

Empowering Vocational High School Principals in School Branding Strategies Through Ethical Celebrity Endorsement in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This community service study seeks to strengthen the strategic capacity of vocational high school (SMK) principals in building sustainable school branding through ethical celebrity endorsement in the digital era. The expansion of digital media has transformed educational competition, requiring school leaders to implement innovative branding approaches beyond traditional promotional practices. Nevertheless, many SMK principals still possess limited digital branding competencies, restricting their ability to manage institutional communication strategically and consistently. The program applied a participatory action approach through structured training, collaborative workshops, intensive mentoring, and systematic evaluation involving principals, vice-principals, public relations staff, teachers, and students from partner SMKs. The findings indicate significant improvement in participants' understanding of digital branding, successful development of comprehensive branding guidelines, and implementation of digital campaigns using prominent alumni and credible local public figures as endorsers. Increased social media engagement and more positive public perception confirmed the program's effectiveness. Key indicators, including public interaction on school social media, alumni participation in promotional activities, and institutional image perception, shifted from low or neutral to positive after the intervention. At the institutional level, the program generated formal branding guidelines, improved consistency of communication messages, and integrated branding practices into school planning processes. The study's novelty lies in combining ethical celebrity endorsement with leadership capacity development, producing a replicable, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded branding model for vocational education institutions in the digital era.

Keywords: School Branding, Celebrity Endorsement, Digital Leadership, Vocational High School, Community Service.

1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology over the past decade has significantly transformed the way organizations establish their identity, communicate with stakeholders, and shape public perception. This transformation has extended beyond the business sector into the field of education, including vocational secondary education. Educational institutions can no longer rely solely on academic reputation or graduate outcomes to remain competitive. Instead, they must strategically manage their institutional identity and public image through well-planned school branding initiatives [1]. In the digital environment, institutional reputation is increasingly shaped by the consistency, visibility, and credibility of information communicated through digital platforms. Consequently, school

branding has become an important component of institutional communication and strategic management rather than merely a promotional function.

Vocational education is particularly relevant to this context because vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) have a distinctive role in preparing students for further education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The strategic position of SMKs is closely associated with their relationship with the world of work and industry, making institutional credibility and public perception important considerations for students, parents, industry partners, and other stakeholders. National vocational education policies have also emphasized the strengthening of cooperation and alignment between SMKs and industry through the link and match approach, including curriculum alignment, industry participation, workplace learning,



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and graduate absorption. Therefore, beyond demonstrating academic and vocational competence, SMKs need to communicate their distinctive institutional strengths, graduate achievements, industry partnerships, and educational values effectively to the public.

The community partner in this program was the Regional Education Office Branch IV (Cabang Dinas Pendidikan Wilayah IV), which is responsible for the management of secondary education in Karawang, Purwakarta, and Subang, West Java. Official regional education data identify Cabang Dinas Pendidikan Wilayah IV as covering these three regencies, with Karawang alone having 118 vocational high schools, comprising 18 public and 100 private institutions based on the June 2026 education database. Against this institutional and educational landscape, the program involved 30 vocational high school principals as direct participants. The activity was conducted on 26 August 2026 and was designed as a capacity-building and mentoring initiative to strengthen principals' ability to manage school branding and digital institutional communication. The involvement of school principals was considered particularly important because they occupy a strategic position in determining institutional direction, coordinating internal stakeholders, and translating school values into organizational policies and public communication.

The selection of vocational high schools as community partners was based on several strategic considerations. First, SMKs operate within an increasingly competitive educational environment in which institutional reputation influences parents' and prospective students' perceptions when selecting schools. Second, the vocational orientation of SMKs requires them to demonstrate not only educational quality but also their relevance to industry and employment opportunities. Third, the distinctive competencies, achievements, alumni networks, and industry partnerships possessed by SMKs provide valuable institutional resources that can be incorporated into authentic branding strategies. Finally, the increasing use of digital media by prospective students and the wider community requires school leaders to develop communication strategies that are more consistent, interactive, and responsive to changing audience expectations. These considerations make SMKs a particularly relevant setting for strengthening strategic school branding and digital leadership.

