

# Strengthening Brand Identity: Embracing Local Wisdom through Character Education Management

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## Abstract:

*The focus of this study is to investigate the role and implementation of character education planning in Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in maintaining the institution's brand identity and strong local values. This study discusses communication dynamics in the pesantren environment and the application of attribution theory in understanding community perceptions. This study explores how communication takes place in the context of pesantren and how attribution theory is used to understand how people interpret messages and actions from pesantren. The research method used is a case study that analyzes communication interactions in certain pesantren and interviews related community members. The results showed that communication in pesantren produces self-awareness, optimization of communication, building a positive image, public education, and collaboration. Attribution theory helps understand how society assigns meaning and interpretation to information received from pesantren. These findings provide valuable insight into the importance of effective communication in building a positive image and increasing public understanding of pesantren. This study's implication is to guide traditional Islamic educational institutions in strengthening brand identity and local values through a planned character education approach.*

**Key Words:** Brand Identity, Communication Dynamics, Pesantren, Community Perception

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization and technological advancements have brought about rapid cultural shifts, impacting traditional educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (Mhlanga et al., 2022; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Tri et al., 2021). The rise of digital platforms and social media has exposed students and communities to diverse global perspectives, often at the expense of local values and long-standing traditions (Florio, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022; Shultz et al., 2022). This cultural dynamic poses a significant challenge for pesantren as they strive to uphold their unique heritage while remaining relevant in an interconnected world (Matthews, 2020; Mazzocchi, 2022; McCormack & Lowe, 2022). In Indonesia, pesantren such as Nurul Jadid play a critical role in character education, blending religious instruction with moral and social values rooted in local wisdom.

However, the growing prevalence of cybercrime, erosion of community norms, and weakening moral foundations highlight the urgent need for a structured approach to preserving pesantren's identity (Matthews, 2020; McCormack & Lowe, 2022). Consequently, understanding how character education can reinforce a pesantren's brand identity is a pressing societal concern and a crucial step toward safeguarding cultural continuity (Alpaslan & Mitroff, 2021; Chatzopoulou & Navazhylava, 2022; Mohiuddin et al., 2022).

Existing research underscores the critical role of character education in shaping individual and collective identity within educational institutions. Several previous studies have explained related similar phenomena where some of them explain that pesantren's challenges in balancing traditional values with modern educational demands (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Mujahid, 2021; Muzammil et al., 2022). Other studies, such as those by Wang et al. (2023), highlight how pesantren practices such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitations, and entrepreneurial activities foster ethical and moral development among students. Tan et al. (2022) demonstrate that brand identity, often associated with commercial entities, can also be applied to educational settings to foster loyalty and maintain public trust. Despite this existing research, limited research has examined how character education can serve as a strategic tool to strengthen brand identity, making this an important area of further investigation.

This research explores how character education management, rooted in local wisdom, can serve as a strategic approach to strengthening the brand identity of pesantren, specifically Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The study addresses a critical question: How can planned character education initiatives help pesantren maintain their unique identity amidst the pressures of modernization and globalization? Although pesantren have long been recognized as religious and moral education centers, the rapid proliferation of competing educational institutions and the encroachment of global cultural influences threaten their traditional role. Therefore, examining the planning, implementation, and evaluation of character education strategies that can reinforce a pesantren's image, enhance public perception, and ensure long-term sustainability is essential. By investigating these aspects, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how pesantren can align their educational practices with branding principles to remain resilient in an evolving educational landscape.

The research had guided the assumption that character education when carefully planned and executed, instills noble values in students and strengthens the pesantren's overall brand identity. It hypothesizes that integrating local wisdom into character education programs can positively influence public perception, foster trust, and maintain institutional distinctiveness. Furthermore, the study assumes that a systematic approach emphasizing consistent values, effective communication, and regular evaluation will improve student outcomes and the pesantren's reputation.

Preliminary findings suggest that a pesantren's adherence to local traditions and ability to adapt to contemporary challenges are key to sustaining its identity and relevance. By testing these hypotheses, the research aims to offer practical recommendations for pesantren and other traditional educational institutions seeking to balance cultural heritage with modern demands, thereby ensuring their continued contribution to society.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, focusing on the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia. This institution was selected due to its distinct local characteristics and long-established educational character system. The study aims to explore the internal dynamics of the institution, as well as the public's perception of the pesantren as both an educational and social entity. Through the case study approach, the research examines various aspects of life within the Islamic boarding school, including communication patterns, religious traditions, and the management of character education based on local wisdom (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Köhler et al., 2022; Pyo et al., 2023). The researcher observes and analyzes how these elements contribute to the identity of the pesantren. The research location includes the pesantren environment, madrasah area, and surrounding communities that have a close relationship with the pesantren. The results of this design are expected to offer a profound understanding of the role of character education in reinforcing the institution's identity through its local wisdom.

