

Elevating Educational Quality: A Management Strategy to Enhancing Muhammadiyah School Branding

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Abstract:

This research focuses on understanding the management carried out by Muhammadiyah schools to improve the quality of education by implementing branding strategies so that public trust becomes more robust and can benefit users of educational services. This research aims to examine the management of Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational School in improving the quality of education. This research uses a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were carried out using interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of the study show that branding strategies that schools can implement to improve the quality of education include analyzing brand identity, brand personality, brand positioning, and brand communication, as well as increasing public trust by improving the quality management of school accreditation, improving school facilities and infrastructure, increasing student achievement, developing superior programs that are the hallmark of the school, creating attractive taglines that are implemented in school programs, expanding collaboration networks, increasing the selling value of the school by uploading each event on social media.

Keywords: *Branding, Network Collaboration, Public Trust*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini berfokus pada pemahaman manajemen yang dilakukan oleh sekolah Muhammadiyah untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan dengan melakukan strategi branding, sehingga kepercayaan masyarakat semakin kuat dan dapat memberi manfaat bagi pengguna layanan jasa pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tentang manajemen SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa strategi branding yang dapat dilakukan sekolah untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan diantaranya dengan menganalisis brand identity, brand personality, brand positioning, dan brand communication, serta meningkatkan kepercayaan masyarakat dengan; meningkatkan manajemen mutu akreditasi sekolah, meningkatkan fasilitas dan sarana prasarana sekolah, meningkatkan prestasi siswa, mengembangkan program unggulan yang menjadi ciri khas sekolah, membuat tagline yang menarik dan direalisasikan dengan program-program sekolah, memperluas jaringan kerjasama, meningkatkan nilai jual sekolah melalui unggahan setiap event di media sosial.

Kata Kunci: *Branding, Jaringan Kerjasama, Kepercayaan Masyarakat*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is faced with intense competition between schools to maintain its existence. Many new schools compete to get new students during the new school year. Competition between educational institutions is becoming more competitive because there are more and more educational institutions, so a change in strategy is needed to manage educational institutions (Banerjee, 2018). As education continues to grow and develop, increased competition puts more and more pressure on institutions to market their programs. Technological, social, and economic changes require that marketing systems be customer-oriented and focus on developing school brands (Nguyen et al., 2019). Marketing and branding of education occupy a vital space today in the highly competitive school market (Dass et al., 2021). Educational institutions must strive to retain enrolled students and attract new students to prevent a decrease in the number of students (Cantu et al., 2021) because the survival of educational institutions depends on the number of students (Nakalyakaani & Bisaso, 2020). Based on this, school marketing is needed so that the community remembers the existence of schools.

Increasing community welfare causes changes in people's views on education. As a result, people become more selective in choosing educational institutions (Hidayatun, 2017). Along with increasing public awareness of the importance of quality education, there are other things besides cheap and even free education for parents to choose educational services for their children (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). Many parents choose private schools with good quality educational services (Srivastava & Walford, 2008). Research shows that school selection by parents is strongly influenced by parental education and family socioeconomic factors (Sattin-Bajaj, 2015). Most parents consider several things in choosing a school for their children, including the school's curriculum, school buildings, facilities and infrastructure, the ratio of the number of students to teachers, the safety of the school environment, the interaction between teachers and students, the quality of teachers in teaching. Parents with an excellent religious educational background will choose private schools with religious excellence programs (Howell, 2004).

Based on this, there are similarities with the results of research Rollefson (2015), which identify parents' considerations in selecting their children's schools, including teachers and principals who care about students, teachers and principals who are competent, safety and security of students, the quality of the curriculum implemented, technology existing facilities, school facilities, and graduate students. Harris & Larsen (2015) added that for some parents, extracurricular activities are one of the reasons for choosing a school.

