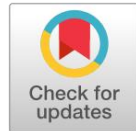


<https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/ijen/>
P - ISSN: 2988-1579
E - ISSN: 2988-0092



Public Perceptions of Madrasah in Indonesia: Evidence from YouTube Comments

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ABSTRACT

Background. Public perceptions of educational institutions are increasingly shaped through digital communication and social media interactions. Although previous studies have examined institutional reputation, educational branding, and public perceptions of madrasahs, limited attention has been given to understanding how these perceptions emerge through naturally occurring digital public discourse.

Purpose. This study aimed to investigate public perceptions of madrasahs in Indonesia by examining how YouTube users construct and negotiate perceptions of Islamic educational institutions through online discussions. It also sought to develop an analytical framework for understanding the multidimensional nature of public perceptions in digital environments.

Method. A qualitative research design employing qualitative content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis was adopted. The dataset comprised 1,471 publicly available YouTube comments collected from nine videos representing four discourse contexts: institutional image and reputation, teacher welfare and educational policy, school choice and educational decision-making, and educational achievement and innovation.

Results. The findings revealed that public perceptions of madrasahs are multidimensional and organized into four interconnected domains: institutional reputation and academic excellence, educational choice and future aspirations, teacher welfare and educational justice, and digital transformation and global aspirations.

Conclusion. This study contributes to the literature by introducing YouTube comments as a valuable source of naturally occurring public discourse for investigating public perceptions of Islamic educational institutions.

KEYWORDS

Digital public, Islamic education, Public perception

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has fundamentally transformed how public perceptions of educational institutions are formed, expressed, and disseminated

Citation: Abidin, Z., Aiyub, A., Ulya, K & Takahashi, H. (2026). The Effect of Educational Institution Differences on the Metacognitive Awareness of Mathematics Education University Students in Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Narrative*, 4(4), 1685–1702.
<https://doi.org/10.70177/ijen.v4i4.4269>

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Received: February 10, 2026

Accepted: May 15, 2026

Published: September 05, 2026



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(Perera et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Unlike traditional media, which primarily delivers one-way communication, digital platforms enable continuous interaction among institutions, students, parents, policymakers, and the broader public, allowing educational issues to be discussed in real time through user-generated content (Tawil & Miao, 2024). Among these platforms, YouTube has become one of the world's largest spaces for public communication, where educational institutions share promotional content, governmental agencies disseminate educational policies, news organizations report educational events, and users actively exchange opinions and personal experiences (Greeves & Oz, 2024). Consequently, YouTube comments represent more than spontaneous online reactions; they constitute a rich source of naturally occurring public discourse that reflects collective interpretations of educational quality, institutional credibility, and educational aspirations (So et al., 2024). As digital communication increasingly shapes public understanding of education, analyzing social media discussions offers valuable opportunities to examine how educational institutions are perceived beyond formal surveys or institutional evaluations (Perera et al., 2023; So et al., 2024).

Within Indonesia, madrasahs occupy a distinctive position within the national education system by integrating Islamic values with the national curriculum while operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, making them an essential component of the country's dual education system (Muttaqin et al., 2020; Nawas et al., 2024). Historically, madrasahs were primarily associated with religious instruction and moral formation, leading to a public perception that emphasized their religious identity rather than their academic competitiveness. However, over the past two decades, comprehensive educational reforms, strengthened governance, curriculum modernization, and continuous quality improvement initiatives have substantially transformed the role and public image of madrasahs in Indonesia (Haddade et al., 2024). Many contemporary madrasahs have demonstrated notable progress in academic performance, institutional management, digital innovation, and educational quality, enabling them to achieve national and international recognition while preparing graduates to compete successfully for admission to leading universities in Indonesia and abroad (Mahsusi et al., 2024).

Alongside these institutional developments, public discourse surrounding madrasahs has also evolved beyond discussions of religious education to encompass broader issues such as educational quality, institutional competitiveness, teacher welfare, educational equity, digital transformation, and global engagement. As social media increasingly serves as a key arena for public discussion, digital interactions play an important role in shaping public trust and perceptions of institutions, including educational organizations (Kiratli, 2023). Consequently, public perceptions of madrasahs are becoming increasingly dynamic and multidimensional, reflecting not only societal expectations regarding the future of Islamic education but also the growing importance of institutional reputation and public trust in shaping the legitimacy and competitiveness of madrasahs in the digital era (Samsudin et al., 2025).

Understanding public perceptions of educational institutions has become an important area of educational research because such perceptions influence institutional reputation, educational choice, public trust, and policy support. Previous studies have shown that institutional reputation is increasingly shaped through digital communication, social media engagement, and online branding strategies (Perera et al., 2023; Samsudin et al., 2025). Research has also demonstrated that school choice is influenced by institutional image, perceived educational quality, parental preferences, and access to educational information (Greaves et al., 2023; Jheng et al., 2022). Other studies have highlighted the importance of teacher professionalism, educational justice, and institutional support in shaping confidence in educational systems (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Tuna, 2022). More

recently, digital transformation has emerged as a central issue in educational reform, with technology increasingly viewed as a driver of educational innovation, institutional competitiveness, and future-oriented learning (Tawil & Miao, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies suggest that public perceptions of educational institutions are shaped by multiple interconnected educational, social, and technological factors. In digital environments, these perceptions are increasingly constructed through cumulative interactions and deliberative exchanges among users, highlighting the role of online discussions as an important mechanism of public opinion formation (Bodrunova, 2024).

