

INSTAGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AS A CREATIVE MEDIA TO INCREASE SCHOOL REACH AND IMAGE

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze Instagram social media management strategies as a creative medium to enhance the reach and image of SMA IT Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that successful school branding through Instagram is supported by three main aspects: content planning that is integrated with school programs, collaborative implementation involving teachers, students, and the foundation's media team, and routine evaluation based on Instagram Insight data. Instagram functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a collaborative space that strengthens student engagement, builds parental trust, and affirms the school's Islamic identity. The study concludes that structured, collaborative, and consistent social media management can serve as a strategic instrument to strengthen the image and competitiveness of educational institutions.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis strategi pengelolaan media sosial Instagram sebagai media kreatif untuk meningkatkan jangkauan dan citra SMA IT Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa branding sekolah yang sukses melalui Instagram didukung oleh tiga aspek utama: perencanaan konten yang terintegrasi dengan program sekolah, implementasi kolaboratif yang melibatkan guru, siswa, dan tim media yayasan, serta evaluasi rutin berdasarkan data Instagram Insight. Instagram tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat promosi, tetapi juga sebagai ruang kolaboratif yang memperkuat keterlibatan siswa, membangun kepercayaan orang tua, dan memperkuat identitas Islam sekolah. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pengelolaan media sosial yang terstruktur, kolaboratif, dan konsisten dapat berfungsi sebagai alat strategis untuk memperkuat citra dan daya saing lembaga pendidikan.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has brought significant changes in various fields, including education. One important aspect is the use of social media as a means of communication and promotion. Social media is not only used for personal interaction, but also as a strategic tool for educational institutions to expand their audience reach and build a positive image

of the school (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Among the various platforms, Instagram holds a significant important position due to its visual and interactive nature, as well as its popularity among school-age teenagers (Altamira et al., 2023).

In the context of education, the use of Instagram has evolved into a school branding strategy that emphasizes consistency in institutional identity and emotional closeness with the audience. *Brand Image Theory* (Keller, 2013) emphasises that a strong brand image can only be built through consistent messaging and sustained positive experiences. *Media Richness Theory* (Daft & Lengel, 1986) also explains that media that uses various forms of communication, such as text, images, audio, and video, will be more effective in conveying complex messages and reducing ambiguity. In line with this, the *Diffusion of Innovations Theory* (Rogers, 2003) asserts that the innovative use of social media can accelerate the adoption of information among students, parents, and the community, thereby expanding the reach of school messages. The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Instagram not only as a communication medium, but also as a strategic tool for expanding the reach of information while strengthening the school's image in the digital age.

Recent studies reinforce the urgency of using social media to play an important role in enhancing the appeal of educational institutions. Research by Altamira et al. (2023) confirms that creative and authentic content can increase audience engagement and loyalty. On the other hand, Tarigan et al. (2021) reveal that schools that actively use Instagram tend to have a more positive image and are better known by the public. Meanwhile, Adriani et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of consistent and authentic creative content to retain audiences and increase interaction.

However, several studies also highlight challenges in managing school social media, including limited human resources and the risk of uncontrolled communication (Elsayed et al., 2025). This situation highlights the gap between the enormous potential of social media and its management practices in schools. Therefore, more in-depth study is needed on how schools plan, implement, and evaluate their Instagram management strategies to support educational branding.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) describe the planning of school Instagram management, (2) analyse creative strategies in content implementation, and (3) identify forms of evaluation of the effectiveness of Instagram management at SMA IT Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich digital communication studies in education through the integration of branding, digital literacy, and engagement strategy perspectives. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a reference for other schools in optimising social media as a creative tool to increase reach, build a positive image, and strengthen the identity of Islamic educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach as it aims to provide an in-depth description of the Instagram social media management strategy at Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar Islamic Secondary School. This approach was chosen so that researchers could understand the phenomenon in context, particularly the school's digital branding practices involving teachers, students, and parents as key stakeholders.

