

# Marketing Strategies of Umrah Travel Agencies in Shaping and Driving Pilgrim Interest at PT. Karomah Bait Al-Ansor

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the marketing strategies of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor, Semarang Regency, Central Java, in encouraging public interest in performing Umrah. Indonesia's Umrah travel industry has grown significantly, with 648,485 pilgrims recorded in April 2025, and the number of licensed travel agencies rising from approximately 700 before the COVID-19 pandemic to over 2,700 by 2024. This dramatic expansion intensifies competition and demands innovative, trust-driven marketing strategies. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Research subjects include the agency director, two marketing staff members, and five pilgrims selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), and validity was tested through source, methodological, and temporal triangulation. Findings reveal that PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor applies two integrated marketing strategies: religious-figure-based marketing through strategic collaboration with Islamic scholars (kyais and ustadz), and digital marketing via Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The 7P Marketing Mix (Kotler & Keller, 2016) provides the strategic framework, while the Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and Customer Engagement Theory (Prentice et al., 2019) explain the mechanisms underpinning pilgrim loyalty. Pilgrim perceptions are highly positive across three customer engagement dimensions: cognitive (information transparency), affective (trust transfer through religious networks), and behavioral (organic brand advocacy). Supporting factors include institutional reputation, religious figure partnerships, and digital technology adoption. Inhibiting factors include intense market competition with over 2,700 licensed agencies, limited digital human resource capacity, exchange rate and regulatory fluctuations, and negative industry stigma from fraudulent agency cases. The integration of religious trust-based marketing and digital marketing creates a comprehensive, effective, and sustainable marketing ecosystem. This study contributes a replicable model for medium-scale religious travel agencies operating in semi-urban Indonesian contexts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia holds the largest Muslim population in the world, with over 235 million Muslims comprising approximately 87% of the total population [1]. This demographic reality creates enormous potential in the religious travel sector, particularly Umrah, which is a muakkadah sunnah worship deeply embedded in Muslim identity and aspiration. The spiritual significance of Umrah, combined with its accessibility throughout the year, has made it a primary religious goal for millions of Indonesian Muslims across various socioeconomic backgrounds.

Data from the Computerized System for the Integrated Management of Umrah and Special Hajj (SISKOPATUH) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs confirms that as of April 2025, Indonesian Umrah pilgrims reached 648,485 individuals. In the previous year, 1.4 million pilgrims departed through officially licensed Umrah



travel organizers (PPIU) [2]. Three converging factors drive this growing demand. First, Umrah offers scheduling flexibility throughout the year and carries no quota system, unlike Hajj, which imposes waiting periods extending across decades for many Indonesian applicants. Second, the rapid growth of Indonesia's middle class has expanded the proportion of households capable of allocating savings for religious travel. Third, digital platform proliferation has democratized access to pricing information, package comparisons, and peer reviews, substantially lowering the information cost for prospective pilgrims.

These demand-side drivers have triggered an unprecedented expansion on the supply side. The number of officially licensed Umrah travel agencies jumped from approximately 700 before the COVID-19 pandemic to more than 2,700 in 2024 [3]. This dramatic expansion means competition among agencies is no longer primarily price-based. Service quality, institutional reputation, package differentiation, religious legitimacy, and consumer trust now function as primary competitive axes. Agencies that fail to build sustained trust risk rapid market exit, particularly as high-profile fraud cases have sensitized prospective pilgrims to reputational signals.

Therefore, examining how Umrah travel agencies develop and implement effective marketing strategies in this increasingly competitive environment is critically important [4]. Without a systematic academic understanding of what makes certain agencies succeed while others fail, the industry risks continued volatility, and prospective pilgrims remain vulnerable to fraudulent operators [5]. This research is particularly urgent for medium-scale agencies operating in semi-urban Indonesian contexts, where community-based trust networks remain highly influential, but digital infrastructure and marketing expertise are often limited. PT Karomah Bait Al Ansor, Semarang Regency, Central Java, represents a strategic case because it has maintained consistent pilgrim volumes since its PPIU licensing in 2020 by integrating two distinct marketing approaches: collaboration with Islamic religious figures (kyais and ustadz) as credibility anchors, and digital marketing through Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp as reach amplifiers. Understanding why and how this integration works can provide actionable insights for similar agencies across Indonesia.

Prior research in this domain has examined various aspects of Umrah agency marketing. Safira studied PT Saudi Patria Wisata Lampung and identified key marketing barriers as high costs and limited digital literacy among both agencies and prospective pilgrims [6]. Indryani found that price, promotion, service, and brand factors jointly influence prospective pilgrim interest in PT Arminareka Perdana Metro, demonstrating that no single factor dominates consumer decision-making. [7]. Umar examined Umrah product marketing strategies in Lampung, emphasizing the role of product quality and service differentiation as primary drivers of customer satisfaction [8]. These studies have established foundational knowledge about the factors that matter in Umrah marketing.

