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Brand Equity Management in Enhancing School Competitiveness at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo

Irma Lisdiana¹, Sitti Roskina², Arifin³

¹²³Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

*Correspondence: E-mail: irma_s1manajpend@mahasiswa.ung.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to describe: (1) The selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo; (2) The implementation of selling value consistency at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo; and (3) The effectiveness and impact of brand equity management at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. This research employed a qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The data analysis model employed was the interactive analysis model, which involved data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was tested using source triangulation. The results of this study show that: (1) The central selling values of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo, which build and strengthen the brand equity of "Unggulan," include: an A accreditation, an innovative curriculum, professional human resources, modern facilities and infrastructure, outstanding extracurricular programs, and various innovative initiatives; (2) The implementation of consistent selling values at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo is carried out through creative and consistent promotional strategies on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube; and (3) The effectiveness of brand equity management at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has proven to strengthen the brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. This substantial brand equity has become the main competitive advantage of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The modern era, characterized by the rapid advancement of technology and the significant impact of globalization, has brought about substantial effects in various aspects of life. These effects not only present opportunities but also challenges that must be addressed. In facing these dynamics, awareness of the importance of quality education is essential. Quality education supports the emergence of a generation capable of critical thinking and resilience in the face of challenges, allowing them to adapt to the changes of the modern era (Indy et al., 2019).

This can be achieved through the implementation of education that aligns with the vision mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 1, which states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process so that learners actively develop their potential to possess spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills required by themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Depdiknas, 2003). Therefore, schools, as institutions responsible for implementing and realizing national education goals, are required to be responsive in taking strategic steps that aim to improve education quality in an adaptive, innovative, and sustainable manner.

Such demands have consequently become a driving factor behind the intense competition among schools in the modern era. As part of the service industry, schools must strive to win the

attention of customers primarily students and parents who are increasingly aware of the importance of quality education. One of the key assets that can help attract customer attention is the brand (Stevi & Artina, 2022). According to Kotler and Gary Armstrong (in Rizki & Mulyanti, 2023), a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or a combination of these elements that identifies a product and differentiates it from competitors. A brand is considered an asset because it provides added value, known as brand equity. Consistent with what Kotler and Keller (in Pandiangan et al., 2021) stated, brand equity refers to the added value of a product (goods or services) as reflected in the way consumers think, feel, and act toward the brand, as well as the influence of the brand on price, market share, and profitability. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity consists of four main elements: brand awareness (the extent to which customers recognize and recall a brand), brand association (the set of associations linked to a brand), perceived quality (customers' perception of the product's quality), and brand loyalty (customers' commitment to repurchase or recommend the brand). In this context, brand equity can be understood as a concept closely related to the school's image and reputation in the eyes of its customers, particularly students and parents. According to Siyamto et al. (2023), effectively managed brand equity helps build consistency in a company's image and identity, reflecting its brand values and personality in the eyes of customers. Therefore, the effectiveness of brand equity management in schools is crucial to support the creation of competitive advantage, allowing the school's image and reputation to play a significant role in attracting more prospective students and retaining current ones.

Gorontalo is a province where the majority of the population adheres to Islam. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2020, Muslims make up 96.93% of the total population in Gorontalo (Perdana et al., 2022). This dominance has led to a growing interest among Gorontalo residents in high-quality Islamic schools. Muslim communities believe that education grounded in Islamic values is a fundamental need that can serve as a moral foundation for facing the modern era an era marked by technological advancements and globalization, both of which have the potential to erode the moral values of the younger Muslim generation (Ratnasari & Suradika, 2020). As a result, leading Islamic private schools in Gorontalo City have gained increasing public attention for their perceived ability to fulfill this educational need. Consequently, these leading Islamic private schools must be able to distinguish themselves by highlighting their unique strengths. In facing this challenge, effective brand equity management is required, as it helps build and emphasize the school's distinctive advantages.