Despite these advances, existing studies exhibit several important limitations. First, research on public perceptions of madrasahs has predominantly relied on surveys, interviews, or institutional case studies that capture perceptions within relatively structured research settings (Muttaqin et al., 2020; Samsudin et al., 2025). Such approaches provide valuable insights into stakeholder attitudes but often overlook the spontaneous interactions through which public opinions are continuously constructed and negotiated in digital environments, where online discussions function as cumulative processes of opinion formation (Bodrunova, 2024; Jakob et al., 2024). Second, although social media has become an increasingly important source of educational information, relatively few studies have examined user-generated discussions as naturally occurring public discourse despite growing evidence that online comments influence public understanding, evaluation, and opinion formation (Hyun et al., 2024; Kubin et al., 2024). Existing research has largely focused on institutional branding, official communication, or social media marketing rather than on how ordinary users collectively negotiate meanings related to educational quality, institutional reputation, educational justice, and future aspirations (Dwivedi, 2024; Samsudin et al., 2025). Consequently, limited attention has been given to understanding how public perceptions of madrasahs emerge organically through participatory digital interactions, particularly through user-generated comments that reflect authentic public discourse in online environments (So et al., 2024; Striewski et al., 2022).

Beyond these methodological and empirical limitations, a conceptual gap also remains. Existing studies have generally examined institutional reputation, educational choice, teacher welfare, and digital transformation as separate topics, providing valuable but fragmented insights into public perceptions of madrasahs. As a result, limited attention has been given to understanding how these interconnected dimensions collectively shape public perceptions within participatory digital environments. A more integrative perspective is therefore needed to explain how diverse educational, social, and technological issues converge through user-generated interactions to construct multidimensional perceptions of madrasahs. Addressing this conceptual gap requires an analytical framework capable of capturing these interrelated dimensions as components of a broader process of public meaning-making rather than as isolated themes.

Addressing these gaps, this study investigates public perceptions of madrasahs in Indonesia through thematic analysis of 1,471 YouTube comments collected from nine videos representing diverse public discourse contexts. Rather than evaluating institutional performance directly, this study examines how YouTube users interpret and discuss madrasahs across issues including institutional reputation, educational choice, teacher welfare, and digital transformation. By analyzing naturally occurring public conversations, the study seeks to capture how collective perceptions are constructed through interaction among students, parents, teachers, alumni, policymakers, and the wider public within digital environments. In doing so, the study conceptualizes public perception as a multidimensional phenomenon that emerges through ongoing digital interactions rather than as a static individual evaluation. This perspective enables the

development of an integrative analytical framework that explains how diverse dimensions of public discourse collectively shape perceptions of madrasahs in contemporary digital environments.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends research on Islamic education by demonstrating the value of YouTube comments as a source of naturally occurring public discourse for investigating how public perceptions of madrasahs are expressed and negotiated beyond conventional survey- or interview-based approaches. Second, the study develops a four-domain analytical framework comprising institutional reputation and academic excellence, educational choice and future aspirations, teacher welfare and educational justice, and digital transformation and global aspirations. Rather than treating these dimensions as separate topics, the framework provides an integrative conceptual lens for explaining how multiple dimensions of public discourse interact in shaping public perceptions of madrasahs within digital environments. Third, the study demonstrates that social media functions not merely as a communication platform but as a participatory arena where institutional legitimacy, educational aspirations, policy debates, and collective expectations are continuously negotiated through user-generated interactions. Collectively, these contributions advance current understanding of the relationship between digital public discourse and public perceptions of Islamic educational institutions while providing a conceptual foundation for future studies examining educational perceptions in online environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using qualitative content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis to examine public perceptions of madrasahs as expressed in YouTube comments. Unlike surveys or interviews that rely on predefined research instruments, this approach enables researchers to investigate naturally occurring public discourse generated through online interactions. Qualitative content analysis was used to organize and interpret the textual data systematically, while thematic analysis facilitated the identification of recurring patterns of meaning across the dataset (Schreier, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). This methodological combination is particularly appropriate for exploring how public perceptions are collectively constructed, negotiated, and expressed in digital communication environments.

The data consisted of publicly accessible comments posted on YouTube videos discussing madrasahs in Indonesia. YouTube was selected because it is one of the world's largest social media platforms where educational institutions, government agencies, news organizations, and members of the public actively exchange information and opinions. Unlike questionnaire-based data, YouTube comments represent naturally occurring user-generated discourse that reflects authentic public responses without direct researcher intervention. Consequently, the platform provides an appropriate setting for examining how public perceptions of madrasahs emerge through digital interactions.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify YouTube videos that were information-rich and directly relevant to the research objectives. Videos were selected according to five criteria: (1) the primary content focused on madrasahs in Indonesia; (2) the videos generated substantial public engagement through comments; (3) the comment sections were publicly accessible; (4) the videos represented diverse discourse contexts, including institutional image, teacher welfare, school choice, and educational innovation; and (5) the videos were published between 2020 and 2025. Applying these criteria resulted in a final sample of nine YouTube videos that collectively represented a broad range of public discussions concerning madrasahs. The final selection was intended to maximize variation in public discourse rather than statistical representativeness. The selected videos originated from different sources, including official

madrasah channels, government institutions, educational content creators, and national news media, thereby capturing diverse contexts in which public perceptions of madrasahs were expressed.

