

# Educational Excellence and Strategic Promotion: Strengthening Islamic School Branding through 7P Integration


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**ABSTRACT.** This research investigates the strategic efforts of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin to enhance its branding image through the application of the 7P Marketing Mix framework: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. In an increasingly competitive Islamic education sector, effective branding is crucial for establishing institutional credibility, increasing enrollment, and fostering public trust. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Key informants include school leaders, administrative staff, academic personnel, students, and community members. The analysis reveals that the leadership of the Kyai, the implementation of flagship programs, consistent promotion strategies, and the quality of physical infrastructure significantly shape the institution's brand image. These flagship programs serve as key differentiators in the competitive education market, emphasising both academic excellence and religious devotion. The institution's commitment to producing well-rounded students competent in Islamic knowledge, languages, and leadership has strengthened its positioning as a leading Islamic educational institution. Findings show that the figure of the Kyai serves as a moral and symbolic leader, fostering public trust and social legitimacy. The madrasah's flagship programs function as academic differentiators that attract both urban and rural communities. Promotional efforts, including social media and alums networks, expand the madrasah's visibility while maintaining its spiritual values. The registration process reflects administrative professionalism, and the well-maintained facilities support both educational effectiveness and brand positioning. This study concludes that a strong brand image in Islamic education is built not only through visibility but through integrated, value-based institutional management. The 7P framework provides a comprehensive lens to understand how internal consistency, leadership, flagship programs, infrastructure, and strategic communication collectively influence public perception and educational choice.

**Keywords:** *Brand Image, 7P Marketing Mix, Madrasah, Educational Marketing, Islamic Education, Strategic Branding, Kyai Leadership, Flagship Programach*

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the importance of strategic brand management in Islamic educational institutions has become increasingly apparent, especially as these institutions face heightened competition and evolving societal expectations (Fanani et al., 2024; Munjin, 2022; Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024). This phenomenon warrants scholarly attention because it addresses not only how Islamic schools maintain their traditional values, but also how they project relevance and excellence in the modern educational landscape (Abidin et al., 2025; Madkan et al., 2025; Salamah et al., 2025). The issue is critical from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives: qualitatively, it involves

values, perceptions, and institutional identity; quantitatively, it relates to measurable outcomes such as enrollment rates, public perception, and stakeholder engagement (Marhareita et al., 2022; Mirawati et al., 2025).

While existing literature has addressed branding strategies in higher education and secular schools (Parra García & Ortega Cortazar, 2023; Seow & Hussain, 2024; Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024), studies focusing on Islamic educational institutions, particularly Madrasah Tsanawiyah at the secondary level, remain limited. Previous research has mostly centered around curriculum integration, pedagogical methods, and educational outcomes in pesantren and madrasah, often overlooking how strategic branding management directly influences institutional growth and public trust (Andriyani & Leksono, 2024; Lutfia et al., 2023; Samsudi et al., 2024; Zainuddin et al., 2025). Moreover, most existing studies do not consider the contextual uniqueness of specific institutions such as Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin, which operates in a semi-rural setting and blends traditional Islamic teachings with formal education. Therefore, this study addresses a clear gap in the literature by exploring how strategic brand image management can enhance the competitiveness and societal perception of such institutions (Choi & Yong, 2025).

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and develop strategic management approaches that contribute to enhancing the brand image of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin in Muaro Jambi Regency. This objective is distinct from previous studies as it moves beyond abstract discussions of branding by focusing on the strategic actions and internal management practices that drive brand enhancement in an Islamic school context. In doing so, this study complements existing research by providing practical and contextual insights into how madrasah leaders can plan and implement branding strategies aligned with both religious values and modern educational expectations.

