

# Digital PR Strategy and Institutional Image in Islamic Boarding Schools

Irfan Maulana<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1,3,4</sup>Department of Entrepreneurship–Faculty of Technology and Business–Yatsi Madani University–Tangerang–Indonesia

Nino Nopriandi Saleh<sup>2</sup>, Puput Aryanto<sup>3</sup>, Roisatul Agitsah Hilwana Putri<sup>4</sup>, Andini Meifiana<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2,5</sup>Department of Management–Faculty of Economics–Krisnadwipayana University–Jakarta–Indonesia

Correspondence: [irfanmaulana@uym.ac.id](mailto:irfanmaulana@uym.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>



JSM  
Volume 8  
Number 1  
January 2026

Received on 27 Aug 2025

Revised on 18 Nov 2025

Accepted on 8 Des 2025

The journal allows the authors to hold the copyright without restrictions and allow the authors to retain publishing rights without restrictions. Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a creative commons attribution 4.0 international license.



DOI: 10.37479

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to examine how digital communication strategies and social media credibility shape institutional image, trust, and public involvement, and to recommend effective digital public relations practices.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Employing a mixed methods sequential exploratory design, the study began with qualitative thematic analysis of interviews with key stakeholders, followed by quantitative testing using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with 215 respondents.

**Findings:** Six major themes were revealed: strategic digital communication, stakeholder engagement, governance and management, values and positioning, issues and crises, and impacts and outcomes. SEM results indicate that social media credibility significantly influences institutional image and public engagement. Institutional image mediates the relationship between credibility and engagement. However, digital communication strategies alone do not significantly affect public engagement unless governance, clear procedures, and competent human resources support them.

**Keywords:** *Digital Communication Strategy; Social Media; Islamic Boarding Schools; Mixed Methods Sequential Exploratory*

## INTRODUCTION

In a digitally native society, religiously based educational institutions are increasingly expected to be open, responsive, and inclusive in shaping their image through information technology–based public relations. Digital transformation in PR involves the strategic use of social media, websites, and interactive platforms to enable participatory relationships with target audiences (Amoah et al., 2021; Zancajo et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift by forcing educational institutions to move from face-to-face communication to digital channels (Gorina et al., 2023; Lee & Han, 2021; Scarlat et al., 2022), rewarding those that could rapidly adapt

with greater reach and improved public reputation (Mu'minin & Nopriandi, 2025; Yusuf & Nopriandi, 2024). For Islamic boarding schools, digital PR is not only a matter of visibility but also a means of communicating religious values to younger generations in a contextual and engaging manner (Webb et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, Islamic boarding schools face significant challenges in adapting to these changes, given their identity as traditional Islamic institutions that prioritise conservative values and oral learning. Many experience limitations in technological infrastructure, digital literacy among managers and teachers, and an organisational culture that is not yet open to technology integration (Mar, 2024; Nikmatullah et al., 2023). These differences in readiness between traditional and modern Islamic boarding schools widen the internal digital divide (Suharto & Fatmawati, 2022). Curricula that do not systematically incorporate information technology, together with limited digital skills among students and teachers, hinder both learning processes and the dissemination of religious teachings (Lundeto et al., 2021; Nurhayati et al., 2024; Siregar, 2024). At the same time, digitalisation requires a shift in institutional communication and information management strategies (Maulana, Supardi, et al., 2022; Murdianto, 2021; Reztrianti, 2024). Some Islamic boarding schools have begun to adopt digital platforms for branding, teaching, and administration (Lutfiatun & Aimah, 2024; Maulana, Soleh, et al., 2022), yet cultural resistance and uncertainty about how to safeguard core values remain significant obstacles to maintaining institutional authenticity.

The Ma'had Tarbiyatul Mubtadiin (MTM) Islamic boarding school in Tigaraksa, Tangerang, is one of the modern Islamic boarding schools that actively utilises digital communication strategies to build a positive image and increase the number of students (Maulana, Soleh, et al., 2022; Maulana, Supardi, et al., 2022). Through platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, this Islamic boarding school consistently disseminates information about its educational and da'wah activities, while responding to the challenges of digital transformation in the post-pandemic era. However, behind these achievements, MTM Islamic boarding school still faces various obstacles in adapting to and strengthening digitalisation.

Based on the above description, this study formulates the following questions: (1) What digital communication strategies does the Ma'had Tarbiyatul Mubtadiin (MTM) Islamic boarding school employ in building its institutional image? (2) How does the credibility of the boarding school's social media influence public trust and engagement? (3) How does the public perceive the institutional image of Islamic boarding schools built through social media? (4) How do digital communication strategies and social media credibility influence public engagement, and what is the role of institutional image as a mediator in this relationship? (5) What digital PR strategies are relevant and effective in strengthening the existence and

reputation of MTM Islamic boarding schools in the digital era?

In line with this, this study aims to analyse digital communication strategies, social media credibility, public perceptions of institutional image, and the influence of these two factors on public engagement with the institutional image as a connecting factor, in order to formulate a relevant and effective digital public relations strategy model to strengthen the existence and reputation of the Ma'had Tarbiyatul Mubtadiin (MTM) Islamic boarding school in the digital era.

A literature review shows that studies on digital public relations (PR) in Indonesia have been dominated by qualitative approaches, particularly in exploring institutional digital communication processes, the roles of key actors, and institutional narratives in shaping public image and relations descriptively (Dunan, 2020; Girsang, 2020; Hidayat et al., 2020; Hou & Johnston, 2024; Permatasari et al., 2021; Sataøen & Lövgren, 2024; Syafaat & Wahyudin, 2020). Quantitative studies have focused more on measuring public perception, professional competence, and the influence of social and digital variables on public relations practices through surveys (Bauer et al., 2023; Hagelstein et al., 2021; Sadi & Nobell, 2024; Tam & Kim, 2023). In addition, approaches such as bibliometric analysis (Soriano & Valdés, 2021) and theoretical deductive studies (Gaara et al., 2024) are emerging. However, there are still very few studies that systematically adopt mixed methods, for example, in longitudinal explorations of the dual role of PR in AI ethics (Bowen, 2024), particularly in Islamic boarding schools.