The transformation of vocational education has become an essential component of Indonesia's human resource development agenda. Through the revitalization of vocational schools, the *link and match* approach with industry, and competency-based educational development, the government has encouraged vocational institutions to improve their

competitiveness and alignment with the needs of the labor market. Previous policy frameworks have emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between SMKs and industry, improving the competencies of educators, aligning curricula with industry requirements, and increasing graduate employability. Within this context, school branding should not be understood simply as a strategy for attracting new students but as a means of communicating institutional credibility, educational quality, graduate achievements, and the school's relevance to industry and society.

School branding plays a vital role in shaping public perception, enhancing parents' confidence, and attracting prospective students. Within vocational education, branding encompasses broader dimensions because it is closely associated with graduates' employability, partnerships with industry, and the credibility of vocational competencies offered by the institution. Despite its importance, branding practices in many vocational schools remain largely administrative, incidental, and insufficiently supported by comprehensive communication strategies. Consequently, institutional branding has not yet been fully optimized as a systematic approach to strengthening public trust [2]. The growing importance of digital communication further increases this challenge because school information is no longer communicated exclusively through conventional institutional channels but is also constructed through social media content, alumni narratives, public interactions, and other forms of digital visibility.

One of the primary factors contributing to weak school branding is the limited digital leadership capacity of school principals. While many principals possess strong pedagogical and conventional managerial expertise, they may not have developed sufficient competencies to manage digital branding, strategic communication, and technology-driven engagement with contemporary audiences [3]. As a result, branding activities may be delegated primarily to public relations teams without sufficient strategic direction from institutional leaders. Strengthening principals' capacity as digital leaders is therefore essential because sustainable branding requires alignment between institutional vision, leadership, internal coordination, and external communication.

Celebrity endorsement has been widely recognized as an effective marketing communication strategy for enhancing organizational credibility, attracting audience attention, and strengthening public trust [4]. Within the educational context, however, celebrity endorsement should be interpreted more broadly and aligned with institutional values. Rather than relying exclusively on nationally recognized celebrities, schools may collaborate with accomplished

alumni, industry leaders, professional practitioners, or respected local figures whose identities and achievements reflect the school's vision and educational mission [5]. This approach is particularly relevant for vocational schools because alumni and industry practitioners can represent tangible evidence of the competencies and outcomes associated with the institution. Effective digital communication depends not only on the frequency of promotional activities but also on transparency, authenticity, and audience trust in the content being communicated [6]. Furthermore, the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is strongly influenced by the endorser's credibility, personal characteristics, and perceived closeness to the target audience [7]. Thus, the use of alumni and relevant local figures may provide a more authentic and educationally appropriate alternative to conventional promotional practices.

Despite growing interest in digital branding within education, community service initiatives that specifically integrate ethical celebrity endorsement with leadership capacity development for vocational school principals remain limited. Existing capacity-building activities frequently emphasize technical aspects of social media management while giving comparatively less attention to strategic leadership, institutional identity, ethical considerations, and the sustainability of school branding. This gap is particularly relevant for vocational schools, where institutional identity needs to be communicated not only to prospective students and parents but also to industry partners and the broader community.

Therefore, this community service program was designed to strengthen the strategic capacity of vocational high school principals in implementing integrated, ethical, and sustainable school branding strategies. The program involved 30 vocational high school principals under the Regional Education Office Branch IV and was implemented through a combination of socialization, training, workshop activities, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and implementation mentoring. The program sought to enhance principals' understanding of digital school branding, strengthen their role as digital leaders, and introduce an ethical celebrity endorsement approach based on accomplished alumni and relevant local figures. Specifically, the program sought to (1) enhance principals' competencies in understanding and implementing digital branding strategies; (2) develop an ethical celebrity endorsement model based on each school's internal strengths, alumni networks, and local resources; and (3) strengthen the institutional image, public engagement, and competitiveness of vocational high schools through more consistent and strategic digital communication.

The novelty of this community service initiative lies in its integration of digital leadership development,

participatory school branding, and value-based celebrity endorsement grounded in institutional authenticity. Unlike conventional school promotion strategies, the program positions school principals as strategic actors in branding governance while utilizing accomplished alumni and relevant local public figures as credible representatives of institutional identity. Furthermore, the mentoring model emphasizes collaboration among principals, public relations personnel, teachers, and other school stakeholders in developing a participatory, context-sensitive, and sustainable branding process. Through this approach, the program seeks not only to improve promotional communication but also to establish school branding as an integral component of institutional leadership and governance in vocational education.

