



International Journal Islamic Education, Research and Multiculturalism (IJIERM)

Available online <https://journal.yaspim.org/index.php/IJIERM/index>

DIGITAL-BASED EDUCATIONAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS: CONSTRAINTS AND SUPPORTING FACTORS FOR INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstrak

Transformasi digital dan meningkatnya persaingan antar lembaga pendidikan menuntut madrasah untuk mengembangkan strategi pemasaran yang lebih adaptif, efektif, dan bernilai. Dalam konteks lembaga pendidikan Islam, pemasaran digital tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai media promosi, tetapi juga sebagai sarana untuk mengomunikasikan identitas kelembagaan, nilai-nilai pendidikan, dan keunggulan program kepada masyarakat. Namun, banyak madrasah masih menghadapi kendala dalam penerapan pemasaran digital, terutama terkait keterbatasan kompetensi sumber daya manusia, pengelolaan media digital yang belum optimal, dan perencanaan konten promosi yang belum konsisten. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi pemasaran pendidikan berbasis digital di Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi, mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambatnya, serta menjelaskan kontribusinya terhadap daya saing lembaga. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumen dari enam informan yang dipilih secara purposive. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, pengodean tematik, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi pemasaran digital melalui media sosial dan komunikasi daring meningkatkan visibilitas lembaga, didukung oleh kepemimpinan visioner, budaya organisasi, dan program unggulan, tetapi masih dibatasi oleh kompetensi digital dan pengelolaan konten yang belum konsisten.

Kata Kunci: *Pemasaran Pendidikan Digital; Madrasah; Daya Saing Lembaga; Media Sosial; Pendidikan Islam*

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Article History	Submitted: 16 January 2026	Accepted: 11 April 2026	Published: 24 April 2026

Abstract

Digital transformation and increasing competition among educational institutions require madrasahs to develop marketing strategies that are adaptive, effective, and value-driven. In Islamic educational institutions, digital marketing functions not only as a promotional medium but also as a channel for communicating institutional identity, educational values, and program excellence to the public. However, many madrasahs continue to face major challenges in implementing digital marketing, particularly limited human resource competence, suboptimal digital media management, and inconsistent promotional content planning. This study aims to analyze the implementation of digital-based educational marketing strategies at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi, identify the supporting and inhibiting factors, and explain their contribution to institutional competitiveness. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis from six purposively selected informants. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, thematic coding, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that digital marketing strategies through social media and online communication increased institutional visibility and public interest. Their implementation was supported by visionary leadership, organizational culture, and flagship programs, but was constrained by limited digital competence and inconsistent content management. These findings indicate that digital-based educational marketing can strengthen institutional competitiveness when aligned with internal institutional capacity and strategic communication.

Keywords: *Digital Educational Marketing; Madrasah; Institutional Competitiveness; Social Media; Islamic Education*

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions today operate in an increasingly competitive environment shaped by digital transformation, shifting public expectations, and the growing demand for quality educational services. In this context, marketing is no longer a peripheral activity but a strategic necessity for schools seeking to maintain visibility, build public trust, and strengthen institutional competitiveness. The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally changed how educational institutions communicate with



prospective students and their families. Websites, social media, and online messaging platforms now function as major channels through which schools present their programs, values, and achievements to the public (Kotler et al., 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). For Islamic educational institutions, this transformation is especially significant because competition is no longer determined solely by academic performance, but also by the ability to communicate institutional identity, religious values, and service quality in compelling digital formats (Ryan, 2020; Hamdani et al., 2022). Academically, this issue is important because it reflects the intersection of educational management, digital communication, and institutional competitiveness (Rasidin et al., 2025). Practically, it matters because Islamic schools that fail to adapt to digital communication patterns may lose public attention and prospective students in an increasingly crowded educational market.

