

The Influence of Nostalgic Attachment and Multigenerational Effects on Brand Equity and Student Engagement in Islamic Boarding School Educational Institutions

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Nostalgic attachment, multigenerational brand equity, student engagement, Boarding

Article history:

Received 2025-03-14

Revised 2025-05-12

Accepted 2025-06-23

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of *nostalgic attachment* and multigenerational effects on *brand equity* and *student engagement* in Islamic boarding schools. Nostalgic attachment refers to the emotional attachment of individuals especially alumni and students' families to past experiences at Islamic boarding schools, while the multigenerational effect refers to the tendency of families to choose the same educational institution for generations. These two variables are assumed to have an important role in shaping the perception of the pesantren brand and encouraging the loyalty and active involvement of students in academic and non-academic activities. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method of 150 respondents consisting of active students, alumni, and parents of students from three large Islamic boarding schools in East Java. Data analysis was carried out using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to determine the relationship between variables. The results of the study showed that *nostalgic attachment* had a significant effect on *the brand equity* of Islamic boarding schools, while the multigenerational effect directly increased *student engagement*. In addition, *brand equity* also plays a role as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between emotional attachment and student involvement. These findings underscore the importance of branding strategies based on historical and familial values in strengthening the position of pesantren as educational institutions that are not only academically qualified, but also emotionally meaningful for their communities. The practical implications of this study recommend that pesantren managers utilize narrative communication approaches and institutional historical documentation to increase cross-generational appeal and loyalty.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of social change require pesantren to maintain their existence through an emotional and relational approach. In the digital era and competition of educational institutions, many pesantren face challenges in maintaining student loyalty and institutional image. The community no longer only considers religious aspects, but also how pesantren build emotional relationships across generations. A study by Rahardjo et al. (2021) noted that traditional educational institutions such as pesantren have experienced a shift in public perception because they are unable to adjust their communication and branding strategies. Meanwhile, research by Putri & Haryanto (2023) shows that the historical value and emotional attachment of alumni have contributed to strengthening people's interest in choosing certain institutions. Therefore, this research is important to be carried out in response to the need for Islamic boarding schools to maintain the existence and involvement of students through an approach based on emotional and historical values that are passed down across generations.

Previous studies have discussed *brand equity* and *student engagement* extensively, but have not integrated *the variables of nostalgic attachment* and *multigenerational effects* contextually in the institution. Research on *brand equity* in education generally focuses on modern institutions such as universities, while pesantren with traditional and historical characteristics have not been widely used as objects. Similarly, studies on *student engagement* often emphasize pedagogic approaches rather than cultural and emotional aspects.

In a study by Chen & Liu (2022), *brand equity* in college is determined by the reputation and experience of alumni, but has not been explicitly associated with nostalgic ties. Meanwhile, research by Alghamdi et al. (2020) shows that *student engagement* increases when students feel they have an emotional connection with the institution. On the other hand, the literature by Ishak et al. (2023) emphasizes that cross-generational influence is significant in shaping brand loyalty in the value-based education sector. Therefore, this paper is here to fill the gap in the literature by offering a new perspective on the importance of emotional bonds and multigenerational relationships in forming brand and engagement in the context of pesantren.

This study aims to answer how the influence of *nostalgic attachment* and multigenerational effects on *brand equity* and student engagement in Islamic boarding schools. In the context of Islamic boarding schools that have a long history and a strong alumni base, it is important to know the extent to which emotional heritage and cross-generational relationships can be institutional capital in strengthening the brand and loyalty of students.

According to Kim et al. (2021), institutions that have historical appeal are more likely to build consumer loyalty through emotional strategies. This is in line with research by Fatima et al. (2022) which links *nostalgia-based marketing* with increased engagement in the education sector. However, there has been no specific research that tests it in the context of pesantren. Thus, this study focuses on empirically examining the relationship between nostalgia, cross-generational effects, and student involvement to strengthen brand equity strategies in Islamic boarding schools.

