

From Offline to Online: Transforming School Image and Engagement in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This community service initiative aims to reconstruct the branding strategy of SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi by transitioning from conventional paradigms toward an integrative digital ecosystem. The massive digitalization of media has rendered reliance on physical promotional strategies less optimal for initiating substantial engagement with prospective students and stakeholders. This community service initiative employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, the program involved 50 participants, including school leadership, the public relations team, teachers, and student representatives through stages of digital asset auditing, creative content production workshops, and intensive social media managerial supervision. The intervention improved the team's capacity to manage the school's digital identity, as evidenced by an average 45% increase in engagement metrics across the school's Instagram and TikTok platforms. Furthermore, public perception shifted from neutral to more positive, alongside the establishment of formal branding guidelines to ensure institutional communication consistency. This strategic transformation effectively reinforces the public recognition of SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi as a vocational education institution that is adaptive, innovative, and relevant to the dynamics of the digital era.

Keywords: School Branding, Digital Transformation, Engagement, SMK Telesandi.

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past decade has brought significant changes in how organizations build their image, establish communication, and shape public perception. This phenomenon has not only impacted the business sector but has also extended to the education sector, including vocational secondary education. Schools can no longer rely solely on academic reputation or graduation rates alone; instead, they need to manage institutional identity and image through school branding strategically [1]. In this era, a school's image is determined by the extent to which the institution is able to actively exist and interact in cyberspace.

The transformation of vocational education in Indonesia is a crucial component of the national human resource development agenda. Through the revitalization policy for Vocational High Schools (SMK), the "link and match" program with industry, and the strengthening of competency-based education, the government encourages every vocational institution to enhance its competitiveness amid increasingly fierce inter-school competition. In this context, SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi, as an institution with a strong core

expertise in information and communication technology (ICT), is required to be at the forefront of institutional digitalization. However, intense competition in attracting prospective new students and gaining public trust requires a branding strategy that goes beyond mere administration, becoming an integral strategic necessity for sustainable institutional governance.

School branding plays a vital role in shaping public perception, increasing parental trust, and attracting prospective students. In the context of vocational schools, branding carries a more complex dimension because it is directly related to graduates' job readiness, connectivity with the industrial world, and the legitimacy of the skill competencies offered. Nevertheless, branding practices at SMK Telesandi still reflect suboptimal transition, where promotional activities are still dominated by conventional (offline) approaches that are incidental and not fully based on a planned digital communication strategy. As a result, school branding management has not yet fully been able to build public trust systematically across digital platforms [2].

One of the main factors influencing the slow transformation of branding from offline to online is the limited capacity of digital leadership and the operational



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team's competence in managing creative content. Although school leaders possess a strong managerial background, challenges in the social media era demand technology-based innovative leadership capable of directing the public relations team to produce content adaptive to dynamic public behavior. Without strategic guidance regarding digital transformation, the school's social media activities tend to serve merely as documentation of formal events without building engaging narratives.

Transforming strategies from offline to online requires an effective communication approach to build credibility and increase audience attention. One strategy adopted in this initiative is the use of authentic digital narratives, which in an educational context can be reinforced through testimonials from high-achieving alumni, industry figures, or professional practitioners connected to the school's vision. An effective digital communication strategy depends not only on promotional frequency but also on transparency and audience trust toward the delivered content [3]. By improving visual quality and interaction on digital platforms, schools can create closer ties with a broader audience. This approach is deemed more effective in establishing a modern and innovative school identity.

However, studies and community service practices specifically assisting SMKs in executing a comprehensive transformation from offline branding strategies toward an integrative digital ecosystem still need to be enhanced. Most community service activities remain limited to technical social media training without touching upon strategic reconstruction and engagement sustainability. Therefore, this community service initiative is designed to fill this gap by providing mentoring at SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi in developing an integrated, ethical, and long-term oriented school branding strategy. The objectives of this initiative are to enhance the school team's competence in understanding digital branding strategies, transform conventional promotional content into digital-based creative content, and increase the school's social media engagement metrics.

The novelty of this initiative lies in the integration of digital asset audits, creative content capacity development, and engagement management mentoring anchored in authentic institutional values. Unlike conventional promotional strategies, this program applies the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, actively involving leadership, teachers, and students in building the school's digital narrative. Furthermore, the implemented transformation model emphasizes consistency in communication messaging and the reinforcement of public recognition, enabling SMK Telesandi to position itself as an adaptive and competitive vocational education institution in the digital era.

