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Strategic Planning for Engagement in the #Kuliahtakperlujauh Campaign: Enhancing Higher Education Participation in Brebes Regency – Central Java

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Abstract - This article investigates the strategic use of digital engagement in the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign, initiated by local higher education institutions in Brebes, Central Java, to address low participation in tertiary education. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, the study analyzes campaign planning through the dual lens of the AISAS model (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) and Customer Engagement Theory (cognitive, affective, conative dimensions). Data were collected from interviews and focus group discussions with students, parents, and campaign organizers. Findings reveal that platform-specific strategies TikTok for youth attention, Instagram for aspirational storytelling, Facebook for parental credibility, and WhatsApp for reinforcement, were designed to align audience needs with platform affordances. Alumni storytelling and localized visual identity fostered curiosity, pride, and emotional resonance, while dialogic features such as live Q&A sessions enhanced participatory engagement. However, cultural stigma, parental skepticism, and digital inequality presented significant barriers, underscoring the need for hybrid strategies that integrate online communication with offline trust-building. The study contributes theoretically by extending AISAS beyond consumer contexts and integrating it with Customer Engagement Theory, offering a conceptual model for understanding digital engagement in higher education. Practically, it emphasizes that sustainable campaigns in non-metropolitan areas require institutional commitment, community co-ownership, and adaptability to shifting digital cultures. The Brebes case demonstrates how digital engagement can act as a transformative communication strategy to reframe local higher education as accessible, credible, and socially meaningful.

Keywords: Digital engagement, Hgher education communication, AISAS model, Customer engagement theory, Non-metropolitan education

Introduction

Community participation in higher education is a crucial indicator of efforts to develop high-quality human resources. The level of involvement not only determines individual competencies but also shapes the collective capacity of a region to face social, economic, and cultural challenges in the global era. However, in non-metropolitan areas, participation often encounters both structural and cultural barriers. Brebes Regency in Central Java, for instance, continues to show low levels of higher education participation. As of December 2024, data recorded that only 3.1 percent of the population

had completed higher education, while the majority stopped at the senior high school level or below (Databoks, 2025). This low percentage reveals a problem more complex than limited educational access; it also reflects persistent community perceptions shaped by the stigma that quality higher education must be pursued outside the region. Consequently, local universities are often undervalued by prospective students and their parents.

In this context, the digital campaign #Kuliahtakperlujauh (literally, "college does not need to be far away"), initiated by local higher education institutions in Brebes, including Widya Mandala College of Economics (STIE Widya Manggala), represents a strategic effort to raise awareness and reshape public perceptions. By utilizing social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, this campaign delivers persuasive messages that higher education in Brebes is both competitive in quality and significantly contributes to regional development. This phenomenon is worth further examination, as it signals a shift in communication strategies of higher education institutions from merely institutional promotion toward fostering relational digital engagement. Such engagement extends beyond the informative dimension, encompassing cognitive, affective, and even conative connections between audiences and the conveyed messages.

Research on digital marketing in the higher education sector has been widely conducted (Tuten & Solomon, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Nevertheless, most studies have emphasized aspects of promotion or brand awareness (Minh & Mai, 2024), while analyses focusing on the dynamics of digital engagement remain limited. Moreover, studies exploring higher education campaigns grounded in local contexts are relatively scarce, even though regional social and cultural factors play a vital role in shaping the resonance and effectiveness of communication strategies (Murtagh & Webb, 2018). Hence, there is a research gap in understanding how digital engagement can serve as an instrument of social transformation within the context of local higher education.

This article seeks to address this gap by analyzing the digital engagement strategies of the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign in Brebes Regency. The novelty of this study lies in integrating Customer Engagement Theory (CET), which emphasizes cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011), with the AISAS Model (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) as a framework for mapping audience journeys within the digital ecosystem (Sugiyono, 2017; Alfarizy & Patrissia, 2025). This integration enables a more comprehensive analysis of how the campaign strategies are designed, implemented, and responded to by audiences.

Through this framework, digital engagement is positioned not merely as a promotional tool but as a transformational communication strategy that seeks to reshape public perceptions of local higher education. The Brebes case is significant not only because of its low higher education participation rate but also due to the persistent social stigma that "college must be pursued far away." This situation opens up space for reflection on how digital campaigns can serve as arenas for negotiating meaning between educational aspirations, local identity, and persuasive communication strategies in the digital era.

Theoretical Framework

Digital Engagement and Higher Education

Recent studies show that student engagement is a key factor in the success of higher education within digital contexts, particularly in hybrid (blended) or online learning models. For example, the study "Understanding Student Engagement in Hybrid Learning: An Analysis Impact Digital Literacy and Academic Self-Efficacy" found that digital literacy and academic self-efficacy significantly influence how students engage in hybrid learning processes (Jaya & Nurqamarani, 2023).

Learning motivation is also closely related to student engagement. The study "*Analisis Motivasi Belajar dan Student Engagement di Pendidikan Tinggi*" (Analysis of Learning Motivation and Student Engagement in Higher Education) (Karambut et al., 2025) demonstrated that high learning motivation strengthens engagement, which in turn supports academic achievement and student persistence.

