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**Implementing Transformative Marketing Strategies
for Islamic Educational Services in the Digital Era: A
Case Study at AIS**

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ABSTRACT:

In the era of globalization and technological disruption, Islamic education institutions must adapt to remain competitive and relevant. Transformative Islamic education, integrating Islamic values with contemporary global demands, has become essential for sustaining excellence in the education service industry. This study examines strategic approaches for enhancing the competitiveness of Islamic education institutions, focusing on Aqobah International School (AIS) in Ngoro, Jombang, Indonesia, as a model of transformative practice. AIS integrates faith-based education with global learning systems through innovative marketing strategies such as systematic social media engagement, international exhibitions with influencer collaboration, online learning trials, live talk programs (AIS Fortnight), and participation in educational fairs.

The research employs a library-based method to analyze literature on transformative education management and digital marketing in Islamic schools. The study introduces the concept of corporate educational production—a strategic integration of academic, economic, social, and business dimensions—to ensure institutional sustainability. Findings indicate that effective management, digitalization, and innovative marketing enable Islamic schools to enhance educational quality and influence, producing graduates with both intellectual excellence and strong Islamic character.

Key words: *Transformative Islamic Education; Educational Marketing Strategy; Digitalization; Aqobah International School (AIS)*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and technological disruption, the Islamic education service industry faces significant challenges in maintaining relevance and competitiveness. Transformative Islamic education, an approach that integrates timeless Islamic values with contemporary global needs, emerges as the cornerstone of excellence in this evolving landscape. To ensure that Islamic educational institutions not only

survive but also excel in the face of global dynamics, effective and innovative strategies are imperative.

One strategic approach is the concept of corporate educational production, which unifies academic, business, social, and economic dimensions into a mutually reinforcing ecosystem. This model empowers Islamic educational institutions to strengthen their competitiveness by creating synergy between education and market demands. Consequently, graduates are not only equipped with strong religious understanding but also with competencies relevant to the modern workforce and the knowledge economy.

Moreover, transformative learning management serves as a vital element in fostering creativity and innovation among students. This pedagogical orientation emphasizes critical reflection, developmental thinking, and continuous evaluation—encouraging learners to think critically, act creatively, and adapt to the rapid pace of change, all of which are essential competencies in the digital era.

Equally important is the strategic marketing of transformative Islamic education services. By applying differentiation strategies, educational institutions can offer unique competitive advantages—such as innovative curricula, modern facilities, and learner-centered services tailored to the expectations of students and parents. These strategies not only strengthen institutional reputation but also elevate Islamic education as a preferred and progressive educational choice in the public eye.

Furthermore, strengthening educational management and governance is crucial for ensuring operational efficiency and effectiveness. Visionary leadership, transparency, and accountability in resource management serve as determining factors in achieving competitive excellence. With professional management, institutions can respond swiftly and

strategically to change while maintaining high-quality educational services.

Finally, the integration of technology and digitalization into learning processes is an essential prerequisite in the era of Industry 4.0. Incorporating information technology not only enhances instructional efficiency but also enables personalized learning experiences tailored to individual student needs. This integration allows Islamic educational institutions to produce graduates who are globally competent while firmly rooted in Islamic ethical values.

In this context, Aqobah International School (AIS) in Ngoro, Jombang, Indonesia, stands as an exemplary locus of transformative Islamic education. AIS was chosen as the focal institution for this study because it successfully embodies the synthesis of Islamic moral foundations with modern educational innovation. The school has implemented a comprehensive strategy encompassing digital transformation, global collaboration, and creative marketing approaches that align with its vision of nurturing globally minded Muslim scholars. By examining AIS as a case model, this study seeks to demonstrate how transformative strategies can be operationalized effectively to achieve excellence and sustainability in the Islamic education service industry.

Literature Review and Theoretical Mapping

Previous studies on Islamic education have largely centered on leadership, curriculum innovation, and institutional quality enhancement in the face of globalization. Scholars such as Sahin (2018) emphasize the need for Islamic education to evolve beyond traditional frameworks by integrating moral and spiritual foundations with global competencies and creative learning approaches. Similarly, Islam (2019) highlights how social media and digital transformation influence Muslim societies,

suggesting that Islamic educational institutions must harness these tools to strengthen both da'wah (Islamic outreach) and academic relevance.

