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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Islamic Educational Institution Branding Management in Building Public Trust

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ABSTRACT

Branding has become increasingly important for Islamic educational institutions amid growing competition among educational providers and changing community expectations regarding educational services. However, branding is still frequently understood primarily as a promotional and image-building activity, while its relationship with stakeholder experience and public trust remains insufficiently examined in an integrated manner. This study aims to analyze the management of Islamic educational institution branding in building public trust. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving institutional leaders, teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, alumni, and community representatives. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through coding, categorization, theme development, and source triangulation. The findings reveal four major dimensions of branding management: (1) the construction of institutional identity based on Islamic values; (2) consistency of educational service experiences; (3) strategic communication and community engagement; and (4) institutional reputation as the foundation of public trust. The findings demonstrate that public trust is not generated merely through promotional activities but develops through consistency between communicated institutional identity, actual educational experiences, institutional communication, and accumulated reputation. This study proposes a conceptual contribution in the form of an Identity–Experience–Reputation–Trust mechanism, in which Islamic identity establishes the brand promise.

Keywords: branding management; Islamic educational institutions; institutional identity; reputation; public trust.

ABSTRAK

Branding lembaga pendidikan Islam semakin penting dalam menghadapi persaingan antar lembaga pendidikan dan perubahan pola masyarakat dalam memilih layanan pendidikan. Namun, branding masih sering dipahami secara terbatas sebagai aktivitas promosi dan pembentukan citra, sementara keterkaitannya dengan pengalaman pemangku kepentingan dan pembentukan kepercayaan masyarakat belum banyak dikaji secara integratif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis manajemen branding lembaga pendidikan Islam dalam membangun kepercayaan masyarakat. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan pimpinan lembaga, guru, tenaga kependidikan, peserta didik, orang tua, alumni, dan perwakilan masyarakat. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik melalui proses pengodean, kategorisasi, pengembangan tema, dan triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat dimensi utama manajemen branding, yaitu: (1) konstruksi identitas kelembagaan berbasis nilai-nilai Islam; (2) konsistensi pengalaman layanan pendidikan; (3) komunikasi strategis dan keterlibatan masyarakat; dan (4) reputasi kelembagaan sebagai fondasi kepercayaan publik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepercayaan masyarakat tidak terbentuk semata-mata melalui promosi, tetapi melalui konsistensi antara identitas yang dikomunikasikan, pengalaman layanan yang diterima, komunikasi kelembagaan, dan reputasi yang berkembang secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menghasilkan kontribusi konseptual berupa Identity–Experience–Reputation–Trust mechanism, yang menjelaskan bahwa identitas Islam menjadi dasar brand promise.

Kata kunci: manajemen branding; lembaga pendidikan Islam; identitas kelembagaan; reputasi; kepercayaan masyarakat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic educational institutions are facing increasingly complex challenges in building and maintaining public trust. Changes in parents' educational preferences, the growing openness of information, the rapid development of digital media, and the increasing diversity of educational choices have transformed the way communities evaluate educational institutions(Okoye et al., 2025). Parents and other stakeholders no longer assess schools and madrasahs solely on the basis of academic achievement. The quality of educational services, student character, institutional reputation, Islamic values, management transparency, achievements, and the institution's ability to communicate effectively with the community have become important considerations in educational decision-making(Luthfiatul Udhma & Sri Minarti, 2025). In this context, educational institution branding should not be understood merely as a promotional activity or the creation of a visual identity, but rather as a strategic process for developing institutional identity, reputation, public perception, and trust.

This issue is particularly significant for Islamic educational institutions because their educational mission extends beyond academic achievement to include character formation, morality, spirituality, and the internalization of Islamic values. Communities increasingly expect consistency between the image communicated by an institution and the actual experiences they receive(Zhao & Shi, 2022). When an institution positions itself as excellent, religious, character-oriented,

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modern, and high-quality, these claims need to be demonstrated through the quality of educational services, organizational culture, teacher behavior, student achievements, and institutional relationships with the community. Consequently, effective branding should not merely generate brand awareness, but should develop brand credibility and brand trust, which can strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions.

