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Branding Strategy for Building Institution Image (Study on Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori Tuban)

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Abstract

Fierce competition in the education sector requires madrasas to build a positive image of madrasas through effective branding strategies in increasing public trust. As an educational institution Madrasah Aliyah Al Islamiyah Senori Tuban Regency plays an important role in introducing and promoting the name of the madrasah. Madrasah Aliyah Al Islamiyah Senori Tuban Regency implements a branding strategy to improve the image of the institution. This study uses a qualitative approach with a field study approach. The research method uses observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews. Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis is used for data analysis, which includes data condensation activities, data appearance, drawing conclusions, or data verification. The results of this study show that (1) MAIS builds a branding strategy in improving the image of the institution through cost, differentiation, and focus leadership strategies. (2) supporting factors in building branding in improving the image of the MAI Senori institution include management commitment, academic and non-academic achievements, and community support. (3) The inhibiting factor is the limitation of modern facilities and teaching staff with digital competence.

Keywords: Branding, Strategy, Madrasah Image.

Introduction

The increasingly fierce global competition forces madrassas not only to play a role as religious educational institutions, but also to build a superior image in order to attract public interest (Winardi, J: 2004). Madrasah as one of the pillars of Islamic education not only functions as an institution of religious teaching, but also as a center for the formation of a generation that has broad insights, life skills, and strong morality. However, many madrasas still face obstacles in strengthening their image and appeal in the midst of increasingly fierce competition with other educational institutions (Alawiyah, F:2014).

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Branding strategy is present as one of the crucial elements used in building the image of madrasas to be known as a superior and sustainable institution. Maintaining the image of madrasas is needed to maintain the existence of an educational institution (Susilawati, I: 2017). According to research by Cheng, Trivitt, and Wolf, who have conducted research on religious schools (which have the potential to be madrasas) need a branding strategy to communicate and maintain public trust by coming up with unique school programs, which distinguish them from similar schools. Religious schools that have a strong religious history and values tend to change their names to attract students. (Cheng, A., Trivitt, J., & Wolf, P. J. (2015).

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture, integrated Islamic education emerged as a form of contemporary Islamic education (Sukhoiri, S: 2022). Islamic education in Indonesia is divided into two types, namely madrassas and Islamic boarding schools. In a pesantren it is very thick with the existence of mosques, kiai, students, and learning that focuses on teaching the yellow book, while learning in Madrasah under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion provides religious education and religious teaching (Alwi, B. M:2013).

The implementation of branding strategies in Islamic educational institutions is still very limited, especially in terms of how these strategies can effectively improve the institution's image (Suliyah, S: 2024). On the other hand, many Islamic educational institutions have not optimally utilized relevant business strategies to build competitive advantage, both through cost efficiency and through different and unique offerings (Irwan, I:2021). This study aims to examine how branding strategies are applied in Madarasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori, Tuban Regency and how to build the image of madrasah as a sustainable Islamic educational institution. The main focus lies in the utilization of cost leadership, differentiation, and focus as the foundation of strategy. In addition, this study also examines the supporting factors and challenges faced in the implementation of the strategy.

Literature Review

Brand Image Meaning: The term "brand" comes from the custom of cattle breeders in the United States who mark their cattle to make it easy to identify who owns them before they are sold to the market. (Riezebos 2003), (Sadat 2009), then (Servier 2000). Furthermore, "brand" is considered as a measure of the quality of value offered to customers and as an asset that can create value for customers by increasing their satisfaction and loyalty (Kartajaya 2007). Ultimately, "brand" is used as a product source mark to protect manufacturers and consumers from competitors who try to make identical products (Susanto 2004). According to this description, it can be concluded that "brand" is a symbol used as a marker or distinguishing identity that institutions have as a form of their existence (Išoraite 2018).

The brand of an educational institution usually consists of the symbol and name of the educational organization that it is intended to identify. According to Tjiptono (2005), this brand is different from other brands that are created to meet similar needs. However, the image of a service does not only consist of operational activities as a basis, but also of the impression and

experience that a person has of something. As a result, the mental attitude of customers can change (Assael 2002) and (Alfisyahr 2018). Because a good brand also builds a good institutional reputation, consumers are more likely to buy certain items if they have a positive impression of the brand (Kotler 2002).

