



Algorithmic Mediation of Islamic Educational Visual Rhetoric: Reshaping Parental Trust Through Institutional Choice Dynamics

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Abstract:

The increasing influence of algorithm-driven digital platforms has transformed how Islamic educational institutions construct public trust and communicate their institutional identity. This study aims to examine how algorithmic mediation, Islamic visual rhetoric, and digital transformation influence parental trust and institutional choice dynamics in contemporary Islamic education. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with parents, school leaders, and teachers; direct observations of institutional visual communication practices; and documentation analysis of digital platforms, promotional materials, and institutional archives. The findings reveal three main patterns: algorithmic exposure gradually strengthens parental trust through repeated digital encounters; Islamic visual rhetoric shapes institutional preferences through consistent symbolic representation; and digital transformation reconstructs legitimacy through transparent and continuous documentation. This study contributes the concept of Algorithmic Tradition Mediation by integrating algorithmic governance, visual rhetoric, and educational legitimacy perspectives. The findings recommend that Islamic educational institutions develop ethical, authentic, and trust-oriented digital communication strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of algorithm-driven digital platforms has fundamentally transformed how families access, evaluate, and interpret information about Islamic educational institutions. Parents no longer rely exclusively on community recommendations, religious leaders, or direct institutional visits when selecting schools for their children (Dereli, 2023; Fuentes-Vilugrón et al., 2023; Masykuroh et al., 2024). Instead, algorithmic recommendation systems embedded within social media platforms increasingly determine which educational narratives, visual representations, and institutional identities become visible and persuasive. This transformation is socially significant because educational decisions directly influence children's religious

identity formation, moral development, and long-term educational trajectories (Brandt et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding how algorithmic mediation shapes parental trust and institutional choice has become an essential concern for educational researchers, policymakers, and Islamic educational institutions seeking sustainable public legitimacy in contemporary digital society.

Despite the growing influence of digital communication technologies, many Islamic educational institutions continue to experience challenges in establishing authentic relationships with prospective parents within algorithmically curated online environments. Educational promotional content is increasingly evaluated not merely by institutional quality but by algorithmic visibility, visual appeal, engagement metrics, and persuasive digital storytelling (Rajas et al., 2021; Rohde et al., 2021). Consequently, institutions possessing sophisticated visual communication strategies often receive greater public attention than schools demonstrating stronger educational quality but limited digital presence. This phenomenon creates an imbalance between educational substance and digital representation, potentially encouraging symbolic branding over authentic educational excellence (Clancy et al., 2022; Subaidi et al., 2023). As parental decision-making becomes increasingly dependent upon mediated visual information, concerns emerge regarding trust formation, institutional transparency, and informed educational choice.

Previous studies have extensively examined digital communication, educational marketing, and parental decision-making from different disciplinary perspectives. Edwards et al. (2022) and Maulana et al. (2025) emphasized that institutional branding significantly influences consumer perceptions through strategic communication. Zhao (2023), Paraskevoulakou et al. (2021), and Pavlenko et al. (2023) argued that platform algorithms increasingly regulate public visibility and social interaction within digital ecosystems. Gastil (2021) demonstrated that deep mediatization fundamentally reshapes institutional legitimacy across modern societies. Meanwhile, Martikainen et al. (2021) and Bay et al. (2021) explained how visual rhetoric constructs persuasive meanings that can influence audience interpretation. Nevertheless, these studies largely investigate branding, digital platforms, visual communication, or trust independently. Limited research has integrated algorithmic mediation, Islamic educational visual rhetoric, parental trust, and institutional choice into a comprehensive conceptual framework, thereby leaving an important interdisciplinary research gap.