Beyond empirical studies, several theoretical frameworks are relevant to understanding Umrah marketing. Kotler and Keller's 7P Marketing Mix (product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence) provides a structural framework for designing and delivering coherent service offerings in the travel industry [9]. Morgan and Hunt's Commitment-Trust Theory explains how relationship marketing effectiveness rests on two central constructs: commitment, which reflects a partner's belief that the relationship is worth maintaining, and trust, which reflects confidence in a partner's reliability and integrity [10]. Prentice, Brodie et al., Customer Engagement Theory defines customer engagement as a multi-dimensional interaction encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components [11]. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick's Digital Marketing Theory emphasizes the application of internet-based technologies to develop and sustain customer relationships [12]. Together, these frameworks offer complementary lenses for analyzing Umrah marketing strategies.

Despite this existing knowledge, a significant lack of research remains. Specifically, no prior study has systematically examined the integration of religious-figure-based marketing and digital marketing as a single, mutually reinforcing system in the Umrah travel sector. Most existing research treats these channels separately: studies on religious endorsements focus on trust and credibility, while studies on digital marketing focus on reach and engagement rates. However, PT Karomah Bait Al Ansor's practice suggests that the two channels work synergistically, digital content extends the reach of personal endorsements, and personal endorsements lend credibility to digital content. This integration has not been theorized or empirically examined in the Umrah context.

Furthermore, prior studies have specific limitations that this research addresses. First, most existing research has been conducted in major urban centers (Makassar, Pekanbaru, Lampung) using quantitative survey methods that cannot capture the deep mechanisms of trust transfer from religious figures to agencies. How exactly does a kyai's endorsement convert into a pilgrim's registration decision? What cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes mediate this conversion? Second, no prior study has applied all three dimensions of Customer Engagement Theory (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) to analyze pilgrim perceptions holistically. Most studies measure satisfaction or purchase intention as single outcomes, missing the multi-dimensional progression from awareness to loyalty. Third, previous research has not addressed the unique constraints of semi-urban Indonesian contexts, where digital literacy may be lower, religious authority structures remain strong, and agency resources are more limited than in metropolitan areas.

Beyond academic gaps, practical problems urgently need to be solved. The proliferation of fraudulent Umrah agency cases, which have received extensive national media coverage, has created negative industry stigma that imposes an information cost on legitimate agencies. PT Karomah Bait Al Ansor must invest additional effort in

communicating its licensing credentials and operational track record to counter prospective pilgrims' generalized skepticism about the sector. Additionally, exchange rate fluctuations (Indonesian Rupiah against Saudi Riyal and US Dollar), regulatory changes in Saudi Arabian visa pricing, and operational cost variations in aviation and accommodation markets create significant planning uncertainty. The agency also faces limited human resource capacity in digital marketing, producing content reactively rather than through data-driven analytics. No existing study has examined how an agency navigates these practical constraints while maintaining an integrated marketing strategy. This research directly addresses this gap by identifying both supporting and inhibiting factors that shape marketing effectiveness in real-world conditions.

To address these three gaps, lack of research on channel integration, limitations of prior studies, and practical problems in the field, this study pursues three clear objectives. First, to identify and describe the marketing strategies implemented by PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor in shaping and driving pilgrim interest, with particular attention to how religious-figure-based marketing and digital marketing function as an integrated system. Second, to analyze pilgrim perceptions of those strategies using the three dimensions of Customer Engagement Theory: cognitive (information transparency and understanding), affective (trust transfer and emotional connection), and behavioral (loyalty and organic brand advocacy). Third, to examine the supporting and inhibiting factors that shape the effectiveness of the agency's marketing ecosystem, including institutional reputation, religious figure partnerships, digital technology adoption, competitive intensity, resource constraints, and external volatility. By achieving these objectives, this study contributes a replicable marketing model for medium-scale religious travel agencies operating in semi-urban Indonesian contexts and extends the theoretical integration of Commitment-Trust Theory and Customer Engagement Theory in the underexplored domain of Umrah travel marketing.

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research investigates natural conditions of an object, wherein the researcher serves as the key instrument [13]. Creswell and Poth (2018) add that qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena in their natural settings, allowing researchers to understand meanings, experiences, and perspectives from the participants' viewpoints [14]. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of the marketing strategies of Umrah travel agencies within a specific social and religious context, namely, how trust is built through religious figure networks and digital platforms, and how pilgrims perceive these strategies. Unlike quantitative approaches that measure predetermined variables, this qualitative design allows for emergent themes and unexpected findings to surface during data collection.