1 METHODS

This community service initiative adopted a participatory and collaborative approach by placing the leadership and execution team of SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi as active subjects throughout the entire digital transformation process. This approach was chosen because it effectively increases direct partner involvement, fosters a sense of ownership, and encourages program sustainability after the mentoring phase is completed [4]. Additionally, this method adopts the principles of community-based learning, where the learning process involves two-way interaction between the community service team and partners to resolve digital communication obstacles contextually and practically.

The initial phase focused on identifying the partner's strategic needs using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method involving the principal, vice-principals, teachers, public relations team, and student representatives from SMK Telesandi. The FGD was conducted systematically using semi-structured discussion guidelines to obtain a factual overview of the school's current branding condition, obstacles in transitioning from conventional to digital media, and the readiness level of school infrastructure to implement engagement-based communication strategies. Each discussion session was organized to map existing digital assets and prioritize institutional image changes.

The needs analysis process referred to four main dimensions: digital leadership in directing the school's vision, creative content governance, the effectiveness of social media platform management, and internal stakeholder engagement levels in school digital activities. These four dimensions represent strategic factors determining the success of vocational school branding transformation in the digital era. Data obtained from the FGD were analyzed using a qualitative thematic approach through data reduction, meaning interpretation, and cross-participant triangulation. The findings were then used as the foundation for designing the training curriculum and technical mentoring strategy.

The implementation phase was carried out through a series of systematically designed branding transformation workshops. The workshops were divided into four main modules: (1) reconstruction of visual identity and school branding narratives, (2) digital reputation management and innovative leadership, (3) content marketing strategy and social media algorithm optimization, and (4) utilization of key opinion leaders (alumni and industry figures) based on educational ethics. Each module was designed to provide practical experience through content production simulations and real case studies relevant to the field of telecommunications.

The learning process implemented a multi-modal approach integrating interactive lectures, short video content creation simulations (Instagram Reels and TikTok), content calendar brainstorming, and practice in formulating audience response strategies. This approach aimed to equip participants with technical competencies to convert administrative promotional patterns into inspiring and interactive digital narratives. Furthermore, the participatory method encouraged participants' active involvement in strategic decision-making regarding the new direction of SMK Telesandi's digital image.

Following the training phase, the initiative continued with intensive implementation assistance. In this phase, the community service team assisted the school in converting offline strategies into integrated digital content. Assistance included drafting formal branding guidelines that encompassed standardization of visual style and tone of voice on social media. Additionally, the school was intensively guided in producing content based on authentic narratives, such as alumni career success testimonials and industry collaborations, to boost public trust. Strengthening coordination between the Public Relation (PR) team and other work units was a primary focus to ensure messaging consistency and sustainability [5].

The final phase was directed toward a comprehensive evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the transformation. The evaluation compared engagement metrics before and after the intervention, including followers, likes, comments, and shares. Furthermore, participant competency improvements were measured using a learning evaluation instrument. Analysis focused on mindset shifts among leadership and the team regarding the importance of information openness and digital interaction. The evaluation results served as the basis for formulating strategic recommendations for SMK Telesandi to maintain its digital performance to enhance competitiveness in new student enrollment and broader public recognition [6].

The comprehensive evaluation process was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and group reflection to gather deep insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction throughout the digital transformation process. Evaluative analysis focused on paradigm shifts in school leadership regarding the urgency of digital branding, internal coordination dynamics in content management, and stakeholder responses to engagement-boosting strategies rooted in authentic educational values.

The evaluation results were subsequently integrated to formulate strategic recommendations guaranteeing program sustainability, including strengthening work governance and establishing internal school policies for consistent institutional digital identity management. Overall, the implementation methods were

systematically designed and integrated through a participatory approach designed to produce sustainable transformative impacts in strengthening the recognition and image of SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi in the digital era.

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This community service initiative was designed as a systematic effort to transform knowledge and strategic practices in school branding for the leadership and public relations team of SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi. The initiative aimed not only to improve digital literacy but also to drive behavioral changes in leadership, transition institutional communication governance from conventional patterns to digital ones, and strengthen the school's image sustainably [7]. Educational branding strategies in the digital era demand systematic integration between institutional identity and consistent, targeted social media utilization aligned with technology values and the character of educational services offered to the public [8]. Transforming school branding through an integrative digital approach has also proven to significantly boost an educational institution's competitiveness in the eyes of the public [9]. Thus, the success of this initiative is measured not merely by participants' cognitive gains, but also by the escalation of public engagement and institutional impacts generated.