Other literature indicates that higher education institutions that successfully manage digital transformation, including digital culture (digital leadership, infrastructure readiness, and faculty competence), tend to be more capable of improving both performance and engagement among faculty and students. For instance, the study "Fostering a Digital Culture in Indonesian Higher Education: The Impact of Digital Leadership on Lecturer Performance and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour" (Malik, Yahya & Aras, 2025) shows that digital leadership plays a significant role in shaping organizational culture that supports engagement and academic performance.

Additionally, recent empirical research has further clarified the factors that underlie digital engagement in higher education. For instance, Gatenet et al. (2024) investigated how students' attitudes toward digital technology, digital literacy, and self-efficacy contribute to online learning engagement across multiple dimensions, behavioural, social, cognitive, emotional, and collaborative. Their findings indicate that self-efficacy acts as a critical mediator: attitudes and digital literacy enhance students' confidence, which then significantly predicts engagement in online settings. This demonstrates that beyond institutional infrastructure or leadership, individual learners' readiness and internal motivational factors are central to achieving meaningful engagement in digital or blended educational environments.

The AISAS model (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) has been widely used as an analytical framework in studies of digital campaigns and social media marketing in Indonesia. This model is useful for tracing audience interaction pathways, from the moment they first become interested (attention), to further exploration (interest and search), to taking action (action), and finally to sharing experiences (share).

The study "*Implementasi Teori AISAS dalam Membangun Brand Awareness pada Akun @eraspceid melalui Pemanfaatan Media Sosial Instagram*" (Implementation of the AISAS Theory in Building Brand Awareness on the @eraspceid Account through the Use of Instagram Social Media) (Pratama et al., 2024) highlights the use of Instagram in building brand awareness through the application of the AISAS model. Research on the @eraspaceid account shows that attractive visual content, the use of Instagram features such as stories and posts, and collaboration with influencers encourage audiences to move through each AISAS stage, from attention to share. These findings illustrate that digital platforms can be strategically leveraged to build audience engagement, while also providing practical guidance for organizations in designing digital marketing communications.

Another study, "*Model Komunikasi Pemasaran AISAS pada Konten TikTok Produk Barenbliss*" (The AISAS Marketing Communication Model on TikTok Content of Barenbliss Products) (Pratiwi, Sari & Satria, 2024), also shows that the use of regular content and direct interaction (live streaming, comments) can strengthen action and share as part of the AISAS pathway.

Although such studies are generally situated in commercial or consumer product sectors, their findings provide a foundation for understanding how higher education campaigns may use the AISAS model not only to promote programs (action), but also to build share (perception testing), where audiences share their experiences or opinions about local universities.

Customer Engagement: Cognitive, Affective, and Conative Dimensions

Customer Engagement Theory (CET) emphasizes that audience or customer involvement (in the context of education: students, prospective students, parents, the community) goes beyond surface-level interaction, comprising three dimensions. *First*, the cognitive dimension refers to understanding, thinking, and evaluating campaign content or messages. *Second*, the affective dimension involves feelings, emotions, and emotional bonds. *Third*, the conative dimension concerns concrete actions or behaviors that emerge based on cognitive and affective drivers.

In local literature, the study *"Peran Customer Engagement Memediasi Pengaruh Social Media Marketing terhadap Brand Awareness pada E-Learning Aku Pintar"* (The Role of Customer Engagement in Mediating the Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness in Aku Pintar E-Learning) (Gandhi, Ekawati, & Widagda, 2024) shows that customer engagement serves as an important mediator between social media strategies and awareness. This indicates that engagement is not merely an output but a connecting process between campaigns and audience perceptions.

In addition, the study *"Pengaruh Social Media Customer Engagement dan Kepuasan Pelanggan terhadap Loyalitas Merek Perguruan Tinggi Swasta"* (The Influence of Social Media Customer Engagement and Customer Satisfaction on Brand Loyalty of Private Universities) (Darmadi, Silitonga, & Kristiadi, 2021) demonstrates that social media engagement among students and alumni directly affects institutional loyalty. This loyalty may be relevant to how communities perceive and choose local universities.

In addition to existing local studies on education marketing, research in adjacent fields further illuminate the multidimensionality of engagement. Asmara Khairani and Fachira (2022) explore digital content marketing within Indonesia's tourism sector, finding that cognitive engagement (e.g., attention, information processing) and affective engagement (e.g., emotional response) strongly influence audiences' subsequent behaviors, such as planning trips. This suggests that while conative outcomes

may not always be immediately observable, they are often shaped by preceding cognitive and affective responses, reinforcing the theoretical structure of CET in practice.

Locality and Cultural Barriers

Beyond technical and theoretical aspects, the literature emphasizes that local context, culture, stigma, socio-cultural aspects, perceptions of distance, resources, and infrastructure strongly determine how digital campaigns are received. Research on smart branding strategies in Demak shows that the use of digital media and campaigns based on local identity can increase community participation. However, such engagement has not been evenly distributed, as community participation barriers remain. These findings reinforce the view that socio-cultural factors and local community perceptions play an important role in determining the success of digital campaigns (Pungkasanti & Handayani, 2024).

