



Value-Based Branding Strategies of Islamic Boarding Schools In Islamic Higher Education at STIS Darul Falah Bondowoso

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Abstract:

This study focuses on the pesantren-based branding strategy at STIS Darul Falah as a case study to understand how traditional pesantren values are integrated into the identity and branding strategy of an Islamic higher education institution. The primary objective is to explore how pesantren values are applied in visual communication elements, institutional narratives, and academic programs, and how these contribute to the institution's image and competitiveness. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the Vice Rector, Head and Secretary of the Quality Assurance Agency (LPM), and marketing staff, as well as through observation of campus visual elements and institutional document analysis. The findings reveal that STIS Darul Falah successfully integrates pesantren values such as sincerity, simplicity, and spirituality into its logo, color schemes, slogans, and consistent institutional narratives across various promotional media. Academic programs such as classical Islamic book studies (*kajian kitab kuning*), study circles (*halaqah*), and da'wah training function as strategic tools to shape student character based on pesantren values. The implications of this research highlight the importance of consistency in visual communication and institutional narratives as an effective branding strategy to strengthen the identity of pesantren-based educational institutions in the modern era.

Keywords: *Pesantren Branding, Visual Communication, Islamic Higher Education.*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini berfokus pada strategi branding berbasis nilai pesantren di STIS Darul Falah sebagai studi kasus untuk memahami bagaimana nilai-nilai tradisional pesantren diintegrasikan dalam identitas dan strategi branding institusi pendidikan tinggi Islam. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan nilai-nilai pesantren dalam elemen komunikasi visual, narasi institusional, dan program akademik, serta dampaknya terhadap citra dan daya saing institusi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan Wakil Rektor, Ketua dan Sekretaris Lembaga Penjaminan Mutu (LPM), serta staf pemasaran, ditambah observasi terhadap elemen visual kampus dan analisis dokumen institusi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa STIS Darul Falah berhasil mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai pesantren seperti keikhlasan, kesederhanaan, dan spiritualitas ke dalam logo, skema warna, slogan, serta narasi institusional yang konsisten di berbagai media promosi. Program akademik seperti kajian kitab kuning, halaqah, dan pelatihan dakwah berfungsi sebagai alat strategis untuk membentuk karakter mahasiswa yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai pesantren.

Implikasi dari penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya konsistensi dalam komunikasi visual dan narasi institusional sebagai strategi branding yang efektif untuk memperkuat identitas institusi pendidikan berbasis pesantren di era modern.

Kata Kunci: *Branding Pesantren, Komunikasi Visual, Pendidikan Tinggi Islam.*

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) have long been one of Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institutions (Putri, et al. 2023; Ridwan 2022), playing a crucial role not only in transmitting religious knowledge but also in character building. Amidst the dynamics of globalization and modernization, pesantren values such as sincerity, simplicity, diversity, and integrity are gaining increasing relevance. This phenomenon is evident in the growing public interest in education that successfully integrates spirituality with modern scientific knowledge (Djamil 2023; Saputra, et.al. 2024). Pesantren aren't just focusing on low-cost marketing; they're also integrating religious values to attract students without compromising educational quality. However, few Islamic higher education institutions have successfully leveraged pesantren values as a strong branding strategy to attract students and expand their academic influence (Pratama et al. 2023; Tonda, et al. 2024).

The academic importance of this topic stems from the urgent need to address the challenges of globalization, which often suppress local identity and spirituality. For Islamic higher education institutions, a value-based branding strategy rooted in pesantren values can be a vital tool for building differentiation and competitiveness at both national and international levels. According to value-based branding theory (Amelia & Riofita, 2024; Gapari, 2024), an authentic value-driven identity can foster higher trust and loyalty among stakeholders. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital suggests that cultural values, such as those held by pesantren, can become strategic symbolic capital in building institutional excellence. By combining social facts and relevant theories, this research is essential for exploring how pesantren values can be adapted into the branding strategies of Islamic higher education institutions. This study also contributes to the academic literature on value-based branding in the context of Islamic higher education, which is currently limited.