This study was conducted at Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar Islamic Secondary School. The research subjects included the school media team, teachers, and students. The school media team was responsible for planning and managing Instagram. Teachers were involved in providing ideas, supervision, and integrating school activities into the content. Students participated as content creators and talents. Parents of students were the main external audience who provided their perceptions and assessments of the school's Instagram content. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in the production and consumption of the school's Instagram content.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with the media team, teachers, students, and parents; direct observation of production activities and Instagram content interactions; and documents from school media meetings. Secondary data was obtained from Instagram archives, Instagram insights, and school documents related to work programmes and media evaluation reports.

Data collection techniques used three methods, namely semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the roles, experiences, and views of the media team, teachers, students, and parents. Participatory observation was used to directly observe the process of producing and managing Instagram content. Documentation consists of Instagram content archives, insight data, upload schedules, and evaluation meeting notes. These techniques were chosen to obtain a comprehensive picture of the school's social media management strategy from various perspectives.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman (1994) model, which includes: (1) data reduction to select and summarise data from interviews, observations, and documentation, (2) data presentation in the form of narratives, engagement tables, and descriptions of findings, and (3) drawing conclusions to link findings with previous theories and research. Furthermore, data validity testing included: (1) source triangulation, comparing information from teachers, students, parents, and the media team, (2) technique triangulation, combining interviews, observations, and documentation, (3) member verification, confirming interview results with informants to ensure accuracy, (4) peer discussion, discussing initial findings with colleagues to ensure a more objective analysis.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary tool. The researcher acts as an observer and data collector, remaining involved without influencing the course of activities. This position allows researchers to understand the meaning

behind the school's digital branding practices holistically from both internal (teachers, students, media team) and external (parents) perspectives. Through these practical steps, the research aims to comprehensively describe the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating the management of the school's Instagram account in order to increase its reach and build a positive image.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that Instagram social media management at Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar Islamic Secondary School is carried out through three main aspects, namely planning, implementation, and evaluation. Research data was obtained through interviews with the media team, teachers, and students; direct observation of the management process; and documentation of uploaded archives and evaluation reports. The results show that the Instagram management strategy has been integrated with the school programme, involves multi-stakeholder participation, and has had an impact on improving the school's image and reach.

School Instagram Management Planning

Based on interviews with the school and foundation media teams, Instagram management is carried out through systematic planning. The main purpose of using Instagram is as a medium for school promotion and branding, especially to support New Student Admissions (PPDB) and New Student Selection (SPMB). The choice of the Instagram platform is based on the behaviour of the target audience, which is dominated by teenagers aged 13-24 years, making it suitable for reaching prospective students.

The media team developed a six-month content plan that was formalised through school working meetings, thereby gaining institutional legitimacy and enabling integration with the semester work programme. A structured content upload schedule was developed to ensure consistent and focused Instagram management. This schedule took into account audience behaviour, which tends to be most active in the afternoon and evening (4pm to 7pm). In addition, tasks are clearly divided between the school media team and the foundation media team to ensure continuity of publication. The types of content vary, including educational content, documentation of activities, interviews with outstanding students, and interactive content. A summary of the types of content and posting schedule can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Types of Content and Instagram Posting Schedule for Al-Hikmah IT High School

No	Day	Person in Charge	Upload Time	Main Content Type	Description
1	Monday	High School Media Team	4:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m	Educational	Learning information, academic tips, Islamic values
2	Tuesday	Foundation Media Team	4:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m	Activity documentation	School activities (student council, competitions, ceremonies, extracurricular activities)

3	Wednesday	High School Media Team	4:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m	Interviews with outstanding students	Profiles of inspiring students, academic or non-academic achievements
4	Thursday	Foundation Media Team	4:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m	Educational or documentary activities	Variations according to the school agenda
5	Saturday	Foundation Media Team	4:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m	Interactive content (puzzles, challenges)	Using viral music, popular hashtags.

Source: Processed data from interviews conducted by the Media Team of Al-Hikmah Islamic High School, 2025.

