



From Capacity Building to Optimization: Strategic Digital Marketing Maturity in Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education

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ABSTRACT:

This study explores the influence of governance and maturity levels on digital marketing at State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN), namely UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. This article is based on a qualitative comparative multiple case study methodology. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The researcher carried out coding, interpretation within and across cases, assessment of maturity levels, and exploration using 4P analysis, SWOT analysis, and the student journey. Both universities target the same audience, emphasising Islamic identity, educational quality, affordability, networking, and technology. However, there are differences in maturity levels and stages of development. Universities in Tulungagung require improvements in the areas of relationships, information exchange, content development, training and performance evaluation; whilst UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang requires improvements in governance and analytical maturity, personalised communication, and a better portfolio of services. This article presents an assessment using a maturity model and a two-stage student journey concept known as the growth model. Overall, the researchers argue that universities need to invest in building digital marketing capabilities—which require commitment, clearly articulated values and a consistent governance structure—and to fulfil the institution's promises through integrated academic programmes, services, analytics and the student experience.

Keywords: Strategic Management; Digital Marketing; Digital Maturity; SWOT Analysis; Marketing Mix; Islamic Higher Education; Prospective Student Interest.

ABSTRAK:

Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana tata kelola dan kematangan organisasi membentuk pemasaran digital di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN), dengan fokus pada UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung dan UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif komparatif multisitus, para peneliti mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam dan dokumen institusional. Data tersebut dianalisis melalui proses pengodean, interpretasi internal institusi, perbandingan antar-institusi, serta penilaian terhadap tingkat kematangan pemasaran digital—dengan perhatian khusus pada aspek tata kelola, bauran pemasaran 4P, analisis SWOT, dan perjalanan calon mahasiswa. Kedua institusi tersebut memanfaatkan identitas keislaman, kualitas pendidikan, keterjangkauan biaya, jejaring, dan platform digital untuk menarik calon mahasiswa, namun keduanya memiliki tingkat kematangan yang berbeda. UIN Tulungagung memerlukan koordinasi dan pertukaran informasi yang lebih baik, konten yang lebih konsisten, pelatihan staf, serta tolok ukur kinerja. Sementara itu, UIN Malang memerlukan tata kelola merek dan kapabilitas analitis yang lebih kuat, pendekatan yang lebih personal, serta layanan yang lebih terpadu. Studi ini mengusulkan model kematangan pemasaran digital dua fase dan kerangka kerja yang dapat disesuaikan untuk perjalanan calon mahasiswa. Studi ini menekankan bahwa kehadiran digital yang kuat harus dibarengi dengan kualitas akademik yang kredibel, layanan yang responsif, data yang terkonsolidasi, serta komitmen institusional yang konsisten.

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Strategis; Pemasaran Digital; Kematangan Digital; Analisis SWOT; Bauran Pemasaran; Pendidikan Tinggi Islam; Minat Calon Mahasiswa.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions increasingly operate in an environment in which academic quality, public reputation, service accessibility, and communication performance shape prospective students' choices. Marketing in this context cannot be reduced to advertising or recruitment-season publicity. It is a strategic management function that connects institutional identity, stakeholder expectations, educational services, and long-term competitiveness. The international literature on higher education marketing has repeatedly shown that universities face market pressures while remaining accountable to educational values and public purposes.¹

Strategic marketing in higher education can be seen as a process of strategic fit between an institution's offering and the needs of prospective students and other stakeholders, which puts increased emphasis on the importance of understanding the market and designing the program in tandem with recruitment and relationship-building practices. In this regard, recruitment communication practice should be viewed as part of a larger system, which also includes academic design and deliberate service to students.²

The article uses "strategic digital marketing" in a specifically limited sense: the governance of digital recruitment communications and services for prospective students. This includes websites, social media, admissions information, online consultations, and coordination between these digital touchpoints and academic and administrative units.

The marketing mix offers a practical framework for organizing marketing in higher education. Its product encompasses more than

¹ Jane Knight, "Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8, no. 1 (2004): 5–31, doi:10.1177/1028315303260832.

² Edna Rabenu and Or Shkoler, "A Systematic and Theoretical Approach to the Marketing of Higher Education," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (October 12, 2022), doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2022.982347.

study programs: it also includes the academic experience, graduate outcomes, institutional values, facilities, student development, and support services. Price includes tuition, scholarships, payment flexibility, and how fair the costs are perceived to be. Place covers both the institution's physical location and people's access to information, consultation, admissions, and registration. Promotion includes all messages communicated through channels such as websites, social media, events, school visits, alumni testimony, and interpersonal communication.³

The 4P logic is extended throughout the prospective student journey via digitalization. Websites, social media, search engines, online events, messaging tools, and admissions platforms are all means by which institutions can reach students and provide them with information regarding their enrollment; however, the strategic value of these channels depends on how effectively they are utilized.⁴

Social media, in particular, has an impact because it allows prospective students to move between official information and the opinions of their peers, view images, and discuss subject matter, rather than relying solely on objective data. However, these platforms are not used in the same way by different segments of the audience. Certain groups prioritize program specifications and career opportunities, while others focus on scholarships, campus culture, religious aspects, or the authenticity of interactions with

³ Jonathan Ivy, "A New Higher Education Marketing Mix: The 7Ps for MBA Marketing," *International Journal of Educational Management* 22, no. 4 (May 16, 2008): 288–99, doi:10.1108/09513540810875635.

⁴ Victora Mishina and Barnaby Pace, "What Digital Marketing Strategies: Promoting International Higher Education," *Rere Āwhio - The Journal of Applied Research and Practice*, no. 1 (2021): 42–49, doi:10.34074/rere.00105.

current students and alumni.⁵ Recent marketing studies conducted at the higher education level support this process perspective.⁶

Since university selection now takes place in a digital environment, recruitment value is based on an institution's credibility (rather than mere exposure). While visibility can raise awareness, a high volume of posts strengthens brand power. Research conducted with universities indicates that the presence of real people and social validation contribute to both brand performance and recruitment provided that the communication is active, trustworthy, authentic, and genuinely aligned with the quality of services offered.⁷

Studies of digital transformation in higher education cover technological, organizational, pedagogical, and social dimensions. Institutions may invest in digital infrastructure to tackle a host of issues including ownership, process integration, staff readiness and performance indicators but this is often done without a cohesive plan. Digital services can remain fragmented without strategic coordination. Academic services, websites, social media and student admissions may work in silos. A better way is to balance technology with institutional goals and user preferences.

The scope of digital transformation describes the path that an organization takes—from digitizing to digitalizing to transforming—and it emphasizes the significance of comprehending the difference between these concepts. Universities can be very different in governance, analytics, coordination and learning

⁵ Efthymios Constantinides and Marc C.Zinck Stagno, "Potential of the Social Media as Instruments of Higher Education Marketing: A Segmentation Study," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 21, no. 1 (January 2011): 7–24, doi:10.1080/08841241.2011.573593.

⁶ Sanjay Krishnapratap Pawar, "Social Media in Higher Education Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda," *Cogent Business and Management* (Cogent OA, 2024), doi:10.1080/23311975.2024.2423059.

⁷ Richard R Hake, *Relationship of Individual Student Normalized Learning Gains in Mechanics with Gender, High-School Physics, and Pretest Scores on Mathematics and Spatial Visualization*. * †, n.d., <http://www.physics.indiana.edu/~hake>.

processes, even when they use the same platform. Digital capability and digital presence are also different things.⁸

Empirical research on digital transformation in higher education supports the maturity-based perspective. Studies by Maryadi, Soegoto, and Budiarti highlight the influence of digital leadership, management information systems, and organizational culture on institutional performance. Their findings support the effectiveness of this approach and underscore the importance of leadership, organizational adaptability, and integrating digital systems into institutional processes for successful transformation.⁹

University branding is also a key aspect. A recent systematic review defines university branding as a construct involving multiple stakeholders, contingent upon factors such as identity, image, reputation, perceived quality, student experience, and stakeholder responses. Brand strength is built through various touchpoints, rather than a single campaign. What should be kept in mind? In this context, branding is characterized by the organized management of credible institutional meanings meanings that prospective students encounter before, during, and after their admission.¹⁰

This study is framed by these cautionary tensions. A systematic analysis of institutional reputation in higher education shows that it is closely related to credibility, differentiation and experience, as well as organizational signals and stakeholder assessments . For Islamic religious higher education institutions (PTKIN), the goal is

⁸ Peter B. Seddon, "A Respecification and Extension of the DeLone and McLean Model of IS Success," *Information Systems Research*, 1997, doi:10.1287/isre.8.3.240.

