

Instagram as a Promotional Media for Islamic Boarding School Darul Ilmi Wal Amal

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how Instagram can be optimized as a promotional tool for Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal, an Islamic boarding school with limited public visibility and student enrollment. The research addresses the challenge of promoting a newly established educational institution through effective digital channels.

Method: Employing a qualitative approach, the research involved stakeholder discussions to map promotional strategies, development of Instagram content showcasing institutional profiles and activities, and evaluation using open-ended questionnaires distributed via Google Form.

Practical Applications: The findings provide actionable recommendations: enhancing visual quality and consistent branding, creating emotionally engaging stories, utilizing interactive features (polls, Q&A), posting educational content, optimizing captions and hashtags, and using analytics to refine engagement strategies.

Conclusion: While the initial Instagram presence was visually appealing, it lacked structured planning and engagement. With strategic content optimization and consistency, Instagram demonstrates significant potential as an effective promotional medium to increase public interest and student enrollment in the Islamic boarding school.

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Introduction

Social media serves as one of the most effective means of providing the latest and real-time information, enabling users to respond immediately after receiving it. This platform is widely used for message delivery, allowing individuals or institutions to communicate their intentions and objectives to the broader community. The nature of users' responses depends largely on the quality of information shared within their online networks. Therefore, it is essential to present information that is detailed, accurate, and communicative in order to attract public interest. This applies to promotional activities across various sectors—commercial, non-profit, and even personal—where visibility within the community is a key objective.

Social media has had a profound impact on the social life of communities. Such impacts can be both positive and negative, or at times, problematic. The negative or problematic aspects may include issues related to potential violations of morality, ethics, law, and privacy, as well as professional behaviour, compliance, and broader social implications (Kanchan and Gaidhane, 2023). In the business sector, marketing managers and entrepreneurs—particularly those operating in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises—must use social media wisely and effectively as a promotional tool. Its strategic use can enhance customer engagement and improve business performance, complementing conventional marketing methods (Fatima and Ali, 2021). The development of digital-based promotional media enables offers and advertisements to appear more appealing and professional (Purba et al., 2024).

Within the government sector, a study by Yuan et al. (2023) demonstrates that digitalisation systems, including social media, have a positive impact by supporting public service strategies that foster more participatory communication with citizens. Furthermore, the use of social media in the field of education plays a significant role in the teaching and learning process as well as in the exchange of information (Sajdah et al., 2022). Research findings also show that consistent use of Instagram can enhance public engagement, strengthen relationships with students and parents, and build a positive institutional image in the eyes of the community (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Social media has generally become one of the most effective tools for promotion (Budiman et al., 2019). It is frequently utilised to introduce and promote specific locations or community-based initiatives, whether related to local areas, activities, or socio-economic aspects. Social media is particularly popular among younger generations who seek both information and entertainment. An initial survey was conducted using a simple random sampling method involving 70 invited respondents, of whom 60 participated. The respondents were aged between 19 and 24 years and were asked about their preferred social media platforms. The majority were familiar with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. The survey revealed that most respondents were active on more than one platform. The ranking of usage from highest to lowest was Instagram (40%), TikTok (35%), Twitter (17%), and Facebook (8%). These findings demonstrate that Instagram is the most popular platform among respondents. This fact suggests that Instagram can serve as a strategic alternative for disseminating information—whether for business purposes or for other important messages—beyond traditional means such as banners, leaflets, pamphlets, or flyers distributed in public spaces.

Information dissemination and promotion activities are also carried out by Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal, both through traditional methods—such as visiting nearby locations and residents' homes—and through digital media. The pesantren utilises various platforms including the four mentioned above and an official website. These efforts aim to reach different social media communities, thereby increasing visibility and public interest. However, this study focuses solely on the use of Instagram, identified as the most preferred platform across different demographic groups. Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal is one of the Islamic boarding schools located in Karawang Regency. It adopts innovative teaching methods for learning Qur'anic recitation, namely the BTQ (Banhaji Tamyiz lil Qur'ani)

approach, and applies the Tamyiz method for Qur'anic translation. A merit-based management system is implemented at the pesantren, where policies and managerial decisions are grounded in qualifications, competencies, and performance, applied fairly and without discrimination. Tuition fees cover operational and educational development costs, while the foundation bears responsibility for the provision of facilities and infrastructure. The pesantren's curriculum integrates religious and general education: religious knowledge shapes students' morality and behaviour, while general subjects build their competencies.

