

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING BRAND IMAGE TO DEVELOP THE COMPETITIVENESS OF MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH IN TULUNGAGUNG REGENCY

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi pengembangan brand image serta upaya peningkatan daya saing Madrasah Ibtidaiyah di Kabupaten Tulungagung. Dalam konteks persaingan yang semakin ketat di antara lembaga pendidikan dasar, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah dituntut tidak hanya unggul dalam aspek akademik, tetapi juga mampu membangun citra positif di tengah masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus yang dilaksanakan pada beberapa Madrasah Ibtidaiyah unggulan di Kabupaten Tulungagung. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa brand image Madrasah Ibtidaiyah dibentuk oleh berbagai faktor, antara lain kualitas layanan pendidikan, kompetensi guru, prestasi peserta didik, penguatan nilai-nilai keislaman, serta komunikasi yang efektif dengan masyarakat. Selain itu, strategi kolaboratif yang melibatkan para pemangku kepentingan (stakeholders), pemanfaatan media digital, inovasi kurikulum, pengembangan sumber daya manusia, dan penguatan budaya organisasi menjadi faktor utama dalam meningkatkan daya saing Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Temuan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pengembangan brand image yang terintegrasi dengan peningkatan mutu pendidikan mampu memperkuat identitas kelembagaan, meningkatkan kepercayaan masyarakat, serta menciptakan keunggulan kompetitif yang berkelanjutan. Implikasi penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi rujukan bagi pengelola madrasah dalam merancang program strategis guna memperkuat eksistensi dan daya saing lembaga pendidikan Islam di era persaingan global.

Kata Kunci:

Brand Image, Daya Saing, Strategi Pendidikan, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

Abstract: This study aims to analyze brand image development strategies and efforts to enhance the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic Elementary Schools) in Tulungagung Regency. In the context of increasingly intense competition among elementary educational institutions, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah are required not only to excel academically but also to establish a positive public image within the community. This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method conducted in several leading Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung. The findings reveal that the brand image of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is shaped by various factors, including the quality of educational services, teacher competence, student achievements, the strengthening of Islamic values, and effective communication with the community. Furthermore, collaborative strategies involving stakeholders, the utilization of digital media, and curriculum innovation are key factors in enhancing the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The implications of this study are expected to serve as a reference for

madrasah administrators in designing strategic programs aimed at strengthening institutional identity while ensuring sustainable competitiveness.

Keywords:

Image, Competitiveness, Educational Strategy, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Introductions

The educational landscape has undergone substantial transformation in the twenty-first century due to globalization, technological advancement, and the emergence of the knowledge-based economy. Educational institutions are increasingly required to adapt to rapid changes in society, technology, and stakeholder expectations. Schools are no longer viewed merely as providers of educational services but also as organizations competing to attract students, maintain public trust, and sustain institutional growth (Lubienski, 2005). Consequently, educational institutions must develop strategic approaches that enable them to distinguish themselves from competitors while continuously improving the quality of their services. This condition has encouraged educational leaders to adopt management practices commonly employed in the business sector, including branding, strategic management, quality assurance, and competitive positioning. The growing competition among educational institutions has become a global phenomenon. Parents and communities are becoming more selective in choosing schools that can provide not only academic excellence but also character development, religious values, technological competence, and future career readiness. In many countries, educational institutions actively engage in branding activities to communicate their unique characteristics and educational advantages. The success of a school is often influenced by its ability to establish a positive image that reflects quality, trustworthiness, and institutional excellence. Consequently, educational branding has become an essential component of strategic educational management.

Within this context, brand image plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and influencing educational choices. Brand image refers to the collection of perceptions, beliefs, and impressions held by stakeholders regarding a particular institution. According to Kotler and Keller, brand image represents the associations that consumers hold in their memory concerning a product or organization (Keller, 1993). In educational settings, brand image encompasses various dimensions, including academic achievement, educational quality, institutional reputation, organizational culture, student character development, leadership effectiveness, and community engagement. A strong brand image creates a positive perception among stakeholders, which ultimately contributes to institutional sustainability and competitiveness. The concept of branding in education has evolved significantly over the past decade. Traditionally, educational institutions relied on their historical reputation and academic performance to attract students. However, contemporary educational environments require institutions to actively communicate their strengths, values, and achievements through various channels. Educational branding now includes digital marketing, public relations, stakeholder engagement, community involvement, and the promotion of institutional achievements. Effective branding enables educational institutions to establish emotional connections with stakeholders and strengthen their position in increasingly competitive educational markets.

Several studies have highlighted the strategic importance of brand image in educational institutions. Ma'sum, In'am, and Alpaningsih (2021) emphasize that educational branding extends beyond visual identity and includes academic reputation, service quality, institutional culture, and responsiveness to community needs (Ma'sum et al., n.d.). Likewise, Rusmini (2021) argues that educational institutions can strengthen their brand image through effective communication strategies, publication of academic and non-academic achievements, and the utilization of digital platforms (Samsu et al., 2022). These findings suggest that a positive institutional image is developed through a combination of internal quality improvement and external communication strategies. The relationship between brand image and institutional competitiveness has also attracted considerable scholarly attention. Competitiveness refers to an institution's ability to maintain its position, attract stakeholders, adapt to environmental changes, and generate superior value compared to competing institutions. In educational contexts, competitiveness is reflected in student enrollment growth, academic performance, stakeholder satisfaction, institutional reputation, and sustainability. According to Porter (1993), competitive advantage is achieved when organizations successfully create value that is difficult for competitors to imitate (Adiguzel, 2021). This perspective is highly relevant to educational institutions, which increasingly compete for students, resources, partnerships, and public recognition.

