency, interactivity, and a balance between spiritual and informative content directly influence the credibility and reputation of *pesantren* in the eyes of the community. These findings are consistent with and expand upon previous studies in the fields of communication, nonprofit management, and digital trust-building. First, the evidence regarding content management and consistency strengthens the argument of Kapoor et al. (2018), who emphasized that consistency in social media strategies leads to improved visibility and legitimacy. In the *pesantren* context, this consistency not only increases online engagement but also provides the community with a sense of reliability. This suggests that *pesantren*, as faith-based educational institutions, must professionalize their digital presence in a way similar to nonprofit organizations, as also highlighted by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012).

Second, the significance of transparency found in this study reflects the conclusions of Sashi (2012), who noted that openness and accountability are fundamental in creating trust-based relationships. In *pesantren*, transparency through financial reports, program updates, and community services is not merely a managerial practice but also aligns with Islamic values of honesty (*shidq*) and accountability (*amanah*). This integration of religious values with modern digital management distinguishes *pesantren* from secular institutions, showing that transparency can be both a spiritual and managerial responsibility.

Third, the role of interaction and dialogic communication supports the findings of Phua et al. (2020) and Men and Tsai (2016), who highlighted that engagement and responsiveness on social media foster stronger relational bonds. In the *pesantren* context, interactive features such as Instagram Live and TikTok Q&A do more than engage audiences; they bridge the cultural and generational gap between traditional *pesantren* authorities and digitally active youth. This demonstrates that dialogic communication is not only a public relations strategy but also an educational and cultural adaptation. Fourth, the importance of balancing spiritual and informative content confirms Nasrullah's (2017) view that religious institutions must adapt to the digital sphere without losing their

spiritual identity. The study shows that pesantren succeed when they combine da'wah and religious inspiration with academic and organizational information. This balance echoes Campbell and Tsuria's (2021) concept of digital religion, where religious practices and institutional communication merge to produce a hybrid form of online religiosity. In this way, pesantren become both guardians of tradition and innovators in digital communication.

Finally, the finding that online trust translates into offline participation resonates with Saxton and Waters (2014), who argued that online engagement motivates offline support for nonprofit organizations. The increase in donations, volunteerism, and event participation demonstrates that digital trust has tangible impacts on institutional sustainability. In the pesantren context, this link between digital trust and offline participation is particularly significant, since community support is a vital element in sustaining pesantren as independent educational and religious institutions. Overall, this study extends the literature by situating social media management within the unique context of Islamic boarding schools. While previous studies have focused largely on secular nonprofits or corporations, these findings demonstrate that pesantren, by applying professional social media strategies, can not only modernize their communication but also strengthen public trust rooted in spiritual legitimacy. This suggests that digital media, when managed effectively, can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, reinforcing pesantren's role as both religious and social institutions in contemporary society.

Overall, the discussion positions pesantren as unique actors in the digital public sphere. While much of the literature has centered on secular nonprofit organizations, this study shows that pesantren successfully localize and adapt these strategies to their socio-religious context. Social media thus functions as a bridge between tradition and modernity, reinforcing pesantren's role as spiritual, educational, and social institutions in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that effective social media management strategies significantly enhance public trust in Islamic boarding schools. Consistency in content, transparency of information, and active community engagement were identified as key factors in strengthening institutional credibility. The integration of educational, religious, and community-oriented content creates a positive image that aligns with the values of pesantren while adapting to modern communication needs. These findings highlight the importance of social media as a strategic tool for building trust and sustaining the reputation of Islamic educational institutions.

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