This research identifies a primary issue related to the suboptimal utilization of pesantren values in the branding strategies of Islamic higher education institutions (Aldi, 2024; Ariyani, Darni, & Darsiah, 2024). Although pesantren values hold significant potential to shape a positive image and enhance institutional competitiveness, many Islamic higher education institutions still employ generic branding approaches that fail to reflect their unique local values. This is evident in the low brand differentiation among Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia (Afrianto & Kamaludin, 2023; Shanjaya, Munarsih, & Harsono, 2023), which often struggle to compete with general universities. Another crucial aspect is the minimal integration of pesantren values into visual communication and institutional narratives. Consequently, the potential of pesantren values to create a unique identity is

often overlooked (Rudwi Hantoro et al. 2022; Ussolikhah, et al. 2024). Therefore, the main focus of this research is to explore methods for implementing value-based branding strategies aimed at enhancing the image and competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions.

Several studies related to branding in Islamic higher education have been conducted, but with different foci. For example, Mundiri's (2023) research revealed that narratives containing spiritual values can build strong emotional ties with stakeholders. In Indonesia, studies highlight that branding prioritizing local values (Hakim, 2024; Shabina et al., 2024), such as cultural wisdom, has great potential to enhance the reputation of higher education institutions. Nevertheless, these studies have not specifically addressed the application of pesantren values as the foundation for branding strategies in Islamic higher education, creating a gap that needs to be filled by further research.

While there are many studies on value-based branding in education, research on how pesantren values can be strategically integrated into the branding of Islamic higher education institutions remains very limited. This gap includes the lack of a clear framework for adapting pesantren values into modern branding strategies (Jamroji, 2024; Soleh, 2024). Additionally, most previous research has focused more on generic branding aspects, without considering the uniqueness of the traditional values inherent in pesantren. This study aims to fill that gap by developing a value-based branding strategy for pesantren that is not only relevant but also applicable in the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. The novelty of this research lies in its approach that integrates modern branding theory with traditional pesantren values. This research offers a new perspective in understanding how pesantren values can become strategic capital for building the identity and reputation of Islamic higher education institutions. Moreover, this study also develops a pesantren value-based branding model that can be practically implemented by Islamic higher education institutions in one of the Islamic higher education institutions in Bondowoso Regency. Another novelty is the focus on integrating pesantren values into visual communication, institutional narratives, and student experiences, which has not been discussed in depth in previous research.

This research aims to analyze pesantren value-based branding strategies that can enhance the image, reputation, and competitiveness of STIS Darul Falah. Achieving this objective is crucial because it not only benefits the strengthening of institutional identity but also contributes to the preservation and dissemination of pesantren values within the context of higher education. Thus, this research is expected to significantly contribute to the development of Islamic higher education at STIS Darul Falah.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore pesantren value-based branding strategies. STIS Darul Falah, located at Jalan KH. Massyur, Desa Ramban Kulon, Kec. Cerme, Bondowoso, was selected as the primary unit of analysis because this institution uniquely integrates pesantren values into its Islamic higher education system, making it a relevant

case for exploring the implementation of local value-based branding in education. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of how these values are applied across various strategic aspects of the institution.

Information sources for this research include the Vice Rector, Head of the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM), LPM Secretary, and marketing staff, who collectively provide a holistic perspective on the institution's branding implementation. Data collection techniques involved observation to understand the visual and symbolic communication elements of the campus, in-depth interviews to gain insights into branding policies and strategies, and documentation, which included gathering secondary data such as official reports and promotional materials.

Data analysis was conducted systematically using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) model. This process involved three main stages: data reduction (selecting, simplifying, and focusing relevant data), data display (presenting information in matrices, tables, or narratives to facilitate interpretation), and conclusion drawing/verification (ensuring that the analysis results are accurate, valid, and accountable). This analytical approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of pesantren value-based branding strategies at STIS Darul Falah.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Pesantren Values into Institutional Identity

The integration of pesantren values into institutional identity refers to the process of embedding fundamental pesantren values such as sincerity, simplicity, diversity, integrity, and social benefit into an educational institution's vision, mission, structure, and culture. These values are translated into managerial practices, academic programs, visual communication, and social interactions both within and outside the institution. In the context of Islamic higher education, this integration creates unique characteristics that differentiate the institution from others (Ananda, et al. 2024; Satria, et al. 2024), making it both relevant and competitive in the modern era. This process goes beyond mere symbols or narratives; it encompasses the formation of systems aligned with pesantren values, such as an *adab* (character) and spirituality-based learning approach, as well as campus management that prioritizes togetherness and justice. By integrating pesantren values into every aspect of the institution, higher education institutions can strengthen their identity, enhance their reputation, and create a positive impact on both students and society. This integration also represents an effort to preserve pesantren traditions amidst the challenges of modernization (Khofi & Furqon, 2024; Sukhoiri, 2022), keeping them relevant in shaping a generation with intellectual and moral excellence. A strong institutional identity based on pesantren values also serves as a strategic tool to build public trust and attract the interest of stakeholders, including prospective students, parents, and strategic partners.