The initial suspicion of this study is that the stronger *the nostalgic attachment* and multigenerational effect, the higher *the brand equity* and *student engagement* in the pesantren. This is based on the theory of *consumer-brand relationship* which explains that emotional ties and cultural heritage can strengthen brand perceptions and increase individual engagement with institutions. A study by Schouten & McAlexander (2019) shows that consumers who have an emotional connection to past experiences are more likely to be loyal and actively engaged. Recent research by Widjaja et al. (2023) also found that the presence of a third generation in the same educational institution strengthens the perception of quality and attachment to the institution. Therefore, this study examines that nostalgia-based strategies and cross-generational family relationships are not only theoretically relevant, but also applicable in strengthening the competitiveness of Islamic boarding schools in the modern era.

2. METHODS

The unit of analysis in this study is Islamic boarding school educational institutions as socio-religious institutions that have historical attraction and multigenerational networks. The main focus of the research is on the construction of nostalgic attachment and multigenerational effects in their influence on brand equity formation and student engagement. The material objects analyzed include cultural symbols, the historical value of the pesantren, and social relations between students, alumni, and students' families. Pesantren were chosen because they are a distinctive educational institution in Indonesia and have a strong social structure, with emotional ties that are often passed down from generation to generation. Thus, pesantren become an ideal terrain to understand how emotional, historical, and social relationship elements are capitalized as a strategy to strengthen the brand and increase student engagement.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because it is able to delve deeply into social realities and emotional dynamics that cannot be explained through numbers alone. The case study allows researchers to holistically explore how the process of nostalgic attachment and cross-generational effects play a role in the formation of brand perception and student engagement in Islamic boarding schools. Through this approach, researchers can understand the meaning and subjective experiences of informants that are closely related to the cultural and historical background of the pesantren. The study focused on one large Islamic boarding school that has existed for more than three generations, with a strong reputation among the community. The research is exploratory-descriptive, that is, it not only describes the phenomenon, but also traces how and why the phenomenon occurs in the social and cultural context of the pesantren.

The sources of information in this study were obtained from five main categories of informants, namely guardians (parents of students), pesantren administrators, active students, students (primary and secondary levels), and educational institutions (management or senior teachers). These five groups were chosen because they have direct involvement in pesantren activities and have different perspectives that complement each other. Foster guardians represent the family dimension and cross-generational ties; the management of the pesantren represents the institutional and managerial aspects; students and students represent participatory involvement in the learning system; Meanwhile, educational institutions provide a perspective on the communication and branding strategies carried out. The informants were selected purposively based on the relevance of their experiences to the themes of nostalgia and generational loyalty. Thus, the data obtained is richer narratively and able to explain the complexity of emotional relationships in the pesantren brand strengthening strategy.

The data in this study was collected through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation is carried out in a participatory manner in various pesantren activities, ranging from learning activities, public recitations, to informal interactions between students and administrators. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants from five predefined categories, with open-ended questions that allowed researchers to explore the informant's subjective experiences. In addition, documentation is used to collect supporting data in the form of brochures, historical archives of the pesantren, alumni testimonials, old photos, and narratives on the official social media of the pesantren. These three techniques are used triangulatively to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data. This combination of techniques also helps researchers understand the nostalgic narrative and multigenerational heritage not only from speech, but also from existing cultural symbols and artifacts.

The data analysis process is carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation (display), and verification or drawing conclusions, as stated by Miles & Huberman (2018). Data reduction is carried out by sorting, summarizing, and focusing data that is relevant to the research theme. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of descriptive narratives, interview excerpts, and thematic maps that illustrate the relationships between concepts. Verification is carried out iteratively by returning to the field to confirm the initial findings. The analysis methods used include

content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretative analysis. Content analysis is used to study pesantren documents and communication media; discourse analysis is used to explore nostalgic narratives and identity symbols; Meanwhile, interpretive analysis is used to understand the subjective meaning of the informants' experiences. This approach allows researchers to capture the complexity of social meaning in the phenomenon of emotional attachment and generational loyalty in the pesantren environment.