Data were collected manually on 10 July 2026 from the public comment sections of the selected YouTube videos. At the time of data collection, the nine videos had accumulated approximately 414,100 views and 1,471 publicly available comments, all of which were included in the analysis. The comments were copied into a text corpus for qualitative coding after removing duplicate entries and comments unrelated to the topic of madrasahs. No usernames, profile information, or other personally identifiable information were retained during data preparation in order to protect user privacy. Comments were screened prior to analysis to remove spam, duplicated posts, advertisements, and comments unrelated to madrasahs. Only comments containing opinions, evaluations, experiences, or discussions relevant to madrasahs were retained in the final corpus.

The analysis followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). First, all comments were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the dataset. Second, initial codes were generated to capture meaningful units of text related to perceptions of madrasahs. Third, conceptually similar codes were grouped into preliminary themes. Fourth, the candidate themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them across the entire dataset to ensure internal coherence and external distinction. Fifth, each theme was defined and named according to its conceptual focus. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to existing literature on educational institutions, social media, and public perception. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was used to refine coding decisions and ensure consistency across the dataset. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being predetermined by existing theoretical categories. Initial coding generated a broad range of descriptive codes, which were continuously compared, merged, refined, or separated throughout the analytical process. This iterative analysis resulted in the identification of four overarching themes that captured the dominant dimensions of public perceptions of madrasahs expressed across the YouTube comments.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility was strengthened through repeated reading of the data and iterative coding to ensure that the identified themes accurately reflected the content of the comments. Dependability was supported by maintaining a transparent coding process and documenting analytical decisions throughout the study. Confirmability was enhanced by grounding thematic interpretations in representative excerpts from the dataset rather than researcher assumptions. Finally, the inclusion of comments from multiple videos representing different discourse contexts increased the richness and transferability of the findings by capturing diverse public perspectives on madrasahs. Reflexive memo writing was also used throughout the analytical process to document coding decisions and support analytical consistency.

The study analyzed comments that were publicly available on YouTube and did not involve direct interaction with human participants. Consistent with ethical guidelines for internet-mediated research, only publicly accessible comments were included in the analysis. Usernames and other identifying information were removed during data preparation, and all quotations presented in this article are anonymized to protect user privacy. The study focused exclusively on the content of public discourse rather than on identifying individual users.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the YouTube Dataset

The final dataset comprised nine YouTube videos published between 2020 and 2025, selected to represent diverse public discussions concerning madrasah in Indonesia. The videos originated from official madrasah channels, national news organizations, government institutions, and independent educational creators, thereby capturing multiple perspectives on madrasah-related issues. Across the selected videos, 1,471 public comments were collected for analysis, with a combined total of approximately 414,100 views. The number of comments per video ranged from 62 to 320, reflecting varying levels of public engagement across different topics. The characteristics of the selected videos are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the YouTube Dataset

Video (Short Title)	Discourse Context	Source Type	Views	Comments
MAN Insan Cendekia Paser Profile	Institutional Image	Official Madrasah	11,000	62
MAN Insan Cendekia Serpong Profile	Institutional Image	Official Madrasah	89,000	160
Best Madrasah Aliyah in Indonesia	Institutional Image	Educational Media	66,000	193
Madrasah Teachers Demand PPPK/ASN	Teacher Welfare and Policy	National News	11,000	161
DPR Receives Madrasah Teachers' Protest	Teacher Welfare and Policy	Government Institution	6,500	63
Six Differences Between SMA and MA	School Choice	Educational Creator	9,600	124
Which Is Better: SMA, SMK, or MA?	School Choice	Educational Creator	27,000	114
Rayyan Accepted by 15 Global Universities	Educational Achievement	National News	151,000	320
Digital Transformation of Madrasah	Educational Innovation	Government Institution	43,000	274
Total			414,100	1,471

To facilitate subsequent analyses, the videos were classified into four discourse contexts: institutional image and reputation, teacher welfare and educational policy, school choice and educational decision-making, and educational achievement and innovation. As shown in Table 2, the largest proportion of comments was generated by videos related to educational achievement and innovation (40.4%), followed by institutional image and reputation (28.2%). School choice accounted for 16.2% of the comments, while teacher welfare and educational policy represented 15.2%.

Table 2. Distribution of Comments Across Public Discourse Contexts

Public Discourse Context	Number of Videos	Comments	Percentage
Institutional Image and Reputation	3	415	28.2%
Teacher Welfare and Educational Policy	2	224	15.2%
School Choice and Educational Decision-Making	2	238	16.2%
Educational Achievement and Innovation	2	594	40.4%
Total	9	1,471	100%

The distribution of comments across these four contexts indicates that public discussions on YouTube extend beyond institutional promotion, encompassing broader issues related to educational quality, policy, educational pathways, and innovation. This diversity provides a comprehensive basis for examining public perceptions of madrasah across different discourse settings.

Public Discourse on Madrasah in YouTube Comments

Analysis of the 1,471 YouTube comments revealed that public discussions about madrasah extended beyond simple expressions of approval or criticism. Instead, users discussed educational quality, school choice, teacher welfare, educational justice, and digital transformation. Although these issues appeared across all nine videos, their prominence varied according to the context of each discussion.

Thematic analysis identified four interconnected discourse domains that shape public perceptions of madrasah: institutional perceptions, educational experiences, social meanings, and future-oriented perspectives. Together, these domains illustrate that public perceptions are multidimensional rather than driven by a single narrative.