Research on public relations practices carried out by micro-communities shows that digital platforms such as YouTube can function as a medium for strengthening community engagement. This finding confirms that social media is not only a communication space for large organizations, but can also be utilized by small communities to foster social involvement and community participation (Kaloka, 2023).

Research by Ajenk, Citra, Intan, and Primadini (2024) highlights how universities employ social media not merely as a channel for publicity, but also as a medium to build communities and foster engagement. Yet, their study also found that digital communication in higher education institutions often remains predominantly one-way, limiting the potential to generate meaningful community participation. These findings underline the necessity of integrating local socio-cultural contexts into digital strategies, so that campaigns can move beyond dissemination and genuinely cultivate engagement.

From the existing literature, several gaps can be identified: (1) Many studies on engagement in higher education focus on students, while paying less attention to the role of parents of prospective students as important audiences, particularly in local contexts such as Brebes; (2) The AISAS model has often been applied in commercial product campaigns, but relatively few studies have explored its use in local higher education campaigns and in shaping public perceptions of local universities; (3) The affective and conative dimensions are often underexplored in digital higher education campaigns, for example, to what extent campaign messages can evoke emotions or encourage concrete actions (conative), rather than merely eliciting social media responses; (4) The integration of Customer Engagement Theory and the AISAS model in the context of local higher education campaigns remains rare, particularly in examining how AISAS stages are reflected within each engagement dimension.

Material and Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to explore the #Kuliahtakperlujauh digital campaign in Brebes Regency, Central Java. This campaign was chosen as a case because it represented a unique and context-specific phenomenon aimed at shifting local perceptions about higher education. The qualitative design allowed the researcher to capture the planning, implementation, and interpretation of digital engagement strategies while also examining the socio-cultural factors that shaped their reception.

Fieldwork was conducted between 20, 25 and 27 August 2025, encompassing interviews and a focus group discussion with stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the campaign. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with criteria ensuring that they had direct involvement in the campaign as organizers, decision-makers, or beneficiaries, or were members of the intended audience, namely students and their parents. Informants included university leaders, campaign coordinators, lecturers, student ambassadors, social media administrators, alumni featured in campaign narratives, parents of prospective students, high school counselors, and local government education officials. Two parents and two students were interviewed to represent the perspective of the campaign's target audience. In total, nine in-depth interviews were conducted, each lasting between forty-five minutes and one hour, either face-to-face or via online video calls depending on availability.

To complement the interviews, a focus group discussion was held on 27 August 2025 at a community venue in Brebes, attended by six representatives: university delegates, health academy representatives, a high school counselor, and a local community leader. The discussion lasted

approximately two hours and aimed to elicit collective perspectives and group dynamics regarding the campaign's strategies, effectiveness, and challenges. The FGD provided space for different institutional and community voices to negotiate their views and articulate recommendations for future initiatives.

Data collection also involved systematic observation of campaign content disseminated on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Posts were analyzed for their visual design, narrative structure, and the forms of interaction they generated, including likes, comments, and shares. Archival materials such as campaign posters, brochures, and internal reports from participating universities and the local education office were also consulted to provide context and triangulation.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The process involved iterative cycles of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Open coding was first applied to transcripts to identify emerging categories, which were then organized into broader thematic clusters. Data were subsequently interpreted through the dual lens of the AISAS model, attention, interest, search, action, share, and Customer Engagement Theory, which emphasizes cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of engagement. This dual framework enabled a comprehensive understanding of how digital strategies translated into audience participation and perception. Coding was conducted manually and cross-checked with a second researcher to enhance reliability. Data saturation was reached by the eighth interview and confirmed through additional data collection.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was employed across sources (interviews, focus group, digital content, and documents), methods (individual and collective accounts, observation, and archival data), and time (data collected at different stages of campaign exposure). Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants, who confirmed the accuracy of interpretations. Ethical clearance was obtained from the research ethics committee of the affiliated university, and all participants provided informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning codes and pseudonyms to each informant, and participation was entirely voluntary. These measures collectively strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Result and Discussion

Digital Engagement Strategies in #Kuliahtakperlujauh

The #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign represents a deliberate shift from traditional higher education promotion toward a more dialogic and community-oriented digital engagement strategy. Rather than simply delivering information about admission procedures or tuition fees, the campaign sought to reshape public perceptions by positioning local universities in Brebes as both credible and socially valuable. The design of the campaign demonstrates how localized narratives, storytelling formats, and the strategic use of multiple digital platforms can mobilize audiences across diverse demographic groups.

Platform-specific strategies. The campaign capitalized on the affordances of three major platforms: TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. TikTok was used to produce short-form, trend-driven videos that captured the immediate attention of high school students. Instagram provided a more visually curated space where storytelling about student success and alumni achievements could be combined with aspirational imagery.

Facebook, in contrast, was strategically deployed to reach parents and community leaders, presenting longer, more information-rich posts. As one campaign organizer explained, "We cannot rely on one channel only. TikTok attracts the young, but parents still check Facebook every day" (Interview, Campaign Team). This platform segmentation reflects what Dwivedi et al. (2022) describe as the necessity of tailoring content to platform-specific cultures and user practices in order to sustain engagement. Table 1 summarizes these platform-specific strategies, illustrating how different digital spaces were leveraged to target distinct audience segments and achieve specific engagement outcomes.

