



## Educational Management: Cultural-Based Islamic School Branding Strategies in Building Public Trust at Amaliah Elementary School, Ciawi

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the branding strategy of Islamic schools based on school culture in building public trust at Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School. The study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological type to understand the experiences and perceptions of informants regarding the branding practices carried out. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies, with informants consisting of the principal, teachers, and parents. Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the school culture based on the value of tauhid is the main foundation in building authentic branding. The branding strategy is implemented through an *inside-out approach*, where the school image is built from the consistency of internal practices such as religious habits, character learning, and teacher role models. Teachers act as *brand ambassadors* who directly influence public perception through professional and Islamic-valued interactions. Public trust is formed from the conformity between the communicated values and the actual experiences felt, which is reflected in the increasing number of enrollees, parental satisfaction, and loyalty based on *word of mouth*. This study concludes that effective Islamic school branding does not depend solely on external promotion, but rather on the strength of the school culture, consistently internalized in educational practices. Therefore, strengthening organizational culture and the quality of human resources is key to building sustainable public trust.

## 1. Introduction

Global developments in the 21st century have driven significant changes in education, with society becoming increasingly critical and selective in choosing educational institutions. Education is no longer viewed simply as a process of



transferring knowledge, but as a strategic investment in developing superior human resources with character. This situation demands that educational institutions improve the quality of their services while building a strong brand image to gain and maintain public trust (OECD, 2023).

In this context, competition among educational institutions is increasingly fierce, making branding a crucial factor in increasing competitiveness and public trust. School branding is not only related to promotion but also encompasses service quality, human resource competency, and flagship programs that differentiate the school from competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2023). In Islamic educational institutions, branding also serves as a reputation-building strategy through the integration of spiritual values, ethics, and professionalism (Fauzi & Prasetyo, 2023).

Growing parental awareness of the importance of character education and a religious environment has fueled growing interest in Islamic schools, particularly Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT). However, the growing number of Islamic educational institutions has also created increasingly fierce competition, requiring schools to develop authentic and sustainable branding strategies. Research shows that the success of an educational institution's branding is largely determined by the consistency between its stated values and its actual practices in school management (Hidayat et al., 2022; Sari & Mulyadi, 2023).

Furthermore, effective branding is inseparable from school culture, the institution's internal foundation. A strong school culture – through values, habits, and daily practices – acts as a "silent brand" that shapes positive perceptions and strengthens public trust (Schein, 2010; Rahmawati, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, internalization of values, teacher role models, and Islamic cultural practices are crucial elements in building a school's sustainable reputation (Azizah & Machali, 2018; Tazqiyah & Setiawan, 2023).

Amaliah Elementary School in Ciawi, an integrated Islamic school, has demonstrated significant progress in service quality and public trust. By integrating the national curriculum and Islamic values through character development and school culture programs, Amaliah Elementary School provides a relevant context for examining how culture-based branding strategies are applied to build public trust.

Based on this, this study aims to analyze Islamic school branding strategies based on school culture and how these strategies shape public perception and trust in Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of adaptive, authentic, and competitive Islamic education management.

## 2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach, aiming to understand the meaning, experiences, and perceptions of informants regarding the phenomenon of Islamic school branding strategies. This approach was chosen because it can explore the subjective experiences (lived experiences) of educational actors in interpreting branding practices and their implications for public trust (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). From this perspective, reality is understood as a dynamic social construction formed through individual interactions and experiences (Levitt et al., 2018).

The research was conducted at Amaliah Elementary School in Ciawi, Bogor, with subjects determined through purposive sampling. Informants included the principal, teachers, and parents, selected based on their involvement and understanding of the school's branding strategy.

Data collection techniques included in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were used to explore informants' experiences and perceptions, observations were conducted to understand the actual practices of school culture and activities, and documentation was used to supplement the data through various archives such as the vision and mission statements, promotional media, and activity reports.

Data analysis used the interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This process was carried out iteratively to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied.

Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, member checks, and peer debriefing to ensure the credibility and consistency of the findings. The research was also conducted with due regard for research ethics, such as maintaining informant confidentiality and using data solely for scientific purposes.

### **3. Results & Discussion**

This research was conducted at Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School in Bogor Regency, a private Islamic elementary school under the auspices of the Amaliyah Indonesia Islamic Development Study Center Foundation (YPSPIAI). Established in 1987, the school has been accredited A and has extensive experience in implementing Islamic values-based education integrated with the national curriculum.