Institutional perceptions

The first domain reflects how users evaluated madrasah as educational institutions. Discussions emphasized academic excellence, institutional reputation, and the integration of religious and general education. Many commenters described Madrasah Aliyah, particularly MAN Insan Cendekia, as a prestigious institution, with comments such as "MAN IC memang sekolah impian" ("MAN IC is truly a dream school") and "Sekolah intelek dan bertakwa" ("A school that combines academic excellence and piety"). These comments demonstrate strong public trust in the academic quality of madrasah.

Educational experiences

The second domain focused on educational decision-making. Users frequently compared Madrasah Aliyah with SMA and SMK while seeking information about university admission, career opportunities, and curriculum differences. Representative comments included "Masih bingung pilih SMA atau MA" ("I'm still confused whether to choose SMA or MA") and "Ijazah MA sama dengan SMA kan?" ("Is a Madrasah Aliyah diploma equivalent to an SMA diploma?"). Such discussions indicate that perceptions of madrasah are closely linked to students' educational aspirations.

Social meanings

The third domain extended beyond educational issues to broader social concerns, particularly teacher welfare and educational justice. Discussions surrounding teacher demonstrations frequently highlighted equality and professional recognition, reflected in comments such as "Guru madrasah juga mencerdaskan anak bangsa" ("Madrasah teachers also educate the nation's children") and "Jangan ada diskriminasi terhadap guru madrasah" ("There should be no discrimination against madrasah teachers"). These responses illustrate how public perceptions of madrasah are intertwined with broader debates on educational policy.

Future-oriented perspectives

The final domain captured expectations regarding the future of madrasah. Commenters expressed strong support for digital transformation, educational innovation, and global competitiveness. Frequently repeated expressions included "Madrasah Hebat Bermartabat" ("Madrasah: Excellent and Dignified") and "Madrasah menuju kelas dunia" ("Madrasah towards world-class education"), reflecting optimism that technological advancement can strengthen the future of Islamic education without compromising its religious identity.

Overall, the findings indicate that public perceptions of madrasah encompass institutional credibility, educational opportunities, social justice, and future educational development. These four discourse domains provide the analytical foundation for understanding how public perceptions are constructed across different contexts of discussion. The analytical framework derived from this thematic analysis is presented in Figure 1.

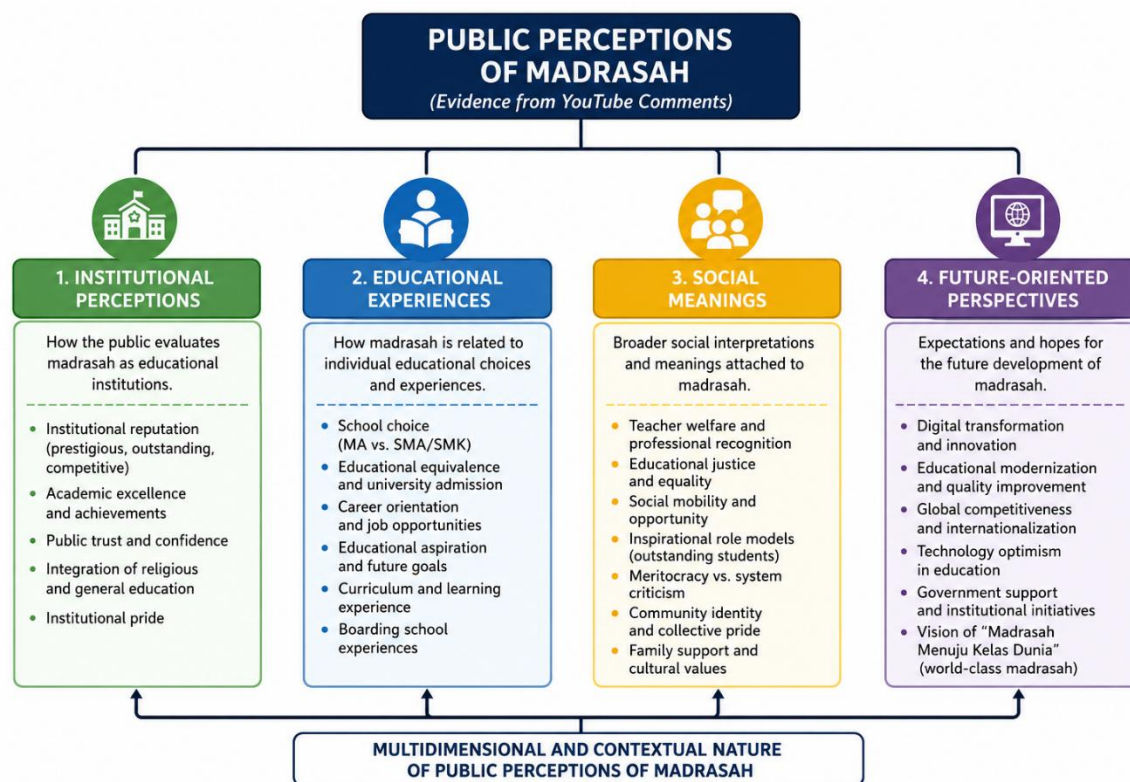


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Public Perceptions of Madrasah Derived from YouTube Comments.

