

Increasing Public Interest through School Image Branding through a Trending Approach

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the branding strategy applied by MA Nurul Jadid in increasing the interest of the public, especially parents of prospective students, in choosing a school. In the context of increasingly competitive education, it is essential for educational institutions, especially madrasas, to have a strong image that reflects the quality and values they carry. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving in-depth interviews with school managers, teachers, and student parents to collect data on public perception of school branding. The study's findings show that an effective branding strategy at MA Nurul Jadid involves implementing a standardized managerial system, developing superior programs based on religion, and using social media as the primary communication channel. In addition, the Tahfidz Qur'an program and the school's slogan reflect a strong vision and mission and significantly strengthen the school's image. The results of this study provide new insights into how madrasas can build positive branding by integrating religious values into their strategies. These findings also provide important implications for madrasah managers and other religious education institutions to design a more integrated branding strategy focusing on education quality and values relevant to the community.

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INTRODUCTION

School branding is an important strategy in education, especially in attracting the public's and prospective students' interest. Branding in the world of education refers to the way an educational institution, such as a school or university, builds and introduces its identity to the public, be it to prospective students, parents, or the general public (Macgilchrist et al., 2020; Nuseir & El Refae, 2022; Perera et al., 2022). The branding here is not just the logo or name of the institution but encompasses the entire experience offered by the institution, including the quality of teaching, facilities, culture, and values carried out (Evans, 2003; Joseph et al., 2012; Subbarayalu, 2022).

In Indonesia, many schools and madrassas have begun to use branding strategies to introduce themselves to the broader community (Bamberger et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2020; Zamroni et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that effective branding can increase the public's positive perception of the quality of education schools provide (Alwi et al., 2020; Mourad et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022). MA Nurul Jadid, which is located in an area with high population density and high competition between Islamic educational institutions, chose to develop branding by integrating religious values and quality education.

Departing from the above, this research was carried out based on previous research that examined similar topics and discussions. Where several previous studies have explored the concept of branding in the education sector (Melewar et al., 2021; Rachbini et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022), but it is still limited to public schools and does not research much branding in madrasas. According to several previous studies, school branding relies heavily on internal quality and reputation built through excellent programs and community involvement. The same thing is also strengthened by several types of research related to the use of social media, where the use of social media plays a significant role in influencing the image of schools (Jędrzejczyk & Brzeziński, 2021; Maresova et al., 2020; Zaini, 2023). On the other hand, research by Lee (2021) reveals the importance of transparent management in building public trust. Although there is research on branding in public education, few have focused on madrasas, which have unique characteristics, such as strengthening religious values in educational programs. Therefore, this study tries to fill the gap by focusing on MA Nurul Jadid and the branding strategy she implements.

Although much research has been done on school branding, most focus on general educational institutions. Not much discusses the context of madrasas, which have strong religious characteristics in their educational activities and flagship programs. In addition, many studies only cover visual branding and do not touch on the important managerial and operational aspects of supporting the branding. The gap in this literature is the lack of a deep understanding of how madrassas build branding that reflects religious values and quality education. This study aims to identify the elements of the branding strategy implemented by MA Nurul Jadid and analyze its influence on public perception and parents' interest in choosing a school. This is important because a better understanding of madrasah branding strategies can contribute to developing relevant branding models for religious education institutions.

This research offers a unique contribution by delving deeply into the application of branding strategies in madrasas, especially MA Nurul Jadid, which integrates religious values in every aspect of branding. Previous studies have focused more on public schools and often ignore religious aspects that are very important in the context of madrasas. This research introduces a new approach by combining standardized managerial elements (such as ISO), faith-based flagship programs, and using social media as the primary communication channel to introduce the school's image.

By focusing on MA Nurul Jadid, this research provides new insights into how madrassas can develop strong and effective branding, which not only appeals to the interest of parents of prospective students but also reflects the madrasah's commitment to quality education based on religious values. This research also opens up opportunities for further research on the branding of religion-based education in Indonesia. This research aims to explore the branding strategy applied by MA Nurul Jadid in increasing public interest, with a focus on the application of religious values in building the school's image. This research will identify key elements in the madrasah branding strategy, including standardized management, the development of superior religious-based programs such as tahfidz Qur'an, and the use of social media to introduce schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at MA Nurul Jadid, a madrasah in an area known for its commitment to quality education. This context was chosen because of its direct relevance to the research problem, namely how school branding can affect people's interest in choosing a school. This research aims to understand the branding strategies used by schools and how this shapes public perception, especially among parents of prospective students. Using case study research, a qualitative research approach is chosen to understand this phenomenon in depth. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore in detail the elements that make up the school's branding and how these interact with the values that exist in society (Bazen et al., 2021; Mulisa, 2022; Mwita, 2023). This approach is in line with the objectives of the research, which aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of branding in the context of education, which cannot be explained by quantitative data alone (Bazen et al., 2021; Mulisa, 2022; Stahl & King, 2020).