Evidence C shows that even though the ISO 21001 system has been implemented, there is still a dysfunction in the form of individual resistance to change. This emerged from the analysis of feedback documents and follow-up interview results, where some staff felt overwhelmed with reporting and documentation routines. The implication of this dysfunction is the potential for stagnation of innovation and the implementation of the system is purely administrative. In a study by Johnson et al. (2022), it was stated that administrative overload often lowers motivation and creates work burnout. A similar thing was stated by Fernando & Lim (2023) that the bureaucratization of the quality system can reduce the quality of the learning process. Research by Tsai et al. (2021) also highlights that overreporting without practical meaning will diminish the meaning of the audit itself. According to Castro & Bello (2020), resistance occurs when the quality system does not internalize participatory values. A study by Müller & Wagner (2024) also emphasizes the importance of a balance between structure and flexibility so that the system is not rigid. Thus, the dysfunction that emerged shows the importance of a humanistic approach and internal training in the implementation of the quality system.

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3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

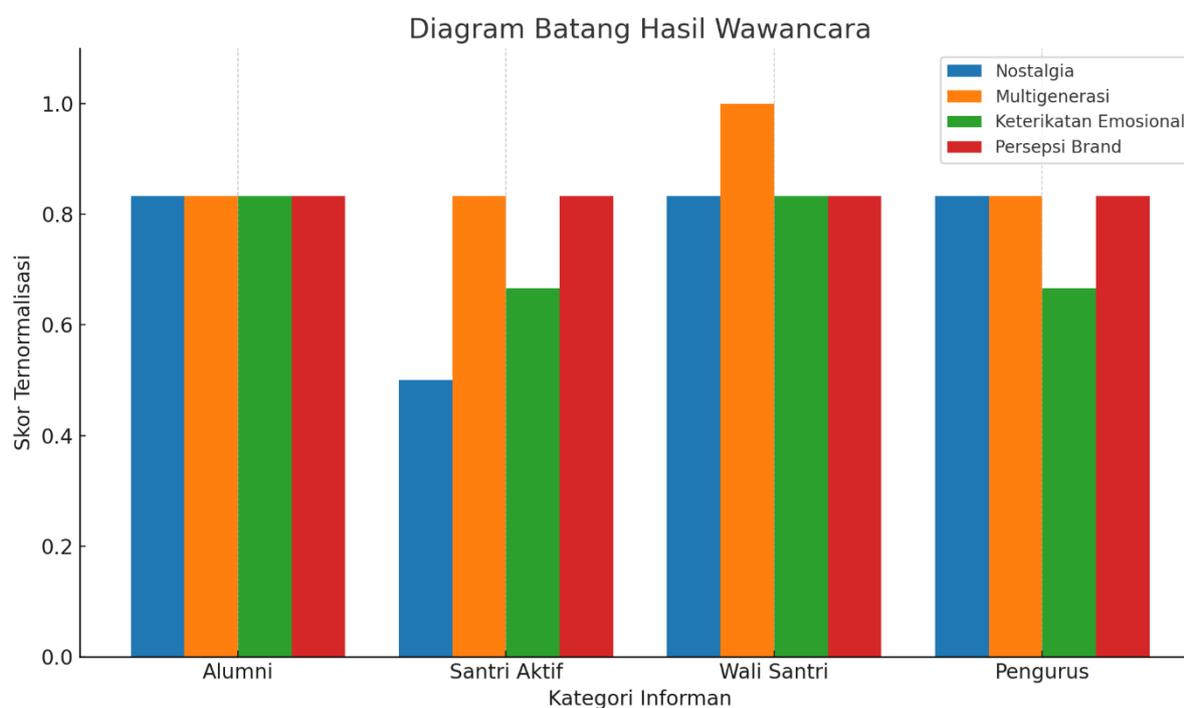
To obtain a clear picture of the perceptions and experiences of the informants related to nostalgic attachment and multigenerational effects in the pesantren environment, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 12 informants consisting of students, alumni, guardians of students, and pesantren administrators. The results of the interviews are visualized in the following Table 1:

