



# Building a Positive School Image: Brand Image Strategy in the Competition of Private Educational Institutions

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## ABSTRACT:

The increasingly competitive landscape of educational institutions requires adaptive brand management strategies to build reputation and competitiveness. This study aims to analyze brand management strategies at Lajnah Pendidikan dan Pengajaran (LPP) Al-Irshad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto using the theoretical framework of Kevin Lane Keller and M. G. Swaminathan, focusing on the dimensions of favorability, strength, and uniqueness. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. The findings reveal that in the favorability dimension, a positive image is built through consistent service quality, teacher professionalism, and staff loyalty, which foster parental trust. The strength dimension is reflected in high market demand, with a student selection ratio of 3:1, and strong alumni networks. Meanwhile, the uniqueness dimension is represented through a global curriculum (integration of the International Baccalaureate and Islamic values) and the global Muadalah network. This strategy has proven effective in creating sustainable competitive advantages and enhancing institutional reputation at both national and international levels. This study suggests that other educational institutions adopt the integration of local values and global standards as a strong brand differentiation.

**Keywords:** School Image; School Competitiveness; Student Loyalty; Educational Management

## ABSTRAK:

Lanskap lembaga pendidikan yang semakin kompetitif membutuhkan strategi manajemen merek adaptif untuk membangun reputasi dan daya saing. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi manajemen merek di Lajnah Pendidikan dan Pengajaran (LPP) Al-Irshad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto menggunakan kerangka teori Kevin Lane Keller dan M. G. Swaminathan, dengan fokus pada dimensi kesukaan, kekuatan, dan keunikan. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif melalui observasi, wawancara, dan studi dokumentasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dalam dimensi kesukaan, citra positif dibangun melalui kualitas layanan yang konsisten, profesionalisme guru, dan loyalitas staf, yang menumbuhkan kepercayaan orang tua. Dimensi kekuatan tercermin dalam permintaan pasar yang tinggi, dengan rasio seleksi siswa 3:1, dan jaringan alumni yang kuat. Sementara itu, dimensi keunikan diwakili melalui kurikulum global (integrasi International Baccalaureate dan nilai-nilai Islam) dan jaringan Muadalah global. Strategi ini telah terbukti efektif dalam menciptakan keunggulan kompetitif yang berkelanjutan dan meningkatkan reputasi institusional baik di tingkat nasional maupun internasional. Studi ini menyarankan agar lembaga pendidikan lain mengadopsi integrasi nilai-nilai lokal dan standar global sebagai diferensiasi merek yang kuat.

**Kata kunci:** Citra Sekolah; Daya Saing Sekolah; Loyalitas Siswa; Manajemen Pendidikan

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## INTRODUCTION

Private educational institutions are currently situated within a vortex of global competition that demands a paradigm shift from traditional management to professional, customer satisfaction-based management.<sup>1</sup> In this ecosystem, communities, parents, and students act as critical education consumers who hold high expectations regarding the value and quality of the services they receive.<sup>2</sup> Theoretically, education consumers tend to undertake rigorous processes of evaluation and elimination among various school options in order to find the institution most relevant to their needs. Therefore, a school's ability to deliver high-quality educational services is no longer merely an option, but a necessity for sustaining its existence.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon makes the study of brand image strategy highly significant, both academically by enriching the literature on Islamic education management and practically, as a strategic guide for institutions in building public trust. Understanding how a school's image is formed and managed is essential, as a positive image serves as a primary differentiator in a saturated education market, ultimately determining an institution's sustainability and competitiveness at both national and international levels.<sup>4</sup> In the increasingly competitive landscape of private educational institutions, each school strives to highlight its advantages through strengthening its brand image in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Hamid Tohidi and Mohammad Mehdi Jabbari, "Education and Its Customers," in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 31, 2012, 433–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.080>.

<sup>2</sup> Angelo and Federico Brunetti Bonfanti, "Customer Education, Evaluation Skills And Perceived Value: A Theoretical Framework," in *Verona International Conference* (Liverpool, 2014), 27–42.

<sup>3</sup> Harisatunisa, "Brand Image Implication in Marketing Islamic Educational Institutions on Student Recruitment Implikasi Citra Merek Dalam Pemasaran Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Terhadap Hasil Rekrutmen Peserta Didik," *INSANIA: Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Kependidikan* 26, no. 1 (2021): 21–37.