This research seeks to test the hypothesis that effective strategic brand image management has a significant positive impact on the public perception, student enrollment, and institutional development of Islamic schools. It argues that branding, when strategically managed, is not merely about promotion or visibility, but about articulating identity, mission, and educational value in ways that resonate with multiple stakeholders. Through this investigation, the study aims to contribute to the theoretical discourse on brand strategy in education and offer actionable recommendations for Islamic school administrators navigating complex socio-cultural and institutional challenges.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and understand the meaning constructed by individuals or groups regarding brand image management in Islamic educational institutions. Drawing from Creswell's (2014) framework on qualitative research, the study incorporated elements of phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of administrators, parents, and students. Additionally, a case study approach was used to focus on a specific Islamic educational institution, providing in-depth insight into the branding practices within that context. Through a combination of interviews and observations, this research sought to understand the meaning and significance participants attach to the process of brand image management in this setting. The study also acknowledged the flexible nature of qualitative research, incorporating grounded theory to allow for theory development based on the data as it emerged.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin which is part of Darul Arifin Islamic Boarding School (Pondok Pesantren) in Muaro Jambi Regency, Indonesia. Consistent with qualitative research principles (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D., 2018), this approach focused on textual and descriptive data to delve into the stakeholders' perspectives on this specific human problem. The research was situated within the Pondok Pesantren Darul Arifin environment, allowing for a contextual understanding critical to observing the school's operational reality. The researcher maintained a prolonged engagement in the field over several weeks to ensure in-depth observation and interaction with the school environment and its stakeholders.

Data were collected using triangulation of methods: interviews, observation, and documentation. Primary data were obtained directly from key informants selected through purposive sampling to provide a holistic view. These included the Head of Madrasah (Key Informant), the Vice Principals for Student Affairs, Public Relations, and Curriculum, administrative staff, students, and parents. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility to explore emerging themes while ensuring core issues on branding strategies were addressed. Observation focused on the school's daily operations, physical environment, and interactions that reflect its brand image. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents, such as brochures, vision and mission statements, internal reports, and archival materials, serving to cross-verify information gathered from interviews and observations.

Data analysis was performed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involved three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Operationally, data reduction involved selecting, focusing, abstracting, and transforming the raw data by removing irrelevant information and categorizing relevant data based on emerging themes related to brand image. The data display phase involved organizing the categorized data into matrices and network diagrams for systematic interpretation. Conclusion drawing involved synthesizing insights and validating interpretations through repeated checks against the data. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by cross-checking information across all sources and methods. Additionally, member checking was performed by confirming preliminary findings with key informants to ensure the interpretations accurately represented their views, and peer debriefing with academic supervisors was used to enhance the credibility of the analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This study found that the enhancement of brand image at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin*, Muaro Jambi Regency, is comprehensively supported by strategic implementation across the 7P elements of the marketing mix, each contributing to strengthening institutional competitiveness and public perception.

#### Product

The research highlights that the flagship programs at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin* namely Tahfiz Al-Qur'an, kitab learning, and bilingual education (Arabic and English) play a vital role in strengthening the school's brand image and attractiveness to prospective students and parents. These programs are not only designed to fulfill societal needs but also to equip students with religious, academic, and linguistic competencies, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to their communities and continue education both domestically and internationally. This align with the finding of the integration of religious values into the curriculum—supported by structured spiritual activities plays a vital role in ensuring that students do not merely acquire knowledge, but also internalize and practice core Islamic values

As described by (Lenggu et al., 2024) flagship programs are strategic academic initiatives aimed at achieving output excellence by enhancing student input quality. Interviews with school leadership affirm that the integration of Qur'anic memorization, classical Islamic texts, and language mastery reflects the institution's commitment to comprehensive Islamic education and personal development.



Figure 1. Promotional flyer containing the flagship programs of the Madrasah.

At Pondok Pesantren Darul Arifin, a distinctive educational experience is offered, combining academic rigor with spiritual development. The flagship programs are designed to foster holistic growth in students, preparing them to become future leaders, scholars, and community builders. These programs include:

Table 1. Flagship Programs of Pondok Pesantren Darul Arifin

Program	Description
International Collaboration (Curriculum Alignment)	Curriculum aligned with international standards inspired by leading Middle Eastern institutions, ensuring global recognition while maintaining strong Islamic values.
International Partnerships (Exposure & Networking)	Collaborations with reputable Middle Eastern institutions providing students with global exposure, enriched learning experiences, and broader academic perspectives.
Arabic & Foreign Language Proficiency	Intensive Arabic and foreign language programs designed to build fluency, enabling students to access Islamic scholarship and engage in global communication.
Kitab Bersanad (Authenticated Religious Texts)	Study of classical Islamic texts with valid chains of transmission (sanad), ensuring authenticity in Islamic scholarship.
Hal Aqoh Zawaya (Islamic Jurisprudence)	Comprehensive study of fiqh from classical and contemporary viewpoints, strengthening students' understanding of Islamic law and its modern application.
Mastery of Qur'an, Islamic Texts & Languages	Integrated mastery of the Qur'an, classical texts, and languages to build strong religious, intellectual, and linguistic competence.
30 Juz Qur'an Memorization & Understanding	Guided memorization of the entire Qur'an (30 Juz) with focus on comprehension, supporting both spiritual and cognitive development.
Abu & Ummu Al-Hujroh (Boarding School Management)	Training program in pesantren management and leadership, equipping students with essential organizational and administrative skills.
Training of Ulama (Islamic Scholars)	Advanced theological education aimed at preparing future ulama with strong academic and religious foundations to serve the Muslim community.

Through the programs provided, Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTS) Darul Arifin, which is part of Pondok Pesantren Darul Arifin, offers a comprehensive and balanced education that integrates both academic excellence and spiritual growth. These programs are carefully designed to equip students with essential skills, knowledge, and values, ensuring that they are well-prepared to face the challenges of the modern world while remaining grounded in Islamic teachings. The institution emphasizes holistic development, nurturing not only academic abilities but also moral character, leadership qualities, and a strong understanding of Islamic principles.

Moreover, observations showed that these programs are implemented through a structured level-based system, with regular testing and progression milestones, motivating students to excel. According to the academic department, every student is expected to achieve basic competency in all three domains, enhancing not only academic performance but also character formation.

Further interviews with school administrators, PPDB committee (new student admission committee), and students reinforce the conclusion that these flagship programs are the primary reasons for the institution's growing appeal. Parents see them as added value, while students appreciate the balanced focus on religious and general education.

Parents see them as added value, with one saying,

"The focus on Tahfiz Al-Qur'an and character-building programs is what really makes this school stand out to us. We feel that our children are not only getting a good education but are also being shaped into individuals with strong faith and values. We appreciate that the school doesn't just prepare them academically but also morally." (Interview, 2025)

Another parent shared,

"The strong emphasis on both religious education and academic achievement shows the school's commitment to developing well-rounded individuals."

Students also express their appreciation, with one saying,

"I like that we get both a strong religious education and a solid academic foundation, which prepares me for the future. I feel more confident about continuing my education at university because of the balance here. It's not just about memorizing the Qur'an, but understanding how it relates to our lives and studies."

Another student added,

"The lessons in Tahfiz are important to me, but I also value how we are taught to think critically and prepare for higher education, which makes me feel ready for both worlds."

This reflects the value-based pricing concept, where the perceived benefits of the service outweigh its monetary cost.

### **Price**

Although *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin* does not explicitly emphasize tuition costs as part of its promotional strategy, the findings indicate that parents and guardians perceive high value in the educational investment due to the balance between spiritual development and academic excellence. This perception of value stems not from affordability alone, but from the quality and outcomes of the programs offered, particularly the flagship areas of *Tahfiz Al-Qur'an*, *kitab* learning, and language proficiency.

Interviews with school administrators and parents suggest that families choose to enroll their children not solely because of the institution's fees, but because of the holistic benefits they receive spiritually grounded education, strong moral character formation, and academic preparedness for higher education both domestically and internationally.

One parent noted,

"We chose this school because it's not just about academic knowledge; the focus on character building and spiritual development aligns with our values." (Interview, June 2025)

Another school administrator emphasized,

"The combination of academic excellence and religious grounding is what attracts parents, and they recognize that the long-term benefits far exceed the financial commitment." (Interview, 2025).

This reflects the value-based pricing concept, where the perceived benefits of the service outweigh its monetary cost. This reflects the value-based pricing concept, where the perceived benefits of the service outweigh its monetary cost.

Observational data also support this finding: parents and community members consistently regard the school as a reliable institution for producing disciplined, well-rounded, and morally upright students. The madrasah's reputation for spiritual integrity and academic quality thus becomes a non-monetary pricing factor that enhances its attractiveness and competitiveness in the education market.