As shown in Table 1, each digital platform contributed distinctively to the overall strategy of the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign. TikTok primarily captured the attention of younger audiences through trend-driven short videos, while Instagram emphasized aspirational storytelling that built emotional identification with local alumni.

Table 1. Platform-specific strategies of the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign and their intended outcome

Platform	Strategic Use in Campaign	Illustrative Data (Interview/FGD)	Intended Outcomes
TikTok	Short-form videos using local dialects, popular trends, and music.	"We use TikTok to attract the younger generation. They follow trends quickly" (Interview, Campaign Team).	Capture *attention* of high school students; spark curiosity.
Instagram	Visual storytelling, alumni testimonials, inspirational posts, interactive stories.	"When I saw alumni from Brebes sharing their success, it felt closer to my reality" (FGD, Student Participant).	Build *interest* and emotional connection; foster aspirational identification.
Facebook	Information-rich posts, schedules, accreditation details, live Q&A sessions.	"Parents like me still check Facebook every day to find detailed information" (Interview, Parent).	Encourage *search* and *action* among parents; provide credibility.
WhatsApp (complementary)	Dissemination of posters and registration links in school/parent groups.	"I first got the link through my school WhatsApp group, then checked Instagram" (FGD, Student Participant).	Reinforce *action* by ensuring easy access to registration and direct communication.

Facebook played a complementary role by providing credibility and detailed information for parents, whose decision-making was critical in determining higher education choices. In addition, although not part of the initial campaign design, WhatsApp functioned as a grassroots channel that reinforced action by facilitating direct sharing of posters, registration links, and schedules within school and parent groups. This multi-platform synergy demonstrates that digital engagement strategies are most effective when platform affordances are aligned with audience needs, echoing Dwivedi et al.'s (2022) argument that sustainability in engagement requires context-sensitive adaptation.

Localized Storytelling

Another hallmark of the campaign was the use of storytelling grounded in local identity. Narratives highlighted students from Brebes who had graduated from local institutions and gone on to secure employment or contribute to community development. A participant in the FGD noted:

> "When I saw alumni from my own area sharing their success, it felt closer to my reality than watching advertisements of universities in Jakarta" (FGD, Student Participant).

Narrative strategies that embed local culture can foster stronger identification, as audiences resonate more with messages that reflect their cultural and social realities (Alam & Kadarisman, 2025). They also resonate with recent Indonesian research showing that locally rooted branding can generate stronger emotional bonds compared to generic promotional content (Mandasari et al., 2023).

Challenging stigma. Central to the campaign's design was the explicit goal of challenging the prevailing stigma that "good universities are always outside Brebes." Several interviewees reflected on how this stigma shaped parental decisions. For example, one parent stated:

> "At first, I thought my child would have to study in Semarang or Jakarta to get quality education. But after seeing the posts about accreditation and achievements of local universities, I started to believe staying in Brebes could also be a good option" (Interview, Parent).

This demonstrates the cognitive and affective potential of digital campaigns, where perceptions and emotional attitudes toward local institutions are transformed. As Lock et al. (2024) argue, higher education communication strategies must now go beyond brand promotion to actively engage with societal narratives and cultural barriers.

Interactive content and dialogic engagement. Beyond the dissemination of information, the campaign intentionally integrated dialogic features to create spaces of reciprocal communication. Interactive polls and quizzes on Instagram Stories invited students to voice their opinions, while Q&A sessions enabled direct clarification of concerns regarding admission and financial aid. Live streaming events on TikTok became especially significant, as they not only conveyed institutional messages but

also simulated a conversational environment where students and parents felt acknowledged. As one student remarked:

> "I liked the live session because we could ask questions directly, and it felt like the university was really listening to us" (FGD, Student Participant).

Such practices marked a departure from traditional, one-way institutional communication and reflected a broader paradigm shift toward participatory engagement. Kent and Taylor's (2016) dialogic theory emphasizes mutuality, openness, and risk-taking as core elements of digital dialogue, and the Brebes campaign exemplified these principles by allowing audiences to co-shape the communicative process. More recent scholarship has further argued that dialogic communication in higher education marketing enhances not only transparency but also trust, which in turn strengthens audience loyalty and willingness to act (Lock et al., 2024; Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Galioto et al., 2025). By embedding interactivity into campaign design, the initiative effectively transformed audiences from passive receivers into active contributors, thus reinforcing the campaign's credibility and social resonance.



Figure 1. Visual example from the #Kuliahtakperlujauh Instagram campaign integrating local landmarks, youthful illustrations, and aspirational messaging.

The design conveys both aspirational messages students proudly completing their studies and a strong cultural anchor that situates higher education within the local community. This combination allowed the campaign to be both relatable and distinctive: students could identify with the youthful imagery, while parents and community members recognized continuity with local identity. As one creative team member explained:

> "We wanted to make the visuals modern but still rooted in Brebes, so that people feel proud to share them" (Interview, Campaign Team).

Such choices resonate with scholarship on glocalization, where cultural markers are strategically embedded in globalized formats to enhance resonance and shareability (Robertson, 2000).

