

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY JAKARTA IN REPUTATION BUILDING MODERN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategic application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in Islamic higher education by observing Muhammadiyah University Jakarta (UMJ), the first Muhammadiyah university that has been established for 70 years in maintaining its reputation as a modern Islamic campus. Using a qualitative approach through an integrative literature review and observations at Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta regarding IMC, university branding, and digital communication, the analysis shows that UMJ has implemented some IMC principles through coordinated activities from the Public Relations, Multimedia, and Protocol units under the University Secretariat Office. Although these practices demonstrate message synergy, their implementation is not yet structured within the IMC framework because they are still separate from the PMB promotion section. This article proposes the Value Digital Coordination (VDC) Model as a strategic guideline for Islamic universities to integrate value-based persuasion, digital synergy, and institutional coordination in building a modern Islamic campus image. The results of the study confirm that IMC is not merely a promotional tool, but rather a communication ideology that integrates Islamic values of trustworthiness, professionalism, and social responsibility into institutional communication.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication; Islamic Higher Education; Brand Image; Digital Strategy; Muhammadiyah University Jakarta.

INTRODUCTION

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has become a strategic necessity for universities in strengthening their reputation, increasing the number of new students, and building long-term trust among stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2016). IMC emphasizes the coordination of various communication channels, including advertising, public relations, digital media, institutional activities, and interpersonal communication, to deliver consistent, persuasive, and value-based messages (Belch & Belch, 2021). Amid increasing competition and digital disruption, IMC helps universities manage their brand identity and strengthen their strategic position (Roy & Misra, 2024).

In Indonesia, competition between Islamic and private universities is increasing along with the development of digitalization and the emergence of value-based branding strategies (Meltareza & Tawaqal, 2023). Universities are increasingly utilizing digital media to communicate academic excellence, institutional values, and organizational culture to prospective students (Perera et al., 2023). However, the implementation of IMC in Indonesian universities is often fragmented, relying on public relations units or digital teams without integrated strategic coordination (Estaswara, 2016). This condition leads to inconsistency in messaging, reduces communication effectiveness, and hinders the formation of a strong institutional image.

Islamic higher education institutions have an additional responsibility to integrate spiritual and ethical values into their communication strategies, while also building a modern, credible, and globally relevant image (Juhaidi, 2024). Communication in Islamic higher education institutions not only serves to provide information, but also to convey moral persuasion based on Islamic teachings, organizational ethics, and social responsibility (Mahyudin et al., 2024). This dual demand for Islamic value-based communication and modern branding is a challenge that can be addressed through an IMC approach.

The University of Muhammadiyah Jakarta (UMJ), which was founded in 1955 as the first Muhammadiyah organization university in Indonesia, is an important example for understanding IMC in Islamic higher education. As part of the Muhammadiyah movement, UMJ carries out a mission that integrates religious values with academic advancement and community service (Kurniasih et al., 2024). UMJ has three divisions related to communication, namely Public Relations, Multimedia, and Protocol, which are under the University Secretariat Office. These three divisions handle media relations, audiovisual content production, and institutional activities, demonstrating a partial implementation of IMC through coordinated collaboration. However, there is a Technical Implementation Unit (UPT) for Promotion and Student Recruitment that promotes the university to attract new students (Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, 2024).

However, despite this synergy, UMJ has not yet institutionalized IMC within an official framework or work program. The absence of an IMC plan has resulted in inconsistent messaging, limited digital integration, and suboptimal utilization of the organization's communication assets. This raises the research question: to what extent has UMJ implicitly applied IMC principles, and how can these practices be formalized into a strategic IMC framework to maintain the reputation of a modern Islamic campus?

In the global higher education ecosystem, IMC has evolved as a communication framework that not only focuses on promotion but also builds long-term relationships through data- and technology-based integrated messaging (Fill & Turnbull, 2019). Universities are now adopting omnichannel strategies to reach the digital-native generation who rely on social media, search engines, and online reviews when choosing a campus (Roy & Misra, 2024). Islamic universities such as UMJ need to adapt to this digital communication landscape so that Islamic messages and academic excellence can be effectively conveyed to an increasingly competitive and segmented public.

The reputation of a university is not only determined by academic quality, but also by the extent to which external communication is able to reflect the consistency of values, institutional performance, and social commitment (Roy & Misra, 2024). Reputation is a collection of images from various stakeholders about the performance, behavior, and communication of an institution within a certain period of time (Doorley & Garcia, 2015). In the context of UMJ as an Islamic campus and part of the large Muhammadiyah organization, public expectations are higher in terms of ethics, service, and academic achievement. Without a structured IMC system, institutional communication has the potential to be unstable and less capable of building public trust optimally (Rehman et al., 2022). Therefore, an IMC strategy is needed to ensure that UMJ's reputation is built consistently and credibly.