⁹ Yadi A Maryadi, Eddy B Soeryanto Soegoto, and Isniar C Budiarti, "Tec Empresarial Digital Leadership, Management Information Systems, and Higher Education Performance: The Mediating Role of Organizational Culture in Indonesian Private Universities," n.d., 265–81.

¹⁰ Thomas K.F. Chiu et al., "Systematic Literature Review on Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Research Recommendations of Artificial Intelligence in Education," *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence* 4, no. November 2022 (2023): 100118, doi:10.1016/j.caeai.2022.100118.

to ensure that the branding efforts undertaken accurately reflect their unique characteristics and to avoid unwarranted symbolic claims concerning the academic offerings and services they provide.¹¹

Studies of brand equity in higher education suggest that awareness, image, perceived quality, and associations are developed through both institutional communications and actual community experience. A university's brand is determined by the quality of the program, facilities, reputation of teaching staff, prospects for graduates and interaction of services – as well as promotional messages. Marketing units are not in a position to create institutional attraction by themselves. Their role is to organize and communicate value that is grounded in the university's real performance.¹²

Prospective students form images through official sources, interpersonal recommendations, prior knowledge, school networks, family influence, and online information. Personal relationships remain influential even in digital environments. Consequently, alumni, current students, teachers, parents, and feeder schools function as important interpreters of institutional reputation. Their experiences can reinforce or contradict official narratives.¹³

Marketing approaches for higher education institutions in Indonesia typically involve integrating an institution's strengths with community-oriented initiatives and religious commitments,

¹¹ Marelby Amado Mateus and Fernando Juarez Acosta, "Reputation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Education* (Frontiers Media S.A., June 29, 2022), doi:10.3389/feduc.2022.925117.

¹² Carla Melani, "Pengembangan Sistem Informasi Akademik Berbasis Web Untuk Manajemen Data Mahasiswa, Dosen, Dan Jadwal Kuliah Di Perguruan Tinggi," *Teknologi Informasi* 3, no. 4 (2023): 1–19, <http://www.portaldata.org/index.php/cyberarea/article/view/396%0Ahttp://www.portaldata.org/index.php/cyberarea/article/download/396/384>.

¹³ Yasir Rashid et al., "Case Study Method: A Step-by-Step Guide for Business Researchers," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18 (July 22, 2019), doi:10.1177/1609406919862424.

as evidenced by research conducted at IAIN Palu. The study suggests that marketing strategies should be tailored to the local environment rather than relying on generic tactics. Furthermore, this emphasis highlights the importance of combining internal learning capabilities with opportunities identified from an external perspective.¹⁴ Research from UIN Sunan Ampel indicates that digital platforms can enhance visibility and communicate an institution's quality as part of a well thought out strategy.¹⁵

This discussion is not limited to platforms, as evidence from Indonesia has emerged. As noted by Mulyono et al., marketing in Islamic higher education is shifting toward institutional values, competitive development strategies, brand image, and transformative experiences for students. Effective marketing requires more than just an online presence; it also depends on an institution's ability to translate its unique values into a credible educational experience and to maintain relationships with stakeholders. In this context, this study examines state-run Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIN) to explore how the development of governance maturity and cross-unit coordination contributes to a coherent student journey.¹⁶ Research on school marketing has shown that SWOT mapping can connect internal

¹⁴ Marelby Amado Mateus and Fernando Juarez Acosta, "Reputation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Education* (Frontiers Media S.A., June 29, 2022), doi:10.3389/feduc.2022.925117.

¹⁵ Tsamara Alya Ardama et al., "IJET : Indonesian Journal of Techniques and Education Techniques OPTIMALISASI LAYANAN DIGITAL DI PERPUSTAKAAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH: STUDI KASUS UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI RADEN INTAN LAMPUNG Hilmi Fauzan , 2 Salsabila Sisda Elzahra , 1 Rofif Fauzan Dkk , Opti" 02, no. 02 (2024): 56–65.

¹⁶ Hardi Mulyono et al., "VALUE-BASED MARKETING TRANSFORMATION IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF COMPETITIVE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, BRAND IMAGE, AND TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT EXPERIENCES," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Terapan Universitas Jambi* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 2025): 1185–93, doi:10.22437/jiituj.v9i3.43194.

strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats to identify an appropriate strategic posture.¹⁷

By leveraging planned educational marketing, an institution's reputation can be strengthened through effective leadership, teacher competence, alumni engagement, school committee participation, and public appreciation of its image. However, due to limited digital literacy or inadequate communication, such strategies may fail to yield the desired outcomes or may even lead to unintended consequences. Several studies show that organizational factors have more influence on marketing effectiveness than technology factors. A recent study by Azizah, Harisatunisa and Mukhtar looked at the foundation for a sustainable reputation. "This study found pillars such as quality of service, professionalism of staff, alumni networks and unique educational programs."¹⁸

Although the literature on this topic is still evolving, there are still gaps in understanding the stages of the development of strategic digital marketing management in the PTKIN (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri) environment. While some studies in Indonesia have documented marketing practices, digital imaging, SWOT positioning, and efforts to improve institutional image, comparative evidence on how factors such as leadership, cross-unit governance, staff capabilities, data integration, service responsiveness and evaluation influence various stages of maturity is still very limited. The text highlights a gap in research on digital promotion: most existing studies describe its "4P" components rather than investigate how organizational capabilities influence their implementation. This distinction matters because institutions

¹⁷ Ali Marzuki Zebua and Kasful Anwar Us, "Strategic Education Marketing: Analyzing the Implementation of the 7P Marketing Mix in Indonesian Islamic Universities," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 17, no. 3 (September 5, 2025): 3765–86, doi:10.35445/alishlah.v17i3.7041.

¹⁸ Harisatunisa, and Mughni Zaenal Mukhtar Meirina Khusnul Azizah, "Building a Positive School Image: Brand Image Strategy in the Competition of Private Educational Institutions," *Jawda: Journal of Islamic Education Management* 7, no. 1 (2026): 90–110.

can use the same online platforms yet create different learning experiences for prospective students.

The PTKIN were chosen as representative case studies because their strategic digital marketing management differs significantly, not because of their overall quality. Both institutions combine Islamic values with a broad academic offering and attract students from East Java and beyond. Field observations indicate that the institutions vary in the intensity and approach of their marketing efforts. In comparing the two, the common strategic grounding and the different management capabilities and priorities for development which are of relevance to each institution at its current stage of development become apparent.

Two questions are analyzed in this study: (1) how the 4P marketing mix, SWOT position, digital channels, and services for prospective students are managed at each PTKIN (Islamic Higher Education Institution); and (2) how differences in organizational maturity influence the development of strategic digital marketing priorities? The objective is therefore to formulate cross-case explanations about the process of capacity development/optimization and the adaptive strategic digital marketing cycle for PTKIN.

METHODS

A dual-site comparative qualitative design is employed in this study. The selection of this design is based on the need to provide a comprehensive and context-sensitive account of managerial processes and stakeholder experiences across two distinct institutional settings.¹⁹

The research was conducted at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The scope of the study does not encompass the entire university; rather, it focuses specifically on communication management within the recruitment process, the digital channels employed, student

¹⁹ Rashid et al., "Case Study Method: A Step-by-Step Guide for Business Researchers."

admission data, institutional image, and the services provided to prospective students. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with institutional leaders, marketing or public communication staff (such as public relations practitioners), faculty members, students, and alumni. Participants were selected based on specific criteria namely, their direct managerial responsibilities or personal experiences related to institutional communication, recruitment, service accessibility, and the shaping of the campus image. The proposed research framework does not categorize or distribute participants based on their specific roles at each location.