A number of previous studies have discussed educational marketing and the growing role of digital media in attracting public interest. Research has shown that digital-based educational marketing can enhance institutional visibility, shape positive public perception, and influence enrollment decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Zuhilmy, 2023). Other studies emphasize the role of school branding, the marketing mix, and promotional consistency in strengthening institutional trust and reputation (Mushoffi & Supardi, 2024; Basorah et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). In addition, marketing scholarship has highlighted the importance of differentiation, value communication, and audience engagement in service institutions, including schools (Kotler & Keller, 2019; Oplatka, 2018). However, most existing studies focus on general educational institutions, higher education, or broad promotional strategies. Limited attention has been given to how Islamic secondary schools implement digital marketing in ways that are consistent with their institutional values, religious identity, and organizational culture. Previous studies also tend to emphasize the effectiveness of digital platforms but pay less attention to the internal constraints and supporting factors that shape implementation in school settings. This limitation leaves an important gap in understanding how digital educational marketing works in Islamic schooling contexts.

This study responds to that gap by examining digital-based educational marketing at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi, an Islamic secondary school operating in a competitive educational environment. Rather than focusing only on digital promotion as a technical activity, this study investigates how digital marketing strategies are implemented institutionally, what factors support and inhibit their



effectiveness, and how these processes contribute to institutional competitiveness. The research specifically addresses three questions. First, how are digital-based educational marketing strategies implemented in the school? Second, what internal and external factors support or constrain their implementation? Third, how do these strategies contribute to strengthening the competitiveness of the institution? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to move beyond descriptive discussions of school promotion and provide a more grounded analysis of digital marketing as a strategic institutional practice. The case of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi is particularly relevant because it represents a developing Islamic school that combines pesantren-based values with contemporary educational demands, while simultaneously facing the challenge of adapting to digital communication patterns in order to attract and retain public trust (Ott & Tiozzo, 2022; Rizka et al., 2022).

This study proceeds from the argument that the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions can be strengthened when digital marketing is implemented not merely as promotional output, but as a strategic process aligned with institutional values, leadership commitment, and organizational capacity. In this perspective, digital marketing becomes effective when it communicates distinctive educational value, flagship programs, and institutional credibility through accessible and well-managed digital channels (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Tjiptono, 2021). At the same time, the study assumes that institutional competitiveness is influenced not only by the use of digital platforms, but also by supporting factors such as visionary leadership, organizational culture, technological accessibility, and program differentiation. Conversely, limited human resources, weak digital competence, and inconsistent content management may reduce the effectiveness of marketing strategies and weaken institutional visibility (Juraerah et al., 2024; Lestari, 2025). Therefore, the relationship examined in this article is not simply between digital media and school promotion, but between digital marketing strategy, institutional capacity, and educational competitiveness. By advancing this argument, the study positions digital marketing as a strategic mechanism through which Islamic schools can adapt to contemporary competition while preserving their institutional identity and educational mission (Porter, 2008; Setyaningsih et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship has responded to the issue of educational marketing and institutional competitiveness from several interrelated



directions, but the relationship among digital marketing, institutional values, and school competitiveness remains unevenly explored. Broadly speaking, at least four tendencies can be identified. First, a number of studies conceptualize educational marketing as a service-based strategy aimed at building public trust, institutional image, and school positioning through the communication of educational value (Kotler & Keller, 2019; Junaris, 2020; Oplatka, 2018). Second, another line of research emphasizes the growing importance of digital media, especially social media and online platforms, as tools for promotion, engagement, and school branding in contemporary educational markets (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Ryan, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Third, some studies focus on institutional competitiveness, highlighting the role of differentiation, flagship programs, reputation, and value creation in attracting prospective students and strengthening institutional sustainability (Porter, 2008; Yulianto, 2024; Setyaningsih et al., 2025). Fourth, a smaller but growing number of studies examine the constraints of implementation, particularly human resource limitations, technological readiness, and content management in digital educational marketing (Zulhilmy, 2023; Juraerah et al., 2024; Lestari, 2025). These tendencies provide a useful foundation, but they still require stronger integration in the context of Islamic secondary schooling.