**Total Pembayaran Santri Baru MTs (Putra - Putri)**

No.	Uraian	Putra	Putri
1	Uang Masuk	Rp 11.830.000	Rp 11.930.000
2	Kitab	Rp 1.235.000	Rp 1.235.000
Total		Rp 13.065.000	Rp 13.165.000

**Total Pembayaran Santri Baru MA (Putra - Putri)**

No.	Uraian	Putra	Putri
1	Uang Masuk	Rp 11.830.000	Rp 11.930.000
2	Kitab	Rp 1.695.000	Rp 1.695.000
Total		Rp 13.525.000	Rp 13.625.000

**Figure 2. Boarding school fees**

The tuition fee set by the Madrasah is in line with the high-quality facilities provided to every student. The investment in education covers not only the cost of learning but also the necessary infrastructure that supports an optimal learning experience. At the Madrasah, the management ensure that every student has access to adequate facilities, including comfortable classrooms, laboratories equipped with modern tools, and study spaces that foster creativity and innovation. With a reasonable tuition fee, parents can be assured that their children receive not only quality education but also an environment that fully supports the development of their potential.

Therefore, the tuition fee paid is a long-term investment that is commensurate with the facilities and educational services provided to the students, as well as contributing to their personal and academic growth in the future.

### Place

The findings of this study reveal that the semi-rural location of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin* plays a strategic role in shaping its brand image and educational appeal. Despite being situated outside urban centres, the madrasah successfully positions itself as a conducive learning environment, blending the tranquillity of its surroundings with strong religious and academic programs. The location offers a quiet, disciplined, and spiritually focused atmosphere, which appeals to parents who seek both quality education and a morally sound environment for their children.

Observational data and interviews indicate that this location not only supports the madrasah's religious identity but also facilitates community integration. The institution actively engages with its surrounding community through religious events, educational outreach, and student participation in social life further enhancing its visibility and accessibility. As a result, local trust and loyalty toward the institution continue to grow, contributing to higher enrolment from nearby villages and districts.

Furthermore, the madrasah's strategic accessibility is enhanced by its proximity to pesantren facilities, including dormitories, prayer areas, and learning centers. These facilities offer a fully immersive environment where students can focus on their religious and academic development without distraction.

### Promotion: Active and Integrated Communication Channels

This study found that promotion plays a strategic role in strengthening the branding image of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin*. The institution implements a hybrid promotional approach, combining digital media strategies with community-based outreach to enhance visibility and attract prospective students.

The madrasah actively uses platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to share information on educational programs, student achievements, facilities, and school activities. This aligns with (Ramadhani & Setyowati, 2023; Sarder & Mustaqeem, 2024) who emphasize the importance of promotional content in attracting students and building institutional image. Online content effectively increases awareness and public engagement.

Printed brochures are distributed through existing student networks, particularly via parents and alumni. These individuals act as informal brand ambassadors, extending the school's reputation to broader community circles. This strategy proves effective in environments with strong interpersonal ties and is consistent with (Marhareita et al., 2022), who highlight the role of optimized promotional tools in identity building.

Promotion is also conducted through active community engagement, including participation in local events and the weekly public sermon (pengajian Ahad) led by the Kyai. This fosters trust and familiarity, strengthening the school's religious and social presence in the local environment. These findings support who underscore the role of public relations and spiritual branding in shaping public perception.

Community members express appreciation for the madrasah's contribution to the social and spiritual atmosphere of the area. The involvement of students and teachers in religious and social gatherings enhances the institution's image as a moral and educational hub. These results resonate with (Marbun, 2025) who argue that effective branding requires strong institutional management and meaningful engagement with external stakeholders.



Figure 3. Promotional Banner in Front of the Islamic Boarding School

### People: Leadership and Staff as Brand Agents

The research found that the figure and character of the Kyai play a central role in enhancing the branding image of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin*. As the head of Madrasah Tsanawiyah stated :

"Kyai Zainul Arifin is highly respected not only within the academic community but also in political and social circles. His humility and scholarly reputation truly set him apart. He's known for being an 'alim, a knowledgeable scholar, and that really resonates with both the local community and beyond. His personal credibility plays a huge role in the school's reputation, especially since we're still relatively new. People trust him, and that trust naturally extends to the institution. It helps us gain visibility and credibility much faster than we would have otherwise." (Interview, August 2025)

Interviews with the head of the madrasah and academic staff revealed that Kyai Zainul Arifin is widely respected across academic, political, and community spheres for his humility and scholarly stature (*'alim*). This personal credibility not only attracts public attention but also significantly contributes to the institution's visibility and reputation, even as a relatively new establishment.