The interview format was designed for a digital marketing strategy scenario. The scope includes environmental scanning; strategy development and implementation; coordination between organisational units; evaluation of websites and social media; communications relating to student admissions, tuition fees and scholarships; responsive services for prospective students; networking with alumni support; and the four elements of the marketing mix. The data were analysed through a structured process comprising within-case and cross-case analyses. The researchers prepared and reviewed interview transcripts repeatedly, coding and grouping the implications of each data point into relevant categories, before revisiting these themes with reference to the original data.

This iterative process moved between interpretations within individual cases and comparisons across cases. A matrix was used to identify similarities and differences, whilst taking institutional context into account. The analysis followed contemporary guidance on reporting data comprehension, coding, theme development, evaluation, finalization, and concise presentation, while recognizing the researcher's role in interpretation.²⁰

²⁰ Sirwan Khalid Ahmed et al., "Using Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health* 6 (August 2025): 100198, doi:10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198.

SWOT analysis is a method for developing strategies, not simply assigning numerical values. It first identifies a company's internal strengths and weaknesses, then connects them to strategic options and possible outcomes within the organizational context, often using the 4P model. The approach brings together varied contextual factors to generate alternative courses of action. It also takes into account risks that may arise from subjective judgments or information that is purely descriptive.²¹

Credibility was established by triangulating sources across participant categories, comparing cases, and consulting documentary materials such as official institutional communications or reception materials. These methods were used to verify the current organizational structure and digital touchpoints. The submitted research records did not mention member checking or the use of NVivo or ATLAS. ti, so these procedures were not included in the revisions. The coding process was reported using qualitative analysis methods, either manual techniques or structured matrices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

3.1 Strategic Management Patterns at the Two Universities

Though they differ in how consistently marketing is incorporated into their management processes, the findings show that both companies see it as a component of their competitive edge. The strategic planning at every site begins with considering the requirements of prospective pupils, the institutional assets, competing businesses, and changes in digital communication. Both colleges also emphasize that their marketing materials ought to always reflect their Islamic beliefs, educational objectives, and public responsibilities. Their degree of organizational readiness

²¹ Mostafa Ali Benzaghta et al., "SWOT Analysis Applications: An Integrative Literature Review," *Journal of Global Business Insights* 6, no. 1 (March 2021): 55–73, doi:10.5038/2640-6489.6.1.1148.

differs: UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang has a clearer division of tasks and significant digital resources; UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung is in progress of arranging roles, processes, data management, and interdepartmental cooperation.

Its closeness, links to the neighboring towns and secondary schools, affordable tuition costs, increasing variety of academic offerings, and Islamic character fit local and regional demands are among UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung's most successful marketing benefits. Several channels, including websites, social media, community outreach, open-house events, student involvement, alumni networking, and local contacts, drive marketing efforts. These techniques demonstrate the degree to which the institution is woven into the society fabric and provide a wealth of points of contact.

The unequal structuring of institutional worth into a cohesive marketing system is the main restriction rather than its lack. Account interviews show that content preparation is not yet uniformly advanced across departments, marketing staff members' specialization is still limited, and data from schools, admissions, public relations, and digital channels are not completely combined. Candidates are likely getting information from different faculty accounts, institution websites, social media channels, school networks, or personal contacts, without going through a completely integrated process—from awareness stage to registration.

The evaluation system has not yet evolved into a comprehensive digital performance platform that can link audience reach and engagement with candidates' questions, pre- and post-registra- tion processes, admission, and student life experience. It results in the university seeing the activity happening but is not always able to identify which content, audience, or service pro- cess is most effective in pushing the potential students to keep moving towards registration. Thus, the findings are placing the institution at the capacity-building stage.

The objective of the capacity-building is to establish clear responsibility relating to the institution's image management, standard operating procedures, content calendar that integrate, staff competence, student recruitment data integration, and the achievement of measurable outcomes. The cross-unit team must include representatives from alumni, student affairs, information technology, public relations, admissions, various departments, and senior management. The purpose is to ensure shared standards, accuracy of information, and the consistency of the institution's value proposition not to centralize all communications at a single point.

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang adopts a highly institutionalised approach to marketing and mass communications. Its educational programmes are complemented by a range of initiatives, a strong focus on the Arabic and English languages, a distinctive Islamic intellectual identity, extensive facilities and national visibility. Dedicated resources, coordinated communication channels, regular digital content and support from various units and departments within the organisation enable these aspects to be managed within a relatively straight forward framework structure. In this regard, a shift has been made from activity metrics to indicators linked to decision-making. To achieve this, the content calendar requires academic staff who can be held accountable for this task.

Furthermore, the dashboard requires review protocols to be in place should response times, brightness levels, query status, user experience or programme completion rates compromise its quality. The university engages with the public through its website, social media, quiz forums, webinars, academic forums and various other digital or hybrid platforms.

Such channels provide a range of information to help prospective students understand the programmes, facilities, events and other aspects of campus life. By consolidating these channels, the institution will expand its reach to the local and national

levels—and perhaps even on a global scale—whilst increasing its audience. Therefore, the best course of action is to refine the existing system, rather than simply building marketing capacity from scratch. There is also a risk that different departments or projects may convey messages that contradict one another or produce repetitive content for various audiences.

Other measures, including improved demographic and audience analysis, the standardisation and consistent communication of faculty announcements, and testing to gauge, in particular, the effectiveness of digital media in generating enquiries or applications, making decisions on student admissions based on admission criteria, and providing a positive experience for students.

At present, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang has, by and large, met the various requirements set out. Consequently, the next steps involve tailoring communication to suit different audiences, strengthening standard response metrics, integrating analytical elements across all communication channels, distinguishing between engagement metrics and conversion and quality metrics, and ensuring that the university's promises align with the enrichment of students' experiences once they have been admitted. The key focus is on continuous optimisation, rather than merely increasing the volume of promotional material.

3.1.1. Documentary Corroboration of Governance and Admissions Architecture

Additional documentary triangulation helps to confirm the difference in administration noted in the interviews. UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung officially carried out a cross-unit FGD in December 2025 to create a Pusat Layanan Admisi dan Promosi and get a staged plan ready for use. While the gathering brought together university leaders, professors, financial, public relations, internal audit, archives, and potential admissions managers, an institutional head said that "admissions have to be a solid and professional team." This documentary evidence supports the view

of Tulungagung as going from disorganized promotional activity to official, cross-unit admissions governance.²²

For UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, governance has a different emphasis. Because the university already has broader channels and stronger institutionalization, the challenge is to prevent fragmentation within scale. Brand governance should establish which elements are fixed across the university Islamic identity, academic standards, key institutional promises, visual identity, and service expectations and which elements may be adapted by faculties for specific audiences. This distinction supports both coherence and relevance.

Governance must also include accountable measurement. Recent capability research in higher education treats results management, stakeholder management, media capability, organizational management, market understanding, and continuous learning as interdependent digital-marketing capabilities. The shift from activity metrics to decision-driven indicators does indeed need to be supported in this way. A content calendar requires a person in charge who is accountable. Dashboards, on the other hand, demand clear review procedures, and it is these procedures that trigger action when the quality of response times, query resolution or application processing begins to decline.²³

²²UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, "UIN SATU Perkuat Strategi PMB 2026 Melalui FGD Pendirian Pusat Layanan Admisi dan Promosi," December 3, 2025, <https://uinsatu.ac.id/berita/uin-satu-perkuat-strategi-pmb-2026-melalui-fgd-pendirian-pusat-layanan-admisi-dan-promosi/>.

²³UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, "PMB UIN MALANG: Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru 2026/2027," accessed August 10, 2026, <https://pmb.uin-malang.ac.id/>.

