



## Visual Storytelling Strategy in Digital Content to Increase Islamic Boarding School Brand Trust

Maulidatul Adzimah\*, Moh. Rofik, Muhammad Thoiful Abrar, Muhammad Kholilurrohman, Mohammad Abdul Aziz Al Wahedi, Febi Febrianto, Abu Hasan Agus Rahmatullah

Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

### **Article History:**

*Received: January 2025*

*Revised: March 2026*

*Accepted: April 2026*

### **Keywords:**

*Visual Storytelling, Digital Content, Brand Trust*

### **\*Correspondence Address:**

*maulidatuladzimah99@gmail.com*

### **Abstract :**

This study examines the role of visual storytelling strategies in digital content to enhance brand trust in Islamic boarding schools. This study addresses the gap between the theoretical potential of storytelling and its limited practical implementation in Islamic boarding school digital communications. Using a qualitative case study approach at Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Pontianak, data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving key informants such as school leaders, public relations officers, and parents. The findings indicate that visual storytelling is built through authentic representations of students' daily activities, religious values, and institutional identity, presented in simple yet meaningful visual formats. This study highlights that authenticity, consistency, and value-based narratives are more influential in building public trust than complex visual aesthetics. Furthermore, digital branding strategies tend to be implicit, relying on real-life storytelling rather than direct promotion. Audience interactions demonstrate positive engagement, reflecting the effectiveness of storytelling in fostering emotional connections and trust. This study concludes that optimizing visual storytelling can significantly strengthen Islamic boarding school brand trust, provided it balances authenticity with adaptive digital innovation in a competitive media environment.

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital technology has brought profound changes to communication strategies in various sectors, including educational institutions. Specifically, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) face a unique challenge in leveraging these technologies to build trust with the public. In today's digital era, trust is a critical factor in shaping the reputation of educational institutions, especially those rooted in traditional values. Visual storytelling is recognized as a powerful tool to foster brand trust, as it allows institutions to connect with audiences on an emotional level, thus enhancing the authenticity of their brand (Sianani, 2025; Jannah, 2025). However, many Islamic boarding schools still fail to fully utilize this approach, which results in missed opportunities for meaningful engagement with their target audience. This research highlights the gap between the theoretical benefits of visual storytelling and its actual application in Islamic boarding schools' digital communication strategies (Al Kautsar & Aqilah, 2026; Baisan et al., 2025).

Despite the potential of digital technologies to transform how Islamic boarding schools engage with the public, there is a significant gap in the adoption and strategic use of visual storytelling. Many schools still rely on traditional, informational social media strategies, which lack emotional depth and fail to inspire trust in their brand. This lack of narrative-driven content leads to a weak emotional connection with the audience, preventing the establishment of a genuine, trustworthy image (Adi, 2026; Eriani et al.,

2025). Moreover, external factors such as societal stigma surrounding Islamic boarding schools further complicate their efforts in building trust and credibility (Abbas, 2025; Maulana et al., 2025). Thus, the central problem facing these institutions is their inability to harness digital storytelling in a way that resonates with the public and enhances their brand reputation.

The challenge faced by Islamic boarding schools is not just technological but also strategic. Many pesantren have adopted digital media, yet their approach to content creation lacks cohesion, strategy, and the narrative components that could foster trust. The content they produce is often inconsistent and lacks a strong visual and emotional story (Jamaludin & Wijaya, 2025; Hermanto et al., 2024). Research has shown that while some Islamic boarding schools are using digital platforms to share information, their content often fails to engage audiences meaningfully. Furthermore, the lack of content creation training and technical expertise exacerbates the problem (Ramadhani, 2025). As a result, these schools struggle to compete in the digital space, where strategic storytelling and high-quality content are crucial for success.

Several studies have explored the impact of storytelling on branding and trust in various industries, especially in the digital space. For instance, research by Al Kautsar & Aqilah (2026) and Aulia & Bimantoro (2026) highlights the positive effects of storytelling branding on consumer trust and loyalty. Agustiana (2026) also finds that strategic visual storytelling significantly increases audience engagement. However, the integration of visual storytelling as a key strategy in building brand trust, specifically in the context of Islamic boarding schools, remains underexplored. Previous research tends to generalize the effects of storytelling, without examining how it can be specifically tailored to the cultural and spiritual values of Islamic boarding schools. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a more contextual approach to visual storytelling in pesantren (Musthofa et al., 2025; Sukriyah & Annisa, 2025).