Theoretical reflection

Taken together, the campaign's strategies underscore that digital engagement in higher education involves more than visibility or brand recognition. It represents an interactive, multi-layered process in which institutional messages intersect with audience cognition, affect, and behavior. Brodie et al.'s (2011) framework of customer engagement highlights how these dimensions reinforce each other, creating sustained relational bonds rather than temporary attention.

In the Brebes campaign, localized storytelling provided cognitive legitimacy, dialogic tools cultivated affective trust, and platform-specific calls to action mobilized conative responses. This triadic

interplay illustrates how engagement can operate as a vehicle of social transformation, repositioning local higher education not as a second choice but as a credible and meaningful path. Such findings echo calls within recent communication scholarship to reconceptualize higher education marketing as a form of dialogic, socially embedded practice rather than a promotional exercise (Lock et al., 2024).

Strategic visual design. The visual identity of the campaign was not merely aesthetic but strategically crafted to bridge modernity with locality. In the Instagram post shown in Figure 1, the integration of Brebes landmarks, such as the Alun-Alun Brebes sign, with youthful illustrations of graduating students exemplifies this dual orientation.

Mapping Engagement through the AISAS Model

The #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign offers a clear example of how audience engagement in higher education marketing can be interpreted through the AISAS model: Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share. Originally developed for digital consumer behavior, AISAS provides a useful analytical lens for mapping how different segments of the Brebes community interacted with campaign content across multiple digital platforms.

Attention and Interest. At the first stage, the campaign successfully captured attention through trend-driven TikTok videos and visually appealing Instagram posts. These formats were specifically designed to resonate with high school students accustomed to short-form, aesthetically rich digital content. Importantly, attention was not only a matter of exposure but also of emotional resonance. As one student participant, Aditya Pratama, explained:

> *"Konten storytelling alumni bikin penasaran"* (Alumni storytelling content keeps people curious) (Interview, Student).

His response illustrates how alumni narratives embedded within Instagram visuals did more than grab attention, they triggered curiosity and emotional identification. This aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing that storytelling is a powerful mechanism for stimulating both attention and sustained interest in digital engagement campaigns (Voorveld, 2019; Lock et al., 2024).

Search and Action. Once attention was captured, students often moved to the search phase, seeking further information about local higher education institutions. Interviews and Focus Group Discussion transcripts revealed that many students initially encountered campaign materials on TikTok or Instagram but then followed links provided in bios or posts to explore program details. This behavior reflects the hybrid nature of search in a digital environment, where the platform itself serves as both the site of initial exposure and the gateway to deeper exploration (Dwivedi et al., 2022). For instance, some participants reported consulting school WhatsApp groups to confirm admission procedures, highlighting the interconnectedness of digital platforms in the search process.

Action, in this context, was not limited to immediate enrollment but also included attending online information sessions or participating in interactive Q&A events. Such forms of action reflect what Brodie et al. (2011) conceptualize as conative engagement: the translation of cognitive and affective involvement into behavioral steps. By reducing informational barriers and making calls-to-action visible and easy to follow, the campaign lowered the threshold for students and parents to take practical steps toward considering local higher education.

Share and Social Amplification. The final stage of AISAS, share, was particularly important for the Brebes campaign, as peer-to-peer diffusion significantly expanded its reach. Students were observed reposting Instagram stories or forwarding TikTok videos to classmates. Parents similarly shared Facebook posts within community groups, reinforcing the credibility of the message.

Such behaviors demonstrate that sharing is not merely a technical act but a form of social endorsement, whereby individuals signal alignment with the campaign's values (Kunstman & Rattle, 2019). In smaller communities like Brebes, this social amplification carried particular weight, as perceptions about higher education are deeply embedded in familial and communal networks.

Theoretical Implications. Mapping the Brebes campaign onto the AISAS model underscores how digital engagement strategies can move beyond transactional communication to become processes of social meaning-making. Attention and interest were achieved not only through visual appeal but also through narratives that localized higher education within familiar cultural frames. Search and action demonstrated how digital platforms intersected with offline networks, reducing uncertainty about

admission processes. Finally, sharing revealed how engagement became embedded in community life, reinforcing the campaign's legitimacy.

This layered trajectory illustrates that the AISAS model, while originally designed for consumer contexts, can be productively extended to higher education campaigns, especially when integrated with Customer Engagement Theory's cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011). In doing so, it provides both a descriptive and normative framework for understanding how local digital initiatives can reshape educational aspirations in underrepresented regions.

