

## Building Public Trust Through Strategic Branding: Insights from Integrated Islamic Schools in Jambi, Indonesia

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### Abstract

Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu/SIT) in Indonesia have experienced rapid institutional growth and increasing public trust, particularly in Jambi Province. Despite this development, empirical investigations on how Islamic schools strategically manage their branding remain scarce. This study examines branding practices in five SIT schools—AN, AZ, AD, NI, and AS—using a qualitative multiple-case study approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic framework. The findings identify five core dimensions of Islamic school branding: Brand Identity, Brand Value Proposition, Service Quality and Relationship Experience, services, Digital and Community-Based Communication, and Brand Trust and Reputation. This study proposes an Integrated Islamic School Branding Management (ISBM) Model **that illustrates** how identity alignment, value-based programs, service excellence, and communication strategies collectively reinforce public trust. The findings contribute to the theoretical discourse on Islamic educational management and provide practical guidance for SIT leaders in enhancing institutional competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Islamic education, School branding, Strategic management, Public trust, Integrated Islamic School.

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia is undergoing a significant transformation, particularly in institutional management and governance that integrates Islamic values with modern, professional educational practices. One of the most visible manifestations of this transformation is the rapid growth of Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu/SIT) across various regions, including Jambi Province. Schools with a modern Islamic identity—such as An-Nahl, Nurul Ilmi, Ash-Shiddiqi, Ahmed Dahlan, and Al-Azhar—have experienced a substantial increase in public trust, reflected in rising student enrollment, strong accreditation results, and expanding community recognition. This development underscores the growing need for Islamic schools not only to improve the quality of teaching and learning but also to maintain their relevance and competitiveness amid the proliferation of public schools, international schools, and private educational institutions.

The growth of SIT institutions highlights that school branding is no longer limited to visual aesthetics or promotional activities. Instead, it has become an integral component of strategic educational management. In the context of Islamic schooling, branding involves constructing a credible institutional image that is academically strong, religiously grounded, and responsive to contemporary challenges. Schools with well-established branding are better positioned to attract new students, strengthen parental loyalty, and cultivate long-term community trust in the educational services they provide.

From a strategic management perspective, institutional branding in education is part of competitive positioning that seeks to situate a school advantageously in the minds of its stakeholders—parents, students, and the broader public (1). This process requires a systemic approach involving governance structures, communication strategies, service quality, and an identity rooted in institutional values. In Islamic educational institutions, this identity is shaped not only by academic excellence but also by character formation, religious ethos, and integrative curricula.

Preliminary mapping of Integrated Islamic Schools in Jambi reveals that branding extends beyond social media visibility or promotional materials. It is embedded within the schools' management systems through the formulation of taglines, the development of visual identities, the establishment of Islamic flagship programs, and the adoption of digital-based educational services. Despite its growing importance, the systematic management of branding in SIT institutions—and its influence on public trust—remains underexplored in existing literature, particularly within the field of Islamic educational management. This research, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how branding strategies are conceptualized, implemented, and perceived within SIT schools, and how these strategies contribute to strengthening institutional credibility and community trust.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a multiple-case study approach to explore how Integrated Islamic Schools (SITs) in Jambi Province develop and manage their branding strategies. A qualitative design was chosen because it enables deep exploration of participants' experiences, meanings, and interpretations within a natural context. According to Creswell and Poth (2), qualitative inquiry is appropriate when the purpose is to understand a complex social phenomenon, capture

participants' perspectives, and build a holistic understanding of processes embedded in real-life settings.

The multiple case study design followed Yin's (3) conceptualisation, allowing a systematic investigation across several bounded systems—in this case, five SIT institutions. This design enabled the identification of both unique patterns within each school and cross-case themes that reveal broader, transferable insights about branding management in Islamic educational contexts. The approach aligns with Creswell's (2) definition of a case study as an in-depth exploration of a bounded system through detailed, rich data collection from multiple sources.

### **Research Sites and Participants**

Five Integrated Islamic Schools were selected using purposive sampling, which is consistent with qualitative sampling logic that prioritises information-rich cases (4). The selected schools—AN, AZ, AD, NI, and AS—represent leading SIT institutions in Jambi, each with strong community recognition and distinct branding characteristics. Participants included school principals, vice principals, branding/marketing officers, senior teachers, and parents. A total of 7 participants were involved. Inclusion criteria were:

1. having direct roles in school management or branding activities;
2. having at least three years of experience in the institution;
3. willingness to participate in the study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Following Creswell and Poth's (2) guidelines for multiple data sources in case studies, three primary techniques were used:

#### **1. Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews served as the primary data source, enabling participants to articulate their experiences and perceptions of branding practices. Each interview lasted between 45–60 minutes and followed an interview protocol developed based on the research questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and member-checked for accuracy.

