

Islamic Branding: Insights from Strengthening Madrasah Competitiveness in Building Public Trust

Ghufron¹, Moh Khusnurridlo², Najiburrahman³, Hasan Baharun⁴,
Moh Najib Hasbullah Muchlis⁵

^{1,2}Islamic Educational Management Department, Universitas Islam Negeri KH Achmad Siddiq Jember, East Java, Indonesia

^{3,4,5}Islamic Educational Management Department, Universitas Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia

Email: ghufronmaksu123@gmail.com¹, ridlostainjbr@gmail.com², najiburrahman@unuja.ac.id³, ha54nbaharun@gmail.com⁴, adark694@gmail.com⁵

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the madrasah branding strategy in increasing the competitiveness of institutions to win the competition between educational institutions. This study uses a qualitative approach to the type of case study. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews and documentation. The data analysis was carried out circularly, starting from data collection, reduction, data display and conclusion. The results show that madrasah branding in increasing the competitiveness of its institutions is carried out through continuous planning, implementation and evaluation by involving all madrasah residents to be involved in realizing shared goals by utilizing various available platforms. This research has implications for the importance of being involved in totality to design and implement a program to achieve the desired targets optimally.

Keywords: *Madrasah Branding, Competitiveness, Community Trust*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang strategi branding madrasah dalam meningkatkan daya saing lembaga, sehingga mampu memenangkan persaingan antar lembaga Pendidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan datanya dilakukan melalui observasi, interviues dan dokumentasi. Analisis datanya dilakukan secara sirkuler, yang dimulai dari pengumpulan data, reduksi data, display data dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa branding madrasah dalam meningkatkan daya saing lembaganya dilakukan melalui perencanaan, pelaksanaan dan evaluasi berkelanjutan dengan melibatkan semua warga madrasah untuk terlibat secara totalitas demi mewujudkan cita-cita bersama, dengan memanfaatkan berbagai platform yang telah tersedia. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi tentang pentingnya pelibatan secara totalitas untuk mendesain dan melaksanakan suatu program, agar supaya target yang diinginkan dapat tercapai secara optimal.

Kata Kunci: *Branding Madrasah, Daya Saing, Kepercayaan Masyarakat*

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INTRODUCTION

The community determines educational institutions' progress because the progress can be seen by how far the community can trust these institutions to carry out their duties (Kusumawati, 2021). Therefore, educational institutions or leaders must create strategies that can create a climate and institutional culture that is dynamic and responsive to the progress of the community's needs in their surrounding environment (Arifin et al., 2021).

Over the last five years, the Government and several educational institutions have been busy making various scenarios to deal with educational liberalization so that education in Indonesia can compete globally (Jonyo & Jonyo, 2017). Education now and in the past has differences, namely moral education today has begun to shift because it is no longer the nation's character, nature and personal benchmark. The rapid change in science, technology, modernization and industrialization is driving the shift in the system, direction and governance of education (Yang, 2018).

Education in the current Global Era has become a necessity consciously recognized by society. This can be proven by the fact that people compete to find the best educational institutions for their children according to their big goals (Cockun, Erdocdu, & Kokoc, 2020). Therefore, educational institutions must be creative and lead in carrying out educational activities that lead to these goals. Increasing the number of educational institutions will be a big challenge for education providers (Samawi, 2021).

Managers of educational institutions are also required to continue to innovate and think critically in finding new ideas to maintain excellence and develop educational institutions by the demands of the times so that they can compete in the struggle for labels or madrasa branding based on educational goals and education customer satisfaction (Diana et al., 2020).

Branding is an interpretation, a set of knowledge and recreations. It is a symbol because, in this case, it is not the object itself but refers to the object. Furthermore, the physical reality of products, brands and organizations, images including meanings, beliefs, attitudes and feelings towards something (Lee & Chen, 2018). Madrasah branding owned by educational institutions varies. Islamic Branding is needed to shape people's perceptions, build people's trust in Islamic branding and build a sense of community love. The purpose of this branding is one thing that is very beneficial for educational institutions. Strong Islamic branding will make customers trust educational institutions more.