The research site is PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor, located at Ruko The Amaya CA-15, Jl. MT. Hariyono, Ungaran Timur, Semarang Regency, Central Java. This location was selected purposively based on three considerations. First, PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor is an officially licensed PPIU (Penyelenggara Perjalanan Ibadah Umrah) Umrah travel agency, ensuring that the research subject operates within legal and regulatory frameworks. Second, the agency has been operating consistently since obtaining its license in 2020, providing sufficient operational history for study. Third, the agency implements a distinctive marketing strategy that combines religious-figure-based approaches with digital marketing, making it an information-rich case for qualitative inquiry. The research was conducted from January 2026 to March 2026, covering a three-month period of data collection, including interviews, observation, and documentation.

Research subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, as defined by Patton, involves intentionally selecting individuals who have relevant knowledge, experience, and willingness to share information about the phenomenon under study [15]. This technique is appropriate for qualitative research because it ensures that data sources are information-rich cases rather than random selections. The research subjects include three categories of informants. First, key informants consisting of the agency director (H.M. Mufid, MD), who possesses comprehensive knowledge of the agency's marketing strategy, vision, and operational decision-making. Second, the main informants consist of two marketing staff members (Nurul Chaqim and Pak Aziz), who are directly responsible for implementing both the religious-figure-based marketing and digital marketing strategies. Third, supporting informants consisting of five pilgrims who have used the services of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor, representing those who have experienced the agency's marketing and service delivery firsthand.

**Table 3.1 Research Informant Profiles**

No	Informant Name	Position/Status	Interview Date
1	H.M. Mufid MD	Director of PT. Karomah Bait Al Anzor	4-Mar-26
2	Nurul Chaqim	Marketing Staff	Mar-26
3	Pak Aziz	Marketing Staff / Congregation Guide	Mar-26
4	Ibu Yati	Umrah Pilgrim	21-Feb-26
5	Ibu Siti Nur	Umrah Pilgrim	21-Feb-26
6	Bapak Sugiarto & Ibu Hartati	Umrah Pilgrim	22-Feb-26
7	Ibu Eni	Umrah Pilgrim	23-Feb-26



No	Informant Name	Position/Status	Interview Date
8	Ibu Siti Sarifah	Umrah Pilgrim	23-Feb-26

To ensure the quality and relevance of data, specific criteria were established for each informant category. For the agency director, the criteria were: (a) holding the position of director during the research period, (b) having direct involvement in formulating marketing strategies since the agency's establishment, and (c) having authority over strategic decisions. For marketing staff, the criteria were: (a) working as marketing staff for at least one year, (b) having direct experience implementing both religious-figure-based and digital marketing, and (c) being able to articulate the agency's marketing processes in detail. For pilgrim informants, the criteria were: (a) having completed Umrah through PT Karomah Bait Al Ansor within the last 12 months (between March 2025 and February 2026), (b) being able to articulate their experience and perceptions clearly, (c) having been exposed to at least one of the agency's marketing channels before registration, and (d) providing voluntary consent to participate. These criteria ensure that all informants possess relevant and recent experience with the phenomenon under study.

Data collection techniques encompass three complementary methods, allowing for methodological triangulation.

- **In-Depth Interviews.** Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with all eight research informants. The semi-structured format, as recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann, allows researchers to follow a core set of questions while maintaining flexibility to probe emerging themes and ask follow-up questions based on informant responses [16]. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews with the director focused on marketing strategy formulation, institutional history, partnership networks with religious figures, and strategic challenges. Interviews with marketing staff focused on daily implementation of marketing activities, digital content creation processes, coordination with religious figures, and handling of pilgrim inquiries. Interviews with pilgrims focused on their journey from first exposure to the agency through registration, departure, return, and post-Umrah behavior, including recommendations. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia (the native language of both researcher and informants) to ensure natural and complete expression of experiences and perceptions. Interviews were audio-recorded with informant consent and transcribed verbatim within 24 hours of each session.
- **5.2 Direct Observation.** Direct observation of marketing and service activities was conducted at the agency office in Ungaran Timur. Observations focused on three areas: (a) the physical office environment as an element of physical evidence in the 7P framework, including how the space communicates professionalism and religious values; (b) staff interactions with prospective pilgrims who visited the office, including how inquiries were handled and how trust was built during face-to-face encounters; and (c) digital marketing practices as they occurred, including content posting on Instagram and Facebook, responses to comments and messages, and WhatsApp communication with prospects. Observation was conducted as a non-participant observer, meaning the researcher observed activities without intervening in natural operations. Field notes were written during and immediately after each observation session to capture details including verbal exchanges, non-verbal behaviors, physical artifacts, and the sequence of service encounters.
- **Documentation.** Documentation was collected in two forms. Primary documents included: (a) promotional brochures and printed materials distributed to prospective pilgrims, (b) digital promotional materials including Instagram posts, Facebook content, and WhatsApp broadcast messages from January 2025 to March 2026, (c) pilgrim departure data from January 2025 to January 2026 as recorded by the agency, and (d) official institutional documents including the PPIU license (Number D.2402/2020) and package descriptions for Economy, Regular, and VIP tiers. Secondary documents included: (a) relevant news articles about the Umrah industry in Indonesia, (b) government regulations and data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and (c) previous research reports on Umrah marketing. All documents were analyzed for content relevant to the research objectives, particularly information about marketing strategy components, service specifications, and institutional credibility signals.

