

Optimization of Instagram-Based Digital Marketing Strategies in Educational Institutions: A Case Study at SMP EDU Global School Bandung

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan pesat teknologi digital telah mendorong lembaga pendidikan untuk mengadopsi strategi pemasaran digital guna meningkatkan branding dan menarik calon peserta didik. Platform media sosial, khususnya Instagram, telah menjadi alat komunikasi yang penting dalam kegiatan pemasaran pendidikan karena jangkauannya yang luas serta fitur-fiturnya yang interaktif. Namun, menjaga keterlibatan audiens (audience engagement) dan menyampaikan konten promosi yang efektif masih menjadi tantangan utama bagi banyak institusi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi strategi pemasaran digital berbasis Instagram di SMP EDU Global School Bandung serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi keterlibatan audiens. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung, partisipasi selama program magang selama 10 bulan, dokumentasi, serta analisis aktivitas pemasaran digital yang dilakukan oleh institusi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat beberapa tantangan yang memengaruhi keterlibatan audiens di media sosial, di antaranya perencanaan konten yang belum konsisten, variasi format konten yang terbatas, serta jadwal unggahan yang belum optimal. Untuk mengatasi permasalahan tersebut, dilakukan berbagai perbaikan melalui peningkatan penggunaan konten berbasis video, penerapan strategi storytelling, koordinasi yang lebih terstruktur, serta pengembangan konten yang berorientasi pada audiens. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemasaran digital yang efektif di lembaga pendidikan memerlukan perencanaan strategis, pengelolaan konten yang kreatif, serta evaluasi berkelanjutan terhadap perilaku audiens. Selain itu, integrasi antara strategi komunikasi daring (online) dan luring (offline) memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dalam memperkuat branding institusi serta meningkatkan efektivitas kegiatan promosi.

Kata Kunci: Pemasaran Digital, Pemasaran Instagram, Keterlibatan Media Sosial, Pemasaran Pendidikan, Rekrutmen Peserta Didik

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology has encouraged educational institutions to adopt digital marketing strategies to improve branding and attract prospective students. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become important communication tools in educational marketing activities due to their wide reach and interactive features. However, maintaining audience engagement and delivering effective promotional content remain major challenges for many institutions. This study aims to analyze the implementation of Instagram-based digital marketing strategies at SMP EDU Global School Bandung and identify factors affecting audience engagement. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach. Data were collected through direct observation, participation during a 10-month internship program, documentation, and analysis of digital marketing activities conducted by the institution. The findings revealed that several challenges affected social media engagement, including inconsistent content planning, limited variation in content formats, and non-optimal posting schedules. To address these issues, improvements were implemented through the increased use of video-based content, storytelling strategies, more structured coordination, and audience-oriented content development. The study concludes that effective digital marketing in educational institutions requires strategic planning, creative content management, and continuous evaluation of audience behavior. Furthermore, integrating online and offline communication strategies contributes significantly to strengthening institutional branding and improving promotional effectiveness.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Instagram Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Educational Marketing, Student Recruitment

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of information technology and digital communication has significantly transformed marketing practices across various sectors, including education. Educational institutions are increasingly utilizing digital platforms to strengthen institutional branding, improve communication, and attract prospective students. Social media has become one of the most influential digital marketing tools because it enables institutions to reach broader audiences efficiently and interact directly with the public in real time.

Among various social media platforms, Instagram has become one of the most widely used platforms for digital promotion due to its visual-based communication features, interactive content formats, and high user engagement. Digital marketing allows organizations to create stronger customer relationships through personalized and interactive communication strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the educational sector, Instagram is commonly used to promote school activities, achievements, events, and institutional identity in order to increase public awareness and attract prospective students.