#### **2. Non-Participant Observations**

Observations focused on school environments, branding artefacts, public-facing communication materials, flagship program activities, and parent–school interactions. Field notes were taken during school visits to document branding elements, including visual identity, service delivery, school culture, and daily operational practices.

#### **3. Document Analysis**

Documents included school profiles, brochures, websites, social media posts, accreditation reports, vision–mission statements, digital marketing content, and program portfolios. Document triangulation helped validate interview and observational data, following Bowen's (5) recommendations.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using thematic analysis guided by the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (6). The analysis process included:

1. data familiarisation;
2. generating initial codes;
3. searching for themes;

4. reviewing themes;
5. defining and naming themes;
6. producing the final thematic narrative.

NVivo 12 software was used to systematically organise, code, and categorise data. A within-case analysis was conducted first to understand each school individually, followed by a cross-case analysis (2) to identify recurring patterns and variations across the five institutions. The integration of both levels ensured analytic depth and interpretive clarity.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee. All participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used for both participants and schools to ensure anonymity and data protection.

### Results

This study collected research data from five Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu/SIT) located in Jambi City. The schools included: AN, AZ, AD, NI, and AS. The research was conducted from October to November. Data were gathered using interviews, observations, and document analysis.

#### 1. SDIT AN

**Table 1.1. Open Coding**

No	Kutipan Kunci	Kode Awal
1	“An Nahl berarti lebah, karena lebah itu mengambil tanpa merusak dan hasilnya bermanfaat.”	Filosofi positif (simbol lebah)
2	“Dari PAUD, SD, SMP, hingga SMA—berproses, tidak langsung keluar semua.”	Pertumbuhan bertahap, manajemen berjenjang
3	“Keunikan dari karakter dan parenting orang tua.”	Diferensiasi berbasis karakter & kolaborasi orang tua
4	“Tes tidak hanya untuk anak, tapi juga orang tua.”	Seleksi orang tua untuk kemitraan
5	“Branding bukan hanya di media sosial tapi juga melalui masyarakat.”	Branding hybrid (digital & social)
6	“Ada MCA (Media Center AN)... juga podcast.”	Struktur humas formal & media digital.
7	“Kepuasan wali murid menjadi sales terbaik kami.”	Word-of-mouth marketing
8	“Ada rapat kerja tahunan dan evaluasi per 6 bulan.”	Sistem perencanaan & evaluasi rutin
9	“Nilai inti: karakter & Al-Qur'an.”	Nilai spiritual sebagai brand essence
10	“Program TLQ (The Living Qur'an).”	Program branding berbasis nilai Qur'ani
11	“Sekolah para bintang: semua anak punya potensi.”	Inklusivitas & penghargaan pada keragaman anak
12	“Menerima anak berkebutuhan khusus.”	Keberagaman & kepedulian sosial

No	Kutipan Kunci	Kode Awal
13	“Yayasan memfasilitasi, mendampingi, dan mengevaluasi.”	Dukungan struktural dari manajemen
14	“Tantangan terbesar: miss komunikasi dan fitnah di era digital.”	Risiko komunikasi & reputasi digital
15	“Guru wajib share flyer; menjadi penilaian kinerja.”	Budaya partisipatif dan disiplin branding
16	“Branding sesungguhnya adalah pengalaman orang tua.”	Experiential branding
17	“Target jangka panjang: sistem serba IT dan jangkauan nasional.”	Visi digitalisasi & ekspansi brand
18	“Kegiatan PPDB dilakukan dari dalam ke luar.”	Strategi rekrutmen berjenjang internal
19	“Program parenting dan FKA (Forum Keluarga An Nahl).”	Sinergi sekolah-orang tua
20	“Setiap unit punya ciri khas dan kekuatan sendiri.”	Desentralisasi kepemimpinan unit
21	“Kendala utama: komunikasi dan fasilitas.”	Hambatan manajerial
22	“Rapat pekanan dan grup koordinasi antarunit.”	Mekanisme kontrol & sinergi internal
23	“Orang tua melihat keunggulan dari outing class dan riset ilmiah siswa.”	Daya tarik akademik & inovasi pembelajaran
24	“Sekolah membangun reputasi dari keseimbangan dunia-akhirat.”	Brand trust berbasis nilai spiritual-modern
25	“Karya ilmiah siswa diuji oleh dosen & profesor.”	Kolaborasi eksternal memperkuat kredibilitas