Therefore, education management is critical because the development and growth of education are determined by the ability to manage educational institutions. This is the duty of the Head of the Madrasah and public relations in particular, to market educational institutions to get the image expected by the community (Das et al., 2020). The Madrasah brand can be built through the frequent occurrence of various events related to parties outside the institution, as well as making banners that contain student achievements; in this way, it will attract public interest. Thus, madrasas will have a good image and be able to compete with other superior schools (Maresova et al., 2020).

The results of preliminary observations in the field show that the Nahdlatul Ulama' Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Kraksaan, Probolinggo is an Islamic Education Institution with a high branding value. Imagine, in plain view, this madrasa uses the label of the most prominent Islamic religious organization in Indonesia, namely Nahdlatul Ulama' to gain sympathy from the community, considering that this organization is a single majority in Probolinggo Regency. Through labelling and supported by continuous improvement in the quality of education, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' will gain a place in the community's hearts and become an advanced educational institution with competitive advantages.

This study is based on the results of research by Sergeyeva et al. (2021), who said that brand image is a set of associations in the minds of a brand that are stored in the minds or memories of consumers. Muhammad et al. (2021) said that one of the impacts of branding formation in increasing school competitiveness is increased interest in joining the community and increased public trust. Naim, Aziz, and Teguh (2022) say that brand image is a set of associations in the minds of a brand that are stored in the minds or memories of consumers.

Educational institutions must also provide information about programs that will be implemented in learning activities to ensure the community can trust these institutions. Therefore, educational institutions must continue to strive to make institutions the most superior to increase general attractiveness. Every parent should find the best school for their child (Chen, 2016).

Many educational institutions sprung up then and eventually became stiff competition. Schools compete to get as many students as possible while remembering the quality of their education (Koowuttayakorn, 2018). In the view of Islam, a competitive advantage is that which is essential, namely, that which can bring people into heaven provided by Allah. For an essential advantage, Islam teaches to place competitors as partners rather than enemies that must be fought, their ugliness removed, and their steps blocked (Syahrizal & Pamungkas, 2021).

Competitiveness is an ability or advantage used to compete in specific markets (Prihantoro, 2020). This competitiveness is created through continuous development at all organisational levels, especially in the production sector. An organisation can improve its performance if it carries out continuous development (Akihary & Apituley, 2019).

Kurniawan (2021) and Suyitno (2021) say that quality improvement in increasing competitiveness is an activity in which Madrasa Heads, teaching staff, quality improvement teams and stakeholders try to compete in skills, strengths, knowledge and so on through a focused strategy to improve quality by achieving a specific size.

MI Nahdlatul Ulama' is one of the brands in the world of Islamic education. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' develops the legacy of religious figures in Nahdlatul Ulama'. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' has excellent hopes in Islamic education, continuously striving to improve and develop Islamic values embodied in the learning process. Therefore, to increase competitiveness in madrasah, Madrasah branding is needed as a form of strategy

to build public trust. Through these branding activities, it is hoped that educational institutions can increasingly influence prospective students and increase madrasahs' competitiveness. Therefore, in this case, the researcher focuses his study on Islamic branding to increase the competitiveness of madrasah.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to the type of case study. His research site is at the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Elementary School in Kraksaan, Probolinggo, East Java. This study aims to dissect the meaning behind madrasah branding activities in building public trust and increasing competitiveness amid competition between educational institutions.

Researchers use observation, interviews and documentation to systematically obtain data in the field to obtain information about the theme being studied. The informants in this study consisted of 7 informants selected by purposive sampling, consisting of the head of the Madrasah, the deputy head of the Madrasah, teachers and employees. Data analysis begins with the presentation of the data as a whole; then, data analysis is carried out, namely grouping and selecting the collected data that has been determined, and finally, drawing research conclusions as research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In carrying out an activity, first determining what to do, how to do it, what to do and who has to do it is planning. Planning or planning is a function of a series of management activities to achieve a goal (Ngari et al., 2018). Associated with the problem of patterns in the education sector, strategic planning can be implemented in educational planning. With strategic planning, there is a tendency to obtain a more operational program formulation. Various internal and external factors that can influence need to be considered in this planning process (Harini, 2014).

According to ACH-1, the leader at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' said that; planning activity is significant with various strategies and supporting factors so that it will produce superior madrasah activities or programs. In line with this opinion, ACH-4, as part of Public Relations, said that a strategy is needed for a unique program that involves all existing aspects.