Despite these efforts, the pesantren remains relatively unknown to the wider public. Therefore, educational and promotional activities are required to raise awareness and attract community interest. Digital promotional strategies are essential for achieving rapid information dissemination through easily accessible media. Such approaches are particularly crucial given that Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal was only established in 2023, resulting in limited public awareness of its existence. Consequently, systematic promotional efforts are needed to highlight the institution's strengths, expand its visibility, and attract new students.

To explore this issue, the researcher conducted a literature search on Google Scholar using the keyword "Instagram as a promotional medium in pesantren." The first round of searches yielded ten relevant studies, seven of which were accessible as open-access papers, while three demonstrated close relevance to the present topic. All three studies underscored the importance of Instagram in pesantren promotion, although they differed in focus and context.

Fanani and Kusumandyoko (2024) concentrated on the development of promotional media through a Research and Development (R&D) approach using the ADDIE model. Their study focused on designing systematic, evidence-based media to enhance existing promotional effectiveness. Putriana et al. (2024) examined the management of social media in supporting pesantren promotion, revealing that effective media management can yield optimal promotional outcomes, although their research did not address the initial construction or development of social media platforms.

Meanwhile, Dwiansyah et al. (2024) conducted research at a pesantren in Lumajang, discussing the optimisation of promotional media through the strategic use of four social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Their findings indicated that the strategic use of social media could enhance promotional effectiveness by up to 71%. Distinct from the aforementioned studies, the present research was undertaken as part of a community service programme, focusing on developing an Instagram platform for a newly established pesantren that previously had no digital presence. This study therefore fills a gap in the literature by addressing the initial construction and implementation of Instagram as a promotional medium for pesantren institutions.

Based on the problems identified, the community service activity conducted in the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year determined Instagram as the primary tool to support promotional efforts aimed at introducing Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal to the wider public. The promotional initiative is expected to generate positive public sentiment towards the pesantren, while also helping to map and attract the community's interest in learning more about it.

The expected benefits of this activity include: The community gains access to accurate information about Darul Ilmi wal Amal; The public becomes interested in learning about the pesantren's distinctive qualities; Individuals make informed decisions to choose Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal as their educational institution. The anticipated outcomes are: Increased public awareness of Darul Ilmi wal Amal; Greater interest in exploring the pesantren's programmes; A rise in the number of students enrolling at Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal.

Method

Social media has become one of the tools widely used by the public for promotional purposes—whether to promote business products, community initiatives, or personal branding. From a business perspective, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can systematically and structurally engage in social media promotion with minimal capital, allowing them to conduct offers and marketing activities at any time (Riu, 2015). In general, professionals and organisations promoting particular products can utilise positive messages and tailor their posts across various social media channels, such as in the promotion of health-related products (Klassen et al., 2018). Social media also provides convenience for business actors by significantly reducing promotional costs (Infante and Mardikaningsih, 2022).

Moreover, social media serves as an effective medium for approaching and engaging with customers. International companies have identified social media promotion as a highly potential promotional system and have refined its use to strengthen marketing strategies (Sajid, 2016). In the educational context, students are strongly connected to social media as a means to gain knowledge about studies, enhance social awareness, foster friendships, and maintain relationships with family members (Safdar et al., 2018).

Promotion is essentially a persuasive message designed to attract consumer attention effectively (Puspitarini and Nuraeni, 2019). Similar to the tourism sector, social media significantly influences the number of tourist visits to various destinations (Soegoto et al., 2018). The platforms most commonly used by communities include Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and several others.

Instagram, as a visual-sharing platform, particularly through photographs and imagery, has the capacity to attract consumers when content is presented in a creative and engaging manner. Such visually appealing presentations have been shown to correlate strongly with consumer interest and engagement (Indika and Jovita, 2017). According to Ramadan and Fatchiya (2021), Instagram effectively captures audience attention; however, it is less effective in stimulating deeper levels of desire and purchase intention.

Facebook, on the other hand, has been identified as an effective platform for enhancing brand awareness and strengthening brand loyalty (Shen and Bisell, 2013). Various organisations, including those in the health sector, strategically employ branding and advertising techniques via Facebook to manage their public image and promote their brands (Park et al., 2013). Furthermore, Facebook provides an advantage in marketing activities by allowing users to post comments that link to other media such as websites, thereby expanding engagement and accessibility (Chawla and Chodak, 2021).

Overall, Instagram demonstrates particularly strong potential as a medium for offers and promotional activities due to its extensive reach and visually appealing features (Destriyani et al., 2019). The platform's ability to combine aesthetic presentation with interactive communication makes it one of the most effective tools for digital promotion in both commercial and non-commercial contexts.

