



From Promotion to Strategic Branding: Educational Service Marketing Management in Building Madrasah Brand Image

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine how educational service marketing management builds the brand image of Madrasah. Increasing competition among educational institutions requires madrasahs to communicate institutional values, service quality, and religious identity more strategically. However, many schools still conduct promotion incidentally, without integrated branding and continuous evaluation. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with purposive site and informant selection. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the madrasah applies structured marketing through planning, implementation, and supervision. Marketing activities involve principals, teachers, staff, and students through brochures, school visits, banners, community interaction, and social media. Nevertheless, digital media is still used mainly for documentation rather than strategic brand storytelling. The study also found that affordable tuition, competent teachers, strategic location, and a clean religious environment strengthen public trust and positive perception. Meanwhile, limited facilities, increasing competition, and weak digital branding constrain marketing effectiveness. This study contributes to educational marketing literature by showing that madrasah brand image emerges from integrated communication, service quality, and Islamic institutional culture.

INTRODUCTION

The development of contemporary education shows that educational institutions are no longer sufficiently understood as a place where the teaching and learning process takes place, but also as a public service organization that determines the quality of people's experiences, beliefs, and decisions (Pinheiro & Alves, 2024; Verhelst et al., 2022). In an increasingly selective society, parents not only assess the curriculum, but also the reputation, school culture, cost, accessibility, facilities, and tangible evidence of student success. Therefore, marketing educational services is important not only to attract new students, but to communicate values, ensure service transparency, and build long-term relationships with education users. Recent studies show that the mix of marketing, reputation, credibility, location, cost, promotion, and physical evidence affect people's decision to choose educational institutions (Al-Dmour et al., 2024; Wardhani et al., 2025). This evidence shows that education marketing is directly related to the public's right to obtain clear information before making a choice of school. Thus, research on marketing

management of educational services is important for the wider community because it helps educational institutions design services that are more responsive, measurable, accountable, and according to the needs of the public.

The general problem behind this research is the increasing competition between educational institutions, both public schools and Islamic educational institutions that offer their own advantages. People face many choices, but decisions are not always based on intact information; It is often influenced by promotions, testimonials, image, and social perception. At the same time, some educational institutions are still running promotions incidentally, not yet based on market analysis, service differentiation, and continuous evaluation. Islamic educational institutions face additional challenges as they must maintain religious identity while proving academic quality and service competitiveness. Studies show that marketing educational services needs to integrate brand image, superior programs, and consistent communication in order to increase public interest and trust (Everett et al., 2023; Riccomini et al., 2024). If this problem is not managed, educational institutions risk losing competition not because of low quality of service, but because their institutional value is not legible to the public.

Previous studies have extensively discussed education marketing through the perspective of marketing mix, increasing public interest, and institutional image formation. Pramiasih et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of implementing a marketing mix in educational service strategies, while Asiah et al. (2022) showed that elements of marketing, reputation, and credibility influence the decision to choose an educational institution. In the context of Islamic education, Muttaqin et al. (2022) place marketing mix and brand image as strategies that can increase public interest in Islamic educational institutions. Shaikh & Alam Kazmi (2022) also found that Islamic school marketing strategies need to pay attention to planning, implementation, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors. However, some of these studies tend to place marketing as an instrument of promotion and increase in the number of students. Such an approach still leaves questions about how managerial processes work at the educational unit level, so there are important research gaps to fill.

Other research has begun to highlight the dimensions of brand image and digital communication in Islamic educational institutions. Sain et al. (2025) show that marketing educational services can improve the image of the institution through community support, the role of foundations, institutional commitments, flagship programs, and promotional media. Marbun (2025) emphasized that pesantren based schools build an image through programs, promotional media, and institutional management. Ibadiyah et al. (2022) found that mixed-service education-based marketing can strengthen the public's positive perception of Islamic educational institutions. Meanwhile, Bonilla Quijada et al. (2022) show the importance of Instagram in marketing communication for new student admissions. An important weakness of previous studies is that not many have examined specifically how social media, human resource engagement, student admission evaluation, and institutional religious character work as a system to form a brand image. Therefore, this research occupies a relevant position to bridge the gap.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on marketing management of educational services in building the institution's brand image operationally and contextually. This research does not only view promotion as an activity to disseminate information, but as a strategic process that involves reading the needs of the community, determining the excellence of the institution, selecting communication media, involving all institutional resources, and evaluating marketing results. This focus emphasizes the

importance of alignment between service quality, religious culture, superior programs, and digital communication in order to form a positive public perception in a sustainable manner. This issue is important to be resolved because educational institutions that have good services do not necessarily gain public trust if their advantages are not communicated systematically.