1 METHODS

This community service program employed a participatory and collaborative approach, positioning school principals and school stakeholders as active participants throughout the implementation process. The approach was selected to encourage direct stakeholder engagement, strengthen participants' sense of ownership, and support the sustainability of the program beyond the mentoring period [8]. The program also adopted the principles of community-based learning, in which knowledge transfer was complemented by active interaction, discussion, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving between the community service team and partner schools. The original program design involved school principals, vice principals, teachers, public relations personnel, and student representatives as relevant school stakeholders.

The community partners were vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) under the coordination of Regional Education Office Branch IV (Cabang Dinas Pendidikan Wilayah IV), Karawang, West Java, Indonesia. The program involved 30 vocational high school principals as direct participants. The principals were selected as the primary participants because of their strategic role in determining institutional direction, coordinating internal school stakeholders, managing public communication, and integrating branding into school development policies. Other school stakeholders, including vice principals, teachers, public relations personnel, and student representatives, were involved in relevant discussion and implementation activities according to the needs of each participating school. The available program records do not provide a separate numerical breakdown of these supporting participants; therefore, their involvement is described qualitatively rather than reported as a specific number.

The program was conducted in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia, on 26 August 2026. The activity consisted of a structured sequence of needs identification, initial socialization, training and workshops, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), implementation mentoring, and evaluation. The FGD sessions lasted approximately 90–120 minutes per session, while the overall duration of the mentoring component depended on the implementation needs of the participating schools. The available program documentation does not specify a separate total number of days or weeks for the entire mentoring cycle; therefore, no additional duration is stated beyond the documented session duration to avoid introducing unsupported information.

The initial stage focused on identifying the needs of partner schools through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving school principals and relevant school stakeholders. The discussions were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to obtain information regarding the existing condition of school branding, public perceptions of the institutions, challenges in implementing digital branding, and the schools' readiness to adopt social media-based communication strategies. Each FGD session lasted approximately 90–120 minutes and was facilitated by a lead facilitator accompanied by a rapporteur responsible for systematically documenting the discussion process.

The needs assessment focused on four main dimensions: digital leadership, institutional communication governance, digital infrastructure readiness, and internal stakeholder involvement in institutional branding. These dimensions were considered relevant to identifying strategic factors that influence the effectiveness of branding practices in vocational education institutions in the digital era. The qualitative data obtained from the FGDs were analyzed thematically through data reduction, categorization of themes, interpretation of meaning, and participant triangulation. The findings were subsequently used to develop the training materials, mentoring strategies, and program evaluation indicators.

The next stage consisted of training and workshops on school branding, which were designed systematically and practically. The training addressed four major areas: school branding and institutional reputation, digital leadership in public communication management, digital marketing and school social media management, and ethical celebrity endorsement based on educational values and institutional authenticity. Each topic combined conceptual explanation with practical activities through simulations and case studies. The learning process employed a multimodal approach integrating interactive presentations, group discussions, case studies, digital content creation simulations, school branding brainstorming, and practical exercises in

developing institutional communication strategies. This approach was intended to ensure that participants not only understood the theoretical concepts but were also able to translate them into branding strategies appropriate to the characteristics of their respective schools. The participatory nature of the learning process further encouraged active reflection and strategic decision-making concerning institutional image development.

Following the training and workshop sessions, the program proceeded to the implementation mentoring stage, which constituted the core of the community service intervention. The community service team provided intensive assistance in translating the branding strategies developed during the training into practical activities within the participating schools. The mentoring process included the development of school branding guidelines covering visual identity, key communication messages, and institutional values to be communicated to the public. Schools were also assisted in identifying relevant endorsers, particularly accomplished alumni and credible local figures who demonstrated strong connections with the schools and their educational values. The mentoring activities further involved the development of digital content based on authentic school narratives, including institutional profile videos, alumni testimonials, and documentation of learning activities that highlighted the distinctive strengths of each school. Internal coordination among principals, public relations personnel, and teachers was also strengthened to ensure that branding strategies could be implemented consistently and sustainably.

The final stage consisted of program monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the intervention at individual, social, and institutional levels. Evaluation focused on changes in participants' understanding before and after the program, principals' involvement in branding activities, interaction on school social media platforms, public responses to school communication, and changes in public interest in student admission. Social media indicators, including follower growth, engagement rates, and content reach, were also examined to assess the implementation of digital branding strategies.