"We integrate an adab and akhlak-based approach into the learning process, where students not only acquire knowledge but are also trained to be individuals of character. Furthermore, our visual communication, such as logos, slogans, and promotional materials, reflects the spiritual values and simplicity we adhere to."

The interview with the Vice Rector of STIS Darul Falah indicates that the institution does not merely focus on the transfer of knowledge but also places significant emphasis on student character formation through an *adab* and *akhlak*-based approach. This reflects a serious effort to integrate *pesantren* values into the core of the educational system. This approach suggests that STIS Darul Falah strives to produce graduates who are not only intellectually competent but also possess high morality, aligning with the *pesantren* tradition that prioritizes noble character. Furthermore, the use of visual communication elements such as logos, slogans, and promotional materials that reflect spiritual values and simplicity demonstrates that STIS Darul Falah understands the importance of visual branding in strengthening institutional identity. This is a strategic step to create an authentic institutional image consistent with its core values. This visual communication serves as a symbolic link between the institution and its stakeholders, such as prospective students and the general public, who may expect alignment between spiritual values and the institution's appearance. The researcher also observed that this *adab* and *akhlak*-based approach not only has an internal impact on shaping students but also serves as an external attraction for the community. This indicates that STIS Darul Falah is not only marketing its institution based on academic aspects but also on the moral values currently needed in the social context. This strategy strengthens STIS Darul Falah's position as an Islamic higher education institution with uniqueness and competitiveness based on *pesantren* values, consistent visual communication, and narrative.

Pesantren Value-Based Academic Programs

Pesantren Value-Based Academic Programs are an educational approach that integrates core *pesantren* values, such as sincerity (Mahmudinata, 2024; Sarwila, Susilawati, Rosalinda, & Chanifudin, 2024), simplicity, diversity, noble character, and spirituality, into the curriculum and teaching methods of higher education institutions. These programs are designed not only to enhance students' academic competencies but also to shape their character to possess strong moral integrity. *Pesantren* values are applied across various components of the academic program, including teaching, research, and community service (Kabul & Mubarok, 2023; Yusuf, 2024), thereby creating harmony between intellectual achievement and spiritual development. The teaching methods used in these programs often include distinctive *pesantren* approaches, such as *halaqah* (study circles), *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) studies, and the strengthening of religious practices, which are combined with modern educational techniques to enhance graduates' relevance and competitiveness in the global era. Through these programs, students are expected not only to become competent individuals in their fields of study but also to possess a strong moral foundation to contribute positively to society. This program is one of the hallmarks of *pesantren*-based higher education institutions that strive to preserve Islamic tradition while addressing the challenges of modernization. By integrating these values, *pesantren*-based academic programs produce graduates who are not only professionally excellent but also capable of serving as moral leaders oriented

towards social benefit, which is greatly needed amidst current social and global changes.

"We have a kitab kuning study program to deepen students' religious insights, halaqah as a means of group discussion to hone critical thinking skills, and da'wah training that equips them with Islamically-rooted communication skills. As a quality assurance institution, we ensure that the integration of these values exists not only in vision-mission documents but also in daily learning practices. With these programs, we hope students will not only excel academically but also become individuals of strong character and contribute positively to society."

Based on the researcher's interview with the Head of the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM), it can be concluded that STIS Darul Falah reflects a holistic approach in implementing its pesantren value-based academic programs. Programs such as *kitab kuning* studies, *halaqah*, and da'wah training not only function as academic elements but also as a means of student character development. The *kitab kuning* studies demonstrate the institution's effort to preserve classical Islamic intellectual traditions while deepening students' religious understanding, thereby building a solid moral foundation. *Halaqah* as a group discussion method reflects an interactive learning approach that not only enhances students' critical thinking skills but also instills values of togetherness and collective responsibility. Da'wah training, on the other hand, shows the institution's attention to developing practical skills based on Islamic values, particularly in communication. This indicates that STIS Darul Falah is not only oriented towards academic competence but also towards shaping students as agents of change capable of effectively disseminating Islamic values in society. The integration of these programs into daily learning practices strengthens the consistency between the institution's vision-mission and its implementation on the ground. This interpretation shows that STIS Darul Falah adopts a value-based educational approach that not only produces intellectually competent students but also those who are character-driven and relevant to social needs. This strategy significantly contributes to strengthening the institution's identity and the relevance of Islamic higher education in addressing modern challenges.