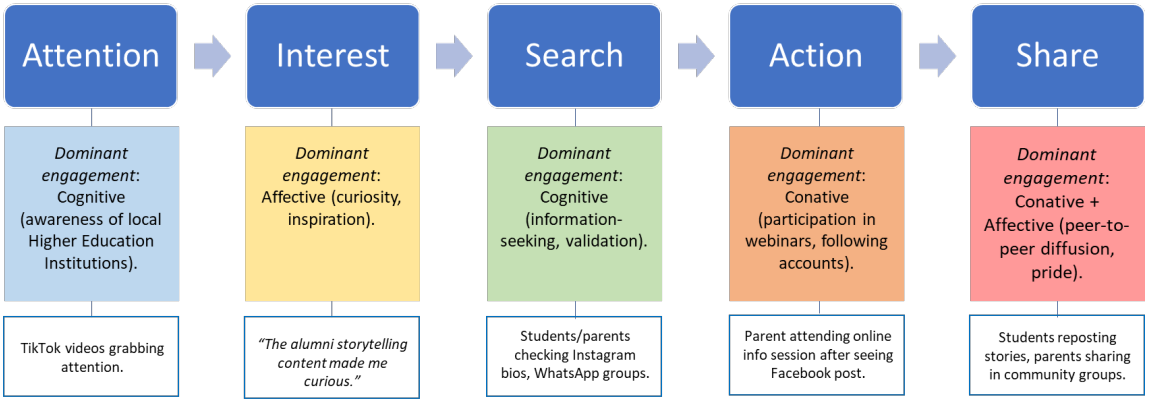


Figure 2. Integrative Conceptual Model: Mapping AISAS with Cognitive, Affective, and Conative Engagement Dimensions in the #Kuliahtakperlujauh Campaign

As shown in Figure 2, the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign strategically aligned platform-specific practices with different stages of AISAS, while simultaneously stimulating cognitive, affective, and conative engagement. Attention and interest were primarily triggered through TikTok and Instagram storytelling, where alumni narratives captured curiosity and reframed perceptions of local higher education. Search and action were facilitated through Instagram bios, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook posts that provided credible and detailed information, particularly for parents.

Finally, the share stage highlighted both conative and affective engagement, as students and parents diffused content within their networks, signaling endorsement and pride. This integrative model demonstrates how AISAS can be extended beyond consumer marketing to the field of higher education communication, showing the importance of planning campaigns that intentionally synchronize digital affordances with audience engagement processes.

Cognitive, Affective, and Conative Dimensions of Engagement

The concept of customer or audience engagement in digital contexts is multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, affective, and conative elements that interact dynamically (Brodie et al., 2011). In the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign, these three dimensions became visible in the ways students and parents processed information, responded emotionally, and translated their perceptions into concrete behaviors. Mapping these dimensions provides a more nuanced understanding of how digital strategies in higher education marketing move beyond visibility toward deeper social influence.

Cognitive Engagement. Cognitive engagement refers to the extent to which audiences actively process, evaluate, and internalize information. In the Brebes campaign, this was evident when students described how alumni narratives on Instagram shaped their perception of local universities. One student commented:

> "When I saw the story of someone from Brebes who succeeded, I started to think that maybe studying here is not as bad as people say" (FGD, Student Participant).

Such statements reveal a cognitive shift: campaign messages were not simply consumed but compared against prevailing stigmas about local education. Recent studies have emphasized that cognitive engagement in digital campaigns requires more than the transfer of factual information; it depends on the ability to challenge or reframe mental models (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Voorveld, 2019).

By presenting alumni stories as counter-narratives, the campaign succeeded in destabilizing entrenched beliefs that quality education could only be found outside Brebes. This shows how digital storytelling can function as a cognitive trigger for re-evaluating social norms in peripheral regions.

Affective Engagement. The campaign also cultivated affective engagement, which involves the elicitation of emotional responses that shape audience identification and attachment. Students often reported feeling motivated or reassured when encountering campaign visuals or live sessions. For example, one participant in the FGD noted:

> "Seeing alumni smiling with their families made me feel like I could also make my parents proud without leaving home" (FGD, Student Participant).

Such affective responses are crucial in contexts where educational decisions are emotionally laden, particularly for families concerned with cost, distance, and social belonging. Theoretical work in media and communication highlights that emotions are central to sustaining engagement, acting as the "glue" that binds cognitive recognition to conative action (Ahmed, 2014; Lock et al., 2024). In this case, the campaign's emphasis on family togetherness and community pride tapped into collective emotions that resonated strongly with both students and parents. By aligning higher education with values of proximity, affordability, and familial closeness, the campaign translated abstract aspirations into emotionally tangible possibilities.

Conative Engagement. Finally, the campaign demonstrated conative engagement, or the translation of cognitive and affective responses into behavioral intentions and actions. Several students reported attending online information sessions after encountering campaign content, while others began following university social media accounts to stay updated. One parent interviewed explained:

> "I asked my child to join the webinar because I wanted to know the details, and it felt easier to get answers directly from the lecturers" (Interview, Parent).

Such actions represent a concrete progression from passive exposure to active participation. Brodie et al. (2011) conceptualize conative engagement as the enactment of commitment, where audiences invest their time and resources in alignment with a campaign's objectives. In Brebes, this translated into students registering for events, parents initiating conversations with local institutions, and communities sharing campaign materials on WhatsApp groups. These behaviors highlight that engagement is not only measurable in enrollment statistics but also in incremental actions that reshape how local higher education is considered and discussed.

Interplay Across Dimensions. What is particularly noteworthy is how the three dimensions reinforced one another. Cognitive recognition of alumni success stories facilitated affective identification, which in turn made students and parents more willing to take conative steps toward participation. This cyclical relationship reflects Brodie et al.'s (2011) assertion that engagement is not linear but iterative, where each dimension amplifies the others. The Brebes campaign thus exemplifies how digital strategies can foster holistic engagement by addressing informational, emotional, and behavioral dimensions simultaneously.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings underscore the need to conceptualize digital engagement not as a unidimensional metric (such as likes or clicks) but as a layered process rooted in cognitive shifts, emotional attachment, and behavioral enactment. In doing so, the campaign illustrates how higher education marketing in non-metropolitan contexts can function as a form of social transformation, challenging stigmas and creating new pathways of aspiration for underrepresented communities.