In relation to brands, images are defined as the formation of images or images in the human mind so that they can recognize the objects being visualized. If a brand is a symbol, then the image is a symbol image. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that the brand image of an educational institution is a description of symbols used by educational institutions with different forms from one institution to another. And, brand image is usually formed from the continuous outpouring of ideas and innovations carried out by educational institutions to the community (Mundiri 2016). In addition, Klotler defines brand image as a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of an object. Meanwhile, a person's attitude and actions towards an object are greatly influenced by that object. This means that a person's beliefs, ideas, and impressions have a great influence on attitudes and behaviors as well as possible responses (Kotler, B2B Brand Management 2006). A person who has a high level of trust in an educational institution will certainly register and entrust the educational institution as a place to educate their children. In fact, they can also force others to entrust their children's education to institutions. Developing and maintaining loyalty as a behavior and attitude that creates a form of word-of-mouth marketing can only happen if the institution maintains a good product image value inherent in the minds of customers.

According to Moore, brand image is the public feeling, impression, or conception of an object, institution or organization (Moore 2005) and (Jefkins 2003). Therefore, the image of a school brand can be categorized as an image or condition of an educational institution that can give a strong impression to the community of the school; Therefore, schools cannot regulate public perception of such images. So, building a brand image is not easy because the communication and information carried out by educational institutions does not directly change the behavior of the person. At this point, institutions are expected to influence a person's perspective on a particular environment or object. In order, schools will get positive and negative brand images in the community (Juhji 2020).

Due to the existence of intangible educational services (Secundo 2010), consumers usually observe certain indications to assess the quality of educational services. They will look at the quality of the performance of teachers, administrators, and employees, infrastructure, educational equipment, symbols used by the school, and tuition fees to pay for school. Thus, the components of educational institutions must continue to update their competencies. The main objective of the reform process is to improve the quality of education in a sustainable, sustainable, and integrated manner.

Efforts to improve the quality of education are carried out not in one process but are carried out based on improving the quality of each component of education (Arbangki 2016). Brand Image in Educational Marketing Creating a positive brand image in educational institutions is not easy. For the managers of educational institutions, they are required to know and understand the things that can shape the brand image in educational institutions. In

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addition, they must build a positive brand image of the educational institution and understand the terms of implementing a synergistic marketing mix (Gajic 2012).

Research Method

The money method used in this study is a qualitative method. A case study approach was chosen to thoroughly investigate MAIS branding strategies. MAIS is used as an example of a madrasah that has succeeded in building a positive image in the midst of competition. with observation, documentation, and interviews as a method of data collection. As data analysis is used, Miles and Huberman interactive analysis is used, which includes actions to reduce data, display data, draw conclusions, or verify data. Madrasah heads, teachers, curriculum officers, and public relations officers are important informants in this study. Trianglate sources and methods were used for the validation of this study. This process includes data reduction, data appearance, conclusions, and verification.

Result and Discussion

Educational institutions that have a good reputation for quality (*perceived quality*) in the eyes of the public will certainly form a strong *brand image* (brand image) of the madrasah. To face these challenges, Islamic educational institutions require the application of management theory that can provide a sustainable competitive advantage and instill strong principles of professionalism (Muhammad Arqan: 2024). Competitive advantage *theory* or the competitive advantage of Michael Porter offers a relevant concept for Islamic educational institutions in the face of competition and building a solid foundation of strategy. Porter states that a company or organization can achieve a competitive advantage by focusing on three main strategies: *cost leadership*, *differentiation* and *focus* (Porter, M. E: (1980).

Implementation of Cost Leadership Strategy at Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori

Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori conducts efficient budget management to ensure that education costs remain affordable. This budget management focuses on top priorities such as school operations and improving the quality of teaching. Thus, Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori can provide adequate education without burdening students with high costs, thus attracting the interest of the community, the majority of whom come from the lower middle economic circles.

Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori effectively implements a low-cost strategy to improve educational accessibility among the surrounding community. This strategy allows the institution to compete in a challenging environment by keeping education affordable. This indicates that Islamic educational institutions can utilize low-cost strategies to increase competitiveness and attract students from various economic backgrounds.