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with several informants, including school managers, teachers, and students' parents. The interviews were chosen because they allowed researchers to dig into individual views and experiences related to school branding. In addition, in-depth interviews allow room for open-ended questions, allowing informants to express their views more broadly and freely. This method was chosen to obtain rich and contextual primary data (Bhatia et al., 2020; Finch & Gordon, 2023; Lichtenstein & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2023), which is highly relevant to research objectives that want to understand branding strategies in depth. In this study, interviews were used as the primary method. However, they were also supported by documentation of school branding activities, such as promotional materials, which helped to enrich understanding of the strategies implemented. Combining interviews and documentation strengthens the analysis and allows for data triangulation, increasing the findings' validity.

Data collected through interviews and documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The first step in the analysis is data encoding, in which text segments relevant to the research question are identified and explicitly coded. After that, the data is grouped into categories related to key themes, such as school management, featured programs, and social media use. This thematic analysis technique allows researchers to identify patterns that emerge from the data, which are then used to answer the research questions. The analysis process is carried out iteratively, with researchers constantly examining and comparing data to ensure compatibility between findings and existing theories. The analysis is done manually to maintain the depth of interpretation and ensure that any emerging themes are carefully considered. This step ensures that the precise analysis process produces valid and accountable findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study explores and analyzes school branding strategies that can increase people's interest in choosing a school for their children, focusing on applying popular branding methods in the digital era. The location of this research was carried out at MA Nurul Jadid, where the results of this research will be presented as follows:

School Branding Strategy for Increasing Public Interest

School branding is a strategic effort to create a unique identity that distinguishes a school from other institutions. In the context of education, branding is more than just promotion; Branding builds a sustainable image in the eyes of the public. The public, especially parents, who are the main stakeholders in school selection, are increasingly selective in choosing schools based on the reputation and image of the school. This study found that an effective branding strategy can increase public trust, improve the quality of perception of schools, and ultimately increase the number of new student enrollments. The strategies MA Nurul Jadid used to increase public interest are as follows.

Improving the Quality of School Management

Good management is the main element in creating a positive image for a school. One of the strategies implemented by MA Nurul Jadid is the implementation of a standardized and well-structured management system. The implementation of ISO in this school reflects the commitment to improving the quality of educational services and strengthening public trust. To improve the quality of management, schools not only rely on administrative aspects and pay attention to the development of competent human resources. The results of interviews with the informants show that good management at MA Nurul Jadid has had a positive impact on public perception. One of the strategies implemented by MA Nurul Jadid is the implementation of ISO, which reflects that the school implements a standardized and well-structured management system. This is strengthened by a statement delivered by one of the informants who said,

"The implementation of ISO in this school shows that our management is running by international standards, which provide quality assurance to parents" (Inf-01).

Based on the results of interviews with informants, it is known that the implementation of ISO at MA Nurul Jadid is the main factor that increases parental trust in the school. This shows that parents see the quality of education not only from student learning outcomes but also from a structured and internationally recognized managerial system. Implementing ISO symbolizes the school's quality and commitment to higher education standards. Along with the importance of management management, MA Nurul Jadid also emphasized transparency in operations that can provide a clear picture of the quality of the school. In the following interview, one of the informants added that,

"The school's transparent and efficient management shows that the school is committed to providing the best education (Inf-02)."

The above statement shows that, in addition to accreditation and international standards, transparency in management is an important aspect that parents pay attention to. This shows that MA Nurul Jadid does not only focus on the administrative aspect but also on openness that allows the public to see firsthand the performance and quality of educational services provided. In addition, MA Nurul Jadid ensures that international standards are followed in every management aspect. One of the informants revealed this in his interview, explaining,

"We always ensure that all administrative procedures are carried out by international standards, which provide quality assurance to parents and the community (Inf-03)."