In qualitative research, the primary research instrument is the researcher themselves [13]. As the primary instrument, the researcher was responsible for designing the study, conducting interviews and observations, collecting and analyzing documents, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions. To enhance the quality of data collection, several supporting instruments were developed. First, an interview guide containing open-ended questions organized around the theoretical frameworks (7P Marketing Mix, Commitment-Trust Theory, Customer Engagement Theory, and Digital Marketing Theory). The guide was tested through a pilot interview with one pilgrim who did not participate in the main study to identify unclear questions or problematic phrasing. Second, an observation checklist focusing on physical environment, staff-customer interactions, and digital content characteristics. Third, a documentation sheet for recording and categorizing document types, sources, dates, and key content. All supporting instruments were reviewed by the second author (Kastolani) as a subject matter expert to ensure content validity and alignment with research objectives. Data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of three concurrent stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification [17].

- **Data Condensation.** Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. In this stage, all interview

transcripts were read multiple times to achieve familiarity. Coding was conducted using a hybrid approach: initial codes were derived from the theoretical frameworks (deductive coding), including codes such as "trust transfer," "religious figure endorsement," "digital content type," "cognitive engagement," "affective engagement," and "behavioral engagement." Simultaneously, new codes emerged from the data (inductive coding), including codes such as "WhatsApp group continuity," "package tier comparison behavior," and "stigma from fraudulent agencies." Data condensation reduced the large volume of raw data into organized, thematically structured summaries.

- **Data Display.** Data display involves organizing and compressing information into an accessible format that enables conclusion drawing. In this study, data were displayed in three forms. First, matrices and tables summarizing informant characteristics, marketing strategy components, and pilgrim perception themes. Second, the narrative text is organized by research question, presenting condensed data in coherent paragraphs. Third, concept maps showing relationships between marketing strategies (religious-figure-based and digital), theoretical mechanisms (trust transfer, engagement dimensions), and outcomes (pilgrim loyalty, recommendation behavior). These displays facilitated systematic comparison across informants and identification of patterns.
- **Conclusion Drawing and Verification.** The third stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying their validity. Conclusions were formulated as answers to each research objective: marketing strategies implemented, pilgrim perceptions across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and supporting/inhibiting factors. Verification was conducted throughout the research process by returning to the data, checking for consistency across informants and data sources, and discussing preliminary findings with the second author. Conclusions were considered valid only when supported by multiple data sources and consistent across informants.

Data validity was tested through three types of triangulation, as recommended by Patton [15].

- **Source Triangulation.** Source triangulation involves comparing data from different types of informants to verify consistency. In this study, data from the agency director were compared with data from marketing staff and from pilgrims. For example, claims about the effectiveness of religious figure endorsements were verified by asking pilgrims whether they actually learned about the agency through such endorsements and whether those endorsements influenced their decision. Claims about service quality were verified by comparing director statements, staff statements, and pilgrim accounts of their actual experience. Discrepancies between sources were followed up with additional questions during subsequent data collection.
- **Methodological Triangulation.** Methodological triangulation involves comparing data obtained through different collection methods. In this study, interview data were compared with observation data and document analysis. For example, statements about digital marketing activities from interviews were compared with direct observation of social media content and with documented Instagram posts. Statements about service quality and transparency were compared with observations of staff-prospect interactions and with package documents. Consistency across methods strengthened confidence in findings.
- **Temporal Triangulation.** Temporal triangulation involves collecting data at different times to verify the stability of findings. In this study, pilgrim informants who departed at different times (various months between January 2025 and January 2026) were interviewed. Their accounts were compared to identify whether perceptions differed based on departure timing or service delivery cohort. Additionally, preliminary findings were shared with two informants (one marketing staff member and one pilgrim) in a member-checking session approximately two weeks after initial interviews to confirm that interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perceptions.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Profile of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor

PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor was established in Palembang, South Sumatra, in 2017, following the successful acquisition of a Ministry of Religious Affairs license. The Semarang branch obtained its PPIU license (number D.2402/2020) in 2020, establishing its legal standing to operate as a licensed Umrah travel organizer in Central Java. The office is located at Ruko The Amaya CA-15, Jl. MT. Hariyono, Ungaran Timur, Semarang Regency, is a commercially visible location accessible to prospective pilgrims from across the regency.