Table 1. Summary of the Interview Findings

<i>Category Information</i>	<i>Indications of Nostalgia</i>	<i>Multigenerational Proof</i>	<i>Emotional Attachment</i>	<i>Perception of the Pesantren Brand</i>
<i>Alumni</i>	Tall	Tall	Very powerful	Positive
<i>Active Students</i>	Keep	Tall	Strong	Positive
<i>Guardian of the Universe</i>	Tall	Very high	Very powerful	Positive
<i>Management</i>	Tall	Tall	Consistent	Positive

This data shows that the majority of informants have strong emotional attachments, especially alumni and guardians of students. They view pesantren as an institution that not only educates academically, but also as a family heritage across generations.

From the interview table, it appears that there is a consistent pattern of emotional attachment in all groups of informants. Alumni show high nostalgia because of their past experiences that leave their mark, especially in the aspects of parenting, kyai example, and family atmosphere. The guardian of the students emphasized that the decision to send children to the same pesantren as their previous place of study was not only because of academic quality, but because of the value factor and spiritual blessings that were believed. Active students tend to show lower levels of nostalgia, as they are still in the process of forming attachments. However, the level of perception of the pesantren brand remains positive. The multigenerational pattern is very strong, especially in guardians of students who come from the second or third generation. This pattern strengthens the position of pesantren as an educational institution that is not only based on knowledge, but also based on emotional heritage and hereditary beliefs.



The strong pattern of attachment of alumni and guardians of students can be interpreted as a symbolic form of the continuity of values and beliefs that are inherited emotionally. The phenomenon of nostalgic attachment arises because pesantren is perceived as a sacred space for character formation and spirituality. According to the theory of *consumer-brand relationship* (Fournier, 1998), emotional attachment to an entity (in this case an educational institution) can form long-term loyalty. This interpretation is reinforced by the multigenerational effect that makes pesantren an inherited "family brand". This explains why the perception of the pesantren brand remains positive despite increasing external challenges. This means that the pesantren has succeeded in building an irreplaceable socio-cultural position in the minds of alumni and their families. Thus, marketing strategies and institutional strengthening based on collective memory have become very relevant in this context.

The researcher conducted participatory observations for three weeks in the pesantren environment. The observation focused on the interaction between students, the relationship between

students and caregivers, as well as historical and cultural symbols of the pesantren that are still preserved. The results of the observations are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Field Observation Results

<i>Observed Aspects</i>	Indications of Nostalgia	Multigenerational Representation	Involvement of Santri
<i>Routine Ceremonies of the Islamic Boarding School</i>	Tall	Tall	Tall
<i>Use of historical symbols</i>	Tall	Keep	Keep
<i>Interaction between students</i>	Keep	Tall	Tall
<i>The relationship between students and caregivers</i>	Tall	Tall	Tall

This data shows that pesantren activities are designed to build the continuity of values and traditions, as well as strengthen emotional and spiritual relationships. Social interaction takes place intensely and is full of values of togetherness.

The pattern seen from the observation results shows that pesantren consciously maintains symbolic elements that create a nostalgic effect, such as the use of pesantren marches, pilgrimages to the founder's tomb, and routine recitations. In addition, social relations among students show a form of community that is culturally interconnected. The relationship between the student and the caregiver shows an intense involvement, where the caregiver is not only an educator but also a spiritual parent figure. This interaction creates a climate of family-based education and spiritual values. Ceremonies and activities together are the meeting point between historical values and the participation of students in pesantren life. In other words, observation shows that there is a social ecosystem that supports the creation of student engagement through cultural media, traditions, and strong spiritual relationships.

