



Institutional Branding in Islamic Education: The Role of Strategic Brand Image in Stakeholder Perceptions

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Abstract: Research on educational branding has been predominantly situated in higher education contexts and tends to position brand image as an outcome rather than an integrated strategic process, while studies examining branding as an institutional practice in Islamic secondary education remain limited. This study aims to analyze how branding image strategies are constructed through brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality, and their implications for prospective students' enrollment interest. Employing a qualitative case study design at MAN 1 Kendari, data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns of meaning. The findings reveal that brand positioning is clearly established through the integration of academic excellence and religious values in institutional vision, programs, and instructional practices; brand identity is consistently constructed through the alignment of institutional symbols, flagship programs, religious culture, and the dissemination of student achievements via digital media; and brand personality is reflected in institutional characteristics such as religiosity, discipline, environmental responsibility, and achievement orientation. The integration of these elements enhances parental trust, shapes positive public perceptions, and contributes to the increasing enrollment interest of prospective students. This study contributes by conceptualizing brand image as an institutional practice grounded in operational quality and accountability rather than merely a promotional activity, while extending the application of brand equity and brand personality theories within the context of Islamic secondary education.

Abstrak: Penelitian tentang branding pendidikan sebagian besar berlokasi dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi dan cenderung memposisikan citra merek sebagai hasil daripada proses strategis yang terintegrasi, sementara studi yang meneliti branding sebagai praktik kelembagaan dalam pendidikan menengah Islam masih terbatas. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana strategi citra merek dibangun melalui positioning merek, identitas merek, dan kepribadian merek, serta implikasinya terhadap minat pendaftaran calon siswa. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif di MAN 1 Kendari, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi non-partisipan, dan analisis dokumen, dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola makna yang

berulang. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa positioning merek jelas dibangun melalui integrasi keunggulan akademik dan nilai-nilai agama dalam visi kelembagaan, program, dan praktik pengajaran; identitas merek secara konsisten dibangun melalui penyelarasan simbol kelembagaan, program unggulan, budaya agama, dan penyebaran prestasi siswa melalui media digital; dan kepribadian merek tercermin dalam karakteristik kelembagaan seperti religiusitas, disiplin, tanggung jawab lingkungan, dan orientasi prestasi. Integrasi elemen-elemen ini meningkatkan kepercayaan orang tua, membentuk persepsi publik yang positif, dan berkontribusi pada peningkatan minat pendaftaran calon siswa. Studi ini berkontribusi dengan mengkonseptualisasikan citra merek sebagai praktik kelembagaan yang berlandaskan kualitas operasional dan akuntabilitas, bukan sekadar aktivitas promosi, sekaligus memperluas penerapan teori ekuitas merek dan kepribadian merek dalam konteks pendidikan menengah Islam.

Keywords: brand image, madrasah, brand identity, brand personality, student enrollment interest

INTRODUCTION

Competition among educational institutions in the global era has intensified due to the increasing diversity of school options and the growing public awareness in selecting institutions perceived to offer strong academic quality, character development, and promising future prospects. In this context, educational institutions are required not only to enhance their internal quality but also to strategically manage public perceptions in order to attract prospective students and build community trust. One approach that has gained increasing attention in the educational literature is institutional branding, particularly through the development of a strong and consistent brand image.

Conceptually, brand image refers to a set of perceptions, associations, and symbolic meanings formed in stakeholders' minds regarding a particular institution (Grassl, 2021). In the education sector, decision-making is not solely based on rational considerations such as facilities and academic performance; rather, it is also shaped by perceived values, reputation, and institutional identity reflected in the institution's brand image (Pinar et al., 2014; Stephenson et al., 2016). Therefore, brand image serves as a strategic determinant in influencing prospective students' interest and their educational choice decisions.

This study is theoretically grounded in brand image theory and brand equity theory (Grassl, 2021), as well as branding strategy theory, which emphasizes the integration of brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality in building a strong and consistent institutional image (Aaker, 1997; Gelder, 2003). From this perspective, branding is conceptualized as a continuous strategic process that generates differentiation, identity clarity, and a distinctive institutional character in stakeholders' perceptions, rather than merely a short-term promotional activity.

