

THE ROLE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA IN IMPROVING THE BRAND IMAGE OF THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF KALIMANTAN MUHAMMAD ARSYA AL BANJARI BANJARMASIN

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the role of marketing communication through Instagram in enhancing the brand image of Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari (UNISKA MAB). The study adopts a qualitative descriptive method, utilizing interviews with social media administrators and content analysis of selected Instagram posts from the official account @uniska_mab. The findings reveal that UNISKA MAB strategically uses Instagram to highlight achievements, academic credibility, and spiritual values, thereby reinforcing a positive and trustworthy institutional image. Posts related to accreditation success, national recognitions, and faculty accomplishments are crafted with culturally resonant and emotionally engaging language. The study concludes that Instagram serves not only as an information platform but also as a powerful branding tool in the digital age. Future developments should include more interactive and audience-driven content to maintain engagement and strengthen emotional ties with the university's brand.

Keywords: *Marketing Communication, Social Media, Instagram, Brand Image, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, social media has emerged as one of the most powerful tools for communication, shaping public opinion and facilitating the dissemination of information (Ausat, 2023). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok have evolved beyond entertainment into essential strategic tools for business, education, and marketing. The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has significantly transformed how institutions interact with the public, especially in how higher education institutions promote themselves and build their brand image (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Marketing communication has become an integral component of strategic institutional management, including within higher education. It is no longer confined to traditional formats such as brochures, billboards, or print advertisements. Instead, it has shifted to digital channels—most notably social media—which offers broader reach, lower costs, and more interactive engagement. Through social media, universities can more effectively convey their values, strengths, and identity to prospective students, parents, alumni, and the general public (Kowalik, 2011). Consistent and creative communication efforts through these platforms can help construct and reinforce an institution's brand image in the public consciousness.

A strong brand image creates positive perceptions, enhances trust, and influences prospective students' decisions when selecting a university (Sari & Sylvia, 2020). In the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education—across both public and private sectors—building a compelling brand image has become a significant challenge. Universities must communicate their uniqueness, academic excellence, achievements, and social contributions in ways that are engaging and easily accessible to the public (Eger & Gangur, 2024).

Previous research has examined the use of social media in marketing communication and brand image building, particularly in commercial sectors. For instance, Mulitawati & Retnasary (2020) conducted a descriptive study on how the Instagram account @ahlinyabotmaag (Polycrol Forte) utilized marketing strategies—such as advertising, direct marketing, and publicity—to build its brand image. Similarly, Paramita et al. (2023) analyzed the role of Instagram and Facebook in marketing practices for a hospitality business during the COVID-19 pandemic, concluding that social media played a vital role in promotion, product recognition, and consumer engagement.

However, there is still a limited body of research exploring how higher education institutions—particularly Islamic universities—strategically use Instagram to build their brand image in a competitive academic environment. Most prior studies focus on product-based industries or hospitality sectors, leaving a gap in understanding how social

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media marketing is applied within educational contexts where the nature of the “product” is more abstract, and trust and reputation are vital elements.

To fill this gap, this study aims to analyze the role of marketing communication through Instagram in building the brand image of *Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari (UNISKA)* in Banjarmasin. This research seeks to uncover not only the strategies employed by the institution but also the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the success of its social media communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term role in social sciences refers to a set of expected behaviors, rights, and obligations associated with a particular position or function within a social context. According to Blomgren & Rozenberg (2015), roles serve as patterns of behavior that are socially recognized, providing a means for individuals or institutions to perform functions within a structured system. In communication, the concept of “role” is often associated with the active function an individual, group, or institution plays in achieving certain communicative goals. When applied to marketing communication, the “role” emphasizes how strategies are executed to influence audience perceptions, particularly in shaping a favorable image or brand reputation. The success of this role depends on how effectively communication efforts align with the intended objectives and audience needs.

Marketing communication is a strategic process through which organizations deliver promotional messages to target audiences in order to inform, persuade, and remind them about their products, services, or brand identity (Taan, 2018). Alexandrescu & Milandru (2018) define marketing communication as part of the promotional mix that includes advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and sales promotion. The main goal is to build awareness, create interest, stimulate demand, and reinforce brand loyalty. In the modern digital era, marketing communication extends beyond traditional channels and integrates new media platforms that allow for two-way interaction with audiences (Madan & Rosca, 2022).

Social media has revolutionized how organizations engage with their audiences by providing interactive, real-time communication channels (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2015). Instagram, as one of the leading social media platforms, emphasizes visual content and storytelling through images, videos, reels, and stories (Aripadono, 2020). According to Gaganjot et al. (2019), social media platforms like Instagram serve seven functional blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups—all of which are integral to strategic marketing communication. Instagram's visual-centric nature enables brands and institutions to craft appealing narratives, highlight achievements, showcase culture, and engage directly with users. For universities, Instagram provides a platform to reach and attract Gen Z students, who are digital natives and more responsive to visual and interactive content than traditional advertising methods.