The first tendency in the literature approaches educational marketing primarily from the perspective of service marketing and school branding. In this view, educational institutions are treated as service organizations that must communicate quality, value, and credibility to the public in order to remain competitive. Kotler and Keller (2019) argue that service marketing is built upon value creation, differentiation, and trust formation, all of which are highly relevant to educational institutions whose services are intangible and dependent on public perception. Within this approach, schools are encouraged to position themselves through program quality, institutional image, and communication strategies that highlight their distinctiveness (Junaris, 2020). Several studies in this category also discuss educational marketing through the lens of the marketing mix, showing that the effective management of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence can strengthen school attractiveness and public confidence (Mushoffi & Supardi, 2024; Basorah et al., 2024; Ambarwati et al., 2025). Methodologically, these studies tend to rely on conceptual discussion, descriptive analysis, or literature review. While they explain why marketing matters in educational settings, they often remain general and do not sufficiently address how digital platforms transform



marketing practice in specific institutional contexts such as Islamic secondary schools.

The second tendency centers on digital-based educational marketing and examines the increasing role of digital platforms in promoting educational institutions. Studies within this stream argue that the expansion of digital technology has fundamentally changed how schools communicate with parents, prospective students, and the wider public. Social media, websites, and digital storytelling are often identified as strategic tools for increasing institutional visibility, communicating achievements, and fostering interaction with audiences (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Ryan, 2020). Dwivedi et al. (2021) highlight that digital and social media marketing can shape consumer decision-making through immediacy, interactivity, and broader audience reach. In the educational field, Zulhilmy (2023) and Rizka et al. (2022) similarly show that digital media can increase public attention and support student recruitment when used systematically. Other studies emphasize that digital marketing also contributes to the formation of a positive institutional image by making school activities, testimonials, and achievements more visible to the public (Hamdani et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2024). However, this literature often prioritizes promotional effectiveness and digital outreach while paying less attention to how digital marketing is embedded in school values, organizational culture, and institutional management structures, particularly in religious or faith-based educational institutions (Febry et al., 2025).

The third tendency examines educational competitiveness through organizational resources, leadership, and institutional differentiation. This body of literature argues that schools strengthen their competitive position not only through promotion, but also through the strategic management of internal assets. Porter (2008) emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage depends on differentiation and value creation, while more recent educational studies show that competitiveness in schools is influenced by flagship programs, institutional reputation, and the ability to respond to public expectations (Yulianto, 2024; Setyaningsih et al., 2025). In Islamic educational settings, several authors note that institutional identity, pesantren-based culture, and religious values may function as unique resources that distinguish schools from their competitors (Indah et al., 2024; Ade S et al., 2024). Leadership is also frequently highlighted as a critical factor because visionary school leaders are able to align institutional goals, marketing efforts, and organizational culture in ways that strengthen long-term sustainability (Rosidi & Fachrunnisa, 2025). Studies in this tendency



usually use qualitative case studies or institutional analyses to examine school practices. Even so, they often discuss competitiveness, leadership, and differentiation separately from digital marketing, leaving unclear how internal institutional values and digital communication strategies interact in building competitiveness in Islamic schools.

Despite these contributions, the three tendencies above still leave an important gap. Service-marketing studies explain why educational institutions need value-based promotion, but they tend to remain conceptually broad. Digital-marketing studies demonstrate the importance of online media for school promotion, yet they often focus on effectiveness without examining how such strategies are shaped by institutional values and managerial capacity. Competitiveness studies, meanwhile, highlight leadership, culture, and flagship programs, but frequently discuss them as internal assets without connecting them systematically to digital communication practices. In this sense, previous studies have largely overlooked the intersection between digital educational marketing, institutional constraints, supporting factors, and competitiveness in Islamic secondary schools. They have not sufficiently explained how a madrasah integrates digital marketing with its religious identity, school culture, and educational mission while simultaneously dealing with limitations in human resources and digital management. As a result, digital educational marketing in Islamic schools is often treated either as a promotional technique or as a separate managerial issue, rather than as an integrated strategic process. This neglected intersection constitutes the novelty space of the present study.