This study advances the literature on digital public relations in religious educational institutions in three ways. First, it offers one of the few sequential exploratory mixed-methods designs that systematically link qualitative thematic analysis with a covariance-based SEM model in the context of Islamic boarding schools. Second, it theorises institutional image as a key mediating construct that translates social media credibility into public engagement, thereby refining current models of organisational communication and reputation in the digital era. Third, it provides a context-specific digital PR strategy framework for Islamic boarding schools that integrates channel strategy, governance, human resources, and value-based communication, offering actionable recommendations for practitioners and policy-makers concerned with the digital transformation of faith-based institutions.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study utilised a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (Cresswell et al., 2003). The qualitative phase was conducted first to explore practices, experiences, and relevant conceptual constructs

within the context of the Ma'had Tarbiyatul Mubtadiin (MTM) Islamic boarding school, and the data were analyzed using NVivo. The qualitative findings were used to formulate indicators and a conceptual framework, which were then tested in the quantitative phase using covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) in AMOS.

### **Phase 1 – Qualitative**

Qualitative themes and sub-themes from Phase 1 were systematically translated into quantitative constructs and indicators. For each theme (e.g., strategic digital communication, stakeholder engagement, governance and management, values and positioning, issues and crises, impacts and outcomes), we identified the underlying meaning units. We linked them to the four latent variables in the model: Digital Communication Strategy (SKD), Pesantren Social Media Credibility (KMSP), Image of Islamic Boarding Schools (CLP), and Public Engagement Interest (MKP). Items were generated from representative codes and illustrative quotations, cross-checked with the literature, and refined through expert review. Table X summarises the operationalisation process and shows how qualitative themes informed the final Likert-scale items used in the survey.

### **Phase 2 – Quantitative**

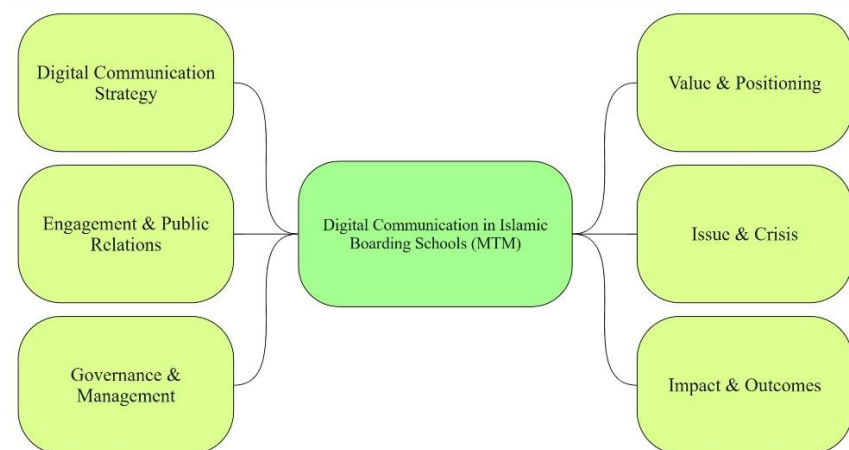
Qualitative findings and literature synthesis were used to develop construct indicators (Digital Communication Strategy, Social Media Credibility, Institutional Image as a connecting factor, and Public Engagement Interest), which were operationalised in a 1–5 Likert scale questionnaire; items were validated by a panel of experts and tested prior to the primary survey, which was conducted online according to inclusion criteria. Pre-analysis data included handling missing values, examining multivariate normality, detecting outliers (Mahalanobis), and examining multicollinearity; further analysis was conducted with CFA and CB-SEM using AMOS (Maximum Likelihood estimator), evaluation of the measurement model (loading, CR, AVE) and fit indices ( $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR), as well as testing structural and mediation models through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples, 95% bias-corrected CI); all pre-analytical steps and modelling decisions are reported transparently along with a discussion of methodological limitations.

## **RESULTS**

### **Thematic Analysis**

The main themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews describe a practical and normative network that shapes digital communication at the MTM Islamic Boarding School (see Figure 1). The themes that emerged were Digital Communication Strategy,

Engagement and Public Relations, Governance and Management, Values and Positioning, Issues and Crises, and Impact and Outcomes.



Source: NVivo, 2025

**Figure 1. Thematic map of digital communication at MTM Islamic Boarding School**

\*Strategic Digital Communication, Engagement and Public Relations, Governance and Management, Values and Positioning, Issues and Crises, Impacts and Outcomes, and their interrelationships in shaping the pesantren’s digital communication practices.

### 1. Digital Communication Strategy

The Digital Communication Strategy theme reveals how decisions about channels and content formats arise from a balance between leadership direction, team capacity, and audience characteristics, as seen when A2 states, “Directions from leadership are conveyed to the social media team for publication” [A2], and A1 observes that “The fastest-growing platforms are Instagram and the website... Instagram has more young users” [A1], while A3 emphasises the informative function of the website and Instagram in communicating with parents: “...the website and Instagram are used to provide information.” [A3] and A4 describe cross-channel distribution practices, including WhatsApp as an internal and external distribution channel: ‘I manage the boarding school’s digital presence, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and the website... then I distribute it through social media’ [A4].

From these excerpts, two interrelated sub-themes emerge: Content and Format, and Channel and Platform Strategy. Format choices such as activity documentation or videos, upload schedules, and curation policies that are sensitive to Islamic boarding school MTM values, such as separating content for boys and girls, are not merely technical production issues but also reflect ethical considerations, target audiences, and institutional legitimacy needs. Therefore, interpretations of digital communication practices need to account for the dynamics of stakeholder negotiations, resource constraints, and

ongoing adjustment processes that refine how boarding schools present their narratives to the public.

## 2. Engagement & Public Relations

The theme of Engagement and Public Relations highlights the role of guardians, parents, alumni, and the community as key audiences who are not only recipients of information but also active agents of feedback, as seen when A2 states, “We always provide regular information... sent to the guardian group as a form of communication” [A2], A5 also emphasises the importance of understanding the audience and their needs before designing a message: “Back to basics: who is the audience and what are their needs... ensure that the content is appropriate for the audience's needs” [A5], while A4 describes the mechanism for receiving and forwarding criticism to the leadership: “We receive reports and criticism... then forward them to the leadership and Kating Ma'had” [A4].