The present study addresses this limitation by introducing the concept of Algorithmic Tradition Mediation, which explains how algorithmic recommendation systems interact with Islamic visual symbolism to influence parental trust and educational decision-making. Unlike previous research emphasizing institutional marketing effectiveness or digital platform performance separately, this study conceptualizes visual rhetoric as a dynamic communicative process mediated by platform algorithms and interpreted through parents' religious values, educational expectations, and institutional perceptions (Maladzhi et al., 2023; Pollice et al., 2021). This perspective extends

contemporary discussions on educational communication by integrating algorithm studies, Islamic educational philosophy, visual rhetoric, and institutional trust into a unified analytical framework. Accordingly, the research offers a state-of-the-art contribution toward understanding educational transformation within increasingly algorithm-driven digital environments.

Based on these theoretical and practical developments, several important questions remain insufficiently explored. It remains unclear how algorithmic recommendation mechanisms amplify or suppress particular representations of Islamic educational institutions, how visual rhetoric shapes parental perceptions of institutional credibility, and how algorithmically mediated communication ultimately influences educational choice dynamics. Existing studies rarely investigate whether parental trust emerges primarily from educational quality, religious symbolism, digital engagement, or interactions among these dimensions. Furthermore, little empirical evidence explains the mechanisms through which algorithmic visibility transforms institutional legitimacy within Islamic education. Addressing these unresolved issues is necessary to develop more transparent, ethical, and trustworthy digital educational communication strategies that support informed parental decision-making.

This study argues that parental trust toward Islamic educational institutions is increasingly constructed through interactions between algorithmic visibility, visual rhetorical strategies, and institutional representations rather than solely through conventional indicators of educational quality. It is hypothesized that algorithmic mediation amplifies persuasive visual narratives that can shape institutional legitimacy and influence educational preferences among prospective parents. The originality of this research lies in integrating algorithmic governance, Islamic educational visual rhetoric, parental trust, and institutional choice dynamics into a single conceptual model that has not been comprehensively examined in previous educational studies. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to digital educational communication scholarship while providing practical guidance for Islamic educational institutions in designing ethical, credible, and trust-oriented digital communication strategies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore how algorithmic mediation, Islamic educational visual rhetoric, parental trust, and institutional choice interact within contemporary digital educational environments (Kohn et al., 2024). A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand meanings, perceptions, and decision-making processes that cannot be adequately explained through numerical measurement alone. The multiple-case strategy enables comparison across several Islamic educational institutions with different digital communication practices, thereby strengthening analytical depth and contextual interpretation. This design is consistent with the study's objective of explaining the mechanisms through which algorithmically mediated visual representations influence parental trust and institutional selection. The methodological foundation follows Yin's

multiple-case study framework emphasizing contextual inquiry and cross-case analytical comparison.

The research was conducted at four Islamic educational institutions representing different organizational characteristics and levels of digital communication activity in East Java, Indonesia. These institutions were selected because they actively utilize social media platforms to communicate institutional identity, educational programs, and religious values to prospective parents. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit 24 informants, comprising 12 parents who recently selected Islamic schools for their children, 4 school principals, 4 digital communication administrators, and 4 Islamic education teachers involved in institutional promotion. Their diverse backgrounds provided multiple perspectives regarding algorithmic exposure, visual communication practices, parental trust formation, and institutional decision-making, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of the collected qualitative evidence.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, document analysis, and digital content analysis to obtain comprehensive evidence regarding institutional communication practices and parental decision-making (Kekeya, 2023). Semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and considerations during school selection, while observations examined institutional promotional activities and interactions within educational environments. Documentary analysis included institutional brochures, websites, strategic communication documents, and admission materials. Digital content analysis investigated visual rhetoric presented through official Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube accounts, focusing on symbolic representations, religious imagery, audience engagement, and communication narratives. The combination of multiple techniques enabled methodological triangulation and generated comprehensive qualitative data addressing the research objectives.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analysis began with data condensation by organizing interview transcripts, observation notes, institutional documents, and digital visual materials according to emerging thematic categories (Cole, 2024). Subsequently, data reduction eliminated repetitive or irrelevant information while retaining evidence directly related to algorithmic mediation, visual rhetoric, parental trust, and institutional choice. Data display was conducted through thematic matrices, coding tables, and conceptual relationship diagrams, facilitating systematic interpretation across multiple cases. Finally, data verification involved continuous comparison, pattern matching, and conclusion drawing to ensure that interpretations remained logically consistent, empirically grounded, and theoretically meaningful throughout the analytical process.