Based on preliminary field observations, it was found that the brand carried by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah (MIM) Unggulan Kota Gorontalo is "Unggulan" (Excellent). This excellence is reflected in its A accreditation and numerous academic and non-academic achievements not only at the local and regional levels but also nationally. In the 2008/2009 academic year, MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo was ranked first among outstanding madrasahs. In 2023, the school earned six academic achievements, including four championships in the Madrasah Science Competition (KSM), one in the National Science Olympiad (OSN) at the city level, and one in the Gorontalo Mathematics Competition at the provincial level. In the same year, the school achieved even more in the non-academic field, with 36 awards in total. These included 27 championships at the city and provincial levels in religious competitions (MHQ, recitation, tahfiz, adhan, pildacil, Islamic fashion), arts (vocal), and sports (Indonesian Merdeka Science Competition, karate, taekwondo, silat, badminton, biographical competitions). The remaining nine achievements came from inter-madrasah competitions, such as healthy madrasah, quiz contests, and Muhammadiyah anniversary events, both at city and provincial levels. Furthermore, the 4 elements of brand equity by Aaker (1991) brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have become key value added components of the MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo brand. In terms of brand awareness, the public already recognizes this madrasah through its "excellent" reputation. In terms of brand association, the image of "excellence" is deeply embedded in public perception as the school's defining identity. Regarding perceived quality, public perception of the madrasah's educational quality including facilities, teaching staff, and services is generally positive. Finally, in terms of brand loyalty, the community's trust in the madrasah is high, as parents frequently recommend the school to relatives and colleagues.

Preliminary observations indicate that the "Unggulan" brand has been well-managed through effective brand equity management, allowing MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo to maintain its existence amid increasingly competitive conditions among leading madrasahs. Based on this rationale, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled: "Brand Equity Management in Enhancing School Competitiveness at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo."

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach that focuses on how Brand Equity Management plays a role in enhancing the competitiveness of schools at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. The qualitative approach is used to describe and interpret the conditions and relationships that occur within the research object in depth. Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation, in order to obtain comprehensive and relevant data aligned with the focus of the study. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive data analysis model, which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity of the data, the study applied source triangulation, by comparing and confirming information obtained from various sources.

The type of research used in this study is a case study, as it aims to reveal in depth a particular event or phenomenon related to the research object. The focus of this study is on brand equity management in enhancing school competitiveness at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo, which includes three main aspects: (1) the selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo, (2) the implementation of selling value consistency of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo, and (3) the impact of brand equity management effectiveness on enhancing school competitiveness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation related to the three research focuses, namely: (1) the selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo; (2) the implementation of brand selling value consistency of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo through social media; and (3) the evaluation of the effectiveness of brand equity management at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo, the findings are described as follows.

A. The Selling Value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo

The selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo represents the aspects that reflect the "Unggulan" brand namely, the advantages that distinguish it from other madrasahs, thereby influencing customer interest and the school's competitiveness. Thus, the selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo becomes an important aspect to consider in brand equity management. The following are the key aspects that most prominently highlight the strengths of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo:

a. Grade A Accreditation

MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has been accredited Grade A with a score of 98 (excellent). This accreditation was granted by the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasahs (BAN-S/M) in Jakarta on May 25, 2023, and is valid until December 2, 2028. This accreditation serves as a selling value that has been promoted to strengthen the image of the "Unggulan" brand and enhance the attractiveness of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo in the eyes of the public.

b. Innovative Curriculum

The innovative curriculum of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo is reflected in its comprehensive integration between general subjects (Indonesian Language, English, Science, Social Studies, Civics, Arts and Culture, and Physical Education), religious subjects (Arabic, Qur'an and Hadith, Muhammadiyah Studies, Aqidah Akhlak, and Fiqh), contemporary subjects (Computer), and religious activities (Qur'an reading reinforcement and Duha prayer). Moreover, its innovation is also evident in the implementation process, supported by a collaborative teaching model involving two teachers in one class and the effective use of learning technology, such as quizzes using PowerPoint visual media and LCD projectors.