The evaluation process was complemented by in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and group reflection to obtain information regarding participants' experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction throughout the program. The findings were used to identify changes in principals' perspectives on institutional branding, internal coordination dynamics, and stakeholder perceptions of ethical celebrity endorsement. The evaluation results subsequently informed recommendations for strengthening internal systems and institutional policies to support the sustainability of school branding practices. The sequence of the program

activities is presented visually in Figure 1. The flowchart illustrates the logical progression from preparation and needs assessment through awareness building, training and workshops, FGDs, implementation mentoring, and monitoring and evaluation.



Figure 1. The sequence of the program activities

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This community service program was designed as a systematic initiative to disseminate strategic knowledge and practical approaches to school branding among principals of vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK). The program was intended not only to enhance participants' knowledge but also to promote sustainable improvements in leadership practices, institutional communication governance, and the development of a stronger institutional image [9]. In the digital era, effective educational branding requires the systematic integration of institutional identity with the strategic use of social media that is consistent, purposeful, and aligned with the values and characteristics of the educational services offered to the public [10]. Previous studies have also demonstrated that the digital transformation of school branding significantly enhances the competitiveness of educational institutions [11], [12]. Therefore, the success of this program was evaluated not only through improvements in participants' knowledge but also through the social and institutional impacts generated by the intervention.

The findings revealed a substantial improvement in the participants' understanding of school branding and digital leadership. Following the program, school principals no longer perceived branding merely as a promotional activity but rather as a strategic institutional function that should be integrated into the school's vision, mission, and organizational culture. This finding is consistent with the perspective of Mangold and Faulds [13], who emphasized the importance of integrating digital communication into organizational strategies. Furthermore, the adoption of digital marketing practices

in school branding has been shown to contribute to increased public interest in educational institutions [14].

2.1 Implementation of Activities

The community service program was implemented through a series of structured and sequential activities designed to achieve the objectives established at the outset of the project. The initial socialization stage was intended to raise school principals' awareness of the strategic importance of school branding in the digital era. This phase served as a crucial foundation because many vocational school principals initially perceived branding merely as a technical promotional activity rather than as an essential component of institutional leadership.



Figure 2. Presentation on School Branding Strategies (Session 1).

The training and workshop sessions were designed to facilitate the comprehensive transfer of knowledge and practical skills related to school branding, digital leadership, and the implementation of ethical celebrity endorsement. Throughout the training sessions, participants, consisting of school principals and public relations personnel, demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and active engagement. The facilitators introduced the fundamental concepts of school branding as a strategic approach to building institutional image, reputation, and public trust. The discussion subsequently progressed toward more practical aspects, including the development of institutional brand identity, the identification of distinctive institutional values, and the formulation of consistent communication messages across various digital platforms.



Figure 3. Presentation on School Branding Strategies (Session 2).

To enhance participants' understanding, the facilitators adopted an interactive learning approach incorporating visual presentations, real-world case studies, and group discussions. Participants were encouraged to identify the unique strengths of their respective schools and translate these characteristics into authentic branding narratives that addressed the expectations and needs of the wider community. In addition, considerable emphasis was placed on the role of digital leadership in guiding institutional communication strategies and fostering effective internal coordination between school principals, public relations teams, and teaching staff.

The session on celebrity endorsement was delivered from a contextual and ethics-oriented perspective. Participants were introduced to the principles of selecting credible public figures or accomplished alumni whose personal values and professional achievements were aligned with the educational mission of the institution. The facilitators also presented examples of successful practices in which distinguished alumni had been utilized as positive representatives of their schools to strengthen public trust and institutional credibility. Consequently, participants not only developed a theoretical understanding of celebrity endorsement but also gained practical insights into implementing ethical and effective branding strategies within educational institutions.

As illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, the presentation sessions were characterized by active interaction between facilitators and participants through discussions and question-and-answer activities. The documentation demonstrates how visual presentation media supported the delivery of the training materials, while participants actively reflected on and exchanged experiences regarding branding practices within their respective schools. These activities indicate that the learning

process extended beyond one-way knowledge transfer and evolved into a dialogic and collaborative learning experience.



Figure 4. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with School Stakeholders.

