

# The Branding Strategy of the "Shobat" Program as a Differentiator for Integrated Islamic Schools: A Case Study of Islamic Junior Highschool

Muhammad Thorif Abdurrofi<sup>1</sup>, Mohamad Joko Susilo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Fakultas Ilmu Agama Islam, Universitas Islam Indonesia

---

## Article Info

### Article history:

Received 20 Februari 2026

Revised 08 Maret 2026

Accepted 27 April 2026

---

### Keywords:

Islamic Education Branding;  
School Differentiation;  
Institutional Reputation;  
Achievement Integration;  
Strategic Partnerships.

---

## ABSTRACT

Integrated Islamic education branding has become an essential strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of educational institutions amid growing competition. This study examines the branding strategy of the SHOBAT program (Sholih dan Berprestasi Terpadu) in shaping the institutional image of an Islamic Junior Highschool in Yogyakarta as a leading Islamic school. A qualitative descriptive approach was utilized, involving data collection through interviews with nine informants, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the branding strategy was implemented across three main dimensions: internal branding, focused on internalizing Islamic values and enhancing teacher competence; external branding, through digital media and strategic partnerships; and reinforcing the SHOBAT program, which integrates piety, academic excellence, and 21st-century skills. This approach has led to increased public trust, stakeholder loyalty, and greater appeal to prospective students. The research contributes to the theoretical development of branding in integrated Islamic education and provides practical insights for other Islamic schools aiming to differentiate themselves through distinctive programs.

*This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.*



---

### Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Thorif Abdurrofi  
Fakultas Ilmu Agama Islam, Universitas Islam Indonesia  
Jl. Kaliurang KM 14,5, Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
Email: [thorif024@gmail.com](mailto:thorif024@gmail.com)

---

## INTRODUCTION

Branding in educational institutions is now understood as a crucial strategy for building image and enhancing school competitiveness amidst increasingly intense competition (Maduro et al., 2018) (Panda et al., 2019). The concept of branding is not limited to visual aspects such as logos or slogans, but encompasses a planned process to shape identity, reputation, and differentiation through flagship programs that become the hallmark of educational institutions (Gao & Liu, 2020) (Sataøen, 2015). In the context of integrated Islamic schools, including SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta, branding strategies play a significant role in fostering public trust while affirming the excellence of Islamic values integrated into the educational services for students and parents (Istikomah & Romadlon, 2023).

Several studies indicate that the success of branding strategies in leading Islamic schools in Indonesia, including SMPIT Abu Bakar, is not solely dependent on promotional activities, but on the consistent integration of Islamic values across all programs and institutional practices. Istikomah & Romadlon (2023) emphasize that the continuous implementation of school values plays a crucial role in shaping a positive public perception. In line with this, Syukri & Harahap (2024) highlight the role of Islamic branding combined with educational innovations, such as boarding school programs and integrated education systems, as a strategic factor in strengthening the school's position in the public sphere. This approach is further reinforced through the application of value-based branding, which synergizes religious missions with balanced academic achievements.

Flagship programs, such as Quran memorization (Tahfidzul Qur'an) and strengthening technological and language competencies, form the core of SMPIT Abu Bakar's branding strategy. Aini et al. (2025) stress that integrated Islamic educational institutions must consistently communicate the strengths of their programs while emphasizing the school's vision as the core identity. This approach enables flagship programs to serve as a clear differentiator, creating a unique selling point in the eyes of students and the public, while strengthening the school's positive image in the national education context.

However, the school's attractiveness is determined not solely by external promotional strategies but also by efforts to build meaningful experiences within the school community (Varadarajan & Malone, 2018) (Khanna & Chopra, 2019). Research from (Zarastri et al., 2024) emphasizes that a successful branding strategy must be supported by efforts to create meaningful experiences within the school community, including direct interactions between teachers, students, and parents, as well as consistent achievements in both academic and non-academic fields. Furthermore, a study by Asmarita (2024) the role of Islamic Education teachers in branding highlights that the involvement of the entire academic community, especially Islamic Education teachers, is pivotal to building a school's reputation and brand through the integration of the Islamic curriculum. Strengthening internal branding can ultimately enhance public response to SMPIT Abu Bakar's flagship programs.

Although studies on Islamic school branding have been extensively conducted, most research has focused on promotion, institutional image, and overall branding success, without delving deeply into flagship programs as the operational framework for institutional branding. Previous studies tend to treat flagship programs as outcomes or impacts of branding, rather than as analytical models that systematically shape the identity and differentiation of integrated Islamic educational institutions. Additionally, research integrating both internal and external branding into a distinctive institutional model remains limited. Therefore, this study positions the SHOBAT program (Sholih dan Berprestasi Terpadu) as a distinctive branding model for SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta and analyzes its operational aspects to address this gap and enrich the study of integrated Islamic education branding based on flagship programs. Overall, research on branding at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta is not only relevant for strengthening the school's image, but also offers a contribution to the development of an educational branding model that can be adopted by other integrated Islamic schools across Indonesia. By drawing on recent studies and examples of branding implementation, the school's branding strategy is expected to foster an innovative, Islamic, and competitive educational climate.