Local Contextual Barriers and Cultural Resistance

While the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign successfully generated attention and participation, its implementation was shaped by a series of local contextual barriers and forms of cultural resistance. These barriers are critical for understanding why digital engagement strategies in peripheral regions such as Brebes cannot be transplanted wholesale from metropolitan contexts but must be carefully adapted to local conditions.

Stigma Toward Local Higher Education. One of the most persistent challenges was the widespread perception that higher education outside Brebes offered better quality and prestige. Several students admitted that, despite being exposed to campaign content, they continued to view studying in larger cities as a more desirable option. As one participant noted:

> "Honestly, even after watching the videos, my parents still think it's better to go to Semarang or Jakarta. They say the diploma will be more respected" (FGD, Student Participant).

This indicates that local stigma is not easily overturned by digital communication alone; it is tied to longstanding cultural hierarchies of educational status.

Research has shown that such perceptions are deeply embedded in social imaginaries of mobility, where leaving one's hometown for education is equated with upward social progress (Murtagh & Webb, 2018; Pham & Saltmarsh, 2022). The Brebes campaign thus had to navigate a cultural context where "going far" was synonymous with ambition, while "staying local" risked being associated with compromise.

Parental Concerns and Intergenerational Tensions. Parents also emerged as a critical audience whose skepticism posed challenges to campaign effectiveness. Interviews revealed that many parents were hesitant to trust digital information alone. One parent commented:

> "I see the posts on Facebook, but I still need to ask my relatives in the city before deciding. Social media is not enough" (Interview, Parent).

This illustrates an intergenerational gap: while students found TikTok and Instagram compelling, parents often relied on interpersonal networks and offline validation to make decisions.

This finding aligns with scholarship emphasizing that digital campaigns in collectivist cultures must account for family-centered decision-making processes (Chen, 2023). For the Brebes campaign, digital engagement could open conversations, but final decisions remained heavily mediated by parental authority and community opinion leaders.

Digital Inequality and Access Gaps. Another structural barrier was uneven digital access. Despite the campaign's reliance on social media, not all households in Brebes had stable internet connections or the latest smartphones. A school counselor explained:

> "Some of our students can only watch the videos when they come to school because their home signal is too weak" (Interview, Counselor).

Such infrastructural challenges meant that even well-designed content risked being inaccessible to parts of the intended audience. This reflects broader critiques of the digital divide, where socio-economic disparities shape not only access to information but also the capacity to participate meaningfully in digital culture (Van Deursen, 2020). For the Brebes campaign, limited access exacerbated existing inequalities in educational aspiration, as those already disadvantaged were least likely to benefit from online initiatives.

Community Norms and Resistance to Change. Finally, cultural resistance also manifested in subtle community norms that discouraged local higher education participation. In the FGD, one student recalled being teased by peers:

> "They said if I stayed in Brebes, I was not brave enough to go out and explore."

Such remarks point to the symbolic dimension of education as a marker of personal independence and family pride. In this context, the campaign's attempt to valorize local study had to counteract peer pressure and community discourses that framed "going away" as the normative path.

Scholars of community communication have argued that digital engagement strategies are most effective when they address not only informational deficits but also cultural narratives that define what is considered desirable or aspirational (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). The Brebes case illustrates how cultural resistance operates not in overt opposition to digital messages but through everyday discourses that silently reinforce hegemonic ideals of mobility and prestige.

Implications. These contextual barriers suggest that while digital engagement is a powerful tool, its transformative potential is conditioned by local socio-cultural dynamics. The #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign highlights the need for higher education institutions in peripheral regions to design communication strategies that engage with, rather than bypass, local norms and hierarchies. This might involve combining digital storytelling with offline community dialogues, integrating parents and community leaders as co-creators of content, and addressing structural access gaps through hybrid online-offline strategies.

In short, digital engagement in Brebes did not occur in a vacuum but within a cultural ecosystem marked by stigma, intergenerational negotiation, infrastructural inequalities, and symbolic pressures. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for building communication campaigns that not only inform but also transform the cultural meanings of higher education in non-metropolitan contexts.

Toward Sustainable Digital Engagement

The #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign illustrates that digital engagement in higher education can generate meaningful shifts in perception and behavior, but its long-term sustainability remains an open challenge. Sustainability here refers not only to maintaining online visibility but also to embedding engagement practices into institutional routines, community networks, and broader socio-cultural structures.

Institutional Continuity. One of the recurring themes in interviews with campaign organizers was concern about continuity. A creative team member admitted:

> "It is difficult to keep producing content once the initial enthusiasm fades, especially when we don't have enough staff or budget" (Interview, Campaign Team).

This highlights the structural issue of resource allocation within smaller higher education institutions, which often lack dedicated communication divisions. Without systematic investment in digital communication, campaigns risk becoming episodic rather than sustained, limiting their transformative potential.