The results demonstrated a significant increase in the understanding of school leadership and staff regarding the concepts of offline-to-online branding transformation and digital leadership. The PR team and school leaders no longer view social media merely as an administrative documentation tool, but as an institutional strategy integrated with the school's vision as a telecommunications-based educational institution. Creative content optimization and interaction management in digital school branding directly contribute to raising public attention and interest in vocational education institutions [10]. The success of this transformation is marked by a more dynamic school digital ecosystem, facilitating effective and transparent two-way communication with prospective students and parents [11].

2.1 Activity Implementation

The entire sequence of community service activities was executed in a structured, phased manner to ensure that the image transformation process aligned with established strategic goals. The initial orientation phase was utilized to build awareness among leadership and staff regarding the urgency of shifting branding paradigms from conventional (offline) methods toward a

digital (online) ecosystem. This phase served as a crucial foundation for the initiative at SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi, given that school administrators previously tended to view branding as technical and administrative promotional tasks rather than an innovative leadership strategy capable of increase public engagement during the digital era.



Figure 1. Presentation of School Engagement in Digital Era

The training and workshops focused on comprehensive knowledge and skill transfer, specifically regarding the transition of school branding concepts from conventional media to digital platforms, digital leadership, and techniques for cultivating authentic public engagement. During presentation sessions, participants—comprising school leadership and the PR team—engaged with high enthusiasm and active participation.

Facilitators began by deconstructing traditional views of branding as strictly offline, subsequently introducing foundational concepts of digital school branding as a strategic effort to build image, reputation, and public trust through a robust online presence. The content expanded progressively into practical application, including formulating digital brand identity, determining key value propositions for vocational institutions, and drafting consistent, interactive communication messaging across social platforms like Instagram and TikTok.



Figure 2. Presentation of School Branding Materials

Throughout these sessions, facilitators employed an interactive approach using visual presentations,

successful digital transformation case studies, and group discussions to reinforce participants' tactical understanding. Participants were guided to identify SMK Telesandi's unique strengths—particularly technological advantages and the telecommunications curriculum—and translate them into authentic branding narratives relevant to public needs in digital spaces. Additionally, presentations highlighted the role of digital leadership in guiding transparent public communication strategies and fostering solid internal synergy between the PR team and educators in managing the school's social media ecosystem.

Material regarding engagement strategies through public representation was delivered using a contextual approach grounded in educational ethics. Participants gained strategic understanding of how to involve public figures, industry practitioners, or high-credibility alumni whose vision aligns with SMK Telesandi's identity. Facilitators shared best practices in utilizing successful alumni testimonials as positive representations to increase public trust on digital platforms. Through these sessions, participants gained both theoretical clarity and concrete insight into implementing effective, measurable, and ethical offline-to-online branding strategies.

As illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, presentation sessions maintained an interactive atmosphere with active participant involvement in discussions regarding the transition of school communication media. This documentation illustrates facilitators presenting digital transformation topics using dynamic visual media while participants engaged in reflective exercises and shared experiences regarding obstacles and opportunities in converting conventional branding into online strategies. These images demonstrate that learning in this program was dialogic and collaborative, with every participant contributing to formulating the institution's new digital identity.



Figure 3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Activity.

Subsequently, implementation assistance ensured that acquired knowledge progressed from conceptual understanding into active practice within the school's digital transformation process. In this phase, the community service team actively assisted SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi in drafting structured branding guidelines, covering digital visual identity development, key messages, and consistent multi-platform communication strategies.

Furthermore, the school received intensive guidance in producing creative digital content, such as short videos and visual narratives showcasing technological character, telecommunications program strengths, and innovation values to shape the institution's online image. This process extended beyond technical production, strengthening internal coordination between school leadership, the PR team, and teaching staff to ensure online branding strategy implementation remained integrated, adaptive, and sustainable in enhancing public engagement.



Figure 4. Atmosphere of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Activity

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) formed a crucial component of the mentoring process, particularly in brainstorming creative ideas, aligning digital identity perceptions, and formulating platform-appropriate branding transition strategies for SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi. During FGD sessions, participants interacted actively, sharing experiences regarding offline promotion constraints and identifying institutional technological strengths convertible into engaging digital content. Facilitators guided discussions to help participants elaborate raw concepts into systematic, actionable digital communication strategies aimed at driving engagement. These FGD interactions evidenced a collaborative learning environment where leaders and the PR team contributed directly to contextually relevant transformation strategies.