**Tabel 1.2. Axial Coding**

Tema Antara	Kode yang Termasuk
A. Filosofi & Identitas Sekolah	(1), (2), (9), (10), (11)
B. Strategi Branding & Promosi	(5), (6), (7), (15), (16), (18), (17)
C. Peran Orang Tua & Komunitas	(3), (4), (12), (19), (24)
D. Sistem Manajerial & Dukungan Yayasan	(8), (13), (20), (21), (22)
E. Kepercayaan Publik & Dampak Reputasi	(14), (23), (25)

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## **Five Major Themes and Their Academic Interpretations**

### **Theme 1: Philosophy and Spiritual Identity as the Core of Branding**

An-Nahl School adopts the symbol of the honeybee as a representation of goodness, cooperation, and beneficial contribution. This philosophy serves as the foundation of the school's brand identity, integrated with the vision of becoming a "School of the Stars" and character education rooted in the Qur'an.

This reflects the application of value-based brand positioning, where institutional identity is constructed through deeply embedded moral and spiritual values.

### **Theme 2: Integrative Branding Strategy (Digital–Community Based)**

Branding is implemented through the An-Nahl Media Center (MCA), which manages digital content across Instagram, TikTok, podcasts, and the school website. This digital strategy is reinforced by community-based programs such as Sunday exercise activities, qurban distribution, and low-cost food programs (sembako murah).

In addition, parent testimonials function as the most effective promotional channel. This indicates a strategic integration of digital branding and community engagement.

### **Theme 3: School–Parent Collaboration as the Pillar of Trust**

Parental involvement is embedded in every educational stage—from student admission testing and monthly parenting programs to the Parents' Communication Forum (FKA)—representing a form of co-branding between school and family.

The school emphasizes partnership and two-way communication with parents in supporting children's education, reinforcing family-based branding as a trust-building mechanism.

### **Theme 4: Structured and Evaluative Internal Management**

The school foundation plays an active role in strategic planning, program facilitation, and regular evaluations. Institutional governance is supported through annual work meetings, six-month reviews, and inter-school coordination groups.

However, the main challenges identified include communication gaps and limitations in digital support infrastructure. This reflects an adaptive strategic management system that continues to face operational constraints.

## Theme 5: The Impact of Branding on Public Trust

Parents' perceptions indicate a highly positive institutional image, characterized by strong character formation among students, balanced worldly and spiritual education, and innovative learning practices such as outdoor classes, scientific research, and international collaboration.

This positive image generates public trust and loyalty, which serve as the core strength of An-Nahl's institutional reputation. Thus, the ultimate branding outcome is the strengthening of public trust through values, service quality, and tangible performance evidence.

### 2. SD ISLAM AZ

**Table 2.1. Open Coding**

Kutipan Data	Kode Awal
“Sekolah ini menyeimbangkan akidah, akhlak, dan akademik.”	Pendidikan holistik (agama dan akademik)
“Program Tahfidz menjadi ciri utama dan dijalankan konsisten.”	Program unggulan berbasis Qur'an
“Kami mengelola promosi lewat Instagram, lomba, dan kegiatan sosial.”	Strategi promosi digital dan sosial
“Ada organisasi orang tua yang disebut <i>Jam'iyah</i> .”	Keterlibatan aktif orang tua
“Sekolah ini amanah dan bisa dipercaya mendidik anak.”	Citra kepercayaan publik
“Anak-anak sopan dan rajin salat di rumah.”	Dampak nyata pembentukan karakter
“Kami selalu evaluasi setelah PMB.”	Evaluasi dan perbaikan berkelanjutan
“Sekolah punya mural besar dan lingkungan nyaman.”	Branding visual dan fasilitas pendukung
“Program SKN membuat siswa dekat dengan masyarakat.”	Hubungan sosial dengan lingkungan
“Promosi dilakukan dari awal tahun ajaran.”	Perencanaan branding yang strategis