The media team also emphasised visual identity standards through the use of brand colours. This decision is outlined in the official guidelines effective from 18 December 2023, with instructions for all brochures and digital content to use the foundation's main logo colours. Instructions for colour usage were determined during the school media team's working meeting and are outlined in the content design guidelines. The following are the colour guidelines for the Instagram content of SMA IT Al-Hikmah Kota Blitar.

Figure 1 Guidelines for using the Al-Hikmah IT High School brand colors



Source: Documentation from the Media Team at Al-Hikmah Islamic High School

With these guidelines, each school's Instagram content design has strong visual consistency, thereby strengthening the institution's brand image in the eyes of its audience. This systematic planning not only maintains consistency in posting, but also builds the school's image as a professional institution that is adaptive to digital trends. Integrating the content plan with the school's agenda ensures that both academic and non-academic activities can be documented and published in a timely manner.

Content Creation and Uploading

The production process for SMA IT Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar's Instagram content is collaborative, involving teachers, students, and the foundation's media team. Teachers provide ideas and input related to content, while students participate as creators and talents. Meanwhile, the media team is responsible for the technical aspects of photography, editing, and uploading. This collaboration makes the school's Instagram not only a publication medium but also a creative learning space that develops students' digital literacy skills.

The content produced is very diverse, ranging from feeds and stories to reels, and utilises digital trends such as viral music and popular hashtags. Documentation

of school activities, such as guest receptions, night explorations, student council activities, and competitions, is the dominant type of content. Additionally, there is educational content (e.g., interviews with high-achieving students, information about universities), interactive content (digital puzzles), and simple entertainment content tailored to the preferences and interests of young audiences.

The Instagram feed shown in Figure 2 reflects the diversity of educational content, activity documentation, and interactive content that is published consistently. This illustration shows that the school has successfully maintained aesthetic consistency, brand colour suitability, and content relevance to the audience's interests.

Figure 2 The Instagram feed of SMA IT Al-Hikmah



Source: Screenshot taken from the @smaitalhikmah_bltar account, September 29, 2025.

Student involvement in content management has been proven to provide added value. They are not only the subjects of the content, but also creators who contribute directly. This strengthens their sense of belonging to the school while developing 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy.

Audience Engagement and Interaction Strategies

Interview results and Instagram Insight data show that the engagement strategy focuses on content performance. Content with high engagement rates, such as puzzles, is prioritised for more frequent display, while educational content is uploaded about twice a week. In addition, the media team utilises engagement techniques in the form of hashtags. Hashtags are selected selectively to be relevant to the target audience, both internal and external. For internal content, the school uses identity hashtags such as #smaitalhikmah, #alhikmahbenceblitar, and

#sekolahislamterpadu to strengthen the school's brand. Meanwhile, for public content aimed at reaching a wider audience, popular hashtags such as #boardingschool, #blitarhits, and #sekolahblitar are added.

The use of this hashtag combination has proven effective in increasing post visibility. Based on Instagram Insight data, content that uses popular hashtags shows a wider reach, while school identity hashtags help maintain branding consistency. This strategy emphasises the importance of maximising the use of digital media features to reduce communication ambiguity and strengthen audience engagement.

In addition to using hashtags, another strategy that has proven effective is the use of viral music in Instagram content. The media team consistently tailors reels and stories to songs or audio that are popular among teenagers. This is done to increase the visual and emotional appeal of the content, so that students feel more connected to the published material.

The school also maximises its collaboration strategy and reposts content from students, the student council, and extracurricular journalism activities. Student involvement is not limited to those who are talented, but also includes creators who generate ideas, photos, and videos. Content originating from students is then reposted by the school's official account to expand its reach and foster a sense of community. This collaborative practice transforms the school's Instagram account into not only a promotional tool but also a space for expression and participation for the entire school community.

To obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of social media strategies, this study analysed Instagram Insight data from the official account of SMA IT Al Hikmah Bence Blitar for the period from 30 August to 28 September. Insight data provides quantitative information on the number of views, interactions, follower growth, and consistency of content publication. This analysis aims to evaluate the extent to which published content is able to reach audiences, encourage interaction, and support the school's branding efforts in the digital space.