The development of digital technology has further expanded the branding space available to Islamic educational institutions. Social media, institutional websites, digital platforms, and other online communication channels enable schools and madrasahs to communicate their identities, programs, achievements, student activities, and Islamic values more rapidly and extensively(Minarti et al., 2023). However, digital transformation also creates new challenges. Information about educational institutions can be easily compared, while positive and negative experiences can spread rapidly through digital networks. This situation creates the potential for a gap between the brand promise communicated by an institution and the brand experience received by the community. When branding communication is not supported by actual service quality and consistent institutional practices, branding may instead undermine institutional credibility. Therefore, branding management requires an integrated approach that connects institutional identity, service quality, communication, community engagement, and the consistent implementation of Islamic values.

From an educational management perspective, branding is closely related to institutional reputation and stakeholder relationship management. Educational institutions are organizations that create educational value and experiences for students, parents, teachers, alumni, and the broader community. Public trust develops through a long-term process in which institutional identity is translated into consistent organizational practices and subsequently recognized by stakeholders. Therefore, branding management should be positioned as an integral component of institutional strategy rather than as an isolated communication function(Dwitasari et al., 2025). This perspective places institutional leaders in a critical position to determine institutional identity, coordinate communication strategies, manage stakeholder experiences, and ensure that Islamic values are reflected consistently in organizational practices.

Previous studies have examined branding in educational contexts from various perspectives. Some studies have emphasized the role of branding in developing institutional image and competitiveness, while others have linked educational branding with digital communication, reputation, loyalty, and parents' decisions in selecting educational institutions. Research in Islamic education has also demonstrated the importance of Islamic identity, reputation, service quality, and institutional communication in developing relationships with communities(Sumardi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these studies tend to examine branding from the perspectives of promotion, image building, marketing, or communication. The managerial dimension of branding as a systematic institutional process for transforming organizational identity and values into public trust remains relatively underexplored.

The research gap is also evident in the limited integration of three interconnected dimensions: institutional identity, stakeholder experience, and public trust. Branding is frequently examined in terms of how an institution seeks to be perceived, whereas trust concerns how stakeholders

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evaluate the consistency between institutional promises, organizational practices, and their actual experiences. In Islamic educational institutions, this relationship is particularly complex because institutional identity is constructed not only through symbols and communication but also through the internalization of Islamic values in leadership, organizational culture, educational services, institutional achievements, and social interactions. Therefore, further research is needed to explain how branding is strategically managed to transform institutional identity and Islamic values into positive stakeholder experiences that subsequently generate public trust.

Based on this research gap, the present study proposes that Islamic educational institution branding management is an integrative process involving identity construction, consistent service experience, strategic communication, community engagement, and reputation development based on Islamic values. This perspective distinguishes the study from branding approaches that primarily emphasize promotion and image. Branding is conceptualized as an identity–experience–trust process, in which institutional identity is constructed and communicated, translated into actual stakeholder experiences, and ultimately transformed into public trust when there is consistency between institutional promises and institutional practices. In this framework, Islamic values function as the foundation of institutional differentiation and credibility rather than merely as attributes used in promotional communication.

The novelty of this study lies in developing a conceptual perspective of trust-based Islamic educational branding, which explains the mechanism through which public trust is developed through the integration of Islamic institutional identity, service experience, strategic communication, community engagement, and institutional reputation. Thus, this study does not merely identify the branding practices implemented by Islamic educational institutions but also examines how managerial processes transform branding into public trust. The proposed mechanism can be formulated as "Islamic identity → consistent experience → strategic communication → community engagement → institutional reputation → public trust." This framework contributes theoretically to educational management and educational branding literature by integrating branding, reputation, and trust perspectives within the specific context of Islamic educational institutions.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore and understand how Islamic educational institutions manage their branding strategies to build public trust. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding institutional processes, managerial practices, stakeholder experiences, and the meanings attached to branding and trust rather than measuring relationships among variables statistically(Agius, 2013). The case study design enabled the researchers to examine branding management within its natural institutional context and to identify the mechanisms through which institutional identity, service experiences, communication, community engagement, and reputation contribute to the formation of public trust. The study was guided by the conceptual perspective that branding in Islamic educational institutions is not merely a promotional activity but an integrated managerial process involving Islamic institutional identity, consistent service experience, strategic