Muhammadiyah is an Islamic organization that focuses on playing a role in improving the quality of education in Indonesia (Sugiarti et al., 2020). Muhammadiyah eroded the socio-cultural dichotomy and educational dualism between public school education and religious education by establishing Islamic educational institutions pioneered by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and called the "School of Modern Religion." Muhammadiyah, with the strength of the community, can expand the spread of Muhammadiyah schools throughout the country. However, the emergence of new Islamic private schools that offer alternative educational

models targeting upper-middle-class Muslim families is challenging for Muhammadiyah schools to remain competitive and become quality schools. Facing these problems, Muhammadiyah schools must be able to transform into modern schools/improving schools and become excellent schools that direct the future by instilling Islamic values. The appearance of a progressive school, which is a product of transformation, takes many forms according to the surrounding community's needs but still puts forward the quality of service and a meaningful learning process (Majelis Dikdasmen PP Muhammadiyah, 2020).

Muhammadiyah's education has dramatically improved the quality of education in Indonesia, especially regarding character education and moral development (Listiana, 2015). Many Muhammadiyah schools have received excellent predicates. Progressive schools receive significant support from the community (Suliswiyadi, 2019). Therefore, Muhammadiyah schools that have yet to receive the title of excellence must continue to be developed because Muhammadiyah education has earned the community's trust (Sugiarti et al., 2020). Muhammadiyah schools, which are Islamic schools, are in great demand by the Muslim community. Muslim families think Islamic schools have an essential purpose for their children, where the Muslim community and Islamic social environment will positively impact their children (Farina, 2021).

Even though the community has trusted Muhammadiyah schools, Muhammadiyah schools continue to innovate and modernize. Innovation is a competitive mechanism for improving the quality of educational institutions and is considered essential to adapt to changing educational conditions (Blackwell, 2006). Educational institutions must be sensitive to competition between educational institutions. If educational institutions are sensitive to existing competition, then these institutions will be included by other outstanding educational institutions. Every school advantage can be formed through branding because the public will better know the introduction of school image through branding. Therefore, in an increasingly competitive world of education, schools need to innovate to improve the quality of education, one of which is by creating school branding.

The innovation process requires interaction between stakeholders to design strategies to improve education quality according to society's current needs (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Branding strategies can be carried out to convince the public that the education being managed is relevant to their current needs. School branding is considered a public perception of the identity of an educational institution (Siswanto, 2017). However, branding must be built honestly so that the image perceived by the public is accurate and by the reality of the institution. Branding is not just something that can display its functional value but also gives a specific value to people's minds (Surachman, 2008).

Many private schools create branding to attract public trust. A study by Cheng et al. (2016) states that religious schools need a branding strategy to communicate school-specific programs that differentiate them from similar schools. The study results show that parents send their children to schools with their brand identity. Stronger preferences for religious instruction in schools are equally associated with an increased likelihood of selecting certain school brands.

Religious schools such as Muhammadiyah schools adapt their branding to religious values, which focus on attracting students (Karsono et al., 2021). The research results show that character building forms good student character, which is emphasized to attract students, increase academic and non-academic achievements, and improve good performance services for teachers and employees. Parents tend to have motivation so that their children have good morals.

Muhammadiyah schools also feel the challenges experienced. Competition between educational institutions is getting tougher, with management, academic staff, lack of funding, and so on (Ali, 2010). Management in an educational institution is a process of achieving goals and ideals that all stakeholders have mutually agreed upon through efficiently utilizing human resources and all materials. To increase school empowerment, management is the most appropriate alternative to create independent schools with high excellence. The effort that can be made in developing schools is to pay attention to the existing management in schools. With good management, educational goals can be achieved optimally, effectively and efficiently (Mulyasa, 2003).

In carrying out school management so that the steps carried out are directed, and the goals aspired to can be achieved, a strategy is needed in the process of making it happen. Strategy in the world of education is defined as plans, methods, and a series of activities designed to achieve educational goals (Davis, 2019). The school's strategy in creating school branding needs to be considered because this is one of the efforts to make the school known to the broader community, easily remembered by the community, and has its evaluation in the eyes of the general public. Branding strategy is a management that aims to build a strong image (Karsono et al., 2021).