The agency structures its service offering across three package tiers: Economy, Regular, and VIP. These tiers differ in hotel proximity to the Masjidil Haram in Mecca, flight class, group size, and accompanying religious guidance intensity. This tiered structure reflects a deliberate market segmentation strategy targeting the heterogeneous income and expectation profiles of Central Java's Muslim population. All three package tiers include a standardized set of physical equipment items provided to each pilgrim.

**Table 4.1 Facilities and Infrastructure of PT. Karomah Bait Al Anzor**

Facility 1	Facility 2	Facility 3
Suitcase bag	Karomah-branded scarf	Ka'bah miniature

Facility 1	Facility 2	Facility 3
Cabin luggage	Hajj/Umrah belt	Arabic and Latin prayer guide book
Sling bag	Karomah batik fabric	Uniform and jacket
Ihram cloth	Medical devices and medicines	Digital book
White and black hijab	Transmitter device	Passport bag

Pilgrim departure data from January 2025 to January 2026 demonstrates operational consistency with a clear growth trend. January 2026 departures (124 pilgrims) exceeded January 2025 departures (112 pilgrims) by 10.7%. The Hajj season months (April through June 2025) saw no Umrah departures, consistent with Saudi Arabia's standard suspension of Umrah services during this period. Peak volumes occur in January, a pattern consistent with regional Umrah demand patterns that reflect year-end bonus allocations and holiday scheduling among Indonesian middle-class families.

**Table 4.2 Pilgrim Data of PT. Karomah Bait Al Anzor January 2025 – January 2026**

No	Month and Year	Number of Pilgrims
1	Jan-25	112 Pilgrims
2	Feb-25	35 Pilgrims
3	Mar-25	50 Pilgrims
4	Apr-25	Hajj Season (no Umrah departures)
5	May-25	Hajj Season (no Umrah departures)
6	Jun-25	Hajj Season (no Umrah departures)
7	Jul-25	50 Pilgrims
8	Aug-25	40 Pilgrims
9	Sep-25	94 Pilgrims
10	Oct-25	45 Pilgrims
11	Nov-25	45 Pilgrims
12	Dec-25	50 Pilgrims
13	Jan-26	124 Pilgrims

#### 4.2 Marketing Strategy of PT. Karomah Bait Al Anzor

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, PT. Karomah Bait Al Anzor implements two main marketing approaches that operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.

##### 4.2.1 Marketing Through Religious Figures (Kyai and Ustadz)

The primary marketing strategy of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor operates through structured collaboration with kyais and ustadz across Semarang Regency and surrounding areas. This approach activates four distinct interaction mechanisms. First, direct recommendation during Islamic study forums and short religious talks (pengajian), where religious figures verbally endorse the agency to their congregations. Second, personal testimonials from kyais and ustadz who have personally undertaken Umrah through the agency, providing authentic first-person accounts of service quality. Third, joint Umrah programs in which a kyai or ustadz serves as the group leader and spiritual guide, embedding the agency's brand within the religious figure's pastoral relationship with their community. Fourth, outreach at Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and study groups, where the agency's representatives present service information to audiences already predisposed to trust the institutional context.

This strategy generates a trust transfer mechanism that Morgan and Hunt's Commitment-Trust Theory explains precisely [10]. The kyai or ustadz already holds a position of established trust within the community. When they publicly endorse PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor, the community's existing trust in the religious figure extends to the agency. Director H.M. Mufid, MD, confirmed this mechanism directly: the agency's initial growth in Semarang Regency was almost entirely attributable to the personal networks of the congregation guides (musyrif) who joined the agency and brought their existing community relationships with them.

Ibu Yati (pilgrim, 21 February 2026) confirmed the mechanism from the consumer side. She first learned of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor through a Barzanji Islamic study session led by Pak Aziz. She stated that her decision to register was driven not by price comparison or digital advertising, but by the long-standing trust relationship she had built with Pak Aziz over the years of shared study group participation. This account exemplifies the behavioral shortcut that trust transfer enables: it replaces the extensive due diligence that a prospective pilgrim would otherwise conduct with a single credibility judgment transferred from a trusted source.