Planning an image branding strategy at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan madrasah, one of which is creating a flagship madrasah program. Madrasahs make this flagship program to meet the needs of their students in order to get quality learning according to their wishes. Educational institutions must also provide information about programs that will be implemented in learning activities to ensure the community can trust these institutions.

Therefore, educational institutions must continue to strive to make institutions the most superior to increase general attractiveness. Every parent should find the best school for their child. The National Education Standards, according to government regulation number 19 of 2005, are the minimum criteria regarding the education system throughout the territory of the Unitary State of

the Republic of Indonesia, including graduation competency standards, content standards, process standards, educator and education staff standards, facilities and infrastructure standards, management standards, financing standards, and assessment standards (Wati & Setiabudi, 2022). One of the characteristics of the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan is that there is a unique program in the form of adding academic achievement classes, specialization classes, Tahfidzul Qur'an classes, and most recently, the Sports Achievement class. The planning process makes this program run well according to the planning stages that were prepared concerning the annual work program of the head of MI Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan.

For educational institutions, planning is essential because planning will play a vital role in the movement of the institution in the future. That is why it is necessary to apply a systems approach to educational planning whose strategy aims to find forms and identity in the future by considering various complex relationships within a system (Armendáriz et al., 2018). Planning can affect education's success, which is carried out with a positive approach.

Planning is a fundamental choice, and planning problems arise when alternatives arise (Safitri & Sa'dudin, 2019). A plan is a crucial step and arises from several alternatives in the form of strategies implemented to achieve a goal to be achieved. As is the case with the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama, several strategic plans are used to increase the competitiveness of institutions. In this finding, the researcher found that there were three plans, including a) Forming a TPM (Madrasa Development Team), b) forming a TPMM (Madrasa Quality Assurance Team), and c) planning for madrasah publication.

According to ACH-3 as a teacher at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama, said that planning a flagship program at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' was carried out by prior deliberation so that in practice, it will produce optimal and maximum output. The results of this decision serve as a guide to running the madrasah work program.

In the planning process for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama 'conduct deliberations and consensus to get good decisions and then carry out these decisions as best as possible according to a predetermined plan. Strategic planning is becoming increasingly important because Madrasa Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama Kraksaan realizes that formulating reasonable goals and strategies will guide achieving goals. In addition, if you have precise strategic planning, you will form a program supporting madrasah.

The second is to form the Madrasah Quality Assurance Team (TPMM) and TPM (Madrasa Development Team). TPMM (Madrasa Quality Development Team) to help improve student achievement in both academic and non-academic fields while the TPM (Madrasa Development Team) This team was formed to create madrasah programs and budget costs when there are activities. There are 11 TPM members. Three core members represent several standards, namely content standards, process standards, assessment standards, graduate competencies, educator and education staff standards, management standards, financing standards, and facilities and infrastructure standards. The existence of teamwork will help madrasahs more easily formulate programs or ideas.

Humans are social creatures. Therefore, humans must cooperate with others in terms of goodness. For example, a team was formed to help the Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah achieve its goals. According to ACH-2 as the headmaster of the Madrasa Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan said that in advancing MI Nurul Istiqomah it was carried out with an optimal strategy, one of which was media publication by displaying the image of the Madrasa Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan to the community and the surrounding environment.

The third is the madrasah publication plan. Madrasah publications are carried out by madrasah public relations, whose purpose is to introduce madrasahs to the public. Public relations is a bridge within schools to create relationships (relationships) with anyone who provides reciprocity and advances the institution. The relationship between the school and the community is a tool that plays a vital role in fostering and developing the personal growth of school students. The planning process carried out by public relations is to publish all activities and information on Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' to the public via social media, directly or offline. This is intended so that people can see and have views of madrasahs.

According to ACH-1 as the leader of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' said that, in the aspect of publication, the institution uses media that is attractive to the public, either through making pamphlets, flyers, or publication on several social media, so that it is easy for the public to listen to and obtain.

Madrasah publications have functions like madrasah marketing. Madrasa managers need to continue to publish madrasahs through media such as banners, bulletin boards, brochures, billboards, pamphlets, calendars, newspapers, radio, social networks (FB, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok) and so on. Publication activities for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' are also carried out by holding activities that involve the community directly in various forms, such as health walks, slaughtering sacrificial animals, cleaning mosques, graves, participating in caring for community corpses, and so on.