Researchers are interested in researching education management at the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School in carrying out school branding to improve the quality of education and attract public interest. Muhammadiyah 1 Vocational High School Nganjuk with a background in Muhammadiyah schools, which previously did not get the trust of the community, but after carrying out school branding, was able to prove that its existence is not in a big city but can compete in terms of achievements with other public educational institutions. Public trust in the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School is also great. The current number of students is more than 1,000, with 35 study groups.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. This research aims to gain insight into the construction of reality to be interpreted (Cropley, 2019). This method is used to describe and analyze school management to carry out a branding strategy at Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School to improve the quality of education. This qualitative research focuses on understanding management that Muhammadiyah schools can carry out to improve the quality of education by implementing branding strategies so that public trust becomes more substantial and can be beneficial for users of

educational services. The object of this research is the strategy chosen by the school to build the brand of the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School. The research subjects consisted of school principals, deputy public relations representatives, students, and parents of students. The location of the research was the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School. Data collection techniques using interviews, observation, and documentation. Researchers conducted interviews with the principal, vice principal of the public relations department of Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School, and the students' parents.

Furthermore, data analysis techniques are carried out after collecting data, which consists of three steps: reduction, display, and verification. Data reduction in summarizing, selecting, and focusing on essential things after data collection. Data display is the process of displaying data that has been collected after going through the reduction stage. Data verification is confirmation of the conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Branding Strategy Steps

The branding strategy steps implemented by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School in facing competition between education providers include 1) the brand identity highlighted by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School is qualified, dedicated, influential, religious, and superior or what is commonly abbreviated as *Mberu Satu*. Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School is one of the pioneers of vocational schools in Nganjuk Regency. There are seven study programs that students are interested in and equipped with workshops to support learning activities, including Motorcycle Engineering, Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering, Agribusiness Agricultural Product Processing, Mechanical Engineering, Electric Power Installation Engineering, Audio Visual Engineering, Software Development and Games. In addition to vocational programs in great demand, Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School also develops extracurricular programs that accommodate students' interests and talents so that students can achieve academic and non-academic achievements. Extracurriculars at Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School include basketball, volleyball, football, English club, futsal, *hizbul wathan*, music, flag raisers, youth red cross, *qiro'ah*, and dance.

Table 1. Skills Program and Competency Skills

Majors			Professional Competences
Motorcycle Engineering			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motorcycle engines • motorcycle power transfer system • motorcycle chassis and suspension • motorcycle electrical systems
Automotive Engineering	Light	Vehicle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • automotive electrical engineering • disassemble the car • chassis maintenance • car engine care • transmission system
Agribusiness Processing	Agricultural	Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agribusiness processing of agricultural products • quality control of agricultural products

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agroindustry
Mechanical Engineering			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mechanical engineering • welding engineering • engineering metal casting • industrial mechanical engineering • engineering design and machine drawing • metal fabrication and manufacturing engineering
Electric Engineering	Power Installation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lighting installation • electric motor power with electronic electromechanical control • programmable logic controllers • maintain and repair electric household appliances
Audio Visual Engineering			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • audio video engineering • industrial electronics engineering • mechatronics engineering • power electronics engineering and communications
Software Development and Games			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • software engineer • database engineer/administrator • software tester • game developer • web development • consultant IT

Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School has the vision to become an outstanding school. This skilled, competitive, broad-minded school is oriented toward science and technology based on faith and piety. The motto instilled by the school is discipline, professionalism, and character. 2) brand personality built by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School to convince the public by showing the facilities owned by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School, collaboration with companies, student achievement, and proven by building school branding through websites and social media.

