

Dynamics of School Branding Implementation: Identification of Support and Obstacles at MAN 2 Makassar City Education

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ABSTRACT

School branding is an important strategy in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions, especially amidst increasingly fierce competition and the development of digital technology. MAN 2 Makassar City as one of the Islamic educational institutions strives to strengthen its identity and positive image to build public trust. This research is motivated by the need for madrasahs to highlight academic excellence, character, and educational services amidst the many choices of Madrasah Aliyah in Makassar City. The main problem studied is what are the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of school branding at MAN 2 Makassar City. This research aims to identify internal and external elements that influence the effectiveness of madrasah branding. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that school branding is supported by the visionary leadership of the madrasah principal, competent human resources, adequate technological facilities, and collaborative support from teachers, staff, alumni, committees, and parents. The use of social media and extracurricular activities also strengthen the madrasah's positive image. However, branding implementation still faces several obstacles, such as limited time management in managing PPDBM and social media, as well as the potential for negative issues to arise that could influence public perception. These findings emphasize that effective public communication, strong internal coordination, and technology optimization are key to maintaining school branding aspirations. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of branding practices in Islamic educational institutions and provides recommendations for strengthening future branding strategies.

Keywords: *School Branding, Supporting and Inhibiting Factors.*

1) INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasingly competitive education services, school branding is no longer merely a promotional exercise, but rather a managerial strategy to build reputation, public trust, and the competitiveness of educational institutions. Schools that successfully and systematically implement branding are able to attract prospective students, strengthen alumni networks, and maintain stakeholder support all with a direct impact on enrollment stability and program dropout rates. Contemporary studies emphasize the central role of branding in increasing school awareness and participation in Indonesia (Chala & Sujianto, 2025).

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Digital transformation is accelerating changes in the school branding landscape, with social media, short video content, and website platforms becoming primary channels for disseminating school imagery and parent/alumni testimonials, while internal public relations management spearheads public communication. Applied research has found that integrated digital marketing and public relations enhance a school's reach and credibility when supported by adequate human resource capacity (Robby et al., 2024). Therefore, the technological dimension and human resource capabilities are key variables in today's branding implementation.

The Indonesian context, particularly for madrasah institutions like MAN 2 Makassar City, presents a unique dynamic: branding must combine academic excellence, religious values (morality/trustworthiness), and evidence of transparent public service to align with community and parental expectations. Research in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) shows that the combination of academic achievement, religious activities (e.g., memorization of the Koran), and alumni involvement are key sources of strong word-of-mouth recommendations that influence enrollment decisions (Azizah, 2024).

From a review of local practices and studies, the main supporting factors for branding are: (1) visionary leadership that encourages innovation and collaboration; (2) strengthening human resources through digital training and division of work teams (public relations, IT, branding); (3) adequate technological facilities and infrastructure; and (4) external networks (alumni, committees, sponsors). Empirical evidence shows that when these factors are synergistic, branding output from promotional content to academic reputation becomes more consistent and impactful (Hidayati, 2025).

However, branding implementation in schools faces significant obstacles: the workload of teachers who also handle public relations (time management), limited creative human resources for content production, and the risk of spreading negative issues, especially during the registration period (PPDB), which can quickly go viral on social media. Literature on PPDB and communication management indicates that inaccurate information and slow public clarification are key triggers for reputational crises that harm the branding process (Salim & Nora, 2022). Therefore, crisis mitigation capabilities and public communication protocols are crucial aspects.

On the theoretical side, recent studies recommend a holistic approach: integrating public relations, digital marketing, and strengthening participatory governance (involving parents, committees, and alumni) to ensure branding sustainability. However, some studies also warn that

broad participation without oversight mechanisms can lead to inefficiency or "budgetary/operational slack" in program implementation, highlighting the need for binding internal policies and clear performance indicators. This opens up research into how schools like MAN 2 Makassar balance stakeholder engagement with operational control (Irdiyanti et al., 2023).