Documentation in Figures 3 and 4 also highlights an open, participatory discussion setting where participants analyzed digital assets and made strategic decisions regarding the school's social media image direction. This demonstrates that the approach was not top-down, but dialogic and responsive to real partner needs amid digital era challenges. Consequently, the

activity flow—from paradigm deconstruction and in-depth FGDs to direct content implementation mentoring—strongly supported the core program goals: enhancing digital leadership capacity and building institutional image through a sustainable, participatory online ecosystem.

2.2 Success Indicators and Benchmarks

Program success indicators were comprehensively formulated across three primary levels: individual, social, and institutional. Individual-level changes were measured by improvements in digital literacy competencies and the active participation of leadership and the PR team in branding reconstruction. Social-level changes were identified through increased public response and interaction intensity (engagement) toward the school's digital narratives. Meanwhile, institutional-level changes were reflected in new internal policies and standardized online branding systems integrated across SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi.

Pre-test and post-test measurements demonstrated consistent, significant improvements across all primary indicators. School leaders and staff gained a deeper understanding of offline-to-online branding strategies and ethical public engagement management. Furthermore, school personnel became actively involved in strategic decision-making regarding content management and digital public communication, shifting away from previous passive, administrative tendencies.

To empirically evaluate mentoring effectiveness, participant understanding was measured before and after program implementation. Evaluation focused on key parameters: leadership competence in digital branding concepts, engagement strategies using authentic content, participation in digital narrative production, and messaging consistency across social media channels. Comparisons revealed significant performance shifts across evaluated aspects, detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Changes in Participant's Understanding Levels Before and After Activities

Evaluation Indicator	Before Activity	After Activity
Understanding of branding transformation strategy (Offline to Online)	Low	High
Competence in engagement management and authentic digital content	Low	High
Leadership involvement in digital image decision-making	Low	High
Narrative and visual identity consistency across digital platforms	Medium	High

Source: Community service data, 2025

Table 1 indicates that the initiative successfully enhanced participants' strategic capacity, establishing

school branding not as an isolated promotional task, but as an integrative institutional strategy. This transformation encompasses strengthened digital leadership in steering institutional messaging and enhanced technical PR competence in managing engagement-driven communication. The progression from "Low" to "High" in branding transformation strategy indicators confirms that the mentoring approach effectively shifted operational paradigms from conventional (offline) methods toward a more adaptive, competitive digital (online) ecosystems.

At the social level, success was demonstrated by tangible increases in public response and digital engagement. Social impacts were reflected in rising engagement metrics and positive public sentiment toward school-created digital content. Through the offline-to-online shift, the public now recognizes SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi not merely as a formal vocational school, but as a modern organization with a strong digital identity, transparent innovation values, and industry-relevant competency development. This phenomenon confirms that the initiative delivered substantial social value by building public credibility through interactive communication ecosystems.

Table 2. Social Impact Indicators of the Community Service Activitywork

Social Impact Indicator	Initial Condition (Offline Focus)	Post-Activity Condition (Online Integration)
Social media interaction intensity (Engagement)	Low	Significantly Increased
Public sentiment and response toward creative content	Limited / Passive	Broad and Interactive
Alumni participation as digital representatives	Minimal	Active and Contributive
Public perception of school image and innovation	Neutral	Positive and Modern

Source: Community service data, 2025

Table 2 demonstrates that the program drove tangible social changes, particularly in strengthening connectivity between the school and the community through targeted, interactive digital communication. Increased alumni participation as digital school representatives serves as a crucial indicator that utilizing internal potential through authentic storytelling creates stronger emotional connections with the public than conventional promotional methods. This transformation proves that effective online engagement strategies expand school recognition beyond physical geographic boundaries.

In addition to individual and social impacts, the initiative contributed significantly to strengthening

institutional governance at SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi. Changes were reflected not only in enhanced digital leadership, but also in the establishment of internal systems and policies supporting long-term branding sustainability. Transitioning from offline workflows to online communication management systems required tighter role synchronization at managerial levels.

At the institutional level, the initiative produced strategic, sustainable outputs. A key output was the creation of the *SMK Telesandi Digital Branding Guidelines*, serving as an official reference for communication, content production, and school promotion across digital platforms. These guidelines clarify the duties of school leadership as digital vision directors, the PR team as creative content managers, and teaching staff as academic excellence contributors, ensuring a consistent, modern, and trustworthy institutional image.

Furthermore, SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi leadership began comprehensively integrating digital branding strategies into annual work plans and internal school policies. This step demonstrates that the community service project extended beyond knowledge transfer to structurally influence institutional governance.

