

# Marketing Management in Islamic Boarding Schools: Integrating Promotion Mix and Faith-Based Values for Sustainable Student Recruitment

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## ABSTRACT

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) currently face social, economic, and digital pressures that force them to reimagine how they communicate the value of education to the community. This study aims to explore the implementation of promotional mix strategies in Islamic boarding schools and how these practices support student recruitment in the digital era while still aligning with Islamic ethical principles. The research method used was a qualitative case study, where data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, and document analysis. The results indicate that Islamic boarding schools utilize a combination of public relations, personal selling, advertising, sales promotions, and a growing digital marketing strategy. Community engagement and interpersonal trust remain central elements, while digital platforms serve as supporting tools to expand reach and strengthen the institution's image. However, optimization of digital strategies remains hampered by limited human resources and technical capacity. This study contributes to the educational marketing literature by demonstrating how the promotional mix framework is adapted in faith-based institutions, where promotional activities are framed as community service rather than purely commercial. Practically, this study offers guidance for Islamic boarding school (pesantren) administrators to strengthen student recruitment without compromising moral integrity in communication practices.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, widely known as pesantren, are experiencing profound transformations as they respond to the shifting social, economic, and technological realities

of contemporary society [1], [2]. Traditionally centered on religious instruction and character formation, these institutions now operate within an increasingly complex educational ecosystem shaped by globalization, rising educational expectations, and digital connectivity [3]. Families today seek schools that provide not only strong religious foundations but also academic competencies and technological literacy that prepare students for participation in broader national and global contexts. Consequently, pesantren are under growing pressure to modernize their institutional management, communication practices, and service delivery models in order to remain relevant and sustainable [2].

These transformations are also closely tied to economic realities that affect the operational sustainability of Islamic educational institutions. Increasing operational costs, inflationary pressures, and limited public funding have compelled many pesantren to seek alternative financial models and improve institutional efficiency [2]. Sustainable funding mechanisms, including community-based endowments and diversified income streams, are increasingly viewed as necessary to ensure long-term institutional resilience [2]. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated shifts in educational delivery, prompting schools to adopt hybrid and technology-assisted learning models that blend traditional instruction with digital tools [4]. This shift not only reshaped teaching practices but also highlighted the need for responsive governance and modern communication strategies that enable institutions to engage effectively with students, parents, and communities [5].

Despite these adaptive efforts, many pesantren continue to face difficulties in aligning their traditional institutional culture with contemporary management and communication demands. One of the most pressing challenges is the limited institutional capacity to implement structured marketing and communication strategies [6], [7]. Leadership within pesantren is often grounded in religious authority and pedagogical experience rather than managerial or marketing expertise, which can hinder the development of systematic outreach and branding initiatives [6]. As competition among educational providers intensifies, schools that lack strategic communication approaches may struggle to articulate their unique identity and value proposition to prospective students and families [8].

Resource constraints further compound these challenges. Many pesantren rely heavily on tuition fees and community donations, leaving limited financial space for investment in marketing infrastructure, professional development, or digital platforms [9]. Cultural resistance also plays a role, as marketing is sometimes perceived as overly commercial and inconsistent with the spiritual mission of Islamic education [10], [11]. Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital technologies creates a skills gap, where institutions struggle to keep pace with online communication trends and data-driven engagement strategies that increasingly shape how families evaluate educational options [12], [13]. These combined factors contribute to difficulties in maintaining enrollment levels and institutional competitiveness [14], [15].

A growing body of research has highlighted the importance of marketing management in educational contexts, particularly for non-profit and faith-based institutions operating in competitive environments [8]. Marketing management provides a strategic framework for institutions to analyze their environment, identify target audiences, and

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communicate their distinctive strengths effectively [8]. In Islamic educational settings, this process involves balancing institutional identity, community expectations, and educational quality in ways that resonate with families seeking both academic and moral development for their children [16]. Studies indicate that institutions that successfully communicate their mission, achievements, and educational pathways are better positioned to attract and retain students [8].