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communication, community engagement, institutional reputation, and public trust. This perspective was used as an analytical lens while remaining open to new themes emerging from the empirical data.

The research was conducted at selected Islamic educational institutions in Way Kanan, Lampung, Indonesia. The research sites were selected purposively based on several considerations: the institutions had established distinctive institutional identities, actively communicated their educational programs to the public, utilized digital or social media for institutional communication, maintained relationships with parents and the surrounding community, and demonstrated efforts to strengthen their institutional reputation. The context of Way Kanan was considered relevant because Islamic educational institutions operate within communities where institutional reputation, religious identity, educational quality, and interpersonal relationships can significantly influence parents' and community members' perceptions. Studying branding practices in this context allowed the researchers to examine how formal branding strategies interact with local social and religious values in the formation of public trust.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, involving individuals who possessed direct knowledge and experience concerning institutional branding and community relations. The participants included institutional leaders, teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, alumni, and community representatives. Institutional leaders and staff provided information concerning branding policies, institutional identity, communication strategies, and reputation management, while parents, alumni, students, and community representatives provided perspectives on how these practices were experienced and interpreted by stakeholders.

The number of participants was determined progressively according to the principle of data saturation, whereby additional interviews no longer generated substantially new information or themes. Participant selection also considered variation in roles and levels of involvement with the institution to obtain diverse perspectives on the relationship between branding practices and public trust. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis(Mashuri et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore institutional branding strategies, the construction of Islamic institutional identity, communication practices, service experiences, community engagement, reputation management, and the development of public trust. The semi-structured format provided sufficient flexibility for participants to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own words while allowing the researchers to maintain consistency across interviews(Sunandar et al., 2026).

Observations were conducted to examine how the institution's stated brand identity was reflected in everyday practices(Chand, 2025). The researchers observed institutional activities, interactions between teachers and students, relationships between the institution and parents, public events, service practices, and the use of institutional communication media. These observations were important for identifying potential differences between the branding messages communicated by the institution and the actual experiences provided to stakeholders.

Document analysis was conducted to complement the interview and observation data. Relevant documents included institutional profiles, vision and mission statements, strategic programs, promotional materials, websites and social media content, achievement publications, school or

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madrasah activity reports, and other documents related to institutional communication and public engagement. The use of multiple data sources enabled the researchers to compare and cross-check information obtained from different participants and institutional records.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through several interconnected stages. First, the researchers organized and familiarized themselves with the interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents. Second, the data were coded to identify meaningful statements related to branding management and public trust. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories and subsequently developed into themes. Fourth, the relationships among the emerging themes were examined to understand how branding practices contributed to the development of public trust(Mcleod, 2024).

The analysis focused particularly on the emergence of themes related to Islamic institutional identity, service experience, strategic communication, community engagement, institutional reputation, and public trust. The researchers then compared findings across participants and data sources to identify consistencies, differences, and contextual patterns. The final stage involved interpreting the relationships among the themes and developing an explanatory model of how branding management operates as a mechanism for building public trust in Islamic educational institutions. The credibility of the findings was ensured through data triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer discussion. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants and different data collection techniques, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by confirming selected interpretations with relevant participants to ensure that the researchers' interpretations accurately represented their experiences and perspectives. The researchers also conducted repeated engagement with the research context to obtain a deeper understanding of institutional practices and stakeholder interactions. In addition, peer discussion was used to critically examine the coding process, emerging themes, and interpretation of findings. These procedures were implemented to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the management of branding in Islamic educational institutions is not limited to promotional activities but represents an integrated institutional process for constructing identity, delivering consistent educational experiences, maintaining communication with stakeholders, and developing public trust. The thematic analysis of interviews, observations, and institutional documents identified four interconnected themes: (1) construction of Islamic institutional identity, (2) consistency of educational service experience, (3) strategic communication and community engagement, and (4) institutional reputation as a foundation of public trust.