According to ACH-4, the Public Relations field at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama Kraksaan said that the competitive advantages of the madrasa must be highlighted in publications, for example, the achievements of the students and the excellence of the madrasa program and so on. This must be conveyed to the public so that they know about the program achievements that have been achieved by the Institute so far.

The publication concerns at least two contents: madrasa achievements and acceptance of new students. Whatever madrasa achievements, both academic and non-academic. Madrasah publications also concern the acceptance of new students. Madrasahs must implement an effective new student acceptance strategy in many ways. Consider accepting new students earlier and longer. The madrasa conducts intensive outreach to TK/RA/BA. In addition, a friendly approach to community leaders and religious leaders where the madrasa is located is critical.

This is the right step to introduce educational institutions to the surrounding community. With the existence of a marketing mix, educational

institutions can develop their existence by what is needed by society at this time with the continuous introduction of educational institutions. Thus the institutional marketing communications built by the institution will encourage the surrounding community to be loyal to the institution's brand (Bakar & Hasanah, 2021). Of the three plans carried out by madrasahs, it is hoped that they can be appropriately implemented to achieve the madrasah's goals.

Implementation is the realization of the plans made to achieve a goal. Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, it is known that the implementation of branding image strategies in increasing the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan are: a) creating special madrasah programs, b) increasing achievement, and c) shaping student character.

According to ACH-4, the Public Relations field at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' said that, after careful planning, the implementation would be carried out optimally by involving all madrasa residents to produce maximum results. This success will be used as a basis for compiling future programs.

The statement above shows that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' is serious about carrying out the branding of its institution so. That can be explained as follows; First, the madrasa made a flagship program by adding class models, which became one of the madrasah's Islamic branding strategies and appealed to the community. This flagship program is also intended to accommodate the needs of students according to the interests of the students themselves.

One of the patterns in the competitive strategy is increasing consumers by providing programs or majors needed by the market and providing new things. Madrasahs must continue to innovate, create something new, and create value that is not easily imitated so that they continue to foster community loyalty and trust in educational institutions.

A brand is a name or symbol (such as a logo, trademark or packaging design) or a combination thereof that identifies a product or service produced by a company (Pringle & Fritz, 2019). The identification aims to differentiate it from products and services offered by competing companies. The brand is a guide for consumers about the source of the product and protects consumers and producers from competitors who try to copy the products produced by the company. With several excellent programs implemented by the madrasa, it is hoped that it will become a separate brand that can become a selling point for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' to the community (Farida, 2016).

The second is to increase madrasa achievement in both academic and non-academic fields. If the madrasa's achievement is good, it will also create a good image for the madrasa. In this case, several madrasa strategies are used to improve achievement, namely through the coaching and development of students, both in the academic and non-academic fields, namely through extracurricular and extracurricular activities. Achievement is the key to any of our activities. In education, achievement certainly concerns three things: madrasah achievement, teacher achievement, and student achievement (Anderson, 2020). Madrasahs that are of interest are madrasahs that excel in various

fields. Likewise, the teacher must excel and be highly committed to advancing the madrasah. However, to attract interest in madrasahs by increasing student achievement (Usman, 2017).

The quality of education is closely related to forming quality students. In order to improve the quality of education, a problem that must receive attention is how students learn. The existence of a learning process will later provide an overview of changes in students, either in the form of knowledge or behaviour, which will measure student success in learning which is called learning achievement. This learning achievement will be the final point in determining the success of education in educating students with planned and standardized activities.

The third is to shape the character of students. Moral issues in madrasah education are central. Even the presence of the Prophet Muhammad SAW on the face of the earth is essential to improve human morals. So that moral issues become central in activities in madrasahs.

In shaping the character of students through religious and social coaching. In addition to these activities, madrasahs also improve discipline and instil values in madrasahs that can affect students' character, namely the habit of being honest, away from drugs, and away from criminals. The existence of madrasah rules for fostering student discipline, and there are points for students who violate them. In shaping students' character, creating a positive image of the madrasah in society is essential.

Many strategies can be developed in advancing education, especially Ma'arif in practising the concept of branding and teaching within his institution, one of which is by utilizing existing facilities so that students are more knowledgeable about existing assistive media tools, in addition to existing soft skills explored. However, the potential abilities of students must also be explored as has been applied by the Nahdlatul Ulama achievement 'by applying the pattern of students' character, which is a priority by galvanizing the study of books on morals every Saturday. This school also provides space for students to explore hidden talents by participating in complete extracurricular activities every Saturday. It has been proven that the achievements obtained at the school are numerous at the National, Regional and provincial levels.