## METHOD

The research methodology includes the type of research, sample and population or research subjects, time and location of the study, instruments, procedures and techniques, and other relevant aspects regarding the research process. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to provide an in-depth description of the branding strategy implemented at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta and to analyze the relationship between the image of flagship programs and public perception. The research location was purposively chosen based on academic considerations, as SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta is one of the integrated Islamic schools with the SHOBAT (Sholih dan Berprestasi Terpadu) program, which serves as its institutional identity and is systematically and consistently designed. The presence of this program makes the research location relevant and representative for studying branding practices in integrated Islamic education amid increasing competition among educational institutions (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The research participants were purposely selected for their direct involvement in the planning and implementation of the school's branding strategy. The participants consisted of 1 school principal, 3 core teachers of the SHOBAT program, 1 school public relations staff member, and 4 students, for a total of 9 key informants. The selection of participants was based on their relevance in representing managerial, pedagogical, institutional communication, and student experience perspectives, aligning with the research objectives of comprehensively understanding school branding from both internal and external viewpoints. Within the methodological framework, the SHOBAT model is positioned as a distinctive branding model for integrated Islamic institutions and serves as the basis for operational analysis in this study. This model serves as a conceptual framework to examine how religious values, academic achievements, and student skill development are integrated into the school's branding strategy, both internally and externally. Thus, SHOBAT is not treated as an outcome of the research but rather as an analytical reference for identifying and categorizing the institution's branding practices.

Table 1. Research Participants

No	Category of Informants	Number	Description
1	School Principal	1	Key informant related to SHOBAT program policy and decision-making
2	Core SHOBAT Program Teachers	3	Main implementers responsible for executing the SHOBAT program
3	School Public Relations Staff	1	Responsible for communication, outreach, and program branding
4	Students	4	Program participants as recipients of the SHOBAT program implementation

Data for this research was collected through literature review from relevant books, journals, and scholarly articles, as well as field data collection in the form of interviews with school leadership, teachers, and students, direct observations of school activities, and documentation of promotional media and publications of flagship programs (Yin, 2018). Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources. This thematic analysis approach was chosen because thematic analysis facilitates the identification of recurring themes that capture significant aspects of the data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



Figure 1. Phase in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

In this study, the analysis followed a structured process beginning with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes to develop an in-depth understanding of the content. This was followed by the generation of initial codes by systematically labeling meaningful data segments relevant to the study focus. The codes were then organized into potential themes by identifying patterns and relationships across the dataset. Subsequently, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and consistency with the overall data. Each theme was then clearly defined and named to capture its core essence and analytical scope. The final stage involved producing a coherent narrative that integrates the identified themes with the research objectives and theoretical framework, supported by representative data excerpts. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of branding values, differentiation strategies, and stakeholder perceptions related to the “Shobat” program within the institutional context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The implementation of branding at SMP Islam Terpadu Abu Bakar Yogyakarta begins with the formulation of the institution's vision and mission, emphasizing the integration of Islamic values in every flagship program offered by the school. These vision and mission statements are not just institutional documents but are consistently published on the school's official website and various social media platforms, creating a unique identity that is easily recognized by the public. This effort aligns with the findings of Azizah (2024), who emphasized that aligning the vision and mission should be reflected in every public communication activity to build a strong and sustainable branding foundation in integrated Islamic education.

The branding implementation at SMPIT Abu Bakar starts with the school's commitment to building an image rooted in Islamic values, using an integrated approach that connects religious education with modern learning standards. The institutional brand is established by developing a strong vision and mission, which are published to the public via various communication channels, such as the school's website and official social media. This step has proven to increase parent involvement and public trust, as identified in research by Kurniawan et al. (2024), which highlights the importance of consistent identity in integrated Islamic schools for shaping perceptions of quality education in the digital age.

The branding process at SMPIT Abu Bakar relies not only on external promotion but also on instilling Islamic traditions and fostering excellent character within the school's internal environment. According to Aini et al. (2025) in the *Al-Tanzim* journal, a values-based branding strategy is crucial for Islamic schools as it builds an authentic image that can withstand the pressures of educational digitalization. Values such as sincerity, discipline, and responsibility are integrated into the curriculum and daily activities, ensuring that the school's branding is not merely symbolic but is truly reflected in students' behavior and achievements. This study also highlights the use of technology to document achievements and flagship programs, which can enhance brand positioning amid competition in modern schools (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

SMPIT Abu Bakar routinely showcases its flagship programs, such as Quran memorization (tahfidzul Qur'an) and character development classes, by publishing activity results on social media and in bulletins, and by collaborating with external communities. Supangat (2021), in his book *Branding Sekolah Islam*, emphasizes that storytelling, school bulletins, and digital publications about activities and achievements can improve the school's reputation and strengthen its appeal to prospective new students. This branding practice reinforces SMPIT Abu Bakar's identity as an institution that excels not only in academics but also in fostering spiritual and social values

through a range of systematically organized promotional platforms. SMPIT Abu Bakar's branding has become a key differentiator in Yogyakarta's educational landscape, where the synergy between Islamic values and modern education is evident. The school's identity is built in a participatory manner, involving teachers, students, parents, and the surrounding community, ensuring that the institutional image is genuinely internalized and collectively supported. By applying a values-based branding approach and leveraging digitalization, SMPIT Abu Bakar has successfully established an authentic, adaptive, and competitive brand image that aligns with the needs of today's educational era.