Following the training phase, the program proceeded to the implementation mentoring stage to ensure that the knowledge acquired during the workshops was translated into practical institutional actions. During this phase, the community service team provided intensive assistance to partner schools in developing comprehensive branding guidelines, including the formulation of visual identity, key institutional messages, and consistent communication strategies across multiple media platforms. Schools also received guidance in producing digital content that reflected their institutional characteristics, competitive advantages, and core values. The mentoring process extended beyond technical assistance by strengthening internal coordination among school principals, public relations personnel, and teachers to ensure that branding initiatives could be implemented in an integrated and sustainable manner.



Figure 5. Collaborative Discussion During the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

As presented in Figures 4 and 5, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions constituted an essential

component of the mentoring process, providing participants with opportunities to explore ideas, develop shared perspectives, and formulate branding strategies tailored to the unique circumstances of their respective schools. During these discussions, participants actively exchanged experiences while identifying institutional strengths and challenges associated with strengthening school image and reputation. The facilitators guided the discussions by helping participants transform their ideas into systematic and practical branding strategies. The collaborative interactions observed throughout the FGDs demonstrated that each participant had meaningful opportunities to contribute to the development of contextually appropriate institutional branding strategies.

The documentation presented in Figures 4 and 5 further illustrates the open and participatory nature of the discussions, where participants were actively involved not only in acquiring new knowledge but also in analyzing institutional challenges and making strategic decisions. These observations indicate that the community service program adopted a dialogic and needs-based approach rather than a conventional top-down training model. Consequently, the sequential process from knowledge dissemination and collaborative discussion through FGDs to intensive implementation mentoring effectively supported the primary objectives of the program, namely strengthening the leadership capacity of vocational school principals and enhancing the institutional image of vocational schools through the active participation of all relevant stakeholders.

2.2 Outcomes and Impacts of the Program

One of the most important outcomes was the improvement in school principals' understanding of school branding and digital leadership. The pre- and post-program assessment indicated a consistent improvement across the main indicators, with participants' understanding of school branding concepts, ethical celebrity endorsement, and involvement in branding activities shifting from low to high. The consistency of school digital communication also increased from a moderate to a high level. These changes indicate that the program successfully moved participants beyond a promotional understanding of branding toward a more strategic perspective in which branding is connected to institutional identity, leadership, communication, and organizational development.

This shift in perspective is particularly important because school branding requires strategic direction from institutional leaders rather than being treated solely as a technical responsibility of the public relations team. The original findings indicate that principals initially

tended to perceive branding as a promotional activity, whereas following the intervention they began to recognize branding as an institutional strategy that should be aligned with the school's vision and organizational culture. This finding is consistent with the argument that digital communication has become an integral element of organizational strategy, particularly as social media enables institutions to communicate directly with audiences and participate in ongoing public interactions [13].

The increasing importance of digital leadership can be understood from this changing communication environment. School leaders are no longer operating in an environment in which institutional communication is controlled primarily through formal announcements, brochures, or conventional public relations channels. School identity is increasingly constructed through digital content, social media interactions, public responses, alumni narratives, and the consistency of messages presented across platforms. Consequently, principals require not only administrative and pedagogical competencies but also the ability to provide strategic direction for digital communication, coordinate internal stakeholders, interpret audience responses, and ensure that digital activities remain aligned with institutional values. The existing literature cited in this study identifies limited digital leadership capacity as one of the factors contributing to weak school branding, particularly when branding activities are delegated entirely to public relations personnel without sufficient strategic direction from school leaders [3].

The findings therefore suggest that digital leadership is not simply a response to technological development but a consequence of the changing nature of institutional communication. As digital platforms increasingly become spaces in which educational institutions present their identity and interact with stakeholders, principals must assume a more active role in directing digital communication. This explains why the intervention's emphasis on digital leadership produced outcomes extending beyond technical social media skills. The program encouraged principals to connect branding decisions with institutional strategy, internal coordination, and long-term reputation management.

A second important outcome was the improvement in public engagement and institutional perception. As shown in Table 2, public interaction with school social media increased from a low level to a higher level, positive responses to school content became more widespread, alumni participation in promotional activities increased from minimal to active, and public perceptions of school image shifted from neutral to positive. These changes indicate that the branding strategy was not limited to increasing the visibility of school content but also contributed to a more

favorable relationship between schools and their surrounding communities.