From these quotes, two main sub-themes emerge: Stakeholders and Involvement, as well as Feedback and Input, in which the guardians of students often function as early social sensors who detect comments or issues and request clarification. Public relations practices in Islamic boarding schools, especially at MTM, appear to be a continuous negotiation process between the message sender and the community, requiring rapid and adaptive responses to maintain institutional legitimacy and improve the quality of content and services.

## 3. Governance & Management

The theme of Governance and Management shows how organisational structure, the roles of public relations and administration, and the mechanisms of leadership verification and approval determine the quality and consistency of institutional communication. This is evident when A2 explains that there are many parties involved: “There are several parties... administration... boys' and girls' dormitories, and the public relations team” [A2], A1 emphasises that the point of decision-making authority lies with the high council: “The final decision lies with the boarding schools high council... similar to policies in other companies and universities” [A1], A5 points to structural problems in many institutions where overlapping tasks reduce focus: “Many institutions do not have specialised divisions; often overlapping tasks make... it not the main focus” [A5], and A4 highlights an absolute lack of operational capacity: “We need to increase the number of administrators in the journalism department... There is no specialised team for social media yet” [A4].

These excerpts reveal two interrelated sub-themes: Public Relations Structure and Human Resources, and SOPs, Approval, and Verification. Unclear mandates, limited human resource capacity, and

the absence of documentation of editorial procedures and crisis management create operational obstacles and potential bottlenecks arising from centralised approval processes. Therefore, interpreting governance practices requires an analysis that considers not only who makes decisions but also how workflows, responsibility distribution, and accountability mechanisms are implemented in daily practice.

#### 4. Value & Positioning

The Values and Positioning theme emphasises that the preservation of religious identity and manners is a normative framework that limits and shapes all communication choices, as seen when A2 states, “Our culture certainly instils Islamic values as the main foundation” [A2] and A1 reminds us of the importance of maintaining the core message so that “...the core messages are not eroded by the changing times” [A1], while A5 emphasises the need for adaptation that remains grounded in core values: “Adaptation needs to be underlined, while still holding on to core values... it is not only the landscape that is changing, but also mindsets” [A5].

These quotes appear in the sub-themes of Values, Identity and Image, and Digital Self-Presentation, where values are used as criteria for content selection through practices such as the separation of content for boys and girls, careful visual curation, and language and tone choices that reflect boarding school ethics. Thus, interpretations of the institution's positioning must account for the constant tension between the need to adapt to modern digital media and the imperative to maintain the institution's dignity and narrative coherence.

#### 5. Issue & Crisis

The Issues and Crises theme highlights early detection and coordinated response, beginning with community vigilance, with A2 noting that negative comments are often first detected by guardians, who then contact the relevant parties if they recognise the comments. “Usually, it is the guardians who know about negative comments... then they immediately contact the person if they know them.” [A2], followed by A3's expectation of a rapid response, which encourages structural officials to intervene to clarify and restore information: “When there is a negative issue, we must respond quickly... structural officials... intervene.” [A3], while A5 emphasises that a stronger public perspective arises from well-orchestrated multi-stakeholder collaboration. “Multi-stakeholder collaboration... shapes a stronger public perspective.” [A5].

This series highlights two mutually supportive areas: response and clarification, which require rapid fact-finding, source verification, and message discipline; and issue and crisis management, which requires clear escalation channels to leadership, measurable crisis threshold

indicators, and cross-stakeholder partnership protocols to ensure consistent corrective narratives across all channels so that the interpretation of issue handling practices does not only depend on the ability to respond to comments that arise but also on the readiness of explicit SOPs, the availability of pre-approved statements, and the coordination capacity that maintains the institution's reputation when public pressure increases.

## 6. Impact & Outcomes

The Impact and Outcome theme highlights how digital communication practices generate clearer information, greater transparency, and stronger trust, especially for parents of students. For example, when A3 feels that the posted activities provide clarity and foster trust: “The activities of the students that are posted... provide clarity and make parents trust.” [A3] while A2 emphasises that content is maintained to be in line with Islamic values and does not stray from the right path: [A2], so that the quality of information is not only assessed in terms of accuracy and timeliness but also in terms of ethical harmony, which is a public reference.

From these observations, the sub-themes of Trust and Access to Information emerged, in which digital channels function as a window that reduces the distance and asymmetry of information between Islamic boarding schools and families, creating a sense of presence in the daily lives of students, and facilitating a quicker and more accurate understanding of policies or activities. Thus, the impact of communication is not merely in terms of reach, but also in terms of feeling present, involved, and convinced through a consistent, accurate, and valuable flow of information.

### Word Cloud Analysis

The word cloud highlights several dominant themes surrounding the pesantren's communication practices and strategies in the digital sphere (see Figure 2). The most prominent terms are keterlibatan, PR, manajemen, and komunikasi digital, indicating that discussions are strongly shaped by efforts to build relationships with stakeholders, to professionalize public relations functions, to strengthen organizational management, and to establish digital communication as a central channel. The frequent use of terms such as pesantren, media, sosial, digital, konten, and santri underscores how institutional narratives are closely tied to the daily life of the pesantren community and how media platforms serve as a bridge for communicating these activities. Words such as informasi, masyarakat, kegiatan, nilai, and isu emphasize the dual role of digital communication: providing clarity and transparency to audiences while also managing challenges that arise in the form of issues or crises. The inclusion of terms such as pondok, tim, orang, and alumni further reflects the multi-actor nature



strengthening SOPs and human resource capacity. Values and Positioning underscores how boarding school communication is guided by Islamic values, identity, and adab, with practical implications in the separation of content for male and female students, careful language choice, and overall alignment with the institution's core values.

The cluster of Issues and Crises illustrates how the boarding school responds to negative comments and emerging controversies through rapid clarification, structured verification, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, while simultaneously reflecting the urgent need for explicit crisis-management protocols. Finally, Impacts and Outcomes emphasize the effects of digital communication on building parental trust, ensuring information clarity, and reducing information asymmetry, thereby fostering a stronger sense of presence and transparency within the community.