<sup>4</sup> Erwin Arianto, M Rikza, and Saekan Muchith, "Implementation of Marketing Manajemen Education in Developing the Image of Madrasah," *Jawda: Journal of Islamic Education Management* 6, no. 2 (2025): 6.

gain public trust.<sup>5</sup> Theoretically, brand image functions as a key differentiator in a saturated education market, shaping both sustainability and competitiveness at national and international levels.

The real situation at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto, however, presents an impressive anomaly. Despite challenges related to education costs and intense competition, the institution has experienced a significant surge in demand. Empirical data indicate that registration quotas are often filled well before the official deadline, with a selection ratio reaching 3:1. This concrete issue forms the focus of this study: how LPP Al-Irsyad manages its brand image strategy to transform competitive challenges into tangible community loyalty and sustainable competitive advantage. Ideally, brand image is a comprehensive strategy built upon strong, unique, and favorable associations to shape consumer perceptions and influence brand loyalty.<sup>6</sup> For educational institutions, such an image should reflect the institution's identity, values, and actual quality, consistently demonstrated through its actions. However, in practice, many private educational institutions remain trapped in superficial promotional activities that are not supported by consistent service quality, making it difficult to sustain their existence amid intense competition. This gap often leads to a loss of public trust, as schools fail to fulfill their brand promises through consistent achievements and service delivery.

Several previous studies have explored the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty in the field of education. For example, a study by Salimah and Ruski shows that service quality is a dominant factor capable of overcoming the

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<sup>5</sup> Muh Ibnu Sholeh, "Menghadapi Persaingan Sengit Lembaga Pendidikan: Strategi Diferensiasi Dalam Pemasaran Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 3 (2020): 192–222.

<sup>6</sup> Marina Ianenko, Mikhail Stepanov, and Liubov Mironova, "Brand Identity Development," *E3S Web of Conferences* 164 (2020): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202016409015>.

barriers of high education costs in parents' decision-making.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Priyanti emphasizes that parental satisfaction, which is shaped by school image, significantly influences long-term loyalty.<sup>8</sup> Although these studies provide a strong foundation regarding the importance of service quality, most of them still focus on general quantitative statistical analysis and have not examined in depth how specific elements of brand image strategy are formed through everyday managerial practices.

This is where the research gap lies; there is still a lack of studies that specifically and comprehensively link modern brand management theories (such as the framework of Keller and Swaminathan) to the operational context of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. The brand image strategy at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto presents a unique case, as it does not merely rely on conventional promotion but integrates concrete actions and community engagement that generate organic loyalty from alumni and parents.<sup>9</sup> This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth qualitative analysis of how the dimensions of strength, favorability, and uniqueness are contextually practiced in the field. Thus, this research does not merely replicate previous findings but offers novelty in understanding the internal mechanisms through which schools build sustainable competitiveness by strengthening institutional identity and values. This study applies the theoretical framework of Kevin Lane Keller and M. G. Swaminathan to analyze the dimensions of favorability,

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<sup>7</sup> Salimah Salimah and Ruski Ruski, "The Influence of Quality of Service and Cost on Parents' Decisions to Choose Islamic Boarding Schools," *Edunesia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 5, no. 3 (2024): 1414–29, <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v5i3.954>.

<sup>8</sup> Indah. Priyanti and Sumitro, "Pengaruh Kualitas Pelayanan Dan Citra Sekolah Terhadap Loyalitas Orang Tua Siswa Yang Dimediasi Variabel Kepuasan (Studi Kasus Tambun Bekasi)," *Jurnal Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Indonesia*, 2020, 1–25.

<sup>9</sup> Mughni Zaenal, Harisatunisa, and Meirina Khusnul Azizah, "TADBIR: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam TADBIR: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam" 13, no. 01 (2025): 221–43.

strength, and uniqueness in the context of LPP Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto. The focus of this research is on how brand image strategies are formed through daily managerial practices and concrete actions, rather than solely through conventional marketing communication.