**Tabel 2.2. Axial Coding**

Kategori Tematik	Deskripsi	Contoh Kode yang Masuk
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Identitas dan Filosofi Pendidikan Islam Modern	Integrasi nilai keislaman dengan standar nasional modern.	Pendidikan holistik, visi dunia–akhirat, akhlak dan akademik seimbang
Keunggulan dan Ciri Pembeda Sekolah	Aspek yang membedakan Al Azhar 57 dari sekolah lain.	Program Tahfidz, kurikulum ganda, fasilitas unggul, mural
Strategi Branding dan Promosi	Upaya membangun citra melalui media sosial dan kegiatan sosial.	Promosi digital, kegiatan komunitas, PMB terencana
Partisipasi dan Kolaborasi Stakeholder	Peran aktif orang tua, guru, dan masyarakat dalam mendukung branding sekolah.	Jam'iyah, kerja sama masyarakat, SKN
Citra dan Kepercayaan Publik	Pandangan masyarakat dan orang tua terhadap kredibilitas sekolah.	Amanah, terpercaya, berdampak pada perilaku anak
Evaluasi dan Konsistensi Program	Mekanisme menjaga mutu melalui evaluasi rutin.	Rapat kerja, evaluasi PMB, perbaikan program

**Tabel 2.3. Thematic Coding**

Tema Utama	Deskripsi Tematik	Contoh Kutipan Pendukung
1. Pendidikan Holistik Berbasis Nilai Islam dan Akademik Modern	Sekolah membangun citra sebagai lembaga yang menyeimbangkan kecerdasan spiritual, moral, dan intelektual.	“Menyeimbangkan aspek akidah, akhlak, dan akademik.”
2. Diferensiasi Sekolah melalui Program Unggulan dan Lingkungan Berkualitas	Keunikan sekolah terletak pada integrasi kurikulum nasional–Al Azhar, program Tahfidz, serta fasilitas modern yang mendukung kenyamanan belajar.	“Program Tahfidz menjadi ciri utama dan dijalankan konsisten.”
3. Branding Digital dan Sosial sebagai Strategi Komunikasi Publik	Sekolah memanfaatkan media sosial serta kegiatan sosial untuk memperluas pengenalan publik dan menunjukkan eksistensi positif.	“Kami promosi lewat Instagram, lomba, dan kegiatan sosial.”
4. Kolaborasi Komunitas dan Orang Tua sebagai Agen Branding	Citra sekolah diperkuat melalui hubungan harmonis antara guru, orang tua (Jam'iyah), dan masyarakat.	“Ada organisasi orang tua yang disebut Jam'iyah.”
5. Konsistensi dan Evaluasi Berkelanjutan sebagai	Kepercayaan publik dibangun melalui konsistensi janji,	“Kami selalu evaluasi setelah PMB.”; “Janji sekolah untuk

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Pilar Kepercayaan pelaksanaan program nyata, dan membentuk adab dan  
Publik evaluasi berkesinambungan. karakter terbukti.”

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### 3. SDIT AD

**Table 3.1. Open Coding**

No	Kutipan/Inti Pernyataan	Kode Awal
1	Sekolah berdiri tahun 2006 di bawah Muhammadiyah	Identitas kelembagaan Muhammadiyah
2	Tujuan sekolah adalah dakwah Islam melalui pendidikan	Dakwah melalui pendidikan
3	Program unggulan tahfidz dan baca Al-Qur'an	Program keagamaan unggulan
4	Masjid menjadi pusat dakwah dan sosialisasi program sekolah	Peran masjid sebagai pusat branding
5	Anak-anak tampil di masjid (ceramah, azan)	Ekspos publik melalui kegiatan religius
6	Program kunjungan edukatif dua kali setahun	Pembelajaran kontekstual dan promosi tidak langsung
7	Silat Tapak Suci sebagai identitas khas Muhammadiyah	Diferensiasi melalui ekstrakurikuler khas
8	Kepanduan Hizbul Wathon membentuk karakter Islami	Pembinaan karakter Islami
9	Pentas seni dan ekskul untuk menyalurkan bakat siswa	Branding melalui prestasi dan kreativitas
10	Promosi melalui media sosial (IG, FB, YouTube, TikTok)	Branding digital
11	Rapat kerja tahunan dan semester dengan seluruh pihak	Perencanaan kolaboratif
12	Tim khusus publikasi dan dokumentasi	Struktur branding formal
13	Target jangka panjang: SDIT Ahmad Dahlan 2 dan peningkatan hafalan	Visi pengembangan jangka panjang
14	Nilai utama: Islami, jujur, disiplin	Nilai inti organisasi
15	Target masyarakat sekitar dan anak pegawai kantor	Segmentasi target publik
16	Beasiswa bagi yatim dan dhuafa	Branding sosial dan inklusif