In response to this gap, the present study proposes a more integrative perspective by examining digital-based educational marketing as a strategic process through which institutional values, supporting factors, and constraints interact to shape institutional competitiveness. Rather than viewing digital marketing only as a communication tool, this study positions it as an institutional mechanism that links school identity, program differentiation, leadership support, and technological capacity within a single analytical framework. The focus on Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi is important because it allows the study to explore how a developing Islamic secondary school negotiates contemporary market competition while maintaining its religious and educational identity. This study therefore directs attention to three interconnected questions: how digital-based marketing strategies are implemented in practice, what internal and external factors support or inhibit their effectiveness, and how these processes contribute to institutional competitiveness. By taking this



approach, the study offers a new direction in the literature on educational marketing. It shifts the discussion from digital promotion as a technical activity to digital educational marketing as a value-based, institutionally mediated, and context-sensitive strategy for strengthening the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study focused on the implementation of digital-based educational marketing strategies and their relationship to institutional competitiveness in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi. The unit of analysis was the educational institution as an organizational setting, together with the key actors directly involved in marketing management, including school leadership, teachers, administrative staff, and personnel responsible for digital media. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative orientation was selected because the research sought to understand processes, meanings, and institutional practices in their natural context rather than to measure relationships statistically. The case study design was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of how digital marketing strategies were planned, implemented, and negotiated within a single Islamic secondary school facing competitive pressures in the contemporary educational environment. Through this design, the study examined how institutional identity, leadership support, organizational culture, and digital communication practices interacted to shape school competitiveness. Such an approach is consistent with qualitative inquiry that emphasizes contextual depth, interpretive understanding, and close engagement with institutional realities (Huberman & Miles, 2020; Charismana et al., 2022).

The sources of data in this study consisted of primary and supporting data. Primary data were obtained from six purposively selected informants, including the head of the madrasah, the vice principal, a teacher, educational staff, and a staff member responsible for digital media management, all of whom had direct involvement in educational marketing activities. Supporting data were drawn from institutional documents such as promotional materials, school records, and digital media content. Data were collected over a three-month period through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document study. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines to explore strategies, constraints, and supporting factors in digital educational marketing. Observation was used to capture institutional practices and the actual use of digital media, while document study was employed to verify and complement field data



(Nilamsari, 2021). The data were analyzed through an interactive process consisting of data reduction, data display, coding, thematic categorization, and conclusion drawing (Huberman & Miles, 2020). To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied source and method triangulation, while ethical procedures included institutional permission, informed consent, and confidentiality of participants' identities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Digital Marketing Strengthened Institutional Visibility and Public Interest

The first major finding concerns the strengthening of institutional visibility through digital-based educational marketing. Observation and document review showed that MTs Darul Arifin Jambi had used social media and online communication channels to present school activities, student achievements, and institutional programs to the public. This finding was reinforced by (PI3), who stated that the leadership strongly encouraged teachers and staff to share school activities through digital media so that the public could recognize the programs and achievements of the madrasah. Similarly explained that social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp helped information about school activities reach a wider audience more quickly (PI4). In practical terms, the school used digital communication not only to announce information, but also to build visibility in a competitive educational environment. Restated more clearly, digital marketing in this setting functioned as a visibility-building mechanism that connected the institution with prospective students and the broader community. Three patterns emerged from this evidence: digital platforms increased public exposure, leadership encouraged active institutional promotion, and school achievements were used as promotional content to strengthen public recognition.

The second layer of evidence shows that digital marketing was not limited to promoting school existence, but also shaped prospective students' interest through the communication of institutional strengths. Observation of promotional content and school documents indicated that the institution consistently highlighted its religious identity, flagship programs, and educational achievements. According to (PI1) and (PI2), the purpose of digital marketing was not merely to attract attention, but to communicate the school's distinctive value in comparison with competing institutions. This means that the school used digital media not only for publicity, but also to present an identity that could influence how the



institution was perceived by families and prospective students. Restated analytically, digital marketing operated as a strategic channel for presenting the school's image, values, and strengths in a form accessible to the public. At least four tendencies are evident here. First, the school framed digital marketing as strategic communication rather than incidental promotion. Second, promotional content emphasized both academic and religious excellence. Third, public trust was supported by visible evidence of activities and achievements. Fourth, digital media functioned as a bridge between institutional identity and enrollment interest.

