



Research Article

Branding Images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in Islamic Educational Institutions: A Case Study of Private Schools

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Abstract

This research article aims to analyse the role of branding images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in strengthening the quality of education in Islamic schools. The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, conducted at Khadijah High School in Surabaya. Data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analysed descriptively while maintaining data validity through source and technique triangulation. The results show that branding images are built through consistency in institutional identity, academic reputation, quality of educational services, and the strengthening of religious values, which contribute to increased public trust and interest. CRM is implemented through the management of ongoing relationships with students, parents, alumni, and the community, thereby encouraging stakeholder satisfaction and loyalty. The synergy between branding images and CRM has proven to have a positive impact on the sustainable strengthening of Islamic education quality. These findings confirm that the integration of branding and customer relationship management strategies is an effective approach to improving the competitiveness and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of education is a strategic issue that continues to arise in line with the dynamics of social and cultural change and technological developments. Educational institutions are required to function not only as academic institutions, but also as public service providers that are able to meet the expectations of the community on an ongoing basis. The quality of education is a key indicator in assessing the success of educational institutions, both in terms of process, service, and educational outcomes that are directly felt by users of educational services (Ma'sum, 2022; Rahman, 2021).

In the context of increasingly fierce competition among educational institutions, marketing strategies have begun to be adopted as part of educational management, including in Islamic educational institutions. One relevant strategy is branding image, which is an effort to build a positive image of the institution through

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perceptions, experiences, and associations formed in the minds of the public. A strong branding image can increase public trust, strengthen the institution's reputation, and become a major attraction for the public in choosing an educational institution (Susanto, 2012; Rangkuti, 2004; Mundiri, 2016).

In addition to branding image, strengthening the quality of education also requires the management of ongoing relationships with stakeholders. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in education is understood as a strategy for building and maintaining long-term relationships between educational institutions and students, parents, alumni, and the community. The application of CRM enables educational institutions to obtain feedback, increase customer satisfaction, and build loyalty, which has a direct impact on the sustainability and quality of educational institutions (Mamlukhah, 2022; Kusumawati, 2021).

However, previous studies indicate that research on branding image and CRM in Islamic education tends to be partial. Some studies emphasise branding image as a means of increasing competitiveness or public trust, while CRM studies focus more on marketing and customer loyalty without being directly linked to the comprehensive strengthening of the quality of Islamic education (Karsono, 2021; Munir, 2022). This condition indicates a research gap that needs to be studied more deeply, especially in Islamic educational institutions that have religious values and cultural characteristics.

This study focuses on analysing branding image and Customer Relationship Management as strategies for strengthening the quality of Islamic education. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic education management and practically to education institution managers in designing integrated, adaptive quality improvement strategies oriented towards public trust and satisfaction (Rahman, 2021; Munir, 2022).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of branding image and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in strengthening the quality of Islamic education. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, processes, and dynamics that occur naturally in the context of educational institutions, without manipulating the research variables. This study focuses on the experiences, views, and practices of educational actors in managing institutional image and relationships with stakeholders as part of a strategy to improve the quality of Islamic education (Mundiri, 2016; Munir, 2022; Rahman, 2021).

Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with researchers acting as the main instruments of the study. Data analysis techniques used descriptive analysis models conducted simultaneously with the data collection process, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation techniques, so that the research findings had an adequate level of credibility and reliability. This approach enabled researchers to obtain a complete picture of the implementation of branding image and CRM and their implications for strengthening the quality of Islamic education in a contextual and sustainable manner (Munir, 2022; Kusumawati, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A brand is an indicator of the value you offer to customers. It is an asset that creates value for customers by strengthening their satisfaction and loyalty. A brand becomes a measure of the quality of the value you offer (Kertajaya, 2007). Meanwhile, Kotler argues that "a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, used to identify goods or services from one seller or group of sellers and to distinguish them from competitors." Meanwhile, de Chernatony and McDonald argue that a brand is a product, service,

person, or place that can be identified in such a way that buyers or customers feel relevant added value that is sustainable in accordance with their needs (Sadat, 2009).