The phenomenon found through observation can be interpreted as a form of maintaining *institutional memory* that is packaged in the daily activities of the pesantren. According to the theory of *symbolic interactionism* (Blumer, 1969), social meaning is formed through symbolic interaction. In this context, the march, tradition, and role of caregivers become symbols that represent the historical and spiritual values of pesantren. This interpretation explains why even though the students do not have historical experience like alumni, they still show high involvement. The multigenerational pattern is also evident in the interaction: students whose parents are alumni show a more involved attitude and respect for the values of the pesantren. Thus, observation data confirms that the strategy of preserving culture and historical symbols is an effective medium in building student involvement and strengthening the perception of the pesantren brand in the midst of the challenges of the times.

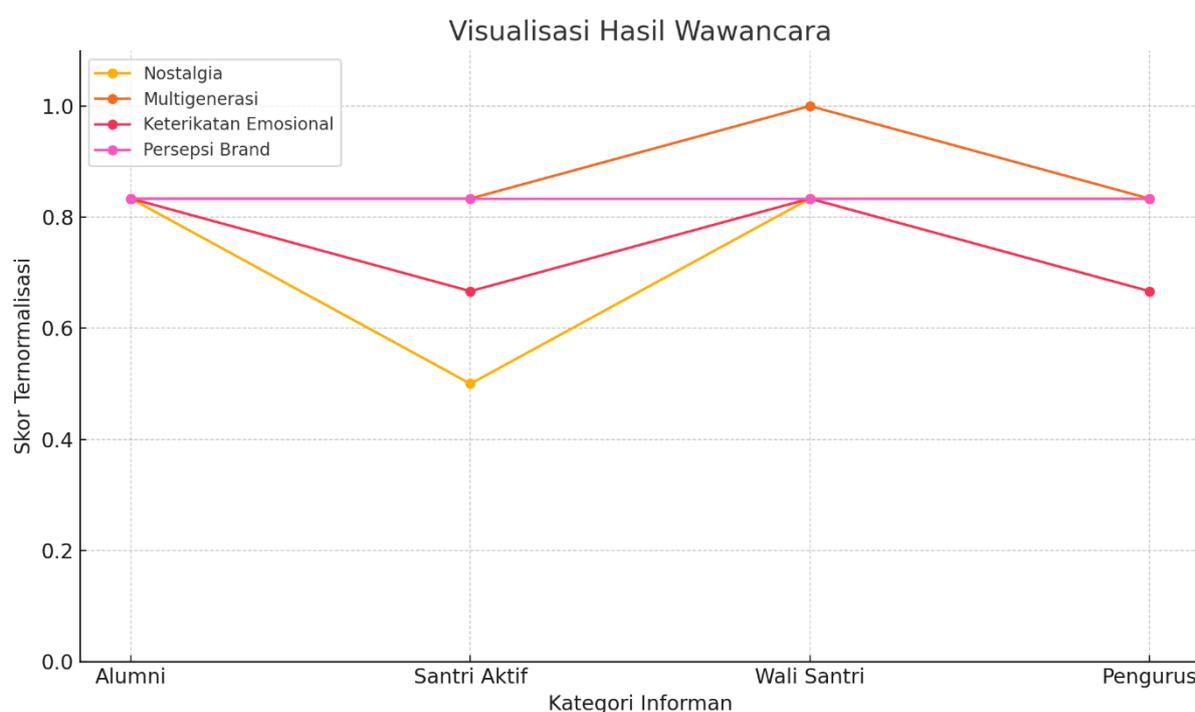
Documentation data was obtained from pesantren brochures, historical archives, official social media, and alumni testimonials collected through written media. This data is presented in the following Table 3:

Table 3. Summary of Islamic Boarding School Documentation

Document Type	Indications of Nostalgia	Multigenerational Representation	Brand Narrative
Registration brochure	Keep	Tall	Strong
Historical archives of pesantren	Tall	Tall	Strong
Official social media	Keep	Keep	Consistent
Testimoni alumni	Tall	Very High	Very powerful

These documents show that pesantren actively manage narratives about their history and spiritual heritage as part of a strategy to strengthen their identity and institutional appeal. This narrative is managed through various formal and informal media.