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17	Dukungan DIKDASMEN dalam pendanaan dan kebijakan	Dukungan struktural organisasi
18	Kendala rapat karena kesibukan pengurus	Hambatan koordinasi manajerial
19	Guru wajib membuat video promosi (PPDB)	Partisipasi guru dalam branding
20	Keterbatasan kemampuan guru membuat video	Tantangan kompetensi digital
21	Rapat rutin setiap Sabtu	Sistem koordinasi efektif
22	Program kemitraan dengan masyarakat sekitar (RT 12,17,18,19)	Kolaborasi sosial-lingkungan
23	Program berbagi sembako & kepedulian sosial	Branding melalui kegiatan sosial
24	Janji brand: “Anggun dalam budi, unggul dalam prestasi”	Identitas brand sekolah
25	Guru menyambut siswa dengan 5S	Implementasi nilai brand di keseharian
26	Literasi tangga dan kuis pagi	Inovasi budaya belajar
27	Media dominan: IG dan YouTube	Kanal komunikasi efektif
28	Kotak saran dan nomor pengaduan	Keterbukaan terhadap feedback
29	Guru aktif dan muda, resisten minor karena usia	Budaya kerja positif
30	Nilai ke-Muhammadiyah dan semangat pelayanan	Kekuatan budaya organisasi
31	Orang tua: sekolah modern, Islami, dan dipercaya	Persepsi publik positif
32	Informasi sekolah banyak tersebar di media sosial	Efektivitas branding digital
33	Anak berubah lebih sopan, rajin ngaji	Dampak nyata terhadap karakter siswa
34	PPDB cepat penuh, kepercayaan tinggi	Indikator keberhasilan branding
35	Kolaborasi orang tua–sekolah perlu ditingkatkan	Saran peningkatan partisipasi publik

**Tabel 3.2. Axial Coding**

<b>Kategori / Tema Antara</b>	<b>Kode yang Terkait</b>	<b>Deskripsi Singkat</b>
A. Identitas dan Nilai Keislaman	1, 2, 7, 8, 14, 24, 25, 30	Sekolah menegaskan identitas Muhammadiyah dan nilai-nilai Islam sebagai dasar seluruh program dan branding.
B. Program Unggulan dan Diferensiasi	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9	Program tahfidz, Tapak Suci, Hizbul Wathon, dan pentas seni menjadi pembeda utama dari sekolah lain.
C. Strategi Branding dan Promosi	4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 19, 21, 27	Branding dilakukan melalui masjid, media sosial, tim publikasi, dan partisipasi guru.
D. Manajemen dan Perencanaan	11, 12, 17, 18, 21	Perencanaan branding dilakukan secara kolaboratif antara sekolah dan majelis DIKDASMEN.
E. Keterlibatan dan Hubungan Sosial	22, 23, 15, 16	Sekolah membangun hubungan sosial dengan masyarakat sekitar dan memberikan beasiswa.
F. Tantangan dan Kendala	18, 20	Keterbatasan waktu dan kompetensi digital menjadi hambatan utama.
G. Dampak Branding terhadap Kepercayaan Publik	31, 32, 33, 34	Kepercayaan masyarakat meningkat, terlihat dari pendaftaran yang cepat penuh dan perubahan karakter siswa.
H. Kolaborasi dan Evaluasi	28, 35	Sekolah terbuka terhadap masukan, namun perlu memperkuat kolaborasi dengan orang tua.