A third finding related to this result is that digital marketing contributed to competitiveness because it helped the school remain visible within an increasingly crowded educational market. Observational data showed that the use of digital media enabled the madrasah to communicate regularly despite competition from public and private institutions. Informants explained that visibility mattered because parents and prospective students often searched for school information through online platforms before making decisions. In this context, the digital presence of the madrasah became part of its competitive strategy. Restated simply, institutional competitiveness was not shaped only by internal quality, but also by how effectively the institution made that quality visible to the public. Three important patterns can be concluded from this result. First, digital marketing expanded the reach of school communication. Second, online visibility increased institutional recognition. Third, competitiveness was supported by the strategic presentation of identity, achievements, and educational value. Thus, the first major result of this study is that digital-based educational marketing functioned as a practical mechanism for increasing institutional visibility and strengthening public interest in MTs Darul Arifin Jambi.

Internal Supporting Factors Strengthened Marketing Effectiveness

The second major finding concerns the internal supporting factors that enabled digital marketing to function effectively. The data indicate that visionary leadership was one of the strongest internal factors. Interviews with (PI1; PI2;PI3) showed that leadership support was central in encouraging innovation, legitimizing digital promotion, and mobilizing staff participation. Informants repeatedly emphasized that the leadership did not treat digital marketing as a secondary administrative matter, but as a strategic institutional priority. Observation also suggested that leadership commitment influenced the willingness of teachers and staff to participate in the dissemination of school information. Restated more clearly, the leadership served not only as a policy actor but also as the initiator of a



school-wide digital communication culture. Three patterns are evident from this finding. First, leadership support created organizational legitimacy for digital marketing. Second, the principal's encouragement stimulated broader staff involvement. Third, leadership commitment helped position digital marketing as part of school strategy rather than a technical side activity. This suggests that managerial commitment was a decisive factor in the effectiveness of educational marketing practices.

A second internal supporting factor was the presence of a strong organizational culture, especially a pesantren-based culture emphasizing religiosity, discipline, and collective responsibility. Data from (PI2; PI3; PI5) indicate that these cultural values shaped how the institution presented itself to the public. Rather than relying only on visual promotion, the school communicated a recognizable institutional character grounded in Islamic values and disciplined educational practice. This cultural foundation also made it easier for staff to produce consistent narratives about the school's identity. Restated analytically, organizational culture functioned as an implicit marketing resource because it supplied the values and meanings that could be translated into digital communication. Several tendencies can be identified here. First, institutional culture provided coherence to promotional messaging. Second, school identity was reinforced by shared values rather than by slogans alone. Third, the pesantren-based environment became part of the school's attractiveness in the eyes of the public. Fourth, cultural consistency supported the credibility of digital marketing efforts. These patterns show that organizational culture did not merely support internal management but also shaped the external image of the institution.

The third internal supporting factor was the existence of flagship programs and institutional achievements that differentiated the school from competitors. According to (PI1; PI2), programs such as Qur'anic memorization, classical Islamic text studies, and religious character development were intentionally presented as markers of institutional distinctiveness. Supporting documents and school promotional materials also demonstrated that achievements at district, provincial, and national levels were consistently used as evidence of institutional quality. Restated simply, the school did not market itself as a generic institution; it promoted specific strengths that could be recognized by the community. Three to four patterns emerge from this evidence. First, flagship programs functioned as differentiation tools. Second, achievements strengthened public trust by providing visible proof of quality. Third, religious and academic excellence were promoted together. Fourth, internal strengths became the substantive



content of digital communication. Therefore, the second major result of this study is that internal factors – especially leadership, organizational culture, flagship programs, and institutional achievements – formed the strategic foundation of digital educational marketing at MTs Darul Arifin Jambi.