Ibu Siti Sarifah (pilgrim, 23 February 2026) described an analogous mechanism operating through peer recommendation. A trusted friend recommended the agency, and she registered without independent verification because the recommender's credibility substituted for direct agency evaluation. This peer-to-peer recommendation behavior reflects behavioral engagement, the third dimension of Brodie et. al.'s Customer Engagement Theory, and



represents the highest-value marketing outcome: unsolicited, authentic advocacy that carries zero additional cost to the agency [11].

#### 4.2.2 Digital Marketing Through Social Media

PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor operates an active digital marketing presence across three platforms: Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Each platform serves a distinct strategic function within an integrated digital communication architecture. Instagram functions as the primary brand-building and awareness platform. Content includes high-resolution images and videos from previous Umrah departures, the Ka'bah and Masjid Nabawi environments, pilgrim testimonials, educational content about Umrah procedures and preparation, and promotional package announcements. Strategic hashtags (#umrohpasti, #umrohsemarang, #karomahbait Alansor) extend reach beyond the agency's existing follower base and connect the content to broader search behavior patterns on the platform.

WhatsApp operates at a more intimate, personal level through three distinct usage modes. WhatsApp Business handles initial prospect inquiries with rapid response times that reduce the information-seeking friction for prospective pilgrims. WhatsApp Groups are established for each departure cohort before departure and maintained as community spaces for pre-departure coordination, spiritual preparation guidance, and post-return community building. WhatsApp Broadcast disseminates time-sensitive information, including registration deadlines, seat availability updates, and promotional pricing windows. Marketing staff Nurul Chaqim described WhatsApp as the platform that converts initial interest into registered commitment, because its conversational format allows the staff to address specific concerns and objections that would not surface in one-way broadcast content.

Facebook reaches the adult demographic (35-55 years) that constitutes the primary market segment for Umrah services, a demographic that uses Facebook more intensively than Instagram. The platform hosts longer-form content, including detailed package explanations, event announcements for departure ceremonies, and community posts that generate social proof through likes, comments, and shares from community members. Facebook's group functionality also enables the agency to maintain branded community spaces where alumni pilgrims share experiences and proactively recommend the agency to their networks.

The digital marketing operation faces an acknowledged resource constraint. Nurul Chaqim confirmed that the current team lacks specialized digital marketing expertise, producing content reactively rather than through a planned content calendar with audience analytics. This constraint limits the agency's ability to optimize content performance through A/B testing, hashtag strategy refinement, and algorithm-informed posting schedules. However, the authenticity of the content, produced by staff with direct agency experience rather than external marketing professionals, may compensate partially for this technical limitation by conveying credibility signals that algorithmically optimized content often lacks.

#### 4.3 Pilgrim Perceptions of Marketing Strategies

All pilgrim informants stated that the information provided by PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor was clear, complete, and transparent. Information transparency covered package content, total cost breakdowns, departure schedules, accommodation specifications, and the procedures to be followed during the Umrah itself. Ibu Siti Nur (21 February 2026) confirmed: 'All the information was open, nothing was concealed.' This perception of transparency is foundational to the cognitive dimension of engagement because it establishes the information base from which prospective pilgrims form their service quality expectations and their risk assessment of the agency.

The cognitive dimension also encompasses pilgrims' understanding of the product they are purchasing. Several informants noted that the Instagram content and the personal explanations provided by Pak Aziz during study group sessions gave them a substantially more detailed understanding of the Umrah experience than they had possessed before first contact with the agency. Bapak Sugiarto and Ibu Hartati (22 February 2026) specifically cited Instagram visual content as their primary source of mental imagery about the Umrah journey prior to their departure. For prospective pilgrims who had never performed Umrah, this cognitive scaffolding reduced anxiety and increased their confidence in the decision to register.

The affective dimension of pilgrim engagement centers on trust, emotional connection to the brand, and confidence in the agency's capacity to deliver on its promises. All informants described their relationship with the agency in terms that extended beyond transactional satisfaction into genuine emotional investment. The trust transfer mechanism through religious figures was the dominant affective driver for pilgrims who joined through kyais or ustadz networks. These informants did not merely tolerate the agency on the basis of competitive pricing; they expressed genuine loyalty grounded in the trust relationships they had developed with the religious figures who introduced them to the agency.

