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Branding Strategy in Improving *Madrasah* Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT
Competition among primary educational institutions in the modern era is increasingly competitive, especially for private schools which are required to attract public trust through a superior image. In this context, branding is a crucial strategy for strengthening an institution's identity and competitiveness. This research aims to describe the branding strategy implemented by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas to enhance the competitiveness of a primary educational institution in Banyuwangi regency. The research approach used is descriptive qualitative, with data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results show that MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas has successfully built an integrated brand through the establishment of a clear vision and mission, optimal service, utilization of communication media, provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure, development of flagship and extracurricular programs, targeted promotion, appreciation for high-achieving students, and collaboration with various parties. The implemented branding strategy not only impacts the enhancement of public image and trust but also strengthens the loyalty of students, teachers, and parents towards the institution. The findings of this research affirm the importance of professional and adaptive brand management as the primary key to building a competitive advantage for private educational institutions. This research also provides theoretical and practical contributions for educational institution managers in designing relevant, effective, and sustainable branding strategies.

Keywords: Branding, Strategy, Competitiveness, Institutional Image, *Madrasah*.

ABSTRAK
Persaingan antar lembaga pendidikan dasar di era modern semakin kompetitif, terutama bagi sekolah swasta yang dituntut untuk mampu menarik kepercayaan masyarakat melalui citra yang unggul. Dalam konteks ini, branding menjadi strategi penting untuk memperkuat identitas dan daya saing lembaga. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan strategi branding yang diterapkan oleh MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas dalam meningkatkan daya saing lembaga pendidikan dasar di kabupaten Banyuwangi. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas berhasil membangun branding terintegrasi melalui penetapan visi dan misi yang jelas, pelayanan optimal, pemanfaatan media komunikasi, penyediaan sarana dan prasarana yang memadai, pengembangan program unggulan dan ekstrakurikuler, promosi terarah, pemberian apresiasi kepada siswa berprestasi, serta kolaborasi dengan berbagai pihak. Strategi branding yang diterapkan tidak hanya berdampak pada peningkatan citra dan kepercayaan publik, tetapi juga memperkuat loyalitas siswa, guru, dan orang tua terhadap lembaga. Temuan penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pengelolaan branding secara professional dan adaptif sebagai kunci utama dalam membangun keunggulan kompetitif lembaga pendidikan swasta. Penelitian ini juga memberikan kontribusi teoritis dan praktis bagi pengelola lembaga pendidikan dalam merancang strategi branding yang relevan, efektif, serta berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Branding, Strategi, Daya Saing, Citra Lembaga, Madrasah.

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INTRODUCTION

The world of education is currently undergoing a major transformation marked by increasing competition among educational institutions at all levels, from primary and secondary to higher education. The discussion of school branding remains a hot topic in society, especially during the period of selecting schools for their children. Consequently, parents will strive to choose the best schools for their sons and daughters.[1] The implementation of effective and appropriate strategies is crucial for building an institution's image to enable it to grow and survive. Furthermore, providing the best service to consumers has become a top priority for educational institutions.[2] MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas, as one of the private primary educational institutions in Banyuwangi Regency, also faces this challenge. Competition among educational institutions is no longer focused solely on improving academic quality but also demands professional management of the school's image to attract public interest. This phenomenon is evident from the large number of primary-level educational institutions, both public and private, scattered throughout the Banyuwangi region, all competing to offer superior programs, modern facilities, and innovative marketing approaches.

Data obtained from the official website of the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that in the 2024/2025 academic year, there are 1,066 primary education institutions in Banyuwangi Regency, consisting of 738 public and 328 private institutions.[3] This high number indicates that the competition among primary education institutions is very tight, requiring every school, including MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas, to have strong competitiveness. On the other hand, the public, especially parents, are now more selective and critical in choosing schools they consider the best for their children. Public assessment is no longer based on cost but on the quality of graduates produced by the educational institution. There are at least three main aspects that parents consider when choosing an educational institution: the quality of the learning process, the completeness of facilities and infrastructure, and the quality of the graduates produced.[4]

Branding strategy plays a vital role in enhancing the position and competitiveness of educational institutions amidst increasingly fierce competition. In the context of education, a brand involves more than just visual elements like a logo or slogan, or a name and address; it is a systematic effort to build the institution's image and identity comprehensively and sustainably.[5] Branding encompasses broader aspects, such as the quality of education and the values offered by the institution. This aligns with the view of Fathul Mujib and Saptiningsih (2020) that branding reflects the unique identity and excellence of an institution, thus serving

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[1] Mohamad Joko Susilo, "Strategi Branding Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Animo Siswa Dan Awareness Masyarakat," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dompet Dhuafa,* 12, no. May (2022): 1–6. Hal. 2.