Consistent Visual Communication and Narrative

Consistent visual communication and narrative is an integrated strategy for conveying an institutional message through harmonious and continuous visual and narrative elements, aiming to build a strong, recognizable identity for the audience. In the context of pesantren-value-based higher education, visual communication includes design elements like logos, colors, typography, banners, promotional materials, and social media content that reflect pesantren values such as sincerity, simplicity, and spirituality. Meanwhile, a consistent narrative, in the form of stories or messages integrated into the visual communication, strengthens the institution's authentic and relevant image. Through consistent visual communication and narrative, every interaction with the audience, whether via print, digital media, or direct activities delivers a uniform and profound impression, creating strong emotional ties with stakeholders such as prospective students, parents, and alumni. This strategy enables institutions to build a solid reputation, differentiate themselves from competitors, and enhance

public trust. By integrating pesantren values into visual communication and narrative, institutions can convey authentic messages aligned with their vision and mission, strengthening their identity and competitiveness amidst global dynamics.

According to an interview obtained by the researcher with the Secretary of the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM), *"We ensure that every design element, such as our logo, colors, and typography, reflects the pesantren values we uphold, like simplicity and spirituality. For example, our logo incorporates elements symbolizing diversity and sincerity, while promotional materials use green and white, which are synonymous with Islamic values. Our narrative is also designed to consistently highlight pesantren traditions combined with modern education, thereby delivering an authentic and relevant message to the community."*

Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that the design approach used reflects an effort to integrate core pesantren values, such as simplicity and spirituality, through carefully selected design elements. The logo, which combines symbols of diversity and sincerity, reflects the pesantren's commitment to creating harmonious bonds with various groups. Meanwhile, the green and white colors used in promotional materials emphasize a deep Islamic identity, with green symbolizing peace and purity, and white representing sanctity and sincerity. Furthermore, the narrative highlighting pesantren traditions blended with modern education aims to maintain a balance between traditional values and contemporary educational needs, ensuring the pesantren remains relevant and authentic to the community, especially the younger generation who require both strong religious education and evolving general knowledge.

Alumni Engagement as Branding Ambassadors

Alumni engagement as branding ambassadors refers to the active role played by an institution's alumni in promoting and strengthening the institution's image or brand within the community. Alumni, with their experiences and established networks, are considered an extension of the institution in disseminating its values, vision, and strengths. As branding ambassadors, alumni not only speak about their personal successes but also reflect the quality and values instilled by the institution they represent, thereby attracting the attention of prospective students, the public, or other potential partners. This involvement creates a mutually beneficial relationship, where the institution gains wider recognition, and alumni can strengthen their networks and professional reputations.

Based on the researcher's interview with the Marketing Staff, they stated that: *"Alumni do not just act as graduates; they also serve as ambassadors who can introduce the values and quality of education at STIS Darul Falah to the community. They are the face of this institution, and they play a crucial role in communicating the successes they have achieved and how the education they received here has prepared them for success."*

Based on the interview results above, it can be concluded that alumni play a highly strategic role in strengthening the institution's image and branding, especially for STIS Darul Falah. Alumni are not merely considered individuals

who have completed their education, but also as representatives or the very face of the campus itself. They function as ambassadors who communicate the values, educational quality, and their experiences during their time on campus to the wider community. The successes they achieve after graduation serve as tangible proof of the effectiveness of the education provided by STIS Darul Falah. Thus, alumni become a credible and authentic source of information regarding the institution's strengths and the significant role played by pesantren education in preparing them for success in the professional world. This also fosters a stronger emotional connection between alumni and prospective students, and provides a clearer picture of the benefits that can be gained from an education at STIS Darul Falah.