Table 3 Main Data from Instagram Insights for Al Hikmah Bence Blitar High School

No	Indicator	Amount	Analysis
1	Views (Reach/Impressions)	35.500	High number of views, indicating that the content successfully reached a large audience.
2	Interactions	966	Engagement rate of approximately 2.7% of total views, which is quite good for an educational institution account.
3	New Followers	20	Follower growth is still low, indicating that many audiences viewed the content but did not follow the account.
4	Shared Content	63	High publication consistency with an average of 2 posts per day.

Source: Instagram Insight data from Al Hikmah Bence Blitar High School, processed by researchers (2025).

Based on Instagram Insight results for the period from 30 August to 28

September, the official account of SMA IT Al Hikmah Bence Blitar recorded significant achievements. The number of views (reach or impressions) was recorded at 35.5 thousand. This figure shows that the published content successfully reached a wide audience, so it can be concluded that the visibility of this account is relatively high for an educational institution account.

In terms of interaction, there were 966 interactions (including likes, comments, shares, and saves). Compared to the total number of views, the interaction rate reached around 2.7%. This percentage can be categorised as quite good, considering that school accounts generally have a relatively limited audience, namely students, parents, and the surrounding community. This shows that the audience is interested in the content published. However, there were only 20 new followers during this period. This shows that although the content reached many users, not all of them became new followers. Therefore, the strategy to increase the conversion rate from views to followers still needs to be optimised.

In terms of publication consistency, the school account shared 63 pieces of content during the analysis period, with an average of two posts per day. This frequency demonstrates good consistency in maintaining the school's digital activity. Regular publication has the potential to maintain the account's presence on the audience's timeline while strengthening the institution's image as a school that actively utilises social media. This data shows that interactive content has a higher reach and engagement rate among students, while content documenting school activities attracts more attention from parents and alumni. Therefore, the application of a content differentiation strategy based on audience segments has proven to be important in strengthening the school's image in the digital space.

Regular Evaluation and Management Documentation

The evaluation of the management of SMA IT Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar's Instagram account is carried out regularly every week by the school and foundation's media team. This evaluation focuses on several important aspects, namely consistency in posting schedules, the suitability of content with predetermined plans, and analysis of Instagram Insight data, including reach, interaction, and audience growth. Through this evaluation, follow-up actions are taken in the form of rescheduling content, improving coordination between team members, and selecting posting formats that are considered more in line with trends and audience preferences.

Figure 5. Coordination Meeting of the Media Team at Al-Hikmah Islamic High School



Source: Documentation by the Media Team of Al Hikmah High School, 2025.

The main obstacles in managing social media are delays in the delivery of material from teachers and students, as well as overlapping posting schedules. These issues are overcome through more intensive coordination via regular briefings, both in person and through internal communication groups. In this way, technical obstacles can be minimised so that the content publication process remains consistent.

The achievement indicators used include the number of post viewers, audience engagement levels, and active student participation in content production. The evaluation results show that although interaction in the form of comments is still limited, achievements in the form of an increase in the number of viewers and student engagement can be categorised as indicators of successful management. This also shows that Instagram not only functions as a medium of information, but also as a means of learning and strengthening the school's identity.

In addition, documentation of school activities is also distributed through the parents' WhatsApp group. This integration strengthens Instagram's function as part of a broader school communication ecosystem. Thus, the school's social media does not stand alone but is connected to other communication channels to build transparency, expand the reach of information, and increase parental involvement in educational activities

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Instagram social media management at SMA IT Al-Hikmah Bence Blitar is carried out with systematic planning, collaborative implementation, and routine evaluation. A six-month content plan integrated with the school programme and structured distribution of posting tasks strengthen the consistency of publications. This strategy is in line with Keller's (2013) view that message consistency is key to building a strong brand image, while also supporting the school's position as an integrated Islamic educational institution that is adaptive to the digital era.