LPP Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto possesses a strategic advantage in building a positive school image through the implementation of a tangible brand image strategy, in which the institution does not rely solely on promotion but emphasizes consistent service quality and concrete actions. This advantage is reflected in the institution's ability to generate high levels of loyalty among parents and alumni, who function as organic promoters, thereby creating strong market demand and a competitive advantage that is difficult to imitate. With a strong brand image, the institution is able to gain broad public trust, improve the quality of student input through rigorous selection, expand international cooperation networks, and strengthen its position as a leading and competitive Islamic educational institution at both regional and national levels. Based on this background, the research questions of this study are: how is the brand image strategy implemented by LPP Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto through the dimensions of strength, favorability, and uniqueness, and how relevant is this brand image to the institution's competitiveness? In line with this, the objective of this study is to analyze in depth the strategy for building brand image at LPP Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto and to examine the extent to which this image contributes to enhancing the institution's competitiveness in the private education market.

## METHODS

This research used a qualitative-descriptive approach with a case study method.<sup>10</sup> The selection of this research type is based on

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<sup>10</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (London: The Guilford Press, 2016); Yin, Robert K, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2003.

the objective of the study, which is to describe how the brand image strategy is implemented in practice at LPP Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto. This study also seeks to analyze how a positive image of an educational institution can help it face competition. Considering these aspects, the case study approach is deemed the most appropriate. This research focuses on LPP Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Purwokerto as the primary locus. The research subjects, who serve as the main sources of information, are key stakeholders, including the Head of Cooperation and International Relations, the Head of Human Resources, the Vice Principal, and the Head of Curriculum. Meanwhile, the object of this research is the brand image strategy implemented by the institution and its relevance to enhancing the school's competitiveness in facing competition among private educational institutions.

The data collection process is carried out through three main techniques to ensure depth of information. First, semi-structured interviews are conducted with the research subjects to obtain flexible yet focused information. Second, non-participant observation is employed to directly observe interactions and promotional activities of the institution objectively without the researcher's involvement. Third, document analysis is conducted by examining various official archives such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the school profile, which reflect the implementation of brand image strategies in practice.

The collected data are analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three systematic stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.<sup>11</sup> To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques, where the researcher verifies findings by comparing data obtained from interviews, field observations, and document

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew B. Miles;, A. Michael Huberman;, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2020).

analysis.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the use of non-participant observation helps minimize bias, ensuring that the data obtained maintains a high level of objectivity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

The strategy for building brand image at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto focuses on concrete actions that create a positive image in the public eye, rather than relying solely on promotional activities. Within the framework of Keller and Swaminathan's brand image theory, this perception is constructed through strong and positive associations held by the community toward the institution.<sup>13</sup> Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto has successfully associated its brand with high-quality education and Islamic values, which in turn foster trust and loyalty among the public. This not only enhances the institution's recognition but also shapes a comprehensive perception that positions it as a preferred choice. In the context of Kevin Lane Keller and M. G. Swaminathan's brand image theory, this perception is built upon three interrelated core dimensions: favorability, strength, and uniqueness.<sup>14</sup>

#### 3.1 Strategy for Building Favorability Toward the Al-Irsyad Purwokerto School Brand

One of the key components developed by LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto to create favorability in the minds of education consumers is a comfortable school environment. This is realized through consistent, concrete actions across various operational

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<sup>12</sup> Bambang Arianto, *Triangulasi Metoda Penelitian Kualitatif*, Borneo Novelty Publishing, vol. 10.70310/q, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.70310/q81zdh33>.

<sup>13</sup> David A. Aaker, *Building Strong Brand* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Kevin Lane Keller, "Keller, Strategic Brand Management, 4th Edition | Pearson" (United States: Pearson Education, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Cheol Whee Park, Deborah J. Macinnis, and J. Jaworski Bernard, "Strategic Brand Concept-Image Management," *Journal of Marketing* 40, no. 4 (1986): 135; Keller, "Keller, Strategic Brand Management, 4th Edition | Pearson."

aspects, directly addressing parents' needs for the best possible education for their children. Staff at Al-Irsyad Purwokerto provide highly detailed personal attention to students. Employees in each unit are required to know all students within their respective units. Through a rolling system, staff are also able to recognize students across more than one unit. This simple culture fosters closer relationships between staff and education consumers. No student feels discriminated against, as all receive equal attention. Both academic and non-academic development of students can be closely monitored. Strong attention is also evident in the learning process, where teachers ensure that every student can effectively grasp the material being delivered. This deep level of care, which is rarely found in other schools, builds parents' trust that their children are in a safe and nurturing environment. This trust becomes the primary foundation for the formation of favorability.