[2] Muhammad Burhan Jamaluddin, "Strategi Branding Di Sekolah Dasar Islam Plus Masyitoh (Yayasan Miftahul Huda) Kroya Cilacap," *Repository.Iainpurwokerto.Ac.Id* (Institut Agama Islam Negeri Purwokerto, 2020). Hal. 1

[3] Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, "Data Sekolah Dasar Negeri Dan Swasta Tahun Pelajaran 2024/2025.," 2025, https://data.dikdasmen.kemdikbud.go.id.

[4] Barnawi and M. Arifin, *Branded School Membangun Sekolah Unggul Berbasis Peningkatan Mutu* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2013).

[5] Tutut Sholihah, "Strategi Manajemen Humas Dalam Menciptakan School Branding Pada Sekolah Islam Terpadu," *J-Mpi* 3, no. 2 (2018). Hal. 73.

as a differentiating value among other educational institutions.[6] A positive image formed through the branding process is more easily achieved if the school is capable of providing quality education.[7] Therefore, branding or brand image must be designed with careful planning and aligned with the institution's vision and mission.

Nevertheless, upon further investigation, research related to branding strategies in primary educational institutions in Indonesia, especially in private Islamic elementary schools (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*) located in rural or semi-urban areas like Banyuwangi Regency, is still relatively scarce. Most research on educational branding has focused more on universities or secondary schools in large urban areas. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the branding planning process at MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas in a more contextual manner. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) assert that educational branding differs from commercial branding because it involves distinct social, moral, and pedagogical values, thereby requiring an approach tailored to the characteristics of the educational institution.[8] Knowledge of consumer behavior is not only beneficial for developing marketing strategies but also for improving service quality and satisfaction for the primary consumers.

The success of school branding lies in the consistency between the communicated image and the actual quality experienced by students and parents. Therefore, branding in a madrasah requires not only an improvement of its visual identity but also a reformulation of its core values of excellence, enhancement of the learning process quality, strengthening of the public information system, and renewal of facilities and infrastructure that attract prospective students. Hakim (2021) highlights the importance of a school image based on Islamic values as an element of institutional differentiation, but his research only describes these values without linking them to a professional branding strategy.[9] A good image of an institution or organization is a valuable asset, as this image influences public perception. With the implementation of the right strategy, the image of an educational institution can be effectively shaped.

The utility of school branding is to increase public trust in the school, form a quality school image, and function as a promotional tool and attraction for the community. Additionally, branding can encourage positive changes in student behavior, improve service quality, and foster public interest and awareness of the school.[10] Educational institutions must be able to develop communication and establish good cooperation to build a positive image of the madrasah in the eyes of students' parents and maintain harmonious relationships

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[6] Fathul Mujib and Tutik Saptininsih, *School Branding Strategi Di Era Disruptif* (Jakarta Timur: Bumi Aksara, 2020).
[7] Muhammad Ulfi Fadli and Usman Mafrukhin, "Branding Strategy Of MA ' Arif NU Education (Case Study of MI MA ' Arif NU Manbaul Huda Purwodadi Tembarak)," *Jurnal Kependidikan Islam Dan Keagamaan* 2, no. 1 (2020): 19–27.
[8] Jane Hemsley-Brown and Izhar Oplatka, *Higher Education Consumer Choice*, *Higher Education Consumer Choice* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).
[9] Lukman Hakim, "Manajemen Program Kelas Unggulan Untuk Meningkatkan Citra Madrasah Tsanawiyah 1 Kabupaten Madiun," *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education Management* 2, no. 1 (May 2, 2021): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.21154/sajiem.v2i1.37.
[10] Muh Wahyunto, Dian Hidayati, and Sukirman Sukirman, "Strategi branding Sekolah di era digital dalam meningkatkan animo masyarakat melalui pemanfaatan digital marketing," *Academy of Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (July 1, 2024): 1260–71, https://doi.org/10.47200/aoej.v15i2.2419.