One of the main challenges for Islamic universities is how to showcase their religious identity without losing their modern appeal and global relevance (Albustomi & Hefniy, 2025). IMC provides a framework to balance the two through Islamic values packaged in modern communication styles, such as digital storytelling, multimedia content, and engaging social media campaigns (Mahyudin et al., 2024). For UMJ, which has a long history of 70 years in educational da'wah, IMC can be a means to strengthen its image as an Islamic, modern, progressive, and competitive campus.

UMJ has great potential to develop an IMC system because its communication infrastructure is relatively complete through Public Relations, Multimedia, and Protocol. However, these three units are not yet integrated into a unified communication framework because they are separate from the New Student Admissions Promotion (PMB) section (Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, 2024). With IMC, each unit can play a role in a unified system: Public Relations focuses on image and media relations, Multimedia on content production and digital engagement, Protocol on leadership representation and event experience, and the PMB Promotion section as the front line in attracting new students. This synergy will result in a stronger message and a more consistent campus identity (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). Amidst the increasing number of private universities and new Islamic universities, UMJ needs to have a communication strategy that sets it apart from its competitors. IMC can maximize all of UMJ's communication assets to showcase the uniqueness of the campus, such as the Muhammadiyah tradition, its long history since 1955, and its commitment to community service (Kurniasih et al., 2024).

Without a clear IMC approach, the potential of these advantages will not be optimally presented to the public. Therefore, the implementation of IMC is not only a strategic step but also an important requirement to increase UMJ's competitiveness in the digital era (Nguyen et al., 2025). The application of IMC has not been widely implemented in a structured manner in Islamic universities in Indonesia, although some IMC practices have been carried out. Previous research only concerned UMJ's reputation in relation to public relations by Patrianti, so the novelty of this research concerns the reputation built with integrated marketing communication (IMC) that has the characteristics of a modern Islamic campus.

This study aims to answer these questions through a synthesis of global IMC literature contextualized with the UMJ communication system. By examining the theoretical basis, best practices, and empirical findings, this study proposes a new conceptual model of the *Value Digital Coordination* (VDC) IMC *Framework* designed specifically for Islamic universities. This study provides theoretical and practical contributions by showing how IMC can bridge Islamic values and modern branding strategies.

Literature Review

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) emerged in the early 1990s as a response to fragmented promotional practices, emphasizing the need for integrated, consistent, and strategically coordinated communication across all communication channels (Schultz et al., 1993).

Kotler & Keller (2016) define IMC as “a concept that integrates and coordinates various communication channels to convey clear, consistent, and compelling messages about the organization and brand.” This definition emphasizes that IMC is both a managerial and strategic process.

The *Value Digital Coordination* (VDC) model places Islamic institutional values as the foundation of digital persuasion through the integration of message design and institutional coordination. This approach utilizes the concept of *value driven* design, which emphasizes that content and information architecture must be built based on the values that the audience wants to instill (Bolchini et al., 2008). VDC requires structured institutional coordination through digital governance, integrated workflows, and a shared data environment. Thus, VDC becomes a strategic guideline for Islamic universities in building a modern Islamic image and reputation in a measurable, coordinated, and value-based manner (Li & Tuunanen, 2022).

IMC encompasses various communication tools such as advertising, public relations, digital marketing, institutional activities, direct marketing, and word of mouth, all of which are aimed at creating message synergy (Belch & Belch, 2021). The goal is to ensure that every communication touchpoint reinforces the same brand identity and increases audience recall (Fill & Turnbull, 2019).

IMC is particularly relevant in today's digital communication landscape, which demands cross-media consistency, especially as audiences increasingly rely on digital platforms as their primary source of information. In higher education, IMC is important because universities operate in a

competitive market where reputation greatly influences student enrollment decisions (Roy & Misra, 2024).

Universities that implement IMC effectively have a stronger brand image, higher public trust, and better stakeholder loyalty (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). Chan et al. (2025) found that IMC strategies significantly influence university reputation in Southeast Asia and are a key factor in increasing global visibility.