Within the educational context, studies over the past decade have consistently shown that institutional branding significantly influences prospective students' interest, preferences, and enrollment decisions (Hemsley-Brown, Jane, 2015). These studies highlight that institutional image constitutes a key factor in the educational decision-making process. More recent research further demonstrates that the consistency of brand identity and institutional experiences contributes to increased stakeholder trust and engagement (Balmer & Podnar, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2016). Accordingly, brand image is increasingly recognized as a strategic resource for sustaining educational institutions in the face of intensifying global competition.

Nevertheless, the majority of educational branding research has

predominantly focused on higher education settings, particularly within Western contexts (Hemsley-Brown, Jane, 2015; Pinar et al., 2014). Empirical studies examining brand image in Islamic secondary educational institutions remain limited. Moreover, existing research tends to treat branding as an outcome, such as institutional reputation or competitiveness, rather than as an integrated strategic process encompassing brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality (Noviani et al., 2023; Abadi & Hidayatulloh, 2022; (Ansori et al., 2023). This indicates a lack of in-depth understanding of how branding is operationalized within institutional practices in Islamic education contexts. Consequently, this limitation constrains the theoretical development of educational branding by overlooking the dynamic and processual nature of brand construction within specific institutional contexts.

Furthermore, prior studies have largely examined brand image in relation to institutional competitiveness in general, while investigations explicitly linking branding strategies to prospective students' interest remain scarce. Contemporary branding literature suggests that consumer interest is shaped through clear identity articulation, consistent brand experiences, and a stable institutional character perceived continuously by stakeholders (Balmer & Podnar, 2021). However, empirical evidence explaining how these elements operate as an integrated process to influence enrollment interest, particularly in Islamic secondary education, is still limited. This gap underscores the need for research that conceptualizes brand image as a strategic and process-oriented practice aimed at attracting prospective students.

This study addresses the identified gap by examining the branding image strategy implemented at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Kendari. The madrasah was selected as a case study due to its institutional vision that integrates religiosity, academic excellence, competitiveness, and environmental awareness. In addition, the

institution actively utilizes flagship programs and digital media to construct and communicate its institutional image. The increasing number of applicants in recent years indicates that its branding strategy has practical significance and warrants scholarly investigation.

Based on this rationale, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is the branding image strategy implemented through brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality at MAN 1 Kendari? (2) How does this strategy influence prospective students' interest and public perceptions? Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the implementation of branding elements within the madrasah context and examine their implications for prospective students' enrollment interest.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. Theoretically, it extends the application of brand image, brand equity, and brand personality theories within the field of educational management, particularly in the context of Islamic secondary education, by positioning branding as an institutional practice grounded in operational quality and accountability. Empirically, it provides contextual evidence on how integrated branding strategies shape stakeholder perceptions and enrollment interest in a non-Western educational setting. Practically, the findings offer strategic insights for educational managers, particularly madrasah administrators, in designing holistic, contextual, and sustainable branding strategies to enhance institutional attractiveness and strengthen public trust.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, specifically an instrumental case study, to obtain an in-depth understanding of the branding image strategies implemented by an Islamic educational institution to attract prospective students. An instrumental case study was chosen because the case of MAN 1 Kendari serves as a representative context

for understanding broader phenomena of institutional branding in Islamic secondary education. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables the exploration of meanings, processes, and strategies constructed contextually by institutional actors. Meanwhile, the case study design facilitates a holistic analysis of the phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the institutional environment cannot be clearly separated (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Kendari, Indonesia, which was purposively selected due to its institutional vision integrating religiosity, academic excellence, competitiveness, and environmental awareness, as well as its increasing trend in student enrollment in recent years. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their institutional roles, level of involvement, and depth of knowledge regarding the madrasah's branding strategies. The selection criteria included: (1) involvement in strategic decision-making (school principal and vice principals), (2) responsibility for program implementation and communication (teachers and public relations officer), and (3) direct experience as stakeholders and recipients of institutional branding practices (students and parents). The study involved 15 participants, consisting of one school principal, two vice principals, four teachers, one public relations officer, three parents, and four students. This composition ensured the inclusion of both internal and external stakeholder perspectives, enabling a comprehensive understanding of branding practices within the institution (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis to ensure the depth and comprehensiveness of the information obtained. A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives and experiences regarding the planning and