Observations confirmed that the Kyai's character and leadership are key factors behind the madrasah's growing popularity. His commitment to the welfare of educators and students, and his encouragement of professional development, reinforce a positive institutional culture.

### **Process: Consistent Implementation of Branding Activities**

The findings reveal that *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin* maintains a systematic and consistent registration process for new students (*Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru – PPDB*), which significantly contributes to the school's branding consistency. This process is not only administrative but also functions as an early branding touchpoint, influencing first impressions among prospective students and parents.

According to interviews with PPDB committee members, the registration process follows a clear, repeatable structure: information dissemination through social media and printed brochures, initial application via designated contact points, and word-of-mouth referrals by existing parents and alumni. This process is intentionally designed to be simple, accessible, and aligned with the school's identity, portraying an image of an organized and welcoming institution.

Offline promotional efforts such as distributing brochures through parents and alumni to their networks reinforce the school's community-based branding approach, while digital promotions through Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp ensure the visibility and reach of the registration process to a wider audience. These integrated steps are implemented consistently each year, making the process familiar and trustworthy for the community.

The findings highlight how a well-organized and structured approach to admissions not only streamlines the process but also reinforces key values that the institution stands for: transparency, religious integrity, and inclusivity. A smooth registration process is crucial in shaping how prospective families view the school, as it reflects the institution's commitment to professionalism and reliability. When the administrative procedures are clear and efficient, it fosters trust and confidence, ensuring that families feel assured about their decision to enroll.

In addition to the procedural aspect, the involvement of the Kyai (religious leader) and school leadership during the registration process plays a crucial role. By engaging personally with prospective families and sharing the school's vision and mission, they add a human touch to the experience. As stated by one of parents :

"Honestly, it was really smooth. From the start, everything was clear and easy to understand. The best part was when the Kyai himself talked to us—he shared the school's vision and values, and it made us feel like we were really a part of the community. It wasn't just about signing papers, it felt personal, like they genuinely cared about our family. That really made us confident about choosing this school for our kids." (interviewed with the parents, August 2025).

This interaction is not just about logistics it builds a sense of authenticity and personal trust, which is essential in forming long-term relationships. Such a human-centered approach is critical in making families feel connected and emotionally invested in the school, strengthening their commitment to the institution and its values.

### **Physical Evidence**

The findings indicate that physical infrastructure is a critical component in shaping the branding image of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin*. Quality facilities including well-maintained classrooms, administrative offices, outdoor learning spaces (*saung*), dormitories, and sanitation facilities significantly influence public perception, parental trust, and student satisfaction.

Interviews with the head of the madrasah reveal that the institution's strategic location near the city and its modern facilities are major attractions for urban families. According to him, city-based parents place strong emphasis on physical comfort and facility readiness when deciding where to enroll their children

Observations further confirm that the physical environment plays a decisive role in school selection. Clean, orderly, and functional spaces not only support daily learning activities but also symbolize the school’s commitment to quality. The academic department echoed this, noting that facilities enhance the learning experience and reinforce the madrasah’s reputation as a reliable educational provider.

From an administrative standpoint, the operational team ensures that facilities are consistently maintained. Administrative staff acknowledged that classroom conditions, office spaces, and supporting areas are regularly inspected and improved. A well-maintained facilities foster a conducive learning environment and positively impact brand perception.

The feedback from students underscores the positive influence of a comfortable and inviting learning environment on their educational experience. One student, for instance, specifically highlighted the comfort and ambiance of both indoor and outdoor learning spaces, such as the traditional “saung” (a small pavilion or hut). This suggests that the physical environment how it feels and how it’s designed plays a critical role in students’ engagement and overall satisfaction. As stated by one of student/santri :

“I really like the learning environment here. The classroom is comfortable because it’s quiet and not too crowded, which helps me concentrate. But what I enjoy the most is studying in the saung. It’s such a peaceful spot with fresh air, and I feel like I can focus better there. It’s just more relaxed, and I don’t get distracted as much. It’s a nice change of pace from being in the classroom all the time.”