Figure 1 summarizes the four discourse domains identified through thematic analysis. Rather than functioning independently, institutional perceptions, educational experiences, social meanings, and future-oriented perspectives interact to shape multidimensional public perceptions of madrasah across different discussion contexts.

Major Themes Shaping Public Perceptions of Madrasah

Building upon the four-domain framework presented in Figure 1, this section elaborates the major themes that shape public perceptions of madrasah in Indonesia. Although the thematic analysis identified numerous discussion topics across the 1,471 YouTube comments, these topics converged into four dominant themes: institutional reputation and academic excellence, educational choice and future aspirations, teacher welfare and educational justice, and digital transformation and global aspirations. These themes were consistently observed across the nine videos, although their relative prominence varied according to the discourse context. Together, they illustrate that public perceptions of madrasah are constructed through interactions among institutional performance, educational experiences, social concerns, and expectations for the future of Islamic education.

Institutional Reputation and Academic Excellence

Institutional reputation emerged as the dominant theme across the YouTube dataset. Discussions consistently portrayed madrasah as reputable educational institutions that successfully

combine academic excellence with Islamic values. This perception was particularly evident in videos featuring institutional profiles, national rankings, and outstanding student achievements, where Madrasah Aliyah, especially MAN Insan Cendekia, was frequently associated with educational prestige and high academic performance.

Public trust was reflected through comments describing MAN Insan Cendekia as "MAN IC memang sekolah impian" ("MAN IC is truly a dream school"), "Sekolah intelek dan bertakwa" ("A school that combines academic excellence and piety"), and "Madrasah sekarang sudah bisa bersaing dengan sekolah favorit." Similar perceptions appeared in discussions of Ahmad Ali Rayyan Shahab's acceptance to fifteen international universities, where many commenters regarded his achievement as evidence that madrasah graduates can compete globally rather than as an isolated personal success. Overall, institutional reputation was constructed through the interaction of academic achievements, successful alumni, selective admissions, and public recognition. These findings suggest that YouTube users increasingly perceive madrasah as competitive educational institutions rather than merely religious schools.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that institutional reputation is increasingly shaped through digital communication and public interaction rather than solely through institutional performance (Perera et al., 2023; Samsudin et al., 2025). However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that institutional reputation is not constructed only through official branding but also through user-generated narratives that collectively reinforce public trust. In this sense, YouTube functions as a participatory arena where institutional legitimacy is continuously negotiated through public discourse.

Educational Choice and Future Aspirations

Educational choice constituted the second major discourse domain. Unlike profile videos that emphasized institutional excellence, comparison videos generated discussions about educational pathways, with users evaluating Madrasah Aliyah alongside SMA and SMK in relation to higher education, career opportunities, and personal aspirations.

Many comments reflected uncertainty before choosing a school, including "Masih bingung pilih SMA atau MA" ("I'm still confused whether to choose SMA or MA"), "Ijazah MA sama dengan SMA kan?" ("Is a Madrasah Aliyah diploma equivalent to an SMA diploma?"), and "Kalau dari MA bisa masuk kedokteran?" ("Can MA graduates enter medical school?"). Other users highlighted the added value of madrasah by emphasizing stronger religious education alongside opportunities for university admission and professional careers. These exchanges transformed the comment sections into informal spaces where prospective students, parents, alumni, and current students shared educational experiences and advice. These findings indicate that public perceptions of madrasah are closely linked to educational aspirations and future planning. Rather than serving as an alternative to general secondary schools, Madrasah Aliyah is increasingly viewed as an educational pathway capable of supporting both academic achievement and character development.

These findings support previous research indicating that school choice is influenced by institutional image, perceived educational quality, and expectations regarding future educational opportunities (Greaves et al., 2023; Jheng et al., 2022). Unlike earlier studies that primarily examined educational choice through surveys of students or parents, the present findings demonstrate how educational aspirations are openly negotiated through peer interactions in online environments, where users exchange information, experiences, and recommendations before making educational decisions.

Teacher Welfare and Educational Justice

Teacher welfare and educational justice emerged primarily from discussions concerning demonstrations by madrasah teachers and parliamentary hearings on teacher recruitment policies. In this context, public attention shifted from institutional performance to issues of professional recognition, employment equality, and government responsibility.

Many commenters emphasized the unequal treatment experienced by teachers in private madrasah, using expressions such as "*Guru madrasah juga mencerdaskan anak bangsa*" ("Madrasah teachers also educate the nation's children"), "*Jangan ada diskriminasi terhadap guru madrasah*" ("There should be no discrimination against madrasah teachers"), and "*Hak guru madrasah harus sama.*" Discussions also included debates regarding PPPK recruitment, teacher salaries, and the state's responsibility for ensuring equal educational opportunities. Religious expressions such as "*Aamiin*" and "*Semoga Allah mudahkan perjuangan guru*" frequently accompanied these discussions, reflecting solidarity with the teaching profession. Overall, perceptions of madrasah in this discourse extended beyond educational quality to encompass broader concerns regarding fairness, professional recognition, and educational governance. Teacher welfare therefore became an important lens through which the public evaluated support for Islamic education.

The findings also reinforce previous studies emphasizing that teacher professionalism and educational equity play an important role in shaping public trust in educational systems (Geiger & Pivovarov, 2018; Tuna, 2022). In the present study, however, teacher welfare emerged not only as an employment issue but also as a symbol of educational justice, suggesting that public evaluations of madrasahs extend beyond institutional quality to include perceptions of fairness and governmental support.