Overall, the tree map demonstrates how the study organizes the multiple dimensions of boarding school digital communication into interconnected thematic categories, reflecting the interplay between strategy, stakeholder engagement, governance, values, crisis response, and communicative outcomes in shaping the institution's legitimacy and public trust.

Strategi Komunikasi Digital	Keterlibatan & Relasi Publik	Tata Kelola & Manajemen	
		Struktur & SDM Humas	
Konten & Format	Stakeholder & Keterlibatan	Nilai & Positioning	Isu & Krisis Respons & Klarifikasi
Strategi Kanal & Platform		Umpan Balik & Masukan	Nilai, Identitas & Citra
			Presentasi

Source: NVivo, 2025

**Figure 3. Tree Map of Digital Communication at MTM Islamic Boarding Schools**

\*Tree map of digital communication at MTM Islamic Boarding School, visualising the relative weight of six thematic clusters (Strategic Digital Communication, Public Engagement and Relations, Governance and Management, Values and Positioning, Issues and Crises, and Impacts and Outcomes) and their sub-themes based on NVivo coding, indicating which aspects of digital communication are most dominant in the data.

Table 1 summarises the construct operationalisation by showing how qualitative themes from Phase 1 (e.g., strategic digital communication, engagement and public relations, governance and

management, values and positioning, issues and crises, and impacts and outcomes) were translated into Likert-scale items for the four latent variables (X1, X2, Y1, Y2). Each item was developed from representative codes and quotations, cross-checked with the literature, and refined through expert judgement.

**Table 1. Construct Operationalisation Linking Qualitative Themes and Quantitative Indicators**

Qualitative Theme (Phase 1)	Sub-Theme/Code	Latent Construct (Code)	Indicator Code*	Questionnaire Indicator (5-Point Likert)
Digital Communication Strategy	Content consistency across channels	Digital Communication Strategy (X1)	X1_1	The content uploaded by MTM Islamic Boarding School on social media is consistently posted.
Digital Communication Strategy	Multi-platform presence		X1_2	MTM Islamic Boarding School employs various digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook) to reach the public.
Engagement & Public Relations	Digital collaboration and participation		X1_3	The administrators of MTM Islamic Boarding School actively invite followers to participate or collaborate in digital activities.
Engagement & Public Relations	Two-way interaction with audiences		X1_4	MTM Islamic Boarding School responds to comments or questions raised on its social media accounts.
Digital Communication Strategy	Attractive content format (visuals, video, storytelling)		X1_5	The visual and video content shared by MTM Islamic Boarding School is presented in an attractive and easy-to-understand way.
Digital Communication Strategy	Message planning and scheduling		X1_6	The information or messages delivered by MTM Islamic Boarding School are regular and aligned with its communication objectives.
Digital Communication Strategy	Perceived trustworthiness of information	Social Media Credibility (X2)	X2_1	I believe that information from MTM Islamic Boarding School's

				official social media accounts is reliable.
Governance & Management	Professional social media management		X2_2	MTM Islamic Boarding School's social media accounts are professionally managed, with attention to consistency and quality.
Issues & Crises	Transparency of sources and references		X2_3	Each content published by MTM Islamic Boarding School clearly states the source of the information.
Issues & Crises	Absence of hoaxes or manipulative content		X2_4	I have never encountered misleading, hoax, or manipulative information from MTM Islamic Boarding School.
Values & Positioning	Alignment with institutional values		X2_5	The content shared by MTM Islamic Boarding School is always in line with the institution's values and principles.
Value & Positioning	Perceived transparency in messaging		X2_6	Messages delivered through social media feel transparent and do not hide important facts.
Values & Positioning	Modern and up-to-date image	Institutional Image of MTM (Y1)	Y1_1	I see MTM Islamic Boarding School as a modern institution that keeps up with current developments.
Values & Positioning	Professional and credible public image		Y1_2	Social media enhances MTM Islamic Boarding School's professional and credible image among the public.
Impacts & Outcomes	Positive reputation strengthened through digital activities.		Y1_3	MTM Islamic Boarding School is known for its strong reputation due to its positive digital activities.
Values & Positioning	Digital competitiveness with other institutions		Y1_4	I consider MTM Islamic Boarding School capable of competing with other institutions in building its digital image.

Values & Positioning	Visibility of religious and spiritual values		Y1_5	Religious and spiritual values continue to be reflected in every digital activity of MTM Islamic Boarding School.
Governance & Management	Openness to innovation and change		Y1_6	MTM Islamic Boarding School welcomes innovations and changes that are relevant to public needs.
Impact & Outcomes	Interest in following pesantren activities	Public Engagement Interest (Y2)	Y2_1	I am interested in participating in additional pesantren activities after viewing MTM Islamic Boarding School's digital content.
Impact & Outcomes	Willingness to attend events		Y2_2	I am willing to attend events or programmes organised by MTM Islamic Boarding School.
Impacts & Outcomes	Intention to recommend the institution		Y2_3	I will recommend MTM Islamic Boarding School to people in my social environment.
Impacts & Outcomes	Intention to continuously follow the information		Y2_4	I want to continue following and receiving updates from MTM Islamic Boarding School's social media accounts.
Engagement & Public Relations	Desire for active participation in digital programmes		Y2_5	I want to be actively involved in communities or programmes organised by MTM Islamic Boarding School in digital formats.
Impacts & Outcomes	Perceived positive impact of participation		Y2_6	I believe that my participation in MTM Islamic Boarding School's digital activities can bring positive benefits.

## Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

### 1. Confirmatory Analysis of Exogenous Variables

A confirmatory analysis of Exogenous Variables (Digital Communication Strategies and Social Media Credibility of MTM

Islamic Boarding Schools) was conducted to assess whether the observed variables reflected the factors under analysis, namely model goodness-of-fit, significant factor weights, and factor loadings. Based on the information in Table 1, which shows that the factor loading value of each indicator exceeds the cut-off value of 0.5, the probability value (p) is less than or equal to 0.05. The Digital Communication Strategy (SKD) indicator has the highest factor loading (0.906), whereas the Pesantren Social Media Credibility (KMSP) indicator has the highest factor loading (0.916).