The leading information in this study was obtained from various sources directly involved with Islamic boarding schools. Respondents included Kyai as leaders of Islamic boarding schools, *Ustadz* (Teacher) and *Ustadzah* (Teacher woman) who were involved in teaching, senior students who understood the traditions of Islamic boarding schools, and administrative staff who managed educational programs. In addition, interviews were conducted with the community around the pesantren to get their views on the image of the pesantren. Respondents were selected purposively based on their relevance and involvement in the character education process in Islamic boarding schools. This allows researchers to gather in-depth and diverse information, resulting in a comprehensive picture. By utilizing diverse sources of information, this research can provide more complete insights and support the validity of the findings.

The data collection techniques in this study include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to dig into in-depth information from the interviewees while being flexible in adjusting questions based on responses. Observation was carried out by observing daily activities in the pesantren, including recitation activities, implementing congregational prayers, and other pesantren traditions.

Documentation includes analysis of official documents, activity reports, and records of educational programs. The data obtained is analyzed through three stages: reduction, where irrelevant data are filtered; data presentation (display) that helps visualize the relationship between findings; and verification, where the analysis results are retested to ensure validity and consistency. With this approach, the research will likely provide in-depth and accurate insights into the role of character education in maintaining the identity of Islamic boarding schools.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **Character Education Planning in Maintaining the Brand Identity**

Character education planning in Islamic boarding schools is critical in preserving and strengthening the institution's brand identity. The planning of character education focuses on developing students' character and seeks to integrate local values that define the institution's identity. This planning process involves identifying the core values to be taught, such as religiosity, discipline, independence, and a sense of social responsibility. Additionally, character education planning encompasses the development of a structured curriculum that ensures each educational level within the pesantren has clear objectives in shaping the students' character. Through careful planning, pesantren can cultivate an environment that promotes the formation of a positive and consistent image, which in turn reinforces the institution's brand identity in the eyes of the public. The results of the documentation related to the General Policy Direction of the Islamic Boarding School (AKUP) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows four priority programs to be implemented under the Islamic boarding school's general policy direction (AKUP). The first program focuses on enhancing the role of the pesantren as an educational institution, which includes internalizing pesantren values, developing a tiered curriculum, and shaping students' character through independence and the spirit of the corps. The second program aims to optimize cadre regeneration and da'wah as a form of community empowerment by empowering students, administrators, and da'wah institutions through digital media. The third program is concerned with improving pesantren services, which includes fulfilling student facility needs, digitizing services, and providing health services. The final program emphasizes empowering the pesantren's economic potential toward independence, developing business units, increasing participation in pesantren income generation, and fostering cooperation with external parties. Overall, the AKUP of the Islamic boarding school aims to enhance the quality of education, community empowerment, services, and the economy of the institution sustainably.

**Table 1. General Policy Direction of Islamic Boarding School (AKUP)  
Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School**

<b>Priority Programs</b>	<b>Sub-program</b>
Increasing the role of Islamic boarding schools as educational and development institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Internalization of pesantren values through understanding and practicing Furu'dhul Ainiyah (FA)</li> <li>b. Development of the pesantren curriculum in stages</li> <li>c. Optimization of pesantren through the integration of the pesantren curriculum</li> <li>d. Improvement of essential HR competencies and skills</li> <li>e. Formation of student character through independence and corporal spirit</li> </ul>
Optimizing the role of pesantren through regeneration and da'wah as community empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Empowerment of student and management cadres in stages</li> <li>b. Empowerment of the role of Islamic boarding school da'wah institutions and duty teachers</li> <li>c. Optimizing the role of online media as a means of information and digital da'wah for Islamic boarding schools</li> </ul>
Improvement of pesantren services in fulfilling integrated management quality standards through empowerment of pesantren and community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Fulfillment of student facilities as a standard of essential service for Islamic boarding schools</li> <li>b. Optimizing the role of digitizing ISO-based pesantren standard services</li> <li>c. Improvement of Islamic boarding school services in the field of public health through the provision of public hospitals</li> </ul>
Empowerment of the economic potential of pesantren towards an independent pesantren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Development of business units as an acceleration of pesantren business growth</li> <li>b. Increasing the participation of pesantren businesses in fulfilling pesantren income</li> <li>c. Increasing the business of pesantren through cooperation and partnerships outside the pesantren</li> </ul>

This study found that character education planning in Islamic boarding schools is crucial in maintaining and strengthening the institution's brand identity. Through careful planning, pesantren can integrate local and religious values characteristic of the institution into students' character education. Priority programs outlined in the General Policy Direction of Islamic Boarding Schools (AKUP), such as the development of a tiered curriculum, enhancement of human resource competence, and character building through independence, focus on strengthening the role of pesantren as educational institutions grounded in religious and social values.