Digital Transformation, Global Aspirations, and the Future of Madrasah

Future-oriented discussions focused on global competitiveness and digital transformation. Public responses to the achievement of Ahmad Ali Rayyan Shahab and the national digital transformation program consistently portrayed madrasah as institutions capable of adapting to global educational developments while maintaining their Islamic identity.

Commenters frequently expressed optimism through statements such as "*Madrasah menuju kelas dunia*" ("Madrasah towards world-class education"), "*Madrasah Hebat Bermartabat*" ("Excellent and Dignified Madrasah"), and "*Bangga menjadi bagian dari madrasah.*" In discussions of Rayyan's achievement, many users also wrote "*Semoga anak saya bisa seperti Rayyan*" ("Hopefully my child can be like Rayyan"), linking student success with broader aspirations for international education. Comments on digital transformation similarly welcomed technological innovation while emphasizing that modernization should continue to strengthen Islamic values. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that public perceptions of madrasah increasingly incorporate expectations regarding innovation, global competitiveness, and educational modernization. Rather than viewing technology and religious education as contradictory, YouTube users generally perceived them as complementary elements in shaping the future of madrasah.

These findings align with recent studies identifying digital transformation as an important driver of educational innovation and institutional competitiveness (Tawil & Miao, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the present study demonstrates that public support for digital transformation is accompanied by expectations that technological modernization should remain compatible with the religious identity of madrasahs. This indicates that innovation and Islamic values are perceived by the public as complementary rather than competing educational principles.

Public Sentiment Across Discourse Contexts

The thematic analysis indicates that public sentiment toward madrasah varies according to the context of discussion rather than remaining uniform across all videos. Discussions concerning institutional reputation, student achievement, and digital transformation were characterized by predominantly positive expressions, reflecting admiration for academic excellence, institutional credibility, and educational innovation. Representative comments included *"MAN IC memang sekolah impian"* ("MAN IC is truly a dream school"), *"Bangga menjadi bagian dari madrasah"* ("Proud to be part of madrasah"), and *"Madrasah menuju kelas dunia"* ("Madrasah towards world-class education"), illustrating strong optimism regarding the role of madrasah in contemporary education.

A different pattern emerged in discussions related to teacher welfare and educational policy. Although many commenters expressed solidarity with teachers through statements such as *"Guru madrasah juga mencerdaskan anak bangsa"* ("Madrasah teachers also educate the nation's children") and *"Jangan ada diskriminasi terhadap guru madrasah"* ("There should be no discrimination against madrasah teachers"), these discussions also contained critical opinions regarding recruitment policies, professional recognition, and government responsibility. As a result, policy-related discussions displayed more varied emotional responses than other discourse contexts.

By comparison, school-choice discussions were dominated by neutral and positive interactions. Most comments sought information or shared personal experiences rather than expressing criticism. Questions such as *"Masih bingung pilih SMA atau MA"* ("I'm still confused whether to choose SMA or MA") and *"Kalau dari MA bisa masuk kedokteran?"* ("Can MA graduates enter medical school?") illustrate that YouTube comments also function as informal spaces for educational consultation and peer learning.

Overall, the findings suggest that emotional responses toward madrasah are closely associated with the discourse context. While institutional and achievement-related discussions primarily evoke pride and optimism, policy-related discussions encourage more critical reflections concerning educational justice and teacher welfare. The dominant sentiment identified in each discourse context is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Dominant Public Sentiment Across Discourse Contexts

Discourse Context	Dominant Sentiment	Typical Emotional Expressions
Institutional Image and Reputation	Positive	Pride, trust, admiration
Teacher Welfare and Educational Policy	Mixed	Support, concern, criticism
School Choice and Educational Decision	Positive–Neutral	Curiosity, aspiration, consultation
Educational Achievement and Innovation	Strongly Positive	Inspiration, optimism, motivation

Note: This thematic sentiment overview will be complemented by quantitative sentiment classification in the subsequent sentiment analysis.

The variation in sentiment across discourse contexts suggests that public perceptions are highly context dependent rather than uniformly positive or negative. Positive sentiment was primarily associated with institutional achievement and educational innovation, whereas mixed sentiment emerged in discussions involving educational policy and teacher welfare. This pattern

indicates that emotional responses are shaped by the issues under discussion, reinforcing the multidimensional character of public perceptions identified through the thematic analysis.

Cross-Context Analysis of Public Perceptions

Comparing the four discourse contexts reveals that public perceptions of madrasah are shaped by the issues under discussion. Videos presenting institutional profiles and rankings primarily generated conversations about academic quality, institutional reputation, and educational excellence. In contrast, policy-related videos shifted attention toward teacher welfare, educational justice, and government responsibility. Discussions of school choice focused on educational pathways, university admission, and career opportunities, whereas videos highlighting student achievement and digital transformation emphasized global competitiveness, innovation, and the future of Islamic education.

Despite these contextual differences, several themes consistently appeared across the dataset. Institutional credibility, integration of Islamic values with academic learning, educational aspirations, and expectations for continuous improvement remained central to public discussions. Rather than representing isolated viewpoints, these themes interacted across contexts and collectively shaped public perceptions of madrasah. Overall, the cross-context analysis demonstrates that public perceptions of madrasah are multidimensional and dynamic. They are constructed through the interaction of institutional achievements, educational experiences, policy debates, and future-oriented aspirations, indicating that perceptions of madrasah evolve according to the surrounding discourse while remaining grounded in shared expectations regarding the role of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that public perceptions of madrasahs cannot be adequately explained through a single dimension such as institutional reputation or educational quality. Instead, public perceptions emerge through the interaction of institutional, educational, social, and future-oriented considerations across different discourse contexts. This integrative perspective provides empirical support for the proposed four-domain analytical framework and extends existing research by explaining how diverse forms of public discourse converge to shape multidimensional perceptions of Islamic educational institutions.