The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through several qualitative validation strategies following the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba. Credibility was established through source triangulation involving parents, principals, teachers, and communication administrators, as well as

methodological triangulation combining interviews, observations, documentation, and digital content analysis (Lee et al., 2024). Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to selected participants to confirm interpretive accuracy. Peer debriefing with educational communication scholars strengthened analytical consistency and minimized researcher bias. Dependability was maintained through detailed documentation of research procedures, coding decisions, and analytical processes, while confirmability was supported by maintaining an audit trail and reflective research memos throughout the investigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings reveal that algorithmic mediation, Islamic visual rhetoric, and digital transformation collectively reshape parental trust and institutional choice within contemporary Islamic education. The data indicate that educational legitimacy is increasingly constructed through sustained digital communication, persuasive visual representation, and transparent institutional documentation. These interconnected findings illustrate how digital ecosystems have become influential mechanisms in strengthening public confidence toward Islamic educational institutions.

Islamic Visual Rhetoric Influences Institutional Choice Decisions

Islamic visual rhetoric in this study refers to the systematic use of visual symbols, religious identity markers, institutional aesthetics, and communication designs employed by Islamic educational institutions to convey credibility, religious commitment, and educational excellence. The operational meaning extends beyond decorative visual elements. It includes the strategic presentation of Islamic values through digital media, school environments, banners, uniforms, institutional logos, slogans, Qur'anic activities, and public educational events. Field observations indicate that these visual elements function collectively as persuasive communication tools capable of shaping first impressions before parents directly interact with institutional representatives. Consequently, visual rhetoric became an observable mechanism influencing institutional attractiveness and educational choice decisions.

Table 1. Observation Results of Islamic Visual Rhetoric Influences Institutional Choice Decisions

Observed Aspect	Visual Indicator	Field Observation	Observed Meaning
Institutional Logo	Islamic calligraphy and mosque symbolism	Present consistently across digital and physical media	Reinforces Islamic institutional identity
School Uniform	Modest Islamic dress and religious attributes	Worn consistently by students and teachers	Represents discipline and Islamic values
Social Media Design	Consistent color palette, typography, and visual layout	Uniform branding across Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok	Creates professional institutional image
Educational	Qur'an recitation,	Frequently	Demonstrates active

Activities	congregational prayer, Islamic celebrations	documented and published	religious practices	educational
School Environment	Prayer facilities, Islamic quotations, Arabic calligraphy	Clearly visible throughout campus	Strengthens atmosphere	religious
Promotional Banner	Islamic slogans combined with academic achievements	Installed at school entrance and promotional events	Communicates religious and academic excellence simultaneously	
Digital Content	Student achievements and character education documentation	Uploaded regularly with visual storytelling	Enhances credibility through observable evidence	institutional

The observational findings demonstrate that Islamic educational institutions intentionally integrate religious symbolism into nearly every visual communication channel presented to the public. The consistency observed across institutional logos, uniforms, promotional materials, social media designs, educational activities, and school environments reflects a deliberate effort to communicate organizational identity through visual persuasion rather than textual explanation alone. In summary, Islamic identity is conveyed not as isolated symbols but as interconnected visual narratives repeatedly encountered across digital and physical settings. The researcher interprets this consistency as strengthening institutional coherence, enabling prospective parents to quickly recognize the school's educational orientation while reinforcing perceptions of credibility, professionalism, and religious authenticity through observable visual evidence.

The observed data reveal a consistent pattern indicating that Islamic visual rhetoric operates through repetition, coherence, and symbolic continuity across institutional communication platforms. Religious symbols are continuously integrated with educational achievements, student activities, institutional facilities, and promotional materials, creating a unified visual identity recognizable both online and offline. Rather than emphasizing isolated promotional messages, institutions consistently construct educational legitimacy through interconnected visual representations reflecting Islamic values and organizational professionalism. The pattern further indicates that physical environments and digital media complement one another in presenting similar institutional narratives, allowing prospective parents to encounter coherent visual experiences across multiple communication channels before making educational selection decisions.