Within this broader marketing framework, the promotion mix—encompassing advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing—has emerged as a key tool for enhancing institutional visibility [17]. Research shows that targeted advertising and community engagement initiatives can significantly strengthen public awareness and institutional reputation [9], [18]. Incentive-based strategies such as scholarships and fee reductions have also been found to influence enrollment decisions among families weighing different educational options [19]. Moreover, direct communication with prospective students and parents fosters trust and relational bonds that are especially important in value-based educational settings [20], [13].

Digital communication has further transformed how educational marketing is conducted. Social media platforms, institutional websites, and digital content strategies enable schools to reach broader audiences and provide interactive channels for engagement [21]. Content marketing—through storytelling, testimonials, and visual media—helps institutions convey their ethos and educational environment in ways that resonate with digitally active families [22]. Data analytics tools also allow institutions to refine their communication strategies based on audience behavior and engagement patterns [19]. Importantly, digital marketing is often more cost-effective than traditional advertising, making it particularly relevant for resource-constrained institutions such as pesantren [23].

However, while literature increasingly acknowledges the relevance of marketing and digital communication in Islamic educational contexts, there remains limited empirical exploration of how pesantren specifically integrate promotion mix strategies within their unique institutional and ethical frameworks [24]. Many studies discuss marketing in general educational terms without addressing the distinctive cultural, religious, and organizational characteristics of pesantren [10], [11]. Furthermore, although Islamic ethical principles such as honesty, transparency, and social responsibility are frequently cited as foundational values, there is insufficient analysis of how these principles are operationalized within contemporary marketing practices [25]. This gap highlights the need for research that examines marketing implementation not merely as a technical activity but as a value-driven institutional process.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to explore how a pesantren applies elements of the promotion mix within the context of ongoing social, economic, and digital transformations, while also integrating Islamic ethical values into its communication practices. By focusing on the lived institutional experience of a pesantren navigating enrollment pressures and digital adaptation, this research contributes a contextualized understanding of marketing management in faith-based education. Its novelty lies in linking promotion mix strategies with organizational capacity and ethical considerations, thereby expanding the discourse on how Islamic educational institutions can remain

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competitive without compromising their core religious mission [8]. Through this approach, the study seeks to offer both theoretical insight and practical guidance for pesantren striving to strengthen their visibility, sustainability, and community relevance in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

Marketing management in educational institutions has evolved from being considered a purely commercial practice to a strategic organizational function that supports institutional sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and service quality. Educational institutions, particularly non-profit and faith-based schools, operate in increasingly competitive environments where they must communicate their value, maintain public trust, and ensure financial viability. Within this context, marketing management provides a framework for analyzing stakeholder needs, designing relevant educational services, and communicating institutional identity effectively [26], [27].

One influential framework applied in education is Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM emphasizes continuous improvement, stakeholder participation, and customer satisfaction, aligning closely with the service-oriented nature of educational institutions [28]. In Islamic educational contexts, TQM encourages systematic evaluation of teaching quality, administrative effectiveness, and community engagement. Feedback from students and parents becomes a central mechanism for refining services and ensuring that institutional offerings meet evolving expectations [29], [30]. Through this lens, marketing management is not limited to promotion but is integrated with quality assurance and institutional development.

Another widely used framework is the Marketing Mix model, traditionally known as the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion). In educational services, this model is often expanded to the 7Ps by including People, Process, and Physical Evidence, acknowledging the intangible and relational dimensions of education [27]. The “Product” in education refers not only to curriculum but also to the holistic learning experience, moral values, and extracurricular activities offered by the institution. “Price” includes tuition structures and financial aid mechanisms designed to ensure accessibility. “Place” encompasses both physical campuses and online platforms, reflecting the growing importance of digital delivery. “Promotion” involves strategic communication through traditional and digital channels to convey institutional strengths [31]. Case studies show that Islamic schools using the 7Ps framework can differentiate themselves in crowded educational markets while maintaining alignment with their religious mission [32].