### **Internal Branding Strategy at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta**

The internal branding strategy at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta focuses on consistently cultivating Islamic character and behavior through daily, habitual activities that are fully integrated into the curriculum. Every student is involved in communal prayers, Quran memorization (Tahfidzul Qur'an), and practicing manners while on school grounds. These practices align with the concept of value-based branding as articulated by Aini et al. (2025), in which the internalization of religious values forms the foundation of an authentic image for Islamic educational institutions, thereby strengthening public trust and community loyalty. Moreover, the development of character and the instillation of positive behaviors by teachers and education staff help enhance the school's reputation in the broader community. Supangat (2021) argues that modern Islamic school branding must always begin with the internal character-building habits collectively nurtured within the school environment.

The internal branding efforts at SMPIT Abu Bakar are also reinforced through training and professional development for teachers and education staff. The implementation of leadership training, active learning methods, and mastery of religious material is systematically designed to ensure that teachers can serve as primary figures in promoting the school's brand and serve as role models for students. According to Rizqon & Fimaisarah (2024), the role of teachers as school brand ambassadors is crucial in shaping the image of an institution that is both outstanding and adaptable in the face of modern educational competition. The tangible impact of these training programs is improved educational service quality and a heightened spirit of innovation among teachers, making internal branding more effective and positively influencing students' and parents' perceptions of the school. The integration of Islamic values with human resource (HR) development at SMPIT Abu Bakar underscores the school's excellence in internal branding. This synergy is the main reason the school has successfully built a religious yet modern brand image in the eyes of the community, as supported by empirical findings from studies in Islamic education journals and branding strategy books.

### **External Branding Strategy and Promotion**

The branding implementation at SMP Islam Terpadu Abu Bakar Yogyakarta begins with the formulation of the institution's vision and mission, which emphasizes integrating Islamic values into every flagship program of the school. These vision and mission statements are not only institutional documents but are consistently published through the school's official website and various social media platforms, creating a unique identity that is easily recognized by the public. This effort is in line with the findings of Azizah (2024), who asserts that aligning the vision and mission should be reflected in every public communication activity to build a strong and sustainable branding foundation in integrated Islamic education.

The external branding strategy at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta focuses on the massive use of digital media to introduce the school's programs and achievements to the wider community. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are actively used to showcase creative content, ranging from student achievements, alumni testimonials, to the promotion of flagship programs that serve as major attractions. Research by Istikomah & Romadlon (2023) indicates that elite Islamic schools in Indonesia that optimize digital marketing interactively can significantly increase visibility and public trust. This strategy not only serves as a promotional tool but also as a means of two-way communication with prospective students and parents, enhancing stakeholder engagement with the school.

In addition to digital promotion, SMPIT Abu Bakar actively builds strategic partnerships with government institutions, universities, and community organizations. These collaborations are realized through various joint events, seminars, social service activities, and competitions, which are documented and published to strengthen the image of the integrated Islamic educational institution. A study by Yanti et al. (2024) emphasizes that cross-institutional partnerships provide legitimacy and extend the school's brand influence to a broader external network. In practice, these extracurricular activities also serve as an effective branding platform for embedding the school's identity and increasing public interest in SMPIT Abu Bakar.

### **Strengthening Flagship Programs as Brand Identity**

The flagship programs at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta, such as Quran memorization (Tahfidzul Qur'an), character development classes, and strengthening technological literacy, serve as the main identity that distinguishes this school from other Islamic educational institutions in the Yogyakarta region. The Tahfidzul Qur'an program is designed with measurable memorization targets and is guided by competent teachers, enabling students to memorize

at least several chapters of the Quran during their time at the school. Rahmawati et al. (2023) emphasize that the Tahfidz program not only functions as a religious academic activity but also serves as an effective branding strategy to build public trust in the quality of integrated Islamic education. A study by Hilmi et al. (2023) also found that the Tahfidz program at various modern Islamic educational institutions in Lombok has developed a strong brand image, as the community views Quran memorization as an indicator of piety and success in religious education.

In addition to the Tahfidz program, character strengthening and technological literacy have become important components in shaping SMPIT Abu Bakar's brand identity as a modern institution responsive to the needs of the times. Wibawa & Hardiansyah (2021) explain that the design of integrated Islamic school programs that combine Islamic values with modern skills, such as information technology and foreign languages, can create a clear differentiation from conventional schools. These programs are not only taught in the formal curriculum but are also practiced through extracurricular activities and daily routines, ensuring that students truly internalize the values and competencies being taught.