**Table 2. Confirmatory Analysis of Exogenous Variables**

Indicator	Latent Variable	Factor Loading	Critical Ratio	P Values	Details
X11	SKD	0.895	17.791	0,000	Valid
X12	SKD	0.905	17.689	0,000	Valid
X13	SKD	0.906	18.415	0,000	Valid
X14	SKD	0.890	18.356	0,000	Valid
X15	SKD	0.893	17.796	0,000	Valid
X16	SKD	0.898	Fixed	0,000	Valid
X21	KMSP	0.903	18.431	0,000	Valid
X22	KMSP	0.881	17.338	0,000	Valid
X23	KMSP	0.898	18.215	0,000	Valid
X24	KMSP	0.916	19.115	0,000	Valid
X25	KMSP	0.911	18.923	0,000	Valid
X26	KMSP	0.901	Fixed	0,000	Valid

Source: Author's Own Elaborations

## 2. Confirmatory Analysis of Intervening and Endogenous Variables

The results of the significance test of the factor loading of endogenous variables (Image of Islamic Boarding Schools and Interest in Public Involvement). Based on the information in Table 2, which shows that the factor loading value of each indicator exceeds the cut-off value of 0.5, the probability value (p) is less than or equal to 0.05. The Islamic Boarding School Image indicator with the highest factor loading is Y6, with a loading of 0.869. In contrast, the Public Involvement Interest indicator with the highest factor loading is Z6, at 0.890.

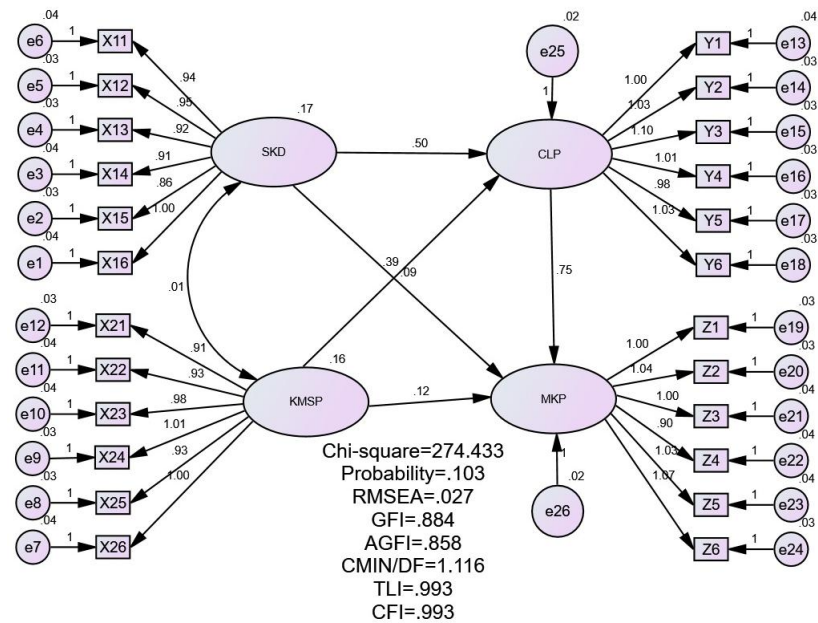
**Table 3. Confirmatory Analysis of Intervening and Endogenous Variables**

Indicator	Latent Variable	Factor Loading	Critical Ratio	P Values	Details
Y1	CLP	0.839	Fixed	0,000	Valid
Y2	CLP	0.859	14.145	0,000	Valid
Y3	CLP	0.885	14.877	0,000	Valid
Y4	CLP	0.858	14.072	0,000	Valid
Y5	CLP	0.852	13.831	0,000	Valid
Y6	CLP	0.869	14.402	0,000	Valid
Z1	MKP	0.867	Fixed	0,000	Valid
Z2	MKP	0.867	15.241	0,000	Valid

Indicator	Latent Variable	Factor Loading	Critical Ratio	P Values	Details
Z3	MKP	0.850	14.678	0,000	Valid
Z4	MKP	0.820	13.650	0,000	Valid
Z5	MKP	0.862	15.056	0,000	Valid
Z6	MKP	0.890	16.061	0,000	Valid

Source: Author's Own Elaborations

### 3. Structural Model



Source: AMOS

Figure 4. Complete Standardised Structural Equation Model

The structural equation model produced in this study can be systematically written as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{MKP} &= 0,505 \text{ SKD} + 0,394 \text{ KMSp} \\ \text{MKP} &= 0,085 \text{ SKD} + 0,115 \text{ KMSp} \\ \text{MKP} &= 0,754 \text{ CLP} \end{aligned}$$

Description:

MKP = *Minat Keterlibatan Publik* (Public Engagement Interest)  
 CLP = *Citra Lembaga Pondok Pesantren* (Image of Islamic Boarding Schools)  
 SKD = *Strategi Komunikasi Digital* (Digital Communication Strategy)  
 KMSp = *Kredibilitas Media Sosial Pesantren* (Credibility of Islamic Boarding School social media)

The next step in performing structural equation modelling analysis is to evaluate the SEM assumptions. The evaluation is conducted using tests for normality, outliers, multicollinearity, and singularity.

## SEM Assumption Test

### 1. Normality Test

Normality testing was conducted by comparing the AMOS-generated normality table values with the skewness (Z) value corresponding to the CR value at the 1% significance level, which must fall within the range  $-2.58 \leq CR \leq 2.58$ . Based on the critical ratio skewness test, the CR value is 2.339. This is based on a multivariate normality test, which indicates that the data are typically distributed. In general, the data used in this study can be used as a basis for further analysis.

### 2. Outlier Test

The squared Mahalanobis distance results indicate that, at the 0.01 significance level, there are observations identified as outliers, namely those with a squared Mahalanobis distance greater than the chi-square statistic ( $df = 16; \alpha = 0.01$ ), which is 42.980. The analysis results indicate that none of the 16 indicators used in this study exhibit outliers.