implementation of branding image strategies, including brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality. Non-participant observations were undertaken to examine branding practices embedded in the madrasah's daily activities, institutional culture, and modes of public communication. Document analysis involved reviewing policy documents, promotional materials, activity records, and digital media content used in constructing the institution's image. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to enhance triangulation and minimize single-source bias (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2020). The analysis involved several systematic stages: (1) data familiarization, through repeated reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents; (2) initial coding, where meaningful data segments related to branding practices were identified and labeled; (3) theme development, by grouping codes into broader categories representing brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality; (4) theme review, to ensure internal consistency and alignment with the dataset; and (5) theme definition and refinement, in which each theme was clearly defined and interpreted in relation to the research questions. This process was iterative and conducted concurrently with data collection, allowing continuous refinement of categories and interpretations. While the analysis was guided by branding strategy concepts, it remained sufficiently flexible to accommodate themes that emerged inductively from the data (Braun et al., 2020).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) and participant groups (school leaders, teachers, students, and parents), as well as member checking with selected key

informants to validate the accuracy of interpretations. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of data collection and analysis procedures. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail and ensuring that interpretations were grounded in empirical data. Transferability was supported by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and institutional characteristics, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts.

This study also adhered to ethical principles of qualitative research, including providing clear information to participants regarding the study's objectives, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identities and data. All data were used solely for academic and scholarly reporting purposes.

To provide a clearer overview of the participant composition and enhance transparency, the distribution of participants based on their roles is presented in Table 1.

Distribution of Research Participants
by Role

Participant Code	Role	Number
P1	School Principal	1
P2-P3	Vice Principals	2
P4-P7	Teachers	4
P8	Public Relations Officer	1
P9-P11	Parents	3
P12-P15	Students	4
Total		15

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

a. Brand Positioning of MAN 1 Kendari

The findings indicate that the branding image strategy at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Kendari was deliberately designed and systematically implemented as part of the institution's broader strategic framework to attract prospective students. Branding image is not perceived as a short-term promotional activity; rather, it is integrated with the madrasah's vision, mission, and institutional programs. These findings were derived from interviews with school leaders, teachers, and program coordinators, as well

as observations of institutional activities and analysis of relevant documents.

Overall, MAN 1 Kendari has developed an institutional image as a state madrasah characterized by academic excellence, strong religious formation, and adaptability to contemporary developments. This image is communicated not only through formal statements but also reflected in educational practices, institutional culture, and consistently implemented flagship programs.

From the perspective of brand positioning, the findings show that MAN 1 Kendari positions itself as a madrasah that integrates academic excellence with Islamic values within a comprehensive educational system. This positioning is reflected in the institution's vision and mission, which emphasize the development of students who are faithful, morally upright, high-achieving, and environmentally responsible.

Interview data indicate that this positioning is deliberately communicated by the madrasah leadership, particularly during student recruitment and public outreach activities. One informant stated:

"We consistently emphasize that this madrasah excels not only academically but also in character development and Islamic values" (P2, Vice Principal).

Another participant explained:

"Parents are usually interested because they see a balance between general education and religious learning offered by the madrasah" (P9, Parent).

Observational findings further indicate that this positioning is enacted through instructional practices and daily institutional activities. Academic programs are implemented through mentoring, participation in competitions, and the strengthening of literacy and numeracy skills. At the same time, religious development is carried out through routine worship activities, structured religious programs, and the reinforcement of moral values in everyday interactions.

In addition, the institution's positioning is supported by the development of flagship

programs aligned with community needs and student interests. These programs include both academic and non-academic initiatives aimed at enhancing students' competencies, achievements, and character development. Document analysis and interview data indicate that these programs serve as representations of the madrasah's institutional strengths.