In addition to these general frameworks, Islamic marketing theory provides a distinctive ethical dimension for marketing management in faith-based institutions. Islamic marketing emphasizes honesty (*sidq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), social responsibility, and community well-being as guiding principles in communication and exchange [33]. For Islamic educational institutions, this means that marketing practices should not rely on exaggeration or manipulation but instead present truthful information and promote benefits that genuinely serve students and society. Partnerships with community stakeholders and transparent communication help build a responsible institutional image consistent with religious values [34].

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The promotion mix, as a component of the marketing mix, refers to the combination of communication tools used to inform, persuade, and remind target audiences about institutional offerings. In non-profit and faith-based educational settings, the promotion mix must be adapted to reflect budget limitations, community orientation, and ethical considerations. Rather than relying heavily on costly commercial advertising, many institutions prioritize community-based approaches and relationship-driven communication [31]. Advertising in this context often takes the form of low-cost or community-focused channels, such as local events, partnerships with religious organizations, and word-of-mouth advocacy. These approaches are perceived as more authentic and culturally appropriate than aggressive commercial campaigns [35]. Public relations activities play an especially important role. Faith-based schools frequently engage in social service programs, religious events, and community outreach initiatives, which can be communicated to strengthen public trust and reinforce their social mission [36].

Sales promotion in non-profit educational institutions often appears in the form of scholarships, tuition waivers, or financial aid programs rather than price discounts in a commercial sense. These incentives align with the mission of expanding access to education and supporting underprivileged families [29]. Direct marketing is also adapted to emphasize relationship building. Personalized communication through newsletters, emails, and direct engagement with parents fosters a sense of belonging and long-term connection with the institution [26]

Digital marketing has become increasingly significant in the promotion mix of faith-based institutions. Social media platforms, institutional websites, and online content strategies enable schools to showcase their programs, values, and community life to wider audiences. These digital tools are particularly effective for engaging younger families who rely on online information when making educational decisions [37]. By combining traditional relationship-based approaches with digital communication, institutions can expand their reach while maintaining cultural and ethical alignment.

The digital transformation of education has significantly influenced marketing practices in Islamic educational institutions. The expansion of online communication channels has altered how institutions present themselves, interact with stakeholders, and manage their public image. Digital platforms provide opportunities for storytelling, visual representation of campus life, and interactive engagement that were previously difficult to achieve through traditional media [37]. For Islamic schools, digital marketing also offers a means to communicate religious identity and moral values in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences. Online sermons, educational videos, testimonials from alums, and virtual tours allow institutions to demonstrate their commitment to both academic excellence and spiritual development. However, digital engagement must be managed carefully to ensure that content remains consistent with Islamic ethical norms and community expectations [38].

Despite these opportunities, digital marketing adoption in Islamic educational contexts is often uneven. Institutions may lack the technical expertise, infrastructure, or strategic planning needed to utilize digital tools effectively. This gap highlights the importance of integrating digital competencies into broader marketing management and

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organizational development efforts [37]. Across these frameworks and studies, a consistent theme is the need to balance professional marketing practices with ethical and mission-driven considerations. Marketing in Islamic education is not merely about increasing enrollment but also about preserving institutional integrity and serving community needs. Islamic marketing theory reinforces that communication should promote genuine value, avoid misleading claims, and contribute to social good [30].

However, while theoretical models such as TQM, the 7Ps marketing mix, and Islamic marketing theory provide useful conceptual guidance, there remains limited empirical research examining how these frameworks are operationalized in the day-to-day practices of pesantren. Many studies discuss marketing strategies in general terms or focus on broader Islamic educational institutions without a detailed exploration of promotion mix implementation at the institutional level [32]. In particular, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on how pesantren integrate ethical considerations with practical promotion mix activities in contexts marked by digital transformation and resource constraints.

This gap indicates the need for research that not only applies marketing theory to Islamic educational settings but also investigates how promotion mix elements are adapted, negotiated, and enacted within the specific cultural, organizational, and ethical environment of pesantren. By positioning marketing management as both a strategic and value-laden practice, such research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how faith-based institutions sustain relevance and competitiveness while remaining faithful to their core mission.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study method to explore marketing practices within an Islamic boarding school. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining institutional marketing because it allows researchers to understand meanings, perceptions, and experiences from the perspectives of those directly involved [39]. Rather than measuring variables numerically, the study seeks to capture how marketing management and promotion mix strategies are interpreted, negotiated, and implemented within a real institutional setting.