External Opportunities and Implementation Constraints Shaped Competitiveness


The third major finding concerns the combination of external opportunities and internal constraints that shaped the implementation of digital marketing. Observation and interviews with (PI4; PI6) showed that increasing technological accessibility in society had created favorable conditions for digital promotion. Social media and online communication channels allowed the school to share content quickly, interact with prospective students and parents, and maintain communication beyond geographical limits. Informants explained that the wider availability of smartphones and social media usage among the community made digital platforms increasingly relevant for school marketing. Restated more clearly, digitalization in society created an external opportunity that supported institutional competitiveness by expanding the reach of school communication. Three tendencies can be identified. First, digital media reduced communication barriers between school and public. Second, broader technological access increased the potential audience for school promotion. Third, digital platforms created opportunities for faster and more interactive engagement with the community. These findings show that digital marketing at MTs Darul Arifin operated within a broader social environment that increasingly favored digital communication.

However, the same data also reveal significant implementation constraints, especially in relation to human resource limitations. Interviews with (PI3; PI4; PI6) indicate that not all staff possessed sufficient competence in content creation, social media management, or digital promotion planning. As a result, some promotional activities were carried out incidentally rather than systematically. Informants acknowledged that while the school had the desire to strengthen digital marketing, its human resources were still uneven in digital skills. Restated analytically, the challenge did not lie in the absence of digital tools, but in the limited institutional capacity to use those tools strategically and consistently. Several patterns emerge here. First, digital competence among staff remained uneven. Second, promotional activities often depended on a small number of active individuals. Third, content production was not always guided by long-term planning. Fourth, institutional ambition sometimes exceeded technical readiness. This means that digital competitiveness was



constrained not only by technology, but by the human capacity needed to manage it effectively.

In addition to limited human resources, the study found that content inconsistency and infrastructural limitations also reduced the effectiveness of digital marketing. Informants noted that promotional content was not always updated regularly, and creative variation in posts was still limited. Observation further suggested that infrastructural issues, including technological facilities and internet stability, could disrupt the production and dissemination of digital content. Restated simply, the school had already entered the digital marketing arena, but its implementation was not yet fully stable or systematic. Three final tendencies can be identified from this result. First, digital marketing was supported by expanding public access to technology. Second, implementation was weakened by limited digital competence and inconsistent content management. Third, infrastructural constraints reduced the continuity and professionalism of promotion. Therefore, the third major result of this study is that institutional competitiveness was shaped by a tension between strong digital opportunities and equally significant implementation constraints. In this context, the future effectiveness of digital educational marketing at MTs Darul Arifin depends on how successfully the institution can convert those external opportunities into sustained organizational capacity.

No	Figure	Description
1		<p>Figure 1: This image demonstrates how literacy and memorization programs integrate in shaping students' religiosity. Literacy strengthens the ability to read and understand texts, while memorization instills the discipline of memorizing the Quran. The synergy between the two contributes to the development of students' morals, worship, and religious behavior.</p>



<p>2</p>		<p>Figure 2: This image shows the process of conducting research interviews with informants within the school environment as part of qualitative data collection. Through these interviews, researchers gathered information regarding the implementation of the literacy and memorization program and its contribution to the development of student religiosity at the school.</p>
<p>3</p>		<p>Figure 3: This poster demonstrates a digital-based educational marketing strategy through visual media to attract new prospective students, while also emphasizing the identity, flagship programs, and competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions.</p>
<p>4</p>		<p>Figure 4: This image demonstrates the use of the madrasah's official YouTube channel as a digital educational marketing tool. By publishing videos of student activities and achievements, the institution expands its promotional reach, builds a positive image, and increases its appeal to prospective students and public trust.</p>



Discussion

This study investigated how digital-based educational marketing strategies were implemented at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi, what supporting and inhibiting factors shaped their implementation, and how these strategies contributed to institutional competitiveness. The findings demonstrate that digital marketing in this madrasah was not merely a promotional instrument but a strategic communication mechanism used to increase institutional visibility, strengthen public trust, and attract prospective students. The results also show that the effectiveness of digital marketing was strongly supported by visionary leadership, pesantren-based organizational culture, flagship programs, and institutional achievements. At the same time, the study identified several limiting factors, particularly uneven digital competence among staff, inconsistent content management, and infrastructural constraints. Taken together, these findings indicate that institutional competitiveness in an Islamic secondary school is shaped not only by academic quality or religious identity, but also by the ability to communicate those strengths effectively through digital media. In this regard, digital educational marketing emerges as an important bridge between internal institutional value and external public perception. The findings therefore reaffirm that digital strategy has become an increasingly central component of school competitiveness in the contemporary educational environment (Kotler et al., 2021; Ryan, 2020; Zuhlilmy, 2023).