Brand image refers to the perception and overall impression that the public holds about a brand (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009). Brand image is a set of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in memory, which may include functional benefits, emotional connections, or symbolic meanings (Keller, 1993). A strong brand image enhances consumer confidence, fosters trust, and can influence decision-making behavior, such as a student's choice of university (Lubis et al., 2023). In the educational institutions, brand image is not only shaped by academic performance but also by the institution's ability to communicate its values, uniqueness, and culture effectively.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, aiming to explore and understand the role of marketing communication through social media—particularly Instagram—in building the brand image of Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari (UNISKA) Banjarmasin. A qualitative method is deemed appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of communication strategies, perceptions, and contextual factors that cannot be quantified but are crucial for understanding branding dynamics in higher education.

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative design, focusing on capturing the communication patterns, messages, and strategies conveyed through the university's official Instagram account, @uniska_mab. To collect comprehensive and reliable data, this study employs two primary techniques, in-depth interview and content analysis. In-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected informants who are directly involved in managing the university's social media platforms—particularly the Instagram account.

This study also applies content analysis to examine the posts, captions, hashtags, visual elements, engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares), and posting patterns of the Instagram account @uniska_mab. The analysis covers a specific time frame—typically the last 6 to 12 months—to observe the consistency, thematic focus, and evolution of the brand messaging.

The data from interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves coding the responses, identifying recurring patterns or themes, and interpreting the findings in light of the research objectives. Meanwhile,

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the Instagram content will be analyzed descriptively by classifying the types of posts and measuring their alignment with branding strategies such as brand awareness, brand positioning, and audience interaction. Triangulation is applied by comparing findings from interviews and content analysis to enhance the validity and credibility of the study (Sugiyono, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that Instagram serves as a vital medium of communication marketing for Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari (UNISKA MAB), helping the institution to construct and strengthen its brand image. Based on interviews with internal stakeholders managing the university's social media presence and analysis of several promotional posts, it becomes clear that UNISKA MAB utilizes Instagram not only as a tool for information dissemination but also as a platform to showcase achievements, credibility, and institutional pride in a visually engaging and emotionally resonant manner.

From the interview data, the university's communication team emphasized that Instagram is intentionally chosen as a primary marketing platform due to its popularity among prospective students and its flexibility for visual storytelling. The team highlighted that the core communication values they uphold are transparency, appreciation, achievement, and spiritual integrity, which are regularly reflected in their Instagram content.

"We don't just post to fill the feed. Every post is aimed to show the value and credibility of the campus—what we achieve, how we grow, and how we stay grounded in Islamic values," (N.R., 2025).

Another respondent added that their Instagram strategy is focused on showcasing UNISKA as an active, excellent, and proud campus in terms of academics and spirituality. A content analysis of UNISKA MAB's Instagram posts illustrates how promotional communication is executed through achievements and recognitions that indirectly contribute to brand building. One example includes a post that reads:

"Terima kasih atas kerja sama, kerja keras, dan kerja cerdas serta kerja Ikhlas semua pihak yang telah membantu baik secara langsung maupun tak langsung. Terima kasih, Mohon doa dan support agar Program Studi Kesehatan Masyarakat bisa mempertahankan peringkat Akreditasi UNGGUL ini."

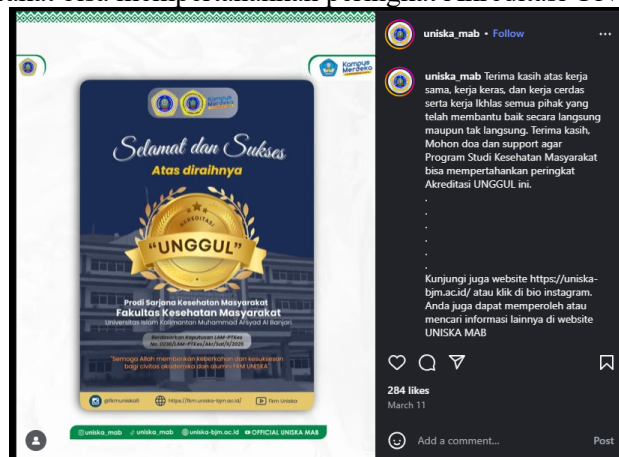


Figure 1. Instagram Post about Akreditasi Unggul

This message conveys appreciation while simultaneously promoting the institution's academic excellence. The tone used is humble yet confident, which helps reinforce a brand image of a collaborative and spiritually grounded university. Another post highlights research productivity and national recognition:

"Selamat kepada 10 penulis top Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari (UNISKA MAB) yang telah berkontribusi dalam klasterisasi perguruan tinggi tahun 2025 (klaster utama)! 🎉🏆"

This serves as both a celebration of internal achievement and a strategic narrative to position UNISKA among the top academic performers nationally. Posts like these align with the institution's aim to enhance its perceived academic credibility and to inspire both internal stakeholders and external audiences.