The existing literature reveals the potential of digital branding in increasing public trust, particularly in educational institutions. Research by Hermanto et al. (2024) and Jamaludin & Wijaya (2025) demonstrates the growing importance of digital branding in various sectors, including education. However, these studies do not address the specific challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in leveraging visual storytelling as part of their branding efforts. Moreover, while some studies have noted the role of digital content in enhancing trust, there is still a lack of in-depth investigation into how visual storytelling can be optimized for this purpose in the pesantren context (Sari et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2026). Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by providing insights into how visual storytelling can be effectively used to build trust in Islamic boarding schools.

This research introduces a novel approach by combining the concept of visual storytelling with the specific context of Islamic boarding schools. Unlike previous studies that focus on general branding strategies, this research examines how Islamic boarding schools can use visual narratives, based on their unique spiritual values, to connect with their audience. The novelty lies in the integration of emotional narratives, visual elements, and authentic values within digital content. This approach not only aims to enhance public trust but also positions storytelling as a means of representing the true identity of Islamic boarding schools in the digital age. Therefore, this study contributes both conceptually and practically by offering a framework for developing strategic visual storytelling in Islamic boarding schools.

The primary research question of this study is how visual storytelling strategies in digital content can increase brand trust in Islamic boarding schools. Given the growing importance of digital platforms in education, this question is crucial for understanding how Islamic boarding schools can compete in the digital space and foster meaningful connections with their audience. The preliminary argument of this study is that a well-

crafted visual storytelling strategy—blending emotional narratives, visual elements, and authentic spiritual values—can significantly improve brand trust in Islamic boarding schools. This argument is based on the finding that storytelling content has a stronger emotional impact, which is essential for building trust and enhancing brand image in the digital era. Thus, the research contends that optimizing visual storytelling will be key to strengthening the position of Islamic boarding schools in a competitive and increasingly digitalized educational landscape.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research took place at the Walisongo Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren Walisongo) in Pontianak. This location was chosen based on the consideration that the Islamic boarding school utilizes digital media as a means of disseminating information and building its institutional image. In the context of this research, the unit of analysis encompasses all forms of digital content produced and distributed by the Islamic boarding school, particularly those containing elements of visual storytelling. This content includes social media posts, video documentation of activities, and other digital-based promotional materials. Furthermore, the interaction between the Islamic boarding school and its digital audience is also a crucial part of the analysis, as it contributes to the formation of brand trust. Therefore, this research focuses not only on content as a communication product, but also on the meaning, message, and public response to that content.

The research design used in this study is a qualitative approach with a case study. This qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth and contextual exploration of social phenomena, particularly related to the complex and dynamic nature of visual storytelling-based communication strategies (Cernasev & Axon, 2023; Mugenda, 2023; Tisdell et al., 2025). The case study was used to provide a comprehensive understanding of practices occurring in one specific location, namely the Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Pontianak. This research seeks to interpret the meaning behind the visual strategies used in digital content and how these strategies influence public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools. Through this approach, researchers can explore social realities that cannot be measured quantitatively but rather are understood through the narratives, experiences, and interpretations of informants. Thus, this research design allows researchers to obtain rich, in-depth data that is relevant to the research objectives.

The sources of information in this study were obtained from several key informants directly involved in the Islamic boarding school's digital communication activities. These informants included the head of the Islamic boarding school, the public relations officer, and the parents of students. The head of the Islamic boarding school was chosen because of his strategic role in determining the direction of communication policy and the institution's image. The public relations officer served as the primary informant because he was directly involved in the production and distribution of digital content, including the design of visual storytelling. Meanwhile, the parents of students were chosen to represent the audience who receive and interpret the messages from the digital content. Informants were selected purposively, considering their relevance, experience, and involvement in the phenomenon under study. With this combination of informants, the study aims to obtain a comprehensive perspective, from both the producer and recipient sides of the digital communication process.