In the field of Islamic education, competitiveness has become an increasingly important issue. Islamic educational institutions face unique challenges in balancing religious values with contemporary educational

demands. Madrasahs are expected not only to preserve Islamic identity but also to provide high-quality education that meets modern societal expectations. Consequently, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, as Islamic elementary schools, must continuously innovate and improve their educational services while maintaining their distinctive religious characteristics. Their ability to establish a positive institutional image and competitive advantage is therefore critical to their long-term sustainability. Previous research has demonstrated that competitiveness in educational institutions is influenced by multiple organizational factors. Mutohar (2013) argues that educational competitiveness is closely related to service quality, leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and stakeholder trust (Zulfa et al., 2024). Educational institutions with strong quality management systems are more likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantages because they consistently meet stakeholder expectations. Similarly, Mutohar and Masduki (2019) emphasize that strategic management, innovation, resource optimization, and responsiveness to community needs are essential components of institutional competitiveness (Yusuf et al., 2024). These findings indicate that competitiveness is not merely the result of academic excellence but also the outcome of effective organizational management and strategic positioning.

Organizational culture constitutes another important factor influencing brand image and competitiveness. Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that guide institutional behavior. A strong organizational culture creates consistency in service delivery, strengthens institutional identity, and fosters stakeholder trust. According to Maunah (2015), successful educational institutions are characterized by adaptive, participatory, and visionary cultures that support continuous improvement (Aina Ainaul Mardliyah et al., 2026). Such cultures enable institutions to respond effectively to environmental changes while preserving their core values and educational missions. In addition to organizational culture, leadership plays a central role in shaping institutional image and competitiveness. Educational leaders are expected to formulate strategic visions, inspire organizational members, and promote innovation. Transformational leadership has been widely recognized as an effective leadership approach in educational settings. Safi'i (2024) explains that transformational leaders act as agents of change who motivate teachers, students, and stakeholders to pursue shared goals. Through visionary leadership, educational institutions can create innovative programs, improve service quality, and strengthen their institutional identity (Susanto et al., 2024). Consequently, leadership contributes significantly to the development of both brand image and competitive advantage.

Furthermore, educational institutions must possess the capacity to manage organizational change effectively. The rapid pace of technological development, shifting educational policies, and evolving stakeholder expectations require institutions to continuously adapt. Change management enables organizations to respond strategically to environmental challenges while maintaining institutional stability. Maunah and Darmawan (2025) argue that successful educational institutions are characterized by their ability to implement systematic and sustainable organizational transformation (Darmawan et al., 2026). Effective change management facilitates innovation, improves institutional performance, and enhances competitiveness in dynamic educational environments. The significance of brand image and institutional competitiveness has become increasingly evident in the context of Indonesian primary education, particularly among Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), which operate in an increasingly competitive educational environment. According to the latest educational statistics, Indonesia had 26,794 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah during the 2024/2025 academic year, making MI the largest educational level among Islamic schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. East Java remains the province with the largest number of madrasahs in the country, reflecting the strategic role of Islamic basic education in responding to growing public demand for quality education that integrates academic excellence with religious values. In regions such as Tulungagung Regency, where numerous Madrasah Ibtidaiyah coexist with public and private elementary schools, educational institutions are increasingly challenged to differentiate themselves and sustain public trust amid intensifying competition. This situation requires madrasahs not only to improve educational quality but also to establish a distinctive institutional identity through effective brand image development, innovative educational programs, strengthened Islamic character education, active stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication. Consequently, developing a strong institutional brand image has become an essential managerial strategy for enhancing competitiveness, attracting prospective students, strengthening community confidence, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in a dynamic educational landscape.

Several factors appear to contribute to this success. Many Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung have implemented innovative educational programs, strengthened Islamic character education, improved teacher quality, enhanced learning facilities, and utilized digital technology to communicate with stakeholders. In addition, these institutions actively engage parents and local communities in educational activities, thereby strengthening public trust and institutional reputation. Such efforts suggest that brand image development and competitiveness are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. From an Islamic perspective, the pursuit of excellence and

competitiveness is aligned with the principle of *fastabiqul khairat* (competing in goodness). The Qur'an encourages individuals and organizations to strive for excellence and contribute positively to society. This principle provides a philosophical foundation for educational institutions seeking to improve their quality and competitiveness. For Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, competitiveness should not be interpreted as rivalry aimed at defeating competitors but rather as a commitment to continuous improvement, educational excellence, and societal contribution.

وَلِكُلِّ وُجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّئُهَا فَاسْتَثْبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

"For each community there is a direction to which it turns. So compete with one another in good deeds. Wherever you may be, Allah will gather you all together. Indeed, Allah is Most Capable of all things." (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah [2]: 148)

Despite the growing body of literature on branding, leadership, organizational culture, change management, and educational competitiveness, existing studies generally examine these variables independently. Research focusing specifically on the interaction between brand image and institutional competitiveness in Islamic elementary education remains limited. Furthermore, empirical investigations involving Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency are still scarce, despite the region's notable educational achievements and increasing public interest in Islamic education. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the strategies employed by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency to develop a strong brand image and enhance institutional competitiveness. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated organizational variables, this research integrates the perspectives of branding, leadership, organizational culture, change management, and competitiveness within a single analytical framework. The study is expected to contribute to the theoretical development of educational management literature while providing practical insights for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to strengthen the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions in an increasingly dynamic educational environment. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated analysis of brand image development and institutional competitiveness within the specific context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. It proposes a comprehensive understanding of how leadership, organizational culture, change management, educational quality, and stakeholder engagement interact to create sustainable competitive advantages. Furthermore, the study provides empirical evidence from Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency, a context that has received limited attention in previous educational management research.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple-case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the strategies adopted by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in developing institutional brand image and enhancing competitiveness in Tulungagung Regency, East Java, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was selected because it enables researchers to explore contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts while capturing the complexity of educational management practices and stakeholder interactions (Creswell, 2003). This approach allows for a comprehensive investigation of branding strategies as they naturally occur in educational settings and facilitates the interpretation of meanings, experiences, and organizational processes from the perspectives of the participants. The study was conducted over a three-month period, from January to March 2025, in three outstanding Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency. The research population comprised all stakeholders involved in institutional management and educational services within the selected madrasahs, including school leaders, teachers, school committee members, parents, and administrative personnel. Because qualitative research emphasizes information richness rather than statistical representation, participants were selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to (1) have direct involvement in planning or implementing institutional branding and quality improvement programs, (2) possess at least three years of experience in the institution, (3) have comprehensive knowledge of school management and community relations, and (4) be willing to participate voluntarily in the research. Based on these criteria, the study involved three headmasters, nine senior teachers, three school committee representatives, and nine parents, resulting in a total of twenty-four participants. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection was concluded when no new themes or substantive information emerged from subsequent interviews.