Based on this description, the problem of this research is directed at how the marketing management of educational services is applied in building the brand image of educational institutions and the factors that support or hinder their implementation. The provisional argument put forward is that the brand image of an institution is not formed only through promotion, but through consistency between marketing planning, program implementation, service quality, religious culture, human resource engagement, and continuous evaluation. When all of these elements are managed separately, marketing only results in the publication of activities without building a strong institutional image. On the other hand, if these elements are managed as a system, educational institutions can strengthen their differentiation and attractiveness in the midst of competition. This research aims to explain not only the strategies applied, but also the working mechanisms, effectiveness, and managerial obstacles in building the brand image of educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to obtain an in-depth, contextual, and holistic understanding of educational service marketing management in building the madrasah's brand image. This design was appropriate because the study sought to describe and interpret the phenomenon in its natural setting, using the meanings and experiences of participants as the main source of understanding (Hayashi et al., 2019; Kavar et al., 2024). Through this approach, the researcher examined the planning, implementation, and supervision of educational service marketing, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors that influenced the formation of the madrasah's brand image.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Hasanah Pekanbaru, which was selected purposively because it represents an Islamic junior secondary educational institution that actively applies educational service marketing to strengthen its institutional image. The site was considered relevant due to its strategic location, religious institutional character, promotional activities, and efforts to communicate academic and non-academic programs to the community. In qualitative research, purposive site selection aims to obtain rich and relevant information rather than statistical representation (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews involved the madrasah principal as the key informant, along with teachers, educational staff, and students as supporting informants selected through purposive sampling. Observation was used to examine the institutional environment, promotional practices, school activities, and interactions related to public image formation. Documentation was used to verify and complement the data through institutional records, promotional media, photographs, and social media publications. These techniques were applied to capture the phenomenon from multiple perspectives and to strengthen credibility through source and method triangulation (Almusaed et al., 2025).

Data were analyzed interactively through data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were selected, simplified, categorized, and organized into thematic displays related to marketing planning, implementation, supervision, brand image formation, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting emerging meanings and comparing information across informants and data sources. The analysis was conducted iteratively to ensure coherent findings, consistent with qualitative thematic analysis that emphasizes systematic coding, pattern identification, theme development, and interpretive rigor (Li & Zhang, 2022; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Structured and Integrated Marketing Strategy

In this study, a structured and integrated marketing strategy is operationally defined as a systematic and coordinated process employed by the madrasah to promote its educational services effectively. The process encompasses three sequential and interconnected stages: planning, implementation, and supervision. Planning involves comprehensive consideration of internal institutional capabilities, external environmental conditions, market segmentation, and institutional competitive advantages. Implementation entails direct and indirect promotional activities, including brochure distribution, school visits, and digital communications via social media platforms. Supervision is conducted periodically to evaluate the efficacy of implemented strategies and to inform subsequent strategic improvements. Operationalizing this concept emphasizes that marketing activities are not only executed but are strategically aligned to institutional objectives and the sustainable formation of a positive brand image.

The principal described the planning process as follows: "Every year, we hold a strategy meeting to evaluate last year's performance and determine the focus for student recruitment, considering both community needs and our institutional strengths. We want to ensure that our messaging is consistent and strategic."

This statement demonstrates that marketing planning is deliberate and reflective, incorporating both internal and external analyses. From an analytical perspective, this indicates an organizational culture that prioritizes alignment between marketing activities and institutional objectives, ensuring that promotional efforts are not incidental but systematically directed.

A teacher involved in the promotional activities stated "We participate in distributing brochures, visiting elementary schools, and posting updates on social media. However, most of our social media content is activity documentation rather than strategic branding."