The relationships found in this study can be explained through the interaction between institutional resources and communication strategy. Digital marketing contributed to institutional competitiveness because it translated internal strengths – such as school identity, flagship programs, and achievements – into forms that were visible and understandable to the public. This helps explain why leadership, culture, and program quality emerged as supporting factors rather than background variables. They mattered because digital marketing in educational institutions depends on substantive content, not merely on technical dissemination. A school cannot build a strong digital image unless it possesses recognizable values and programs to communicate. At the same time, the inhibiting factors reveal why digital marketing does not automatically produce competitiveness. Limited human resource competence and weak content consistency reduce the school's ability to transform institutional strengths into persuasive communication. In other words, competitiveness increases when digital marketing is supported by both strategic substance and organizational capacity. This finding aligns with service-marketing perspectives that



emphasize value communication and differentiation as foundations of trust-based institutional positioning (Kotler & Keller, 2019; Tjiptono, 2021). It also supports the view that digital communication becomes effective only when embedded in institutional readiness and strategic management (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Compared with previous research, the present findings show both confirmation and extension. Similar to earlier studies, this research confirms that digital media can increase school visibility, broaden promotional reach, and influence enrollment interest when managed systematically (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2024; Rizka et al., 2022). It also supports studies showing that leadership and school branding are important factors in strengthening educational competitiveness (Mushoffi & Supardi, 2024; Indah et al., 2024; Yulianto, 2024). However, the novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on an Islamic secondary school and in its integrative explanation of how digital educational marketing interacts with institutional values, organizational culture, and internal constraints. Many previous studies tend to examine digital marketing either as a promotional technique or as a component of the educational marketing mix. By contrast, this study shows that in a madrasah context, digital marketing is deeply tied to institutional identity, particularly pesantren-based values and religious educational orientation. The findings therefore extend the literature by demonstrating that competitiveness in Islamic schooling is shaped not only by external promotion, but by the strategic alignment between religious identity, organizational culture, leadership support, and digital communication practice.

The meaning of these findings becomes clearer when interpreted within the broader social and ideological context of contemporary Islamic education. Islamic schools today operate in a dual environment: they are expected to preserve religious values and moral identity, while simultaneously adapting to digital transformation and competitive market logic. In such a context, digital educational marketing cannot be understood simply as commercialization. Rather, it should be interpreted as a contemporary form of institutional communication through which schools articulate their values, educational mission, and public relevance. For a madrasah, digital presence is therefore not only about attracting students, but also about representing religious legitimacy, educational seriousness, and institutional trustworthiness to a society increasingly shaped by online information flows (Ott & Tiozzo, 2022; Hamdani et al., 2022). Historically, educational legitimacy in Islamic institutions was often conveyed through community reputation and direct social networks. In the digital era, that



legitimacy must also be translated into visual, textual, and interactive media. This shifts the arena of public trust from purely face-to-face relations toward hybrid forms of mediated institutional presence. Thus, the findings suggest that digital marketing in Islamic schooling is not merely a managerial adaptation, but also an ideological negotiation between tradition, modernity, and institutional survival.

These results invite reflection on both the functional and dysfunctional implications of digital-based educational marketing. Functionally, digital marketing strengthens institutional competitiveness by expanding public access to school information, improving visibility, showcasing achievements, and enabling schools to position themselves strategically in a competitive educational field. It also creates opportunities for stronger engagement with parents and prospective students through more immediate and interactive communication. In this sense, digital marketing contributes not only to promotion but also to institutional sustainability. However, the findings also reveal possible dysfunctions. If digital marketing is not supported by adequate competence and strategic planning, it may become superficial, inconsistent, or overly dependent on a few individuals. This creates institutional vulnerability and may weaken credibility rather than strengthen it. In addition, there is a risk that schools become overly focused on image production without giving equal attention to the substance of educational quality. Such imbalance could lead to symbolic competitiveness rather than substantive improvement. Therefore, the study indicates that digital educational marketing can be highly productive, but only when it remains grounded in institutional integrity, educational quality, and sustainable organizational support.