In addition, other students stated :

“I definitely appreciate the space we have here, especially the outdoor areas like the saung. It’s not just about the classroom being quiet, it’s also the fact that being outside makes me feel more comfortable and less stressed. When I study in the saung, it’s easier to focus and think because I’m not confined to a desk. Plus, the open air and calm atmosphere really help me stay engaged and avoid getting bored.

After hearing from the first student about their preference for the peaceful and relaxed atmosphere of the saung, the second student shared similar sentiments. While both highlighted the comfort of the classroom, it was clear that the outdoor spaces, especially the saung, provided an ideal environment for studying and staying focused. Their responses reflect a common appreciation for spaces that are open, calming, and less distracting, which significantly enhance their learning experience.

This observation aligns with the idea that comfort and a supportive setting have a direct impact on student interest and performance. When students feel at ease in their learning environment, whether through a cozy, familiar space or a peaceful outdoor area, they are more likely to engage with the material and perform better academically.

Moreover, the feedback echoes a broader trend in education where institutions are increasingly adopting a model that sees students and parents as stakeholders. This approach views the satisfaction of these groups not only as important for academic success but also as a means of enhancing the reputation of educational institutions, especially in the context of Islamic schools. When the educational institution focuses on meeting the needs and expectations of students and parents, it can foster greater trust and respect from the community, ultimately benefiting the institution's public image.

In essence, a thoughtful, student-centered approach to creating a conducive learning environment one that considers both comfort and a broader stakeholder satisfaction model can have a profound impact on student engagement and the institution's reputation.

**Table 2.** Summary of Research Findings Based on the 7P Marketing Mix

7P Element	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
<b>Product</b>	1. Strong flagship programs: Qur’an memorization, kitab learning, bilingual Arabic–English. 2. Integrated religious, academic, and character development.	1. Leaders: programs increase attractiveness. 2. Parents & students: see strong added value.
<b>Price</b>	-Value-based pricing: parents see high value, not just affordability. - Fees match facilities, outcomes, and holistic education.	-Interviews: long-term benefits outweigh cost. -Observations: facilities well-maintained.

<b>Place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-rural location supports a calm, religious, and disciplined environment.</li> <li>- Strong community integration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Observations: environment supports learning.</li> <li>- Local families show trust and loyalty.</li> </ul>
<b>Promotion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hybrid promotion: social media + brochures</li> <li>+ alumni networks.</li> <li>-Religious activities strengthen spiritual branding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active IG/FB/YouTube content.</li> <li>- Community events boost visibility.</li> </ul>
<b>People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kyai's reputation significantly strengthens brand image.</li> <li>- Teachers and staff act as brand ambassadors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Interviews: high community trust in Kyai.</li> <li>- Observations: positive institutional culture.</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear and consistent student admission process (PPDB).</li> <li>- Personal engagement by Kyai builds trust.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents: process is easy and welcoming.</li> <li>- Committee: simple and accessible system.</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clean, comfortable facilities: classrooms, dormitory, saung (outdoor space).</li> <li>- Facilities represent the school's quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students: enjoy peaceful study spaces.</li> <li>- Staff: routine maintenance improves perception.</li> </ul>

## Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the strategic management of brand image at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin* is a holistic institutional effort, deeply rooted in leadership, facilities, academic programs, promotion, and stakeholder relationships. This finding affirms that successful school branding is not limited to promotional tactics but involves multidimensional consistency in delivering educational value and experience.

Furthermore, the madrasah's flagship programs Tahfiz Al-Qur'an, kitab learning, and bilingual language development serve as distinct academic differentiators. Their structured, tiered delivery model fosters both academic and character development, ensuring that students achieve progressive learning milestones. These programs contribute to brand positioning by aligning the school's academic identity with religious and societal values.

In addition to these, the madrasah also offers several other critical flagship programs that enhance its unique position in the educational landscape. Islamic Leadership Training prepares students to become moral and ethical leaders, providing them with the skills to lead with integrity in both religious and community settings. The 30 Juz of the Qur'an Program focuses on Qur'anic memorization and understanding, enabling students to internalize the teachings of the Qur'an deeply.