The research utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly from participants through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and field notes, whereas secondary data consisted of institutional documents, school profiles, accreditation reports, strategic planning documents, promotional materials, official websites, social media publications, photographs, meeting minutes, and relevant

policy documents. These multiple data sources enabled comprehensive triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the research findings. In qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument (human instrument), responsible for identifying participants, collecting and interpreting data, and constructing meanings from the field findings (Weyant, 2022). To ensure consistency during data collection, several supporting research instruments were employed, including semi-structured interview guidelines, observation checklists, documentation review sheets, field-note formats, digital voice recorders, and cameras for recording research activities. The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore institutional branding strategies, leadership practices, stakeholder involvement, educational innovations, promotional activities, organizational culture, and factors influencing institutional competitiveness. The observation checklist focused on school culture, teaching and learning activities, student discipline, environmental conditions, branding media, school facilities, stakeholder interactions, and institutional events that reflected the development of brand image. Documentation sheets were used to systematically record and classify institutional documents relevant to the research objectives. Data collection was conducted in three sequential stages. The first stage involved preliminary observations and obtaining research permission from the selected madrasahs to identify institutional characteristics and establish rapport with participants. The second stage consisted of intensive data collection through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent before being transcribed verbatim. Participant observations were conducted repeatedly during academic activities, religious programs, extracurricular activities, parent meetings, and promotional events to obtain comprehensive contextual information. Simultaneously, documentary evidence was collected to corroborate findings obtained from interviews and observations. The third stage involved validating preliminary findings through member checking and follow-up interviews whenever clarification or additional information was required.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of four interconnected stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Charli et al., 2022). During the data condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation records, and documentary evidence were coded, categorized, and reduced into meaningful themes relevant to institutional branding and competitiveness. Coding was conducted through open coding to identify initial concepts, followed by axial coding to establish relationships among categories, and selective coding to integrate major themes into coherent findings. Subsequently, the organized data were displayed through thematic matrices, narrative descriptions, comparison tables, and conceptual diagrams to facilitate interpretation across cases. Finally, conclusions were continuously drawn and verified throughout the research process by comparing emerging patterns, identifying similarities and differences among cases, and confirming interpretations against empirical evidence until theoretical saturation was achieved. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's criteria for qualitative rigor. Credibility was established through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking with key participants. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability was maintained through comprehensive documentation of the research procedures, methodological decisions, interview protocols, coding processes, and analytical procedures, creating a transparent audit trail. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining reflexive field notes, preserving all research documentation, and ensuring that interpretations were grounded in empirical evidence rather than researcher assumptions. These procedures enhanced the validity, reliability, and overall trustworthiness of the research findings.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that brand image development has become a strategic instrument employed by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Tulungagung Regency to strengthen institutional competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic educational environment. The study demonstrates that a positive institutional image is not established instantaneously; rather, it is cultivated through a systematic and sustainable process involving the enhancement of educational quality, effective stakeholder communication, human resource development, curriculum innovation, and the strengthening of organizational culture. Educational service quality emerged as the primary foundation for building a strong brand image. The investigated madrasahs consistently demonstrated excellence in both academic and non-academic domains, including achievements in academic competitions, Islamic contests, and character-building programs. These accomplishments have significantly contributed to strengthening public trust and increasing student enrollment rates. Consequently, educational quality functions not only as an indicator of institutional performance but also as a strategic asset that shapes positive public perceptions and

enhances the reputation of the institution.

The study further indicates that effective communication management plays a pivotal role in reinforcing institutional image. Most Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung actively utilize social media platforms and official websites to disseminate information regarding educational programs, student achievements, religious activities, and institutional developments. Through these digital communication channels, madrasahs are able to provide transparent information, foster stakeholder engagement, and maintain strong relationships with parents, alumni, and the wider community. Such transparency contributes substantially to building public confidence and strengthening emotional bonds between educational institutions and their stakeholders. These findings suggest that digital communication has evolved into a powerful strategic tool for institutional branding and reputation management in the era of educational digitalization. Another significant finding highlights the crucial role of human resource quality in enhancing institutional competitiveness. Madrasahs with stronger competitive positions consistently invest in professional development programs for teachers and educational staff through workshops, seminars, training sessions, and continuous capacity-building initiatives. Competent and professional educators contribute directly to improved learning outcomes, student achievements, and stakeholder satisfaction. These factors collectively strengthen institutional reputation and create sustainable competitive advantages that distinguish one madrasah from its competitors. Curriculum innovation also emerged as a key strategy for strengthening competitiveness. Several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah have successfully integrated Islamic values with contemporary educational demands by incorporating information technology, foreign language instruction, and diverse extracurricular activities into their educational programs.

These innovations not only improve educational quality but also create distinctive institutional characteristics that differentiate madrasahs from competing educational institutions. Such uniqueness enhances institutional attractiveness and reinforces organizational identity in the eyes of prospective students and their families. Furthermore, the findings underscore the strategic importance of organizational culture in shaping both brand image and competitiveness. Madrasahs characterized by strong organizational cultures grounded in discipline, responsibility, collaboration, and Islamic values tend to enjoy higher levels of public trust and institutional recognition. The consistent implementation of Islamic principles in daily educational practices contributes to the formation of a distinctive institutional identity that positively influences stakeholder perceptions. A strong organizational culture thus functions as a source of competitive advantage by fostering a productive educational environment and reinforcing the institution's credibility and legitimacy within the community.