This illustrates that while marketing implementation engages multiple institutional actors and multiple channels, the strategic use of digital platforms for long-term brand building remains underdeveloped. The researcher interprets this as a partial integration of marketing activities, with operational execution present but strategic digital branding still limited.

Field observations confirmed extensive promotional activities, both in physical and digital environments. Banners and posters were placed in strategic locations, brochures were disseminated at community events, and students' achievements were

documented on social media. While these activities increased visibility and engagement, they were predominantly operational and lacked a strategic branding orientation. This observation corroborates the interview data, revealing a recurring pattern of comprehensive implementation without fully leveraging digital media for integrated brand promotion.

Synthesis of interview and observational data reveals that the madrasah employs a structured marketing strategy, incorporating planning, implementation, and supervision. All institutional members participate in the process, and multiple communication channels are utilized. Nevertheless, the strategic application of social media for long-term brand reinforcement is limited. Therefore, marketing efforts demonstrate systematic structure but only partial integration in terms of brand strategy.

The emerging pattern indicates three key characteristics: (1) active involvement of staff and students in all stages of marketing, (2) use of both direct and indirect marketing channels, and (3) a discrepancy between operational implementation and strategic branding through digital platforms. This suggests that the institution has established a robust framework for marketing execution, yet the strategic cohesion, particularly in digital branding, requires further development to maximize the impact on institutional brand image.

Table 1. Influence of Structured and Integrated Marketing Strategy

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"Every year, we hold a strategy meeting to evaluate last year's performance and determine the focus for student recruitment, considering both community needs and our institutional strengths. We want to ensure that our messaging is consistent and strategic."	Structured planning, alignment with institutional objectives
Teacher	"We participate in distributing brochures, visiting elementary schools, and posting updates on social media. However, most of our social media content is activity documentation rather than strategic branding."	Implementation by multiple actors, partial integration of digital channels
Student	"We help share school achievements on social media, but we do not really follow a clear branding plan."	Participation in implementation, limited awareness of branding strategy
Staff	"Observing the banners and brochures, we see they reach parents effectively, but social media posts are mostly routine updates."	Supervision and evaluation evident, strategic digital use limited

The data in Table 1 reveal that marketing activities are characterized by structured planning and widespread institutional participation. The principal emphasizes strategic planning aligned with institutional objectives, while teachers, students, and staff demonstrate operational engagement in promotional activities. However, a consistent theme across informants is the underutilization of social media for strategic branding, indicating a partial integration of digital platforms into the overall marketing strategy. The pattern suggests that while marketing processes are systematic and collaborative, the strategic dimension of branding particularly the integration of online platforms is not yet fully realized. Consequently, the institution's visibility and engagement are operationally strong but may not translate into a consistently reinforced institutional brand without improved strategic cohesion.

Impact on Brand Image and Public Perception

the impact on brand image and public perception is operationally defined as the observable outcomes of structured marketing activities, service quality, and the institution's religious environment on stakeholders' beliefs, attitudes, and impressions of the madrasah. A positive brand image encompasses heightened public awareness, trust, and favorable perceptions of institutional credibility, academic quality, and organizational culture. Key differentiating factors include affordable tuition fees, competent teaching staff, and a conducive learning environment. These elements function as both functional and symbolic cues, influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children and shaping the overall institutional reputation within the community. Operationally, this construct measures not only visibility but also the consistency of perceptions and alignment between institutional practices and stakeholders' expectations.

The principal described the influence of marketing and service quality on brand image as follows: "We have noticed that parents often comment on how clean and religious our school environment is, and they appreciate the dedication of our teachers. This feedback shows that our efforts are recognized and valued."

This statement indicates that the integration of structured marketing, educational quality, and religiously supportive environment positively contributes to public perception. The researcher interprets this as evidence that the madrasah's internal capabilities and institutional culture reinforce external stakeholder evaluations, thereby shaping a credible and trustworthy brand image.

A teacher emphasized the role of cost-effectiveness and student-centered practices: "Many parents say our tuition fees are reasonable, and they feel that the teachers really care about their children's progress. This seems to make the school more attractive compared to others in the area."

This comment highlights how tangible service advantages, combined with human resource competencies, enhance differentiation and positively affect public perception. The researcher interprets this as a demonstration of how functional and symbolic attributes of the institution interact to form a cohesive and favorable brand image.