However, research also shows that IMC implementation in higher education institutions, especially in developing countries, is often fragmented and focused only on public relations activities without strategic cross-unit coordination (Nguyen et al., 2025). This condition is also seen in many Indonesian universities, including UMJ, which, despite having several communication units, does not yet have a formal IMC framework to integrate all communication activities comprehensively.

Higher education branding involves creating a strong, credible, and trusted institutional identity among various stakeholders (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). IMC supports higher education branding by ensuring that all forms of communication are aligned in conveying institutional messages. Studies show that universities that implement IMC well tend to see an increase in new student interest and stronger institutional loyalty (Roy & Misra, 2024). Digital transformation expands IMC automation, as digital platforms become the primary medium for showcasing institutional culture and values (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Fardiansyah et al. (2021) asserts that e-IMC strategies increase the visibility of new universities through coordinated digital messaging.

In Indonesia, IMC practices in higher education institutions are beginning to develop, but they generally still arise spontaneously and do not yet have a formal framework (Meltareza & Tawaqal, 2023). This is similar to the situation at UMJ, which is developing a cross-unit communication system.

In addition, Islamic universities must not only convey academic excellence, but also Islamic values and moral ethics (Albustomi & Hefniy, 2025). Persuasion in Islamic communication is based on the principles of amanah, sidq, and maslahah, which make communication both informative and transformative (Mahyudin et al., 2024). In the context of branding, value-based persuasion combines rational and emotional appeal with Islamic identity (Juhaidi, 2024). A study of the largest Islamic brand, Wardah, shows that consumer trust increases when communication is consistent with organizational values. This principle is particularly relevant to Islamic universities such as UMJ.

International studies show that colleges in the United States and Europe have already adopted IMC as a strategic approach to managing reputation and stakeholder relations. Gordon-Isasi et al. (2021) explain that universities in the United States integrate media relations, digital marketing, and alumni relations into a single integrated IMC system. In Europe, IMC is used in global campaigns to attract international students and enhance institutional reputation. This shows that IMC plays an important role in global higher education competition.

Research in East Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, and China, also shows a positive trend in IMC implementation. Ayvat & Gunturkun (2025) found that universities utilize IMC to build strong brand positioning through coordination between Public Relations, the International Office, and the Digital Media Center. In China, IMC is implemented using big data and AI to personalize student recruitment messages (Lingling & Fuli, 2021).

Umrah travel services in Malaysia customer satisfaction and customer loyalty by integrating marketing communication and after sale service into the traditional marketing, are also actively implementing IMC. Othman et al. (2021) note that universities in Saudi Arabia integrate Islamic values with a modern image through digital communication, international promotion, and global public relations strategies. Bonilla Quijada et al. (2022) found that Qatari universities use IMC to build a national identity based on research innovation, demonstrating that IMC can be adapted to cultural and religious contexts.

At the global level, IMC has also proven effective in increasing the number of international students. Hung & Yen (2022) asserts that universities that consistently implement IMC produce strong institutional messages to attract prospective global students. IMC improves international students' perceptions of academic credibility and service quality. This emphasizes the importance of IMC for universities seeking to expand their international reach sustainably.

A global comparison shows a significant gap between the implementation of IMC in universities around the world and universities in Indonesia. Universities in America, Europe, and East Asia usually have an Integrated Communication Office or a special strategic division that manages IMC (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). However, many universities in Indonesia still separate the functions of

Public Relations, Marketing, and Information Technology without integrated coordination (Meltareza & Tawaqal, 2023). This condition explains why many campuses, including UMJ, have implemented several elements of IMC but do not yet have a comprehensive integrated communication system. This reinforces the urgency for UMJ to develop IMC as an institutional communication strategy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the *integrative literature review* method, which is an approach that allows researchers to critically combine various scientific sources to produce new theoretical perspectives and a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Torraco, 2005). This approach was chosen because the implementation of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in higher education varies greatly between countries and institutions, requiring a synthesis that can connect global theory with the local context of Islamic universities, particularly Muhammadiyah University Jakarta (UMJ). By using an integrative literature review method, this study can combine IMC concepts, the latest empirical findings, and UMJ institutional documents to formulate a conceptual model of IMC that is in line with the characteristics of Islamic universities (Snyder, 2019). The data sources in this study consist of two broad categories, namely academic and institutional sources. The articles were selected based on their relevance to the themes of IMC, higher education marketing, digital communication, or Islamic branding. The data selection process was carried out through a systematic search using keywords such as “integrated marketing communications,” “university branding,” “Islamic higher education communication,” and “digital marketing in universities.” All articles found were then selected through a screening stage to ensure topic suitability, methodological feasibility, and contextual suitability with the research object. Data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis as developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The validity and reliability of the research were maintained through source triangulation by comparing international literature, national literature, UMJ institutional documents, and classical and modern IMC theories (Patton, 2015). The limitations of this study are that it did not use interviews or field observations, so the interpretation is limited to public documents and academic publications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the implementation of IMC in higher education institutions, especially Islamic universities, is still uneven and tends to be fragmented (Roy & Misra, 2024). In Southeast Asia, IMC has been proven to improve university reputation, student engagement, and digital visibility (Chan et al., 2025). Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta (UMJ) is a private university under the auspices of Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia. UMJ is committed to realizing its vision of “Realizing an Islamic Campus in 2025” and positioning itself as a modern, excellent, and competitive Islamic university.