The efforts of the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School towards becoming an outstanding school are participating in competitions and scoring achievements, innovative and fun learning, and habituation of worship, which is carried out every day to make students not only excel in academics and skills but good religion too. Making students who excel in religion is also an essential concern for the school because the identity of the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School is an Islamic school according to the vision of the institution. "The realization of Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School that is clean, religious, innovative, creative, knowledgeable where graduates are ready to work and able to compete at the national and international levels". Religious Vocational High School is a brand that Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School built. Habituation of the application of religious values aims to instill Islamic religious values obtained by students from learning outcomes at school to be applied in students' daily behavior in society.

To achieve the success of a religious vocational high school in the school environment, the principal and all teachers make implementation standards and

stages for implementing religious culture in schools. 3) Brand positioning carried out by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School, including winning various competitions, increasing testimonials about the learning process at school, and establishing collaboration with some industries. 4) Brand communication carried out by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School is posting all activities, student achievements, school achievements on the website and social media, the public relations team disseminated information to junior high schools (SMP), held friendly events with all stakeholders and parents of students to convey the advantages of the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk vocational high school and invited junior high school students to take education at the school, as well as actively participating in exhibitions of student works held by related agencies.

Based on the results of interviews with the principal of the Muhammadiyah 1 Vocational High School Nganjuk, the school is trying to fight for accreditation recognition from the National Accreditation Board for Schools so that it is accredited A and achieves various kinds of student achievements, both academic and non-academic. One of the factors forming a brand is quality related to the services offered Firmansyah (2019) and branding, which is a part protected because of eligibility and legally recognized by law (Keller & Kotler, 2012).

Testimonials issued by users of educational services come from students and parents. The existence of good testimonials regarding success in making students as expected by parents shows the success of the school in operation, where this will bring the school's name to be more widely known. This is one of the factors forming a brand, namely being trusted by consumers (Firmansyah, 2019) as well as getting a good impression and giving good memories to users (Keller & Kotler, 2012).

Various innovations have been made by Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School to improve the quality of its education. Among the innovations developed to support learning at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk are presented in Table 2.

Based on this, Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School seeks to promote the school to the broader community through its business fields. Thus, the community will be more confident that SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk has a business field that can accommodate workers from school graduates.

Table 2. Business Innovations Developed by Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School

Bussiness	Industri yang dikembangkan
Multimedia	Outdoor photography services, wedding photo and cinematography services, photo studio, printing
Automotive	Motorcycle service, oil change, tire change
Fashion	Production of shirts, trousers and school uniforms
Welding	Production of flower pots, cupboards, shoe racks and bookshelves

Brand Forming Factors

The quality of graduates is the most highlighted by society. The ability to compete in the industrial world, the business world, or to continue their studies at

university can be seen in the quality of graduates. Graduate students from the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk vocational high school can compete with graduates from other vocational high schools. The principal of Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School is very concerned about graduates who can compete and be accepted in the industrial and business world or those who continue to the university level. This is to the theory (Fahri & Imanuddin, 2018) that the tangible part of a brand is a product. In this case, the product of the educational institution is the quality of the graduates produced by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School.

Trust among stakeholders is considered an essential ingredient for any school (Karri et al., 2006), resulting in a network of loyal alums and goodwill in the market (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). To be competitively sustainable, a school must ensure that the students perceive the school as trustworthy and delivering value (Gibbs & Dean, 2015). Trust must be established among the present students of the school so that they advocate their trusted school to outsiders once they become alumni.

The flagship program of Nganjuk Muhammadiyah 1 Vocational High School is the Religious Vocational High School. As an Islamic school, Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School equips its students with a strong religious character. The programs that have been running are the literacy program, the "*Aku Mengaji*" program, the "*Pesantren Sabtu Ahad*," and the habit of Dhuha prayer. Apart from having the Religious vocational high school program, Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School also has excellent programs to equip its students' skills professionally, including collaboration with Daihatsu Jakarta for student internship programs and already has MoU with 26 companies throughout Indonesia. Muhammadiyah 1 Vocational High School Nganjuk is preparing its students for the Nganjuk Regency government's efforts to develop the Nganjuk Industrial Area, called "*Kawasan Industri Nganjuk (KINg)*." Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School also trains the entrepreneurial spirit of its students with various trainings according to their respective expertise programs, which help prepare their students to face the changing times. The existence of programs in forming a brand is one of the elements forming a brand, which means these programs provide additional information for students (Keller & Kotler, 2012).