with the public, both internal and external. This is important for shaping a public opinion that is favorable to the educational institution.[11] Roziqin and Rozaq (2018) suggest that there are several stages undertaken by the madrasah to build its brand image, including through institutional accreditation, instilling positive behavior in all students, improving student achievements, enhancing the quality of educators and graduates, organizing superior programs, and strengthening relationships with alumni.[12]

Considering these findings, this research offers novelty in several respects: it examines a planned and comprehensive branding strategy within the context of a private Islamic elementary school (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*) in a semi-urban/rural area, integrates religious values, local needs, and professional branding principles, and provides practical contributions for managing the image of basic Islamic educational institutions to compete in an increasingly tight and modern competitive landscape. Thus, this research is expected to be an important contribution, both theoretically and practically, to the development of Islamic education branding studies in Indonesia.

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is a private primary educational institution under the auspices of the Regional Leadership Foundation of Muhammadiyah (PDM) of Banyuwangi Regency. The madrasah was established on February 20, 2001. In its vision, MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is committed to producing a generation that excels in faith, piety, academics, non-academics, and inclusive education. The madrasah achieved an "A" accreditation on October 25, 2016, and is noted as the only inclusive madrasah in the Muncar district. With these various potentials, MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas holds a strategic position in the competitive map of primary education in Banyuwangi. Nevertheless, maintaining and expanding its competitiveness requires a branding strategy that is systematic, adaptive, and aligned with the institution's characteristics.

This fact underscores the importance of strengthening institutional identity through the implementation of a planned and long-term-focused branding strategy. Therefore, this research is focused on analyzing the branding strategy implemented by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas in building its institutional competitiveness. The main focus is directed at how this madrasah manages its identity, communicates its competitive advantages to the public, and its efforts to build community trust. Through this study, it is hoped that an effective and relevant branding strategy can be identified to enhance the competitiveness of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas, while also providing theoretical and practical contributions to the formulation of branding strategies in other primary educational institutions.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method at MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas. Bogdan and Taylor define qualitative research

[11] Zainiya Anisa and Saparudin Saparudin, "Branding Sekolah Islam Modern: Sekolah Islam Terpadu, Madrasah/Sekolah Alam, Dan Tahfiz Al-Qur'an," *eL-HIKMAH: Jurnal Kajian Dan Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 16, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 49–64, https://doi.org/10.20414/elhikmah.v16i1.6191.

[12] Karsono Karsono, Purwanto Purwanto, and Abdul Matin Bin Salman, "Strategi Branding Dalam Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Masyarakat Terhadap Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Islam* 7, no. 2 (July 5, 2021): 869–80, https://doi.org/10.29040/jiei.v7i2.2649.

as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from informants and observable behavior.[13] In qualitative research, data is obtained from various sources, using diverse data collection techniques, and is conducted continuously until the data is saturated.[14] The purpose of this study is to describe and deeply understand the branding strategy implemented at MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas and its impact on enhancing the institution's competitiveness. There are several methods that can be used in qualitative research, and thematic analysis is considered very important to learn because it is regarded as a core skill or fundamental knowledge for conducting analysis in qualitative research.[15]

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and related document analysis. Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of the madrasah principal, teachers, and parents. The interviews focused on: (1) the madrasah's understanding and implementation of the branding strategy; (2) teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of social media as a promotional tool; and (3) parents' responses to the institution's image and its influence on their decision to enroll their children. The observation technique was used to obtain data on the direct implementation of branding activities, both through social media and other promotional events. Observation was conducted participatively in various school activities and through digital visual documentation (Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook content). Documentation was used as supplementary data to reinforce the findings from interviews and observations. The documents analyzed included the madrasah's official social media archives, digital brochures, promotional activity reports, and internal documents such as the institutional branding program.

The data obtained were then analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.[16] The data were then analyzed thematically using a qualitative analysis approach and strengthened through data triangulation and discussions with participants.[17] In the data reduction stage, the researcher simplified and selected data relevant to the research focus. Data presentation was done through thematic narratives, matrices, and excerpts from interview transcripts. Conclusion drawing was carried out by identifying emerging patterns of meaning, which were then verified through source and method triangulation to ensure data validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Competition among primary educational institutions in the modern era, which is fraught with technological advancements and increasing societal demands, pushes every educational institution to develop adaptive and competitive strategies. MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas responds proactively to this condition by implementing an institutional branding strategy to increase its visibility and competitiveness amidst the