### **Implementation of Character Education in Maintaining the Brand Identity**

The study's findings indicate that the approach used in implementing character education involves four main strategies: First, integrating the character education content formulated into all subjects. Second, character education should be incorporated into daily activities at the institution. Third, character education should be embedded into programmed or planned activities. Fourth, fostering cooperative communication between the institution and the parents of students.

One of the applications of character education is integrating it into the existing curriculum in formal institutions. This integration is carried out to develop intervention activities, where character education that is embedded in all subjects is closely related to the noble values that define the institution. Thus, learning character values is not only at the cognitive level but also linked to internalization and real-life experiences in students' daily lives. Examples of such routine activities include Isighosah Akbar (ISTIKBAR) and Commemoration of Islamic Holidays (PHBI), National Santri Day ceremonies, and student development activities, all mandatory for students as shown in the following activities in Table 2.

**Table 2. Implementation of Character Education in Maintaining the Brand Identity**

Activity	Description	Evidence (Images)
Isighosah Akbar (ISTIKBAR)	A routine spiritual activity where students gather for collective prayer and reflection.	
Commemoration of Islamic Holidays (PHBI)	Ceremonial events mark significant Islamic holidays, fostering religious values.	
National Santri Day Ceremonies	A national event that celebrates the contributions of Islamic boarding schools and their students.	
Student Development Activities	Activities designed to foster personal growth, leadership, and social responsibility.	

This activity is categorized as a routine activity carried out by students continuously and consistently. Integrating character education into routine and development activities aligns with the supplement model theory, which emphasizes implementing character education through extracurricular activities. The advantages of this model lie in the concrete experiences students gain and the development of their affective abilities.

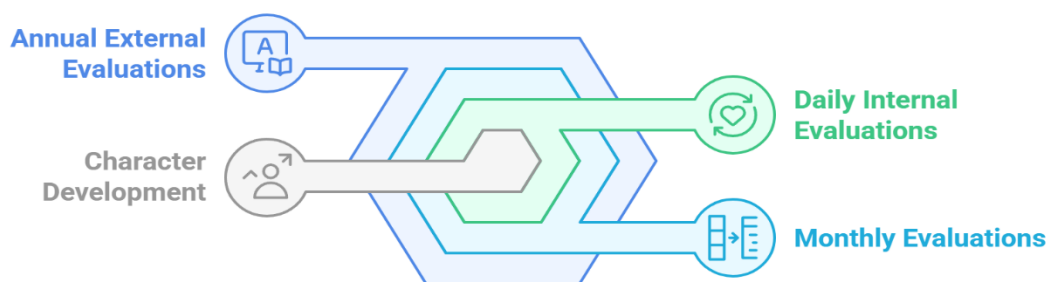
### Evaluation of Character Education in Maintaining the Brand Identity

In this study, the evaluation of character education in Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is one of the important aspects of maintaining the brand identity of the Islamic boarding school. Based on data collected through interviews with caregivers and students, it was found that pesantren implemented two types of

evaluation: internal and external. Internal evaluations are carried out daily through the student muhasabah book and are supervised by supervisors tasked with monitoring the development of the student's character. External evaluations are carried out by the deputy head of the pesantren at the end of the year to assess the achievement of the program, and monthly evaluations and leadership evaluations are carried out every two months.

Internal evaluations carried out daily are very effective in providing direct feedback to students regarding their character development. This process allows for continuous improvement, which is important in forming a sustainable character. For example, in an interview with a senior student, he explained, "Daily evaluations really help us to remind ourselves of the values taught, such as discipline and responsibility" (RSP-03, 2023). The data also show that the integration between formal teaching and routine activities such as congregational prayers, learning the Yellow Book, and daily supervision by a supervisor plays a significant role in shaping their character.