In this community service program, two main strategies were designed to address the promotion challenges of Darul Ilmi wal Amal Islamic Boarding School through digital media. The first strategy focuses on determining platform priorities, aiming to establish an initial platform design that can be easily accessed and accurately integrated with other platforms, considering that all platforms to be used must be interconnected to create a cohesive promotional ecosystem. The second strategy involves filling the platform content, which will consist of the Islamic boarding school's profile along with ongoing activities and promotions, thereby delivering comprehensive information to potential followers and prospective students.

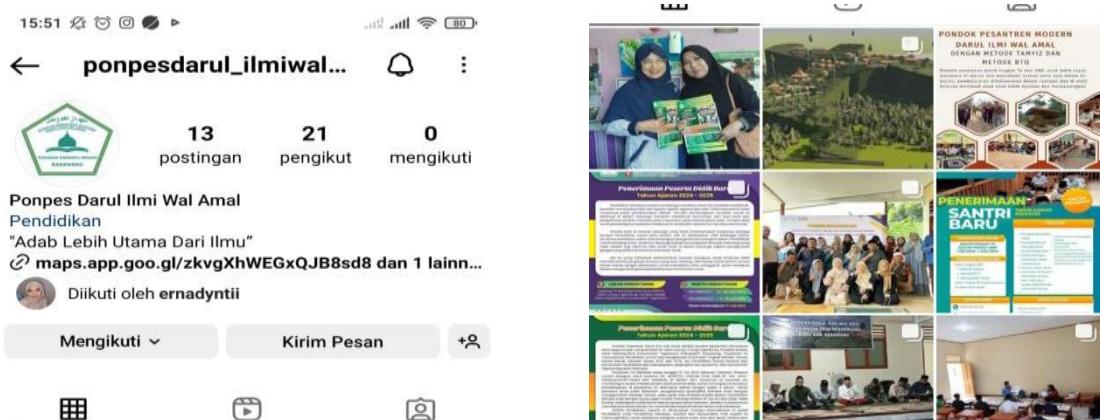
The implementation of activities was conducted through a systematic series of six main components. The initial phase began with discussions to map out platform development for aligning promotional goals and strategies. Subsequently, platform content creation was carried out, including the collection of visual materials and the development of engaging promotional narratives. After the content was ready, the platform launch was conducted as

the third phase of implementation. Although in this community service program, the planning and implementation of activities officially only reached the platform launch stage, the process continued with platform testing to ensure technical functionality. Additionally, content evaluation was conducted to identify the effectiveness and shortcomings of the platform when presented to the public, followed by content adjustments based on evaluation findings. Although the implementation phase officially concluded at the platform launch, the team continued to conduct evaluations to assess the platform's effectiveness and weaknesses in performing its promotional function, thereby providing further development recommendations to enhance the quality of the Islamic boarding school's digital promotion. This step-by-step approach enables the development of more structured and sustainable promotional strategies according to needs and available resources.

Result

The community service initiative commenced with an internal brainstorming session conducted by 26 lecturers from the Faculty of Economics and Business, Diploma Programme in Management, focusing specifically on developing promotional strategies to increase prospective parents' interest in selecting Pondok Pesantren Darul Ilmi wal Amal as an educational institution for their children. This activity was executed as part of the mandatory Community Service Programme (Abdimas), one of the three pillars of Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi alongside education and research, as stipulated in Chapter 1, Article 1, point 11 of Law No. 12 of 2012. The program embodies the academic community's responsibility to utilize science and technology for public welfare enhancement and national intellectual development, providing communities with practical academic support systems that address societal needs through effective promotional material structuring and presentation.

Figure 1. Instagram Profile of Pondok Pesantren



Source: Private Documentation, 2025.

To map out the promotional activities, an introductory meeting was held at the pesantren in Mekarbuana Village, Tegalwaru District, Karawang Regency, on May 1, 2024, where several teams were formed from a pool of 37 lecturers to develop different promotional platforms, with one dedicated team assigned to Instagram development. The initial project phase involved comprehensive information gathering through interviews, site surveys, observations, and collection of visual materials showcasing the pesantren's facilities. Established on July 1, 2023, the institution currently operates with three classrooms, four bathrooms, an ablution area, and a student gazebo, while actively expanding with additional kindergarten classrooms and playgrounds. Future development plans include a 900 m² grand mosque, a three-story academic building with 16 classrooms per floor, two three-story dormitory buildings, residential housing for educators, sports fields, laboratory and library facilities, and dining halls. The pesantren currently serves early childhood and junior secondary levels, implementing the BTQ (Banhaji Tamyiz lil Qur'an) and Tamyiz teaching

methods under the Ahsanul Insan Foundation, with a vision focused on fostering students' moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

Table 1. Age and Number of Respondents

Age, Year	Number of Respondent
16	1
18	7
20	5
21	2
22	5
23	2
24	1
Mean	20,57
Total	23

Source: Author's Work, 2025.