The first finding indicates that Islamic educational institutions construct their brand identity through the integration of Islamic values, educational quality, institutional culture, and distinctive

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educational programs. Institutional leaders did not perceive branding merely as the use of logos, slogans, or promotional materials. Instead, branding was understood as the process of communicating what makes the institution different and what values it seeks to deliver to students and the wider community. The Islamic identity of the institutions was reflected through religious programs, habituation of Islamic behavior, Qur'anic learning, congregational worship, character education, and the development of students' moral attitudes. These programs became important elements in communicating the institutional identity to parents and the surrounding community. The findings also indicate that institutional identity was strengthened when the values promoted publicly were consistently reflected in the daily behavior of teachers, students, and institutional leaders.

The construction of institutional identity therefore occurred through two interconnected dimensions: symbolic identity and lived identity. Symbolic identity was represented through institutional profiles, slogans, social media content, educational programs, and promotional materials, while lived identity was reflected in the daily educational practices experienced by students and parents. The stronger the consistency between these two dimensions, the more credible the institutional brand appeared to stakeholders.

The second finding demonstrates that stakeholder experience constitutes a central mechanism in transforming institutional branding into public trust. The study found that parents and community members did not evaluate an institution solely from the information presented through promotional media. Their perceptions were significantly influenced by their direct experiences with educational services, teachers, administrative staff, school leaders, and student development. Several aspects of educational experience emerged as important, including teacher responsiveness, communication with parents, administrative services, learning quality, student discipline, religious character development, and institutional responsiveness to parents' concerns. Positive experiences reinforced the perception that the institution was able to fulfill its institutional promises.

The findings further reveal that consistency was more important than isolated promotional achievements. A strong institutional image could be maintained when the quality communicated through branding was continuously experienced by stakeholders. Conversely, discrepancies between promotional claims and actual services had the potential to weaken confidence. Thus, branding effectiveness depended on the institution's ability to ensure that brand promises were translated into authentic and consistent educational experiences.

The third finding concerns the role of strategic communication and community engagement in strengthening institutional branding. Islamic educational institutions utilized various communication channels, particularly social media, messaging applications, institutional websites, school events, parent meetings, and community activities. These channels were used not only to promote institutional programs but also to demonstrate achievements, communicate student activities, disseminate Islamic educational values, and maintain relationships with parents and the wider community. Digital communication provided institutions with opportunities to construct a positive and contemporary institutional image. However, the findings indicate that effective communication was not determined merely by the frequency of promotional content. Stakeholders valued communication that was transparent, informative, responsive, and consistent with actual

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institutional conditions. Information concerning student achievements, educational programs, religious activities, institutional innovations, and community involvement was perceived as more credible when supported by observable evidence.

Community engagement also strengthened the branding process. Parent meetings, religious activities, social programs, community events, alumni networks, and collaborative activities created direct opportunities for stakeholders to interact with the institution. These interactions enabled the institution to communicate its values while simultaneously allowing the community to experience the institutional culture directly. The findings therefore suggest that branding operates through a two-way communication process. Institutions communicate their identity to the community, while community responses, experiences, and expectations subsequently influence how the institutional brand is perceived and developed.

The fourth and most significant finding shows that institutional reputation functions as the bridge between branding management and public trust. Public trust did not emerge immediately from promotional activities but developed gradually through repeated positive experiences, institutional consistency, achievements, transparency, and strong relationships with stakeholders.