The case study design enables in-depth exploration of a single pesantren as a bounded system, allowing the researcher to examine complex interactions between institutional values, resource constraints, and communication practices [39]. Case studies are especially relevant in Islamic educational contexts because they allow for contextualization—revealing how cultural, social, and religious factors shape marketing decisions. This approach also supports the examination of how general marketing frameworks, such as the promotion mix, are adapted in faith-based, non-profit environments.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of institutional marketing practices. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observations. In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including the pesantren leader, administrative staff, teachers involved in student recruitment, and personnel responsible for

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communication or promotional activities. Interviews are widely used in qualitative educational marketing research because they allow participants to explain strategies, challenges, and motivations in detail [40].

Focus group discussions were organized with parents of students and, where appropriate, senior students. Focus groups facilitate the exploration of collective perceptions regarding the institution's image, communication effectiveness, and factors influencing enrollment decisions. These discussions help reveal how promotional messages are received and interpreted by the community.

Observational data were gathered during school promotional events, community outreach activities, and daily administrative interactions related to student recruitment. Observational studies are useful for capturing real-time marketing practices and understanding how promotional strategies are enacted in practice rather than only described verbally [27]. Secondary data included institutional documents such as brochures, posters, social media content, admission forms, and internal reports on student enrollment trends. These documents were analyzed to identify the elements of the promotion mix being utilized and to triangulate information obtained from interviews and observations.

The research procedures were carried out in several stages. First, a preliminary field visit was conducted to establish contact with the pesantren leadership and to gain an overview of the institution's structure and communication practices. This stage also involved identifying key informants who were directly involved in marketing and recruitment activities. Second, data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was prepared based on marketing management and promotion mix concepts, covering themes such as advertising practices, public relations activities, sales promotion initiatives, direct communication with prospective students, and the use of digital media. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on issues they considered important [39]. Third, focus group discussions were facilitated using open-ended questions about how families learned about the pesantren, what aspects of the institution influenced their enrollment decisions, and how they perceived the school's communication efforts. These discussions were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed for analysis. Fourth, non-participant observation was conducted during selected promotional activities, such as school visits, community religious events, and information sessions for prospective students. Field notes were taken to document communication styles, audience engagement, and the integration of religious values in promotional messages. Finally, document analysis was performed on promotional materials and institutional communication outputs. This analysis aimed to map these materials onto the elements of the promotion mix and to identify the presence of Islamic ethical values in marketing content.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research to identify patterns, categories, and themes across different data sources [27]. The process began with data familiarization, where interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, observation notes, and documents were read repeatedly. Next, initial codes were generated to label segments of data related to specific aspects of

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marketing management, such as “digital promotion,” “community engagement,” “scholarship incentives,” and “religious messaging.” These codes were then grouped into broader categories corresponding to elements of the promotion mix and institutional marketing functions. Themes were developed to capture how the pesantren conceptualized and implemented marketing strategies, what constraints it faced, and how Islamic ethical values shaped communication practices. Data from different sources were compared to identify convergences and divergences, strengthening the robustness of interpretations.

Table 1. Data Sources and Collection Techniques

Data Source	Participants/Materials	Technique	Purpose
Institutional Leaders	Pesantren head and administrators	In-depth interviews	To understand strategic perspectives on marketing
Teachers/Staff	Recruitment and communication staff	In-depth interviews	To explore the implementation of the promotion mix
Parents/Students	Parents and senior students	Focus group discussions	To identify perceptions of the institutional image
Promotional Activities	School events and outreach programs	Observation	To capture real-time communication practices
Documents	Brochures, posters, social media posts, enrollment reports	Document analysis	To map promotion mix elements and ethical messaging

To ensure validity and credibility, several techniques were applied. Triangulation was achieved by combining interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, allowing findings to be cross-checked from multiple perspectives [10]. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of interview findings with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretation [15].