This study explored public perceptions of madrasah in Indonesia through thematic analysis of 1,471 YouTube comments across nine videos representing different discourse contexts. The findings demonstrate that public perceptions are multidimensional rather than uniformly positive or negative. Four interconnected domains emerged from the analysis: institutional reputation and academic excellence, educational choice and future aspirations, teacher welfare and educational justice, and digital transformation and global aspirations. Together, these findings suggest that contemporary discussions about madrasah have shifted beyond their traditional identity as religious educational institutions toward broader issues of educational quality, equity, and innovation.

The first major finding highlights the importance of institutional reputation in shaping public perceptions of madrasah. Across institutional profile videos and student achievement stories, commenters consistently associated madrasah, particularly MAN Insan Cendekia, with academic excellence, competitive university admissions, and strong Islamic values. These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that digital communication and social media have become strategic instruments for strengthening the public image of educational institutions by enhancing institutional visibility, credibility, and stakeholder engagement (Perera et al., 2023; Samsudin et al., 2025). Likewise, research on higher education branding consistently argues that institutional reputation constitutes a valuable intangible asset that influences public trust, educational preferences, and

institutional competitiveness (Stephenson et al., 2016; Yaping et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings indicate that public perceptions of madrasah are socially constructed through continuous digital interactions, where institutional evaluations, educational aspirations, policy concerns, and expectations for future development become interconnected rather than independent dimensions of public discourse.

However, our findings extend this body of literature in several important ways. Previous studies have primarily conceptualized institutional reputation as the outcome of strategic branding, official communication, and social media management conducted by educational institutions (Perera et al., 2023; Samsudin et al., 2025). In contrast, the present study demonstrates that reputation is also co-created through participatory digital interactions among students, alumni, parents, and the wider public. Rather than functioning merely as audiences of institutional communication, social media users actively construct institutional legitimacy by sharing success stories, educational experiences, and personal evaluations. This participatory process amplifies institutional credibility through electronic word-of-mouth and peer endorsement, reinforcing public trust beyond the boundaries of formal institutional communication. Similar patterns have been observed in higher education, where peer-generated interactions significantly influence institutional image and prospective students' behavioral intentions (Simiyu et al., 2020). Therefore, this study suggests that the reputation of contemporary madrasahs is increasingly shaped through the dynamic interplay between institutional branding and community-generated digital discourse.

The second finding extends previous research on school choice by demonstrating that educational decision-making is increasingly shaped through participatory digital interactions. Existing studies suggest that school choice is influenced by parental preferences, perceived educational quality, institutional reputation, and access to reliable educational information (Greaves et al., 2023; Jheng et al., 2022). While our findings support these perspectives, they also reveal an additional mechanism facilitated by social media. Rather than merely consuming information provided by educational institutions, prospective students and parents actively compare educational pathways, seek advice from other users, and exchange personal experiences within YouTube comment sections. These interactions transform social media from a promotional platform into an informal public forum where educational decisions are collectively negotiated. This finding is consistent with recent evidence showing that social media participation broadens educational aspirations and enables prospective students to acquire educational knowledge through peer interactions and community networks (Brown et al., 2022). Moreover, recent studies indicate that universities increasingly rely on interactive social media communication not only to promote institutional brands but also to foster meaningful engagement with prospective students throughout the decision-making process (Perera et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2026). Our findings therefore extend current understandings of school choice by demonstrating that YouTube comment sections function as participatory digital spaces where educational aspirations and school-choice decisions are co-constructed through user-generated discussions rather than institutional communication alone. Beyond immediate school selection, these interactions also reveal how educational aspirations are collectively shaped through peer discussions concerning higher education, career pathways, and future opportunities.

A third important finding concerns teacher welfare and educational justice. Unlike videos promoting institutional achievements, discussions related to teacher recruitment and professional recognition generated considerably more critical responses. Commenters frequently framed teacher welfare not merely as an employment issue but as a matter of educational equity and recognition of teachers' contributions to national education. This finding is consistent with previous research

demonstrating that teachers' working conditions, professional recognition, and institutional support are fundamental to teacher retention and educational quality (Geiger & Pivovarov, 2018). It also reinforces studies highlighting the importance of teacher professionalism in strengthening the quality and credibility of Islamic education institutions (Tuna, 2022). However, our findings extend this perspective by showing that public evaluations of madrasah are shaped not only by classroom performance but also by broader policy debates concerning fairness, equal educational opportunities, and government support. In the Indonesian context, these concerns resonate with evidence of persistent disparities affecting Islamic schools and broader challenges in ensuring equitable access to quality education (Muttaqin et al., 2020; Sulistyosari et al., 2023). Consequently, public perceptions of madrasah extend beyond institutional characteristics to encompass wider issues of educational governance, suggesting that teacher welfare has become an important indicator through which the public evaluates the state's commitment to educational justice.