[13] Muhammad Rizal Pahleviannur, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, ed. M.Pd Dr. Fatma Sukmawati (Surakarta: CV Pradina Pustaka, 2022).
[14] Sugiyono, *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R & D*, 2020.
[15] Novendawati Wahyu Sitasari, "Mengenal Analisa Konten Dan Analisa Tematik Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif," *Forum Ilmiah* 19, no. 1 (2022).
[16] Djam'an Satori and Aan Komariyah, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2010).
[17] J Moleong, L, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif (Edisi Revisi)*, ed. Remaja Rosadakarya (Bandung, 2021).

competition from private and public schools. This strategy is not only focused on attracting public interest but is also aimed at building a sustainable positive perception of the madrasah's image. This positive image reflects the school's primary vision and goals in establishing a good reputation in the eyes of the public.[18] Thus, an educational institution that can effectively manage its image will more easily attract prospective students, increase parental trust, and foster loyalty from students, teachers, and educational staff.

Analysis of Branding Strategy in Enhancing the Competitiveness of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas

Strategy can be defined as the process of establishing an organization's mission and goals, formulated by considering internal strengths and external factors, through the creation of policies and the selection of appropriate approaches, as well as directed implementation to ensure the effective achievement of the organization's main objectives.[19] Branding originates from the word "brand." Terminologically, a brand is an identity attached to a product or service that includes a name, term, symbol, design, or a combination of these elements, with the purpose of identifying the product or service of one seller and differentiating it from competitors' products.[20] Branding is the activity of shaping an image, while an image is a depiction that is not always physically visible but can be felt through an impression or perception.[21]

School branding is a strategy aimed at increasing public trust and awareness of the educational institution.[22] According to Landa, branding is not limited to a trade name or brand but encompasses all visual and non-visual elements such as the logo, image, character, impression, and the perception formed in the consumer's mind about a product or company.[23] Meanwhile, according to Zulaikha, the development of branding or brand image must be designed in a planned manner and aligned with the institution's vision and mission.[24] Furthermore, branding also needs to have a selling point to be promoted effectively. Consequently, the school has a greater opportunity to attract students who fit its target, both in terms of quantity and quality. These efforts are made to align with consumer expectations, especially parents, who tend to choose schools based on their perception of the school's image as being of high quality. An identity such as a mark, brand, or school image plays a crucial role as a promotional tool because it helps the school to be more easily recognized, remembered, and embedded in the public's memory.

A branding strategy is a crucial aspect that every educational unit must possess, so that the school's image or identity can be accepted by the community and withstand

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[18] Rusyanti et al., "Manajemen Hubungan Masyarakat Dalam Membangun Citra Sekolah," *Jurnal Educatio FKIP UNMA* 7, no. 3 (2021): 753–62, https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v7i3.1218.

[19] Steiner, George A., and John B. Miner, *Kebijakan Dan Strategi Manajemen* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 1997).

[20] Mujib and Saptininsih, *School Branding Strategi Di Era Disruptif*.

[21] Strategi Branding: Teori Dan Perspektif and Komunikasi Dalam Bisnis, *Strategi Branding: Teori Dan Perspektif Komunikasi Dalam Bisnis* (Malang: Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2020).

[22] Inezalda Sonia Azizah, Mukhlisah A.M, and Ni'matus Sholihah, "Strategi Kepala Madrasah Melalui Branding Sekolah Dengan Program Riset Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Sidoarjo," *Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 12, no. 1 (2022): 91–99, https://doi.org/0.15642/jkpi.2022.12.91.-99.

[23] Robin Landa, *Advertising by Design: Creating Visual Communications with Graphic Impact* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2006).

[24] Zulaikha, "Perlukah Branding Pada Sekolah? Studi Kasus Pada SMP Swasta Di Surabaya," *Jurnal Komunikasi Professional* 1, no. 2 (2017): 93–104.

competition. More than just being recognized, a branding strategy also serves to create clear differentiation from other schools. According to Gelder (2005), a branding strategy is not only determined by public perception of the brand but also depends on the instruments that form the brand and how those instruments are systematically managed through brand management.[25] There are three steps in building a strong branding strategy: (1) positioning, which is the strategic placement of the brand to showcase its advantages and differences compared to competitors; (2) identity, which is the creation of an identity that represents the brand's background, values, goals, and vision; and (3) personality, which is the formation of the brand's character designed to attract attention and build consumer trust, so the brand can present itself as the best choice in the public's eye.[26]