Table 1. Documentary Triangulation Matrix for Strategic Digital Marketing Governance

Dimension	UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang	Cross-case implication
Governance institutionalization	2025 cross-unit FGD initiated a Pusat Layanan Admisi dan Promosi and staged blueprint.	Central PMB portal operates as an established institutional entry point.	Supports capacity-building versus optimization interpretation.
Prospective-student access	Admissions information is being consolidated through formal service architecture and help channels.	Routes, schedules, fees, programs, registration, scholarships, and international admissions are linked centrally.	Difference concerns integration of the journey, not merely channel count.
Cross-unit coordination	Official FGD explicitly involved leadership, faculties, academic, finance, PR, audit, archives, and admissions actors.	Central portal links institutional admissions services and program pathways.	Marketing is empirically a governance process across units.
Evidence boundary	Documents corroborate organizational direction; they do not measure campaign conversion.	Portal architecture corroborates access integration; it does not establish causal recruitment effects.	Interpretation remains qualitative and non-causal.

Source: Authors' synthesis of interview findings with supplementary official institutional documents, accessed 2026.

3.2 Comparative Findings Based on the 4P Marketing Mix

The product comparison shows that both colleges feature Islamic values and intellectual quality as main differentiators. Emphasizing relevance to local and regional needs, community closeness, growing study programs, and advancing academic facilities is UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang has some rather distinctive characteristics. It continues to promote multilingualism, its reputation is growing at a national level, and its range of programmes is expanding. Product communication at both institutions is most powerful when it integrates curriculum, facilities, student activities, religious development, graduate prospects, and institutional support into one value offer instead of presenting study programs as independent administrative units.

Table 2. Comparative 4P Marketing Strategy at the Two Islamic Universities

4P	UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
Product	Islamic identity, regional relevance, growing study-program portfolio, community proximity, and developing academic facilities. Main need: communicate program value, learning experience, and graduate prospects more consistently.	Broad study-program portfolio, strong Arabic-English positioning, recognizable Islamic academic identity, extensive facilities, and wider national visibility. Main need: preserve coherent differentiation across faculties and programs.
Price	Competitive and accessible tuition for local and regional families; scholarship information is available but needs a clearer connection to program value, service quality, and financial guidance.	Competitive tuition supported by scholarship and subsidy information; perceived value is reinforced by facilities, reputation, program breadth, and national visibility.
Place	Strategic regional location and	Strategic location with more

4P	UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
	strong feeder-school networks; integrated websites, social media, digital information is offline events, and admissions distributed across several services; accuracy and channels that require better consistency across units remain integration and a clearer important. admissions journey.	
Promotion	Outreach, open house, school visits, community activities, student–alumni advocacy, websites, and social media. Main need: formal content planning, specialized personnel, and consistent response standards, and analytics.	Structured multimedia content, academic events, webinars, social media engagement, and coordinated institutional campaigns. Main need: deeper analytics, personalization, and brand governance.

Source: Authors' cross-case synthesis based on interview findings, 2026.

Through scholarship information, payment assistance, and the apparent link between cost and service quality, tuition affordability helps to control pricing. Though many local and regional families find UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung to be reasonably priced, the value shown by that reasonable pricing has to be more precisely communicated. Prospective pupils should be aware of not only the cost but also the learning possibilities, resources, support services, and kinds of financial aid related to it.

While its larger amenities, reputation, and program diversity provide apparent value, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang also combines competitive costs with scholarship and grant data. At both colleges, price information has to be readily available, open, and tied to clear directions. Even when tuition is actually reasonable, concealed, broken, or hard-to-understand information could cause doubt.

In this study, place is defined as the access mechanism by which a prospective student gets validated information and finishes recruitment chores: the actual campus, official websites,

social media referral sources, admissions portals, helpdesks, school networks, and registration channels. Though its digital access points are still being centralized, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung gains from regional access and close feeder-school connections. Though uniformity in institutional and faculty-level communication is still needed, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang exhibits a more centralized digital admissions structure. For both sites, the useful ramification is to reduce gaps between awareness, questioning, application, and enrollment.

Promotion is the field in which the difference is most obvious. Together with creating digital campaigns, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung mixes traditional outreach and social-network promotion. Still crucial marketing tools are alumni, students, school visits, and community activities. Using more organized multimedia content, academic events, webinars, social media involvement, and coordinated institutional messages helps UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang to reach a larger audience. The difference is not only in the number of channels but also in the degree to which institutional process is planned, staffed, synchronized, serviced, and reviewed via promotion.

3.3 SWOT-Based Cross-Case Findings

The SWOT analysis reveals various strategic mixes for the two companies. Though it has great regional confidence, accessibility, stakeholder networks, and growing academic potential, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung has fragmented coordination, varied digital capability, and limited integration of admissions data that it has to fix. Demand for accessible Islamic higher education, cooperation with schools and communities, and the use of alumni testimonials as well as the rise of digital communication define its outside possibilities. Its dangers include fierce competition, fast changing media habits, contradictory unofficial information, and the potential that institutional assets go unnoticed by viewers outside the area.

Strong reputation, program range, multilingual identity, facilities, organized channels, and more visibility define UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Its disadvantages are related to the difficulty of coordinating many departments, activities, and audience groups as well as the risk of fragmented brand communication. Its chances include hybrid events, better conversion management, national and worldwide segmentation, and advanced analytics. Its risks include message saturation, erratic reputation, rising rivalry from other institutions, and the possibility that great digital presence is not complemented by equally quick service.

Table 3. SWOT-Based Strategic Priorities

Dimension	UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
Strengths	Regional accessibility; local trust; feeder-school and community networks; affordable options; growing program portfolio; student and alumni participation.	Recognizable reputation; broad programs; Arabic-English facilities; positioning; structured team; national visibility; integrated digital and hybrid channels.
Weaknesses	Uneven content planning; limited specialization; fragmented data and channel ownership; inconsistent evaluation across the admissions funnel.	Complex coordination across faculties; risk of duplicated or inconsistent messages; analytics not yet fully connected to conversion and experience.
Opportunities	Digital reach beyond the region; integrated admissions journey; alumni advocacy; school partnerships; content based on local relevance and graduate outcomes.	Audience personalization; national and international segmentation; advanced analytics; integrated CRM; stronger academic-event and alumni ecosystems.
Threats	Competition from better-known institutions; rapid platform change; unofficial or inconsistent information; visibility gap between actual	Message saturation; reputational inconsistency; rising competition; gap between high promotional expectations and service

Dimension	UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
Strategic implication	quality and public perception. Build governance, people, data, and process foundations before scaling campaign volume.	delivery. Optimize brand governance, analytics, personalization, and continuous learning across an established system.

Source: Authors' interpretive SWOT mapping based on the field findings, 2026.

3.4 Cross-Case Strategic Position and Proposed Management Cycle

An analysis of various case studies reveals two stages of strategic marketing development. During the capacity-building stage, organisations still possess substantial resources, but not all of these are coordinated through a formal framework, including data management, content management and digital evaluation. At the utilisation or quality improvement stage, organisations have prioritised the systematisation and utilisation of mutually beneficial communication channels. They also involve more elements to strengthen communication with customers and external stakeholders. They aim to integrate these more efficiently, maximise the use of data and personalisation, whilst ensuring regular updates. This stage can be described as the extent to which each organisation is seen to convey its value proposition to the outside world; however, it does not imply an academic quality ranking.