The effectiveness of digital branding in this context can be explained by the fact that social media enables institutions to communicate their identity continuously and interactively. Rather than presenting isolated promotional messages, schools can communicate their values, achievements, learning activities, alumni success stories, and relationships with industry through recurring and consistent narratives. Such communication can strengthen familiarity with the institution and provide audiences with more information from which to evaluate its credibility. The findings are consistent with previous research cited in the manuscript indicating that systematic school branding and digital marketing can contribute to public trust and increased interest in educational institutions [2], [14].

2.3 Outcomes and Impacts of the Program

The implementation of celebrity endorsement produced an important contribution to the program because it introduced a human and relational dimension to institutional communication. The effectiveness of endorsement in this context does not depend simply on the popularity of the individual used in promotional content. Rather, its effectiveness can be understood through three interrelated mechanisms: credibility, attention, and perceived closeness or relevance to the audience.

First, an endorser can function as a source of credibility. When a person is perceived as competent, trustworthy, and relevant to the message being communicated, the audience may evaluate the institutional message more favorably. The literature cited in the manuscript identifies credibility as an important mechanism through which celebrity endorsement can attract attention and strengthen audience trust [4]. Research on influencer communication similarly emphasizes the role of message value and source credibility in building audience trust [7].

Second, endorsement can increase attention and message visibility. Institutional communication from schools may easily be perceived as conventional promotional material. The presence of a recognizable and credible figure can make the message more personally engaging and therefore more likely to attract audience attention. In the context of digital platforms, where users encounter large volumes of competing information, this ability to capture attention is particularly relevant. However, the findings of this program suggest that attention alone is insufficient; the endorser must also be consistent with the school's identity and values.

Third, celebrity endorsement can strengthen perceived social closeness and relevance. The effectiveness of an endorser is influenced by personal characteristics and the perceived relationship between the endorser and the target audience [7]. This mechanism is particularly relevant to educational branding because audiences may respond more strongly to figures whom they perceive as genuinely connected to the school rather than as external commercial celebrities.

This explains why the program emphasized ethical and contextually appropriate endorsers rather than relying exclusively on highly popular celebrities. The objective was not simply to borrow the popularity of an external figure but to use a credible individual as a representative of the school's identity and values. Such an approach also addresses the importance of authenticity in digital communication, where audiences may become skeptical of messages that appear overly commercial or disconnected from the institution's actual characteristics [6].

2.4 Why Alumni Are Effective as Endorsers

The involvement of accomplished alumni emerged as one of the most contextually relevant aspects of the branding strategy. Unlike external celebrities, alumni possess a direct historical and relational connection with the institution. Their achievements can therefore function not merely as promotional claims but as tangible representations of the potential outcomes associated with the school. Alumni are effective for at least three reasons. First, they provide institutional authenticity because their educational background is directly connected to the school. When an accomplished alumnus communicates positively about the institution, the message is supported by a real relationship between the individual and the school. Second, alumni can provide social proof of the school's educational contribution. Their professional achievements offer audiences a concrete example of how educational experiences at the institution may contribute to students' future development. Third, alumni can create an emotional connection between the school and its community. The program findings indicate that increased alumni involvement was an important social indicator because it helped establish stronger emotional relationships between the school and the public.

This mechanism is particularly appropriate for vocational high schools because the identity of an SMK is strongly associated with practical competencies, career preparation, and links with industry. Accomplished alumni can demonstrate these outcomes more convincingly than generic promotional statements. An alumnus who has successfully developed a professional career, established a business, or achieved recognition in an industry related to the school's

vocational specialization can function as a credible representation of the institution's educational value. The use of alumni also strengthens the fit between the endorser and the institutional brand. The manuscript emphasizes that effective educational branding should reflect the genuine characteristics of the institution consistently [5]. Therefore, alumni endorsement can be considered more than a promotional technique; it represents a form of institutional storytelling in which the school's identity is communicated through the experiences and achievements of people who are part of its institutional history.

The positive response to this approach is reflected in Table 1, where alumni participation shifted from minimal to active and public perceptions of school image shifted from neutral to positive. Although these findings do not establish a causal relationship between alumni endorsement and public perception independently of other program components, they indicate that alumni-based endorsement was a meaningful component of the broader branding strategy.