The data collection process utilized three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted to observe the Islamic boarding school's digital communication activities, including content upload patterns and interactions with audiences. In-depth interviews with informants were conducted to explore their understanding, experiences, and strategies used in developing visual storytelling. This technique enabled researchers to obtain subjective yet meaningful data.

Meanwhile, documentation was used to collect data in the form of digital content archives, photos, videos, and other supporting documents relevant to the research. These three techniques were used triangulatingly to enhance data validity. Thus, the data obtained was not solely sourced from a single method, but rather complemented and strengthened the overall research findings.

Data analysis in this study refers to the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. Data reduction was carried out by simplifying, selecting, and focusing data relevant to the research objectives. Next, the data was presented in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices for easier understanding. The final stage was data verification, a process of drawing conclusions that was carried out continuously throughout the research. Furthermore, the analytical methods used included content analysis to identify messages within the content, discourse analysis to understand the meaning and construction of language, and interpretative analysis to interpret phenomena in depth. This combination of methods enabled the researcher to produce findings that were not only descriptive, but also analytical and interpretative, appropriate to the research context.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **The Concept of Visual Storytelling in Digital Communication**

The concept of visual storytelling in digital communication at Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Pontianak is operationally understood as the practice of conveying messages through a combination of visual elements (photos, videos, graphic design) and narratives that reflect the school's values. In practice, visual storytelling is not only interpreted as aesthetic content, but also as a representation of the students' lives, religious activities, and institutional identity, packaged narratively on social media. The content produced tends to depict the students' daily activities, religious moments, and social interactions in simple yet meaningful visual forms. This demonstrates that storytelling is built from everyday reality, not merely visual engineering. Thus, the concept of visual storytelling at this Islamic boarding school emphasizes aspects of authenticity, value, and emotional closeness with the audience, compared to a commercial approach oriented solely on aesthetics.

Interview results indicate that visual storytelling is seen as a strategy for building closeness with the public. The Public Relations Manager stated that "this content was created so that various Islamic boarding school activities can be accessed by the general public who are curious about the activities carried out by the Islamic boarding school." Meanwhile, the head of the Islamic boarding school said that "the stories uploaded on the Islamic boarding school's social media are various student activities and information about the Islamic boarding school." Based on this statement, the researcher interpreted that storytelling is understood as a tool for building authenticity and transparency. The narrative conveyed is not only intended to attract attention, but also build trust through real experiences. This is in line with the finding that storytelling based on real experiences can strengthen trust because the audience feels emotionally connected to the content presented.

Based on observations, the digital content of Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Pontianak is dominated by visuals depicting student activities such as studying, worship, and social activities, presented in photos and short videos. The narratives accompanying the content tend to be simple, using communicative and religious language, and emphasizing the values of togetherness and spirituality. Furthermore, audience interaction is evident through positive comments, support, and questions that demonstrate interest in

Islamic boarding school life. Researchers interpret this pattern as indicating an effort to build two-way communication through humanistic storytelling. Visual storytelling at this Islamic boarding school focuses on presenting the realities of students' lives visually and narratively to build emotional closeness and public trust. Content that is authentic, simple, and based on real experiences tends to be more effective in creating engagement and strengthening brand trust than content that is purely formal and informative.

### Characteristic of Islamic Boarding School Digital Content

The content produced tends to be oriented toward educational and religious values, as well as representations of the lives of Islamic boarding school students. Content uploaded to social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube is dominated by the students' daily activities, religious activities, and documentation of Islamic boarding school events. The content uses photos and short videos with simple editing, without complex visual effects. The narrative accompanying the content is informative and persuasive, using religious language that is easily understood by the general public. Furthermore, there is consistency in the use of themes such as togetherness, discipline, and spirituality. This demonstrates that Islamic boarding school digital content serves not only as an information medium but also as a means of preaching and building a positive image of the institution in the digital space.

**Table 1. characteristics of digital content**

<b>Content Aspects</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Visual Form</b>	<b>The Meaning Conveyed</b>
Them	Santri Activities (Formal, Non-Formal and Ubudiyah Education)	Photos and Videos	Religious values and discipline
Visual Style	Simple	Minimal Editing	Original
Narrative	Informative and Persuasive	Caption	Education and Preaching
Audience Interaction	Positive Comments and Active Response	Like and Comment	Trust and attraction

The table 1 shows that Islamic boarding school digital content has a relatively consistent structure and focuses on conveying values. Simple visuals reinforce the impression of realism and authenticity. The accompanying narrative also clarifies the message intended for the audience.