Algorithmic Mediation Shapes Parental Educational Trust Dynamics

Algorithmic mediation in this study refers to the process through which digital platform algorithms regulate the visibility, frequency, and presentation of Islamic educational content that parents encounter before selecting an educational institution for their children. Rather than making decisions solely based on direct recommendations, parents increasingly construct educational trust after repeated exposure to institution-related content delivered through algorithmically personalized social media feeds. Trust therefore emerges as a cumulative cognitive and emotional response shaped by recurring digital

interactions, perceived authenticity, and consistent institutional communication. Field findings indicate that algorithmic mediation has become an important intermediary connecting institutional digital presence with parental confidence during educational decision-making.

Interviews with parents revealed that repeated exposure to school content substantially strengthened institutional trust before any direct interaction occurred. One parent explained, "I kept seeing the school's activities on Instagram almost every day, and eventually I believed the school was active and genuinely cared about students." Another participant stated, "Initially I was only browsing, but because similar posts continuously appeared, I became curious and finally visited the school." These statements indicate that trust was gradually established through continuous digital exposure rather than a single promotional message. The researcher interprets that algorithmic repetition reinforced familiarity, making institutional credibility appear increasingly convincing in parents' educational evaluations.

Additional interviews demonstrated that parents associated consistent digital communication with institutional transparency and educational quality. One informant commented, "The school frequently uploaded learning activities, Qur'an programs, and teacher interactions, making me feel nothing was being hidden." Another parent remarked, "Seeing parents regularly commenting positively gave me confidence because their experiences seemed genuine." These responses suggest that parental trust was influenced not only by institutional messages but also by algorithmically amplified social interactions surrounding the institution. The researcher interprets that algorithms indirectly facilitated trust formation by continuously exposing parents to positive educational narratives and visible community engagement, thereby strengthening perceptions of institutional legitimacy.

Field observations supported the interview findings by revealing that the participating Islamic educational institutions consistently maintained active digital communication across multiple social media platforms. Institutional accounts regularly displayed classroom learning, Qur'anic recitation, student achievements, teacher interactions, religious celebrations, and community service activities using visually coherent formats. Posts appeared frequently and generated sustained audience engagement through comments, shares, and reactions from parents. These observable patterns demonstrate that institutions intentionally sustained digital visibility as part of their communication practices. In sum, the observed consistency between online educational representation and parental perceptions indicates that continuous algorithmically mediated exposure contributed to strengthening parental confidence before formal school enrollment decisions were made.

The overall findings reveal a consistent pattern: parental educational trust developed progressively rather than instantaneously. Initial exposure to institutional content generated curiosity, repeated algorithmic recommendations increased familiarity, and sustained interaction with educational narratives gradually strengthened confidence toward the institution. Parents rarely relied upon a single source of information but instead interpreted repeated digital

encounters as indicators of institutional credibility, transparency, and educational commitment. The pattern further demonstrates that algorithmic mediation functioned as an indirect trust-building mechanism by continuously presenting institutional activities within parents' personalized digital environments. Consequently, digital visibility became an influential component shaping educational trust and subsequent institutional choice dynamics.

Digital Transformation Reconstructs Islamic Educational Legitimacy

Digital transformation in this study refers to the systematic integration of digital communication technologies into institutional management, public communication, and educational promotion that reconstructs the legitimacy of Islamic educational institutions. Operationally, legitimacy is reflected through the institution's ability to demonstrate educational quality, religious identity, transparency, and organizational credibility using digital platforms rather than relying solely on conventional reputation. The transformation encompasses official websites, social media accounts, digital brochures, online admission systems, multimedia documentation, institutional publications, and continuous dissemination of educational activities. Field evidence indicates that digital transformation has become an important mechanism through which institutions strengthen public recognition, reinforce organizational credibility, and sustain educational legitimacy within contemporary digital society.