A safe and comfortable environment is also supported by the provision of complete facilities and infrastructure, as well as a curriculum designed based on children's developmental stages. The management of LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto ensures that all targets, both academic and non-academic, are grounded in a strong educational philosophy. The philosophy currently adopted is holistic education. Therefore, the institution ensures that all targets can be achieved through processes that are both comfortable and enjoyable. For example, at the kindergarten level, while many schools compete to teach reading and writing due to the demands of certain primary schools, Al-Irsyad Kindergarten remains focused on the development of motor, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and artistic skills.

The second effort undertaken by the management of LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto to stimulate favorability among education consumers is by building positive real experiences through service quality. Service quality is supported by the quality of human resources through various regular training programs, such as "Qur'an Teacher Training" and "Workshops for PYP Teachers" (IB

Program). These continuous professional development programs ensure that educators remain aligned with current educational standards, thereby maintaining excellent learning services. Service quality begins with a rigorous and lengthy recruitment process, including interviews, psychological tests, microteaching sessions, and bootcamps. Even after being accepted, employees must undergo a one-year probation period. With high standards in place, the management ensures that a strong team becomes the foundation of service quality. This extensive selection process ensures that employees are able to adapt to the institution's working rhythm. The result is the achievement of academic and non-academic excellence, as well as high levels of satisfaction among education consumers.

### **3.2 Strategy for Building Strength Toward the Al-Irsyad Purwokerto School Brand**

The effort of LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto in creating the strength aspect lies in developing standardized systems and procedures. This system ensures consistency, which is the foundation of brand strength. Consistency guarantees that every individual who interacts with the school experiences the same high-quality service. The management of LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto also ensures that all units maintain high standards, with no unit left behind.

The second effort involves building emotional closeness among staff and parents of students. The strong relationship between LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto and education consumers, particularly parents, results in high communication intensity. This leads to repeated exposure to information about the Al-Irsyad brand, which in turn strengthens its image. Emotional closeness with parents and staff encourages all elements to voluntarily support the success of school programs. This relationship with parents is built through openness, allowing them to provide feedback and suggestions for the development of Al-Irsyad schools. Meanwhile, emotional bonds among staff are fostered through

regular activities such as inter-unit competitions, family gatherings, and alignment of shared goals within the institution.

### **3.3 Strategy for Building Uniqueness Toward the Al-Irsyad Purwokerto School Brand**

One example of the unique advantage developed by LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto is its collaboration with international educational institutions such as the Islamic University of Madinah and Al-Azhar. In the context of school image management, such programs are still relatively rare. Generally, collaborations among schools in Purwokerto are limited to local or national levels. This uniqueness strengthens public trust in the institution's global quality and creates an image of Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto as not merely a regular school, but as an Islamic educational institution with an international vision.

Another effort is embedding the responsibility of education across all staff members of Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto. Students can learn discipline from security staff and politeness from cleaning staff, meaning that all employees are responsible for setting positive examples. The educational process is not limited to teachers alone; therefore, Al-Irsyad instills the principle that "everyone is a teacher." This approach is designed to create a comprehensive educational environment that extends beyond the classroom. While educational activities are commonly perceived as classroom-based, the management of LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto expands this perspective by ensuring that all staff contribute to the educational process, reinforcing values and character development throughout the entire school ecosystem.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Implications of the Favorability Dimension in Building Parents' Trust**

Favorability refers to how positive the associations held by education consumers are toward a school. Favorable associations can enhance positive perceptions and encourage consumers to make decisions. LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto develops this aspect by

consistently delivering high-quality education and excellent services. This creates a positive image in parents' minds that Al-Irsyad is an institution that cares about both the academic development and character building of its students. These positive associations directly become a primary attraction for prospective students and their parents.