The study also reveals a reciprocal relationship between brand image and institutional competitiveness. A positive brand image enhances public trust, expands stakeholder support, strengthens collaborative networks, and increases student enrollment. Conversely, improvements in educational quality, leadership effectiveness, innovation, and organizational culture further reinforce the institution's positive image. This mutually reinforcing relationship demonstrates that brand image should not be viewed merely as a promotional mechanism but rather as a strategic organizational asset that directly contributes to institutional sustainability and long-term competitive positioning. Therefore, the findings suggest that the success of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency is determined not only by academic excellence but also by the institution's ability to strategically develop and manage its brand image. The integration of educational quality enhancement, stakeholder engagement, human resource development, curriculum innovation, and organizational culture strengthening has proven effective in generating sustainable competitive advantages. Therefore, brand image development should be positioned as an integral component of strategic educational management, enabling madrasahs to respond effectively to the growing challenges and complexities of contemporary educational competition.

Discussion

THE CONCEPT OF BRAND IMAGE

Brand image in educational institutions extends beyond visual identity or institutional recognition; it represents stakeholders' cumulative perceptions regarding educational quality, organizational values, and institutional credibility. The findings of this study demonstrate that the participating Madrasah Ibtidaiyah developed their brand image through an integrated combination of academic excellence, Islamic character education, leadership commitment, community engagement, and strategic communication. These findings reinforce Keller's theory that brand image consists of a network of associations stored in stakeholders' memory, which are gradually constructed through consistent experiences and repeated interactions (Lane Keller & Kotler, 2022). Rather than relying solely on promotional activities, the madrasahs strengthened their institutional image by ensuring that their educational practices consistently reflected the values they communicated to the public. This finding also supports Kotler's perspective that a strong brand is built through sustained value creation rather than

symbolic identity alone. In the investigated madrasahs, branding emerged as an outcome of organizational performance rather than a marketing strategy in isolation. Parents consistently associated the institutions with disciplined learning environments, religious character formation, academic achievement, and responsive educational services. These perceptions illustrate that institutional reputation develops through repeated positive experiences, confirming that brand image is socially constructed by stakeholders rather than unilaterally created by institutional management.

Furthermore, the findings expand Aaker's brand equity framework by demonstrating that educational brand image encompasses dimensions that differ from those of commercial organizations. While Aaker emphasizes brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and loyalty, this study reveals that, within Islamic educational institutions, these dimensions are reinforced by religious identity, moral education, community trust, and long-term social relationships. Consequently, the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is influenced not only by educational outcomes but also by their ability to embody Islamic values that resonate with community expectations. This finding suggests that educational branding in faith-based institutions should be understood as a multidimensional social process in which symbolic values and educational quality mutually reinforce one another. The results are consistent with previous studies reporting that educational branding is closely associated with institutional reputation, service quality, and stakeholder satisfaction. However, this study offers a broader interpretation by showing that branding is not merely the consequence of effective communication but is deeply embedded in organizational culture and strategic leadership. Institutional image was continuously reproduced through teachers' professional practices, students' achievements, extracurricular activities, parental involvement, and collaborative relationships with the surrounding community. These interconnected organizational processes transformed brand image into a sustainable institutional asset that was difficult for competing schools to replicate. A critical implication of these findings is that many educational institutions continue to perceive branding primarily as promotional activity through brochures, social media, or institutional logos. The present study challenges this assumption by demonstrating that promotional communication contributes little unless it is supported by consistently high educational quality and authentic organizational practices. In other words, institutional credibility precedes institutional visibility. Sustainable brand image is achieved when educational values communicated externally correspond to stakeholders' lived experiences within the institution. This alignment between organizational identity and stakeholder perception constitutes the principal source of competitive advantage identified in this research and represents an important theoretical contribution to the literature on educational branding, particularly within the context of Islamic elementary education.

Factors Forming Brand Image

The findings of this study indicate that the formation of brand image in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is a multidimensional and continuous process resulting from the interaction of organizational quality, stakeholder experiences, and institutional communication. Rather than being shaped solely through promotional activities, the participating madrasahs developed their institutional image by consistently delivering educational services that reflected their organizational values and educational mission. This finding supports Kasali's perspective that perception is influenced by accumulated experiences, social values, and information received by stakeholders (Rani et al., 2024). Parents, students, and community members formed positive perceptions not merely because of institutional publicity but because they repeatedly experienced high-quality educational services, responsive school management, and strong Islamic character education. This suggests that institutional credibility is constructed through sustained stakeholder experiences rather than short-term promotional efforts. The study further confirms Alma's (2013) proposition that teachers, educational facilities, technological resources, and supporting services constitute important determinants of institutional image. However, the present findings extend this framework by demonstrating that these factors do not operate independently; instead, they function as an integrated organizational ecosystem. Teacher professionalism enhanced students' academic achievement, while effective school leadership encouraged innovation and strengthened organizational culture. Simultaneously, adequate learning facilities and digital technologies improved educational quality and facilitated communication with parents and the wider community. Consequently, brand image emerged from the interaction among human resources, organizational leadership, educational infrastructure, and stakeholder engagement rather than from any single organizational component.

An important finding of this research concerns the strategic role of extracurricular and religious programs in strengthening institutional differentiation. Although Alma identifies extracurricular activities as one component of institutional image, the findings reveal that these programs function beyond student enrichment. Flagship activities such as Qur'anic memorization, marching band performances, sports competitions, academic Olympiads,

and Islamic character-building programs became distinctive institutional identities that differentiated the madrasahs from competing schools. These programs generated symbolic value, enhanced public recognition, and reinforced parents' confidence in the institutions. From the perspective of Keller's brand image theory, these distinctive educational experiences became strong brand associations stored in stakeholders' memory, thereby contributing to long-term institutional reputation rather than merely increasing public visibility. The findings also highlight the importance of stakeholder relationships in the construction of institutional image. Regular parent engagement, transparent communication, active school committees, alumni involvement, and community partnerships significantly strengthened public trust and institutional legitimacy. This finding expands previous branding literature by demonstrating that educational brand image is socially co-created through continuous interactions between educational institutions and their stakeholders. Unlike commercial organizations, where branding is often controlled by marketing departments, educational branding depends heavily on relational trust, shared educational values, and collaborative participation among school leaders, teachers, parents, alumni, and local communities. Therefore, institutional image should be understood as a collective social construction rather than an organizational claim communicated through promotional media alone.