Figure 2. Instagram Post about Top 10 Author

Furthermore, the university promotes institutional reputation by sharing awards and recognitions in national events. A post states:

"Alhamdulillah, Selamat dan Sukses Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari Banjarmasin atas peraih Bronze Winner Anugerah Kerjasama Kategori PTS dengan Sub Kategori Pengelolaan Laporan Kerja Sama (LAPORKERMA) Terbaik pada ANUGERAH DIKTISAINTEK 2024."



Figure 3. Instagram Post about Anugerah Diktisaintek 2024

This statement not only documents success but also emphasizes accountability, transparency, and professional management, further solidifying a brand image of excellence and responsibility. According to one informant, such posts are intentionally crafted to reach both prospective students and institutional partners:

"If we post national achievements like that, the hope is that not only prospective students will see it, but also other institutions that want to collaborate with UNISKA." (S.F., 2025).

The findings of this study reaffirm the theoretical framework that positions marketing communication as a strategic process aimed at shaping audience perceptions and strengthening institutional credibility. According to Alexandrescu & Milandru (2018), marketing communication is not merely about delivering information, but about creating meaningful and persuasive interactions that build a lasting image in the minds of stakeholders.

In the case of UNISKA MAB, the use of Instagram as a primary communication tool reflects this perspective, where content is curated not just for information dissemination but to foster emotional engagement, institutional pride, and a perception of excellence. This aligns with the theoretical concept of *role*, as defined by Blomgren & Rozenberg (2015), where the institution assumes the role of an active communicator and brand builder in the digital public sphere.

When examined through the lens of previous studies, the present research both supports and extends earlier findings. For instance, the study by Mulitawati & Retnasary (2020) on @ahlinyaobatmaag demonstrated that Instagram can be effectively used for brand positioning by leveraging content elements like promotion, publicity, and personal connection with followers. Similarly, UNISKA MAB uses Instagram to position itself through promotional posts highlighting accreditation, research achievements, and national awards. However, while @ahlinyaobatmaag focused heavily on commercial branding and consumer interaction, UNISKA MAB's approach

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integrates spiritual values, academic identity, and institutional achievements, making its communication more complex and layered.

In addition, the study by Paramita et al. (2023) on Montana Del Café emphasized that social media, especially Instagram and Facebook, plays a vital role in increasing brand awareness, expanding market reach, and facilitating two-way communication. The case of UNISKA MAB reinforces this view, particularly in how the institution utilizes Instagram to project academic success and institutional transparency. What differentiates this study is the academic context, where branding is not purely profit-driven but reputation- and trust-oriented. The use of captions such as "*Terima kasih atas kerja sama...*" and "*Alhamdulillah, Selamat dan Sukses...*" adds a cultural and emotional layer that is particularly effective in appealing to an Indonesian audience sensitive to collective gratitude and spiritual framing.

The use of Instagram as a marketing communication tool also ties into the theory of brand image by Keller (1993), which emphasizes that brand associations—whether functional, emotional, or symbolic—shape how audiences perceive an institution. In this research, UNISKA MAB leverages symbolic capital through messages of *gratitude*, *faith*, and *achievement*, which resonate deeply with its target demographic. By consistently posting content that highlights accreditation status, recognition by national education bodies, and individual staff or student achievements, the university reinforces brand associations of excellence, trustworthiness, and Islamic identity. This strategic alignment between communication and desired brand perception is what ultimately enhances its public image.

Traditional marketing through brochures and banners has shifted toward dynamic, dialogical, and immersive storytelling via social media. This shift is in line with Gaganjot et al. (2019), who argue that social media platforms like Instagram are structured around identity creation, sharing, and relationship-building. UNISKA MAB's content strategy clearly utilizes these features, not only sharing information but crafting an institutional identity that is both aspirational and relatable. The findings illustrate that brand image in the higher education sector is no longer just about rankings or facilities but also about narratives, values, and presence—all of which can be amplified through well-executed social media marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the role of marketing communication through Instagram in building the brand image of Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari (UNISKA MAB). As anticipated in the introduction, the increasing importance of digital platforms—particularly social media—has transformed how higher education institutions communicate their identity, achievements, and values. The findings confirm that Instagram is not merely a channel for content distribution but functions as a strategic tool for strengthening public perception and institutional credibility. Through promotional posts highlighting academic accomplishments, accreditation status, and national recognitions, UNISKA MAB has effectively utilized Instagram to project a brand image rooted in excellence, integrity, and Islamic values.

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that marketing communication via Instagram contributes significantly to shaping a favorable and trusted brand image in the eyes of the public. This research offers practical implications for educational institutions that seek to remain relevant and competitive in the digital age. For future development, UNISKA MAB and similar universities should continue refining their digital communication strategies by integrating more interactive features, such as student-generated content, storytelling formats (e.g., Reels or Instagram Stories), and audience engagement tools (e.g., polls, Q&A sessions).

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