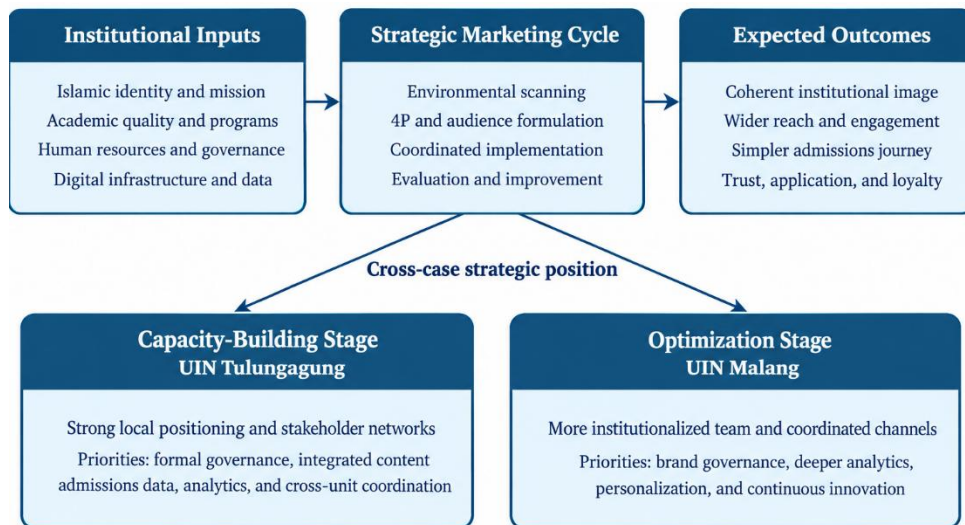


Figure 1. Cross-Case Strategic Marketing Management Cycle

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the study findings, 2026.

Figure 1 summarises the interrelationships between the key components, namely institutional resources, the strategic marketing cycle, expected outcomes, and the unique development objectives of each of these higher education institutions. This figure positions digital marketing as part of the overall institutional process, rather than merely a standalone campaign. The process begins with a clear definition of institutional identity and resources, followed by an environmental scan and the formulation of the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion), and concludes with implementation through integrated activities, as well as evaluation and refinement. This methodology ensures that marketing is closely integrated with student admissions, academic services, stakeholder experiences, etc.

3.5 Prospective-Student Journey and Performance Indicators

The research results also show that both the universities need to evaluate marketing as student's journey. Awareness is only the tip of the iceberg. Potential students are not only comparing the various programs, they are also searching for information, contacting institutions, starting the application process, completing the registration and, eventually assessing whether the

promises made by the institutions were aligned with the actual experience they had. Each stage entails different information needs, requires different services, and involves different indicators. A university that only measures reach or impressions will not know at which point prospective students begin to have doubts nor will it know at which stage they decide to drop out.

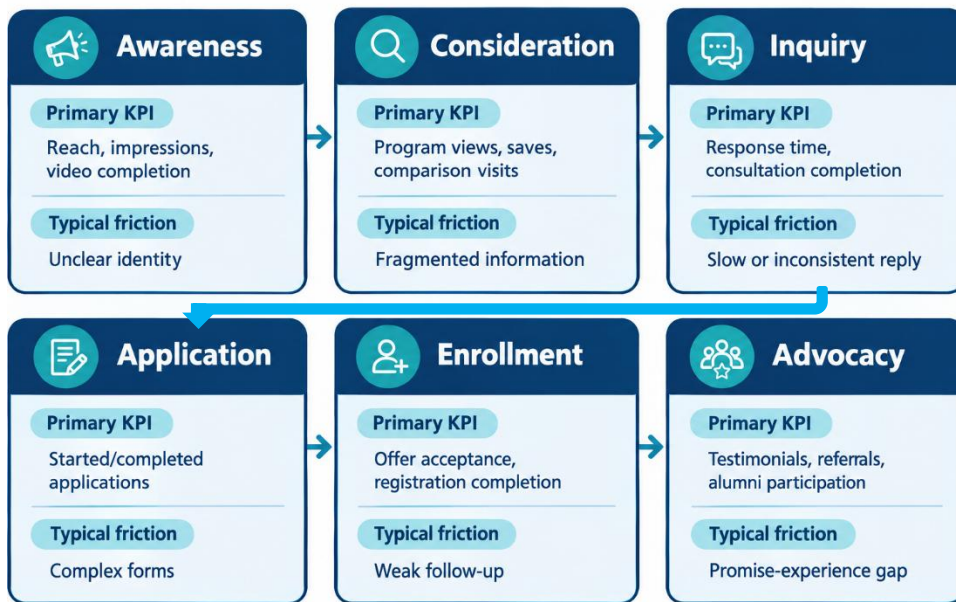


Figure 2. Prospective-Student Digital Journey and Evaluation Logic
Source: Authors' proposed model based on the cross-case findings, 2026.

Figure 2 shows the results in six steps that are linked together: awareness, consideration, inquiry, application, enrollment and advocacy. Figure 2 separates signs of success, from usual problems and adds a loop that uses what students and alumni say to guide future plans. Figure 2 says that content teams, faculty units, admissions officers, information-technology staff and student-service units all have to work to make things better. Figure 2 says that to get better we must find which messages catch attention and also which service problems stop students from moving forward.

3.6 Strategic Action Matrix

The cross-case analysis recommends a phased approach to implementation rather than expanding all initiatives at once. It is clear from this that the two institutions have different needs, so the next steps must also be tailored accordingly. Before making significant investments in various campaigns, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung would be well advised to lay a solid foundation first. Meanwhile, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang is better suited to focusing on optimisation and personalisation. The matrix of practical actions in Table 4 can be adapted for each institution's annual planning.

Table 4. Phased Strategic Action Matrix

Horizon	Governance and People	Channels and Service	Data and Evaluation
0–6 months	Tulungagung: appoint cross-unit team, define authority, SOPs, and brand standards. Malang: audit brand governance across faculties.	Tulungagung: unify admissions information and response standards. Malang: map duplicate channels and message inconsistencies.	Tulungagung: define baseline indicators. Malang: separate visibility, engagement, conversion, and quality metrics.
6–18 months	Tulungagung: train staff in content, analytics, and service. Malang: establish audience owners and personalization protocols.	Tulungagung: implement content calendar and integrated inquiry routing. Malang: develop omnichannel consultation and automated follow-up with human oversight.	Tulungagung: build dashboard linking content to applications. Malang: deepen segmentation and cohort analysis.
18–36 months	Tulungagung: formalize continuous learning and budget alignment. Malang: institutionalize innovation review and cross-faculty governance.	Tulungagung: expand targeted regional and national campaigns after process stabilization. Malang: scale national/international campaigns with consistent service.	Both: connect applicant, enrollment, satisfaction, retention, and alumni data for longitudinal evaluation.

Source: Authors' managerial synthesis, 2026.

DISCUSSION

4.1. Strategic Marketing as Institutional Governance

This research reveals that strategic marketing at Islamic universities is almost as much a challenge as governance. The differences between universities cannot be explained solely by the number of their social media accounts, their general activities, or the content they provide. Rather, these differences reflect the definition of responsibilities, the sharing of information, the coordination of messages, services for prospective students, and the evaluation of results. Consequently, marketing capabilities are not entirely determined by tools or techniques, but by organisational design.

This conclusion is consistent with research linking strategic leadership to digital transformation in educational institutions. For digital change to be effective, a strong digital culture and a high degree of adaptability are required. This is where the role of leaders becomes crucial. They build this culture whilst simultaneously preparing the institution to cope with technological shifts. Thus, digital capability does not arise solely from the implementation of technology. It grows out of managerial commitment, organisational readiness and aligned institutional processes.²⁴

Social media marketing in higher education has become clearer in light of these findings. Social media marketing in higher education encompasses engagement, branding, enrolment decisions, relationship management and strategic marketing. The two state Islamic universities studied demonstrate that all aspects of social media marketing in higher education must be linked through governance mechanisms. These governance mechanisms require coordinated ownership, verified data, responsive services, and continuous evaluation throughout the prospective student's

²⁴ Endrik Sugianto and Ibrahim Bafadal, "STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS" 7, no. 3 (2026).

journey. Social media marketing in higher education is truly meaningful when supported by robust institutional processes.²⁵

A brand's value is shaped by consistent collaboration across the entire institution, not merely by its outward appearance. If the faculties, the admissions office, the public relations department, student services and the alumni association all speak for themselves, they may create an incomplete impression and give rise to differing expectations. Good management helps to ensure that the institution's core identity remains clear, whilst allowing faculties and degree programmes to highlight the differences that genuinely exist.²⁶

At UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, the management must establish a formal body that brings together the various units within the institution. A dedicated team and a coordination forum should define the institution's core values and ensure that the information provided is consistent. Furthermore, they must clearly specify which unit is responsible for each stage of the prospective student admissions process, whilst ensuring that any queries raised by prospective students reach the appropriate person. There must be representation from the academic department, alongside the faculty. This is because the qualifications for each study programme cannot be communicated clearly without the direct involvement of faculty members.

For UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, management has a different focus. Universities have broader communication channels and a stronger organisational structure. However, the main challenge is to prevent communication and governance from becoming fragmented amidst a large operational scale. To this end, brand governance must clearly define the elements that remain

²⁵ Pawar, "Social Media in Higher Education Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda."

²⁶ Krzysztof Błoński and Jolanta Witek, "Marketing of Higher Education Institutions: Research Themes and Their Shifting Relevance over Time," *Marketing of Scientific and Research Organizations* 55, no. 1 (March 1, 2025): 69–89, doi:10.2478/minib-2025-0005.

consistent across the entire university. These elements include Islamic identity, academic standards, key institutional commitments, visual identity and service expectations.

All of these must be consistent across the institution. On the other hand, there are also elements that faculties can adapt to suit specific audiences. This flexibility is essential to ensure that communication remains relevant and effective at faculty level. However, this flexibility must remain within the framework of robust brand governance. This distinction supports both coherence and relevance.

Governance must also include accountable measurement. Recent capability research in higher education treats results management, stakeholder management, media capability, organizational management, market understanding, and continuous learning as interdependent digital-marketing capabilities. This supports a move from activity metrics to decision-linked indicators: a content calendar needs an accountable owner, and a dashboard needs a review rule that triggers action when response time, inquiry progression, or application completion weakens.²⁷

4.2. Product Strategy and the Institutional Value Proposition

The 4P analysis defines an educational product as more than a list of study programs. Prospective students consider a broad package that includes curriculum relevance, lecturer quality, facilities, student activities, religious environment, international exposure, community involvement, graduate prospects, administrative reliability, and opportunities for personal development. In a sound product strategy, every element of the educational institution can work in a coordinated manner to set it apart from other educational providers.

²⁷ Peter C. Verhoef et al., "Digital Transformation: A Multidisciplinary Reflection and Research Agenda," *Journal of Business Research* 122 (January 1, 2021): 889–901, doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022.

For UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, the narrative of its most distinctive offering emphasises accessibility, regional relevance, Islamic identity, community ties, and the expansion of access to education. Local relevance should serve as a strengthening factor: the institution's relationships with schools, communities, religious organisations, local government and local industry stakeholders can be utilised to aid contextualisation, community service and social improvement. Marketing must ensure that these relationships are translated into tangible and credible outcomes.

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang highlights the variety of its programmes, facilities, multilingualism and level of engagement at the national level through narratives centred on its flagship offerings. However, a potential risk arises when a diverse portfolio leads to the communication becoming so broad that the message loses its focus. For example, whilst each faculty may develop its own proposition, these propositions must still reflect the collective identity of the institution as a whole. Prospective students must be able to understand the key characteristics of the university as a whole, whilst also recognising the unique features of the specific educational programmes they are considering.

Scientific studies on brand attachment have revealed that the meaning or significance of a brand influences satisfaction, trust, commitment and the brand's value. In real life, students do not simply want information about something; they actually need something that encourages them to identify emotionally with a place. Islamic universities can achieve this through a genuine connection between knowledge, spirituality, social responsibility and employability. However, it is not enough to merely envisage all these aspects through slogans alone; they must also be understood in detail through the programmes and activities of the teaching staff, as well as the university's services to the wider community.

Indeed, the experiences of the university's graduates can serve as a testament to the institution's uniqueness.²⁸

A stronger product strategy requires verifiable evidence and builds on the article's ideas about brand equity and service quality. Prospective students assess quality through both institutional messages and evidence they can examine. Program pages should support claims with facts about curriculum structure, accreditation, learning facilities, lecturers' expertise, student projects, internship opportunities, graduate destinations, and pathways for further study. If this information is unavailable, the issue is not promotion but governance: the institution must first establish the systems needed to provide it before making stronger claims in the market.

4.3. Price, Accessibility, and Perceived Value

In the world of education, price has financial, informational and psychological dimensions. Even if the cost of education appears affordable, students may still perceive a high level of risk. This perception can arise when information about scholarships is unclear, there are unknown additional costs, the payment process is difficult to understand, or the relationship between cost and educational value is not explained. Therefore, pricing strategies must focus on clarity and the provision of guidance, rather than simply setting a low price.

As affordability can be leveraged as a strategic advantage, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung will be able to benefit families living both locally and in the surrounding areas. However, the concept of affordability should not be presented merely as 'low prices', as this approach risks reinforcing the public perception that low prices necessarily equate to low-quality services. The promotional messages conveyed to the public should emphasise the value that will be provided, namely the quality of

²⁸ Charles Dennis et al., "The Role of Brand Attachment Strength in Higher Education," *Journal of Business Research* 69, no. 8 (August 1, 2016): 3049–57, doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.020.

service, infrastructure, support for student development, partnerships with the community, and the availability of various forms of assistance.

Nowadays, information regarding scholarships and payment schemes should be included directly on the degree programme pages and the new student admissions pages, rather than in a multitude of separate announcements, which can confuse prospective students and cause them to lose focus. This speeds up and simplifies the new student admissions process. With its strong reputation, coupled with a wealth of facilities that reflect the institution's identity, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang possesses exceptional appeal.

To communicate the tuition-related costs that prospective students will incur at the institution, the UIN rectorate must present information on scholarships, subsidies and other forms of financial support in a straightforward and concise manner. This can help improve students' perception that the relatively high cost of tuition fees can be offset by various forms of assistance and direct support from the institution.

Essentially, for some students, the decisive factors—aside from the tuition fees themselves—are the certainty of the cost estimates and the assurance that support from the institution will always be available. Therefore, the university needs to present these matters clearly and in an easily understandable manner, taking into account students' needs for transparency and cost-saving.

On average, students are not particularly concerned with all the details regarding costs, but they are very concerned about whether their tuition fees will fit within their spending plans. Thus, by providing information transparently and offering various forms of assistance, the university can safeguard its reputation.

Relationship marketing is crucial because those dealing with financial matters can be a key factor in building trust. Students wishing to study at a university, along with their families, are likely to have several discussions with university staff before making a

major educational decision. Prompt support, transparent explanations and empathetic responses not only address their concerns but also help to build a good relationship.

Two universities can analyse recurring questions regarding tuition fees and identify the stages at which applicants withdraw their applications (dropout points). By identifying patterns in the application process, they can determine whether applicants perceive the fees as prohibitively high or simply do not fully understand the various types of tuition fees, scholarship deadlines, required documents or payment methods. Identifying these issues and providing applicants with more adequate information regarding the university's funding is a shared responsibility amongst the finance team, the admissions team, lecturers, counsellors and the communications team.

4.4. Place as an Omnichannel Admissions Journey

In the world of higher education, the concept of 'place' encompasses more than just the physical campus environment. 'Place' refers to all the points where prospective students can find and obtain information, as well as complete their enrolment. Around 60 per cent of students live off-campus, so they must complete the enrolment process remotely. Consequently, the organisation of digital spaces is one of the key factors that will either strengthen or weaken remote enrolment procedures. Websites, social media, instant messaging apps, secondary school connections, telephone information centres and various activities should function as part of an interconnected student support system. At Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah State Islamic University in Tulungagung, a key issue is the fragmentation of information: prospective students are highly likely to encounter multiple versions of information regarding study programmes, timetables and contact details across numerous online accounts.