This finding was obtained through in-depth interviews with the madrasah, namely the head of the madrasah, the head of curriculum, the deputy public relations officer and the treasurer of the madrasah who provided an explanation of budget management and the main priorities in operations. Observations of madrasah operational activities also show how cost management is applied daily to maintain the quality of education. Analysis of financial documents, such as annual budget reports, strengthens the data by demonstrating the institution's focus on cost efficiency.

Cost leadership *strategies* in the MAIS environment can be further developed by prioritizing efficiency in elements that are directly related to the quality of education (Dian Kurniati and Lukman Hakim:2023). In this context, the strategy can be focused on the concept *of socially responsible cost leadership*, where cost management is not only cost-oriented but also does not sacrifice the quality of the madrasah.

Strategy	Explanation	Examples in MAIS		
	Focus on affordable costs while	Keeping education costs		
Cost	maintaining quality service.	affordable with efficiency		
Leadership		budget.		
	Creating unique services that competitors	Tahfiz, Khitobah in three		
Differentiation	struggle to replicate to attract market interest.	languages, and Prodistik.		
01	1	Focus on communities in need of religious education and technology.		

Table A.1 Elements and Implementation in MAIS

Implementation of Differentiation Strategy through Flagship Programs

Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah offers superior programs based on Islamic values, namely tahfizd Al-Qur'an, Islamic character education (khitobah) and technology excellence programs with Prodistik (an applied program in the field of computer science technology). This program provides a uniqueness that distinguishes MAIS from other educational institutions, which are able to attract the interest of parents who are looking for a strong religious education for their children and are able to master technology.

Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah is the only private madrasah in Tuban Regency that spearheads prodistic activities and it is proven that MAIS is able to compete with other madrasas. The prodistik program is used as one of the flagship programs because it is a form of effort to guide all students to be IT proficient. This is in accordance with the opinion of Alvin Toffler (1980) who stated that "Those who are illiterate in the future are not those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, forget, and relearn" (Nihayaty, A. I., & Fanani, D. R. :2022).

Thus, MAIS seeks to equip its students with skills through mastery of technology and understanding Islamic values so that they are ready to compete in the modern era.

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Graph A. 1 Distribution of Ownership and Accreditation Status of the Supreme Court of Tuban Regency

In building a strong madrasah image, MAIS through its superior programs provides evidence to the community that madrasas have big ideals with the spirit of "Pinter Ngaji Jago IT" which then continues to be the spirit of the residents of Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori Tuban Regency. This advantage can be realized through innovative learning programs by teaching general curriculum as well as local curriculum. The support of superior facilities, quality teaching staff, and a conducive learning environment is also a differentiation that strengthens the positive image of the madrasah.

With the awards that have been achieved, since the beginning of its partnership with ITS in 2015 until now, MAIS has increasingly shown its commitment to developing technology-based learning. In accordance with the Fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) on quality education for the future, it is hoped that collaboration between ITS and school partners can continue to develop to support quality education.

Successful branding is not only about being known by the community, but also being remembered, trusted, and selected as an educational institution that excels and contributes to the progress of the surrounding community. The differentiation strategy through a unique program based on Islamic values and technology applied by MAIS shows its effectiveness in attracting the attention of the public, especially for parents who prioritize religious education for their children, as well as the ability to become technologists.

These findings are in line with Sudarso's (2024) research, which shows that unique educational programs can increase the attractiveness of institutions. Programs that are relevant to the values and expectations of the community provide added value that makes the institution more competitive. With Islamic and technology-based programs, MAIS not only meets the needs of religious education but also strengthens its position as a competitive institution in its environment.

Differentiation strategies in Islamic educational institutions can be further developed by emphasizing curricula and programs that are relevant to Islamic identity and community needs (Sholeh, Muh Ibnu:2023). This approach can be a modification in the

application of Porter's theory of differentiation, where differentiation is not only academic in nature but also based on the mission and values that society desires.