Conceptually, Amaliah Elementary School upholds the vision of a monotheistic-based education that emphasizes not only academic aspects but also religious character development. This is realized through various programs such as habituation of worship, Quran memorization, and a conducive Islamic learning environment. This strong school culture serves as both a distinctive feature and an identity of the institution.

Institutionally, Amaliah Elementary School has a large capacity of approximately 576 students, supported by adequate teaching staff and excellent learning facilities. The school's clean, comfortable, and religious environment, along with its strategic location, contribute to the learning process and character development of its students.

Overall, Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School demonstrates a structured educational management system, a strong Islamic school culture, and a high level of community trust. These conditions make Amaliah Elementary School a relevant location for examining Islamic school branding strategies based on school culture in building trust Public.

#### **3.1 Results**

The research results show that the branding strategy at Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School is strongly built through a school culture that is internalized

throughout all educational activities. These findings indicate that branding is not symbolic, but rather based on real experiences (experiential branding) directly experienced by students, teachers, and parents. This can be seen in the following figure:

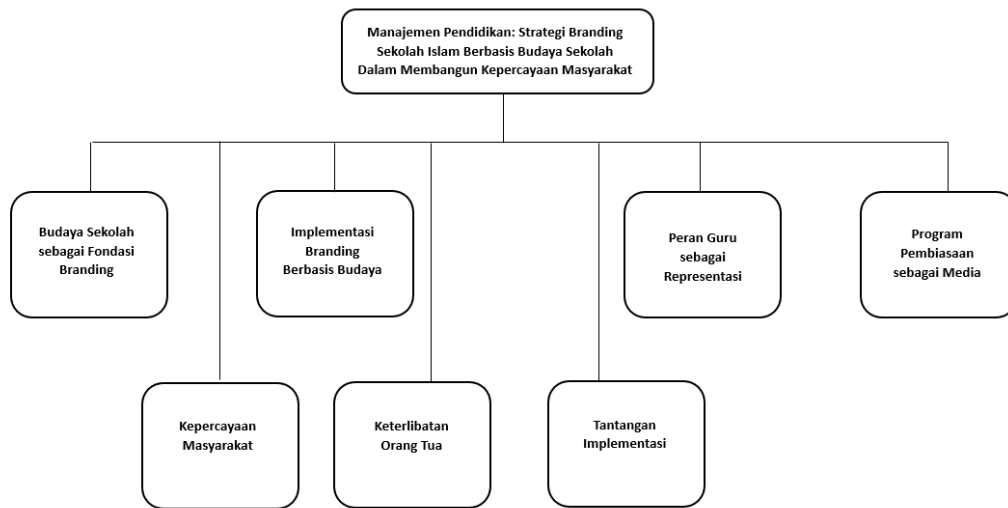


Figure 1 Research Results

### 3.1.1 School Culture as the Foundation of Branding

The school culture at Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School has proven to be a key foundation in shaping the identity, character, and strategic direction of the institution's development. This culture exists not merely as normative rules but has evolved into *living values* internalized in the daily practices of the school community. Islamic values such as the habituation of worship, memorization of the Quran, and the integration of monotheism into the learning process have become a living and consistently implemented value system.

Furthermore, this culture serves as a meaning system that guides the behavior of students, teachers, and all school stakeholders. Continuous internalization of values results in the formation of a religious character that is not merely instructive, but reflective and habituating. Thus, school culture not only shapes the internal qualities of students but also forms the basis for the institution's positive image in the eyes of the public.

### 3.1.2 Implementation of Culture-Based Branding

The branding strategy at Amaliah Elementary School demonstrates an *inside-out branding approach*, where the school's image is built from internal strengths in the form of consistent values, culture, and concrete practices. Branding is not positioned as a mere promotional activity, but rather as the result of a quality experience directly felt by stakeholders.

Flagship programs such as Quran memorization, character education, and the integration of modern learning approaches (e.g., STEM) serve as a medium for representing school values. This implementation results in a form of *implicit branding*, an image formed naturally through authentic experiences, not through symbolic

communication construction. In other words, branding is a consequence of quality practice, not simply a communication strategy.

### 3.1.3 The Role of Teachers as Image Representation

Teachers hold a strategic position as key actors in translating school values into practical practice. In this context, teachers serve not only as educators but also as *role models* and *brand ambassadors*, directly representing the school's identity to students and parents.

Polite interactions, professional service, and exemplary attitudes and behavior are key factors in building positive public perception. Teachers' consistency in displaying these values strengthens the institution's credibility, as the public tends to judge a school's quality through direct interactions with teachers. Therefore, the quality of human resources, particularly teachers, is a crucial determinant of the success of a school's branding.