The process of building favorability within a brand image strategy involves creating a sense of liking by presenting meaningful and memorable elements.<sup>15</sup> The management of LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto adopts a corporate management approach that is target-oriented, yet it recognizes that educational institutions cannot be entirely equated with business organizations. Educational consumers who entrust their children to schools are not solely focused on academic achievement but also on a safe and comfortable environment. Schools are not only places for intellectual development but also for value formation, expected to serve as a second home.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, one of the key components developed by LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto to create favorability is a comfortable school environment.

### **3.2 The Role of the Strength Dimension in Building Alumni and Parents' Loyalty**

Strength reflects how firmly brand associations are embedded in the minds of education consumers. Strong associations have proven to be a dominant factor influencing consumer loyalty decisions.<sup>17</sup> Education consumers tend to choose brands that are

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<sup>15</sup> Wilson Frenredy and Purnama Dharmawan, "Dimensi Brand Image Untuk Memprediksi Brand Love Dan Brand Loyalty," *Jurnal Manajerial Dan Kewirausahaan* 2, no. 4 (2020): 1005, <https://doi.org/10.24912/jmk.v2i4.9884>; Kevin Lane Keller, "Building Customer-Based Brand Equity," *Marketing Management* 10, no. 2 (2001): 14–19; Ianenko, Stepanov, and Mironova, "Brand Identity Development."

<sup>16</sup> Al Amin, "Pendidikan Islam Sebagai Peearisan Nilai-Nilai Dan Budaya" 10, no. 2 (2018): 1–12.

<sup>17</sup> Satanik Mitra and M Jenamani, "OBIM: A Computational Model to Estimate Brand Image from Online Consumer Review," *Journal of Business Research* 114 (2020): 213.

strong and easily remembered. The strength of LPP Al-Irsyad's brand image is evident in the depth and intensity of associations formed in consumers' minds. This is demonstrated by the high level of loyalty among alumni and parents. Such loyalty represents an "extraordinary strength" that turns parents and alumni into the institution's most effective promoters. This strong loyalty is the result of deep emotional relationships and trust that have been built over time.

In addition, a standardized and centrally managed system enables the management of Al-Irsyad Purwokerto to monitor the performance of each unit. Although there were previously some differences in quality, the institution has successfully made significant improvements. Collective efforts to maintain quality across all areas demonstrate that the brand's quality promise is consistently fulfilled in every unit, which in turn strengthens public trust over time. This reinforces the image that LPP Al-Irsyad does not focus on a single flagship unit but ensures excellence across all levels. As a result, public trust and loyalty continue to grow. This effort also reflects a shared responsibility in maintaining quality across all lines, ensuring that the community receives equally high-quality services at every educational level. Such consistency proves that the brand's quality promise is truly upheld across all units.

### **3.3 The Uniqueness Dimension Strategy as the Primary Differentiator of Educational Institutions**

Uniqueness distinguishes services in the minds of education consumers, creating preferences and reducing sensitivity to negative reviews.<sup>18</sup> This uniqueness is not limited to the curriculum but also includes the values upheld and relevant specialized programs. By integrating global elements through the IB curriculum with Islamic values, LPP Al-Irsyad constructs an

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<sup>18</sup> Lihong Chen et al., "Relationship Analysis among Apparel Brand Image, Self-Congruity, and Consumers' Purchase Intention," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 13, no. 22 (2021): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132212770>.

image as an institution with an international vision while maintaining balance. This uniqueness differentiates Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto from other schools, as it successfully combines international education standards with strong Islamic teachings. Within the uniqueness dimension, distinct and differentiated associations provide compelling reasons for consumers to choose a particular brand over its competitors. In addition to incorporating IB as a global element alongside Islamic values, LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto also holds a vision of producing well-rounded graduates, not only excelling in a single field.

Brand uniqueness functions to differentiate services in the minds of consumers, create specific preferences, and reduce sensitivity to negative reviews. Within this dimension, distinctive associations offer strong justification for consumers to select a particular brand over others. By integrating global elements through the IB curriculum and Islamic values, LPP Al-Irsyad establishes an image as an institution with an international outlook while maintaining balance. This strategy creates a comprehensive educational environment that goes beyond classroom learning, emphasizing holistic character development across the entire school ecosystem.