### 3. Multicollinearity and Singularity Tests

Based on the SEM output analysed using AMOS, the determinant of the sample covariance matrix is 29864853.000, indicating that it is greater than zero. It can therefore be concluded that there is no multicollinearity or singularity, meaning that the data is suitable for use.

## Goodness of Fit Index

Model suitability was assessed using goodness-of-fit indices. Model suitability is presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4. Goodness of Fit Index**

Goodness of Fit Index	Cut-off Value	Model Results	Details
Chi-square (df = 246)	Expected to be small ( $\leq 283.100$ )	274,433	Good
Probability	$\geq 0,050$	0,103	Good
RMSEA	$\leq 0,080$	0,027	Good
GFI	$\geq 0,900$	0,884	Marginal
AGFI	$\geq 0,900$	0,858	Marginal
CMIN/DF	$\leq 2,000$	1,116	Good
TLI	$\geq 0,950$	0,993	Good
CFI	$\geq 0,950$	0,993	Good

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025

Table 4 shows that the structural model produced in the study has a goodness-of-fit index that meets the criteria for a good fit, except for the GFI and AGFI values, which are marginal; the proposed model is

acceptable. Although there are two indicators (GFI and AGFI) with ‘Marginal’ results, most of the other indicators, especially those considered most important in modern practice, such as RMSEA, CFI, and TLI, show ‘Good’ or even excellent results. Thus, this research model exhibits a good fit with the data. This means that the theoretical model proposed in this study is acceptable and supported by the existing empirical data. Marginal results on GFI and AGFI can often be tolerated if other strong indicators show good results.

### Hypothesis Test

**Table 5. Hypothesis 1 – 3**

Variable	Standardized Regression Weight	S.E	C.R	Probability	Details
<b>H.1. The effect of SKD and KMSP on CLP</b>					
SKD	0,505	0,045	11,247	0,000	Significant
KMSP	0,394	0,042	9,490	0,000	Significant
<b>H.2. The effect of SKD and KMSP on MKP</b>					
SKD	0,085	0,064	1,328	0,184	Not Significant
KMSP	0,115	0,055	2,100	0,036	Significant
<b>H.3. The Effect of CLP on MKP</b>					
CLP	0,745	0,118	6,337	0,000	Significant

Source: Author’s own elaboration, 2025

The implemented digital communication strategy has proven effective in enhancing the MTM Islamic boarding school's image (see Table 4). Its influence (Standardised Weight) is 0.505. Social media accounts of Islamic boarding schools considered credible (trustworthy) have also proven effective in enhancing the institution's image. Their influence is 0.394. Digital communication strategies are insufficiently robust to attract public interest and engagement. Unlike communication strategies, the credibility of social media has been shown to directly increase public engagement, although its influence is not substantial (Standardised Weight = 0.115). The institution's image has a strong and positive influence on public engagement. This is a key finding of this study. The better the image of the Islamic boarding school, the greater the public's interest in participating. The strength of its influence is tremendous (Standardised Weight = 0.745).

Based on the results of the analysis in the fourth hypothesis test, as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Hypothesis 4**

The path	Sobel Test		Details
	t-stat	P	

<b>The Effect of SKD on MKP Through CLP</b>	1.299	0.193	Not Significant
<b>The Effect of KMSP on MKP Through CLP</b>	1.984	0.047	Significant

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025

Table 6 shows that the Image of the MTM Islamic Boarding Schools (CLP) variable does not mediate the effect of the Digital Communication Strategy (SKD) on Public Engagement Interest (MKP), as its p-value exceeds 0.05. The Image of Islamic Boarding Schools (CLP) is a mediating variable for the effect of Pesantren Social Media Credibility (KMSP) on Public Engagement Interest (MKP), as its p-value is less than 0.05. This means that the fourth hypothesis is proven, namely that the Image of Islamic Boarding Schools (CLP) can only mediate the Credibility of Islamic Boarding School social media (MSP) on the Image of Islamic Boarding Schools (CLP), but cannot mediate the Digital Communication Strategy (SKD) variable on Public Engagement Interest (MKP) at MTM Islamic Boarding Schools.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that digital communication at MTM Islamic boarding schools is not merely a technical activity of channel management but rather a strategic practice closely linked to reputation, credibility, and institutional values.

### Digital communication strategies of Islamic boarding schools in building their image (RQ1)

Qualitative analysis found that MTM's digital strategy focuses on Instagram, websites, and WhatsApp, with content formats including activity documentation, videos, and infographics. This strategy is expected to strengthen the institution's image and bridge relations with the public. However, SEM results show that digital strategies do not have a significant direct effect on public engagement. This discrepancy confirms that the implementation of digital strategies remains constrained by human resource capacity, governance, and the consistency of execution. This aligns with the findings of Lutfiatun & Aimah (2024), who show that many Islamic boarding schools still face infrastructure and digital literacy challenges in optimising communication, so that digital strategies remain technical rather than systematic in building institutional reputation. This similarity indicates that, although digital channels are already being utilised, their effectiveness is primarily determined by the quality of management and the consistency of the narrative.

### The credibility of social media in building public trust (RQ2)

Unlike digital strategies, the credibility of social media has been shown to significantly affect institutional image and public engagement, even though its contribution is relatively small. This indicates that the trustworthiness of digital channels is an important factor shaping public perception. Mar (2024) also emphasises that social media among Muslims has excellent potential to strengthen public trust, but moral risks and disinformation make credibility a determining factor in public acceptance. This similarity indicates that Islamic boarding schools' efforts to maintain the authenticity of information, the accuracy of content, and the suitability of values are crucial to the legitimacy of their digital communications.

### **Public perception of institutional image (RQ3)**

Guardians of students, alums, and the community assess that pesantren digital content increases information clarity, transparency, and trust. This view aligns with Siregar's (2024) research, which emphasises the need for Islamic boarding schools to integrate technology into their curricula and communication to meet the expectations of the digital generation, who seek openness and rapid access to information. This shows that public perception of institutional image is shaped not only by the messages conveyed but also by the alignment between traditional Islamic boarding school values and the contemporary needs of the audience.