Based on data from the official UMJ website (umj.ac.id) and PDDIKTI as of July 15, 2025, this university has 58 study programs and 30 accredited programs at the Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral, and Specialist Program levels. These programs are distributed across various faculties and postgraduate programs, consisting of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI), the Faculty of Medicine and Health (FKK), the Faculty of Education (FIP), the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), Faculty of Engineering (FT), Faculty of Public Health (FKM), and others. UMJ has more than 17,900 active students, a significant number of lecturers with various qualifications, including 28 professors, scientific publications managed by the institution in the form of journals and proceedings, and various Student Activity Units (UKM) for the development of students' soft skills.

UMJ positions itself as a modern Islamic university that integrates Islamic values with modern education. As a Muhammadiyah-based institution, UMJ practices Muhammadiyah values in its management and learning. Its positioning as a superior and competitive institution is reflected in its focus on academic quality and graduate competitiveness. In addition, UMJ is also committed to contributing to society through research and community service.

Based on publications on the UMJ website, this institution has achieved various achievements in several categories. In the student achievement category, there are various winners in national and international competitions, such as FKK UMJ students who won 1st place in S-RMO 2025 and FIP UMJ students who won 1st place in the 2025 Pangdam III/Siliwangi Open Karate Competition. In the accreditation category, study programs are accredited with various rankings. In the academic

development category, there are new professors such as Prof. Ir. Anwar Ilmar Ramadhan, Ph.D., Prof. Dr. Muhammad Hadi, M.Kes., and Prof. Sri Yunanto, M.Si., Ph.D. In the educational output category, there are regular graduations with thousands of graduates, for example, 1,558 graduates in one period. In the category of cooperation, UMJ has established cooperation with other institutions, such as LPPM UMJ, which received a visit from ITERA for PkM and KKN cooperation.

Gordon-Isasi et al. (2021) emphasize that IMC is effective when all communication channels are aligned. The Communication Structure of the University of Muhammadiyah Jakarta (UMJ) has three parts: (1) The Public Relations Section, which manages media, news, publications, and external relations; (2) The Multimedia Division, which produces designs, videos, digital content, and manages social media; and (3) The Protocol Division, which organizes academic events, Muhammadiyah association events, official events for ministries/state institutions, leadership assistance, and ceremonies. This structure shows that there is coordinated division of labor under the University Secretariat Office, but it is not yet in the form of a formal IMC that is written down or planned in the work program (Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, 2024). UMJ also has a special unit for promotion that focuses on several activities. The first activity is marketing study programs and recruiting new students. The second activity is a student recruitment campaign. The third activity is visiting schools. The fourth activity is managing the new student admission platform (PMB). A special website for PMB (pmb.umj.ac.id) shows that there is an integrated system for promoting and registering new students.

Based on an analysis of UMJ's website content, social media, and publications, the partial implementation of IMC at UMJ can be seen through the consistent publicity of the Public Relations Office in publishing news about internal and external campus activities on the university's official website, social media, and partner media such as Republika Online, Media Indonesia, and Televisi Muhammadiyah (Perera et al., 2023).

The digital content produced by the Multimedia Department shows consistency in UMJ's visual identity (Belch & Belch, 2021). The Protocol Department also plays a strategic role as an event organizer that serves to build the image of religious, professional, and modern campus leadership (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Additionally, word-of-mouth emerges from the involvement of students' parents, Muhammadiyah association activities, and alumni networks, all of which contribute to UMJ's organic reputation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The role of IMC in building the reputation of a modern Islamic campus for 70 years can be seen from UMJ's ability to integrate Islamic values into communication messages (Juhaidi, 2024), create cross-platform digital synergy (Fardiansyah et al., 2021), maintain consistency in slogans and visual identity (Albustomi & Hefniy, 2025), and encouraging internal and external public engagement (Chan et al., 2025). The conceptual model of IMC *Value Digital Coordination* (VDC) developed in this study confirms that Islamic higher education institutions require a value-based communication approach, digital integration, and institutional coordination to create a holistic institutional image.