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas implements a number of strategies in building its branding to enhance the institution's competitiveness. The brand-building process is not an instant effort; rather, it requires careful planning, a long period of time, and consistent implementation. Therefore, every step taken is strategic and long-term oriented, with the goal of shaping an institutional image that is superior and trusted by the community. The branding strategies carried out by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas include:

1. Branding positioning

   Positioning is a strategic step in building and gaining trust from the community, as well as being a determining factor for a brand's existence. In educational institutions, positioning plays a crucial role in shaping a strong perception in the public's mind regarding the institution's advantages and distinctiveness compared to its competitors. MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas positions itself as an inclusive madrasah with an Islamic character, through the slogan *"Madrasah Maju, Bermutu, Mendunia"* (A Progressive, High-Quality, Global Madrasah). This slogan reflects a global vision, holistic educational quality, and an orientation towards progress and modernity that remains grounded in Islamic values.

   Hermawan Kartajaya, in his book *Marketing on Brand*, states that formulating the right positioning requires four main steps. First, positioning must be based on strong rational reasons that can encourage customers to choose a brand or institution. Second, positioning needs to reflect the strengths and competitive advantages that the institution possesses. Third, positioning must have unique characteristics to be easily distinguished from competitors. Fourth, positioning needs to be sustainable and remain relevant to market dynamics and customer needs.[27]

   The theory proposed by Hermawan Kartajaya aligns with the positioning strategy implemented by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas. The institution strengthens its position as a madrasah with an Islamic character and as one of the representative inclusive madrasahs in the Muncar District. This position becomes the primary reason for parents who desire primary education with a strong emphasis on

[25] S. Van Gelder, *Global Brand Strategy Unlocking Potential across Countries, Cultural & Markets* (London: Kogan Page, 2010).
[26] *Ibid*., hlm. 31-41
[27] Hermawan Kartajaya, *Seri 9 Elemen Marketing–Hermawan Kartajaya on Brand* (Bandung: Mizan Media Utama, 2007).

religious values, as well as an inclusive approach for students with diverse needs. This advantage is reinforced by its institutional affiliation under the auspices of the Regional Leadership of Muhammadiyah (PDM) of Banyuwangi Regency, which provides legitimacy and added value in the aspect of Islamic education. Not all primary schools possess similar strengths, making this positioning a strategic differentiation in the effort to enhance the competitiveness of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas amidst the tight competition among primary educational institutions. This positioning strategy is also realized through various concrete steps, such as achieving success in academic and non-academic competitions, increasing the publication of positive testimonials from parents and students about the learning process, and strengthening strategic partnership networks with various external parties, including educational institutions, government agencies, and religious organizations. All these efforts are aimed at reinforcing the madrasah's image as a superior, credible, and adaptive institution in responding to the dynamics of education in the modern era.

2. Brand Identity

Brand identity is a central element in a branding strategy that represents the character, values, and fundamental goals of an institution. The brand identity highlighted by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is that of a madrasah that excels in faith, piety, academics, non-academics, and inclusive education. This identity is reflected through various dimensions, from the choice of a name affiliated with the major religious organization Muhammadiyah and the use of Islamic symbols in the madrasah's physical environment, to the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum and learning process.

The identity of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is reinforced through the implementation of flagship programs that differentiate it from other institutions, such as the *peeling wall school*, *outing class*, *full day school*, *tahfidz camp* (Qur'an memorization camp), and *English camp*. In addition, the madrasah also provides self-development activities like robotics, dance, *tapak suci* (a form of Indonesian martial arts), and culinary arts. This diversity of programs is designed to comprehensively explore students' potential and serve as a primary attraction in building the institution's image in the eyes of the community.

3. Brand Personality

Brand personality refers to the human-like characteristics associated with an institution or brand, thereby shaping the public's emotional perception of that entity.[28] In the world of education, brand personality functions to build an emotional connection between the institution and the community, especially students, parents, and external partners.[29] A strong brand personality allows an educational institution to appear authentic, trustworthy, and relevant in the eyes of its stakeholders.

[28] Víctor Calderón-Fajardo et al., "Brand Personality: Current Insights and Future Research Directions." (2023).," *Journal of Business Research* 166 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114062.