Instagram's visual content also contributed to the affective dimension in a distinct way. For prospective pilgrims who had not yet established personal contact with a religious figure associated with the agency, the high-quality visual documentation of previous pilgrim departures, the sacred sites in Mecca and Medina, and the evident happiness of returning pilgrims created an emotional aspiration that motivated inquiry. This content did not primarily convey information (cognitive engagement) but rather evoked the emotional and spiritual significance of the Umrah experience, activating the prospective pilgrim's personal desire to participate. Chaffey and Ellis Chadwick identify this aspirational content function as a critical component of digital brand building in service industries, where the experience quality cannot be evaluated before purchase [12].



The behavioral dimension of engagement encompasses actual service usage, repeat engagement, loyalty, and active recommendation. All pilgrim informants reported active recommendation of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor to family members, neighbors, colleagues, and study group participants. Several reported having personally brought at least two additional pilgrims to the agency. Ibu Eni (23 February 2026) stated that she had recommended the agency to three members of her extended family, two of whom had subsequently completed Umrah through PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor. This organic brand advocacy behavior represents the highest value marketing output from the agency's perspective, as it extends the reach of the religious figure-based trust mechanism into new social networks at no additional promotional cost.

This behavioral pattern aligns with Bozkurt's finding that consumer brand engagement in social media produces loyalty effects that generate sustained referral behavior [18]. The agency's WhatsApp Group infrastructure appears to reinforce this behavioral tendency by maintaining community connection among pilgrim alumni, creating a social context in which recommendations to others arise naturally from continued participation in the group. Several informants noted that they remained active members of their departure cohort's WhatsApp Group long after their return, and that this sustained connection had reinforced their positive feelings about the agency and their willingness to recommend it.

#### 4.4 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Five supporting factors contribute to the effectiveness of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor's marketing strategies. First, institutional reputation and credibility, built through seven years of consistent operations across two branch offices and maintained through documented pilgrim satisfaction across hundreds of departures. Second, the strategic depth of the partnership network with religious figures across Semarang Regency and adjacent areas, which provides the agency with a distributed sales and trust-building infrastructure that would be prohibitively expensive to replicate through conventional advertising. Third, demonstrated capacity to adopt digital technology, including the consistent management of active profiles across three platforms and the integration of WhatsApp Business into the customer engagement workflow. Fourth, consistent service quality across all package tiers, evidenced by the absence of significant complaint narratives among the pilgrim informants and the active recommendation behavior observed in the behavioral engagement dimension. Fifth, the strategic location of the agency office in Ungaran Timur, a commercial hub within Semarang Regency that offers high visibility to prospective pilgrims from across the region.

Four inhibiting factors constrain the full realization of the agency's marketing potential. First, competitive intensity from the more than 2,700 licensed Umrah agencies operating nationally. While the religious figure network creates a protected market segment within existing community relationships, it provides limited defense against direct price competition from agencies operating in the same geographic area. Second, the agency's limited human resource capacity in digital marketing. The current team produces content based on experience and intuition rather than data-driven analytics, which constrains the agency's ability to optimize content performance, expand its reach to new audience segments, and respond strategically to platform algorithm changes.

Third, price volatility driven by exchange rate fluctuations (Indonesian Rupiah against Saudi Riyal and US Dollar), regulatory changes in Saudi Arabian visa pricing, and operational cost variations in aviation and accommodation markets. These external factors create significant planning uncertainty that complicates package pricing, requires frequent price updates, and can generate prospective pilgrim hesitation when announced prices differ from initial estimates. Fourth, the negative industry stigma created by fraudulent Umrah agency cases that have received extensive national media coverage. This stigma imposes an information cost on PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor, which must invest additional effort in communicating its licensing credentials and operational track record to counter prospective pilgrims' generalized skepticism about the sector.

#### 4.5 Integrative Theoretical Analysis

The four theoretical frameworks applied in this study converge on a consistent interpretation of PT Karomah Bait Al Anzor's marketing ecosystem. From the 7P Marketing Mix perspective, the agency's strategic strengths concentrate on the people and promotion elements, both of which reflect the religious figure-based marketing approach [9]. The product element reflects intelligent segmentation through three-tiered packages. The physical evidence element, particularly the branded equipment and high-quality visual content, reinforces brand identity. The primary weaknesses appear in the process element (limited digital marketing procedures and content planning) and the promotion element's digital track (underdeveloped analytics and content strategy). Addressing these weaknesses would require systematic capacity building rather than fundamental strategy revision.

From the Commitment-Trust perspective, the religious figure endorsement mechanism represents an optimal implementation of trust-building in a high-stakes service context [10]. The trust transfer chain from religious figure to agency eliminates the need for prospective pilgrims to independently verify agency claims, reducing decision-making friction and accelerating the conversion from awareness to registration. The challenge is scalability: this mechanism depends on the personal relationships of specific individuals and cannot be scaled through recruitment alone.