Based on the description above, the main research question arises: "How are the dynamics of school branding implementation at MAN 2 Makassar City, what factors support and hinder, and what strategies are effective for optimizing branding sustainably?" This study aims to identify and analyze supporting and inhibiting factors (human resources, leadership, facilities, collaboration, extracurricular activities, time management, and PPDB issues), as well as formulate practical policy recommendations for madrasah management and stakeholders to strengthen an inclusive, adaptive, and crisis-resistant branding ecosystem.

2) METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of branding strategies at MAN 2 Kota Makassar. A qualitative design was selected because it allows the researcher to understand phenomena in depth through the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of participants involved directly in the branding process. This design also provides the flexibility needed to capture real contexts, natural interactions, and the dynamic nature of branding efforts within educational institutions.

The research was conducted at MAN 2 Kota Makassar, a public Islamic senior high school that actively implements various forms of institutional branding to strengthen public trust. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, in which individuals were chosen based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research focus. The participants included the head of the madrasah, vice principals responsible for public relations and student affairs, teachers, and staff who contribute to branding activities, including the management of social media and documentation of school achievements. This selection ensured that the data collected would reflect authentic insights regarding both the driving and limiting factors influencing branding practices.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides, allowing the researcher to explore predetermined themes while remaining open to new and relevant information emerging during the conversation. The interviews focused on participants' experiences,

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roles, perceptions, and challenges related to branding initiatives carried out in the madrasah. Observations were performed to capture real situations and activities related to branding, such as promotional events, public relations activities, school programs, and interactions on digital platforms. Documentation was used to complement interview and observation data; documents analyzed included school brochures, posters, social media content, reports of achievements, organizational structures, and strategic programs related to public image building.

The data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction involved selecting, organizing, and simplifying raw data obtained from the field into thematic categories relevant to supporting and inhibiting factors. Data display was conducted by organizing information into descriptive narratives that allowed patterns and relationships among themes to become visible. The final stage, conclusion drawing, involved interpreting the meanings, identifying core findings, and validating interpretations by cross-checking with participants when necessary. This analytic process ensured that the findings remained grounded in the data and presented a credible understanding of the branding dynamics at the madrasah.

Ethical considerations were strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their voluntary involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time. The researcher ensured confidentiality by anonymizing participant identities and securing all research data. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school administration, ensuring that all procedures aligned with institutional and academic ethical standards. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study ensured accuracy, transparency, and respect for all participants involved.

3) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Strengthening Human Resources as the Foundation of Madrasah Branding

Strengthening human resources is a key factor in building a madrasah's branding. Early in his leadership, the madrasah principal faced the challenge of resistance to change from some teachers and educational staff who experienced culture shock from a more disciplined, structured, and digital-based work culture. This was reflected in statements from teachers and the public relations team, who stated that the change in work rhythm, tightened discipline, and documentation requirements forced some teachers to adapt to new standards.

However, through a coaching approach, mentoring, open communication, and the formation of work teams such as Public Relations, IT, Branding, Social-Media, and Champions, the madrasah principal succeeded in building a solid and collaborative workforce. This strengthening of human resources resulted in improved performance, productivity, and consistent branding of the madrasah. This cohesive and adaptive workforce became the main foundation for the successful branding of MAN 2 Makassar City.

b. Visionary Leadership of Madrasah Principals

Madrasah principals act as visionary and transformational leaders who drive systemic change and digital innovation. An open leadership style, adapting to change, and involving teachers, students, committees, and stakeholders in every decision-making process are key pillars of successful madrasah branding.

This visionary leadership is reflected in the principal's commitment to technological innovation, openness to ideas, and courage to embrace change. Full support for the use of social media, digitizing administration, and the formation of a creative team has all accelerated the madrasa's popularity in the community. Collaboration and a participatory communication style also foster a sense of ownership among the madrasa community, fostering an innovative and professional work culture.

c. Facilities and Technology as Strategic Branding Instruments

The availability of facilities and technology is a key factor in building MAN 2 Makassar City's image as a modern and superior madrasah. Facilities such as an IT center, multimedia studio, podcast room, fully equipped laboratories, smart classrooms, internet connectivity, and photography and editing equipment have strengthened the publication and documentation process for madrasah activities.