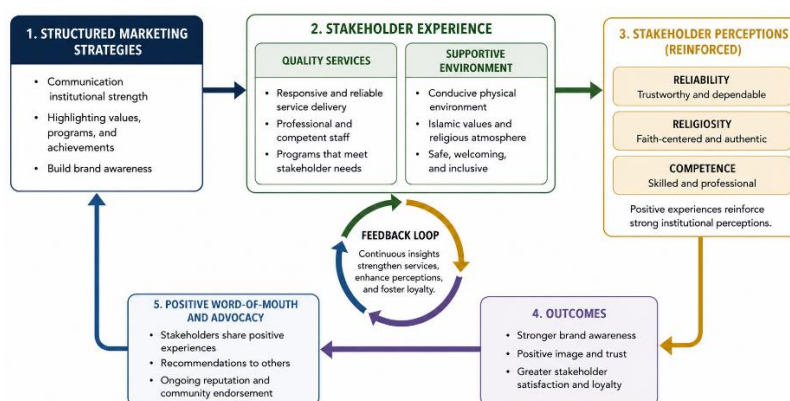


Figure 1. Flow of Brand Image Formation through Educational Service Marketing

The sub-theme illustrates a process whereby structured marketing strategies, combined with quality services and a supportive environment, create a feedback loop. Marketing communicates institutional strengths; stakeholders experience service quality and environmental cues, which then reinforce perceptions of reliability, religiosity, and competence. This cycle strengthens brand awareness and encourages positive word-of-

mouth, further consolidating institutional reputation. The researcher conceptualizes this as a dynamic interplay among marketing communication, service delivery, and stakeholder perception.

Field observations revealed that the madrasah maintains a visibly organized, clean, and religiously enriched environment. Educational activities are conducted in a systematic manner, with teachers actively engaging students, and extracurricular activities showcased publicly. Observations also noted that promotional materials consistently reflected the institution’s core values and academic achievements. The researcher interprets these findings as confirmation that the operational environment and visible practices support the formation of a positive brand image, reinforcing perceptions noted in the interviews.

Synthesizing interview and observational data, the findings indicate that a structured marketing approach, high service quality, and a conducive religious environment collectively enhance brand image, strengthen public awareness, and foster positive reputation. Key differentiating factors affordable tuition, competent educators, and supportive learning environments serve as catalysts for favorable stakeholder perceptions. In essence, the institutional practices and marketing strategies are mutually reinforcing, producing a coherent and credible brand image.

The pattern emerging from these findings demonstrates a consistent link between strategic marketing activities and positive stakeholder perceptions. Three main elements are observed: (1) operational and environmental factors contribute to credibility, (2) human resource competencies and affordability create functional differentiation, and (3) stakeholder experiences and feedback form a reinforcing loop that consolidates brand image. These patterns suggest that brand image is not merely a result of promotional efforts, but an emergent property of integrated service delivery, institutional culture, and strategic communication.

Table 2. Influence on Brand Image and Public Perception

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"We have noticed that parents often comment on how clean and religious our school environment is, and they appreciate the dedication of our teachers. This feedback shows that our efforts are recognized and valued."	Perceived credibility, influence of institutional culture, stakeholder recognition
Teacher	"Many parents say our tuition fees are reasonable, and they feel that the teachers really care about their children’s progress. This seems to make the school more attractive compared to others in the area."	Functional differentiation through service quality and cost-effectiveness
Student	"Parents often tell us that they are proud to send their children here because the school environment is supportive and organized."	Stakeholder satisfaction, environmental cues reinforcing brand perception
Staff	"Visitors and community members often ask about our programs and comment positively on our activities. This shows that people notice our efforts."	Public awareness, visibility of institutional strengths, reinforcement of reputation

The table indicates that all informants consistently recognize the interplay of service quality, affordability, and environmental cues in shaping public perception. The principal highlights institutional culture and credibility, the teacher emphasizes functional differentiation, and students and staff corroborate stakeholder awareness and

satisfaction. Collectively, these data suggest a pattern in which marketing activities, service delivery, and environmental management are mutually reinforcing, producing a coherent brand image. This pattern indicates that brand image formation is both intentional, through structured marketing, and emergent, through stakeholder experiences and feedback.