However, the implementation of digital marketing strategies in educational institutions is not always fully effective. Previous studies have widely discussed digital marketing practices in higher education institutions and commercial organizations, while limited research specifically examines Instagram engagement strategies within junior high school educational institutions in Indonesia. Furthermore, many educational institutions still face challenges in optimizing audience interaction despite consistently utilizing social media platforms for promotional purposes. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing digital marketing implementation and engagement optimization strategies within a junior high school institution context. Many institutions face challenges in maintaining audience engagement, creating attractive content, and optimizing communication strategies. Although content may be consistently published, low interaction rates such as limited likes, comments, shares, and audience participation indicate that marketing efforts may not effectively reach the target audience.

This issue was observed during the implementation of a Study Completion Program (Internship Track I-II) at SMP EDU Global School, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The institution actively utilized Instagram as a primary promotional platform to support student recruitment and branding activities. However, several challenges related to audience engagement and content optimization were identified during the internship period. Some promotional content did not achieve optimal interaction levels despite regular posting activities.

Several factors contributed to this condition, including inconsistent content planning, limited variation in content formats, and ineffective posting schedules. In addition, communication strategies during promotional events required more structured and persuasive messaging to clearly deliver the institution's value proposition to prospective students and parents.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Instagram-based digital marketing strategies at SMP EDU Global School Bandung and identify factors influencing social media engagement. This study also examines several improvement strategies implemented to optimize digital marketing effectiveness within the institution.

The results of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study contributes to discussions regarding digital marketing implementation in educational institutions. Practically, the findings may provide recommendations for schools and educational organizations in developing more effective social media marketing strategies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative reflective case study approach to examine the implementation of Instagram-based digital marketing strategies at SMP EDU Global School Bandung during the author's professional internship placement. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of organizational practices, communication processes, and marketing activities within their natural setting. The reflective case study method was selected because the researcher was directly involved in the planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of digital marketing activities throughout the internship period, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of both operational challenges and professional learning experiences.

The study focused on a single embedded case, namely the implementation of digital marketing activities within the Marketing Unit of SMP EDU Global School Bandung. The internship was conducted as part of the Study Completion Program (Internship Track I–II) of the Bachelor of Management Program at Nusa Putra University, Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia. The placement lasted for ten months, from June 2025 to May 2026, providing sufficient time to observe marketing activities, participate in institutional promotional programs, and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented communication strategies over an extended period.

The primary subject of this study was the institution's Instagram-based marketing activities, which served as one of the main communication channels used to promote educational programs, student achievements, school events, and institutional branding initiatives. Particular attention was given to audience engagement, content development processes, communication effectiveness, and promotional strategies aimed at strengthening institutional visibility and supporting student recruitment objectives.

Data collection was conducted through continuous observation, documentation review, and direct participation in organizational activities. Observation involved monitoring daily marketing operations, content creation processes, audience interactions, and promotional campaigns conducted through Instagram. Documentation included the collection and examination of social media content, promotional materials, event documentation, content planning records, audience engagement statistics, and institutional marketing reports generated during the internship period. Participation experience constituted an important source of data because the researcher was actively involved in content development, social media management, event promotion, and communication with prospective students and parents.

The analytical framework of this study was grounded in three major theoretical perspectives. First, digital marketing theory was used to examine how digital technologies and online communication platforms support organizational marketing objectives. Second, customer engagement theory was utilized to understand audience interaction patterns and the factors influencing engagement performance. Third, content marketing theory was applied to evaluate the effectiveness of different content formats, storytelling approaches, and communication strategies implemented throughout the internship period.

The process of analysis consisted of three stages. First, significant marketing activities, recurring challenges, and notable observations were identified and documented based on professional experiences and organizational records. Second, these experiences were critically analyzed using the selected theoretical frameworks to determine how various factors influenced audience engagement and promotional effectiveness. Third, the findings were interpreted within the

broader context of digital marketing literature to establish connections between practical experiences and existing academic knowledge.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, this study employed methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained through observation, documentation, and direct participation experiences. Continuous observation throughout the ten-month internship period enabled the identification of recurring patterns and strengthened the consistency of findings. In addition, documentation verification was conducted by reviewing promotional materials, Instagram content records, and institutional reports to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected actual marketing practices implemented by SMP EDU Global School Bandung.