Compared with previous studies that primarily associate educational branding with marketing communication and institutional reputation, this study provides a broader interpretation by identifying organizational culture and stakeholder engagement as the primary mechanisms underlying sustainable brand image formation. Promotional media, institutional publications, websites, and social media contributed to enhancing institutional visibility; however, their effectiveness depended on the consistency between communicated messages and stakeholders' actual experiences. This finding challenges the conventional assumption that branding is primarily a communication strategy. Instead, the evidence suggests that successful educational branding is fundamentally rooted in organizational quality, authentic educational practices, and the institution's ability to consistently fulfill stakeholder expectations. Accordingly, sustainable brand image becomes not merely a marketing outcome but a strategic organizational capability that strengthens institutional competitiveness and long-term public trust.

Strategies of Madrasah in Building Brand Image

The findings of this study reveal that the strategies employed by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah to build institutional brand image extend beyond conventional promotional activities and encompass a comprehensive process of organizational development. The participating madrasahs consistently integrated educational quality, Islamic values, stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication into a coherent branding strategy. This finding supports Ferrinadewi's proposition that brand image is established through the alignment between institutional identity and stakeholders' perceptions (Widiana & Ferrinadewi, 2025). However, the present study demonstrates that such alignment cannot be achieved solely through communication campaigns; rather, it requires continuous organizational commitment to delivering educational services that consistently reflect the institution's declared vision, mission, and core values. One of the most significant strategies identified in this research was the systematic communication of institutional excellence through multiple channels. The madrasahs actively disseminated information regarding students' academic achievements, Qur'anic memorization programs, extracurricular accomplishments, teacher competencies, and community service activities via official websites, social media platforms, school events, and direct interactions with parents and local communities. These communication practices strengthened institutional visibility while simultaneously reinforcing stakeholder confidence. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that communication was effective only because it reflected authentic educational practices. Parents emphasized that promotional messages corresponded with their actual experiences after enrolling their children, suggesting that credibility emerged from the consistency between institutional communication and educational performance. This finding extends Ferrinadewi's branding framework by demonstrating that communication functions as a mechanism for confirming organizational quality rather than creating institutional reputation independently.

The study also found that the participating madrasahs continuously evaluated public perceptions through informal stakeholder feedback, parent consultations, community discussions, and regular institutional evaluations. Although these activities were not formally designed as brand image assessments, they performed functions similar to Ferrinadewi's concept of image analysis by enabling school leaders to identify stakeholder expectations, recognize institutional strengths, and respond to emerging challenges. This adaptive process allowed the madrasahs to revise educational programs, improve service quality, and strengthen relationships with parents and the surrounding community. Consequently, brand image was not treated as a static organizational asset but as a dynamic construct that evolved through continuous interaction between institutional performance and stakeholder

feedback. The findings further reinforce Susanto and Wijarnako's argument that branding strategies should create favorable stakeholder perceptions by establishing trust rather than relying solely on promotional activities (Julaihah et al., 2024). However, this study suggests that trust in Islamic educational institutions is constructed through a broader set of organizational practices, including transparent leadership, consistent educational quality, teacher professionalism, ethical conduct, and sustained collaboration with parents and community members. These organizational characteristics generated institutional legitimacy, which subsequently became the foundation for positive public perceptions and long-term stakeholder loyalty. Thus, trust emerged not as a consequence of branding but as its fundamental prerequisite.

Compared with previous studies that predominantly conceptualize educational branding as a marketing and communication strategy, this research provides a broader interpretation by demonstrating that brand image development is fundamentally embedded within educational management processes. Branding was found to be inseparable from strategic leadership, organizational culture, innovation, stakeholder participation, and continuous quality improvement. Promotional activities enhanced institutional visibility, yet they were insufficient to establish a sustainable brand image unless supported by authentic educational performance and consistent organizational values. This finding challenges traditional marketing-oriented perspectives on educational branding by positioning brand image as an organizational capability developed through the integration of institutional identity, educational quality, and stakeholder trust. Accordingly, the study contributes to educational branding theory by proposing that, within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, sustainable brand image is primarily a product of organizational excellence and value-based educational practices rather than promotional communication alone.

Development of Brand Image in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung

The findings of this study indicate that the development of brand image in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Tulungagung Regency is not merely the result of promotional activities but rather the outcome of a comprehensive educational management process that integrates service quality, organizational culture, stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication. Data obtained through interviews, participant observations, and document analysis consistently demonstrate that the participating madrasahs have succeeded in building a favorable institutional reputation by maintaining high standards of academic achievement while simultaneously strengthening Islamic character education. These two dimensions emerged as the primary institutional identities distinguishing the madrasahs from competing educational institutions. The increasing number of student enrollments and the sustained public trust reported across the three cases suggest that stakeholders evaluate institutional quality based on their cumulative educational experiences rather than on promotional messages alone. This finding supports Keller's theory that brand image is formed through a network of positive associations stored in stakeholders' memories as a consequence of repeated interactions and consistent organizational performance (Lane Keller & Kotler, 2022). In this context, educational quality functions as the foundation upon which institutional reputation is constructed.

The findings also reinforce Kotler's perspective that a strong brand is created through the delivery of superior value that consistently meets stakeholder expectations. Parents interviewed in this study perceived the madrasahs as institutions capable of balancing academic excellence with Islamic values, disciplined learning environments, and character development. These perceptions indicate that institutional brand image extends beyond functional educational outcomes to encompass symbolic and emotional values that influence parents' school selection decisions. Unlike commercial branding, where consumer preferences may be shaped primarily by advertising, educational branding in the participating madrasahs was found to rely heavily on stakeholders' direct experiences and interpersonal communication within the community. Positive word-of-mouth recommendations from parents and alumni emerged as one of the most influential mechanisms for strengthening institutional reputation, demonstrating that trust constitutes a strategic resource in educational branding. Another important finding concerns the role of digital communication in supporting institutional image development. The participating madrasahs actively utilized official websites and social media platforms to disseminate information regarding student achievements, flagship programs, religious activities, extracurricular accomplishments, and institutional innovations. These digital platforms increased institutional visibility while facilitating transparent communication with parents and the broader community. However, the findings reveal that the effectiveness of digital branding depended on the consistency between online communication and stakeholders' actual experiences within the institution.