The implementation of this strategy creates a unique attraction that is difficult for other educational institutions to replicate, in accordance with Porter's theory of competitive advantage which emphasizes the importance of creating sustainable uniqueness to increase competitiveness. This position is strengthened through a narrative that is consistent in the vision, mission, slogan, and public communication that targets the right audience, such as prospective students, parents, and the community. With the right positioning, it is easier for MA Islmaiyah Senori to build a strong branding because the public understands the uniqueness offered.

Active communication campaigns through social media, websites, and madrasah newsletters will maintain connectivity with the public. In addition, testimonials of successful alumni and madrasah participation in social activities, such as social services, Islamic festivals, or parenting days, will further strengthen the positive image. Here are some of the flagship programs of Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah.

Featured Programs	Information
Prodistic	Classes X, XI, XII
Program Tahfidz	Classes X, XI, XII
Khitobah Program 3 languages	Classes X, XI, XII
Yellow Book Study (Local Curriculum)	Classes X, XI, XII

Table A. 2 Table 1.4 MAIS Featured Programs

Several excellent programs in madrassas are proof that madrassas are ready to compete in the development of Islamic character and digital competence, which at the same time strengthens the image of madrasas as modern educational institutions that are adaptive to technological developments.

Table A 2 Strategy to	Strongthon the	a Idantity and	Image of MA	Islamirsch Cononi
Table A.3 Strategy to) Strengthen in		Image of MA	Islamivan Senori

Activity	Purpose	Implementation	Indicator
			Success
Create a	Creates a	Using professional	Logos are
professional	positive and	designers and	recognized and
and attractive	memorable	surveys	remembered by
logo	impression	Small public	students,
			parents,
			community
Choosing a	Provide a	Color research	Consistent colors
color with a	strong visual	according to the	in promotional
specific	identity	vision of the	media and
meaning		madrasah	attributes
_			Madrasah
_	Create a professional and attractive logo Choosing a color with a specific	Create a professional and attractive logoCreates a positive and memorable impressionChoosing a color with a specificProvide a strong visual identity	Create a professional and attractive logoCreates a positive and memorable impressionUsing professional designers and surveys Small publicChoosing a color with a specificProvide a identityColor research according to the vision of the

Designing a typicalIncrease students' sense of pride and cohesivenessInvolve students and teachers in designStudents fe proud and w uniformImproveStrengthening the publicEnsure information is disseminated effectively and on targetForming a relations team and activePublic relat team activeActively communicateActively positiveBuilding positiveCreate communicationMadrasah is b known and vio	ions in a and
Imadrasah uniformof pride and cohesivenessdesignuniform wellImprove CommunicationStrengthening the public relations teamEnsure 	ions in a and
uniformcohesivenesswellImproveStrengthening the public relations teamEnsure information is disseminated effectively and on targetForming a 	ions in a and
ImproveStrengthening the publicEnsure information is disseminated effectively and on targetForming a competent public 	in a and
Improve Communicationthe public relations teaminformation is disseminated 	in a and
Improve Communicationthe public relations teaminformation is disseminated 	in a and
Communicationrelations teamdisseminated effectively and on targetrelations team and creativeactive 	a and
effectively and on target creative Activities madrasal Social Media Activities madrasal Actively Building Create Madrasah is b	a and
and on target Activities Actively Building Create	
Actively Building Create Madrasah	
Actively Building Create Madrasah is b	
with the relationships channels (website, Positive	
community and public social media, etc.)	
(internal & trust	
external)	
Identify the Messages are Audience Increase i	in
right target more easily segmentation: registrants acc	ording
audience received by prospective to the targ	0
expected students, parents,	,
parties community	
Establish Improve Hold formal Increasing stra	ategic
cooperation external hearings and partners	-
with networks and cooperation	
community support	
organizations	
Participate in Holding or Show the Engaging students, Documentation	on of
Social Activities participating in madrasah's teachers, and activities at	nd
a devotional concern for parents acknowledge	nents
social community of	
communit	ty
Be involved in Improve the Identify relevant Madrasah is	seen
projects that positive image community projects as active an	nd
benefit the and reputation Cared by	y
environment of the communi	ty
madrasah	
Establishing a Collaborate Expand Establishing MOU The existence	e of
Partnership with other students' with leading exchange prog	grams
educational connections madrasas/potential or collaboration	ions
institutions and learning partners between	
opportunities Institutio	n
Partnering with Increase Fostering regular Students a	re
religious, exposure and relationships with active in exte	
sports, and participation the community and activities a	nd
Art of madrasas organization bring	
in Achieveme	ent
Various fields	