This study operates under the assumption that reflective professional experiences, when supported by verifiable organizational records and interpreted through established theoretical frameworks, can provide meaningful insights into the practical implementation of digital marketing strategies within educational institutions. As a single-case study, the findings are context-specific and intended to provide analytical understanding rather than statistical generalization. Nevertheless, the results offer valuable implications for educational institutions seeking to optimize social media marketing strategies and improve audience engagement through digital communication platforms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the implementation of Instagram-based digital marketing strategies at SMP EDU Global School Bandung, identify challenges affecting audience engagement, and evaluate the effectiveness of improvement strategies implemented during the internship period. The findings indicate that successful digital marketing within educational institutions requires a combination of strategic planning, audience-centered communication, content innovation, and continuous performance evaluation.

Throughout the ten-month internship period, the researcher participated in a wide range of marketing activities, including social media management, content creation, promotional campaign development, event documentation, audience communication, and student recruitment support. These responsibilities provided valuable opportunities to observe how theoretical marketing concepts were translated into practical organizational activities.

Table 1. Summary of Internship Activities and Outputs at SMP EDU Global School Bandung

Activity	Tools Used	Professional Outputs
Instagram Content Management	Instagram Business, Canva	Promotional and branding content published regularly
Event Documentation	Camera, Canva, Google Drive	School activities documented and promoted through social media
Student Recruitment Promotion	Instagram, WhatsApp Business, Open booth, Open House	Information dissemination to prospective students and parents
Content Creation	Canva, CapCut	Reels, posters, promotional videos, and educational content
Audience Communication	Instagram Direct Message, WhatsApp Business	Responses to inquiries from prospective students and parents

The activities summarized in Table 1 demonstrate that digital marketing within educational institutions extends beyond simple promotional communication. It encompasses branding,

stakeholder engagement, information dissemination, and relationship-building activities aimed at strengthening institutional reputation and attracting prospective students.

One of the most significant findings observed during the internship involved variations in audience engagement across different content formats. Although the institution consistently utilized Instagram as its primary promotional platform, engagement levels varied substantially depending on the nature of the published content. Posts containing dynamic visual elements, particularly short-form videos and Instagram Reels, generally generated higher interaction rates than traditional static image posts.

Table 2. Content Types and Audience Engagement Trends

Content Type	Characteristics	Audience Response
Instagram Reels	Short-form video promotional content	High engagement
Static Image Posts	Informational and promotional visuals	Moderate engagement
Event Documentation	School activities and exhibitions	Good interaction
Student Achievement Posts	Academic and non-academic accomplishments	Positive audience response
Interactive Stories	Polls, questions, quizzes, and audience interaction	Increased participation

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that audiences increasingly prefer interactive and visually engaging content formats. This observation aligns with contemporary digital marketing literature, which emphasizes the growing importance of video-based content in attracting audience attention and increasing engagement levels. Instagram Reels were particularly effective because they allowed the institution to communicate information in a concise, visually appealing, and algorithm-friendly format.

A second important finding concerned the role of content planning in maintaining engagement consistency. During the early stages of the internship, content production was often driven by immediate organizational needs rather than long-term strategic planning. As a result, posting schedules occasionally lacked consistency, and some content failed to achieve optimal audience reach. Through continuous observation and evaluation, it became evident that the absence of a structured content calendar reduced opportunities for strategic campaign development and limited the institution's ability to maintain sustained audience interest.

To address this issue, content planning procedures were gradually improved through the development of more organized content schedules. This adjustment enabled better coordination among marketing personnel, teachers, and administrative staff while ensuring that promotional materials aligned with institutional objectives and audience expectations.

Another challenge involved limited content diversification. Initially, most promotional materials relied heavily on static images accompanied by informational captions. While these posts effectively conveyed information, they were less successful in generating audience interaction compared to interactive content formats. Consequently, greater emphasis was placed on producing short-form videos, behind-the-scenes content, student testimonials, and event highlights.

The incorporation of storytelling strategies emerged as one of the most effective approaches implemented during the internship period. Rather than focusing exclusively on institutional information, content increasingly highlighted student experiences, academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and school events. This shift enabled audiences to establish stronger emotional connections with the institution and contributed to increased engagement levels.