Based on the researcher's interpretation, the characteristics of the Walisongo Islamic Boarding School's digital content in Pontianak emphasize authenticity, simplicity, and religious values as key strengths in digital communication. The content is not oriented towards complex modern aesthetics, but rather focuses on the candid representation of the reality of Islamic boarding school life. This Islamic boarding school digital content serves as a medium for representing the lives of students, packaged visually and narratively, to convey educational and spiritual values to the public. This approach demonstrates that the Islamic boarding school prioritizes honesty over excessive visual appeal. It also demonstrates an awareness that public trust can be built through transparency and consistent messaging delivered repeatedly in digital content.

The dominance of content based on real-life activities indicates that the Islamic boarding school relies on reality as its primary source of storytelling. The use of simple visuals indicates both technical limitations and a strategy for maintaining authenticity. A narrative consistent with religious values strengthens the institution's identity. Positive audience interaction indicates that this content pattern is effective in building engagement

and trust. Thus, it can be concluded that the characteristics of Islamic boarding school digital content form a distinctive communication pattern, namely simple, authentic, valuable, and consistent, which indirectly contributes to the formation of brand trust among the digital community.

### Islamic Boarding School Branding Strategy in the Digital Era

Based on documentation of the digital activities of Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Pontianak, the branding strategy implemented demonstrates a value-based branding approach, utilizing social media as the primary communication channel. Published content consistently displays the Islamic boarding school's identity through visuals of religious activities, education, and the lives of its students. Branding is not explicitly implemented through direct promotion, but rather is constructed through everyday narratives that reflect the institution's character. The use of platforms such as Instagram and YouTube demonstrates an adaptation to digital technology developments, as the Islamic boarding school seeks to reach a wider audience, including the younger generation and the general public. Furthermore, there is a relatively consistent pattern of logo use, visual colors, and language style as part of its brand identity. This indicates that the Islamic boarding school's branding strategy tends to be implicit, based on real-life experiences, and prioritizes trust through the representation of authentic activities in the digital space.

**Table 2. Islamic Boarding School Digital Branding Strategy**

Branding Elements	Implementation Method	Media Used	Branding Goals
Visual Identity	Logo, Colors, and Feed Appearance	Instagram and Youtube	Branding Consistency
Creative Content	Student Activities and Islamic Boarding Schools	Videos and captions	Building emotional connection
Religious Values	Ubudiyah Activities and Devotion	Photo and Videos	Creating a positive image
Posting Consistency	Regular Uploads	Social Media	Increasing brand awareness
Audience Interaction	Comment Replies	Digital Platforms	Building relationships and trust

Table 2 shows that branding strategy lies not only in visuals, but also in narrative and consistent communication delivered continuously through digital media. The Islamic boarding school branding strategy emphasizes a soft branding approach that focuses on values and experiences, rather than commercial promotions. Branding is built through consistent, real-life representations, creating an authentic perception in the eyes of the audience. This Islamic boarding school branding is carried out through the repeated delivery of digital content that showcases the institution's identity, values, and activities to build a positive image and public trust. This approach demonstrates that the Islamic boarding school does not directly "sell" the brand, but rather builds meaning through the visual experience and narrative presented. This also indicates that public trust is formed through message consistency and the alignment between the content and the reality presented.

The Islamic boarding school branding strategy in the digital era has several key trends. First, branding is carried out indirectly through content based on real activities, rather than formal advertising. Second, there is consistency in the use of visual elements and narratives that strengthen the institution's identity. Third, religious values are the core

of every published content, distinguishing the Islamic boarding school from other institutions. Fourth, interaction with the audience demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy in building sustainable relationships. Thus, the branding strategy that is formed is a combination of authenticity, consistency, and values, which collectively contribute to building brand trust for Islamic boarding schools in the digital space.