The reputation of the institutions was associated with several indicators, including student achievements, graduates' academic and religious development, teacher competence, institutional discipline, leadership credibility, community responsiveness, and the consistency of Islamic values in institutional practices. Parents and community members tended to develop stronger confidence when the institution demonstrated a stable reputation over time. An important finding is that trust was strengthened when institutional identity, educational experience, communication, and reputation were mutually consistent. In other words, public trust emerged when what the institution claimed to be was consistent with what stakeholders actually experienced. This relationship can be illustrated through the following conceptual mechanism: Islamic institutional identity, consistent educational experience, strategic communication and community engagement, institutional reputation public trust.

Overall, the study reveals that branding management in Islamic educational institutions is best understood as a continuous process of alignment between institutional identity, educational practices, communication, stakeholder relationships, and reputation. The findings challenge the narrow understanding of educational branding as promotional activity and demonstrate that public trust is primarily developed through the consistency between what an institution communicates, what it does, and what stakeholders experience.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that branding management in Islamic educational institutions is a multidimensional managerial process that extends beyond promotional activities. The four identified dimensions—Islamic institutional identity, consistent educational experience, strategic communication and community engagement, and institutional reputation—form an interconnected mechanism through which public trust is developed. This finding reinforces the argument that educational branding should be understood as an organizational process in which

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institutional promises must be translated into authentic stakeholder experiences. In the context of Islamic education, the process becomes more distinctive because institutional identity is strongly connected to Islamic values, moral conduct, religious culture, and the credibility of educational practices.

The first finding shows that Islamic educational institutions construct their brand identity through the integration of Islamic values, educational quality, institutional culture, and distinctive programs. This finding is consistent with the perspective of brand identity theory, which views identity as the set of meanings and values that an organization intentionally seeks to establish and communicate to its stakeholders. In educational institutions, identity is therefore not limited to names, logos, slogans, or visual symbols but encompasses the values, culture, programs, and institutional characteristics that distinguish one institution from another.

In the context of Islamic education, the findings suggest that Islamic identity becomes a substantive component of institutional branding rather than merely a symbolic attribute. Religious programs, Qur'anic learning, character formation, discipline, worship practices, and Islamic habituation provide tangible expressions of the institution's identity. This supports recent research showing that Islamic school branding becomes more credible when Islamic values are integrated into learning practices and institutional culture rather than simply communicated through promotional media. A qualitative study of Islamic school branding, for example, found that the integration of Islamic values into learning and consistent digital communication strengthened institutional reputation and public trust(Mahmud et al., 2026).

This finding also corresponds with research by Badarwan et al., which demonstrates that brand positioning, identity, and personality in Islamic secondary education are constructed through the alignment of institutional vision, flagship programs, religious culture, institutional symbols, and student achievements. Their study further indicates that such alignment can strengthen parental trust and positive public perceptions. The present study extends this argument by showing that identity becomes meaningful when it is lived through institutional practices(Becker et al., 2021). Thus, the central issue is not simply whether an Islamic institution has a distinctive identity, but whether the identity is consistently embodied by teachers, leaders, students, and institutional services.

The second finding indicates that public trust is strongly associated with stakeholders' direct experiences of educational services. Parents and community members do not construct their perceptions exclusively from promotional messages but also from interactions with teachers, administrative staff, school leaders, students, and educational services. This finding supports the logic of brand experience theory, which emphasizes stakeholders develop perceptions of a brand through direct and indirect interactions with the organization. In this study, teacher responsiveness, administrative services, learning quality, student discipline, religious character development, and institutional responsiveness emerged as important elements of the educational experience. These findings suggest that branding becomes credible when the institution is capable of transforming its brand promise into consistent service experiences.

This interpretation is strengthened by recent research on Islamic school branding and educational service quality. A study using the SERVQUAL perspective found that reliability, responsiveness,

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assurance, and empathy contribute substantially to institutional credibility and reputation, with service experience playing a more important role in reputation formation than promotional activities alone(NGO et al., 2025). This supports the present finding that what stakeholders experience is more influential than what institutions merely claim.