Storytelling-based content was particularly effective because it transformed promotional communication into relatable narratives that resonated with prospective students and parents.

Furthermore, the study revealed the importance of audience-oriented communication during student recruitment activities. While the institution possessed numerous strengths, these advantages were not always communicated effectively in promotional messages. Through continuous refinement of communication strategies, marketing content became more focused on highlighting unique institutional values, educational benefits, and student development opportunities. This adjustment improved message clarity and enhanced the persuasive impact of promotional communication.

The findings also demonstrate the practical application of management functions within digital marketing activities. Planning was reflected in content scheduling and campaign development. Organizing involved coordinating resources and responsibilities among marketing personnel and other institutional stakeholders. Controlling was evident through performance monitoring and evaluation activities aimed at improving engagement outcomes. These management functions collectively contributed to the effectiveness of digital marketing implementation within the institution.



Figure 1. Illustrates the continuous improvement cycle observed during the implementation of Instagram marketing activities.

The cycle demonstrates that effective digital marketing is not a one-time activity but an ongoing process of evaluation, adaptation, and refinement. Through repeated observation and strategic adjustments, marketing activities became increasingly aligned with audience preferences and platform trends.

Beyond organizational outcomes, the internship experience also contributed significantly to the researcher's professional development. Direct involvement in digital marketing activities enhanced competencies related to content creation, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and audience analysis. More importantly, the internship provided practical insights into the challenges of managing institutional branding within highly competitive digital environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that successful Instagram-based marketing within educational institutions requires more than regular content publication. Effective digital marketing depends on strategic planning, content diversification, audience understanding, interactive communication, and continuous performance evaluation. Educational institutions that successfully integrate these elements are better positioned to strengthen institutional branding, improve audience engagement, and support student recruitment objectives in increasingly digitalized communication environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of Instagram-based digital marketing strategies at SMP EDU Global School Bandung during a ten-month internship placement within the institution's Marketing Unit. The findings demonstrate that digital marketing has become an essential component of educational marketing, enabling institutions to strengthen branding, improve communication with stakeholders, and support student recruitment activities through digital platforms.

The study identified several challenges affecting audience engagement, including inconsistent content planning, limited diversification of content formats, and posting schedules that were not always aligned with audience activity patterns. These challenges influenced the visibility and effectiveness of promotional content published through Instagram. Furthermore, the findings revealed that informational content alone was insufficient to maintain sustained audience engagement in an increasingly competitive digital environment.

To address these challenges, several strategic improvements were implemented throughout the internship period. These included the increased use of Instagram Reels and short-form video content, the integration of storytelling approaches into promotional communication, the development of more structured content planning practices, and continuous monitoring of audience engagement performance. The implementation of these strategies contributed to improved interaction levels and enhanced the effectiveness of institutional branding efforts.

The findings also demonstrate the practical application of digital marketing, customer engagement, and content marketing theories within an educational context. Audience engagement was found to be strongly influenced by content relevance, visual

attractiveness, communication quality, and the institution's ability to adapt content strategies to audience preferences and platform trends. These findings support existing literature emphasizing the importance of audience-centered communication and interactive content in digital marketing effectiveness.

From a professional development perspective, the internship provided valuable opportunities to apply academic knowledge in a real organizational environment. Direct involvement in content creation, social media management, promotional activities, and audience communication contributed to the development of practical competencies in digital marketing, strategic communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and performance evaluation.

Overall, this study concludes that effective Instagram-based marketing in educational institutions requires a combination of strategic planning, creative content development, audience understanding, and continuous evaluation. Educational institutions that successfully integrate these elements are better positioned to strengthen institutional branding, improve stakeholder engagement, and maintain competitiveness in increasingly digitalized communication environments. Future research may expand this study by comparing digital marketing practices across multiple educational institutions or by incorporating quantitative measures of audience engagement to provide broader insights into social media marketing effectiveness within the education sector.

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