The findings also indicate that this positioning is positively perceived by the community. As expressed by one parent:

"I chose MAN 1 because it offers strong religious education while still supporting students to achieve academically" (P10, Parent).

Overall, the findings show that MAN 1 Kendari has established a clear and consistent positioning in the public's perception, which is communicated through institutional messages and reflected in educational practices.

b. Brand Identity of MAN 1 Kendari

The findings indicate that the brand identity of MAN 1 Kendari is constructed through the integration of visual identity, institutional narratives, flagship programs, religious culture, achievement records, and planned public communication. This identity represents how the madrasah presents itself to the public through tangible and observable elements.

In terms of visual identity, MAN 1 Kendari displays institutional symbols that represent both religious values and academic excellence. This is reflected in the consistent use of the official logo of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, accompanied by the madrasah's name, which signifies its legal status and institutional affiliation. The logo is applied across official documents, school signage, event banners, and various communication media.

Beyond visual symbols, brand identity is also expressed through slogans and institutional narratives aligned with the madrasah's vision as a religious, competitive, and quality-oriented educational

institution. This is reflected in the tagline "progressive, high-quality, and globally oriented," which is communicated across institutional activities. As stated by one informant:

"This tagline reflects our commitment to continuously improve quality and adapt to global developments" (P1, School Principal).

Observational findings indicate that these visual and narrative elements are consistently displayed in institutional attributes such as uniforms, banners, and official communication materials. These elements contribute to the visibility of the madrasah's identity in everyday institutional practices.

In addition to visual and symbolic elements, the brand identity of MAN 1 Kendari is also reflected in its flagship programs. Interview and document data indicate that the madrasah develops both academic and non-academic programs aimed at improving students' competencies and character. These include academic mentoring, extracurricular activities, and structured religious development programs. One teacher explained:

"Our programs are designed not only to improve academic performance but also to develop students' character and skills" (P5, Teacher).

Institutional practices also demonstrate the implementation of the madrasah's identity, particularly in activities involving parents and the wider community. For example, meetings during report distribution and student achievement appreciation events reflect efforts to communicate institutional performance and maintain engagement with stakeholders.

Religious identity constitutes a central component of the madrasah's overall identity. Observations show that Islamic values are embedded in daily routines, including regular worship activities, religious programs, and moral habituation. An informant stated:

"The religious environment here makes students more disciplined and helps them develop good character" (P12, Student).

The madrasah's identity is further reinforced through the communication of student achievements. Document analysis shows that both academic and non-academic accomplishments are regularly disseminated through various platforms, including social media and institutional publications.

The use of digital media also plays a role in presenting the madrasah's identity to the public. The findings indicate that social media platforms are used to share information about school activities, student achievements, and institutional programs. As noted by a public relations officer:

"Social media helps us share information more widely and allows the public to see what we do in the madrasah" (P8, Public Relations Officer).

Overall, the findings show that the brand identity of MAN 1 Kendari is expressed through visual symbols, institutional narratives, program implementation, religious practices, and communication strategies that are consistently presented in institutional activities.

c. Brand Personality MAN 1 Kendari

The findings indicate that the brand personality of MAN 1 Kendari is reflected in institutional characteristics that are consistently manifested in the madrasah's culture, interaction patterns among school members, and everyday educational practices. Based on interview, observational, and documentary data, MAN 1 Kendari is perceived as religious, disciplined, environmentally conscious, and achievement-oriented.

Religiosity emerges as a central dimension in shaping the madrasah's brand personality. Observational findings show that Islamic values are embedded not only in formal instruction but also in daily routines. Regular worship practices, religious programs, and moral habituation are consistently implemented across the school community. One student explained:

"The religious activities here are part of our daily life, not just something we do in class" (P12, Student).

Another informant stated:

"Parents feel more confident because their children are guided not only academically but also in terms of religious values" (P9, Parent).

This orientation is also emphasized by the school leadership, as reflected in the following statement:

"Our goal is to ensure that students develop strong religious character alongside academic competence" (P1, School Principal).