Every year, External evaluations focus on achieving broader goals, namely whether Pesantren has succeeded in maintaining its identity in the increasingly growing world of education. In addition, monthly evaluations also provide an overview of success or failure in achieving shorter goals. As stated by the caregiver of the pesantren, "Annual external evaluation helps us assess whether we are on the right track in educating the character of students" (RSP-02, 2023). Departing from the interviews conducted with several informants, the study was then analyzed to find the substance of the research findings, which are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Evaluation Process in Character Development**

Departing from Figure 1. which emphasizes the importance of integrated evaluation in maintaining the identity of the pesantren. Internal and external evaluations complement each other in monitoring student character development and the effectiveness of character education programs. Through regular internal and annual external evaluations, pesantren can ensure that the character values taught remain relevant and well internalized in students' daily lives. In this way, pesantren not only succeed in academic education but also in shaping a character shaped by the brand identity of the pesantren itself.

## Discussion

The findings align with recent studies emphasizing the importance of aligning character education with institutional identity. Several related studies have made it clear that character education integrated with local cultural values significantly strengthens the identity of educational institutions (Brown & Shay, 2021; Jubba et al., 2021; Pizzutilo & Venezia, 2021). Similarly, research by Pazienza (2022) underscores the importance of coherent, value-based education in fostering long-term institutional sustainability and public recognition. These studies suggest that character education plays a crucial role in the development of students and in enhancing the visibility and identity of the institution itself. Thus, the correlation between strategic character education planning and brand identity is consistent with global educational policy trends that advocate preserving institutional identity through educational values.

The implementation of character education provides profound implications for the role of daily routines and activities in shaping student character. By embedding character education within formal curricula and daily practices, the pesantren create a holistic environment where values are consistently reinforced, contributing to academic and moral development. Integrating activities such as ISTIKBAR and the National Santri Day Ceremony into students' daily lives allows character education to transcend the classroom and become part of the students' lived experiences.

These findings resonate with the work of scholars like Pike et al. (2021), who argue that character education programs are most effective when values are internalized through daily practice rather than abstract teaching. A study by Zguir et al. (2021) similarly concluded that embedding character education into school routines, such as morning assemblies and communal activities, significantly improves student engagement with values. These global studies highlight the connection between daily engagement with character-building activities and the long-term internalization of values. The correlation between this approach and the findings at Boarding Schools strengthens the argument that integrating character education into daily routines fosters more profound, more lasting behavioral change among students. The dual evaluation model adopted this Boarding School aligns with best practices found in the literature on effective character education. For instance, other studies have highlighted the importance of formative and summative assessments in evaluating the success of character education programs (Muzammil et al., 2022; Puad & Ashton, 2023; Thompson & Meer, 2021).

Formative assessments, such as internal evaluations, provide ongoing feedback, while summative assessments, like external evaluations, offer a holistic view of the program's overall impact. This dual approach ensures that character education remains aligned with both immediate educational objectives and long-term institutional goals. Thus, the combination of internal and external evaluations supports a dynamic, responsive approach to character education,



mirroring findings from global studies that advocate for comprehensive evaluation systems in educational settings.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of character education planning in strengthening the brand identity of Islamic boarding schools, especially in Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on character education in faith-based educational institutions, by highlighting the importance of integrating local and religious values in the curriculum to form a consistent and positive image. This research also contributes to understanding how character education can be applied holistically through the formal curriculum, daily routines, and programmatic activities, leading to internalizing those values in students' lives. By highlighting Pesantren's internal and external evaluations, this study provides insight into the importance of a continuous evaluation mechanism in ensuring that character values remain relevant and profound. This contribution enriches theories about character education and institutional identity management in Islamic education.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, this study shows that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of character education in Boarding Schools runs in a planned and integrated manner. A systematic management approach in character education planning ensures that character values are well integrated into the daily activities of pesantren. Integrating character values into the formal curriculum, daily activities, and planned activities allows students to internalize and apply these values practically. In addition, good communication between pesantren and guardians and internal and external evaluations provide a strong foundation for continuous improvement in student character formation. Thus, this research makes an important finding for understanding and implementing character education in Islamic boarding schools. It is a valuable reference for other educational institutions to strengthen character education.

Future research should conduct a more thorough study on the effectiveness of the learning methods employed in implementing character education. This study could involve interviews with boarding school administrators and students and the analysis of evaluation results. Additionally, further research could focus on developing strategies to enhance participation and active involvement from all components of the pesantren in implementing character education. Thus, it is hoped that subsequent studies will offer deeper insights and provide more practical solutions for optimizing character education within the pesantren environment.

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