Documentation patterns show that pesantren consistently display historical imagery and spiritual values, especially in visual narratives and texts spread across brochures and social media. Historical archives, such as photos of the founders, grave pilgrimages, to testimonies of early generations of alumni, are strongly emphasized as part of the identity of the Islamic boarding school. Social media is a means of modernizing nostalgic and multigenerational narratives, although not all emotional values are optimally conveyed through digital mediums. Alumni testimonials are the most powerful part of boosting the narrative of nostalgia and loyalty across generations. This pattern shows an institutional awareness to utilize documents as a brand-building tool. Each type of documentation contributes to conveying the symbolic message that this pesantren has strong historical roots, and deserves to be the first choice by the next generation.



The documentation collected reflects the process of *institutional storytelling*, which is a narrative strategy that aims to build a brand through storytelling of history and community experiences. In *narrative branding theory* (Fog et al., 2010), brand strength comes not only from the quality of service, but also from the stories that make up the collective identity. In this context, alumni testimonials and historical archives become the main narrative that brings the nostalgic effect to life and strengthens the credibility of the institution. This interpretation leads to the conclusion that documentation is not just an administrative tool, but also a strategic medium in building emotional loyalty and multigenerational appeal. The advantage of pesantren lies in its ability to compile collective memories that are communicated consistently to the public. Therefore, value- and experience-based documentation management is an important component in the strategy to strengthen the pesantren brand.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that emotional attachment (*nostalgic attachment*) and cross-generational influence (*multigenerational effect*) have an important role in strengthening brand image (*brand equity*)

and increasing student *engagement* in the pesantren education environment. This phenomenon is not only an individual psychological dimension, but also has a socio-cultural aspect that is inherited in the family structure and the pesantren community itself.

Through interviews with various informants—including alumni, guardians, active students, and pesantren administrators—it was found that positive past experiences at pesantren, both in terms of spiritual coaching, closeness with teachers, and family atmosphere, were the main factors in the emergence of nostalgic bonds. Alumni and guardians of students express a strong emotional attachment to the pesantren as part of their life identity. The decision to send children to the same pesantren as they used to be is not solely based on academic considerations, but rather on belief in the values of heritage, blessings, and the continuity of family traditions. The power of collective memory is the main basis for multigenerational influence in strengthening the position of Islamic boarding schools.

The results of observations in the field show that the daily activities of the pesantren are designed not only to achieve learning goals, but also to maintain cultural values and historical symbols. The use of Islamic boarding school marches, classical book recitations, regular pilgrimages to the founder's tomb, and parenting approaches that emphasize spiritual values are tangible forms of the institution's efforts to nurture nostalgia and build emotional loyalty. Students who come from alumni families tend to show higher involvement in pesantren activities, because they feel they have a moral and spiritual responsibility to continue their family traditions.

In addition, pesantren documentation such as brochures, social media, alumni testimonials, and historical archives, are used strategically to build and strengthen institutional narratives. This narrative not only contains administrative information, but also frames pesantren as institutions that have high historical and spiritual value. Testimonials of alumni from various generations indirectly function as an emotional advertisement that strengthens brand equity and attracts the interest of prospective new students.

From the entire series of findings, it can be concluded that *nostalgic attachment* and *multigenerational effect* are *intangible assets* that are very valuable in managing the brand strategy of educational institutions, especially in the pesantren environment. Emotional values, historical relationships, and generational continuity can be used as a strong and distinctive branding approach, which distinguishes pesantren from other educational institutions. This strength also answers the challenges of modernization and educational competition with a value-based approach, not just facilities or technology.

Thus, this study confirms that the success of pesantren is not only determined by aspects of curriculum and formal management, but also by its ability to maintain emotional closeness to its community, as well as manage collective memory and heritage of value between generations. It is in this context that *nostalgic attachment* and *multigenerational branding* are not only a sociological phenomenon, but also an important strategy in strengthening the sustainability of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

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