The final finding emphasizes digital transformation and future-oriented aspirations. Public responses to both the national digital transformation initiative and the international achievements of madrasah students consistently reflected optimism regarding the future of Islamic education. This finding aligns with recent studies suggesting that digital transformation has become a key driver of educational innovation, institutional competitiveness, and sustainable educational development (Perera et al., 2023; Tawil & Miao, 2024). It also supports evidence that digital communication increasingly shapes the public image and reputation of educational institutions, including madrasahs, through participatory online engagement (Samsudin et al., 2025; Yaping et al., 2023). However, our findings reveal a distinctive characteristic of Indonesian public discourse. Rather than perceiving technological innovation as a challenge to religious education, commenters generally viewed digital transformation as complementary to Islamic values and as an opportunity to strengthen the global competitiveness of madrasahs. This perspective is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing that successful educational transformation depends not only on technological adoption but also on human-centered governance, institutional values, and the integration of digital innovation into long-term educational reform (Tawil & Miao, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Consequently, public expectations increasingly position madrasah as institutions capable of simultaneously preserving religious identity, embracing digital innovation, and preparing globally competitive graduates.

Taken together, these findings contribute to the literature in three important ways. First, unlike previous studies that primarily examined perceptions of madrasah through surveys or institutional case studies, this research captures public perceptions as they emerge naturally within social media interactions. Second, the study proposes a four-domain analytical framework comprising institutional reputation, educational experiences, social meanings, and future-oriented perspectives. This framework provides an integrative conceptual explanation of how institutional, educational, social, and future-oriented dimensions interact in shaping public perceptions of Islamic educational institutions within participatory digital environments. Third, the findings demonstrate that YouTube comments represent more than expressions of public opinion; they function as spaces where institutional reputation, educational aspirations, policy debates, and collective expectations are continuously negotiated.

More broadly, the proposed four-domain analytical framework suggests that public perceptions of madrasah are not formed through isolated evaluations of institutional performance. Instead, they emerge through the interaction of institutional reputation, educational aspirations, social justice concerns, and future-oriented expectations within participatory digital environments. This integrative perspective extends previous studies that examined these dimensions separately and

provides a conceptual basis for understanding how public perceptions of Islamic educational institutions are constructed through online public discourse.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that madrasahs should view social media not only as a promotional tool but also as a platform for sustained public engagement. Institutional reputation appears to be strengthened through transparent communication, visible educational achievements, and active interaction with the wider community. At the same time, policymakers should recognize that public perceptions are also influenced by issues of teacher welfare and educational equity. Addressing these concerns may contribute not only to improving teacher professionalism but also to strengthening public confidence in Islamic education.

This study has several limitations. The analysis was limited to YouTube comments, which represent only one segment of online public discourse and may not fully capture broader societal perceptions. In addition, the study focused on comments associated with nine purposively selected videos related to madrasah. Future research may extend this framework by incorporating data from multiple social media platforms, applying large-scale sentiment classification and topic modeling, and conducting comparative analyses across different countries or Islamic educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined public perceptions of madrasahs in Indonesia through thematic analysis of 1,471 YouTube comments collected from nine videos representing diverse public discourse contexts. The findings demonstrate that public perceptions of madrasahs are multidimensional and extend well beyond their traditional image as religious educational institutions. Four interconnected domains, institutional reputation and academic excellence, educational choice and future aspirations, teacher welfare and educational justice, and digital transformation and global aspirations, collectively shape how madrasahs are understood and evaluated within contemporary digital environments. These findings suggest that public perceptions are continuously constructed through participatory online interactions rather than being determined solely by institutional communication or formal educational policies. Taken together, these findings indicate that public perceptions emerge through the interaction of institutional, educational, social, and future-oriented considerations within participatory digital environments.

The study contributes to the literature in several important ways. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of YouTube comments as a source of naturally occurring public discourse for investigating public perceptions of educational institutions. Conceptually, it proposes a four-domain analytical framework that captures the multidimensional nature of public perceptions of madrasahs in digital environments. Rather than serving as a descriptive classification of themes, the proposed framework provides an integrative conceptual explanation of how these dimensions interact in shaping public perceptions of madrasahs through user-generated discourse. The findings also extend previous studies by showing that institutional legitimacy, educational aspirations, and public trust are co-constructed through user-generated interactions, highlighting the growing role of social media in shaping public understandings of Islamic education.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that madrasahs should view social media not merely as a promotional channel but as an interactive space for engaging with diverse stakeholders. Transparent communication, visible educational achievements, responsiveness to public concerns, and continuous innovation may strengthen institutional reputation and public confidence. At the policy level, improving teacher welfare, educational equity, and digital transformation initiatives may further enhance public trust in Islamic education.

This study is limited to comments collected from nine YouTube videos and therefore represents only one segment of online public discourse. Future research may expand the analysis by incorporating multiple social media platforms, employing large-scale computational approaches such as sentiment analysis and topic modeling, or conducting comparative studies across different countries and Islamic educational contexts. Future studies may also examine the applicability of the proposed four-domain analytical framework across different educational systems and cultural contexts. Such investigations would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how public perceptions of Islamic educational institutions evolve within increasingly interconnected digital societies.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to improve the language, clarity, and organization of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Data curation.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Methodology; Supervision, Writing – review and editing.

Author 3: Formal analysis; Methodology; Supervision; Validation, Writing – review and editing

Author 4: Investigation; Project administration.

Author 5: Writing – original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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