This observation extends the findings of Ma'sum, In'am, and Alpiansih (2021), who argue that effective communication enhances institutional image. The present study demonstrates that communication alone is insufficient to establish a sustainable brand image unless it accurately represents authentic educational practices

and organizational quality. Therefore, digital media functioned primarily as instruments for reinforcing institutional credibility rather than creating it independently. Furthermore, the findings suggest that brand image development is a dynamic process of continuous organizational improvement rather than a static marketing objective. School leaders consistently evaluated stakeholder expectations, introduced educational innovations, strengthened teacher professionalism, and expanded collaboration with parents and local communities to sustain institutional competitiveness. These adaptive strategies indicate that brand image is continuously reconstructed through organizational learning and stakeholder feedback. This finding expands previous educational branding literature by positioning brand image as an outcome of strategic educational leadership and quality management rather than as a communication product alone. In this regard, institutional image became an organizational capability embedded in everyday educational practices, organizational culture, and stakeholder relationships. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to educational branding literature by demonstrating that the development of brand image in Islamic elementary schools is shaped by the interaction of educational quality, Islamic institutional identity, strategic leadership, stakeholder trust, and transparent communication. These findings challenge conventional branding perspectives that predominantly emphasize promotional strategies and marketing communication. Instead, the evidence suggests that sustainable institutional reputation is primarily achieved through authentic educational performance, value-based organizational practices, and the institution's ability to consistently fulfill community expectations. Consequently, brand image should be understood not merely as an external perception managed through communication but as a strategic organizational asset generated through the integration of educational excellence, institutional values, and long-term stakeholder relationships.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH

The Concept of Competitiveness

Competitiveness in educational institutions extends beyond the ability to attract students or outperform competing schools; it reflects an institution's capacity to continuously create educational value that is recognized and appreciated by stakeholders. The findings of this study demonstrate that the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is built through the integration of educational quality, organizational innovation, strategic leadership, stakeholder trust, and continuous institutional improvement. This perspective supports Frinces' view that competitiveness is the outcome of accumulated organizational advantages generated through effective management and the optimal utilization of institutional resources (Zen et al., 2022). However, the present findings suggest that, within Islamic educational institutions, competitiveness cannot be explained solely by resource efficiency or managerial effectiveness. Instead, it emerges from the institution's ability to combine tangible resources, such as qualified teachers and educational facilities, with intangible assets, including Islamic values, organizational culture, institutional reputation, and public trust. The findings also reinforce Sumihardjo's argument that competitiveness is characterized by the ability to demonstrate distinctive institutional value rather than merely surviving in a competitive environment. The participating Madrasah Ibtidaiyah developed unique educational identities by integrating academic excellence with Islamic character education, Qur'anic memorization programs, extracurricular achievements, and community-based educational services. These distinctive characteristics enabled the institutions to differentiate themselves from other educational providers while simultaneously strengthening their legitimacy within the local community. Thus, competitiveness was not interpreted as aggressive rivalry but as the institutional capacity to provide educational experiences that stakeholders perceived as superior, meaningful, and aligned with their expectations.

Furthermore, the findings provide empirical support for Assauri's concept of competitive advantage, which emphasizes the importance of identifying and leveraging internal organizational strengths (Hijriani et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this study extends the theoretical perspective by demonstrating that competitive advantage in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is dynamic rather than static. Institutional advantages were continuously reconstructed through educational innovation, curriculum development, teacher professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive leadership in response to changing community needs. This indicates that sustainable competitiveness depends not only on possessing superior resources but also on the organization's ability to continuously renew and strategically manage those resources in response to environmental changes. A critical interpretation emerging from this study is that competitiveness in Islamic elementary education should not be viewed through a purely market-oriented perspective. Unlike commercial organizations, where competitive advantage is frequently measured by financial performance or market share, the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is fundamentally associated with educational quality, moral credibility, social legitimacy, and stakeholder confidence. Parents' decisions to enroll their children were influenced not only by measurable academic achievements but also by the institutions' demonstrated commitment to Islamic values, character development,

ethical leadership, and transparent governance. Consequently, institutional trust became a strategic intangible asset that strengthened long-term competitiveness and was considerably more difficult for competing institutions to imitate than physical facilities or promotional activities.

These findings also contribute to the broader literature on educational competitiveness by suggesting that competitive advantage in faith-based educational institutions should be understood as a multidimensional organizational capability. While previous studies have primarily emphasized strategic management, resource optimization, and service quality as determinants of competitiveness, this research demonstrates that organizational culture, religious identity, stakeholder engagement, and sustained public trust function as equally important strategic resources. Therefore, the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is not simply the result of effective institutional management but reflects the successful integration of educational excellence, Islamic values, organizational innovation, and collaborative stakeholder relationships. This integrated perspective broadens existing theories of educational competitiveness by positioning intangible organizational assets as fundamental drivers of sustainable institutional advantage in Islamic basic education.