In addition to religiosity, discipline represents another key characteristic of the institution's personality. Interview and observational data indicate that discipline is reflected in punctuality, structured learning processes, and adherence to institutional rules. This is reinforced through the example set by teachers and school leaders. As noted by one teacher:

"Discipline is part of our daily routine, and students are used to following clear rules and schedules" (P5, Teacher).

Environmental awareness is also reflected as part of the madrasah's institutional character. Observations and documents show that the school promotes environmental responsibility through activities such as maintaining cleanliness, implementing greening programs, and managing the school environment sustainably. A student stated:

"We are encouraged to keep the environment clean and take care of the school surroundings" (P13, Student).

Furthermore, achievement orientation appears as a prominent characteristic of the madrasah's personality. The findings indicate that students are encouraged to participate in academic and non-academic competitions and to develop their competencies. One vice principal explained:

"We continuously motivate students to participate in competitions and improve their achievements at various levels" (P2, Vice Principal).

In addition, the role of communication in reinforcing this personality is reflected in how institutional activities are presented to

the public. As stated by a public relations officer:

“We actively share students’ achievements and school activities through digital platforms so that the public can see our strengths” (P8, Public Relations Officer).

Overall, the findings show that MAN 1 Kendari demonstrates a consistent institutional character reflected in religiosity, discipline, environmental awareness, and achievement orientation, as observed in daily practices and interactions within the madrasah.

d. The Impact of Institutional Brand Image on Prospective Students’ Enrollment Interest

The findings indicate that the branding image constructed through brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality is associated with increasing prospective students’ interest in MAN 1 Kendari. This is reflected in positive public perceptions, strong attraction to the madrasah’s programs, and an upward trend in the number of applicants during each admission cycle.

Interview data reveal that positive perceptions of the madrasah’s image constitute an important consideration for parents and prospective students when selecting an educational institution. Informants reported that MAN 1 Kendari is perceived as capable of providing a balance between academic education and religious character development. As expressed by one parent:

“We chose this madrasah because it offers both strong academic education and religious guidance for our children” (P10, Parent).

Another informant noted:

“The reputation of the madrasah makes parents more confident in enrolling their children here” (P11, Parent).

Prospective students’ interest is also influenced by their attraction to the flagship programs offered by the madrasah. The findings show that academic initiatives, religious activities, and various self-

development programs serve as key attraction factors. A student explained:

“There are many programs here that help us develop our skills and compete in different fields” (P13, Student).

Furthermore, the madrasah’s public communication through social media platforms and outreach activities contributes to shaping prospective students’ interest. The consistent dissemination of information regarding school activities, achievements, and institutional environment provides broader access to information for the public. As stated by the public relations officer:

“We regularly share school activities and achievements so that the community can see what students experience here” (P8, Public Relations Officer).

Documentary data also indicate an increasing trend in the number of applicants over recent years, which informants associate with the strengthening of the madrasah’s branding image. While other factors such as institutional status and location are also acknowledged, participants emphasized the role of institutional image in influencing school choice.

Overall, the findings show that the branding image of MAN 1 Kendari is reflected in positive perceptions, program attractiveness, and increased interest among prospective students, as indicated by both interview data and institutional records.

Overall, the findings indicate that the branding image of MAN 1 Kendari is constructed through the integration of brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality, which are consistently reflected in institutional practices and stakeholder interactions. Brand positioning is articulated through the alignment of academic excellence and religious values, while brand identity is expressed through visual symbols, institutional narratives, flagship programs, and communication strategies. These elements are further reinforced by a distinct brand personality characterized by religiosity, discipline, environmental awareness, and achievement orientation. The interplay of these dimensions contributes to

shaping positive public perceptions and increasing prospective students' interest, as reflected in stakeholder responses and institutional enrollment trends.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the branding image of MAN 1 Kendari is constructed through a dynamic and integrated process involving brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality, which are consistently enacted in institutional practices and stakeholder interactions. While this pattern aligns with customer-based brand equity theory, which emphasizes the role of consistent experiences in shaping brand meaning (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2020), the findings also suggest a contextual refinement of the theory. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, brand image is not merely formed through symbolic associations but is deeply embedded in everyday institutional practices, particularly those reflecting religious values and moral commitments.