### 3.1.4 Habituation Program as a Branding Media

The habituation program at Amaliah Elementary School serves as a strategic tool for internalizing values while strengthening the school's branding. Activities such as communal prayer, Quran recitation, and congregational prayer are not only part of a religious routine but also create a unique and memorable educational experience for students.

This program has a dual effect: it serves as a character-building tool and a means of communicating values to parents. Through the children's firsthand experiences, parents gain concrete evidence of the quality of education provided by the school. This makes the habituation program an effective form of *experiential branding in building perception and trust*.

### 3.1.5 Public Trust

Public trust in Amaliah Elementary School is built on the consistency between communicated values and implemented practices. This trust isn't built overnight, but rather through repeated and ongoing experiences.

These trust indicators are evident in the increasing number of applicants, high levels of parental satisfaction, and the presence of experience-based recommendations (*word of mouth*). These findings suggest that public trust results from a match between expectations and perceived reality, thus strengthening the school's social legitimacy within the community.

### 3.1.6 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement at Amaliah Elementary School is active, collaborative, and ongoing. The school positions parents not merely as recipients of services but as strategic partners in the educational process.

Intensive, transparent, and responsive communication is key to building a harmonious relationship between schools and parents. Parental participation in various school programs strengthens emotional bonds and fosters a sense of

belonging to the institution. This fosters increased loyalty and trust, ultimately strengthening the school's collective image.

### 3.1.7 Implementation Challenges

Although the culture-based branding strategy has been effective, this study identified several key challenges in its implementation. These challenges primarily relate to maintaining the consistency of school values and culture amidst the dynamics of change, both in education policy and technological developments.

Furthermore, human resources, particularly the commitment and stability of teaching staff, are crucial. Teacher turnover has the potential to impact the continuity of value internalization if not balanced with a structured cultural reinforcement system. Therefore, the sustainability of a branding strategy depends heavily on the institution's ability to maintain cultural consistency and sustainably manage the quality of its human resources.

## 3.2 Discussion

### 3.2.1 School Culture as a Value in Branding

Research findings indicate that the school culture at Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School serves as a core value that drives the entire education system and serves as the primary foundation for building the school's brand. This culture is rooted in the values of monotheism and morality, which are not merely normative but have been internalized in the daily practices of the school community as *living values*.

This aligns with Hermawan Kartajaya's perspective, which emphasizes that a brand's strength lies in authentic, consistently implemented values. In this context, the value of monotheism at Amaliah Elementary School is not merely a symbolic identity but has become a *value-in-action* that shapes the collective behavior of the school community.

This finding is also supported by Edgar H. Schein's theory of organizational culture, which states that culture is a pattern of basic assumptions learned and inherited within an organization (Schein, 2010). The values internalized through habituation, learning, and teacher role models at Amaliah Elementary School indicate that the school culture has reached the level of basic assumptions, not merely artifacts or stated values.

Recent studies also show that a school culture based on religious values has a significant influence on the character formation and image of the educational institution (Rahmawati, 2022; Sari & Mulyadi, 2023). Thus, Amaliah Elementary School's branding is not built through external promotional strategies, but through the strength of a consistent and authentic internal culture.

#### ***Differentiation and School Positioning***

The research results show that the strength of Amaliah Elementary School's differentiation lies in the systematic integration of Islamic values into all aspects of education. This differentiation is evident not only in religious programs but also in the learning process, social interactions, and school environment.

In Hermawan Kartajaya's framework, strong differentiation will shape *positioning*, namely how an institution is perceived in the minds of consumers.

Amaliah Elementary School has successfully positioned itself as an integrated Islamic school that excels academically while also being strong in character formation based on monotheism.

This finding aligns with Michael E. Porter's concept of *competitive advantage*, which emphasizes the importance of differentiation as a strategy for winning the competition (Porter, 2008). Furthermore, recent studies have shown that value- and experience-based differentiation has a stronger influence on public perception than solely facility-based differentiation (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Interestingly, Amaliah Elementary School's positioning is shaped by the direct experiences of parents and students (*experience-based positioning*), rather than promotional claims. This demonstrates the alignment between *brand promise* and *brand experience*, which are key factors in building an institution's credibility.

### **3.2.2 Teachers as Brand Ambassadors (Human-Centered Branding)**

Research findings confirm that teachers play a strategic role as *brand ambassadors* in building a school's image. Teachers serve not only as educators but also as representatives of the school's values and culture in daily interactions with students and parents.