Components Supporting Competitiveness

The findings of this study demonstrate that the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is supported by an interconnected set of organizational components that collectively strengthen institutional performance and long-term sustainability. Rather than functioning independently, leadership, organizational culture, human resource quality, stakeholder commitment, technological capability, and strategic management interact to create an organizational ecosystem capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage. This finding reinforces the resource-based perspective proposed by García-Morales et al. (2021), which emphasizes that organizational competitiveness depends on the effective integration of both tangible and intangible resources. However, the present study indicates that, within Islamic elementary education, intangible resources—including institutional values, organizational culture, stakeholder trust, and religious identity—often contribute more substantially to competitiveness than physical infrastructure alone. One of the most influential components identified in this research is visionary leadership. School leaders were found to play a strategic role not only in formulating institutional policies but also in shaping organizational culture, encouraging innovation, motivating teachers, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. This finding extends previous leadership studies by demonstrating that educational leaders in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah function simultaneously as instructional leaders, organizational change agents, and institutional brand ambassadors. Their ability to communicate a clear institutional vision while maintaining consistency between organizational values and educational practices strengthened both institutional credibility and stakeholder confidence. Consequently, leadership should be viewed not merely as an administrative function but as a strategic organizational capability that directly influences institutional competitiveness.

The study further reveals that organizational culture constitutes a critical mechanism through which competitive advantage is sustained. The participating madrasahs cultivated cultures characterized by discipline, collaboration, continuous improvement, and the internalization of Islamic values. These shared organizational norms created consistency in educational service delivery and strengthened the institutions' distinctive identities. From the perspective of organizational culture theory, this finding suggests that competitive advantage is embedded not only in formal management systems but also in the collective beliefs and behavioral patterns shared by organizational members. Such cultural characteristics are difficult for competing institutions to replicate, thereby providing a sustainable source of institutional differentiation. Another important finding concerns the strategic role of human resources in strengthening institutional competitiveness. Teacher professionalism, continuous professional development, pedagogical competence, and commitment to educational excellence significantly influenced the quality of educational services delivered by the participating madrasahs. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that technical competence alone is insufficient to generate sustainable competitiveness. Teachers who consistently demonstrated integrity, effective communication, and commitment to Islamic educational values contributed substantially to strengthening stakeholder trust and institutional reputation. This observation expands conventional human resource management perspectives by indicating that professional competence and value-based commitment jointly determine institutional performance in faith-based educational organizations.

The findings also highlight the importance of technology utilization and organizational adaptability in responding to contemporary educational challenges. The participating madrasahs effectively integrated digital technologies into educational administration, communication with parents, student services, and promotional activities. However, technology functioned primarily as an enabling resource rather than a source of competitive advantage in itself. Institutions achieved sustainable competitiveness because technological innovation was supported by adaptive leadership, organizational learning, and continuous service improvement. This finding

challenges deterministic assumptions that digital transformation automatically improves institutional competitiveness. Instead, the evidence suggests that technology contributes meaningfully only when integrated within coherent organizational strategies and supported by competent human resources.

Furthermore, stakeholder commitment emerged as a fundamental component supporting institutional competitiveness. Strong collaboration among school leaders, teachers, parents, school committees, alumni, and local communities created a high level of organizational trust and shared responsibility for institutional development. This collaborative governance strengthened institutional legitimacy and generated positive word-of-mouth recommendations, which proved to be one of the most influential drivers of student enrollment. Unlike commercial organizations, where competitiveness is frequently associated with market expansion, the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah was found to depend substantially on relational capital and community trust. These intangible assets enabled the institutions to maintain stable public confidence despite increasing competition from other educational providers.

The findings also demonstrate that strategic planning and environmental analysis are essential for sustaining institutional competitiveness. School leaders continuously evaluated internal strengths, identified organizational weaknesses, monitored changes in educational policies, and responded proactively to evolving community expectations. This adaptive management process reflects Assauri's perspective that competitive advantage depends upon an organization's ability to understand and strategically manage its internal and external environments. However, this study further suggests that environmental analysis should not be limited to identifying opportunities and threats but should also encompass continuous stakeholder engagement and institutional learning. Such an approach enables Madrasah Ibtidaiyah to anticipate educational changes while preserving their distinctive Islamic educational identity. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on educational competitiveness by demonstrating that sustainable competitive advantage in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is generated through the integration of strategic leadership, organizational culture, professional human resources, technological capability, adaptive management, stakeholder collaboration, and value-based educational practices. These components operate synergistically rather than independently, creating a resilient organizational system capable of responding to environmental changes while maintaining educational quality and public trust. This integrated perspective broadens existing theories of educational competitiveness by emphasizing that, in faith-based educational institutions, long-term competitiveness depends as much on intangible organizational assets and relational capital as on managerial efficiency and physical resources.

Brand Image Strategies for Developing the Competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The findings of this study demonstrate that brand image functions not merely as a communication or promotional strategy but as a strategic organizational capability that significantly contributes to the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency. The participating madrasahs strengthened their institutional competitiveness through the integration of educational quality, Islamic values, strategic leadership, organizational innovation, and stakeholder engagement. This finding aligns with the Islamic principle of *fastabiqul khairat* (competing in goodness), which conceptualizes competitiveness as the pursuit of excellence through beneficial contributions rather than rivalry for domination. In this context, institutional competitiveness is reflected in the continuous improvement of educational quality, the cultivation of moral values, and the ability to meet the evolving expectations of students, parents, and the wider community. Thus, competitiveness in Islamic education represents an ethical and value-oriented process that differs fundamentally from market-driven competition commonly discussed in business literature. The findings further support Álvarez-García et al. (2021), who argue that institutional image represents stakeholders' cognitive and emotional evaluations of an organization. However, this study extends the theoretical perspective by demonstrating that, within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, brand image is not primarily constructed through promotional communication but through stakeholders' direct experiences with educational services and institutional values. Parents consistently associated the participating madrasahs with academic excellence, Islamic character formation, disciplined learning environments, and transparent school management. These repeated positive experiences generated institutional trust, which subsequently became the foundation of a strong and sustainable brand image. This finding reinforces Keller's brand image theory, suggesting that favorable brand associations emerge through consistent organizational performance rather than isolated communication campaigns.