[29] P. Choudhary and Krishna Kant Sahu, "Managing and Shaping Brand Associations to Ensure Positive Alignment with 'Brand Image': Narrative Synthesis," *International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health* 10, no. 3 (2023): 112–17, https://doi.org/10.22271/kheljournal.2023.v10.i3b.2935.

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas builds its brand personality to foster public trust through various strategic approaches. These efforts are realized, among others, by providing adequate facilities, student achievements in various fields, and active partnerships with multiple parties, both internal and external. Furthermore, the madrasah also utilizes social media as a means to strengthen its image and widely convey the institution's values. All these elements mutually support the formation of an institutional personality that is friendly, superior, and adaptive to the changing times.

The efforts made by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas to build its image as a school of achievement are manifested through active participation in various competitions, student accomplishments, the application of innovative and enjoyable learning models, and the habitual practice of worship conducted routinely every day. The goal is not limited to improving academic achievements and skills but also includes strengthening the religious aspects of the students. The focus on forming a religious character is a primary concern, given the institution's identity as a madrasah that upholds Islamic values, in line with the school's vision: "to realize MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas as a school that excels in faith, piety, academics, non-academics, and inclusive education."

Building an image as a religious school has become a branding strategy systematically developed by the madrasah. The application of Islamic values in school life aims to form positive habits that students can apply in their community life. In order to create a religious school environment, the madrasah principal, along with all educators, has established implementation standards and stages for a religious culture that is consistently carried out in daily activities within the madrasah environment.

Analysis of the Factors Forming School Branding in Enhancing the Competitiveness of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas

1. Institutional Accreditation

The quality of an educational unit is reflected in its ability to meet the National Education Standards set by the government. MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas, as a primary education institution, has achieved an "A" accreditation, which represents recognition of its superior service quality and institutional performance. This achievement aligns with the elements of brand image, particularly the aspect of **protectability**, which indicates that the competence of the madrasah principal, teachers, educational staff, and students has been officially recognized and is under the framework of applicable legal protection.[30] This accreditation status not only reflects institutional legitimacy but also serves as a crucial indicator in building public trust.[31] Many parents use the "A" accreditation as a primary reference when choosing a madrasah for their children. Thus, this achievement significantly contributes to shaping a positive image for

[30] Ahmad Fauzi, Windhi Candra, and Rista Dwi Jayanti, "Peningkatan Pemahaman Satuan Pendidikan Dalam Pengisian IASP Melalui Sosialisasi BAN S/M Jawa Timur," *Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 13, no. 1 (2023): 84–97, https://doi.org/10.15642/jkpi.2023.13.1.84-97.

[31] Eneng Muslihah et al., "Akreditasi Sebagai Upaya Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan Di Madrasah (Penelitian Di Lingkungan Kantor Kementerian Agama Kabupaten Pandeglang)," *Jurnal Paris Langkis* 5, no. 1 (2024): 132–50, https://doi.org/10.37304/paris.v5i1.15486.

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas and enhancing its competitiveness amidst competition from similar educational institutions.

2. Visual Identity
   a. School Name

      he name combines the element "Islamiyah," which indicates that the institution is based on Islamic teachings and makes sharia values the primary foundation of its educational process, while the element "Muhammadiyah" declares the institution's affiliation with the da'wah, educational, and Islamic reform movement initiated by the Muhammadiyah organization.

   b. School Logo



Figure 1. Logo of MI Islamiyah Sumberberas

1) The distinctive Muhammadiyah symbol of a radiant sun (*sang surya*) which symbolizes enlightenment, the spirit of da'wah (Islamic preaching), and the dissemination of knowledge based on Islamic teachings.
2) In the center of the sun, there is Arabic calligraphy of the name "Muhammad," referring to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the primary role model for Muslims. This indicates that the entire educational process at this institution is directed towards shaping the morals and character of students based on the example of the Prophet.
3) The text "MIIM" at the bottom is an acronym for MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah, serving to reinforce a concise identity that is easy to recognize and remember.
4) The circular text "MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas" unites three main elements: "MI" as the Islamic-based primary education level, "Islamiyah" which affirms the Islamic orientation, "Muhammadiyah" as a marker of institutional affiliation with the Muhammadiyah da'wah and educational organization, and "Sumberberas" which indicates its locality.
5) In line with its vision as a madrasah that excels in faith, piety, academics, non-academics, and inclusive education, the curved lines at the top and bottom of the logo form a protective or umbrella-like symbol, representing the school's role in guiding and protecting students towards a bright future under the shelter of Islamic values.