Good personal branding is one factor that makes Islam acceptable to people of various races, ethnicities and cultures around the world. As is the case with the achievement of Nahdlatul Ulama', namely forming positive student character through activities and habits instilled through their religious values to elevate their image before the surrounding community.

Results are the final part of a plan. The results are obtained because of the implementation or application carried out through a strategy that is carried out. Of the several results that have been obtained, they must continue to be evaluated with the principle of continuous improvement. Successes and failures must be recorded as a guide for improving and compiling future programs so that better special programs will be obtained and various problems that have befallen failures can be suppressed as much as possible.

There are at least four criteria that can be used to help educational institutions identify resources that can support competitive advantage, as follows; Valuable, to support the excellence of educational institutions, a resource must be valuable. In this case, it is explained that capacity improves efficiency and organizational effectiveness and generates innovation. Rare resources must be rare, not widely available or complex and in high demand. It can also support the competitiveness of educational institutions. Difficult to imitate, in this case, educational institutions must be more creative and innovative so that it is easier for competitors to imitate. The resource must be challenging to replace or find a replacement or substitution.

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation conducted by researchers, these madrasahs' branding image strategies to increase their competitiveness are a) Giving madrasah identity, b) increasing the number of prospective new students, and c) the quality of graduates.

First, giving an identity to the madrasa. An Islamic Branding will provide a separate identity for the madrasa. This is the theory of brand formation. Namely, the uniqueness of brand association is the uniqueness of a product brand that will be seen by others and give a different image from competitors. This is meant as a madrasa that is different from the others. When the brand image of the madrasa is good, the result is that the madrasa will have its characteristics and identity for the madrasa. This is by one of the four criteria put forward by Barney, namely rare and difficult to imitate. When a madrasah already has its own identity, it will be rare and difficult to imitate its competitors. It can also support the competitiveness of educational institutions.

Second, increase the number of prospective students. With a good strategy, there will be a distinctive feature for madrasahs so that people are interested in enrolling their sons and daughters in MI Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan. The influence of the branding image for MI Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan is significant to make people continue to trust madrasahs and can increase the number of registrants.

Every educational institution is forced to deal with other institutions in an era of competition that is developing very rapidly. All institutions generally wish to be able to perform their best to attract market attention. Educational institutions must produce good quality, increase their competitive advantage and improve their image to gain the community's trust.

Based on the results of an interview with ACH-7 as a teacher at the Nahdlatul Ulama, achievement said that, from year to year, the number of registrants in this madrasa is increasing. It is just that it is limited to 6 classes. For 2021/2022, there is only a limit of 30 quotas for admitting new students. The ratio between the number of applicants and participants accepted has increased.

Third, the quality of graduates. Nahdlatul Ulama's achievement is very concerned about the quality of its graduates. With an excellent institutional image, the input obtained during PPDB is also good. So that the Institute has sufficient capital for further development and can produce sound and quality output. The quality of madrasah graduates is quite good. This is evidenced by the large number of students who are accepted at leading educational

institutions. Islamic Branding is not only seen from the advantages possessed by a sich, but the quality of graduates is also one of the results of the implementation of the branding image strategy implemented at this institution. as well as the existence of coaching both in the academic and non-academic fields and the instilling of values that can affect the character of students can make quality graduates.

CONCLUSION

Madrasa Ibtidaiyah Nahdlatul Ulama' Kraksaan is a madrasah institution under LP Ma'arif NU Kraksaan with myriad achievements. Madrasah branding is carried out through branding planning, implementation and evaluation of branding activities which are carried out in a planned, systematic and continuous manner. Through this branding strategy, madrasahs have won a place in the community's hearts. Hence, their existence is no longer considered a second choice but has become an educational institution whose existence is reckoned with.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to all Islamic Education Institutions. All Educational Institutions can use this exact strategy to increase their competitiveness. However, the research findings apply to the same culture and characteristics of society, thus providing opportunities for further research to complement each other through different contexts and situations and conditions of society, to add to the scientific treasures of management of Islamic Education.

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