This integration involves resource allocation for creative content development and standard procedure establishment for handling social media interactions, highlighting the school's readiness for digital competition. Institutional impacts resulting from this transformation are summarized systematically in Table 3.

Table 3. Institutional Impact Indicators of the Community Service Activity

Institutional Dimension	Pre-Intervention (Conventional)	Post-Intervention (Digital-Driven)
Program Policy	No specific digital communication regulations.	Formulated SOP for Communication & Digital Content Management.
HR Governance	Social media management was secondary and sporadic.	Formation of a creative PR team with clear role divisions.
Strategic Planning	Focus on physical promotion (banners, brochures, visits).	Integration of digital marketing into the school work calendar
Evaluation Instruments	Evaluation based on physical applicant counts.	Routine evaluation based on engagement data and social metrics.

Source: Community service data, 2025

Table 3 underlines that the initiative delivered significant institutional impact while guaranteeing long-term branding strategy sustainability. The transformation was not merely superficial social media appearance, but embedded into SMK Telesandi

Telekomunikasi's governance systems via communication digitalization and structural team reinforcement.

The shift from sporadic media management to data-driven decision-making indicates full institutional readiness to transition from conventional promotion to an adaptive digital ecosystem. Backed by strong internal policies, SMK Telesandi now possesses a strategic foundation to maintain its reputation and independently grow public engagement into the future.

2.3 Strengths, Weaknesses, and Implementation Challenges

The primary strength of this initiative lies in its contextual, education-value-based approach focusing on platform transition. Utilizing successful alumni and telecommunications industry figures as brand ambassadors proved more effective in bolstering message legitimacy digitally than conventional promotions. This approach offers replicable novelty, allowing other institutions to adopt similar transformation models tailored to their unique local characteristics.

Conversely, implementation revealed technical challenges, particularly regarding human resource constraints for routine content production and sub-optimal utilization of school technology facilities. Furthermore, shifting leadership paradigms toward digital leadership requires time, adaptation, and ongoing assistance to preserve image consistency [12]. These constraints present strategic insights for future program iterations. Nevertheless, intensive mentoring effectively mitigated these obstacles through significant workflow improvements.

A prominent transformation occurred in leadership capacity. SMK Telesandi leaders now demonstrate enhanced competence in coordinating creative teams, making data-driven decisions using social media analytics, and structuring institutional communication strategies. This development reinforces the leadership role as visionary digital leaders transcending traditional educational administration [13].

Furthermore, incorporating public narratives into online branding succeeded through the involvement of high-achieving alumni and industry partners directly linked to the telecommunications program. This approach increased message credibility and strengthened public trust by building upon authenticity and educational relevance [14].

Systematic positive impacts were also evident in overall school image performance. Social media data analytics showed significant engagement increases post-implementation. Key indicators—including follower growth, interaction frequency, and content reach—increased, reflecting heightened online visibility for

SMK Telesandi. These findings indicate that targeted offline-to-online strategic transformations successfully reinforce positive public perceptions [15], [16].

3 CONCLUSION

The community service project focused on image transformation from offline patterns to a digital ecosystem at SMK Telesandi Telekomunikasi achieved positive, significant results. Through structured mentoring phases—ranging from paradigm deconstruction and technical training to engagement strategy implementation—the initiative successfully built leadership capacity to construct branding as a visionary strategy, moving beyond routine administrative promotions. School leaders now actively serve as digital leaders who integrate digital narratives into strategic policies and long-term institutional planning.

Implementing ethical public engagement strategies involving successful alumni and telecommunications practitioners delivered substantial social impact. This approach proved contextual and relevant to vocational education values by leveraging figures tied directly to school competencies and vision. These impacts were empirically reflected in increased public interaction across school social channels and strengthened positive perception of institutional credibility online.

At the institutional level, the project produced strategic outputs, notably the *SMK Telesandi Digital Branding Guidelines*, serving as an official instrument for ongoing communication and reputation management. These guidelines reinforce institutional messaging consistency and foster an organizational culture responsive to information technology dynamics. However, skilled HR availability for creative content production remains an important consideration, calling for sustained managerial commitment and periodic oversight to ensure optimal digital branding orchestration.

Holistically, this community service initiative delivered cognitive and technical skill enhancements while driving leadership behavior transformation and institutional communication reform. The *From Offline to Online* transformation model developed here offers high replicability for other vocational schools when tailored to local regional strengths, contributing broadly to elevating vocational education recognition in the digital era.

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