### **Relationships between variables and the role of institutional image (RQ4)**

The SEM model shows that institutional image plays an important mediating role in the relationship between social media credibility and public engagement, but not in the relationship between digital strategy and public engagement. These results confirm that institutional image is symbolic capital that can transform credibility into real public engagement. However, the weak role of digital strategy in this model indicates a gap between planning and execution. Murdianto (2021) found that the digital transformation of Islamic boarding schools will be effective only if it is supported by visionary leadership and the strengthening of human resources capable of operationalising strategies into practice. Thus, digital strategies that lack governance, crisis SOPs, and human resource capacity may be ineffective, even when the channels are utilised.

### **Recommendations for relevant digital PR strategies (RQ5)**

Based on the integration of results, relevant recommendations include developing communication crisis SOPs, increasing the capacity of public relations and administration, maintaining consistency in content calendars, and curating narratives aligned with pesantren values. This aligns with the study by Lundeto et al. (2021), which

emphasises the importance of adopting a disruptive mindset and adapting to remain relevant in the 4.0 era. Furthermore, research by Nikmatullah et al. (2023) highlights that the digital transformation of pesantren must integrate the values of tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib with modern technology so that digitalisation does not damage their identity but rather strengthens the image of Islamic boarding schools as adaptive religious institutions. These recommendations emphasise that effective digital PR strategies in Islamic boarding schools should not only be based on channels and content. However, they must also be rooted in strong values, governance, and credibility.

Overall, this discussion shows that the digitisation of Islamic boarding schools is a multidimensional phenomenon involving communication strategies, credibility, image, and public engagement. The literature reveals similarities in context: limitations in human resources and infrastructure (Lutfiatun & Aimah, 2024), the importance of social media credibility (Mar, 2024), the need for curriculum and communication adaptation (Siregar, 2024), the role of leadership and governance (Murdianto, 2021), and the urgency of maintaining values in the digitalisation process (Nikmatullah et al., 2023). This study contributes new insights by combining thematic qualitative analysis and quantitative SEM to confirm that institutional image is a key variable linking digital communication with public engagement.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that digital communication in Islamic boarding schools is a multidimensional practice involving channel strategies, social media credibility, institutional image, and public engagement. The findings show that digital communication strategies across Instagram, websites, and WhatsApp, employing various content formats, have been implemented to build institutional image but have not significantly affected public engagement without consistent governance support. Conversely, social media credibility has been shown to significantly strengthen institutional image and encourage public engagement, both directly and through image mediation. Thus, institutional image emerges as an important symbolic capital that bridges digital communication practices with the public legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools. The integration of qualitative and quantitative results confirms that the success of digital PR strategies in Islamic boarding schools is determined not only by the choice of channels and content but also by the quality of governance, human resource capacity, and alignment with the values and ethics of Islamic boarding schools.

Theoretically, this study expands the study of organisational communication and pesantren management by emphasising the role of institutional image as a key mediator in digital communication and public engagement. The mixed-methods approach also contributes

methodologically by combining the richness of qualitative data with the power of quantitative analysis, yielding a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of digital communication in religious institutions. From a practical perspective, the results of this study recommend developing communication crisis SOPs, increasing the capacity of public relations and administrative personnel, establishing a consistent content calendar, and strengthening narrative curation in line with Islamic boarding school values. An effective digital PR strategy must integrate technical aspects (platform, format, and content rhythm) with normative aspects (values, ethics, and credibility) to strengthen Islamic boarding schools' reputation and presence in the digital era.

This study has limitations regarding the sample scope, which covers only one Islamic boarding school; therefore, the generalisability of the results remains limited. Furthermore, quantitative surveys emphasise respondents' perceptions, which may be influenced by social bias, while qualitative exploration still relies on semi-structured interviews. Therefore, future research should conduct comparative studies across Islamic boarding schools, both traditional and modern, using big data analysis of social media to corroborate survey results, and employing longitudinal designs to assess the sustainability of digital communication strategies. Future studies should also examine the roles of gender and kiai leadership in shaping the trajectory of digital transformation, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the integration of technology and Islamic values in pesantren communication practices.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology under the “Penelitian Dosen Pemula” grant scheme in 2025. The authors sincerely thank the Ministry for its support, with the hope that this study will contribute to strengthening digital communication strategies in Islamic boarding schools and inspire further research in this field.

## **REFERENCES**

- Amoah, J. A., Khan, Z., Wood, G., & Knight, G. (2021). COVID-19 and digitalization: The great acceleration. *Journal of Business Research*, 136, 602–611. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.08.011>
- Bauer, J. C., Murray, M. A., & Ngondo, P. S. (2023). Who is missing out? The impact of digital networking behavior & social identity on PR job search outcomes. *Public Relations Review*, 49(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2023.102367>
- Bowen, S. A. (2024). “If it can be done, it will be done:” AI Ethical Standards and a dual role for public relations. *Public Relations*

Review, 50(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2024.102513>

Cresswell, J. W., Plano-Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, 209–240. [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/19291\\_Chapter\\_7.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/19291_Chapter_7.pdf)

Dunan, A. (2020). Government Communications in the Digital Era: Public Relations and Democracy. *Journal Pekommas*, 5(1), 71. <https://doi.org/10.30818/jpkm.2020.2050108>

Gaara, A., Kaptein, M., & Berens, G. (2024). It is all in the name: Toward a typology of public relations professionals' ethical dilemmas. *Public Relations Review*, 50(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2023.102418>

Girsang, C. N. (2020). Pemanfaatan Micro-Influencer pada Media Sosial sebagai Strategi Public Relations di Era Digital. *Ultimacomm: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 12(2), 206–225. <https://doi.org/10.31937/ultimacomm.v12i2.1299>

Gorina, L., Gordova, M., Khristoforova, I., Sundeeva, L., & Strielkowski, W. (2023). Sustainable Education and Digitalization through the Prism of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sustainability* (Switzerland), 15(8). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15086846>

Hagelstein, J., Einwiller, S., & Zerfass, A. (2021). The ethical dimension of public relations in Europe: Digital channels, moral challenges, resources, and training. *Public Relations Review*, 47(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102063>