The findings of this study are related to the IMC challenges identified in the introduction, namely message inconsistency, fragmentation of communication tasks between units, and the absence of an integrated communication policy at UMJ. This lack of integration is consistent with findings in many developing countries' universities that still rely on single-unit communication, usually public relations, without strategic integration (Nguyen et al., 2025). As a result, UMJ experiences a situation where each unit produces strong communication outputs but does not always contribute to the overall institutional narrative. This gap shows that the need for IMC at UMJ is not only technical but also structural and strategic.

When compared to global IMC practices, UMJ is still in the early stages of communication integration. Universities in America, Europe, and East Asia have used Integrated Communications Offices to combine PR, marketing, digital media, and protocol into a single integrated structure (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). This is in contrast to UMJ, which still places three communication units in separate structures, so that coordination often takes place informally. The absence of a formal IMC structure is a major factor in the lack of consistency in UMJ's messaging and communication visibility compared to more advanced and institutionalized global practices.

As discussed in the literature review, Islamic universities have the unique requirement of integrating religious values into institutional communication (Albustomi & Hefniy, 2025). In the context of UMJ, Islamic values such as trustworthiness, sincerity, and *maslahah* are implicit in various *da'wah*, academic, and public service activities, but have not been systematically packaged within an IMC framework. If UMJ formally implements value-based IMC, spiritual values can become

a brand differentiator that distinguishes UMJ from other campuses. This approach is highly relevant because value-based branding has been proven to increase public trust and audience loyalty (Juhaidi, 2024).

The digitization of university communications is now a dominant factor in prospective students' decision-making (Chan et al., 2025). Research findings show that UMJ already has strong digital assets through public relations content, multimedia, and documentation of academic activities. However, the absence of an integrated digital strategy means that these messages do not appear as a cohesive communication ecosystem. In the context of IMC, digital integration must include a content calendar, cross-platform synergy, visual identity management, and measurable digital analytics (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). UMJ has great potential to leverage these digital assets to strengthen its image as a "Modern Islamic Campus" if digital coordination is implemented strategically.

The results of institutional mapping show that UMJ's biggest challenge is not a lack of communication output, but rather a lack of coordination between units. This can be seen from the work patterns of Public Relations, Multimedia, and Protocol, which run in parallel but are not part of a single strategic plan. According to global IMC literature, institutional coordination is a key requirement for all communication functions to run consistently and produce long-term effects (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). The establishment of an Integrated Communication Office (ICO) at UMJ, even though there is already a University Secretariat Office, but it is still separate from the Promotion section, as suggested in the VDC model, can be an institutional solution to overcome this fragmentation.

The VDC model produced by this study reinforces IMC literature by adding an Islamic value perspective to IMC, a dimension that is still rarely discussed in global IMC studies. From a practical standpoint, this model provides a realistic and adaptive framework for UMJ by integrating three key elements: Islamic values as the foundation of the message, digital integration as a modern communication strategy, and institutional coordination as an organizational pillar. These three elements make VDC not only a technical IMC model, but also an organizational communication approach that reflects UMJ's identity as a modern, professional, and globally relevant Islamic campus.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of institutional mapping show that UMJ's biggest challenge is not a lack of communication output, but rather a lack of coordination between units. This can be seen from the work patterns of Public Relations, Multimedia, and Protocol, which run in parallel but are not part of a single strategic plan. According to global IMC literature, institutional coordination is a key requirement for all communication functions to run consistently and produce long-term effects. The establishment of an Integrated Communication Office (ICO) at UMJ, even though there is already a University Secretariat Office, but it is still separate from the Promotion section, as suggested in the VDC model, can be an institutional solution to overcome this fragmentation. The VDC model produced by this study reinforces IMC literature by adding an Islamic value perspective to IMC, a dimension that is still rarely discussed in global IMC studies. From a practical standpoint, this model provides a realistic and adaptive framework for UMJ by integrating three key elements: Islamic values as the foundation of the message, digital integration as a modern communication strategy, and institutional coordination as an organizational pillar. These three elements make VDC not only a technical IMC model, but also an organizational communication approach that reflects UMJ's identity as a modern, professional, and globally relevant Islamic campus.

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