c. Professional Human Resources

Many educators at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo possess high qualifications. Among the 41 teachers, 11 hold a master's degree (S2), and 4 of them are certified professionals. Meanwhile, among the 12 educational staff members, 5 hold a bachelor's degree (S1). To enhance their professional skills, the school regularly provides relevant

training and workshops aligned with both spiritual and modern needs. Some notable programs that have been implemented and widely shared on the school's official Facebook account include the *Workshop on the Development of Digital Learning Media Based on Augmented Reality (AR)* and the *Qur'an Reading Strengthening Program* for all teaching and administrative staff.

d. Modern Facilities and Accredited Infrastructure

MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo is equipped with modern facilities, including a computer laboratory with Wi-Fi access, a digital whiteboard, and CCTV systems. Its accredited infrastructures consist of a library, canteen, and school health unit (UKS), all of which contribute to supporting an effective and comfortable learning environment.

e. Outstanding Extracurricular Activities

MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo offers extracurricular programs such as *Tapak Suci* (martial arts), *Marching Band*, and *Hizbul Wathan* (scouting). These programs not only serve as platforms for students to develop their interests, talents, and skills but also function as training grounds that consistently produce high-achieving students in both academic and non-academic fields.

f. Innovative Programs

The school also provides a variety of innovative programs in both academic and non-academic domains. In the academic field, the programs include specialization tracks in selected subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English. Meanwhile, in the non-academic field, students can participate in Calligraphy and a mandatory *Tahfidz Qur'an* (Qur'an memorization) program. These programs are designed to foster students' holistic development while enhancing the school's competitive advantage.

g. National and International Academic and Non-Academic Achievements

MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has achieved numerous accomplishments in both academic and non-academic fields at the national and international levels. In 2024, several outstanding achievements were recorded, including 3rd place in the *World Mathematics and Science Competition (WMSC)* at the international level, 2nd and 3rd place in the *International Mathematics and Science Olympiad (IMSO)*, 1st place in the *Math Champions Competition* for Eastern Indonesia, and 1st place in English and Mathematics competitions for elementary and Islamic elementary schools (SD/MI) across Gorontalo Province.

In the non-academic field, the school has obtained a total of 46 achievements, with several notable awards such as 2nd place in the O2SN badminton branch at the city level, 1st place in *Taekwondo*, overall 1st place in the *Regional Pencak Silat Championship (Region 3, Gorontalo Province)*, and 1st and 2nd place in the *Kempo* competition across Sulawesi. In the arts and literature field, the school won 1st place in *Music Analysis*, 1st place in *Concert Band*, overall 2nd place in *Marching Band*, overall 1st place in *Poetry Reading* at the *Language and Literature Festival*, and 2nd best in the *Storytelling Competition* for SD/MI in Gorontalo City. Meanwhile, in the religious field, MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo successfully represented the province in the *National MTQ (Qur'an Recitation Competition)* in Kalimantan for the *Tartil* category, and won 1st place in *Tartil*, 2nd place in *Qira'at Mujawwad* at the provincial level, and 2nd place in *Tartil Qur'an* at the *Bank Indonesia Ramadan Festival*.

B. Implementation of the Selling Value Consistency of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo Through Social Media

a. Promotion of the Madrasah Name

The promotion of the madrasah's name is carried out strategically by highlighting the "Unggulan" (Excellent) brand as a distinctive identity through the use of official social media account names. This strategy is exemplified by the Facebook account name "MIM Unggulan" (MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo), which emphasizes the brand's positioning by placing its distinguishing identity outside the parentheses. This consistency continues across other platforms, such as Instagram, with the main account name

"mim.unggulan.kota.gorontalo" and the username "MIM Unggulan." Meanwhile, the YouTube account "MIM UNGGULAN KOTA GORONTALO" uses capital letters to reinforce the brand's presence, and the TikTok account "@mi.mu.go" employs a shorter form to maintain a clean and visually appealing content layout. Offline, the madrasah's name promotion is implemented through the strategic placement of the school name on the third-floor wall of Building 1 and on the signboard of Building 2 facing the main road, making it easier for the public to recognize the madrasah's identity as part of its strategy to reach its target audience.