The school's brand identity is further reinforced through regular evaluations and the publication of the results of its flagship programs to the wider community. Firmansyah et al. (2024) state that the Tahfidz program, regularly showcased through Quran graduation ceremonies, competitions, and social media, enhances the brand of private schools, making them more competitive than public schools, as this program serves as a significant differentiator in public perception. Consistency in implementing flagship programs and transparency in evaluation results are key to maintaining the school's strong, trusted brand positioning in the eyes of stakeholders.

Overall, the strengthening of flagship programs as the brand identity at SMPIT Abu Bakar reflects the institution's commitment to continually innovate in integrated Islamic education that is relevant to the needs of modern society. The integration of Islamic values, character development, and technological proficiency makes SMPIT Abu Bakar a role model for other integrated Islamic schools in building a positive image through clear, measurable, and sustainable flagship programs.

### **Leadership Role and Stakeholder Collaboration**

The school principal's leadership plays a strategic role in the success of branding at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta, as the principal acts as a change agent, driving all institutional resources towards achieving the shared vision and mission. Razak et al. (2025), in their study at SDIT Al Ghazali Pamekasan, found that visionary, collaborative, and innovative leadership can significantly strengthen the school's brand image and enhance the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions amid intense competition. The principal is responsible not only for strategic planning but also for ensuring effective communication with all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and alumni, to create an inspirational and high-quality learning environment. According to Perdana & Azzani (2025), the role of the principal in enhancing school branding includes managing the school's social media accounts, improving teacher quality, upgrading facilities, and maintaining active communication with parents and alumni.

Collaboration with external stakeholders, such as parents, alumni, and the local community, has proven to have a significant impact on the sustainability of the school's branding. Babun et al. (2024) highlight the importance of stakeholders in the management of Islamic education, noting that the involvement of parents and the community in school activities, such as religious programs, social service activities, and extracurricular events, strengthens relationships and builds a shared commitment to supporting student development. Falah et al. (2023), in their study at SMA Syubbanul Wathon, found that active alumni involvement is a measure of the school's success, as alumni not only provide positive testimonials but also contribute to promotion, mentoring, and the provision of valuable information for prospective students. Successful alumni serve as effective school ambassadors, building public trust in the quality of education provided.

The synergy between strong leadership and active stakeholder participation creates a solid educational ecosystem that supports the achievement of the school's branding objectives. Regular two-way communication among the school, parents, and alumni strengthens the external network, a key support system for promoting flagship programs and maintaining loyalty within the educational community (Rahmanita et al., 2025). Thus, the visionary leadership of the school principal and close collaboration with all stakeholders form an essential foundation for building and maintaining SMPIT Abu Bakar's brand image as a trusted and outstanding Islamic educational institution.

### **Impact and Challenges of Integrated Islamic School Branding**

The implementation of branding strategies at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta has had a significant impact on increasing the number of new students, stakeholder loyalty, and public trust in the institution's quality. Mubarak & Niswatin (2024), in their literature review on branding effectiveness, emphasize that consistent and authentic branding not only attracts new students but also retains alumni loyalty, which ultimately contributes to the institution's positive reputation. This finding aligns with the notion that positive experiences during the study period increase satisfaction and loyalty to the institution, encouraging alumni to actively support the school through testimonials, mentoring, and informal promotion to prospective students. The enhancement of flagship programs,

such as Tahfidzul Qur'an and Islamic character development, is a key driver of student attraction to SMPIT Abu Bakar amid increasingly fierce competition in education.

However, SMPIT Abu Bakar also faces various challenges in implementing sustainable branding strategies. The main challenges include intense competition with other public and private schools, limited budgets for promotion and facility development, and changes in government policies regarding new student admissions under the zoning system. Susilawati & Harun (2017), in their SWOT analysis of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al-Hidayah, found that limited resources and competition with other educational institutions pose serious threats requiring continuous innovation in branding strategies. Halim (2020) also highlights the importance of active Islamic education marketing management in attracting students and gaining public trust amid increasingly dynamic global competition.

To overcome these challenges, SMPIT Abu Bakar has implemented branding innovations through digital media, regular SWOT analyses, and strengthened relationships with external stakeholders. Aprilia (2022) states that conducting regular annual SWOT analyses helps the school with its annual evaluations and strategic planning to improve graduate quality and enhance its brand image. Karsono et al. (2021) further note that steps such as institutional accreditation, improved student achievements, teacher quality development, and building alumni relations can significantly increase the school's competitiveness. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become primary sources of information for parents and prospective students, making consistent and creative digital campaigns essential for building brand awareness and attracting public interest. Overall, despite facing various internal and external challenges, SMPIT Abu Bakar's innovative and adaptive branding strategy, supported by SWOT analysis, digital promotion, and stakeholder collaboration, has proven effective in maintaining competitiveness and strengthening the school's reputation as an outstanding and trusted integrated Islamic educational institution. The commitment to continuous innovation and periodic evaluation of branding strategies is key to long-term success in navigating the dynamics of modern educational competition.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study emphasize that the integration of brand value, flagship programs, promotional innovation, and stakeholder collaboration are key factors in the successful image-building of SMPIT Abu Bakar in Yogyakarta. Carnawi et al. (2024) in their research on the branding strategies of Islamic educational institutions state that effective branding goes beyond mere promotion; it involves management practices that demonstrate integrity, transparency, and a firm commitment to educational excellence. Islamic educational institutions that effectively manage their brand image can significantly enhance public trust, strengthen their competitive position, and help shape a generation grounded in moral integrity and academic excellence. Fitria et al. (2024) further highlight that school branding, strategic management, and competitiveness are interrelated and mutually supportive concepts aimed at improving the quality and success of Islamic educational institutions in the era of disruption.