Thick description was used to provide detailed accounts of the institutional context, participants, and promotional practices, enhancing transferability of findings to similar educational settings [26]. Peer debriefing was conducted with academic colleagues who reviewed the coding framework and emerging themes to challenge assumptions and improve analytical rigor [41]. Credibility was further strengthened through purposeful sampling, selecting participants who had direct involvement in marketing and recruitment processes [42]. Reflexivity was maintained through research notes documenting the researcher’s assumptions and potential biases, especially given the cultural and religious sensitivity of the research context [43]. Ethically, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing participant names and institutional identifiers in research records. Digital data were stored securely, and care was taken to respect religious norms and institutional protocols during fieldwork. Through these methodological steps, the study aims to provide a credible and contextually grounded understanding of how the promotion mix is implemented in a pesantren while maintaining sensitivity to its cultural and ethical environment.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Results**

##### **Forms of Promotion Mix Implemented in the Pesantren**

The findings show that the pesantren applies multiple elements of the promotion mix, combining traditional communication methods with emerging digital strategies. These promotional efforts are not always formally labeled as “marketing,” yet they function as systematic attempts to inform, persuade, and engage prospective students and their families.

##### **Advertising Practices**

Advertising activities are primarily conducted through low-cost and community-based channels. Printed materials such as brochures, flyers, and banners are distributed during the student admission period. These materials typically highlight the pesantren’s religious identity, academic programs, boarding facilities, and moral development goals. Notices are also posted in local mosques, community centers, and partner schools, indicating a strong reliance on geographically proximate networks. In addition to printed advertising, the pesantren uses social media posts as a form of digital advertising. These posts often contain admission announcements, registration deadlines, and short descriptions of flagship programs. Compared to printed materials, digital advertising is updated more frequently but remains relatively simple in design and content.

##### **Public Relations Activities**

Public relations emerged as one of the most prominent components of the promotion mix. The pesantren regularly organizes community-oriented events such as religious gatherings, charity programs, Qur’an recitation ceremonies, and graduation events for memorization programs. These events are open to the public and serve to strengthen the institution’s social image as a religious and community-serving organization. School leaders and teachers also maintain relationships with local religious figures and community leaders. These relationships function as informal endorsement channels, where positive word-of-mouth communication enhances institutional credibility. Parents who previously enrolled their children often recommend the pesantren to relatives and neighbors, reinforcing the importance of relational trust in the recruitment process.

##### **Personal Selling**

Direct interpersonal communication plays a significant role in student recruitment. Teachers and admission committee members visit nearby schools and madrasahs to present information about the pesantren’s programs. During these visits, they explain academic pathways, boarding life, extracurricular activities, and religious learning structures. Home visits are occasionally conducted for families who express a strong interest. These visits allow staff to answer detailed questions, discuss financial concerns, and reassure parents about student supervision and character development. Such face-to-face communication is perceived as highly persuasive because it aligns with local cultural norms that value personal relationships.

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## Sales Promotion

Sales promotion in this context takes the form of financial incentives rather than commercial discounts. The pesantren provides registration fee reductions for early applicants and offers scholarships for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or those with strong academic or religious achievements. These incentives are framed as support mechanisms rather than marketing tools, yet they significantly influence enrollment decisions among families with limited financial capacity.

## Digital Marketing Practices

Digital marketing is present but still developing. The pesantren maintains official accounts on social media platforms, where content includes photos of school activities, short religious messages, student achievements, and admission information. Interaction occurs through comments and private messages, where prospective parents ask about fees, facilities, and curriculum. A website exists but is not consistently updated. As a result, social media functions as the primary digital communication channel. Despite these limitations, digital platforms extend the pesantren's reach beyond its immediate locality, allowing information to circulate among diaspora communities and distant relatives of current students.