These facilities not only enhance the quality of learning but also support the production of digital content such as promotional videos, after movies, infographics, and other branding materials. The utilization of these facilities by teachers, public relations staff, and students demonstrates that the madrasah's branding is built through strong intra-school synergy.

In addition to technology-based facilities, comfortable classrooms, such as air conditioning, LCD projectors, and a clean environment, also influence public perception of the quality of educational services. The presence of indoor and outdoor fields also strengthens the madrasah's identity as an institution with varied and competitive student activities.

d. Internal Collaboration and External Support

Internal-external collaboration plays a crucial role in building public trust and expanding the reach of the madrasah's branding. Internal collaboration is realized through collaboration between teachers, educational staff, students, public relations, and various specialized teams. Meanwhile, external collaboration includes relationships with alumni, committees, parents, and sponsors.

Alumni act as promotional agents through testimonials, academic networks, and their reputations at leading universities. The committee provides managerial and oversight support, enhancing the institution's transparency and fostering parental trust. Furthermore, parental involvement through recommendations, program support, and participation in school activities reinforces the school's positive image in the community.

Collaborations with sponsors, such as beauty and beverage brands, increase the school's exposure in various student activities. This multi-stakeholder synergy forms a strong foundation for the sustainable branding of MAN 2 Makassar City.

e. Extracurricular Activities as a Medium for Madrasah Image and Identity

Extracurricular activities play a significant role in building the identity and image of madrasahs. Various activities, such as FOJU (Photography and Journalism), OSIM (Student Student Organization), scouts, memorization of Islamic teachings (tahfiz), robotics, scientific research, and sports, result in achievements and work that are showcased through social media as part of a branding strategy.

FOJU has become a highly influential organization in the production of creative content and publication of madrasah activities. This organization's presence ensures that madrasah branding is no longer solely dependent on teachers, but rather directly involves students in the creative process.

Furthermore, academic and religious activities, such as memorizing the Quran (tahfiz), serve as a distinguishing feature, strengthening the madrasah's religious and intellectual identity. Active and varied extracurricular activities also attract prospective students and parents.

f. Inhibiting Factors: Teacher Time Management and Negative Issues During the Student Admissions Period (PPDBM)

Despite numerous supporting factors, the implementation of madrasah branding also faces several obstacles. The main problem arises from teacher time management, as teachers must divide

their focus between teaching duties, administrative duties, and involvement in branding and publication activities. The high workload prevents some branding programs from running optimally.

Furthermore, negative issues emerging in the media during the PPDBM period pose a challenge. Inaccurate information or the spread of rumors can influence public perception and distort the image of the madrasah. Therefore, madrasahs need to have crisis mitigation strategies and effective public communication management.

g. General Discussion

Overall, this research shows that school branding is a complex and multidimensional managerial process. Branding focuses not only on promotion but also encompasses strengthening human resources, visionary leadership, facilities, a collaborative work culture, and student activities as a representation of the school's values. MAN 2 Makassar City's success in strengthening its public image is supported by consistency, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and the ability to adapt to technological developments.

However, challenges related to teacher time management and negative media coverage serve as reminders that school branding requires a risk management system and a responsive and targeted communication strategy. Therefore, educational branding requires not only creativity but also strong leadership, transparency, and long-term collaboration.

4) CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the branding success of MAN 2 Makassar City is driven by several interconnected factors, including strengthened human resources, visionary leadership, adequate facilities and technology, and strong internal–external collaboration. These elements collectively shape a professional, innovative, and technology-oriented school culture that enhances the madrasah's public image. Extracurricular activities further reinforce the institution's identity by showcasing student achievements and unique religious–academic characteristics.

Despite these strengths, branding efforts still encounter challenges, particularly related to teacher time management and the emergence of negative issues during the student admissions period. These obstacles highlight the need for crisis communication strategies and a more balanced distribution of teacher responsibilities. Overall, effective madrasah branding requires consistency, collaboration, and strong leadership capable of adapting to continuous technological and social changes.

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Author Contributions:

Amanda Tri Lestari: conducted field research, interviews, and data collection.

Ahmad Afiif: performed data analysis, literature review, and manuscript drafting.

Lisa Nursita: supervised the conceptual development, methodological design, and final manuscript revision. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Data Availability:

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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