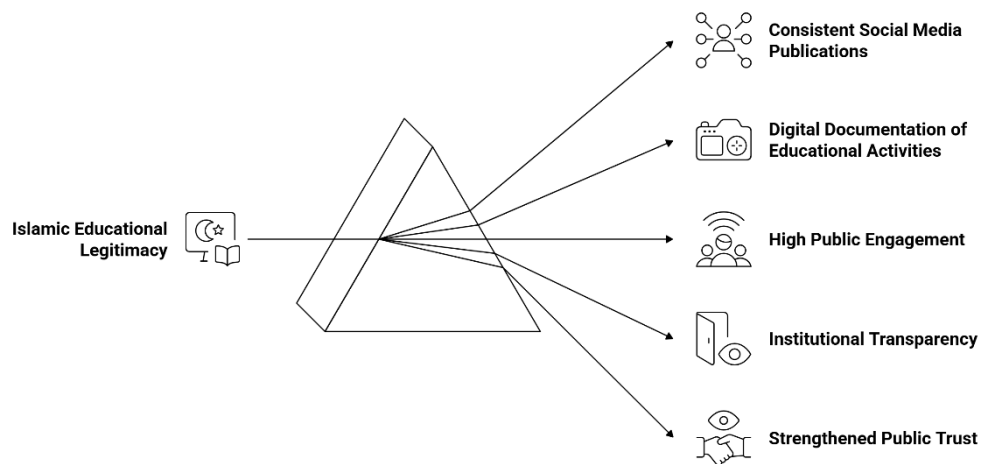


Figure 1. Unveiling the Dimensions of Islamic Educational Legitimacy

Documentation collected from the participating institutions demonstrates a consistent transition from conventional promotional practices toward integrated digital communication systems. Official websites contained institutional profiles, educational programs, online admission information, and documentation of academic achievements. At the same time, social media accounts regularly published photographs and videos depicting learning activities, Qur'anic programs, student accomplishments, and community engagement. Digital brochures and promotional materials presented standardized institutional branding across multiple communication platforms. The researcher observed that institutional documentation was continuously

updated and publicly accessible, reflecting organizational transparency and communication consistency. These documented practices indicate that digital transformation has become an integral component of institutional representation and public engagement rather than merely a promotional activity.

The documented evidence indicates that digital transformation contributes to institutional legitimacy by making organizational activities increasingly visible, accessible, and verifiable by the public. In other words, institutions no longer rely exclusively on historical reputation or interpersonal recommendations but actively construct legitimacy through continuous digital documentation of educational practices. The consistency between websites, social media publications, digital promotional materials, and institutional documentation enables prospective parents to observe educational performance before direct interaction occurs. The researcher interprets that the availability of comprehensive digital evidence reduces uncertainty regarding institutional credibility while strengthening perceptions of transparency, accountability, and organizational professionalism through continuous public exposure of educational activities.

The documented data reveal a clear pattern: institutional legitimacy develops through continuous digital transformation rather than isolated communication initiatives. Educational institutions systematically integrate websites, social media platforms, digital promotional materials, online documentation, and visual reporting into a coherent communication ecosystem. Every documented activity reinforces previous institutional messages, creating cumulative evidence supporting educational credibility and organizational consistency. The pattern further demonstrates that legitimacy emerges from sustained transparency, frequent publication of educational activities, and accessible institutional information available across multiple digital platforms. Consequently, digital transformation functions not only as technological adaptation but also as a strategic process through which Islamic educational institutions continuously reconstruct and maintain their public legitimacy in contemporary educational environments.