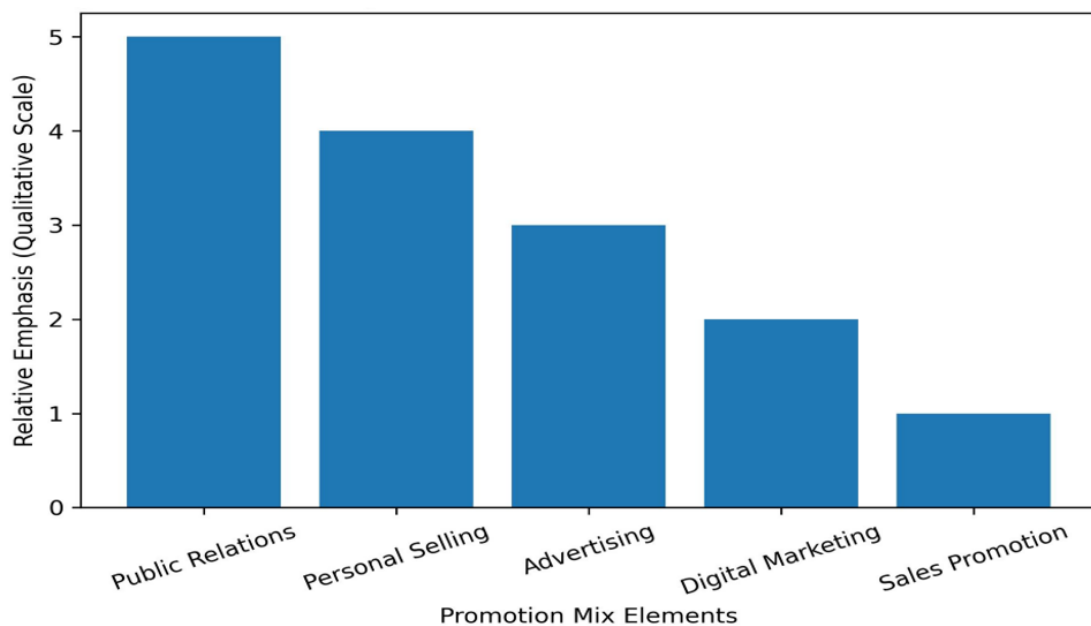


Figure 1. Relative Emphasis on Promotion Mix Elements in the Pesantren

Description: Public relations and personal selling are the most dominant promotional practices, followed by advertising and digital marketing. Sales promotion plays a supportive but less frequent role.

## Effectiveness of Digital Platforms in Student Recruitment

Digital platforms contribute to recruitment in several observable ways. First, they expand the geographical reach of promotional messages. Families outside the immediate village or district reported learning about the pesantren through social media posts shared

by relatives or community networks. This indicates that digital communication supplements traditional word-of-mouth by enabling faster and wider information diffusion. Second, digital communication supports interactive engagement. Prospective parents often initiate contact through messaging features, asking about admission procedures, dormitory conditions, and daily schedules. Responses from administrators build early trust and reduce uncertainty before in-person visits occur. Third, digital content strengthens institutional image. Photos of student activities, religious events, and academic achievements help families visualize the learning environment. This visual representation complements verbal explanations given during personal meetings. However, the effectiveness of digital platforms is constrained by limited technical management. Content updates are irregular, and there is little use of data analytics to track engagement. As a result, digital marketing serves more as a supporting channel than a strategically managed system.

Table 2. Contributions of Digital Platforms to Student Recruitment

Contribution Area	Observed Role	Stakeholder Perception
Information Access	Provides fast access to admission procedures and school information	Useful for initial consideration
Communication	Enables direct interaction between parents and the institution	Helps build early trust
Image Building	Showcases student activities and achievements	Strengthens confidence in the school environment
Reach Expansion	Disseminates information beyond the immediate local area	Attracts students from neighboring regions
Data Use	Limited use of engagement metrics and performance tracking	Not yet optimized for strategic planning

### Organizational Factors Influencing Marketing Implementation

Internal organizational conditions strongly influence the implementation of marketing practices.