From a practical and policy perspective, the findings suggest several action points for Islamic educational institutions and their leaders. First, school leaders should institutionalize digital marketing as part of strategic management rather than treating it as incidental promotion. This requires clear policy direction, role distribution, and regular evaluation of digital communication performance. Second, investment in human resource development is essential. Teachers and staff need training in digital literacy, content creation, social media management, and audience engagement so that digital marketing can be managed professionally and consistently (Juraerah et al., 2024; Lestari, 2025). Third, schools should design structured content plans that integrate institutional values, flagship programs, student achievements, and community-oriented narratives. Fourth, digital marketing should be linked to broader school improvement efforts, ensuring that public communication reflects actual educational quality



rather than symbolic branding alone. At the policy level, educational stakeholders may support madrasahs by providing technical assistance and capacity-building programs for digital communication management. In this way, digital educational marketing can develop from a reactive promotional practice into a sustainable strategic tool for strengthening the competitiveness and long-term resilience of Islamic educational institutions (Setyaningsih et al., 2025; Ambarwati et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that digital-based educational marketing can strengthen institutional competitiveness when it is implemented as a strategic and value-oriented process rather than as incidental promotion. The key lesson drawn from this research is that the competitiveness of an Islamic educational institution is not determined solely by academic quality or religious identity, but also by its ability to communicate these strengths effectively through digital media. In the case of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin Jambi, digital marketing became meaningful because it was supported by visionary leadership, organizational culture, flagship programs, and institutional achievements that could be translated into persuasive public communication. This suggests that digital marketing in Islamic schools should not be understood merely as technical media usage, but as a broader institutional effort to build trust, visibility, and public recognition. Another important lesson is that digital transformation in education requires alignment between internal values and external communication. When such alignment is achieved, digital platforms can function not only as tools for promotion, but also as channels for conveying institutional credibility, educational mission, and competitiveness in an increasingly demanding educational environment.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to educational marketing scholarship, particularly in the context of Islamic secondary education. Empirically, the research provides contextual data from a madrasah that is actively negotiating digital transformation while maintaining its religious and institutional identity. This is important because much of the previous literature has focused either on general school marketing, higher education promotion, or broad digital communication practices, with limited attention to how Islamic secondary schools manage digital marketing strategically. Conceptually, the study contributes by linking three important dimensions within a single analytical frame: digital educational marketing, institutional supporting and inhibiting factors, and



institutional competitiveness. In doing so, it clarifies that digital marketing effectiveness depends not only on media platforms, but also on organizational leadership, culture, differentiation, and managerial capacity. Methodologically, the qualitative case study approach allows for an in-depth understanding of institutional processes, strategic decisions, and contextual constraints. The study also opens new questions about how digital marketing can be integrated more systematically into school governance, branding, and stakeholder trust-building in faith-based educational institutions.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a single madrasah, which limits the broader generalizability of the findings to other Islamic schools or educational institutions with different organizational structures, technological capacities, and community contexts. Second, the number of informants was relatively small, although sufficient for a qualitative case study, and therefore may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives among all institutional actors and stakeholders. Third, this study focused primarily on institutional implementation and internal dynamics, without examining in detail the perceptions of parents, prospective students, or the wider community as recipients of digital marketing communication. Fourth, the study did not measure the quantitative effectiveness of digital marketing outputs, such as audience engagement metrics, conversion rates, or comparative enrollment growth over time. These limitations suggest the need for future research using comparative multi-site studies, mixed-method designs, or longitudinal approaches. Further studies may also investigate audience reception, digital analytics, and cross-institutional strategies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital educational marketing in Islamic schooling.

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Coding

PI1 = Head of Madrasah

PI2 = Vice Principal

PI3 = Teacher

PI4 = Administrative Staff

PI5 = Educational Staff

PI6 = Digital Media Staff