As a concept, integration can take place without calling into question the existence of faculty channels, such as faculty websites and social media accounts. However, the institution will require a

single source of information that is easily accessible online by prospective students, which provides a general overview of the institution and the campus, and directs prospective students to the latest admissions information at relevant times. Faculty accounts can still disseminate various types of content, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the enrolment pathway. For example, Maulana Malik Idris Malik Ibrahim Islamic University in Malang has consolidated and integrated its various communication channels, demonstrating that this results in simpler operations. On the other hand, as an institution expands its capacity, the challenges it faces also change.

Applicants from both within and outside the country may prefer to receive information in different languages, at different times, and the support offered may also vary. Universities may open special admission channels for these groups without deviating from their own verified single information system. Prospective international students should be provided with specific guidance on language, documentation and payment matters, rather than simply being put through a process similar to that for local applicants.

Recent research into how prospective students make decisions reveals that social media is the primary channel for disseminating information about universities. Prospective students use social media to check a university's reputation, academic programmes, campus facilities and content shared by their peers. Recent research in higher education suggests that effective marketing involves linking marketing messages to authentic voices, whether from current students or alumni. Universities should ensure that digital content, testimonials and social media conversations are closely linked to academic information and responsive support services. In this way, universities can guide prospective students' journey and build trust.²⁹

²⁹ Agus Sriyanto, Purwanto, and Zaenal Muttaqin, "From Instagram to Campus: The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Students' Interest through

Omnichannel does indeed require consistency, and this applies here too. Enquiries received via social media need to be properly recorded or referred. The aim is to ensure that users do not have to repeat the same information to different departments. In fact, even a simple mechanism for channelling enquiries is enough to make the service feel more reliable. In the long term, both universities could develop a more integrated customer relationship management system (or, in this context, applicant relationship management), whilst maintaining data protection and human oversight.

4.5. Promotion, Content Strategy, and Audience Segmentation

Promotion is highly visible in marketing, but visibility alone does not guarantee strategic effectiveness. Effective promotion connects content to audience needs, institutional priorities, service capacity, and the admissions calendar, while using formats suited to each stage of the prospective-student journey: introducing institutional identity, explaining programs and outcomes, answering inquiries, guiding applications, and fostering belonging and advocacy after enrollment. For UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, the urgent priority is to establish a content system supported by quarterly and monthly calendars. These calendars can coordinate various elements such as themes, faculty contributions, student stories, new student admission deadlines, scholarship guidelines, and community engagement.

Each entry must include the target audience, objectives, content lead, publication channels, response lead, and performance indicators. In this way, content production becomes a repeatable management process, rather than merely a series of disjointed activities. individual posts. For UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, the priority is segmentation and personalization for audiences such as national students, international postgraduate students, scholarship seekers, and people interested in particular programs.

Messages can be adapted to audience needs without creating separate institutional identities, expressing the same central promise through relevant evidence and language. Research on university Facebook use indicates that content type, presentation, and engagement practices influence audience responses.

Institutions should therefore test and compare various formats, rather than assuming that posting more frequently is better, by evaluating videos, student-generated content, lecturers' explanations, virtual tours, live Q&A sessions and alumni stories in line with their objectives and target audiences.³⁰

Educational promotion must be guided by ethical safeguards and accurate, verifiable information. Accreditation must be up to date, graduates' employment outcomes verified, data authentic, facilities accurately represented, scholarship information correct, and academic results factual. Educational marketing must avoid deceptive tactics, artificial urgency and exaggerated promises. Credibility is paramount, and procedures must be in place to correct any inaccurate information published through any channel.

4.6. Brand Image, Service Quality, and Islamic Ethical Coherence

An institution's image is not shaped solely by its visual appearance and advertising. The quality of its services also shapes that image. Prospective applicants form their impressions through a range of experiences. For example, when they access the website, receive prompt replies, understand the information provided, interact with staff, complete the enrolment process, take a campus tour, and assess whether the institution's promises appear genuine. These experiences influence the extent to which an individual trusts the institution's statements about itself. The SERVQUAL model explains service quality through five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles.

³⁰ Paul Capriotti, José Carlos Losada-Díaz, and Rodolfo Martínez-Gras, "Evaluating the Content Strategy Developed by Universities on Social Media," *Profesional de La Informacion* 32, no. 2 (March 1, 2023), doi:10.3145/EPI.2023.MAR.10.

Although originally developed for the business sector, this model can also be used to assess admissions and information services. In this context, reliability means providing consistent information. Responsiveness means providing assistance promptly. Assurance encompasses the presence of knowledgeable and trustworthy staff. Empathy means understanding the different needs of each prospective applicant. Tangibles encompass the appearance and professionalism of the website, buildings, documents and services offered.³¹

UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung could use this metric to establish service standards across various channels. For example, setting response time standards for frequently asked questions, clear procedures for dealing with issues, and easy access to scholarship support could make the institution appear more professional. On the other hand, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang can use these metrics to monitor the consistency of service across various departments and a wider range of contact points.

Service quality management also needs to assess the gap between students' expectations and their actual experiences. Recent data from the education sector using the SERVQUAL method indicates a correlation between perceptions of service quality and student satisfaction levels. Aspects such as reliability, response speed, professionalism, empathy and physical facilities remain effective measures for identifying areas in need of improvement. For prospective students, this means that the promises made in promotional materials must be matched by the accuracy, speed and readiness of staff to assist, the ease of contacting the institution, and the quality of the service provided. When there are differences, between what's promised and what is

³¹ Valarie A. Zeithaml, and Leonard L. Berry A. Parasuraman, "SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality," *Journal of Retailing* 64, no. 1 (1988): 12–40.

delivered schools should fix both the way the service is done and the messages they send.³²

For PTKINs, ethical coherence adds another dimension: Islamic identity should be reflected in institutional communication through fairness, accuracy, inclusiveness and dignity. Transparent fees, respectful interaction, accessible information, protection of personal data and honest representation of academic quality are both service practices and expressions of institutional values. When upheld consistently, ethical coherence can become a source of trust.

4.7. Capacity-Building and Optimization as Different Development Stages

This two-stage model illustrates why a single, standardised checklist of best practices would not be suitable for both institutions. UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung should not rush to replicate the scale of a more advanced system. Before doing so, it needs to establish governance, reliable data, staff skills and integrated services. Expanding processes too early could actually increase inconsistencies. This institution's priority is to stabilise its foundations, set standards and highlight its existing strengths through a clear system.

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang already possesses the necessary resources and recognition. Consequently, simply adding more activities may yield only limited results or result in a less clear message. Its priorities are to improve coordination, segment its audience groups, utilise analytics, and boost conversion rates. This requires identifying which groups, messages, communication methods, and services best support the institution's objectives.

³² Meruyert Seitova et al., "Perceived Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: A Case Study at Khoja Akhmet Yassawi University, Kazakhstan," *Frontiers in Education* 9 (2024), doi:10.3389/feduc.2024.1492432.

Two-Stage Strategic Marketing Maturity Roadmap

 Dimension	 Capacity-Building – UIN Tulungagung	 Optimization – UIN Malang
 Governance	Define cross-unit authority, roles and SOPs	Strengthen faculty-level brand governance and accountability
 Content and Brand	Create one value proposition and a shared content calendar	Personalize content while preserving one coherent core message
 Data and Technology	Integrate admissions information and build a basic dashboard	Use deeper analytics, segmentation, and cohort comparison
 Prospective-student Service	Set response standards and clear referral paths	Build omnichannel consultation and systematic follow-up
 Evaluation and Learning	Track funnel indicators and review them routinely	Connect communication metrics with enrollment and service quality

Figure 3. Two-Stage Strategic Marketing Maturity Roadmap

Source: Authors' developmental roadmap based on the study findings, 2026.

Figure 3 breaks down these two stages into five components: governance; content and branding; data and technology; services for prospective pupils; and evaluation. This plan emphasises development and improvement that take place in a sequential manner. A school may be excellent at teaching, but it is not necessarily skilled at marketing. Conversely, a well-established school may also face difficulties in providing support to pupils or in terms of collaboration. Therefore, we need to assess whether each process is running smoothly and whether learning is taking place, rather than simply looking at how frequently promotional activities are carried out.