Research on digital communication in education emphasizes that sustainability requires institutional integration: campaigns must be embedded in long-term strategic planning rather than treated as short-term promotional efforts (Rowe et al., 2023). For Brebes institutions, this means aligning digital engagement with recruitment policies, alumni relations, and community outreach to ensure continuity beyond temporary campaigns.

Community Co-ownership. A second dimension of sustainability is community involvement. FGD participants noted that they were more motivated to engage with campaign content when it featured familiar faces, friends, teachers, or local figures. One student said:

> "If my own teacher appears in the video, I feel more confident sharing it" (FGD, Student Participant).

This suggests that sustainability is reinforced when campaigns are not only institution-led but also community-driven. By incorporating local influencers, alumni, and even parents into content creation, institutions can distribute ownership of the campaign across social networks, making it less dependent on institutional capacity alone.

This aligns with contemporary perspectives on participatory culture, where the success of digital initiatives depends on creating conditions for users to contribute and co-create (Jenkins et al., 2020). By inviting communities to play active roles, campaigns can move from top-down persuasion to co-constructed narratives that are more resilient and credible.

Hybrid Strategies: Online and Offline Integration. The Brebes case also revealed the importance of integrating online strategies with offline engagement. Parents in particular emphasized that they trusted information more when it was reinforced in face-to-face meetings. As one parent put it:

> "I saw the Facebook post, but I believed it more after meeting the university representative at school" (Interview, Parent).

This underscores that digital sustainability cannot rely solely on online channels; it requires hybrid approaches that combine digital reach with offline trust-building.

Recent scholarship has noted that hybrid models, where digital storytelling is complemented by physical events, enhance credibility and inclusiveness, especially in regions with uneven digital access (Chen, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2022). For Brebes, this means that digital campaigns should be seen as gateways that spark interest, followed by offline engagements that consolidate trust and facilitate decision-making.

Evolving with Platform Cultures. Finally, sustainability also depends on adapting to evolving platform cultures. Students in the FGD pointed out that while TikTok was currently popular, trends shifted quickly:

> "If the campaign only stays on TikTok, it might get boring. We want fresh content or maybe other platforms," noted one participant (FGD, Student Participant).

This reflects the dynamic nature of digital ecosystems, where the relevance of platforms fluctuates with generational preferences and algorithmic changes.

Scholars argue that sustainable engagement requires flexibility, campaigns must evolve with changing digital cultures rather than anchoring themselves too rigidly to one platform (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Lock et al., 2024). For the Brebes institutions, this entails continuous monitoring of platform trends and experimentation with emerging formats such as micro-vlogs, interactive reels, or even localized podcasts.

Conclusion of the Subsection. Toward sustainability, therefore, digital engagement in higher education must address three key dimensions: institutional continuity, community co-ownership, and adaptability across platforms and hybrid settings. The #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign provides an instructive example of how these elements can be initiated, but it also reveals vulnerabilities if long-term planning and community integration are not prioritized. For institutions in non-metropolitan contexts, sustainability is not only about "keeping the campaign alive" but about embedding digital engagement into the social fabric of local education, thereby ensuring that digital communication becomes a lasting driver of cultural change rather than a temporary promotional effort.

Conclusion

This study examined the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign as a case of digital engagement strategy for higher education participation in a non-metropolitan context. By focusing on campaign planning rather than outcomes alone, the analysis highlighted how local higher education institutions in Brebes intentionally mapped platform-specific strategies onto the AISAS model while embedding the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of engagement.

Findings revealed that TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp were mobilized in complementary ways, with each platform addressing distinct audience needs, from attention-grabbing visuals for youth to more detailed, credibility-oriented posts for parents. Alumni storytelling and locally rooted visual designs triggered curiosity and pride, demonstrating how glocalized communication practices can counteract stigmas against local higher education. At the same time, the study underscored persistent contextual barriers, including parental skepticism, digital inequality, and cultural norms equating mobility with success.

Theoretically, the integration of AISAS and Customer Engagement Theory offers a framework for understanding how digital campaigns can foster engagement beyond transactional communication, transforming audience perceptions and behaviors through layered cognitive, affective, and conative processes. Practically, the Brebes case demonstrates that sustainable digital engagement requires not only creative platform use but also institutional continuity, community co-ownership, hybrid online-offline strategies, and adaptability to evolving platform cultures.

In conclusion, the #Kuliahtakperlujauh campaign contributes to a broader rethinking of higher education communication in non-metropolitan contexts. Digital engagement, when strategically planned and locally embedded, can serve as a catalyst for reframing educational aspirations and strengthening participation in local higher education.

For policy and practice, the findings suggest several immediate steps. Local universities should institutionalize cross-platform communication units with trained staff to ensure campaign continuity

beyond admission periods. Alumni ambassador programs can be formalized to amplify credible local success stories, while parents and community leaders should be involved as co-creators of narratives that normalize studying locally. The local education office can support these initiatives by facilitating collaborations between universities and high schools and by strengthening digital infrastructure in underserved areas. Embedding digital engagement indicators into institutional performance assessments will also help ensure systematic monitoring and improvement. Taken together, these measures can guide local stakeholders in transforming campaign efforts into sustained increases in higher education participation.

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