In the realm of educational marketing, Kotler and Keller (2021) argue that digital branding, learner experience, and strategic communication play vital roles in shaping institutional competitiveness. For Islamic schools, these strategies are not only used to attract students, but also to build trust and show clear differentiation in mission and identity. This perspective supports the need for Islamic educational institutions to become more adaptive, innovative, and market-oriented while maintaining their religious principles.

However, the current literature still shows a clear gap: research tends to separate discussions between transformative Islamic education, school management, and digital marketing efforts. There are limited studies that systematically combine these elements into one unified and practical model. This creates an opportunity for further exploration to understand how Islamic schools can upgrade their management strategies and educational systems simultaneously through technological and digital tools.

Therefore, this study positions itself to fill the research gap by integrating three key concepts: transformative Islamic education philosophy, quality management in Islamic institutions, and digital marketing approaches. By doing so, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive and contextual strategy for institutions like Aqobah International School (AIS) to gain a competitive advantage while staying loyal to Islamic values and addressing the needs of modern learners.

Gap Analysis and Novelty

Most previous research treats Islamic education and marketing as separate topics. Some focus on improving Islamic learning, while others study digital promotion in general education. The gap lies in

understanding how Islamic schools can use marketing and digital strategies without losing their spiritual identity. This study fills that gap by examining Aqobah International School (AIS), which has successfully merged Islamic values with modern management and creative marketing. The novelty of this study is the idea of corporate educational production, which links academic, economic, social, and business aspects into one sustainable system.

Rationale of the Study

Islamic education faces new challenges in the digital age: low visibility, weak adaptation to technology, and limited innovation in management. Aqobah International School (AIS) in Ngoro, Jombang, was chosen as the research site because it offers a successful example of how to overcome these challenges. AIS has built a strong image through digital transformation, international collaboration, and creative marketing, while maintaining its Islamic character. Studying AIS provides both theoretical insights and practical lessons for other Islamic education institutions.

Purpose, Focus, and Research Questions

This study aims to analyse the strategic marketing and management model of transformative Islamic education through the case of Aqobah International School (AIS). The focus is on how AIS integrates Islamic values, technology, and market-oriented innovation to stay competitive and sustainable.

The main research questions are:

1. How does AIS implement transformative Islamic education in management and marketing?
2. What strategies help AIS remain competitive in the global education industry?
3. How can the concept of corporate educational production support Islamic education sustainability?

Through these questions, this research develops a clearer understanding of how Islamic schools can achieve excellence by balancing spiritual identity and modern innovation.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach. The main goal is to analyze and connect ideas from various sources about transformative Islamic education, school management, and digital marketing strategies. This approach is chosen because it helps explain concepts deeply and systematically based on existing research.

The data sources include books, journal articles, and online publications related to Islamic education and educational marketing. Data were collected through documentation, by identifying, reading, and organizing relevant materials from trusted databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. The data were analyzed using content analysis, focusing on key themes, patterns, and research gaps.

Through this method, the study develops a conceptual model that links Islamic educational transformation with modern marketing practices. Aqobah International School (AIS) in Jombang is used as the main example to show how these strategies can be applied effectively in a real educational setting.

Results

The results of this study reveal that Aqobah International School (AIS) in Jombang has effectively applied a transformative marketing approach that combines Islamic educational values with modern promotional strategies. Based on the three main research questions—focusing on transformative Islamic education, institutional management, and digital marketing—the findings indicate that AIS has successfully built a strong institutional identity while responding to the demands of globalization. In the area of transformative Islamic education, AIS

integrates Islamic moral values with creative, project-based, and technology-enhanced learning. This allows students to develop spiritual integrity alongside global competencies such as digital literacy, communication, and critical thinking.

From the perspective of institutional management, AIS exhibits professional governance characterized by transparency, accountability, and innovation. The school's leadership implements continuous teacher development programs, structured performance evaluation, and collaboration with international educational networks. This reflects the management model proposed by Indrawan and Refika (2024), emphasizing that strong institutional management rooted in Islamic ethics enhances both academic quality and public trust.