Further analysis indicates that the brand identity of MAN 1 Kendari has evolved into an operational and performance-based identity. The madrasah's tagline, "progressive, high-quality, and globally oriented," is not positioned merely as a normative slogan; rather, it is enacted through improvements in instructional practices, enhanced quality of teacher services, and verifiable academic and non-academic achievements. This finding supports prior research on institutional branding (Maringe & Paul Gibbs, 2008; Chapleo, 2015; Balmer & Podnar, 2021), which emphasizes the importance of alignment between identity claims and organizational performance. However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that in Islamic education contexts, identity is validated not only through measurable performance but also through the integration of religious values in institutional routines (Pinar et al., 2020; Yaping et al., 2023). This suggests a shift from symbolic branding toward practice-based branding in faith-based educational settings.

The brand personality identified in this study further reinforces the relational dimension of institutional branding. Attributes such as religiosity, discipline, environmental responsibility, and achievement orientation contribute to the formation of affective connections between the madrasah and its stakeholders. While this finding is consistent with brand personality theory (Aaker, 1997) and previous empirical studies (Asadullah, 2016; Foroudi et al., 2016; Simiyu et al., 2019; Kaushal & Ali, 2020; Juhaidi et al., 2024; Samsudin, M. A. et al., 2025), this study highlights an important contextual distinction. In contrast to many Western branding models, where personality traits are often constructed through communication strategies, religiosity in this context is institutionalized and embedded in daily practices. This indicates that brand personality in Islamic educational institutions is not merely symbolic but lived and experienced, thereby strengthening its authenticity and credibility.

The findings also confirm that digital media play a strategic role in strengthening institutional identity and image. Consistent with prior studies (Barus, 2023; Perera et al., 2023; Perera, 2023; Stephenson et al., 2016), digital platforms enhance visibility and influence public perceptions. However, this study suggests that in the madrasah context, digital media function not only as promotional tools but also as mechanisms of transparency, enabling stakeholders to observe institutional practices and achievements. This dual function indicates that digital communication contributes not only to brand awareness but also to institutional accountability, which is particularly relevant in educational environments emphasizing moral and religious legitimacy.

From a comparative perspective, these findings resonate with research conducted in other Muslim-majority contexts, such as Malaysia and Pakistan, where institutional trust is closely associated with the integration of religious values and educational quality. However, this study

contributes by demonstrating that such integration is not merely normative but is operationalized through systematic branding strategies that align positioning, identity, and personality within a coherent institutional framework. This provides a more process-oriented understanding of branding in Islamic educational institutions.

Despite these contributions, several tensions and considerations emerge from the findings. While the madrasah projects a consistent and integrated brand image, it remains uncertain whether all stakeholder groups interpret this image uniformly. Differences in perception between parents, students, and institutional actors may exist but are not fully explored in this study. Furthermore, although the findings suggest alignment between identity claims and institutional practices, the extent to which this alignment is consistently maintained across different contexts and over time warrants further investigation.

The impact of branding image on prospective students' interest in this study appears to be mediated primarily through parental trust and expectations regarding educational quality. This finding is consistent with prior studies (Hemsley-Brown, Jane, 2015; Jeynes, 2024; Kim, 2022), which highlight the role of parental involvement in school choice decisions. However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that trust is shaped not only by institutional reputation but also by the perceived consistency between communicated values and observable practices. In this sense, branding image functions as a relational mechanism that connects institutional identity with stakeholder expectations.

Based on the findings, this study proposes a conceptual model illustrating the relationships among brand positioning, brand identity, brand personality, and their impact on stakeholder perceptions and prospective students' enrollment interest. The model highlights that branding image in Islamic educational institutions is constructed through the alignment of strategic

positioning, operational identity, and institutional personality, which collectively shape parental trust and influence enrollment decisions.