The facilities and infrastructure owned by the school will undoubtedly support student success in the learning process. Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School already has a practicum room and study workshop that can be used to support learning activities. The benefits of facilities and infrastructure are one of the factors forming a brand and are a consideration for parents in choosing a school. This statement is the opinion (Fahri & Imanuddin, 2018), which states that there are two tangible brand elements related to facilities and infrastructure, including elements of buildings and classrooms.

The Impact of Branding Strategy on the Quality of Education

The interviews with school principals show that the branding strategy carried out by the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School has a

positive impact and benefits education service providers, in this case, schools and users of education services, including students and parents. The principal of the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School explained that several impacts of implementing the branding strategy included 1) increasing services that support academics by holding special training and coaching by experienced practitioners. 2) The wider society better knows the school. This is evidenced by the increase in students each year. 3) parents' trust increases. This is evidenced by the testimonies of parents who state that the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School has a good quality education and recommends it to others. 4) Schools improve facilities and infrastructure. The construction of new buildings evidences this to facilitate student learning activities. 5) Schools are motivated to achieve achievements. To become an outstanding school, schools must have excellence and be able to compete in scoring achievements. 6) Schools continue to improve the performance and quality of educators. Based on the results of interviews with students, they revealed that they were satisfied with the services provided by the teacher. Teachers at the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School are competent teachers. 7) Student behavior becomes better. In improving the quality of education and realizing outstanding schools, the Muhammadiyah 1 Nganjuk Vocational High School prioritizes students' academic abilities. It can make students with good character and good in worship. Student behavior in society is an application of teaching in schools. Both at school and in society, students can reflect on the condition of the school through their behavior and character.

Branding for schools needs to display an identity so that it is easily recognized and becomes a differentiator from other schools. Schools can display the educational service process through school-owned facilities, teacher performance, learning quality, graduate quality, unique attributes of teaching and learning activities, and student achievement. The school's excellent programs and the benefits of going to school in those places also need to be presented. The existence of a branding strategy requires schools to improve the quality of education in order to face educational competition. A good branding strategy will positively impact and benefit all educational service users.

Brand image can be formed starting from the main foundation of an institution in carrying out operational activities. Image is formed based on the impression that people have of something. The image will be favorable if people experience a satisfying impression. Thus, schools with a positive image in the eyes of students and parents will be more likely to attract the attention of prospective new students. Communities can act as word of mouth, channeling information from one person to another.

CONCLUSION

A branding strategy is essential to improve school quality. By creating good brand values relevant to society's wishes, the quality of Muhammadiyah schools can develop quickly and optimally. With the existence of a school brand, school stakeholders will do more optimally in realizing a quality school because branding is not just an empty message without meaning but is a commitment to realizing

the school's ideals. Branding strategies that schools can carry out to improve the quality of education include analyzing brand identity, brand personality, brand positioning, and brand communication, as well as increasing public trust by improving school accreditation quality management, improving school facilities and infrastructure, improving student achievement, develop excellent programs that are characteristic of schools, create attractive taglines and be realized with school programs, expand cooperation networks, increase school selling points through uploading each event on social media.

This study recommends strategies to strengthen school branding apart from visual characteristics that must also prioritize the quality of learning outcomes by graduating students who have value. Creating school branding must be followed by a quality assurance package. School management must formulate quality assurance by designing programs to synergize brands with concrete steps to show quality school communities. It is not justified if a school that excels in its promotion is, in fact, not by what is being promoted. This can lead to public disappointment because expectations are different.

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