One of the most prominent strategies identified in this study was the systematic utilization of strategic communication to reinforce institutional credibility. The participating madrasahs actively disseminated information regarding academic achievements, Qur'anic memorization programs, extracurricular accomplishments, community service initiatives, and religious activities through official websites, social media

platforms, and direct engagement with parents and local communities. Although these activities increased institutional visibility, the findings reveal that communication alone did not determine institutional reputation. Instead, communication was effective because it accurately reflected the educational quality experienced by stakeholders. This observation challenges branding approaches that primarily emphasize promotional exposure, indicating that institutional visibility contributes to competitiveness only when supported by authentic organizational performance and educational excellence. The study also identifies leadership as a central mechanism linking brand image to institutional competitiveness. School leaders acted not only as administrators but also as strategic leaders responsible for developing institutional vision, strengthening organizational culture, fostering innovation, and maintaining stakeholder relationships. Through transparent governance and participatory decision-making, school leaders enhanced organizational credibility while encouraging teachers and staff to continuously improve educational quality. These findings support Asrop's argument that leadership and teacher development are fundamental determinants of educational competitiveness (Susanto et al., 2024b). Nevertheless, the present study expands this perspective by showing that leadership contributes indirectly to competitiveness through its influence on institutional reputation, organizational commitment, and stakeholder trust. In other words, leadership creates competitive advantage by shaping organizational conditions that enable a sustainable and credible brand image to emerge.

Curriculum innovation also emerged as a strategic source of institutional differentiation. The participating madrasahs integrated Islamic values with contemporary educational demands by incorporating digital literacy, foreign language instruction, Qur'anic memorization, science enrichment programs, and diverse extracurricular activities into their educational offerings. These innovations strengthened educational quality while simultaneously creating distinctive institutional identities that differentiated the madrasahs from competing schools. This finding supports previous research emphasizing the contribution of technological innovation to educational competitiveness (Widat et al., 2025). However, this study demonstrates that innovation becomes strategically valuable only when it reflects institutional identity and addresses stakeholder expectations. Consequently, innovation should not be interpreted merely as curriculum modernization but as a process of creating unique educational value that strengthens both institutional image and competitive positioning. Another important finding concerns the strategic role of organizational culture in sustaining both brand image and competitiveness. The participating madrasahs consistently cultivated organizational cultures characterized by discipline, collaboration, professionalism, continuous improvement, and the internalization of Islamic values. These shared values influenced teachers' professional behavior, students' character formation, and institutional interactions with parents and the wider community. This finding supports Maunah's (2015) assertion that organizational culture significantly shapes institutional identity and public perception. More importantly, the present study demonstrates that organizational culture functions as an intangible strategic asset that is considerably more difficult for competing institutions to replicate than physical infrastructure or promotional activities. Accordingly, sustainable competitiveness depends not only on superior educational programs but also on the consistency with which institutional values are translated into everyday educational practices.

The findings further reveal that stakeholder engagement constitutes another critical mechanism through which brand image enhances institutional competitiveness. Parents, alumni, school committees, and local communities were actively involved in educational activities, institutional development, and promotional initiatives. Such collaboration strengthened public trust, increased institutional legitimacy, and generated positive word-of-mouth recommendations that significantly influenced student enrollment decisions. This evidence suggests that brand image in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is socially co-created rather than institutionally imposed. Unlike conventional branding models that focus primarily on organizational communication, this study indicates that educational branding is fundamentally relational, relying upon continuous interaction, transparency, shared values, and mutual trust among institutional stakeholders. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by proposing an integrated framework that positions brand image as a mediating organizational capability linking educational quality, strategic leadership, curriculum innovation, organizational culture, and stakeholder engagement to institutional competitiveness. Previous studies have generally examined these variables independently, often emphasizing either marketing communication or educational quality as the principal determinants of competitiveness. The present findings demonstrate that sustainable competitive advantage emerges from the interaction among these organizational dimensions rather than from any single factor. Brand image therefore functions not simply as an outcome of institutional excellence but also as a strategic mechanism through which educational quality is transformed into stakeholder trust, institutional legitimacy, and long-term competitive advantage.

A critical implication of this study is that many educational institutions continue to invest substantial

resources in promotional activities while paying comparatively less attention to strengthening internal organizational quality. The evidence from this research suggests that such an approach is unlikely to produce sustainable competitiveness. Institutional reputation can only be maintained when external communication accurately reflects authentic educational experiences delivered within the institution. Consequently, successful branding strategies in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah should prioritize continuous quality improvement, value-based leadership, organizational learning, and stakeholder collaboration before emphasizing promotional communication. This perspective broadens existing educational branding theory by positioning brand image as an organizational outcome rooted in institutional authenticity rather than as a marketing instrument designed solely to enhance public visibility.

Table 1
Operational Strategies for Enhancing the Competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

No	Strategy	Practical Steps
1	Improvement of teacher quality	Continuous training and professional development Teacher further education Performance evaluation
2	Curriculum innovation	Integration of Islamic and general curriculum Local content based on regional potential Development of flagship programs Use of e-learning
3	Technology utilization	Official madrasah website Social media for promotion Classroom renovation Development of laboratories
4	Improvement of facilities and learning environment	Addition of laboratories Green and safe environment
5	Strengthening partnerships and public communication	Community collaboration activities Media-based promotion Parenting programs

Congclusions

This study concludes that building a strong brand image is a strategic approach for enhancing the competitiveness of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tulungagung Regency. A positive brand image is developed through the provision of quality educational services, student achievements, effective leadership, curriculum innovation, strong organizational culture, and active engagement with stakeholders. These factors contribute to increased public trust, higher student enrollment, and stronger institutional recognition. The findings indicate that brand image and competitiveness are closely interconnected, as a positive institutional image strengthens competitive advantage while continuous improvements in educational quality further reinforce the institution's reputation and sustainability in an increasingly competitive educational environment. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah should continuously strengthen their brand image through the improvement of educational quality, professional development of teachers, effective communication with stakeholders, and the utilization of digital media to promote institutional achievements and programs. In addition, school leaders should foster innovation, maintain a strong organizational culture based on Islamic values, and enhance collaboration with parents, alumni, and the wider community. By integrating these strategies into institutional development efforts, madrasahs can sustain public trust, improve their competitive position, and achieve long-term educational excellence.

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