The thematic analysis reveals that branding at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta is constructed through six interconnected themes, including institutional identity formation, internal value internalization, flagship program development, external digital branding, leadership-stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive response to contextual challenges. These themes collectively converge into a global theme of authentic and competitive Islamic school branding in the digital era, demonstrating that branding is not merely promotional activity but a holistic socio-educational process embedded in school culture, leadership practices, and community engagement.

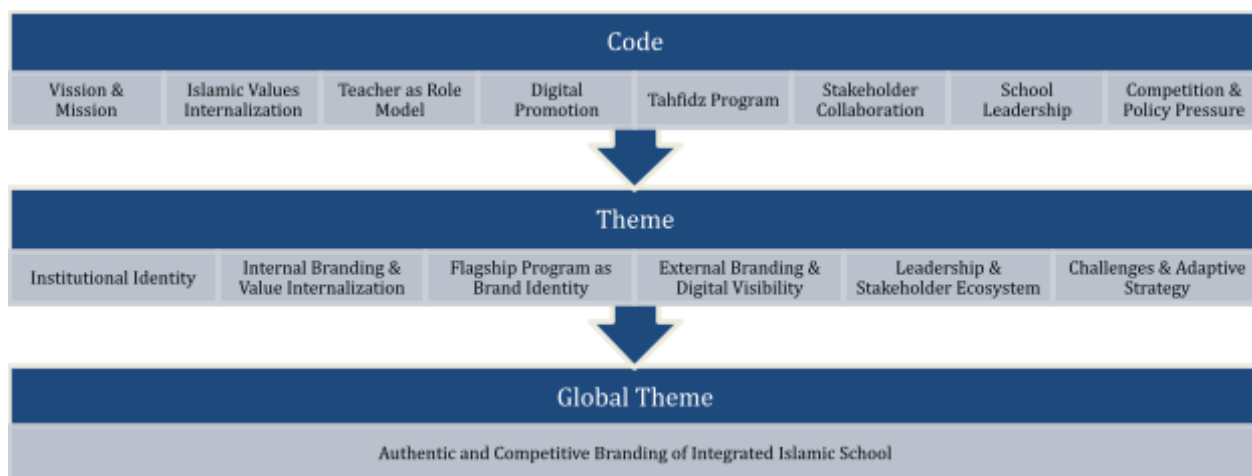


Figure 2. Thematic Map Branding Strategy

The first finding shows that branding at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta is initiated through the formulation and consistent communication of the school's vision and mission, which emphasize the integration of Islamic values in education. This finding is in line with branding theory which states that brand identity serves as the foundation of all branding activities and must be consistently communicated to create strong brand associations in the minds of stakeholders. Keller explains that brand equity is built through consistent identity representation and meaningful associations. In this context, the school's vision and mission function as a strategic identity framework that is not only documented formally but also disseminated through digital platforms, thereby strengthening public recognition and institutional legitimacy. This consistency in identity communication also reflects previous findings by Azizah (2024), who emphasized that institutional vision and mission must be integrated into all communication channels to establish sustainable educational branding.

Internal branding practices at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta are characterized by the internalization of Islamic values through daily school activities such as congregational prayer, Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), and character-based discipline. This finding reflects the concept of internal branding, which emphasizes that organizational identity must first be lived by internal members before being communicated externally. From the perspective of Islamic education theory, these practices align with the concept of tarbiyah, which focuses on holistic development of moral, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions. Teachers play a central role as role models, reinforcing the principle of *uswah hasanah* in Islamic pedagogy. The study supports Aini et al. (2025), who argue that value-based branding in Islamic schools is effective when institutional values are embedded in daily behavior rather than merely symbolic representations. Furthermore, teacher development programs enhance the consistency of internal branding by ensuring that educators function as both instructional agents and cultural ambassadors of the institution.

External branding strategies are implemented through the utilization of digital media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, as well as through community engagement and institutional partnerships. This reflects the principles of school marketing theory, which emphasize the importance of strategic communication in building trust, visibility, and stakeholder engagement. Kotler and Fox highlight that educational institutions function as service organizations that must actively manage perceptions through communication strategies. The findings indicate that SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta has successfully adopted digital marketing approaches by showcasing student achievements, flagship programs, and institutional activities in a structured and consistent manner. This digital presence not only enhances visibility but also facilitates interactive communication with parents and prospective students, thereby strengthening institutional credibility. These results are consistent with Istikomah and Romadlon (2023), who found that digital marketing significantly improves public trust in Islamic educational institutions.