Discussion

Digital technologies have fundamentally transformed parental decision-making by positioning algorithmic mediation as an intermediary between institutional communication and educational trust. The findings demonstrate that repeated algorithmically curated exposure increases familiarity and gradually strengthens parental confidence before direct institutional interaction occurs. This finding is consistent with Javaid et al. (2021) and Karthik et al. (2023), who argued that platform algorithms regulate public visibility and influence social perceptions, and aligns with Moustafa (2021), who emphasized that deep mediatization reconstructs institutional legitimacy through continuous digital interaction. However, the present study extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that algorithmic mediation influences not only information exposure but also trust formation in Islamic educational contexts, thereby expanding understanding of digitally mediated educational decision-making.

The second finding indicates that Islamic visual rhetoric functions as a

persuasive communication mechanism shaping institutional attractiveness and parental educational preferences. Consistent visual identities expressed through Islamic symbols, educational activities, institutional environments, and digital branding create coherent institutional narratives that reinforce credibility. These findings correspond with Calvert et al. (2024) and Bay et al. (2021), who explained that visual communication constructs persuasive meanings beyond written language, and support Guglietti (2023), who emphasized branding consistency as a determinant of organizational reputation. Nevertheless, this study advances existing knowledge by demonstrating that Islamic visual rhetoric operates simultaneously as religious representation, institutional identity, and strategic educational communication within digitally mediated environments.

The third finding reveals that digital transformation reconstructs Islamic educational legitimacy through transparent documentation, integrated communication platforms, and continuous dissemination of institutional activities. Unlike conventional legitimacy derived primarily from historical reputation or interpersonal recommendations, legitimacy increasingly emerges from accessible digital evidence documenting educational quality and organizational accountability. This observation supports Gunawan et al. (2023), who described network society as transforming institutional authority through digital communication, while complementing Fornaia et al. (2022) and Chaika (2025) regarding organizational transparency in digital environments. The present study contributes by illustrating that legitimacy in Islamic education is dynamically produced through sustained digital visibility, comprehensive institutional documentation, and consistent communication across interconnected online platforms.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that algorithmic mediation, Islamic visual rhetoric, and digital transformation should not be interpreted as isolated phenomena but as mutually reinforcing processes shaping institutional legitimacy and parental educational choice. Algorithmic systems amplify institutional visibility, visual rhetoric strengthens persuasive interpretation, and digital transformation provides observable evidence supporting institutional credibility. This integrated pattern differs from previous studies that predominantly examined digital communication, branding, or educational trust independently. The present research therefore proposes a holistic understanding of how digital ecosystems reconstruct educational legitimacy through interactions among technological infrastructures, symbolic communication, and organizational transparency, particularly within the context of contemporary Islamic educational institutions.

The study provides important theoretical and practical implications for Islamic educational research and institutional management. Theoretically, it introduces Algorithmic Tradition Mediation as an integrative conceptual perspective linking algorithmic governance, visual rhetoric, parental trust, and institutional legitimacy within Islamic educational communication. This framework extends digital communication and educational legitimacy theories by explaining how technological mediation reshapes educational decision-making. Practically, the findings encourage Islamic educational institutions to

prioritize authentic digital communication, coherent visual identity, and transparent institutional documentation rather than relying solely on promotional activities. Consequently, the study contributes a comprehensive framework that supports sustainable trust-building strategies and strengthens institutional competitiveness within increasingly algorithm-driven educational environments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that parental trust toward Islamic educational institutions is increasingly reconstructed through the interaction of algorithmic mediation, Islamic visual rhetoric, and digital transformation rather than through conventional reputation alone. The most important finding demonstrates that sustained digital visibility, coherent Islamic visual communication, and transparent institutional documentation collectively strengthen institutional legitimacy and influence educational choice dynamics. These findings provide an important lesson that educational credibility in contemporary society depends upon authentic digital engagement alongside educational quality. Scientifically, the study contributes the Algorithmic Tradition Mediation framework by integrating algorithmic governance, visual rhetoric, parental trust, and institutional legitimacy into a unified conceptual perspective. Nevertheless, this research is limited to qualitative evidence from selected Islamic educational institutions; therefore, future studies should employ mixed-method or longitudinal approaches across broader educational contexts to examine the model's generalizability and causal relationships.

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