The name of the madrasah, as the main identity of the brand, has been consistently and strategically promoted both online through social media and offline. This not only serves as a strategy to attract customer interest but also helps to demonstrate and highlight the "Unggulan" brand carried by the madrasah.

b. Promotion of New Student Admissions (PPDB)

The promotion of New Student Admissions (PPDB) is carried out strategically through pamphlets and videos presented with attractive visuals and engaging content. For instance, the 2024 PPDB pamphlet not only provides registration information but also highlights the school's selling values, such as extracurricular activities, facilities, and religious programs offered. On Facebook, this pamphlet is posted alongside photos of the madrasah's infrastructure to make it more visually appealing and informative.

The implementation of brand selling value consistency in the pamphlets and promotional videos for New Student Admissions (PPDB) demonstrates the madrasah's strategy to reach more prospective students and to build initial customer awareness of the existence of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo.

c. Promotion of Achievements

Various academic and non-academic achievements are posted on social media using a consistent caption template and hashtags. Each post includes a time reference, such as "Today's activity, Monday, November 4, 2024," followed by the achievement statement, for example: "A student of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo once again records an outstanding achievement..." and ends with hashtags such as #MadrasahMajuBermutuMendunia (Progressive, Quality, and Global Madrasah) or #MadrasahMandiriBerprestasi (Independent and Achieving Madrasah).

The large number of posted achievements and the use of such hashtags clearly demonstrate the madrasah's strategy to highlight and strengthen its brand identity or image as an outstanding madrasah, particularly in the aspect of achievements, in a creative way.

d. Promotion of Extracurricular Activities and Innovative Programs

Extracurricular activities such as Hizbul Wathan, Tapak Suci, and Marching Band, as well as innovative programs like the Tahfidz program and academic specialization, are frequently featured across all social media platforms of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. These posts not only showcase student activities but also highlight their achievements in various events, reinforcing the madrasah's image as a dynamic and achievement-oriented institution.

These innovative programs demonstrate the strategic efforts of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo in building and strengthening its image as a madrasah that excels not only in academic aspects but also in non-academic ones. The extracurricular activities and flagship programs that are consistently publicized across various social media platforms help build a positive image and attract broader public interest toward the madrasah.

C. The Impact of Brand Equity Management Effectiveness on Enhancing the Competitiveness of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo

a. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness among students is at the *brand recognition* level (consumers can recall the brand with the help of stimuli), meaning that students initially became

familiar with MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo through their parents and relatives. This indicates that parents play a major role in building brand awareness of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo among students. Therefore, the madrasah needs to implement promotional strategies that can reach more parents as the primary target market.

Meanwhile, 60% of parents' brand awareness is at the *top-of-mind* level, indicating that they have known MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo from the beginning as an "Unggulan" (Excellent) madrasah in Gorontalo City. The most frequently mentioned initial source of information by parents was Facebook, while a smaller portion mentioned the school's nameplate and promotional billboards in front of the madrasah. The remaining 40% were at the *brand recognition* level, recognizing MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo as an "excellent school" based on recommendations from relatives and friends. Relatives and friends mentioned as sources of information about MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo not only indicate that word-of-mouth promotion plays a significant role in reaching parents but also demonstrate the madrasah's success in building customer trust, leading them to willingly recommend the madrasah to others.

b. Brand Association

Most students associate MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo with an "achievement-oriented school," while others associate it with a "quality school," "high-quality facilities," and a "school with many interesting activities." These associations are influenced by the school's popularity for its numerous achievements in 2024, including those at the international level. The association of the madrasah with aspects of quality (35%), quality facilities (25%), and numerous interesting activities (15%) indicates that while these three aspects are recognized, they are not as strongly associated as the main image of the madrasah compared to its achievements. Based on the research findings, this is influenced not only by the evenly implemented brand consistency across all aspects but also by the popularity of the achievements attained in 2024, many of which were at the international level.