The finding also resonates with the recent systematic literature review by Khonsa et al., which concludes that school branding should be understood as a sustainable managerial strategy involving educational service quality, transparency, academic reputation, and digital communication rather than merely visual identity or promotion(Muhammad Albab Mananna, Novrian Eka Safutra, 2025). However, the present study provides a further explanation by positioning service experience as the validation mechanism of brand identity. In other words, institutional identity generates expectations, while educational experience determines whether those expectations are confirmed.

This relationship can be understood through the concept of brand promise–brand experience congruence. When the institution communicates that it provides religious, high-quality, responsive, and character-oriented education, stakeholders expect to encounter those characteristics in their everyday interactions. The third finding reveals that strategic communication and community engagement function as important mechanisms for making institutional identity visible and establishing relationships with stakeholders. The use of social media, institutional websites, parent meetings, religious activities, community programs, and other communication channels enables Islamic educational institutions to communicate their programs, achievements, values, and institutional activities. This finding can be interpreted through the perspective of relationship marketing and stakeholder theory, which emphasizes that organizational sustainability depends not only on attracting stakeholders but also on developing continuous and mutually beneficial relationships with them. From this perspective, branding is inherently relational. The institution communicates its identity, receives responses from stakeholders, adjusts its practices, and continuously negotiates its reputation within the social environment.

The findings are consistent with research on Islamic educational branding that identifies communication, digitalization, religious values, service differentiation, teacher quality, and student experience as important factors in strengthening public perceptions. Similarly, research on Islamic school reputation emphasizes the multidimensional role of educational public relations, communication, branding, and community engagement in sustaining institutional reputation(Khofi et al., 2026). Community engagement therefore becomes an important complement to digital communication. Direct interactions through parent meetings, religious activities, social programs, alumni networks, and community events provide opportunities for stakeholders to experience institutional values directly. This supports recent findings that communication strategies grounded in social relationships and community participation can strengthen school branding and public trust(McNeish et al., 2022).

The implication is that Islamic educational branding should shift from a one-way promotional communication model toward a relational and participatory communication model. The institution

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is not simply a communicator of its brand; the community also becomes an active participant in constructing and validating the institutional brand.

The fourth finding represents the most significant dimension of the study: institutional reputation functions as the bridge between branding management and public trust. Public trust was not formed immediately through promotional communication but developed gradually through repeated positive experiences, institutional achievements, transparency, consistency, and stakeholder relationships. This finding is strongly supported by recent empirical research on Islamic education. Nugraha, Bakti, and Zubair found that branding and institutional reputation positively influence public attitudes toward Islamic schools, while also noting that other factors such as educational experience, emotional closeness, spiritual appeal, and information literacy contribute to public perceptions(Zubair, 2026). Their findings reinforce the present study's argument that branding and reputation should be understood as interconnected processes rather than separate organizational activities.

The finding is also consistent with earlier qualitative research on elite Muslim schools in Indonesia, which demonstrated that branding involves internal strategies based on institutional vision and mission as well as external strategies designed to strengthen public trust. The study further highlighted the importance of public relations management, stakeholder involvement, strategic planning, and evaluation(Gill, 2014). Nevertheless, the present study advances these findings by explaining how reputation is produced. Reputation does not emerge simply because an institution communicates its achievements. Rather, reputation accumulates from repeated stakeholder experiences and the consistency of institutional behavior. In this sense, reputation represents the accumulated social evaluation of institutional performance. The relationship can therefore be conceptualized as: Islamic Institutional Identity, Educational Experience, Strategic Communication & Community Engagement, Institutional Reputation and Public Trust.

The most important contribution of this study is the identification of an Identity–Experience–Trust mechanism in the management of Islamic educational institution branding. Existing research has established that branding, reputation, communication, and service quality are associated with public trust. Recent studies have similarly emphasized that Islamic school branding should integrate identity, service quality, digital communication, and reputation. However, the present study brings these elements together into a sequential managerial mechanism.