Participating in	Participate in	Increasing the	Manage an active	Madrasas are
External	religious,	existence of	and organized	known to be active
Activities	sports, and arts	madrassas in	extracurricular team	and competitive in
	activities	the		various Field
		community		
	Holding a	Building	Regularly hold	Parents are more
	parental visit to	engagement	parent meetings with	actively involved
	the madrasah	and trust	a family approach.	in madrasah
		parents		activities.

Focus Strategy in Maintaining the Image of the Madrasah

In addition to the aspect of competitive excellence, focusing on the ideals of madrasah is also an important pillar in the management of Islamic education. The concept of focus according to Michael Porter emphasizes the importance of integrity, quality, and commitment in every aspect of organizational management. The focus in the context of Islamic education includes moral responsibility, ethics, and dedication in carrying out duties as educators and institutional managers. With a focus on high professionalism, Islamic educational institutions can build a strong organizational culture, which not only motivates faculty and staff but also creates a conducive learning environment that is in harmony with Islamic values.

Focus Strategy in Porter's *theory of competitive advantage* in Islamic educational institutions can be further developed by emphasizing curricula and programs that are relevant to Islamic identity and community needs. This approach can be a modification in the application of Porter's Focus theory. MAIS, for example, can strengthen superior programs such as tahfiz Al-Qur'an and Prodistik by adding elements of technology use in religious learning. In addition, MAIS can target more specific market segments, such as families that prioritize technology-based religious education.

MAIS can also expand its strategy focusing on developing competent educators in modern technology and pedagogy, strengthening infrastructure such as computer laboratories and fast internet access, and developing innovative curricula that integrate general science with Islamic values. In addition, structured career guidance and alumni involvement as mentors will strengthen graduates' readiness to face the challenges of the world of work. With this approach, MAIS not only builds a stronger image, but also creates uniqueness that is difficult for other institutions to imitate (E. Mulyasa: 2022).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of *Competitive Advantage* Strategy

The main supporting factors for the implementation of the strategy at MAIS are the commitment of management and the quality of teaching staff who focus on Islamic education. However, limited financial resources are an obstacle in the development of physical facilities and other programs. This requires schools to be creative in managing budgets and seeking additional funding (Isropil Siregar et al:2024).

Aspects	Description		
Strength	The only private madrasah in Tuban Regency that collaborates with the ITS Surabaya PRODISTIK program. Excellent programs such as tahfidz plus, khitobah, and local curriculum (book studies) Positive image in society through academic and academic achievements.		
Weaknesse s	Modern facilities are still limited compared to public schools. The number of teaching staff with digital competence is limited.		
Opportunities	Support from the local community and guardians. The increasing need for technology-based education. Wider potential for the development of flagship programs with strategic partnerships.		
Threats	Competition is fierce with other private schools that offer similar programs. Changes in education policies that can affect external cooperation. Technological developments that demand improvement facilities and competencies of teachers in an ongoing manner.		

Table A.4 SWOT Analysis

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah Senori (MAIS) has succeeded in building a positive image through the implementation of a structured branding strategy. The combination of *Cost Leadership*, *Differentiation*, and *Focus Strategy* strategies allows MAIS to offer quality education at affordable costs, present superior programs based on Islam and technology, and target relevant market segments.

Further development of educators, infrastructure, innovative curriculum, and career guidance will strengthen MAI's position as an adaptive, modern, and superior madrasah in the midst of competition. So that MAIS has the potential to become a model madrasah that not only maintains Islamic identity, but also produces graduates who are competent and ready to face future challenges.

Declaration of conflicting interest

Declaration of conflicting interestsIn writing this article, I as a researcher ensure that I am free from any form of interest or conflict that may affect the objectivity of the research, whether professionally, personally, or financially. This research was conducted independently to make positive contribution to the development of the world of education

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