Similarly, most parents associate MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo with an "excellent school," while others associate it with a "quality school," an "achievement-oriented school," a "high-quality Muhammadiyah school," and a "religiously strong school." The association of the madrasah with aspects of quality, achievements, as well as its identity as a religious and Muhammadiyah school, tends to have a balanced percentage. This indicates that MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has successfully built a strong image, not only in one aspect but also across several of these aspects.

c. Perceived Quality

Most students expressed positive assessments of teacher quality (highlighting attitudes and teaching methods), learning models (particularly the quiz-based model using digital whiteboards), facilities (considered adequate and of good quality), extracurricular activities (especially Hizbul Wathan, the most popular mandatory extracurricular), and the madrasah's innovative programs (such as the Tahfidz program and subject specializations in English, Mathematics, and Science, which were viewed as interesting and beneficial). Only 5% of students stated that some teachers showed favoritism.

Likewise, most parents also gave positive assessments of teacher quality highlighting overall teaching competence (13%) and teachers' responsibility in ensuring student safety before pickup (6%). In terms of teaching, 66% rated the overall quality positively, and 34% highlighted the effectiveness of the dual-teacher collaborative model in one classroom. Regarding the curriculum, 13% emphasized overall quality, 40% highlighted the effectiveness of religious education in shaping students' morals and character, 33% valued the attractiveness and usefulness of the Tahfidz program, and 65% appreciated the appeal of Arabic and English subjects. Facilities such as the computer laboratory, library, building infrastructure, desks and chairs, and spacious playground were also rated positively. Parents considered the tuition fees appropriate for the quality provided by the madrasah. Only 13% expressed criticism regarding the parking area, which they felt was insufficient. Based on observation, this limitation is due to restricted land availability, especially in Building 1, which lacks a designated parking area. In Building 2, the inner parking area has limited capacity, causing the schoolyard to be used as an alternative parking space. However,

as a practical solution, the madrasah has provided an additional parking area outside Building 2, near the gate.

d. Brand Loyalty

Most students' loyalty toward the madrasah is at the *liked the brand* level, while 5% are at the *switchers/no brand loyalty* level. The majority of students feel satisfied with the quality of several aspects of education at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo and have never considered transferring to another school, indicating that their loyalty remains at the *liked the brand* level. Meanwhile, the 5% who were less satisfied and had once considered transferring are categorized at the *switchers/no brand loyalty* level. This finding indicates that the quality of various educational aspects at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has successfully provided satisfaction to students, making them willing to continue studying at the madrasah (loyal). Therefore, this should be maintained while also using the 5% of non-loyal students as evaluation material to anticipate the potential weakening of the madrasah's brand loyalty.

In contrast, parents' loyalty toward the madrasah is at the highest level *committed buyer*. As many as 60% of parents recommend the madrasah to others, 27% have enrolled another child after one graduated, and 13% currently have two children studying at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. This indicates that most parents' loyalty toward the madrasah is at the *committed buyer* level. This finding shows that MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has successfully provided satisfaction and built trust among parents, making them willing to recommend the madrasah to others, and even to enroll more than one child and/or choose MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo again.

3.2 Discussion

A. The Brand Selling Value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo

In line with the theory of brand equity (Aaker, 1991), the distinctive characteristics and quality of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo represented by its A accreditation (score of 96, excellent), innovative curriculum, professional human resources, modern facilities and accredited infrastructure, innovative programs, high-achieving extracurricular activities, as well as national and international academic and non-academic achievements constitute the elements of brand association. These elements have the potential to be associated by customers with the "Unggulan" (Excellent) brand promoted by MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo.

Furthermore, this finding is also consistent with the Total Quality Management (TQM) theories proposed by Zulkarmain (2021) and Syaefudin (2020), which emphasize that schools with high-quality educational input, process, and output are those that meet comprehensive quality standards. In this context, the brand selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo falls into the high-quality category, as it has been officially recognized by the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasahs (BAN-S/M) with an A accreditation (score of 96). This recognition reflects the school's comprehensive quality achievement across various aspects of input, process, and output, which serve as the core strengths of the "Unggulan" brand.

B. Implementation of Brand Selling Value Consistency of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo Through Social Media

The implementation of brand selling value consistency at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has been carried out through promotional strategies using social media. Social media serves as a strategic choice and a potential promotional medium in the modern era. This aligns with the theory proposed by B.K. Lewis (as cited in Sukarna, 2024), which states that social media is a label referring to digital technology that enables everyone to connect, interact, produce, and share messages.