This text states that various skills need to be developed through a planned sequence. The first step is to establish clear rules and provide reliable information. Only then should we move on to more sophisticated computing tools. We need to start with basic indicators before utilising AI-based predictions. We must also ensure there is an appropriate response from the relevant parties before creating personalised messages for each individual. Following this sequence can prevent technology from undermining

existing working practices. Furthermore, this approach can also reduce the risk of data collection without a clear purpose.

4.8. Managerial Indicators and an Integrated Evaluation Dashboard

An integrated dashboard can link various aspects, ranging from communication and services, through to student admissions and quality metrics. The aim is not simply to maximise every figure. This dashboard helps answer specific questions. Reach and impressions show how many people have viewed the information. Engagement shows how they interact with that information. Inquiries received indicate interest. The number of completed enrolments tracks progress in the admissions process. The acceptance rate indicates whether applicants ultimately enrol. Retention and satisfaction reflect whether the institution is delivering on its promises.

Support from alumni demonstrates the strength of the relationships forged over time. UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung could begin with a set of practical metrics. For example, the number of visits to programme pages, enquiries received by contact method, average response times, the number of applications started and completed, frequently asked questions, interest in scholarships, and the regional origins of applicants. The main priority is the availability of reliable data and regular reviews, rather than the use of complex tools.

Each metric should aid decision-making, for example when changing content, rotating staff or simplifying forms. UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang could create a better dashboard to compare different groups, departments, campaigns, content types, responses to enquiries, and applicant categories. However, more in-depth analysis must not lead the university to prioritise quick results over student suitability or the principle of fairness. The aim is to improve communication and services, not merely to increase student numbers.

Evaluations must combine quantitative data with the first-hand experiences of those involved. Figures alone cannot explain why someone feels confused. Conversations alone, too, cannot reveal the scale of a problem. Brief surveys of students, records of enquiries received, analysis of the stage at which applicants drop out of the process, usability testing, content reviews, and feedback after students have enrolled can all be considered together. This combined evidence can support broader institutional marketing and development efforts.

Planning is best when the numbers used for marketing stay connected to the school's goals what is happening around them how to put things into action and checking regularly. Research about planning in education also says that what is happening inside and outside the school should become a long-term plan with things to do not something to report. For PTKIN the dashboard suggested here should act as a tool for making decisions. It should help leaders change what is important work, with parts of the school and use resources in ways that match the school's education and service goals.³³

4.9. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

In Islamic higher education the new results only partly agree with Riofita's proof that e Islamic marketing boosts the impact of an Islamic marketing mix on marketing performance.. This study points out another organizational requirement in public PTKIN: Islamic identity and digital promotion become trustworthy only when governance, admissions information, service responsiveness and cross unit data fit together well. This distinction is important because it shifts the focus from merely carrying out digital marketing activities to the organisation's capacity to ensure those activities continue to run smoothly.

³³ Berlian Nursyanti Mahardhika and Setya Raharja, "The Importance of Strategic Planning With Modern Trends in Education," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 2 (May 30, 2023): 1807–20, doi:10.35445/alishlah.v15i2.2527.

These findings indicate that the same marketing elements can yield different results, depending on the organisation's level of maturity. Product, price, place and promotion do not operate in isolation. These elements are implemented through governance, human resources, data and service processes. The proposed digital marketing maturity model for PTKIN (State Islamic Higher Education Institutions) consists of two stages. This model outlines development across five interconnected areas: governance, content and branding, data and technology, services for prospective students, and evaluation and learning. The capacity-building stage focuses on ownership, verified information, shared standards, core skills and baseline indicators.

The optimisation phase focuses on brand management across all units, advanced analytics, personalisation, cross-channel consistency and continuous learning. This model illustrates institutional development over time. It is not intended as a university ranking or a measure of academic quality. The study also offers a strategic cycle, a journey model, an action matrix and a maturity roadmap as interconnected practical tools. This cycle addresses management aspects. The 4P and SWOT tables explain values and context. The journey model illustrates service stages and bottlenecks. The action matrix sets out the sequence of steps. The roadmap determines institutional priorities. Overall, these tools facilitate the transition from campaign-based promotion to evidence-based management.

The study also shows the benefit of putting Islamic education management research next to global higher education marketing studies. Al Machturoh, Wiranata and Noviandari show how SWOT based school marketing works. Arianto Chamami and Muchith highlight leadership, implementation, competence, alumni participation and communication. Azizah, Harisatunisa and Mukhtar focus, on service quality, professionalism, alumni networks and unique programs. With recent digital marketing studies these works back the article's governance first view while

keeping the special institutional and ethical context of Islamic education.

4.10.Limitations and Future Research

This study contains four reporting and design limitations. First the submitted research package does not preserve a participant count, site-by-role distribution or documented member-checking procedure; these details should be restored from the original field log before resubmission Secondly, this study primarily draws on institutional reports and supporting documents. Thirdly, this study does not examine enrolment data, social media analytics, conversion rates or financial analysis. Fourthly, the proposed distinction between capacity-building and optimisation is a cross-case model, rather than a standard, tried-and-tested maturity scale. Nor do the findings of this study suggest that marketing activities alone cause changes in enrolment figures.

Prospective students' decisions are influenced by their interests, family considerations, location, financial aspects, reputation, peer influence, career expectations and the national admissions system. This study explains how strategic management can strengthen communication and services. Claims of cause and effect require long-term or experimental evidence.

In my view, this study should remain open and transparent. Further research could test the proposed models using a variety of methods. Interviews and focus groups could be combined with content analysis, website analytics, social media engagement, enquiry logs, enrolment trends, and surveys of prospective students. Researchers could examine which information needs and service experiences actually influence trust, the desire to enrol, the completion of the enrolment process, and ultimately, formal enrolment as a student. Subsequent research could also compare PTKINs (State Islamic Higher Education Institutions) based on region, institutional size and level of digital maturity. Proven maturity assessment tools can be used to evaluate governance, content coherence, data integration, service responsiveness, ethical

communication and evaluation capabilities. Research of this kind should not transform the model into a ranking system, but rather identify ways to implement improvements appropriate to the specific context.

Finally future studies should examine equity and ethics. Digital marketing may expand access. It can also exclude audiences with limited connectivity, disability-related needs, language barriers or low digital literacy. I feel that research should evaluate whether institutional information is accessible whether scholarship communication reaches groups and whether data driven segmentation is transparent and fair.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic digital marketing management at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang rests on foundations such as Islamic identity, academic value, affordability, accessibility, stakeholder networks and digital communication. Yet strategic digital marketing management differs in maturity. UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung is regarded as a model of capacity building that must prioritise cross-unit management. Information on student admissions needs to be integrated. Content standards, staff competencies, response protocols and key performance indicators must also be addressed. On the other hand, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang is regarded as a model of optimisation that must prioritise brand management across all faculties. Analytics need to be more in-depth. Personalisation for the audience, cross-channel consistency, and continuous service improvement must also be prioritised.

The main contribution of this study is a two-stage digital marketing maturity model integrated with an adaptable prospective student journey. The comparison carried out shows that the 4Ps marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) will only be effective if supported by strong governance. Advantages in terms of product and price may be undermined by fragmented

access and promotion. High visibility alone will not be sufficient to sustain interest if the information and services provided are unreliable. The recommended sequence of steps is to establish governance first. Subsequently, integrate data and develop staff capabilities. Finally, implement segmented communication, utilise analytics, and engage in continuous learning. For PTKINs, well-planned digital marketing must be able to convey the institution's quality without reducing the value of education to a mere commercial transaction.

Accuracy, transparency, fairness, rapid responsiveness, responsible data management practices, and alignment between the institution's promises and the student experience are ethical and managerial imperatives. Further research is needed to test this maturity model across various institutions. Research may utilise participant reports and samples, enrolment stage data (applicant funnel), digital engagement metrics, service quality assessments, and surveys of prospective students.

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