From the Customer Engagement perspective, the agency successfully activates all three engagement dimensions simultaneously: cognitive engagement through transparent information provision, affective engagement

through trust transfer and aspirational visual content, and behavioral engagement through organic recommendation networks. The behavioral engagement outcomes, in particular the active and widespread recommendation behavior reported by all pilgrim informants, indicate that the agency's strategy has succeeded in producing the deepest and most commercially valuable form of customer engagement. Prasetyo and Mukti Ali confirm that marketing mix implementation effectiveness is measurable through consumer purchase interest indicators, and the organic advocacy behavior observed in this study represents the strongest such indicator available [19].

The digital marketing component amplifies the reach and speed of the trust-based relationship marketing approach without replacing its relational logic. Instagram content creates a visual narrative of the Umrah experience that supplements the verbal endorsements of religious figures with sensory evidence of service quality. WhatsApp maintains the relational continuity that converts initial engagement into long-term loyalty. Facebook extends reach to the age demographic most likely to act on Umrah interest. Together, these platforms create a digital infrastructure that accelerates the natural social diffusion of trust-based endorsements beyond the geographic and temporal limits of any single Islamic study forum or community gathering.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study yields three substantive conclusions. First, PT Karomah Bait Al Ansor implements an integrated dual-channel marketing strategy that combines religious figure-based marketing, through collaboration with kyais and ustadz as institutional credibility anchors and trust transfer mechanisms, with digital marketing through Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, which function as reach amplifiers and effective engagement platforms. These channels are not independent but mutually reinforcing: digital content extends the reach of personal endorsements, and personal endorsements lend credibility to digital content.

Second, pilgrim perceptions of the agency's marketing strategies are highly positive across all three dimensions of the Customer Engagement Framework. Cognitive engagement is driven by transparent and complete information provision. Affective engagement is generated through trust transfer from religious figures and aspirational visual content. Behavioral engagement manifests in widespread, active, and unsolicited recommendation behavior that represents the highest-value marketing output for the agency.

Third, the effectiveness of the integrated marketing strategy is shaped by a set of supporting and inhibiting contextual factors. Supporting factors include institutional reputation, deep religious figure partnership networks, demonstrated digital technology adoption, consistent service quality, and strategic office location. Inhibiting factors include intense competitive pressure from over 2,700 licensed agencies, limited digital marketing human resource capacity, exchange rate and regulatory volatility, and the negative industry stigma created by fraudulent agency cases.

The theoretical implication of these findings is that the integration of Commitment-Trust Theory and Customer Engagement Theory provides a more complete explanation of Umrah marketing effectiveness than either theory can offer independently. Trust building through religious figure networks creates the relational foundation; digital marketing provides the communication infrastructure; and the 7P framework structures the service delivery system through which this trust foundation is validated through actual service experience. Future research should examine these mechanisms through quantitative methods with larger samples to establish the relative weight of religious figure endorsements versus digital content in pilgrim decision-making, and to explore whether these findings generalize across different regional and demographic contexts in Indonesian Muslim communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Based on the findings, this study advances five recommendations for PT Karomah Bait Al Ansor and for the broader Umrah travel industry.

First, the agency should invest in structured digital marketing capacity building. This includes training existing staff in content analytics, content calendar planning, and platform-specific optimization, or recruiting a dedicated digital marketing specialist. Without this investment, the agency's digital presence will remain reactive rather than strategic, limiting its capacity to reach new audience segments beyond existing religious figure networks.

Second, the agency should systematically expand its religious figure partnership network into geographic areas and demographic segments not yet covered. Mapping the geographic distribution of current pilgrim origins against the total addressable market within Semarang Regency and adjacent areas would identify the highest-value expansion targets for new religious figure partnerships.

Third, the agency should develop a structured Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to manage the lifecycle of pilgrim relationships from initial inquiry through post-Umrah follow-up. The current organic recommendation behavior of alumni pilgrims represents substantial commercial value that a structured CRM system would enable the agency to amplify through systematic follow-up communication, loyalty programs, and facilitated testimonial collection.

Fourth, the agency should prioritize operational consistency in departure schedule coordination and service delivery standards across all package tiers. The current high levels of pilgrim satisfaction create a reputational asset that inconsistent operational execution can rapidly erode.

Fifth, future researchers should examine the relative contribution of religious figure endorsements and digital marketing content to first-time pilgrim decision-making using quantitative survey methods with statistically representative samples. Comparing findings across different Indonesian provinces and city-regency contextual types would establish the boundary conditions for the integrated marketing model identified in this study.

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