The statement made by one of the informants above shows that MA Nurul Jadid strives to ensure that every policy and procedure is followed appropriately, reflecting a managerial system that is not only efficient but also accountable. This provides a sense of security to parents and the community, and this school has a strong and structured foundation for providing quality education. Departing from the data from the interview results, it is known that several points can be filtered related as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Strategies for Improving the Quality of Management of MA Nurul Jadid

From the findings above, it is known that implementing good management standards, such as accreditation and ISO, and transparency in operations plays a significant role in improving the school's image in the eyes of parents. Parents tend to choose schools that promise quality education and have a tested and standardized managerial system. MA Nurul Jadid clearly shows that quality management is vital in building public trust. Applying strict international procedures and transparency in every administrative step assures parents that the school is reliable, reinforcing a positive perception of the quality of education provided. This also proves that school branding depends not only on image but also on real performance that can be seen and felt by the public.

Development of Flagship Programs and School Slogans

A strong flagship program and slogan are important elements in a school's branding strategy. Excellent programs, such as tahfidz Qur'an, character education, and extracurricular activities relevant to the community's needs enrich the curriculum and provide a distinctive feature that distinguishes the school from others. A proper and memorable slogan is essential in strengthening the school's image. In this study, MA Nurul Jadid utilizes the Qur'an tahfidz program and slogans that describe the school's vision and mission as a way to create a positive image in the eyes of the public, which strengthens the school's branding in the long run. One of the branding strategies implemented by MA Nurul Jadid is the development of the Qur'an tahfidz program, which is attractive to parents and a source of pride for the surrounding community. In this interview, one of the informants explained,

"We have a Qur'an tahfidz program that is not only attractive to parents, but also a source of pride for the community (Inf-04)."

This statement shows that the Qur'an tahfidz program at MA Nurul Jadid is beneficial for students in developing religious skills and positively impacts the school's image in the community. The community sees that this school not only focuses on academic achievement but also on strengthening religious values, which is attractive to parents who want to educate their children in an environment that prioritizes Islamic values. In addition, MA Nurul Jadid also uses slogans that reflect the school's vision and mission in building student character. In this interview, one of the informants said that,

"Our simple slogan, 'The Realization of Madrasah Excellence in Forming Religious, Civilized, Independent and Outstanding Students,' succeeded in uniting the vision of the entire academic community to create an environment that supports the development of students' character (Inf-05)."

The slogan "The realization of Madrasah Unggul in forming religious, civilized, independent and outstanding students" shows how MA Nurul Jadid combines academic aspects and student character in their school branding. This slogan serves as a reminder to the academic community about the school's goals. It creates an easily remembered identity, reinforcing the school's image as a place that educates students with positive values. The slogan chosen by MA Nurul Jadid also played a role in strengthening the public's first impression of the school. In this interview, one of the informants stated,

"School taglines Help reinforce first impressions, especially when parents see a program that matches the values they teach at home (Inf-06)."

This statement shows that the right tagline can make a deep impression on the parents of prospective students. This also shows that people are increasingly choosing schools that can reflect the values they uphold at home, both in terms of education and student character development.

The results of several interviews show that the development of superior programs, such as the Tahfidz Qur'an, and the application of relevant slogans play an important role in the branding strategy at MA Nurul Jadid. The Qur'anic tahfidz program provides an added value that can distinguish this school from other schools, giving the impression that this school is not only focused on academics but also on strengthening students' character. Slogans that reflect the values that parents want, such as "Smart Schools, Noble Morals," reinforce the positive image that society wants. A strong tagline is also an important factor in creating a good first impression for the parents of prospective students, showing that the values instilled in this school align with their expectations. This proves that school branding must be comprehensive, including excellent programs and consistent messaging in every aspect of communication.

The Influence of Social Media in Improving School Image

Social media is increasingly important in strengthening school branding in this digital era. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok allow schools to reach a wider audience at a lower cost than traditional promotional methods. Schools that are active on social media can take advantage of direct engagement with the community and prospective parents of students. This research reveals that the appropriate and consistent use of social media can improve the school's image, introduce excellent programs, and build closer relationships with the community and prospective students. The following is one of the social media platforms used by MA Nurul Jadid, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Instagram MA Nurul Jadid

Figure 2 shows the official Instagram account of Supreme Court Nurul Jadid, which represents the institution's digital communication strategy. With over 500 uploads and 4,000 followers, this account appears to be actively managed. Highlights such as "Achievement " and "KSS " indicate a primary focus on student achievement. Embedded uploads that display appreciation and motivational messages are most likely intended to build an image of a progressive and accomplished school. Although its effectiveness cannot be ascertained directly, this representation is suspected to have helped strengthen the school's public image as a religious, independent, and accomplished institution. In addition, MA Nurul Jadid's strategy to introduce the school to the public is regularly uploading content on social media platforms. In this interview, one of the informants stated,

"We regularly upload photos and videos of school activities, from competitions to farewell events, on Instagram and TikTok to attract parents' attention (Inf-07)."