The strengthening of flagship programs such as Tahfidzul Qur'an, character education, and technological literacy serves as a key differentiator in school branding. From a branding theory perspective, these programs function as unique value propositions that distinguish the institution from competitors. The prominence of Tahfidz programs, in particular, reflects both academic and spiritual excellence, which contributes to the construction of a strong institutional image. Islamic education theory supports this finding by emphasizing that memorization of the Qur'an is not only a religious achievement but also a marker of educational quality and moral integrity. Studies by Rahmawati et al. (2023) and Hilmi et al. (2023) confirm that Tahfidz programs contribute significantly to institutional branding by shaping public perception of educational excellence. The integration of technological literacy further demonstrates the school's adaptation to modern educational demands, reinforcing its positioning as an institution that balances religious values and contemporary competencies.

Leadership and stakeholder collaboration emerge as critical factors in sustaining school branding (Goh et al., 2019) (Bisani & Mortimer, 2022). The principal functions as a strategic leader who directs institutional resources, shapes vision alignment, and ensures communication effectiveness across stakeholders. This finding aligns with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of visionary leadership in organizational change and identity formation. Razak et al. (2025) highlight that leadership in Islamic schools significantly influences institutional image and competitiveness. In addition, collaboration with parents, alumni, and community stakeholders strengthens external legitimacy and expands institutional networks. Alumni involvement plays a particularly important role in reinforcing brand credibility through testimonials, mentoring, and informal promotion. This supports Falah et al. (2023), who argue that alumni act as organic brand ambassadors who enhance institutional trust and reputation.

The study also identifies both impacts and challenges in the implementation of branding strategies. The positive impacts include increased student enrollment, improved stakeholder trust, and strengthened institutional reputation. These findings are consistent with school marketing theory, which states that effective branding leads to higher institutional attractiveness and loyalty. However, the institution also faces challenges such as intense competition among schools, limited financial resources, and policy changes related to student admissions. From a strategic management perspective, these challenges require continuous innovation and adaptive planning. The use of SWOT analysis and digital innovation represents a rational response to environmental uncertainty. This aligns with

Aprilia (2022), who emphasizes that strategic evaluation is essential for maintaining institutional competitiveness in dynamic educational contexts.

Branding at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta is a holistic and integrated process that combines institutional identity, value internalization, strategic communication, leadership, and stakeholder engagement. When viewed through the integration of branding theory, school marketing theory, and Islamic education theory, it becomes evident that school branding in this context is not merely a promotional activity but a comprehensive educational ecosystem. The synergy between internal culture, external communication, and Islamic value foundations creates an authentic and competitive institutional identity. This finding contributes to the growing discourse on Islamic school branding by demonstrating that successful branding requires the alignment of values, strategy, and digital transformation within a coherent institutional framework.

Theoretically, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Islamic education branding and the management of flagship programs based on Islamic character in integrated schools. Fitriana et al. (2024) (Brewer, 2010) assert that building relationships within the framework of branding and image in Islamic educational institutions involves creating brand awareness, followed by the development of perceived institutional quality. This study enriches the literature on how Islamic educational institutions can leverage branding as a strategic tool to strengthen their reputation and attract more students amidst increasingly fierce competition. The results of this study also show that consistent and authentic branding can strengthen the relationship between institutions and their communities and improve the institution's image in the education market.

In practice, the branding strategy at SMPIT Abu Bakar can serve as a model for integrated Islamic schools across regions to strengthen their image and enhance the competitiveness of modern Islamic educational institutions. Maulana (2025), in his research on school branding strategies, concludes that analyzing the factors contributing to successful school branding, formulating strategic steps, and evaluating the impact of branding on competitiveness are essential to be done systematically. Mufarrohah & Maunah (2024) add that building the school's organizational brand is crucial to creating a positive image aligned with the school's vision and mission. Therefore, the findings of this research make real contributions not only to SMPIT Abu Bakar but also to the academic community and Islamic education practitioners seeking to develop effective and sustainable branding strategies to meet the challenges of the future of education.

## CONCLUSION

The SHOBAT branding strategy at SMPIT Abu Bakar Yogyakarta has proven effective in building an excellent school image through a holistic approach integrating Islamic values, flagship programs, and promotional innovation. Its success is driven by three key pillars: consistent internal branding through Islamic character habituation, human resource development, and programs such as Qur'an memorization and technological literacy; external branding through digital media, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous publication of achievements; and visionary leadership supported by strong participation from teachers, parents, and alumni. This strategy has resulted in increased student enrollment, stakeholder loyalty, and public trust, and despite competition and limited resources, the school has sustained its brand through continuous innovation and strategic SWOT analysis. Overall, these findings contribute to the development of integrated Islamic education branding in Indonesia and offer a practical model for other schools to enhance competitiveness and build a positive reputation in the modern era.