In addition, the promotional strategies used by MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo also reflect differentiation strategies (Fradito et al., 2020) and positioning strategies (Wijaya, 2022), which involve emphasizing the school's strengths to establish or build a positive image, value, and product uniqueness in the minds of customers. Consequently, the school

becomes more recognizable and stands out amid the increasingly intense competition among schools (Fradito et al., 2020; Wijaya, 2022).

The consistency in the types and styles of message delivery through creative and innovative content such as caption templates, hashtags, pamphlets, and informative videos also meets the indicators of promotional success proposed by Kotler (as cited in Sukarna, 2024), particularly in terms of delivering engaging and appropriate promotional messages and media that are relevant to the modern era.

Overall, the promotion of the school's name, new student admissions (PPDB), achievements, extracurricular activities, and flagship programs contributes to shaping and strengthening the four elements of brand equity defined by Aaker (1991), namely brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Consistent and creatively appealing promotion of the brand's selling value enhances brand awareness, helping customers recognize and remember "MIM Unggulan." The school's selling values such as achievements, facilities, extracurricular activities, and various innovative programs help build a positive perceived quality. The use of consistent and engaging narratives and visuals fosters positive brand associations, where the school is associated with excellence, religiosity, and competitiveness. Continuous and consistent brand promotion cultivates a sense of pride and trust among customers, which in turn strengthens their loyalty to MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo.

C. The Impact of Brand Equity Management Effectiveness on Enhancing the Competitiveness of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo

The brand equity management of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has proven effective in shaping the four elements of brand equity proposed by Aaker (1991), namely brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. In this regard, students and parents demonstrate a high level of recognition, positive perception, and loyalty toward MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. However, aspects such as certain teacher personality traits that slightly reduce student satisfaction and the limited parking facilities that slightly affect parent satisfaction though minor in percentage still require attention to maintain and strengthen the school's brand.

Furthermore, these four elements of brand equity also align with the school competitiveness indicators defined by Wijaya (2022), which include customer awareness, customer image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Therefore, the effectiveness of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo's brand equity management has contributed significantly to enhancing the school's competitiveness and strengthening its overall competitive advantage.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research focus, data presentation, and discussion of the findings, the results of the study can be concluded as follows:

1. The brand selling value of MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo, which has been identified to build and strengthen the "Unggulan" (Excellent) brand, includes advantages in the aspects of input, process, and output of the madrasah, namely: (1) A accreditation with a score of 96 (excellent); (2) An innovative curriculum; (3) Professional human resources; (4) Modern facilities and infrastructure; (5) High-achieving extracurricular activities; (6) Innovative programs; and (7) Academic and non-academic achievements at national and international levels. The distinctive values of each of these advantages serve as the foundation for forming and strengthening the brand equity of the "Unggulan" brand, which includes brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty.
2. The implementation of brand selling value consistency at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo as an effort to strengthen the "Unggulan" brand equity has been carried out through promotional strategies on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The main selling values highlighted include: (1) The school's name (emphasizing the "Unggulan" label in social media account names and strategically placing the school's name on the school signboard); (2) New Student Admissions (PPDB) promotion presented creatively and attractively; (3) The school's outstanding achievements (promoted using caption templates and engaging hashtags); and (4) The school's extracurricular activities and innovative programs (promoted both through the implementation of activities and through consistent achievement highlights). The consistent and creative promotional activities conducted on social media help form and strengthen the brand equity of the

- "Unggulan" brand, which encompasses brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty.
3. The effectiveness of brand equity management at MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo has been proven to have an impact on strengthening the four elements of brand equity: (1) brand awareness, (2) brand association, (3) perceived quality, and (4) brand loyalty. Most students and parents demonstrate high levels of recognition, positive perception, and loyalty toward MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. This strong brand equity has become the school's main competitive advantage in reinforcing the "Unggulan" brand image and increasing public trust in MIM Unggulan Kota Gorontalo. Improvement and development efforts only need to be focused on the aspects of teacher personality and parking facilities, which were considered less satisfactory by a small number of respondents.

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