The Abu & Ummu Al-Hujroh Program, dedicated to boarding school management, cultivates leadership and administrative skills, equipping students to manage and oversee Islamic educational institutions. Hal Aqoh Zawaya, which centers on Islamic jurisprudence, ensures students gain a deep understanding of Islamic law, both in theory and practice.

Moreover, the International Collaboration with Middle Eastern Institutions Program provides students with global exposure, linking them to educational practices and academic frameworks used in prestigious Middle Eastern institutions. Curriculum Standardization inspired by the Middle Eastern system further strengthens the academic rigor and alignment with international standards. The Arabic and Foreign Language Proficiency Program ensures that students are not only fluent in Arabic but also proficient in other languages, enhancing their global communication skills and preparing them for various academic and professional opportunities.

Lastly, the Kitab Bersanad Program, which focuses on the study of religious texts with authenticated chains of narration, fosters academic excellence in traditional Islamic scholarship, ensuring that students are rooted in authentic Islamic knowledge.

Collectively, these programs not only strengthen the academic and spiritual growth of students but also reinforce the madrasah's branding as an institution committed to producing well-rounded, globally

competitive Islamic scholars and leaders. This aligns with Maresova et al. (2020), who argue that a strong brand image in education is built on innovation, differentiation, and consistent quality. Additionally, the increasing interest and enrollment rates each year serve as tangible evidence of these programs' impact on institutional branding. The findings are consistent with Yanto et al. (2023) and Nisak (2023), who suggest that quality flagship programs function as effective branding tools, shaping public trust and preference.

Although tuition fees were not directly examined in this study, it is evident that the madrasah's perceived value—spiritually and academically—plays a decisive role in student enrollment. Parents view their investment as worthwhile due to the school's outcomes in character formation, religious adherence, and academic competence. This aligns with Zeithaml's (1988) concept of perceived value, which posits that customers base their decisions on the benefits they receive relative to what they sacrifice. Amado et al. (2023) also support this perspective, emphasizing that high perceived value in educational services contributes positively to institutional loyalty and reputation. This aligns with the finding of (Amado et al., 2023) that suggests how students perceive the value of their education can directly influence the university's reputation, which is crucial for attracting and retaining students.

Promotion emerges as another critical element of branding. *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin* employs a dual promotional strategy: digital outreach through social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, and traditional methods via alumni, parents, and community events like the weekly *pengajian Abad* led by the Kyai (Arif et al., 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2025; Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Yamin et al., 2023). This aligns with Ramadhani & Setyowati (2023) and Sarder & Mustaqeem (2024), who highlight the effectiveness of social media in communicating school values and achievements. Offline strategies, particularly the role of alumni and community religious leaders, add authenticity and expand reach to broader audiences.

One of the influential factors in building the madrasah's brand is the figure of the Kyai. His personal charisma, scholarly reputation, and active role in both internal operations and community outreach have positioned him as both a symbol and driver of the school's credibility. As noted by (Hariadi et al., 2024; Rahmi et al., 2025), the Kyai serves as a religious and social mediator who bridges various societal segments while reinforcing moral authority (Juwaini et al., 2025; Karyono et al., 2025; Permadi et al., 2025; Qasserras, 2024). This aligns with findings in this study, where the Kyai's involvement in teacher development, student progress, and community interaction directly enhances the institution's image and public trust.

Equally important is the school's registration process, which exemplifies administrative professionalism and contributes to branding consistency. A well-organized admission system—comprising online outreach, brochure distribution, and word-of-mouth—ensures a smooth entry point for prospective families. Observations indicate that this structured approach not only facilitates efficient admissions but also reinforces the institution's brand values of transparency, religious integrity, and inclusiveness. As (Haqqi et al., 2025; Nurdi & Ahmad, 2025) explain, service processes especially those involving direct contact with the customer shape perceptions of quality and reliability. In educational contexts, a well-managed registration process demonstrates administrative professionalism and instills confidence in prospective families.