c. School Uniform

The student uniform is designed to reflect the values of modesty, neatness, and institutional identity. The design of the SGM and HW uniforms, which pays attention to the logo, patterns, and special accents on the shirts and hijabs, distinguishes the MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas uniform from that of other schools.

d. Documents and Communication Media

The visual identity is also apparent on letterheads, brochures, pamphlets, event banners, and social media, all of which display the institution's distinctive logo, colors, and communication style.

e. Optimal Service

Optimal service, both online and offline, is part of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas's branding strategy to build a positive image and public trust. This approach focuses not only on visual elements but also on the direct experience felt by students and parents. A professional, friendly, responsive, and solution-oriented service reflects the madrasah's commitment to providing quality education.

1) Early Start Time as a Differentiator

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas implements a policy of starting school at 6:00 AM, earlier than other schools in the vicinity. This technique is considered helpful for parents who work in the morning, thus becoming an added value in service that directly impacts the convenience of students' families.

2) Technology-Based Communication Service

The madrasah utilizes a "digital madrasah" application as a student attendance system that is integrated with parents. By scanning a barcode upon arrival, an attendance notification is automatically sent to the parents. This innovation reflects a form of technology-based service that is transparent and accountable, while also strengthening public trust in the institution's professionalism.

3) Discipline

Discipline is a central pillar in the service system of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas. The policy of starting school at 6:00 AM, followed by religious development routines such as Qur'an memorization (*tahfidz*), the Duha prayer, and Quranic reading improvement (*tahsin*) according to each student's level, reflects the madrasah's commitment to order, religiosity, and an Islamic work ethic. The consistent implementation of daily regulations reinforces the madrasah's professional image as an educational institution that excels in the character and spiritual development of its students.

3. Adequate Facilities

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas possesses complete and representative facilities. One of the key advantages of its facilities is its status as the only inclusive madrasah in the Muncar District, which provides continuous educational

services for students with special needs. The madrasah accepts and nurtures children with special needs on an ongoing basis. The availability of competent Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers skilled in handling inclusive students strengthens this service advantage and demonstrates a more responsive social approach compared to other primary schools.

4. Utilization of Social Media

MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas optimizes social media (WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook) as a branding strategy. The content shared includes documentation of activities, achievements, and religious events to build a positive institutional image. Social media plays a crucial role in facilitating efforts to attract the attention and interest of parents to enroll their children at MI Muhammadiyah Islamiyah Sumberberas.[32] Social media is also used as a means to build emotional closeness with parents and provide responsive online services.

5. Conducting Research and Regular Evaluation

The branding strategy of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is supported by the implementation of simple research in the form of evaluations and surveys of public interest. Evaluations are conducted annually, especially during the distribution of report cards, where the madrasah organizes parenting activities accompanied by the dissemination of questionnaires to parents. These questionnaires are used to explore their hopes for their children's future, such as the desire for their child to become a Qur'an memorizer or to excel in a particular field. The results of this evaluation form the basis for program adjustments to make them more relevant to the needs and aspirations of the community. This strategy shows that the madrasah's branding is not one-directional but is based on a participatory approach through research and regular evaluation, reflecting an adaptive and responsive attitude to the dynamics of the surrounding environment.

6. The Madrasah's Flagship Activities

The various flagship activities organized at MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas serve as a strategic means of introducing the madrasah to the wider community. These activities not only function as a form of institutional promotion but also as a medium for social interaction that strengthens the emotional bond between the madrasah and the public. On the other hand, the community often has high expectations for a school's participation in organizing varied and continuous activities. This is due to the public's tendency to form perceptions based on direct experience as well as information received indirectly. Over time, this perception will develop into a positive public image and spread through word-of-mouth interpersonal communication, ultimately strengthening the institution's reputation.[33]

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[32] Iis Mei Susilawati and Muhammad Harun, "Analisis Swot Sebagai Dasar Strategi Branding Pada Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Alhidayah, Cireunde, Ciputat," *Tarbawi: Jurnal Keilmuan Manajemen Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (2017): 111–28, https://doi.org/10.32678/tarbawi.v3i01.1783.

[33] Sutisna, *Perilaku Konsumen Dan Komunikasi Pemasaran*, 3rd ed. (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya Offset, 2003), https://doi.org/Offset.