The role of teachers in managing Instagram is not limited to their role as

educators, but also as branding agents who provide ideas and support content production. This is in line with the concept of teachers as digital agents, which emphasises the contribution of teachers in digital literacy education (Altamira et al., 2023). On the other hand, students actively participate in taking pictures, editing, and creative ideas, although their interactions through comments and sharing are still limited. These findings are in line with Harendita et al. (2025), which states that student involvement in digital content production can enhance the learning experience while strengthening the institution's image. Therefore, Instagram not only serves as a promotional tool, but also as a collaborative learning space that develops 21st-century skills.

From a communication perspective, Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) explains that media capable of displaying various forms of information will be more effective in reducing communication ambiguity. This can be seen from the use of images, videos, reels, and stories on Instagram, which enrich communication between schools and their audiences. Meanwhile, the adoption of Instagram by teachers and students reflects the principle of Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003), which is a social process in the dissemination of new technologies that accelerate the flow of information and strengthen the connectivity of school communities.

In addition to internal involvement, the role of parents is also important in building trust in schools. Consistency in posting activities and achievements strengthens institutional transparency, although some parents hope that the content highlights non-academic successes such as religious discipline, honesty, and morals. This view is in line with Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), which emphasises that authentic content increases audience loyalty, and Wilczyński et al. (2025), which shows that the level of audience trust in digital content greatly determines the effectiveness of educational communication. This indicates that digital branding must balance academic achievement with character education.

From a branding strategy perspective, this study is in line with the study by Çekirdekci & Ahmed (2025), which found that Instagram can strengthen brand engagement of educational institutions in a multistakeholder environment. The findings of Prayoga et al. (2025) at SMA Negeri 1 Pangandaran also demonstrated that digital marketing strategies through social media can enhance the image of secondary schools. However, unlike the context of the Islamic-based SMA IT Al-Hikmah, the use of Instagram not only emphasises image building but also serves as a means to showcase Islamic values through creative content. This is in line with Chamidi et al. (2025), which emphasises that digital transformation can enhance competitiveness while maintaining the religious identity of educational institutions.

The main challenge in managing Instagram is the limited interaction of students through comments and internal coordination constraints. This condition is in line with the findings of Elsayed et al. (2025), which show that the lack of active user participation in digital interactions can hinder the effectiveness of communication strategies. As a solution, Fauzi (2025) emphasises that the use of

digital technology, such as artificial intelligence, can enhance the effectiveness of educational branding strategies through audience preference analysis. Meanwhile, Yao (2025), emphasises the importance of systematically using audience data to support more targeted strategic decision-making.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of brand image theory, media wealth, and innovation diffusion in the context of digital-based Islamic education. In practical terms, these findings prove that systematic, participatory, and data-driven management of Instagram can enhance a school's appeal, build a positive image, and expand the reach of Islamic educational institutions. This is in line with the opinion of Istiqomah et al. (2025), that well-planned school branding can strengthen competitiveness and public trust.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses on only one school, so the findings cannot be widely generalised. Second, the relatively short research period did not allow for a long-term analysis of the impact of digital branding. Third, audience engagement in the form of comments and direct interaction was still limited, so it did not fully reflect the level of participation of the school community. These limitations open up opportunities for further research comparing different schools or over a longer period of time.

As a follow-up, school institutions need to implement clear social media usage policies, provide education on digital ethics and safety for the entire school community, and address the digital divide so that all students can participate optimally (Singarimbun, 2023). Further research is recommended to examine the impact of social media use not only on school branding but also on academic engagement, character building, and the development of students' soft skills in an Islamic educational environment.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the success of school branding through Instagram is largely determined by structured management, including targeted content planning, implementation that involves all stakeholders, and continuous routine evaluation. School social media management has proven to be an integral part of educational institutions' differentiation strategies in the digital age. With collaborative and consistent management, social media can serve as a strategic instrument to strengthen identity, increase competitiveness, and expand the school's reach. As a follow-up, schools need to adopt similar practices with adjustments to their respective characteristics, particularly in combining academic, non-academic, and Islamic values in digital content. Further research is recommended to examine more deeply the influence of social media use not only on the formation of school image, but also on academic engagement, character building, and the development of students' soft skills in the era of digital transformation.

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