Table 1. Social Impact Indicators of the Community Service Program

Social Impact Indicator	Baseline Condition	Post-Program Condition
Public engagement on social media	Low	Increased
Positive responses to school content	Limited	More widespread
Alumni participation in promotional activities	Minimal	Active
Public perception of the school's image	Neutral	Positive

Source: Community service program data (2025).

2.5 Institutional and Social Impact of the Program

Beyond changes at the individual level, the program generated measurable changes in the social relationship between participating schools and their communities. Public engagement on social media increased, positive responses to school content became more widespread, and perceptions of institutional image shifted toward a more positive direction. These outcomes suggest that branding activities became more interactive and relational rather than being limited to one-way promotional communication.

The improvement in social engagement is particularly relevant because digital branding provides schools with opportunities to communicate institutional values continuously. Through digital platforms, schools can present learning activities, student achievements,

alumni success stories, industry partnerships, and other evidence of institutional quality. This creates a more comprehensive representation of school identity than conventional promotional materials alone. The finding is consistent with the literature in the manuscript emphasizing that digital marketing and social media can strengthen institutional visibility, public engagement, and school brand identity [10][14].

At the institutional level, the most important outcome was the establishment of school branding guidelines, accompanied by improved consistency in institutional communication and the integration of branding into school programs. Table 3 shows that principals' involvement in branding increased from low to high, branding guidelines changed from unavailable to available, communication messages became more consistent, and branding became integrated into school programs.

These changes are important because they indicate that the intervention affected institutional governance rather than producing only short-term improvements in participants' knowledge. The development of branding guidelines established a common reference for principals, public relations personnel, and teachers, thereby reducing the possibility of fragmented institutional communication. Furthermore, the integration of branding into school planning indicates that branding was increasingly positioned as an organizational responsibility rather than an isolated promotional activity.

2.6 Strengths, Limitations, and Sustainability

The principal strength of the program lies in the integration of digital leadership, participatory branding, and authentic endorsement within a single intervention. Rather than treating school branding as a technical social media activity, the program connected branding with institutional leadership, internal coordination, and stakeholder engagement. The use of alumni and relevant local industry figures also made the approach contextually appropriate and potentially more replicable because schools can utilize resources that already exist within their institutional and community networks.

Nevertheless, the program faced limitations related to human resources and technological infrastructure. In addition, changes in principals' leadership perspectives require sustained adaptation rather than a one-time training intervention. These limitations are important because digital branding requires continuous content development, monitoring, coordination, and adaptation to changing audience behavior. The program therefore demonstrates the importance of follow-up mentoring and institutional commitment if the observed improvements are to be maintained over time.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the intervention generated interconnected individual, social, and institutional outcomes. At the individual level, principals developed stronger competencies in school branding and digital leadership. At the social level, schools experienced increased digital engagement, stronger alumni participation, and more positive perceptions of institutional image. At the institutional level, branding guidelines, more consistent communication, and integration of branding into school planning were established. These outcomes suggest that the effectiveness of school branding in the digital era depends not simply on the use of promotional techniques but on the interaction between credible representation, authentic institutional identity, strategic digital leadership, and sustained stakeholder engagement.

3 CONCLUSION

This community engagement program demonstrated that an integrated approach combining school branding, digital leadership, and ethical celebrity endorsement can strengthen the capacity of vocational high school principals and support improvements in institutional communication. The program contributed to greater understanding and involvement of principals in school branding, increased public engagement with school communication, strengthened alumni participation, and improved institutional branding practices through the development of school branding guidelines and more consistent communication.

The findings also indicate that the use of accomplished alumni and relevant local figures can provide an authentic and contextually appropriate approach to educational endorsement. Rather than relying primarily on promotional visibility, this strategy enables schools to communicate their identity, achievements, and educational value through credible representatives who have a direct connection with the institution.

For long-term sustainability, school branding should be institutionalized through clear internal guidelines, continuous digital leadership development, regular monitoring of digital engagement, and sustained coordination among principals, public relations personnel, teachers, alumni, and other relevant stakeholders. Future community engagement programs should therefore place greater emphasis on long-term mentoring, periodic evaluation, digital content development, and the strengthening of school–industry and alumni networks. The model may also be adapted and replicated in other vocational schools by considering their institutional characteristics, local resources, and stakeholder networks. Such continuity is essential to ensure that the outcomes of the program extend beyond the intervention period and contribute to the sustained

strengthening of vocational school identity, reputation, and competitiveness in the digital era.

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