## Discussion

The research results show that visual storytelling and digital content strategies in Islamic boarding schools are oriented toward authenticity, religious values, and representation of the lives of students. These findings align with Maulana's research (2025) which states that effective Islamic boarding school digital branding is built through consistent daily narratives and institutional values. In addition, Eriani (2025) and Zuher (2025) emphasized that social media management based on authentic content can significantly increase public trust. However, this differs from Lay's study (2025) who emphasized the importance of strong visual aesthetics in digital storytelling, this study's findings actually show that visual simplicity is not a barrier, but rather strengthens the perception of authenticity. The implication is that storytelling effectiveness is not solely determined by visual quality, but by the congruence between the message, values, and reality presented.

These findings have important implications for the role of Islamic boarding school branding strategies in building brand trust. Authentic storytelling-based strategies have been shown to function as communication tools that build emotional closeness between the Islamic boarding school and its audience. This aligns with Sianani's findings (2025) which states that storytelling has a positive influence on trust and loyalty. However, dysfunctionally, an overly simplistic approach without developing visual creativity has the potential to limit audience reach, especially among younger generations accustomed to more dynamic digital content. Therefore, there is a need to balance authenticity and visual innovation to keep messages relevant and competitive in the digital space.

The success of this strategy is influenced by the alignment of digital content with the core values of Islamic boarding schools. Value-based branding is a key factor in building public trust in Islamic educational institutions. Visual storytelling that showcases the real-life activities of students creates transparency and credibility, making it easier for audiences to trust the information conveyed. Thus, a causal relationship emerges: the more authentic and consistent the content presented, the higher the level of trust formed among the public.

This research also demonstrates alignment with the public relations concept of building trust through two-way communication. Communication strategies that involve active interaction with the audience can strengthen relationships and increase trust. In this study, audience interaction through comments and responses to content is an indicator that the storytelling used is able to create positive engagement. However, unlike the ideal two-way symmetrical communication model, the interaction that occurs is still limited and has not been fully utilized as a space for strategic dialogue. This implies that Islamic boarding schools have an opportunity to develop more participatory communication strategies to strengthen long-term relationships with their audiences.

This discussion shows that the visual storytelling strategy in Islamic boarding school digital content has a distinctive pattern, namely that it is based on authenticity, consistency, and religious values, which have proven to be effective in building brand trust, as supported by research Rosanti (2026) which emphasizes that sustainable, values-based branding can significantly increase public trust. However, the challenge is how to integrate these values with digital innovation to remain relevant in a competitive era. Thus, the main

implication of this research is the need to develop storytelling strategies that not only maintain authenticity but also adapt to the dynamics of digital media to strengthen the position of Islamic boarding schools as trusted institutions in the public eye.

## CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that visual storytelling in the digital content of Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Pontianak effectively builds public trust through authenticity, consistency, and the integration of religious values. The key lesson is that trust is not established through complex visuals or overt promotions, but through honest, repeated representations of real-life experiences. Storytelling based on students' daily activities fosters an emotional connection with the audience, shaping a positive perception of the institution. This demonstrates that the primary strength of Islamic boarding school branding lies in maintaining alignment between values, narratives, and realities presented in the digital space.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes by enriching understanding of visual storytelling-based branding strategies within the context of Islamic boarding schools, an area previously underexplored. By integrating visual storytelling, digital content, and brand trust within a single analytical framework, and using a qualitative case study approach, this research provides an in-depth perspective on values-based digital communication, complementing the predominantly quantitative literature. However, the study has limitations: it focuses on a single location, relies on current documentation and digital practices without longitudinal analysis, and is constrained by limited informant access and platform variety. Future research should extend the study to multiple Islamic boarding schools with diverse characteristics and employ mixed methods to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of digital branding and trust-building strategies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses his deepest appreciation and gratitude to all parties who have contributed to the completion of this research. Special thanks are extended to the head of the Islamic boarding school who volunteered to serve as a research informant and provided invaluable experience and insight. The author also appreciates the support of colleagues and academic supervisors for their input, criticism, and guidance that enriched the quality of this research. Furthermore, the author would like to thank the affiliated institutions that provided academic support and facilities throughout the research process. Hopefully, the results of this research can contribute to the development of science, particularly in the field studied.

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