One concrete effort undertaken is the installation of banners on roadsides containing information about student achievements. This step is effective in building a positive image that the school has superior programs and activities worthy of appreciation. This strategy highlights the importance of the ability to form a strong brand image so that external parties, especially the community, can recognize and assess the quality of the institution comprehensively and objectively. MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas also implements its branding strategy by organizing various flagship programs that differentiate it from other institutions. These programs include the *peeling wall school*, *outing class*, *full day school*, *tahfidz camp* (Qur'an memorization camp), and *English camp*. In addition, the madrasah also provides self-development activities such as robotics, dance, *tapak suci* (a form of Indonesian martial arts), and culinary arts. This diversity of programs is designed to explore students' potential holistically and become a primary attraction in building the institution's image in the eyes of the community. This strategy demonstrates that branding is not just based on promotion but is also supported by the tangible quality of the programs offered.

7. Targeted Promotion and Events

One of the branding strategies applied by MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas to enhance its competitiveness is through targeted promotions and the organization of various events tailored to the needs and interests of its primary target groups, namely parents and prospective students. Promotion is not only conducted through digital media but also through direct approaches in the form of participatory and interactive activities. Some forms of these promotional activities include: a) organizing coloring and *tahfiz* (memorization) competitions for kindergarten (TK) level students throughout the Muncar District, held annually; b) direct visits to kindergartens and organizing parenting classes as a medium to introduce superior programs to parents; and c) visits by kindergarten students to the madrasah packaged as a *trial class*, which also serves as a means to showcase the self-development programs offered by the madrasah, such as robotics, dance, *tapak suci*, and culinary arts. This strategy has proven effective in building an emotional connection with prospective students and parents, as well as reinforcing the madrasah's positive image as an institution that is adaptive, innovative, and responsive to community needs.

8. Student Awards and Appreciation

The branding strategy of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is also realized through the provision of awards and appreciation to students. This effort is made to build motivation, foster a sense of pride, and strengthen the madrasah's positive image in the eyes of students and parents. Forms of appreciation include giving awards to students who excel in both academic and non-academic fields at the Local, Provincial, and National levels. The presentation of these awards is based on the numerous achievements successfully attained by the students. Examples include winning 2nd place in a National level mathematics Olympiad, 1st place in a Regency level singing competition, 1st place in a Regency level Arabic speech competition, 3rd place in a Regency level English speech competition, and 2nd place in a Regency level Indonesian

speech competition. These various achievements reflect the madrasah's success in nurturing student potential comprehensively and continuously.

9. Collaboration and Synergy

The collaboration and synergy strategy in the branding of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas is manifested through the involvement of the madrasah principal, teachers, school committee, and parents in various processes of developing the institution's image. This involvement aims to create internal synergy and strengthen community loyalty to the madrasah. In addition, cooperation is also established with kindergartens (TK) in the vicinity of the madrasah to expand the partnership network and enhance the institution's reputation at the local level.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of a planned and sustainable branding strategy plays a crucial role in enhancing the competitiveness of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas amidst the tight competition among primary educational institutions in Banyuwangi regency. Branding that focuses not only on visual aspects like logos and slogans but also emphasizes the building of image, identity, educational quality, and the institution's core values of excellence has proven effective in strengthening the school's position in the eyes of the community. The branding strategies implemented include establishing a clear vision and mission, providing optimal service, utilizing communication media, supplying adequate facilities and infrastructure, developing flagship programs and extracurricular activities, conducting targeted promotion, giving appreciation to high-achieving students, and collaborating with various parties. The implementation of these strategies has resulted in increased trust and interest from the community, especially parents, in choosing MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas as the educational institution for their children. The branding undertaken by the madrasah has had a positive impact on enhancing its public image and trust, strengthening the loyalty of students, teachers, and parents, and fostering clear differentiation from other educational institutions. The success of MI Islamiyah Muhammadiyah Sumberberas in establishing its positioning as an inclusive madrasah with an Islamic character, supported by a strong institutional identity and innovative programs, has been the primary factor in strengthening the institution's competitiveness. This research confirms that professionally and integrally managed branding is a key factor in building the competitiveness of private educational institutions. These findings provide a significant contribution to the development of educational psychology, particularly in the context of educational management and school marketing, and serve as a reference for other educational institutions in designing effective branding strategies.

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