The Instagram platform was officially launched on April 26, 2024, as a primary digital information channel, featuring curated content including institutional profiles and activity photos. Targeting primarily young social media users while also considering housewives as secondary audience members, the initiative employed a community-based strategy encouraging early followers to engage with and share the account to expand organic reach. Despite these efforts, the first evaluation revealed modest results, with the account accumulating only 21 followers and 13 posts between April 26 and November 1, 2024, many of whom were pesantren staff and project participants. A subsequent evaluation using Google Forms received responses from 23 out of 90 invited participants, indicating low engagement levels that suggest the need for improved outreach strategies. The respondent pool showed an average age of 20.57 years (ranging from 16-24) with an average Instagram usage duration of 6.6 years. While all respondents found the content interesting, 8.7% indicated the interactivity could be improved.

Table 2. Duration Activities of Respondent Using Instagram

Duration of Activities using Instagram, year	Number of Respondent
2	1
3	2
4	3
5	4
6	4
7	3
8	1
9	2
10	1
12	1
-	1
Average	6,6
	23

*N/D= No Data

Source: Author's Work, 2025.

Based on this feedback, several strategic recommendations emerged to enhance Instagram content effectiveness: implementing high-quality visuals with consistent color themes to establish strong visual identity; developing compelling storytelling to build emotional connections; incorporating interactive elements like polls and Q&A sessions in Stories; providing valuable educational content related to pesantren education; collaborating with relevant influencers; optimizing captions and hashtags for discoverability; maintaining regular posting schedules across various formats (Reels, Feeds, Stories); and conducting periodic

content analysis to refine strategies. For Islamic boarding school promotion specifically, the recommendations emphasized highlighting institutional quality through showcasing activities, achievements, facilities, and unique strengths, while adopting creative approaches that incorporate modern technology and visually appealing designs to present a progressive institutional image.

Discussion

The findings from this community service initiative reveal critical insights about the challenges and opportunities of leveraging Instagram as a promotional medium for newly established Islamic boarding schools. Despite the strategic selection of Instagram as the primary platform—based on its popularity among the target demographic (40% usage rate among surveyed youth)—the initial implementation demonstrated significant shortcomings in engagement and growth, with the account accumulating only 21 followers over a six-month period.

This outcome aligns with Komariah et al.'s (2024) assertion that visually captivating content is essential for audience engagement, yet contradicts Dwiansyah et al.'s (2024) findings that strategic social media use could enhance promotional effectiveness by up to 71%, suggesting that mere platform selection is insufficient without proper content strategy. The disconnect between respondents' perception of content as "interesting" yet lacking interactivity (8.7% reported disengagement) highlights a critical gap between aesthetic presentation and meaningful interaction—a finding that extends Fanani and Kusumandyoko's (2024) R&D approach by demonstrating that even visually appealing content requires structured engagement strategies to translate interest into follower growth.

Notably, this study fills a significant research void by addressing the foundational development of digital presence for institutions with no prior online footprint, unlike previous studies that examined optimization of existing platforms. The low participation rate in evaluation (23 out of 90 invited respondents) further underscores the challenge of building community engagement from scratch, suggesting that promotional efforts must incorporate dual strategies: developing compelling content while simultaneously cultivating audience participation habits. These findings collectively indicate that for nascent educational institutions in the digital age, Instagram promotion requires not just content creation but a comprehensive ecosystem approach that integrates consistent branding, interactive features, audience analytics, and community-building tactics to transform passive viewers into active participants and, ultimately, prospective students.

Conclusion

The current presentation of the Instagram account remains relatively unappealing in delivering information. The content appears unstructured and functions merely as periodic updates, lacking visually engaging and informative design elements. Therefore, the development of informative visual materials is essential to enhance both visibility and engagement. This can be achieved through a structured and systematic approach to optimising social media promotion via Instagram (Fanani and Kusumandyoko, 2024). Moreover, content strategies that incorporate visually captivating images and video materials have proven effective in increasing audience engagement and interaction (Komariah et al., 2024).

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