The mechanism suggests that identity alone is insufficient to generate trust. A strong Islamic identity creates a brand promise, but that promise must be confirmed through consistent educational experiences. Those experiences need to be communicated transparently and reinforced through community engagement. Over time, repeated consistency between identity, practice, and communication produces institutional reputation. Reputation then becomes the social basis upon which public trust develops. This finding also helps explain why some institutions may have strong promotional visibility but relatively weak public trust. Visibility represents only one component of branding. Without service consistency, authentic stakeholder relationships, and institutional credibility, visibility may not be transformed into trust. Conversely, institutions with limited promotional resources may still develop strong reputations when their educational practices consistently generate positive stakeholder experiences.

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Theoretically, the findings contribute to the development of educational branding literature by positioning branding as an integrated institutional management process rather than a marketing or promotional function. The study also extends the application of branding theory to Islamic educational institutions by demonstrating that religious identity operates simultaneously as a source of institutional differentiation, organizational culture, and credibility. Practically, the findings suggest that leaders of Islamic educational institutions should avoid treating branding as the responsibility of a marketing or public relations team alone. Branding should involve school leaders, teachers, administrative personnel, students, parents, alumni, and the wider community. Institutional leaders need to ensure alignment between the institution's identity, educational services, communication, and stakeholder experiences.

Overall, the discussion confirms that the branding of Islamic educational institutions becomes effective when it moves from image construction toward experience management and trust formation. The central contribution of this study can therefore be expressed as the identity, experience, reputation, trust mechanism, in which Islamic identity provides the foundation, educational experience validates the brand promise, communication and community engagement strengthen relational visibility, reputation accumulates through consistent institutional performance, and public trust emerges as the ultimate outcome. This mechanism provides a more comprehensive understanding of branding management in Islamic educational institutions and strengthens the study's novelty within the field of Islamic educational management.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the management of branding in Islamic educational institutions is a comprehensive institutional process that extends beyond promotional activities and visual image construction. Branding is developed through the integration of Islamic institutional identity, consistent educational experiences, strategic communication, community engagement, and institutional reputation. These dimensions operate interdependently in transforming the values and identity of an Islamic educational institution into public trust. The findings demonstrate that Islamic institutional identity serves as the foundation of branding. Islamic values are not merely communicated as symbolic attributes but are manifested through religious programs, character formation, institutional culture, teacher behavior, and daily educational practices. The credibility of this identity depends on its consistency with the actual experiences received by students, parents, alumni, and the wider community. The study further concludes that educational experience is the principal mechanism for validating the institutional brand promise. Quality learning, teacher responsiveness, administrative services, student development, institutional responsiveness, and positive interactions with parents strengthen stakeholders' perceptions of institutional credibility. Therefore, branding becomes sustainable when the image communicated by the institution is consistently supported by authentic educational practices.

Strategic communication and community engagement also play an important role in making institutional identity and performance visible to stakeholders. Digital platforms, parent meetings, religious activities, community programs, alumni networks, and social engagement provide opportunities for institutions to communicate their values while simultaneously developing

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relational ties with the community. However, communication becomes effective only when it is transparent, responsive, evidence-based, and consistent with actual institutional conditions. The most important finding is that institutional reputation functions as a bridge between branding and public trust. Public trust is not generated instantly through promotional activities but develops through repeated positive experiences, consistent institutional practices, credible communication, achievements, and sustained relationships with stakeholders. This finding reinforces recent research showing that branding and reputation are closely associated with positive public perceptions of Islamic schools, while service experience and community engagement contribute substantially to the sustainability of institutional credibility.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of an Identity–Experience–Reputation–Trust mechanism. The mechanism explains that Islamic institutional identity establishes the brand promise; consistent educational experiences validate that promise; strategic communication and community engagement make institutional values and performance visible; institutional reputation develops through accumulated stakeholder evaluations; and public trust emerges as the outcome of this integrated process. This perspective extends the understanding of educational branding from a predominantly promotional function toward a strategic process of institutional value creation and trust formation.

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