## REFERENCES

- Aini, T. N., Nugraha, L., Surbakti, A. H., Mundiri, A., & Sanjani, M. A. F. (2025). Value-Based Branding in Islamic Boarding Schools: Efforts to Maintain Identity in Digitalization Dynamics. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 9(2), 442–457. <https://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v9i2.10753>
- Aprilia, R. D. (2022). *Analisis SWOT Dalam Membangun Brand Image Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu (SDIT) Cordova Samarinda*. <http://repository.uinsi.ac.id/handle/123456789/2260>
- Asmarita, D. (2024). *Peran Guru Pai Dalam Meningkatkan School Branding Melalui Kurikulum Terintegrasi Di Smpit Abu Bakar Full Day School Yogyakarta*.
- Azizah, Y. (2024). *Program Studi Manajemen Pendidikan Islam Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Negeri Profesor Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto*.
- Babun, Hefniy, Aini, N., & Wardi, M. (2024). The Role of Stakeholders in the Management of Islamic Education: A Collaborative Approach to Education Quality. *Managers: Indonesian Journal of Educational Management*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.52627/managere.v6i3.769>
- Bisani S, Daye M, Mortimer K (2022), Multi-stakeholder perspective on the role of universities in place branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 15 No. 2 pp. 112–129, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-05-2020-0039>
- Brewer A, Zhao J (2010), The impact of a pathway college on reputation and brand awareness for its affiliated university in Sydney. *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 24 No. 1 pp. 34–47, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541011013033>

- Carnawi, C., Hermawan, I., & Zahro, F. A. (2024). Konsep Membangun Branding Image Untuk Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Terhadap Lembaga Pendidikan Islam. *Ascent: Al-Bahjah Journal of Islamic Education Management*, 2(1), 12–26. <https://doi.org/10.61553/ascent.v2i1.96>
- Falah, R. Z., Muchlisin, I., Indriyani, D., Ulyahimawati, V., & Haq, M. M. B. (2023). Strategi Membangun Brand Image Sekolah Berbasis Pesantren (Studi di SMA Syubbanul Wathon Secang Magelang). *MA'ALIM: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 4(2), 145–164. <https://doi.org/10.21154/maalim.v4i2.7447>
- Firmansyah, M., Rahwan, R., & Kholis, N. (2024). Program Unggulan Tahfidz Al Qur'an: Inovasi Kepala Sekolah SD Swasta untuk Mencetak Siswa Hafidz-Hafidzah. *Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 7(01). <https://doi.org/10.30868/im.v7i01.6072>
- Fitria, U. R., Chotimah, C., & Sulistyorini, S. (2024). Peran School Branding dalam Implementasi Manajemen Strategik untuk Meningkatkan Daya Saing Lembaga Pendidikan Islam. *Cendekia: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran*, 2(12), 427–436. <https://jurnal.kolibi.org/index.php/cendekia/article/view/4526>
- Gao, Y., Liu, J. International student recruitment campaign: experiences of selected flagship universities in China. *High Educ* 80, 663–678 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00503-8>
- Goh, J.W.P., Chua, C.S.K., Hairon, S. (2019). School Branding. In: Wong, B., Hairon, S., Ng, P. (eds) *School Leadership and Educational Change in Singapore. Springer Texts in Education*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74746-0\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74746-0_12)
- Halim, A. (2020). Manajemen Marketing Pendidikan Islam: (Upaya Meningkatkan Bargaining Power MTs Nurul Islam Kapasbaru Surabaya). *Al-Ibrah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Keilmuan Islam*, 5(1), 1–26. <https://ejournal.stital.ac.id/index.php/alibrah/article/view/83>
- Hilmi, M., Nasir, M. A., Saparudin, S., Dahlan, F., & Saharudin, S. (2023). Tahfiz Al-Qur'an as Brand Image of Modern Islamic Education in Lombok. *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama*, 15(2), 483–496. <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v15i2.2389>
- Istikomah, & Romadlon, D. A. (2023). Building Trust and Reputation: Branding Strategies of Elite Muslim Schools in Indonesia. Dalam T. T. Y. Alabdullah, M. I. Awang, B. Sobirov, M. T. Multazam, & M. D. K. Wardana (Ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Intellectuals' Global Responsibility (ICIGR 2022)* (Vol. 750, hlm. 419–425). Atlantis Press SARL. [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-052-7\\_46](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-052-7_46)
- Karsono, K., Purwanto, P., & Salman, A. M. B. (2021). Strategi Branding Dalam Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Masyarakat Terhadap Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri. *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Islam*, 7(2), 869–880. <https://doi.org/10.29040/jiei.v7i2.2649>
- Khanna, M., Jacob, I., & Chopra, A. (2019). Promoting Business School Brands Through Alumni (Past Customers)-Analyzing Factors Influencing Their Brand Resonance. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 25(3), 337–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2019.1557812>
- Kurniawan, H., Arifin, S., & Mulyono, M. (2024). Implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM): Optimizing School Branding Strategy in Urban Islamic Schools. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 16(4), 5127–5139. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i4.6182>
- Maduro S, Fernandes PO, Alves A (2018), Management design as a strategic lever to add value to corporate reputation competitiveness in higher education institutions. *Competitiveness Review*, Vol. 28 No. 1 pp. 75–97, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/CR-04-2017-0029>
- Maulana, A. I. (2025). *Strategi school branding dalam meningkatkan daya tarik calon peserta didik baru di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Raja Unggulan Jenggawah Jember* [Undergraduate, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim]. <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/75351/>
- Moleong, L. J. (2007). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Revisi). Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Mubarak, M. Z., & Niswatin. (2024). Efektivitas Branding dalam Meningkatkan Reputasi Lembaga Pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal Kompetensi Ilmu Sosial*, 3(1), 25–35. <https://doi.org/10.29138/jkis.v3i1.52>
- Mufarrohah, A., & Maunah, B. (2024). Strategi Lembaga Pendidikan dalam Meningkatkan School Branding. *Pendas: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, 2(1), 30–34. <https://ejournal.mmnesia.id/index.php/PENDAS/article/view/146>
- Panda S, Pandey SC, Bennett A, Tian X (2019), "University brand image as competitive advantage: a two-country study". *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 33 No. 2 pp. 234–251, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-12-2017-0374>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Perdana, N., & Azzani, M. Z. (2025). The Role Of The Principal In Improving School Branding Smp Muh 2 Kartasura. *Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 8(01), 593–604. <https://doi.org/10.30868/im.v8i01.8334>