Hidayat, D., Gustini, L. K., & Dias, M. P. (2020). Digital Media Relations Pendekatan Public Relations dalam Menyosialisasikan Social Distancing di Kota Bandung. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 18(3), 257. <https://doi.org/10.31315/jik.v18i3.3575>

Hou, J. Z., & Johnston, J. (2024). Putting ethics of care into public relations: Toward a multi-level agency model. *Public Relations Review*, 50(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2024.102495>

Lee, J., & Han, S. H. (2021). The Future of Service Post-COVID-19 Pandemic (J. Lee & S. H. Han, Eds.; Vol. 1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4126-5>

Lundeto, A., Talibo, I., & Nento, S. (2021). Challenges and Learning Strategies of Islamic Education in Islamic Boarding Schools in the Industrial Revolution Era 4.0. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 13(3), 2231–2240. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v13i3.1153>

Lutfiatun, A., & Aimah, S. (2024). Islamic Boarding School

- Education in the Digital Era: Communication Crisis. *As-Sulthan Journal Of Education (ASJE)*, 1(2), 253–268. <https://ojssulthan.com/asje>
- Mar, N. A. (2024). Integration of Technology and Islamic Education in the Digital Era: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies. *Journal of Scientific Insight*, 1(1), 1–8. <https://journal.scitechgrup.com/index.php/jsi>
- Maulana, I., Soleh, J., Setiyawati, A., & Ahidin, U. (2022). Strategi Digital Branding Dalam Meningkatkan Jumlah Santri DI Pondok Pesantren Tarbiyatul Muhtadin. *PERKUSI: Pemasaran, Keuangan, Dan Sumber Daya Manusia*, 2(2).
- Maulana, I., Supardi, J., & Septiana, T. I. (2022). Peningkatan Citra Pondok Pesantren Tarbiyatul Muhtadiin Melalui Implementasi Hubungan Masyarakat. *ADAARA: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 12(1).
- Mu'minin, A., & Nopriandi, N. (2025). Pengaruh Pemasaran Digital dan Pengalaman Pelanggan Terhadap Loyalitas Pelanggan Alfamart TB Simatupang 9 Jakarta Timur. *Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis Krisnadwipayana*, 13(1), 21–29. <https://doi.org/10.35137/jmbk.v13i1.168>
- Murdianto, M. (2021). Adaptation Strategies of Islamic Boarding Schools in Lombok in Facing the Digital Age. *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme*, 3(1), 76–92. <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v3i1.6300>
- Nikmatullah, C., Wahyudin, W., Tarihoran, N., & Fauzi, A. (2023). Digital Pesantren: Revitalization of the Islamic Education System in the Disruptive Era. *Al-Izzah: Jurnal Hasil-Hasil Penelitian*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.31332/ai.v0i0.5880>
- Nurhayati, R., Isnaeni, M., Nur, M. J., P.S., & Suriyati. (2024). Adaptation of the Islamic Boarding School Education Curriculum as a Response to Developments in Learning Technology. *ICOP: International Conference On Pesantren*, 1–12. <https://ejournal.darunnajah.ac.id/index.php/edukasiana>
- Permatasari, A. N., Soelistiyowati, E., Suastami, I. G. A. P. P., & Johan, R. A. (2021). Digital Public Relations: Trend and Required Skills. *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 6(2), 373. <https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v6i2.836>
- Reztrianti, D. (2024). *Digital Marketing Unlocked: Strategi Inovatif & Praktis Untuk Penguasaan Masa Depan*. CV Pustaka Aksara. [www.pustakaaksara.co.id](http://www.pustakaaksara.co.id)
- Sadi, G., & Nobell, A. Á. (2024). Capability gap regarding public relations' strategic issues in Latin America. *Public Relations*

- Review, 50(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2024.102428>
- Sataøen, H. L., & Lövgren, D. (2024). Support and core? The changing roles of communication professionals in higher education institutions. *Public Relations Review*, 50(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2024.102510>
- Scarlat, C., Stănciulescu, G. D., & Panduru, D. A. (2022). COVID-19 Pandemic as Accelerator: Opportunity for Digital Acceleration. *Journal of Internet and E-Business Studies*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.5171/2022.296375>
- Siregar, K. E. (2024). Islamic Boarding School Education in the Digital Era: Literature Review About Building a Relevant and Adaptive Curriculum. *ICOP: International Conference On Pesantren*, 46–62. <https://ejournal.darunnajah.ac.id/index.php/edukasiana>
- Soriano, A. S., & Valdés, R. M. T. (2021). Engaging universe 4.0: The case for forming a public relations-strategic intelligence hybrid. *Public Relations Review*, 47(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102035>
- Suharto, B., & Fatmawati, E. (2022). Digital learning transformation in Islamic boarding schools: digital learning patterns in Salafi and modern Islamic boarding schools in Jember. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(2), 5319–5329.
- Syafaat, M., & Wahyudin, D. (2020). Analisis Implementasi Digital Public Relations Pada Konten Instagram @alamuniversal. *Jurnal Pustaka Komunikasi*, 3(1), 1–12. <http://journal.moestopo.ac.id/index.php/pustakom>
- Tam, L., & Kim, S. (2023). Understanding conspiratorial thinking (CT) within public relations research: Dynamics of organization-public relationship quality, CT, and negative megaphoning. *Public Relations Review*, 49(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2023.102354>
- Webb, A., McQuaid, R. W., & Webster, C. W. R. (2021). Moving learning online and the COVID-19 pandemic: a university response. *World Journal of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development*, 18(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WJSTSD-11-2020-0090>
- Yusuf, A. W., & Nopriandi, N. (2024). Pengaruh Kualitas Layanan dan Citra Perusahaan Terhadap Kepuasan Pelanggan PT. Eka Maju Sejahtera. *Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis Krisnadwipayana*, 12(3), 199–206. <https://doi.org/10.35137/jmbk.v12i3.82>
- Zancajo, A., Verger, A., & Bolea, P. (2022). Digitalization and beyond: the effects of Covid-19 on post-pandemic educational

policy and delivery in Europe. *Policy and Society*, 41(1), 111–128. <https://doi.org/10.1093/polsoc/puab016>