### **3.4 The Relevance of Brand Image to School Competitiveness at LPP Al-Irsyad Purwokerto**

Competitiveness is a fundamental foundation for the sustainability of an organization, particularly private educational institutions operating in a highly competitive market environment. Brand image plays a strategic role in strengthening the competitiveness of educational institutions. A positive brand image fosters public trust, positioning a school as a primary choice among many alternatives. A strong reputation not only attracts prospective students but also enables institutions to implement selective admission processes, thereby maintaining the quality of student input. In general, competitiveness can be understood as

the specific advantage possessed by an institution to differentiate itself from its competitors, allowing it to become the preferred choice of the community while achieving its established goals. One of the key reasons why brand image is highly relevant to competitiveness is its ability to serve as a form of differentiation that is difficult to imitate. In the field of education, schools or universities with a strong image, whether in terms of academic quality, achievement reputation, or institutional tradition tend to be more trusted by prospective students compared to institutions that have yet to establish a solid reputation.

In this context, LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto has successfully positioned its brand image strategy as the primary driving force supporting its competitiveness in the educational sector. The relevance between a strong brand image and institutional competitiveness at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto is both functional and sustainable. The brand image, built upon the dimensions of strength, favorability, and uniqueness, has become a strategic engine that ensures competitive advantage. A strong brand image at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto demonstrates direct relevance to institutional competitiveness in the education market. This advantage is reflected in two main elements: first, the number of applicants exceeding the institution's capacity; and second, the consistent achievement of competitive accomplishments each year, both in academic and non-academic fields, ranging from regional to international levels. Based on the findings, LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto consistently fulfills these two indicators, indicating that a strong brand image directly contributes to institutional competitiveness.

The first aspect of competitiveness can be observed through high market demand, as reflected in the number of prospective students far exceeding the available class capacity. The higher the level of applicant interest in an institution, the stronger the public's preference for its brand. LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah

Purwokerto demonstrates significant market dominance, particularly at popular levels such as SMA IT. The strength of its brand image enables the institution to meet enrollment targets within a short period. This reinforces the fact that Al-Irsyad's brand image, shaped by the dimensions of strength and favorability has firmly occupied a top-of-mind position among parents. Many are willing to register far in advance and compete intensely for admission. The rapid fulfillment of quotas without excessive promotion serves as concrete evidence that the institution's brand image has successfully created a strong appeal. The large number of applicants at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto not only leads to the rapid fulfillment of admission quotas but also provides a competitive advantage in the form of selective admissions. Based on available data, the applicant ratio at the SMA IT level reaches 3:1, meaning that only one-third of applicants are accepted. This condition reinforces the institution's image as an exclusive school with high-quality standards. Such an advantage plays a crucial role in strengthening competitiveness, as students selected through rigorous processes generally possess higher academic and non-academic potential. Supported by a high-quality learning system, this ultimately leads to outstanding achievements. Students who are selected through this strict process tend to demonstrate stronger academic and non-academic potential. When combined with a high-quality learning system, this leads to outstanding achievements. Furthermore, a high selection ratio automatically positions the school above its competitors, reinforcing the public perception that the institution upholds elite educational standards. Thus, a strong brand image generates high demand, which in turn enables the institution to implement rigorous selection processes, and the results of this selection further strengthen both educational quality and institutional competitiveness.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Megaria Damanik et al., "Pengaruh Brand Image, Experiential Marketing, Dan Product Quality Terhadap Customer Loyalty Merek Tropicana

The second measure of competitiveness is the institution's ability to consistently achieve competitive accomplishments at regional, national, and international levels. Achievements function as empirical evidence that affirms the quality of education and the brand promise offered. Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto continuously demonstrates its quality through achievements across various levels. This aligns with the theory that achievements reflect the true quality of education. At the elementary school level (SD 01), students have received awards in environmental innovation and technology, such as first place for *Krijel*neco-friendly crayons made from used cooking oil and second place for the development of a 2D educational game. These accomplishments indicate a learning process that fosters creativity and innovation. At the senior high school level, students have earned national medals in various science olympiads, including a Gold Medal in Biology, a Silver Medal in Informatics, and a Bronze Medal in Economics. These achievements demonstrate a very high level of academic competitiveness.