Moreover, the Kyai and school leadership play a proactive role during the registration phase, engaging with prospective families and sharing the vision and mission of the school (Humaidi et al., 2024; Mumtaz et al., 2024; Syah et al., 2025). This human-centered interaction adds authenticity and personal trust to the branding process, in line with (Edvardsson 2005) who stress that well-structured service processes must also be emotionally engaging to build long-term loyalty. Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) argue that service processes significantly affect how clients perceive reliability and professionalism, a view echoed in this research. The direct involvement of leadership during registration further personalizes the experience, increasing parental confidence and satisfaction. This supports (Arifin et al., 2023; Hamdanah et al., 2025; Hermawan et al., 2025), who argue that charismatic and visionary leadership—especially one that invests in human resource development—is essential to building a strong educational brand. According to (Hamdanah et al., 2025; Hermawan et al., 2025; Rusdinal et al., 2024), a leader serves as a social mediator and key communicator, bridging the interests of various societal groups—including elites and the general public—by managing the flow of information both vertically and horizontally.

Lastly, the school's physical facilities play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions. The madrasah's infrastructure—including classrooms, dormitories, administrative areas, and open-air learning spaces such as saung—not only supports daily academic functions but also symbolizes the school's commitment to educational excellence. These tangible aspects act as "servicescapes" (Bitner, 1992), which are known to

influence how customers (in this context, students and parents) perceive service quality (AL-Momani, 2024; Azizah et al., 2024; Rachmawaty & Bahiroh, 2025).

The study found that urban families, in particular, are drawn to the institution because of its proximity to the city and its modern, well-maintained environment. These findings resonate with Wulandari et al. (2019), who argue that school facilities significantly affect parental decisions and student engagement. The learning environment both inside and outside the classroom was found to influence students' experiences and perceptions. The school's ongoing efforts to improve its physical infrastructure are part of a deliberate branding strategy. These improvements aim to provide comfort and reinforce trust. (Etemi et al., 2024; Seow & Hussain, 2024) emphasize that effective facility management in Islamic schools boosts efficiency and student satisfaction, thereby enhancing institutional image.

Student testimonials affirm that facilities such as outdoor study areas enhance comfort and motivation. These findings are consistent with (Aghaei et al., 2022), who assert that a supportive and comfortable learning atmosphere contributes to increased interest, performance, and ultimately, the institution's reputation. When those facilities meet their expectations, they are more confident in choosing the madrasah. This reflects (Rachmawaty & Bahiroh, 2025) who assert that facilities influence parents' and students' decisions by serving as tangible indicators of educational quality. (Jauhari et al., 2025; Mayasafira, 2025) also emphasize that effective facility management is essential for operational efficiency and brand reinforcement in Islamic schools. Moreover (Thaib et al., 2025) argue that comfort and a supportive environment elevate student interest and performance, while (Avdeeva & Kokodey, 2024; Hambali et al., 2024; Nellitawati et al., 2024; Shittu et al., 2025) highlights that adopting a "customer satisfaction" model where students and parents are seen as stakeholders can significantly improve the public reputation of Islamic educational institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study finds that the brand image management strategy at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin is the result of a systematic, integrated, and value-driven approach guided by the 7P Marketing Mix framework: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. These findings reveal that successful school branding goes beyond promotional tactics; it involves multidimensional alignment of educational values and experiences. In this context, the leadership figure of the Kyai emerges as a highly influential factor in establishing credibility and moral authority, thereby boosting the madrasah's trust and visibility in the public eye. This holistic approach, which includes flagship programs like Tahfiz Al-Qur'an, kitab learning, and bilingual language development, has a larger impact than previously anticipated, opening new discussions about how religious and academic values can synergize in Islamic educational branding strategies.

This study reinforces previous findings regarding the importance of leadership and physical facilities in educational branding, while challenging the limited view that branding is solely about visibility and promotion. By introducing the 7P Marketing Mix framework, this research offers new insights into brand image management, especially within the context of Islamic madrasahs. It enriches the scientific discussion of educational branding by emphasizing the importance of aligning academic programs, infrastructure, and religious values in creating a strong brand identity. The concept of perceived value, integrated into the decision-making of both parents and students, introduces a new variable in Islamic education branding, offering a more holistic perspective on how educational programs and brand image management can coexist effectively.

This study is limited by its small sample size and focus on Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Arifin as a specific case, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other institutions, particularly those in different cultural or geographic contexts. Additionally, factors such as data variation, gender, and age were not fully explored, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of branding in Islamic education. Further research with a larger sample size and broader variables is necessary to provide a more generalizable and holistic view of branding efforts in Islamic educational institutions.

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