An analysis of the profile of Khadijah High School in Surabaya shows that this school has a strong foundation in strengthening the quality of education through its commitment to national and international standards. According to the school's official website, SMA Khadijah was established in 1961 under the auspices of the Nahdlatul Ulama Khadijah Education and Social Foundation, with a vision of becoming an international-standard educational institution that develops polite, excellent, and competitive human resources. The school has successfully obtained A accreditation and ISO 9001:2015 certification, demonstrating systematic efforts in the management of formal and documented educational service quality. In addition, the existence of flagship programmes such as the Cambridge Curriculum, the Tartil & Tahfiz Al-Qur'an programme, and comprehensive learning facilities reinforce the institution's image as a competitive and highly competitive school in Surabaya.

The strengthening of the institution's image is also reflected in SMA Khadijah's active participation in various educational activities that promote student aspirations and achievements. For example, the school organises an Education Fair that brings together dozens of public and private universities as part of a career guidance programme for upper secondary school students, which aims to encourage students to plan their academic future more carefully. Activities such as this not only expand the institution's network with higher education stakeholders, but also contribute to the community's positive perception of the school's credibility as an institution that supports students' academic success and career development.

Student academic achievement is also an important aspect in mapping the quality and strengthening of education at Khadijah High School in Surabaya. Media reports show that the percentage of students accepted into state universities through the achievement-based selection process (SNBP) is quite high, with hundreds of students graduating without taking tests in recent years. This fact is a clear indicator that the school not only prepares students academically, but also successfully places its graduates in nationally recognised higher education institutions. Such achievements contribute greatly to the school's branding image in the eyes of the public and prospective new students.

In addition to academic aspects, SMA Khadijah Surabaya also consistently implements programmes that support literacy and the development of religious character. The designation of the school as a National Literacy School by the Ministry of Education and Culture illustrates that this institution is active in programmes to improve general literacy and reading skills among students in various fields of study. The literacy activities carried out on a regular basis reflect the school's commitment to strengthening critical thinking skills and academic culture, which indirectly enriches the school's reputation in the field of value-based education.

Another finding that supports the strengthening of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) in the school context is active involvement in community activities and external relations, such as cooperation with local media and educational visits to various higher education institutions. These programmes demonstrate how schools build harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships with external parties, which in turn strengthen the public's perception of schools as institutions that are responsive and concerned about the needs and aspirations of students and stakeholders. The pattern of relationships formed between schools, students, parents, and external partners is a tangible representation of CRM in the educational environment, with implications for public satisfaction, trust, and loyalty towards the institution.

Discussion

The Process of Branding Images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in Schools

The process carried out by educational institution managers to improve branding images and CRM is to create programmes related to the school's vision and mission. Several activities are carried out, beginning with familiarisation (in the sense that activities are carried out consistently), followed by supervision (each activity is

supervised and accompanied by teachers or educators when carrying out several activities), and followed by controlling (supervising and monitoring students to ensure that all religious activities are carried out solemnly).

The results of the study indicate that the process of branding images at Khadijah High School in Surabaya was not done instantly, but rather through a planned and sustainable strategy that emphasised institutional identity, religious values, and the quality of educational services. Branding images are built through strengthening academic reputation, achieving institutional accreditation, providing representative facilities and infrastructure, and consistently applying Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islamic values in all educational activities. These findings reinforce the view that the image of an educational institution is formed from the accumulation of experiences, perceptions, and public trust in the quality of services and educational outcomes offered (Rangkuti, 2004; Susanto, 2012).

The process of branding images in schools also appears to be integrated with the institution's differentiation strategy. SMA Khadijah Surabaya emphasises its distinctive characteristics as an Islamic boarding school with a balanced academic and religious orientation. This differentiation serves as a distinguishing identity amid competition among secondary education institutions, especially in urban areas. This finding is in line with Mundiri (2016) and Munir (2022), who emphasise that the branding of educational institutions is not only oriented towards promotion but also towards strengthening internal quality and consistency in the values presented to the public.

The implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in schools is reflected in systematic efforts to build and maintain harmonious relationships with students, parents, alumni, and the community. Schools facilitate two-way communication through various academic service programmes, religious activities, parent-teacher meetings, and alumni involvement in supporting school development. This relationship pattern shows that CRM in schools is not solely oriented towards recruiting new students, but rather towards creating long-term satisfaction and loyalty to educational institutions (Mamlukhah, 2022; Kusumawati, 2021). Furthermore, the synergy between branding images and CRM has direct implications for strengthening the quality of Islamic education. Positive branding images strengthen public trust, while CRM ensures the sustainability of relationships and active participation of stakeholders in supporting school programmes. These findings expand on the research results of Karsono (2021) and Munir (2022), which emphasise that the success of educational institution branding will be more optimal if supported by effective and value-oriented customer relationship management.

The process of branding images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in schools serves as an integral strategy in strengthening the quality of Islamic education. Both not only enhance the competitiveness and reputation of the institution, but also build an education ecosystem based on trust, satisfaction, and community loyalty. This discussion emphasises that Islamic education management that is adaptive to the principles of branding and CRM can serve as a strategic model for developing the quality of Islamic educational institutions amid the dynamics of modern educational competition.

The Impact of Branding Images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in Schools

Branding images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) have a significant impact on strengthening the quality of education in schools. Branding images that are consistently built through academic reputation, religious identity, and quality of educational services contribute directly to increasing public trust in institutions. The positive image of schools not only shapes good public perception but also strengthens the position of schools as credible, competitive Islamic educational institutions that are worthy of being the community's first choice. This impact is in line with the view that the image of an educational institution is a reflection of its internal quality as perceived externally by users of educational services (Rangkuti, 2004; Susanto, 2012).

From an academic and institutional perspective, the achievements in branding images and CRM are reflected in increased public interest, stable student enrolment, and a strengthened reputation for graduates. The school's success in showcasing student achievements, graduate quality, and consistency in Islamic values makes the school continuously attractive. This condition reinforces the argument that effective branding images not only function as a promotional tool but also as a long-term strategy in maintaining the existence and quality of Islamic educational institutions (Mundiri, 2016; Munir, 2022).

The implementation of CRM has an impact on the establishment of harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships between schools and stakeholders. Intensive communication with parents, alumni involvement, and school responsiveness to community needs and input create high levels of satisfaction and loyalty. This loyalty is an important social capital for schools, as it encourages positive word-of-mouth recommendations and ongoing support for school programmes and policies. These findings reinforce previous research results which state that CRM in education plays a strategic role in retaining customers and increasing the long-term value of educational institutions (Kusumawati, 2021; Mamlukhah, 2022).

The synergy between branding images and CRM has an impact that is not only managerial, but also educational and cultural. Schools are not only perceived as institutions that produce academic achievements, but also as educational environments that consistently instil religious values, character, and Islamic culture. The impact of these achievements is evident in the formation of students' personalities based on Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah values, increased public trust, and the maintenance of the quality of Islamic education on an ongoing basis. Thus, branding images and CRM function as complementary strategic instruments in creating holistic and competitive Islamic education quality (Karsono, 2021; Munir, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that branding images and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) play a strategic role in strengthening the quality of education in schools. Branding images that are consistently built through institutional identity, service quality, and religious values can increase public trust and positive perceptions. Meanwhile, CRM strengthens the relationship between schools and students, parents, alumni, and the community, thereby encouraging stakeholder satisfaction and loyalty. The main finding of this study emphasises that the synergy between branding images and CRM is an important foundation for the sustainability of Islamic education quality. Schools need to maintain consistency between their public image and internal quality, and develop CRM in a more systematic and data-driven manner. The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single school and its use of a qualitative approach, meaning that the findings cannot be widely generalised. Further research involving more subjects and a quantitative approach is recommended in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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