The pattern further suggests that institutional differentiators, such as affordable tuition and competent teaching staff, act as catalysts for positive perception, while observable environmental and cultural cues serve as symbolic reinforcements. This interplay creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which marketing and service quality converge to produce sustained awareness, trust, and reputation among stakeholders.

Supporting Factors and Strategic Constraints

Supporting factors and strategic constraints are operationally defined as internal and external conditions that either facilitate or limit the effectiveness of educational service marketing. Supporting factors refer to institutional assets that strengthen marketing performance, including strategic location, competent staff, affordable tuition fees, and the use of digital media to disseminate institutional information. Strategic constraints refer to conditions that hinder the optimal implementation of marketing, such as limited facilities and infrastructure, increasingly competitive educational markets, and the absence of a fully integrated digital branding strategy. Thus, this sub-theme does not merely describe advantages and obstacles as separate categories; rather, it examines how institutional strengths and limitations interact in shaping the sustainability of marketing management and brand image development.

Table 3. Interview Evidence on Supporting Factors and Strategic Constraints

Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Informant
"Our location helps a lot because parents can easily find the school. It is close to the community, so people already know us."	Strategic location as a supporting factor for accessibility and public visibility	Principal
"The school fees are still affordable for most parents, and this becomes one of the reasons they choose this madrasah."	Affordable tuition as a functional advantage in educational service marketing	Administrative Staff
"Teachers here are involved in promotion. We talk to parents, share information, and help explain school programs."	Competent and participatory staff as internal marketing resources	Teacher
"We use social media to post activities, but honestly, we mostly upload documentation. We do not yet have a fixed plan for branding."	Digital adaptation with limited strategic branding orientation	Teacher
"Sometimes we want to promote more, but the facilities are still limited. Other schools may have better buildings or equipment."	Limited infrastructure as a constraint on institutional competitiveness	Administrative Staff
"Competition is getting tougher. Parents compare many schools now, so we have to keep improving our programs and promotion."	External competition requiring continuous innovation	Principal

The interview evidence indicates that the effectiveness of educational service marketing is supported by a combination of institutional accessibility, affordability, human resource participation, and initial digital adaptation. The principal's statement about location shows that physical accessibility functions as more than a geographical advantage; it operates as an entry point for public familiarity and institutional visibility. Similarly, affordable tuition becomes a practical consideration that strengthens the

madrasah's appeal among parents who seek a balance between educational quality and economic feasibility. These findings suggest that marketing effectiveness is partly shaped by functional advantages that are directly perceived by the community. In this sense, the madrasah's marketing strength does not depend solely on promotional messages, but on concrete institutional attributes that correspond to stakeholders' needs.

However, the table also reveals that the existing supporting factors are accompanied by structural and strategic constraints. The involvement of teachers in promotional activities demonstrates strong internal participation, yet the use of social media remains largely documentary rather than strategic. This indicates a gap between digital presence and digital branding. The madrasah has entered the digital communication space, but its content management has not fully developed into a planned mechanism for strengthening institutional identity. In addition, limited facilities and intensifying competition create pressure for institutional innovation. These constraints show that the madrasah's brand competitiveness is not only determined by what it already possesses, but also by its ability to transform limitations into strategic improvements. Therefore, the data point to a tension between existing institutional strengths and the need for more systematic innovation.

Field observations strengthened the interview findings. The madrasah was located in an accessible area and visibly connected to the surrounding community, which supported public recognition and ease of access for parents and prospective students. Teachers and staff were observed to participate in promotional activities, particularly during student admission periods, through information sharing, direct communication with parents, and dissemination of school-related materials. Social media accounts were also used to display student activities, religious programs, and institutional events. Nevertheless, the observed digital content tended to be descriptive and event-based rather than strategically organized around a consistent brand narrative. Observations also showed that several facilities required further development to support a stronger institutional image. The researcher interprets these findings as evidence that the madrasah has substantial marketing assets, but these assets require more coherent integration to achieve sustained branding effectiveness.