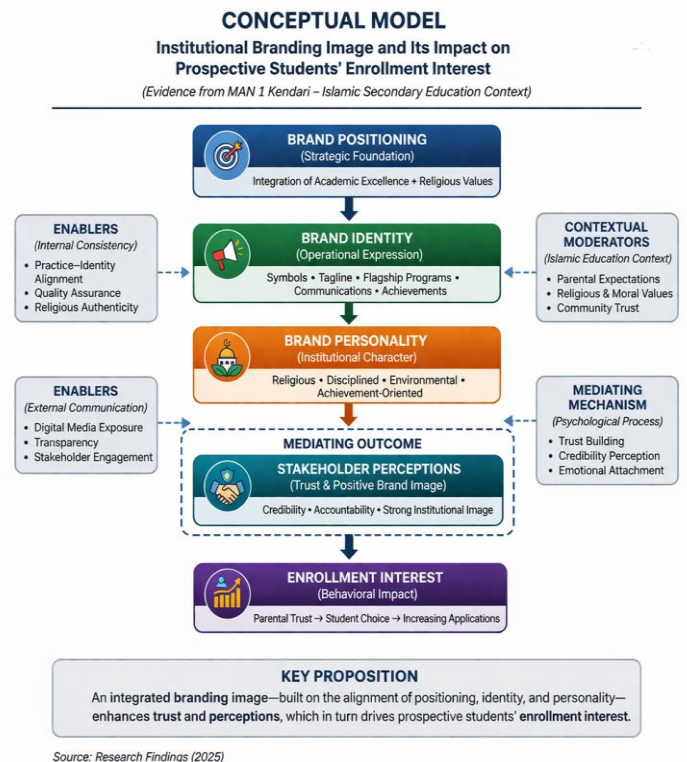


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Institutional Branding Image and Its Impact on Prospective Students' Enrollment Interest

The model illustrates that institutional branding operates as an integrated and sequential process. Brand positioning provides the strategic foundation by defining the institution's distinctive value, particularly through the integration of academic excellence and religious values. This positioning is translated into observable practices through brand identity, including symbols, programs, communication strategies, and institutional achievements. Furthermore, brand personality reflects the lived institutional character, manifested in religiosity, discipline, environmental awareness, and achievement orientation.

These dimensions collectively shape stakeholder perceptions, particularly trust and credibility, which ultimately influence prospective students' enrollment interest. The model also suggests that in Islamic educational contexts, branding effectiveness is closely linked to the consistency between communicated values and actual institutional practices.

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a single case study, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative approach employed in this study provides in-depth insights but does not allow for statistical generalization. Third, the study is context-specific, focusing on one madrasah in Indonesia, and may not fully capture variations in branding practices across different institutional and cultural settings.

In terms of practical implications, this study offers several actionable insights. For school leaders, the findings suggest the importance of aligning branding strategies with daily institutional practices to ensure consistency between identity claims and service delivery. For policymakers, the results highlight the need to support accountability mechanisms and quality assurance systems that strengthen public trust in Islamic educational institutions. For researchers, this study provides a foundation for further investigation into the relationships among brand identity, trust, and student enrollment, particularly through quantitative approaches and comparative studies across different contexts

CONCLUSION

This study argues that the effectiveness of institutional branding in Islamic education is not primarily determined by symbolic representation or promotional strategies, but by the consistent alignment between institutional values, everyday practices, and stakeholder experiences. The case demonstrates that branding image emerges as a lived and operational process, where brand positioning, brand identity, and brand

personality are not only communicated but continuously enacted through educational practices, organizational culture, and stakeholder engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the advancement of educational branding literature by extending customer-based brand equity and brand personality frameworks into the context of Islamic secondary education. It shows that religiosity functions as a core and institutionalized dimension of branding, moving beyond symbolic identity toward practice-based branding rooted in moral and social values. Practically, the findings highlight the importance for school leaders and policymakers to ensure coherence between institutional vision, program implementation, and public communication in order to build sustainable trust and strengthen institutional competitiveness.

Future research is encouraged to further examine the dynamics of branding in Islamic educational institutions across diverse contexts using comparative and mixed-method approaches. In particular, investigating how different stakeholder groups interpret and respond to institutional branding, as well as exploring longitudinal changes in branding practices, would provide deeper insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of branding strategies in education.

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