This statement shows that MA Nurul Jadid uses social media to introduce various school activities that depict the dynamics and life of the school. The often uploaded content shows the school's seriousness in building an active and transparent image and introducing the school to a broader audience, including parents who may be interested in the school's activities.

The findings above show that social media plays a vital role in building and strengthening the school's image in the public's eyes. The regular and consistent use of social media allows MA Nurul Jadid to show the various activities carried out by the school, including competitions and farewell events, which provide a vivid picture of the dynamics of the school. More than that, interactions carried out through social media strengthen the relationship between the school and prospective student's parents and provide space for them to communicate directly. In addition, by displaying student achievements on the platform, MA Nurul Jadid built parental trust in the quality of education provided. The use of social media here not only serves as a promotional tool but also as an in-depth communication channel with the audience, thereby enhancing the school's credibility and positive image.

Discussion

This research explores and analyzes the branding strategy MA Nurul Jadid applied to increase public interest in choosing a school. The main findings of this study show that school branding depends not only on the promotions carried out by the school but also on implementing a standardized managerial system, developing relevant flagship programs, and using social media to introduce the school's identity. In this discussion, I will relate the findings to the existing literature, identify the relevance of existing theories, and explore implications that can be drawn for future research, theory, and practice.

The results of this study provide answers to the main questions asked in the research, namely, how school branding strategies can increase public interest in choosing a school. The findings show that the strategies implemented by MA Nurul Jadid include improving the quality of management through the implementation of ISO and transparency, the development of superior programs such as tahfidz Qur'an, and the active use of social media. All of these strategies aim to strengthen the positive image of the school in the eyes of the public, especially the parents of prospective students. This is in line with the branding theory that the success of branding depends not only on visual promotion but also on the operational quality and value conveyed through flagship programs (Bhatia et al., 2020; Ramadhani & Indradjati, 2023; Smyrnaïou et al., 2020).

These findings reinforce the branding theory that school imagery is formed through a combination of managerial qualities and visible activities to the community (Engeness, 2021; Quintana-García et al., 2021; Terho et al., 2022). The implementation of ISO and transparent management at MA Nurul Jadid supports the view that sound management can increase public trust in the quality of education offered, which is in line with findings in education branding studies that show that managerial quality can strengthen public trust (Latifatus, 2023; Mansoor, 2021; Schmidhuber et al., 2021). In addition, the development of flagship programs such as tahfidz Qur'an and strong school slogans reflects what Jędrzejczyk (2021) calls "brand identity," which describes the school's image as prioritizing character and religious values. The use of social media, which is increasingly crucial in this digital age, is in line with research by Mourad et al. (2020), which states that social media can serve as an effective promotional tool and, at the same time, build a two-way relationship between schools and society.

These findings expand on previous research focusing only on visual branding and school marketing strategies (Greaves et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2020; Sample et al., 2020). This research shows that successful branding in education depends not only on advertising or promotional materials but also on the implementation of standardized procedures (such as ISO) and the development of programs that suit the needs of society. The study also challenges previous research emphasizing traditional branding elements by highlighting the importance of social media as a more direct and interactive communication channel.

This research makes a significant contribution to the literature on school branding, particularly by highlighting how internal factors such as standardized management, excellent programs, and social media utilization can increase public interest in schools. Combining existing branding theories with practice in the field enriches an understanding of the importance of a holistic approach to branding strategies in the education sector. The study also provides new insights into how school branding should be more than just visual promotion. However, it should include proven managerial qualities, program development relevant to community values, and effective communication through social media. This is an important basis for further research and guides school managers in designing a more integrated and effective branding strategy.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the branding strategy applied by MA Nurul Jadid to increase public interest in schools and explore elements that affect public perception. Key findings suggest that standardized management, the development of excellent programs such as the Tahfidz Qur'an, and the use of social media are key factors that contribute to effective school branding. Implementing ISO, managerial transparency, and excellent programs relevant to the community's needs have strengthened the school's image in the eyes of prospective students' parents. These findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach in school branding strategies, which rely on visual promotion and tangible performance that the public can see. Practically, this research provides valuable insights for school managers in designing a more integrated branding strategy focusing on education quality and community involvement. This research also opens up opportunities for further research on the role of social media in educational branding.

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