Based on the interview and observational data, the researcher restates that the madrasah's educational service marketing is supported by several important factors: a strategic location, affordable tuition fees, competent and participatory staff, and the initial use of social media for public communication. At the same time, the implementation of marketing is constrained by limited facilities, stronger competition among educational institutions, and the underdeveloped use of digital media as a systematic branding instrument. In other words, the madrasah already possesses foundational resources for effective marketing, but these resources have not yet been fully converted into an integrated and sustainable strategic advantage. The central issue is not the absence of marketing potential, but the need to manage that potential more systematically.

The pattern emerging from the data shows a dual structure: supporting factors strengthen institutional visibility and public accessibility, while strategic constraints limit the depth and sustainability of brand differentiation. The first pattern is the dominance of functional advantages, such as location, affordability, and teacher competence, which directly influence public interest. The second pattern is the partial use of digital media, where online communication exists but has not yet become a deliberate branding

strategy. The third pattern is the pressure of competition, which requires the madrasah to move beyond routine promotion toward continuous innovation. Overall, the data suggest that sustainable marketing effectiveness depends on the institution's capacity to integrate its internal strengths with digital optimization and facility improvement.

Table 4. Ideal Influence of Supporting Factors and Strategic Constraints on Marketing Effectiveness

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"Our location helps a lot because parents can easily find the school. It is close to the community, so people already know us."	Accessibility, public visibility, and geographic advantage
Administrative Staff	"The school fees are still affordable for most parents, and this becomes one of the reasons they choose this madrasah."	Affordability as a competitive service attribute
Teacher	"Teachers here are involved in promotion. We talk to parents, share information, and help explain school programs."	Human resource participation in marketing implementation
Teacher	"We use social media to post activities, but honestly, we mostly upload documentation. We do not yet have a fixed plan for branding."	Digital communication exists but lacks strategic branding integration
Administrative Staff	"Sometimes we want to promote more, but the facilities are still limited. Other schools may have better buildings or equipment."	Infrastructure limitation as a barrier to competitiveness
Principal	"Competition is getting tougher. Parents compare many schools now, so we have to keep improving our programs and promotion."	Competitive pressure and need for continuous innovation

Table 4 shows that the ideal influence of supporting factors lies in their capacity to strengthen the institution's value proposition. Strategic location increases visibility and accessibility; affordability broadens market reach; and teacher participation strengthens interpersonal communication with parents and the wider community. These factors are not merely operational advantages but constitute important elements of institutional differentiation. When communicated consistently, they can reinforce the madrasah's position as an accessible, affordable, and service-oriented Islamic educational institution. The table therefore indicates that internal resources can become strategic marketing capital when they are aligned with stakeholder expectations.

At the same time, the table demonstrates that constraints are not peripheral issues, but central determinants of marketing sustainability. Limited infrastructure weakens the symbolic dimension of institutional image, particularly when parents compare the madrasah with competing schools that may offer more complete facilities. Likewise, the absence of a systematic digital branding plan restricts the institution's ability to transform social media visibility into long-term reputation building. The pattern suggests that effective marketing requires more than routine promotional activity. It requires strategic integration among institutional strengths, physical development, digital communication, and continuous innovation. Therefore, the madrasah's future marketing effectiveness depends on its ability to convert existing supporting factors into a coherent competitive advantage while gradually reducing structural and strategic constraints.

The overall data pattern indicates that the madrasah's marketing management is positioned between potential and challenge. On the one hand, it has strong foundational assets, including accessibility, affordability, teacher involvement, and community recognition. On the other hand, it faces limitations in facilities, digital branding, and

competitive differentiation. This pattern demonstrates that the sustainability of educational service marketing depends on strategic consolidation. If supporting factors are managed only as isolated strengths, their impact will remain limited. However, if these strengths are integrated with facility improvement, planned digital branding, and innovation in educational services, they can significantly enhance marketing effectiveness and strengthen institutional brand image.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the madrasah applies a structured marketing process through planning, implementation, and supervision, yet its integration remains incomplete because social media is still used mainly for documentation rather than strategic brand construction. This is consistent with studies showing that educational branding requires coherent visual identity, storytelling, interactive content, and community engagement, not merely routine posting (Leandro et al., 2025; O'Sullivan et al., 2024). The result also aligns with IMC literature, which argues that institutional image becomes stronger when offline promotion, digital communication, public relations, and service delivery transmit a unified message (Glinskaya & Popova, 2025; Nyagadza & Mazuruse, 2021). However, this study differs by showing a transitional pattern: the madrasah already has collective marketing participation, but its digital branding logic has not matured into a long-term narrative system. This gap is crucial because the manuscript shows that teachers, students, and staff participate actively, while strategic branding awareness remains uneven.