This concept aligns with the *human-centered branding approach* proposed by Hermawan Kartajaya, where brand strength is determined by the quality of human interactions within it. In the context of Amaliah Elementary School, the politeness, professionalism, and exemplary behavior of teachers are key factors in shaping positive public perception.

These findings are also supported by recent research showing that the quality of relationships between teachers and stakeholders significantly influences the reputation and public trust in a school (Fauzi & Prasetyo, 2023). Furthermore, *service quality theory* emphasizes that direct interaction between service providers and users is a key determinant of satisfaction and loyalty (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Thus, teachers are not only curriculum implementers, but also key actors in building and maintaining the school's image in a sustainable manner.

### **3.2.3 Emotional Branding and Trust**

Research results show that public trust in Amaliah Elementary School is formed through a strong emotional connection between the school and parents. This relationship is built through consistent positive experiences, resulting in satisfaction, loyalty, and *word-of-mouth recommendations*.

From Hermawan Kartajaya's perspective, *emotional branding* is a crucial step in building *trust*, where consumers connect not only rationally but also emotionally with the brand. This trust is formed when there is a match between the brand promise and the actual experience.

These findings also align with recent research showing that trust in educational services is built through consistent experiences, transparent communication, and quality interpersonal relationships (Sari & Mulyadi, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023). The increasing number of enrollees and parental loyalty at Amaliah Elementary School indicate that this trust has developed into a strong collective reputation.

Thus, it can be concluded that the success of SD Amaliah branding does not only lie in program differentiation, but in its ability to build sustainable emotional relationships with the community through educational experiences. authentic.

The discussion is intended to interpret the research findings in accordance with the theoretical framework used, rather than merely describing the results. The discussion must be enriched by referring to findings from previous studies published in scientific journals.

References within the body of the article should follow a parenthetical citation style. If there is only one author, for example: (Retnowati, 2018); if there are two authors: (Nurgiyantoro & Efendi, 2017). If there are two to five authors, all authors should be listed in the first citation, for example: (Retnowati, Fathoni, & Chen, 2018), and subsequent citations should be written as (Retnowati et al., 2018). For more than three authors, only the first author is written followed by *et al.*, for example: (Janssen et al., 2010). Citations may also be written with the author's name outside the parentheses, for example: Nurgiyantoro (2017), depending on the writing style.

If the cited statement is a direct quotation or a specific fact, the page number must be included, for example: (Nurgiyantoro & Efendi, 2017:144), or when referring to multiple pages: (Nurgiyantoro & Efendi, 2017:144-146).

It is recommended to avoid excessive direct quotations. However, if a direct quotation contains fewer than 40 words, it should be incorporated within the paragraph (not separated) and enclosed in quotation marks ("..."). If a direct quotation contains 40 words or more, it should be presented as a block quotation (separate from the paragraph), indented half an inch from the margin, without quotation marks, and followed by the author, year, and page number in parentheses (author, year:page).

If a statement is derived from multiple references, all sources should be cited in alphabetical order and separated by semicolons, for example: (Sahlberg, 2012; Schunk, 2012; Retnowati, Fathoni, & Chen, 2018). For translated sources, the citation should refer to the original author's name, along with the year of the translated edition and the original publication. For example, see the reference list for (Schunk, 2012a) as the original and Schunk (2012b) as the translated version.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study shows that the branding strategy at Amaliah Ciawi Elementary School was built Strongly instilled through a school culture based on monotheistic values internalized in all educational activities. School culture serves as the primary foundation ( *core values* ) that not only shapes student character but also serves as a primary resource for authentically building the institution's identity and image.

Branding is implemented through an *inside-out approach* , where the school's image is shaped by consistent internal practices, such as religious habituation programs, character education, and teacher role models. In this context, teachers play a strategic role as *brand ambassadors* , representing the school's values and culture through direct interactions with students and parents.

Public trust in a school is proven to be built through the alignment between communicated values and actual experiences. This is reflected in increasing enrollment, parent satisfaction, and the formation of loyalty and *word-of-mouth*

*recommendations* . Furthermore, active parental involvement through intensive communication strengthens the emotional bond and trust in the institution.

However, the sustainability of a culture-based branding strategy faces challenges in maintaining value consistency, particularly related to policy dynamics and human resource stability. Therefore, strengthening internal systems, particularly in organizational culture management and teacher professional development, is necessary to ensure school branding remains authentic, sustainable, and competitive amidst competition in educational institutions.

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