In the field of digital marketing, AIS demonstrates excellence through consistent and strategic online engagement. The school manages multiple social media platforms—Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook—with scheduled, creative, and trend-based content that showcases student achievements and school programs. Programs such as AIS Online Trial and AIS Fortnight allow interactive participation from prospective students and parents, creating authentic emotional connections and enhancing brand loyalty. These findings confirm the theories of Kotler and Keller (2021) and Munawwaroh and Rahayu (2024), who argue that experiential and digital-based marketing significantly increases institutional competitiveness. Overall, AIS stands as a living model of how Islamic education institutions can merge spiritual values, innovative management, and digital marketing to achieve sustainability and global relevance.

Discussion

Understanding Service Marketing in Education

Marketing in the education sector has often been misunderstood and undervalued. Many schools only see marketing as promotion, limited

to banners, brochures, or social media campaigns during student admissions. However, true marketing goes far beyond that. It is a continuous process that starts from how a school designs its learning experiences to meet the expectations of parents and students.

When a school creates value for students and parents, through quality teaching, programs, and outcomes, marketing is already happening. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as the activity and process of creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers and society (Kotler & Keller, 2021). In this sense, developing a curriculum that reflects graduate competencies or offering unique educational programs is part of marketing strategy.

A good example comes from history: Ford identified people's need for gasoline-powered vehicles before others did. Similarly, Chanel recognized women's desire for elegant fashion, and Coca-Cola discovered the public's need for a refreshing, easy-to-serve drink. These stories show that marketing starts with identifying human and social needs, then turning them into valuable offers.

In education, marketing means understanding what kind of learning experience parents want for their children. For instance, some parents prioritize Quran memorization (tahfidz) or full-day programs. Schools that provide these specific values are already doing marketing by aligning their programs with family expectations.

Education as a Public Service

Educational services differ from physical goods. A car or a book can be produced, stored, and sold, but education is intangible, it exists as an experience. Students "consume" learning at the same time it is delivered. This makes it difficult to measure quality, as it depends on both the process and the result.

Services are also heterogeneous; they vary depending on the teachers, students, and timing. Therefore, evaluating education is more complex than evaluating physical products. Parents judge a school not only by final grades but also by the learning journey and how their children are treated along the way (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2018).

As a public service, education involves three key principles: voice, choice, and exit. Voice means parents and students can participate in school decisions, such as through committees or feedback. Choice allows them to select schools that match their values, while exit represents the right to move to another school if the current one fails to meet expectations (Hirschman, 1970). However, in many areas, switching schools is difficult due to zoning or quality differences.

Factors Influencing Educational Consumers

Parents' decisions in choosing schools are shaped by several factors, personal needs, cultural background, social environment, and economic capacity. Kotler and Keller (2012) explain that consumer behavior is influenced by cultural, social, and personal factors. For example, religious families may prefer Islamic schools or pesantren, while parents with busy work schedules may opt for full-day schools.

Social influences also play a major role. Recommendations from friends, religious leaders, or community figures can strongly affect parental choices. Personal factors—such as age, occupation, income, and values—also determine school preference. For instance, middle-income Muslim families might prefer modern Islamic schools that reflect both their faith and social identity.

Strategic Approaches to Educational Marketing

Educational institutions need creative strategies to attract and retain students. Some key approaches include:

Educational Production Corporation

Schools can adopt corporate-style management to sustain their operations legally and systematically. Education can produce both intellectual and economic value—through books, training programs, digital content, and consultancy services. This approach makes schools more independent and innovative while ensuring quality learning (Ki Hajar Dewantara, 1935; Effendi, 2020).

Transformative Learning Management

Transformative education focuses on changing how students understand themselves and the world. It develops critical, reflective, and spiritual learners who can adapt and contribute to society. In Islamic contexts, it means internalizing moral and spiritual values alongside intellectual growth (Mezirow, 1997; Al-Attas, 1980).

Transformative Islamic Education Marketing

This strategy integrates Islamic values with modern digital promotion. By combining faith-based programs, social media engagement, and community partnerships, schools can strengthen their image and attract families who seek spiritual and academic balance (Munawwaroh & Rahayu, 2024).