#### Leadership Commitment

Leadership plays a central role in determining the direction of promotional activities. The pesantren leader actively supports community engagement and encourages participation in religious and social events. This leadership orientation reinforces the prominence of public relations activities in the promotion mix. Resource Availability: Financial and human resources shape the scale and sophistication of marketing efforts. Limited funding restricts the ability to produce high-quality promotional materials or hire specialized marketing staff. As a result, most promotional activities rely on existing teachers and administrators who carry multiple responsibilities. Community Engagement Strong ties with the local community enhance marketing effectiveness. The pesantren’s involvement in social and religious events increases its visibility and trustworthiness, which in turn supports word-of-mouth recruitment. Cultural and Social Context Cultural expectations favor personal interaction and moral credibility. Therefore, strategies emphasizing personal selling and community presence are more effective than purely

digital or impersonal advertising: Human Resource Limitations and Their Impact. Human resource constraints significantly affect marketing execution. There is no dedicated marketing division; tasks are distributed among staff with primary roles in teaching or administration. This leads to irregular scheduling of promotional activities and limited long-term planning. Technical skill gaps also affect digital marketing. Staff responsible for social media management have limited training in content strategy or analytics. Consequently, digital engagement is reactive rather than data-driven.

Table 3. Human Resource Constraints in Marketing Implementation

<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Impact on Marketing Activities</b>
Lack of marketing expertise	Strategies remain informal and based on personal experience.
Limited staffing	Promotional tasks compete with primary teaching responsibilities.
Limited digital skills	Online presence is inconsistent and poorly optimized.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the pesantren implements a multi-element promotion mix grounded primarily in community relationships and personal communication, with digital platforms serving as an emerging but not yet fully optimized channel.

### 3.2. Discussion

#### **Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Educational Marketing Literature**

The results indicate that the pesantren's marketing practices are strongly rooted in community engagement, interpersonal communication, and value-based representation. This pattern aligns with broader educational marketing literature that emphasizes relationship marketing and stakeholder trust as central to institutional success [44]. However, while mainstream educational institutions often operationalize these principles through structured branding campaigns and professional marketing divisions, the pesantren in this study relies more on culturally embedded, informal mechanisms such as religious events, personal networks, and word-of-mouth endorsement. This demonstrates that marketing effectiveness in faith-based institutions may derive less from formal sophistication and more from social legitimacy and moral credibility.

The prominence of public relations and personal selling in the pesantren's promotion mix also reflects findings that community-centered communication is particularly influential in culturally cohesive environments [44] [45]. Unlike secular institutions that frequently highlight rankings, facilities, or academic metrics, the pesantren's messaging foregrounds character development, religious commitment, and moral guidance. This difference illustrates how marketing strategies are shaped by institutional identity and audience expectations. The findings reinforce arguments that faith-based educational marketing must be interpreted through a socio-religious lens rather than a purely commercial framework [46].

At the same time, the study reveals a gradual shift toward digital engagement, echoing trends identified in contemporary educational marketing research [47] [48]. The pesantren's adoption of social media for announcements and image-building suggests

alignment with broader digital communication practices. However, unlike highly digitized institutions that employ data analytics and integrated online campaigns, digital marketing here functions as a supplementary tool rather than a strategic core. This confirms that digital transformation in pesantren is uneven and shaped by institutional capacity, rather than solely by technological availability [49].

### **Practical Implications for Promotion Mix Strategies in Islamic Schools**

The findings offer several practical implications for enhancing student recruitment in pesantren and similar Islamic schools. First, the strong reliance on community engagement demonstrates that relational trust remains a powerful recruitment driver. Strengthening partnerships with local religious leaders, alum networks, and community organizations can amplify word-of-mouth influence and sustain enrollment growth [44]. Structured planning of community events, combined with consistent follow-up communication, may increase their long-term promotional value. Second, targeted messaging that emphasizes both religious and academic development appears particularly persuasive for families seeking holistic education. Crafting communication materials that clearly articulate how spiritual formation, discipline, and life skills are integrated into the curriculum can strengthen institutional differentiation [46]. This approach positions pesantren not only as religious institutions but also as comprehensive educational environments. Third, digital platforms represent a major opportunity for expanding reach beyond local boundaries. Even with limited technical expertise, consistent social media storytelling—highlighting student achievements, daily activities, and community service—can build emotional connections with prospective families [47]. Gradual improvements in website management and basic analytics training could enhance the effectiveness of these efforts without requiring large financial investments.