Figure 1. Pesantren Value-Based Branding Strategies in Islamic Higher Education

Integration of Pesantren Values into Institutional Identity

The integration of pesantren values into institutional identity is a strategic step that plays a crucial role in strengthening the character and vision of an educational institution. In the context of STIS Darul Falah, pesantren values such as simplicity, sincerity, and spirituality serve as the foundation for designing the institution's identity. These values not only reflect the religious dimension but also shape an academic culture that prioritizes togetherness, self-development, and lifelong learning. STIS Darul Falah strives to internalize these values in every operational aspect of the campus, ranging from curriculum and policies to the expected behavior of students and staff. Thus, the institutional identity of the campus is not merely tied to logos or visual symbols but also encompasses the ways in which pesantren values are brought to life in everyday campus life. This integration is vital as it fosters a sense of belonging and pride among the entire academic community and creates an environment that supports balanced spiritual and intellectual development.

Academic Programs Based on Pesantren Values

The academic programs at STIS Darul Falah, grounded in pesantren values, adopt a different approach from general educational programs. STIS

Darul Falah not only emphasizes academic achievement but also places strong attention on the moral and character development of students. The implemented curriculum integrates religious values with general knowledge, aiming to produce graduates who are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually and ethically strong. Courses offered include subjects such as fiqh, tafsir, Islamic ethics, and Islamic history, which are combined with other academic fields such as economics, management, and technology. This approach is designed to shape a generation that is well-prepared to face professional challenges while living by strong moral principles. Furthermore, the pesantren-based academic approach also emphasizes the importance of independence, discipline, and a sense of responsibility towards others – values instilled in pesantren life as part of holistic character education.

Consistent Visual Communication and Narrative

Consistent visual communication and narrative are key to building a strong and integrated public image. At STIS Darul Falah, visual communication serves as an important medium to express the pesantren values upheld by the institution. Every design element—from the logo, colors, to typography—is carefully crafted to reflect simplicity, peace, and sincerity—the core values upon which the pesantren was founded. For instance, the use of green and white in various promotional materials and campus media symbolizes peace, purity, and alignment with Islamic values. Additionally, visual communication involves delivering messages in a clear and audience-relevant manner, whether directed at prospective students, parents, or the general public. The narrative constructed through this visual communication consistently highlights the pesantren tradition intertwined with modern education, portraying STIS Darul Falah as an institution capable of balancing traditional roots with the demands of an increasingly advanced era. Consistency in communicating these values ensures that the image being built is not only authentic but also easily recognizable and understood by the public.

Alumni Engagement as Branding Ambassadors

Alumni engagement as branding ambassadors of STIS Darul Falah plays a critical role in extending the campus's influence. Alumni are not only individuals who have completed their education but also serve as representations of the quality of education provided by the institution. In this regard, alumni act as messengers who share their success stories and how their education at STIS Darul Falah prepared them for the professional world. As branding ambassadors, alumni serve as credible sources of information for prospective students and the public. They share personal experiences, the challenges they faced, and the benefits they gained from their education at STIS Darul Falah. This is highly effective in attracting prospective students, as testimonials from successful alumni tend to be more trusted than information coming solely from the institution. Moreover, alumni who actively participate in campus activities can strengthen networks and foster mutually beneficial relationships between the institution and external parties—whether companies, organizations, or other educational institutions. Therefore, alumni involvement in campus branding not

only benefits the institution's image but also positively impacts the career development of the alumni themselves.

CONCLUSION

The main finding of this study reveals that the pesantren-based branding strategy implemented at STIS Darul Falah successfully integrates sincerity, simplicity, and spirituality into various institutional elements. These values are concretely reflected in academic programs such as classical Islamic book studies (*kajian kitab kuning*), study circles (*halaqah*), and da'wah training, as well as in visual communication elements like the logo, color palette, and consistent narrative. An important lesson from this research is that building an authentic and trustworthy institutional image requires strong alignment between core values and operational practices consistently applied throughout campus life. Thus, branding for Islamic educational institutions is not merely a matter of visual design but a cultural process rooted in fundamental values that shape the character of the institution and its community.

This study makes a significant scholarly contribution by offering a fresh perspective on value-based branding within the context of Islamic higher education. By focusing on pesantren values as the foundation of branding, the research renews theoretical approaches that have previously relied more heavily on market strategies or visual identity alone. The use of a qualitative case study method allows for in-depth and contextually relevant analysis; however, the study is limited by its focus on a single case—STIS Darul Falah. Broader generalization of these findings requires further research that includes diverse institutions, gender representation, student age groups, and more extensive data collection methods such as quantitative surveys. Future studies should aim to accommodate these variations to provide a more comprehensive picture, which can serve as a sound basis for formulating more targeted and effective value-based branding policies in modern Islamic education.

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