- Rahmanita, T., Khoridatunisa, S., Hazami, M. H., Gunawan, S. N., & Munawwaroh, Z. (2025). Strategi Branding Sekolah dalam Menciptakan Loyalitas Pelanggan Jasa Pendidikan. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dasar, Menengah dan Tinggi [JMP-DMT]*, 6(4), 544–552. <https://doi.org/10.30596/jmp-dmt.v6i4.26165>
- Rahmawati, I., Anwar, H., Wathoni, K., & Maromi, I. (2023). Building Public Trust through The Excellency Program; A Study on Tahfidz Branding in Pesantren. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 7(1), 287–298. <https://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v7i1.3897>
- Razak, A., Masrokan, P., & Sujianto, A. (2025). Strategi Membangun Brand Image Dalam Meningkatkan Daya Saing Lembaga Pendidikan (Studi Kasus Di Sdit Al Ghazali Pamekasan). *Mubtadi: Jurnal Pendidikan Ibtidaiyah*, 6(2), 225–237. <https://doi.org/10.19105/mubtadi.v6i2.13924>
- Rizqon, A., & Fimaissarah, A. (2024). Digital Revolution in Islamic Education: Building the Branding of Religious Schools in Rural Indonesia through Innovative Digital Marketing Strategies. *JUMPA : Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 5(2), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.33650/jumpa.v5i2.7348>
- Sataøen, H. L. (2015). Higher education as object for corporate and nation branding: between equality and flagships. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 37(6), 702–717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2015.1102822>
- Supangat, S. (2021). *Branding Sekolah Islam*. School Principal Academy. <https://id.scribd.com/document/513770044/Buku-Strategi-Branding-Dr-Supangat>
- Susilawati, I. M., & Harun, M. (2017). Analisis SWOT sebagai Dasar Strategi Branding pada Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Alhidayah, Cireunde, Ciputat. *Tarbawi: Jurnal Keilmuan Manajemen Pendidikan*, 3(01), 111–128.
- Syukri, M., & Harahap, V. A. (2024). Sekolah/Madrasah Bertaraf (Branding): Islami, Boarding School, dan Terpadu. *Journal on Education*, 6(2), 11711–11720. <https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v6i2.4825>
- Varadarajan, B., & Malone, T. (2018). Branding strategies of a private international school. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(4), 932-948. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/branding-strategies-private-international-school/docview/2036388225/se-2>
- Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101
- Wibawa, R., & Hardiansyah, H. (2021). Desain Program Sekolah Islam Terpadu Terhadap Pelaksanaan Kurikulum. *Jurnal Visionary: Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Di Bidang Administrasi Pendidikan*, 9(2), 27–33.
- Yanti, Y. C. M., Buntoro, F., Badarudin, Barniat, Z., & Tamim, R. (2024). Branding Strategies for Increasing Public Confidence in Islamic Boarding Schools. *KnE Social Sciences*, 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v9i12.15848>
- Yin, R. K. (with Campbell, D. T.). (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Sixth edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Zarastri, R., Chairunnisa, C., Ardhani, D., & Supriadi, S. (2024). Strategi Branding Dalam Meningkatkan Daya Tarik Sekolah: Studi Kasus Di Sma Negeri 3 Kota Jambi. *Journal of Economic Education*, 3(2), 43–47. <https://doi.org/10.22437/jeec.v3i2.39146>