Strengthening Management and Governance

Good governance ensures transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. Effective leadership and participatory management help schools remain relevant in the face of globalization and technological change (Indrawan & Refika, 2024).

Technology and Digitalization

Digital transformation is now essential. Online learning platforms, social media, and digital marketing tools expand access, enhance communication, and improve learning efficiency. However, schools must also address challenges like data security and unequal access (UNESCO,

2023). The findings of this study are presented based on three main research questions concerning how transformative Islamic education, institutional management, and digital marketing strategies can strengthen the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. First, addressing how transformative Islamic education contributes to institutional excellence, the study finds that by integrating Islamic values with modern learning approaches, such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy, a holistic education model emerges. For example, research by Taufikin (2024) on pesantren shows successful integration of Islamic values, entrepreneurial skills and digital technology into curriculum and daily practices. This model helps learners develop both strong faith-based character and relevant 21st-century skills.

Second, regarding institutional management, the findings highlight the importance of visionary leadership, transparency, and continuous quality improvement. Studies such as Indrawan & Refika (2024) demonstrate that Islamic management practices, rooted in values like amanah (trust) and ihsan (excellence), have a positive impact on service effectiveness and institutional governance. At Aqobah International School (AIS) in Jombang, these practices appear in the form of structured governance, ongoing professional development for teachers, and a performance-based evaluation system that keeps the institution responsive and accountable.

Third, in response to the question about digital marketing strategies, the study reveals that effective usage of social media, content marketing, and virtual engagement (such as AIS's online-trial and live-talk programs) greatly increases public interest and strengthens the school's brand image. Research by Munawwaroh & Rahayu (2024) on boarding-school digital branding shows that combining traditional values with modern digital marketing significantly enhances institutional attractiveness. Similarly, Wahyunto et al. (2024) found that school branding in the digital era via digital marketing and social media is key to building enrollment interest. These combined strategies demonstrate that Islamic

schools can remain competitive and relevant without losing their spiritual foundation.

Aqobah International School (AIS) in Jombang serves as a strong example of how Islamic educational institutions can successfully implement transformative marketing strategies while maintaining their spiritual and academic identity. The rationale for focusing on AIS lies in its proven ability to integrate faith-based education with innovative digital marketing practices. AIS has demonstrated that effective branding in Islamic education does not rely solely on academic excellence but also on how institutions communicate their values, culture, and achievements to the wider public. Through systematic use of social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and SnackVideo, AIS consistently delivers engaging and trend-aligned content highlighting student achievements, school programs, and international collaborations. This aligns with Munawwaroh and Rahayu's (2024) findings that digital marketing significantly enhances institutional visibility and stakeholder trust.

Furthermore, AIS has creatively expanded its outreach through interactive promotional programs, such as AIS Online Trial—allowing prospective students and parents to experience the school's learning atmosphere virtually, and AIS Fortnight, a live talk show designed to engage audiences in real time. These initiatives reflect the experiential marketing approach discussed by Kotler and Keller (2021), emphasizing emotional connection and user experience. In addition, AIS's participation in international exhibitions and educational bazaars, supported by influencer collaboration, reinforces its global image and strengthens community engagement. These strategies collectively illustrate that AIS has moved beyond conventional promotion toward a transformative marketing model, integrating digital innovation, institutional management, and Islamic educational values—providing a

practical and replicable model for other Islamic schools in the global education landscape.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Aqobah International School (AIS) in Jombang has successfully implemented a transformative marketing strategy that integrates Islamic educational values, modern management, and digital innovation. The findings, aligned with the three research questions, reveal that AIS's approach to transformative Islamic education strengthens students' intellectual, moral, and technological competencies; its management practices ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement; and its digital marketing strategies—through active social media engagement, online trials, live talk shows, and participation in educational exhibitions—effectively enhance institutional visibility and public trust. The study reflects that AIS serves as a model for how Islamic schools can adapt to globalization while maintaining their spiritual identity. By aligning faith-based principles with creative digital outreach, AIS demonstrates that Islamic education can remain both relevant and competitive in the 21st-century educational landscape.

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