These achievements represent tangible outcomes of the implementation of quality strategies, particularly in strengthening quality management and enhancing teacher competence through professional training. A strong brand image at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto plays a crucial role in fostering loyalty, which ultimately becomes a competitive advantage. This is consistent with Sutriani's view that customer satisfaction with services and educational quality significantly increases loyalty, both in the education sector and in other service industries. This loyalty is reflected in repeat engagement and recommendations to others. The satisfaction experienced by parents and students toward consistent service and educational quality ultimately

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Slim Pada Premium Community," *Maeswara: Jurnal Riset Ilmu Manajemen Dan Kewirausahaan* 1, no. 6 (2023): 138–53, <https://doi.org/10.61132/maeswara.v1i6.386>; Priyanti and Sumitro, "Pengaruh Kualitas Pelayanan Dan Citra Sekolah Terhadap Loyalitas Orang Tua Siswa Yang Dimediasi Variabel Kepuasan (Studi Kasus Tambun Bekasi)."

fosters emotional attachment and encourages them to recommend the institution to others.

Success in achievements also creates a positive cycle in the form of organic promotion (*word-of-mouth*). Word-of-mouth has proven to be a highly credible and influential form of promotion, as recommendations from satisfied and loyal customers are more trusted by prospective customers than conventional advertising.<sup>20</sup> Based on interview data, organic promotion from parents and alumni is far more powerful than paid advertisements because it is grounded in real experience and trust. Stories of student success spread widely within the community and are perceived as far more credible than promotional campaigns. The loyalty of alumni and parents further amplifies this impact. Their loyalty positions them as the institution's most effective promoters, who willingly share positive experiences and their children's achievements.

As a result, LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto possesses a sustainable competitive advantage, as it does not rely heavily on large promotional expenditures. This significantly reduces the institution's need for costly marketing efforts, making its strategy both efficient and sustainable. The institution simply needs to maintain its quality and achievements to ensure that organic promotion continues to thrive. This phenomenon explains why interest among applicants at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto remains very high, often leading to full enrollment quotas even before the official registration deadline. In conclusion, the brand image developed by LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto is not merely a superficial image, but a strategic asset that generates loyalty and creates a competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate. The combination of the three strong dimensions of brand image, supported by community loyalty,

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<sup>20</sup> Eddy Soeryanto Soegoto et al., "Utilization of Word-of-Mouth Marketing Strategy in Culinary Business," *International Journal of Research and Applied Technology* 1, no. 2 (2021): 439–47, <https://doi.org/10.34010/injuratech.v1i2.6779>.

becomes the main driving force that enables the institution to remain at the forefront of competition.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the brand management strategy at LPP Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto is the result of a systematic integration between concrete managerial actions and strong institutional values. This strategy is successfully implemented through the three main dimensions of Keller and Swaminathan's theory. In the favorability dimension, the institution fosters positive perceptions through humanistic services and personal attention from teachers toward students that go beyond conventional academic standards. The strength dimension is built through centralized quality standardization across all units, ensuring consistent quality and generating organic loyalty from alumni networks and parents as primary promoters. Meanwhile, the uniqueness dimension is emphasized through a differentiated glocal curriculum that integrates international standards (IB) with Islamic values, as well as the operational principle of "everyone is a teacher," which serves as a distinctive characteristic of the institution.

This strong brand image strategy has direct and functional relevance to the institution's competitiveness. The positive image not only enhances reputation but also acts as a key driver in generating high market demand, as evidenced by a 3:1 admission ratio and the early fulfillment of quotas without reliance on paid advertising. This condition enables the institution to conduct rigorous student selection, which ultimately leads to competitive achievements at national and international levels. The study contributes theoretically by validating the effectiveness of modern brand management frameworks within the context of Islamic educational institutions. Practically, the findings serve as a reference for private education managers, emphasizing that sustainable competitiveness can only be achieved when the brand promise is consistently delivered through real service practices.

The novelty of this study lies in the “organic community loyalty” model, which transforms the internal school ecosystem from security staff to top management into collective agents of image-building. Although this study successfully examines the internal mechanisms of image formation, its limitation lies in its focus on a single research site. Therefore, future research is recommended to further explore brand adaptation strategies in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in responding to digital technological disruption.

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