Fourth, dynamic brand positioning that integrates moral identity with educational quality can strengthen competitiveness. By consistently presenting themselves as institutions that cultivate both character and competence, pesantren can distinguish themselves from schools that emphasize only academic performance [7]. Such positioning reinforces authenticity and aligns promotional narratives with institutional mission. Finally, the study highlights the need for strategic human resource development. Training staff in basic marketing communication and digital engagement skills can significantly improve implementation quality [49]. Even modest capacity-building initiatives may enhance message consistency and responsiveness to prospective families.

### **Theoretical Contributions: Integrating Marketing Management with Islamic Ethical Values**

This study contributes theoretically by illustrating how marketing management principles can be adapted to align with Islamic ethical and social values. The pesantren's emphasis on honesty, moral development, and community service reflects the integration of value-based messaging within promotional practices. This supports Islamic marketing theory, which advocates transparency, social responsibility, and trustworthiness as core elements of communication. The findings also demonstrate that ethical positioning is not

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merely symbolic but shapes operational choices. For instance, financial incentives are framed as scholarships and social support rather than commercial discounts, reinforcing a mission-oriented rather than profit-oriented identity. Community engagement initiatives similarly serve dual roles as religious service and promotional communication, illustrating how ethical commitments and marketing functions can converge [7]. By situating promotion mix implementation within a moral framework, the study expands educational marketing theory beyond instrumental effectiveness to include ethical congruence. This perspective highlights that marketing success in faith-based contexts depends on maintaining coherence between promotional strategies and institutional values.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on a single pesantren, which limits the generalizability of findings to other institutions with different resources or cultural contexts. Comparative studies across multiple pesantren would provide broader insight into variations in marketing implementation [39]. Second, the research adopts a cross-sectional perspective, capturing marketing practices at a specific moment. Longitudinal studies could reveal how promotion mix strategies evolve over time, particularly as digital adoption increases [50]. Third, while digital marketing is discussed, the study does not include a quantitative analysis of online engagement metrics. Future research integrating digital analytics could provide a more detailed assessment of platform effectiveness [29]. Fourth, cultural context plays a significant role in shaping marketing practices, and findings from one region may not fully represent practices in other socio-cultural environments. Broader regional comparisons would help clarify how local norms influence marketing adaptation. Finally, although this study includes perspectives from staff and parents, future research could deepen stakeholder analysis by incorporating alumni and community leaders to enrich understanding of institutional reputation dynamics [51]. Taken together, these considerations highlight the need for continued investigation into how faith-based educational institutions balance marketing effectiveness with ethical integrity. The next section synthesizes these insights into overarching conclusions regarding promotion mix implementation and institutional sustainability.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study examined how a pesantren implements promotion mix strategies within the context of social change, digital transformation, and Islamic ethical values. The findings demonstrate that marketing practices in pesantren are deeply rooted in community engagement, interpersonal communication, and value-based representation. Public relations and personal selling emerged as the most influential promotional tools, reinforcing trust and social legitimacy among families. Digital platforms, particularly social media, extend institutional reach and support image building, yet their use remains limited by technical skills and resource constraints. The study confirms that marketing management in faith-based educational institutions differs from commercial models, as promotional activities are closely tied to moral identity and community service. Islamic ethical principles shape messaging, incentive structures, and communication tone, ensuring

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that marketing remains aligned with institutional mission. At the same time, the integration of digital communication illustrates an ongoing transition toward more modern promotional practices. By linking promotion mix theory with Islamic ethical marketing, this research contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of educational marketing. It also provides practical guidance for pesantren seeking to enhance student recruitment while maintaining cultural authenticity. Future institutional efforts should focus on strengthening digital capacity, developing structured marketing roles, and sustaining community partnerships to ensure long-term institutional relevance.

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