The finding that brand image is shaped by affordable tuition, competent teachers, religious environment, cleanliness, and stakeholder satisfaction supports previous research on Islamic educational institutions, where service quality and school image significantly influence satisfaction, trust, and parental preference (Hailat et al., 2021; Khoiroh et al., 2025). In this sense, brand image is not produced by promotion alone, but grows from lived institutional experience. This confirms the view that school branding is an interaction between communicated identity and daily service consistency (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2024; Pang & Zhang, 2024). The difference is that this study emphasizes the symbolic role of religiosity and environmental cues as branding capital, a small but sharp novelty because the madrasah's "clean and religious" atmosphere becomes a reputational asset, not only a moral identity.

Theoretically, this study contributes to educational marketing literature by proposing that madrasah brand image emerges through a triadic mechanism: structured marketing communication, functional service differentiation, and symbolic institutional culture. Prior studies often discuss social media marketing, school image, or service quality separately (Dwivedi, 2024; Song et al., 2023), while this research integrates them into one interpretive model. The novelty lies in showing that partial digital integration can still generate positive public perception when supported by strong service quality and religious-cultural legitimacy, although its impact may remain fragile without strategic branding consolidation. Thus, the study extends IMC and service marketing perspectives into the specific context of Islamic school competition.

Practically, the findings imply that madrasah leaders should move beyond routine promotion toward planned brand storytelling. Brochures, school visits, banners, WhatsApp communication, Instagram posts, and student achievement documentation need to be arranged under one consistent identity: affordable, caring, religious, and academically credible. This is important because current literature shows that social

media engagement and content marketing can influence institutional selection more strongly than passive digital presence (Capriotti et al., 2024), while educational institutions increasingly compete through reputation, accessibility, perceived teacher quality, and facilities (Asiyai, 2022; Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022). The practical impact is clear: if the madrasah can convert its location, affordability, teacher participation, and religious environment into a coherent brand promise, it can strengthen parental trust, student recruitment, and community-based word-of-mouth.

Overall, the study's contribution lies in revealing that educational service marketing in madrasah operates in a tension between strong grassroots visibility and weak strategic digital branding. Its impact is both managerial and social: it helps madrasah administrators understand that institutional image is not a cosmetic campaign, but a cumulative public reading of service quality, culture, affordability, and communication consistency. Compared with existing literature, this research adds contextual novelty by positioning Islamic values and community proximity as brand-forming resources within an integrated marketing framework. Therefore, the study offers a practical model for smaller Islamic educational institutions that cannot rely on luxury facilities, but can build competitive advantage through authenticity, service consistency, and disciplined digital branding.

CONCLUSION

The most important lesson from this study is that madrasah marketing should not be understood merely as promotional activity, brochure distribution, or social media posting, but as a strategic institutional process that connects planning, implementation, supervision, service quality, affordability, teacher competence, religious atmosphere, and public trust into a unified brand image. The findings show that the madrasah already has strong foundational assets, especially community accessibility, affordable tuition fees, participatory teachers, and a clean religious environment, which collectively shape positive public perception. The main scholarly contribution of this study lies in its explanation that brand image in Islamic educational institutions is not produced only by external communication, but also by repeated stakeholder experiences with the institution's real services, values, and daily practices. Thus, this study enriches educational marketing literature by positioning religious culture, community proximity, and service consistency as important elements of brand formation in madrasah contexts. However, this research is still limited because it focuses on one institution and relies on qualitative data, so the findings cannot yet be generalized widely to all madrasah. Future research should involve more schools, compare public and private Islamic institutions, apply mixed-method approaches, and examine more deeply how digital branding, parental trust, service quality, and Islamic identity influence school choice, student recruitment, and long-term institutional competitiveness.

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