**Table 3.3. Thematic Coding**

<b>Tema Utama</b>	<b>Penjelasan Tematik</b>
1. Branding Sekolah Berbasis Dakwah dan Nilai Keislaman Muhammadiyah	SDIT Ahmad Dahlan membangun citra melalui dakwah, pembentukan karakter Islami, dan penguatan nilai-nilai ke-Muhammadiyah. Branding bukan sekadar promosi, tapi bagian dari misi dakwah pendidikan.
2. Diferensiasi Program sebagai Identitas Unik Sekolah	Program Tahfidz, Tapak Suci, Hizbul Wathon, dan Pentas Seni menjadi diferensiasi kuat yang memadukan akademik, religiusitas, dan keterampilan sosial.
3. Strategi Branding Kolaboratif dan Adaptif terhadap Era Digital	Sekolah memanfaatkan media sosial (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok), masjid, dan keterlibatan guru untuk promosi. Tim publikasi menjadi bagian penting dalam membangun citra digital.

<b>Tema Utama</b>	<b>Penjelasan Tematik</b>
4. Keterlibatan Sosial dan Budaya Pelayanan sebagai Fondasi Kepercayaan Publik	Kegiatan sosial, beasiswa, dan hubungan baik dengan masyarakat sekitar memperkuat kepercayaan publik terhadap sekolah. Nilai pelayanan menjadi kekuatan kultural utama.
5. Keberhasilan Branding yang Meningkatkan Reputasi dan Loyalitas Publik	Meningkatnya kepercayaan masyarakat terlihat dari antusiasme PPDB, persepsi positif orang tua, serta dampak nyata pada karakter siswa. Namun kolaborasi dengan orang tua masih perlu ditingkatkan.

#### 4. SDIT NI

**Table 4.1. Open Coding**

<b>No</b>	<b>Kutipan Penting</b>	<b>Kode Awal</b>
1	“Sekolah Islam Terpadu Nurul Ilmi berdiri pada tahun 2001, diprakarsai oleh sekitar 20 orang guru... dengan tujuan membangun sekolah berkarakter yang memadukan kurikulum umum dengan kurikulum Islam.”	Integrasi kurikulum umum dan Islam; inisiatif guru pendiri; pendidikan berkarakter
2	“Perkembangan pesat sekolah ini didorong oleh tingginya animo masyarakat.”	Dukungan masyarakat; permintaan tinggi terhadap sekolah Islam
3	“Cita-cita luhur... agar siswa menjadi pemimpin beriman dan bertakwa kepada Allah SWT.”	Visi spiritual; orientasi akhirat; pendidikan berbasis iman dan takwa
4	“Pembiasaan adab dan karakter melalui keteladanan dan program terstruktur.”	Pendidikan karakter; pembiasaan adab; keteladanan guru
5	“Pembiasaan Bahasa Inggris dan Arab dalam interaksi sehari-hari.”	Penguatan bahasa asing; pembiasaan bilingual
6	“Guru bisa menjadi orang tua, teman, atau sahabat bagi siswa.”	Pendekatan humanis; relasi guru-siswa positif
7	“Kurikulum terpadu dengan nilai-nilai Al-Qur’an dan Sunnah.”	Integrasi nilai Islam dalam kurikulum umum
8	“Program KKN Siswa sebagai bentuk pengabdian masyarakat.”	Pembelajaran berbasis karakter sosial; inovasi program khas

No	Kutipan Penting	Kode Awal
9	“Strategi kami dimulai dari penguatan pondasi internal melalui tiga pilar: SDM, program unggulan, dan kehumasan.”	Strategi tiga pilar branding: SDM, program, humas
10	“Publikasi aktif melalui media sosial dan guru sebagai humas.”	Pemanfaatan media digital; peran guru sebagai agen komunikasi
11	“Monitoring dan evaluasi dilakukan secara berkala oleh tim yayasan.”	Sistem evaluasi berjenjang; supervisi internal
12	“Visi besar menjadikan sekolah percontohan atau rujukan.”	Visi jangka panjang; positioning sebagai benchmark
13	“Nilai inti: karakter Islami, keunggulan akademik, akhlak mulia.”	Nilai inti lembaga; keseimbangan iman-akademik
14	“Segmen utama masyarakat Islam, tetapi inklusif bagi semua kalangan.”	Segmentasi inklusif; strategi aksesibilitas
15	“Yayasan mendukung kehumasan melalui Nuril TV dan Radio Nuril.”	Dukungan kelembagaan; media inovatif untuk branding
16	“Tantangan terbesar: keterbatasan SDM humas karena guru merangkap tugas.”	Kendala SDM; efisiensi waktu guru
17	“Komunikasi efektif agar strategi dipahami semua pihak.”	Manajemen komunikasi internal; kolaborasi organisasi

**Tabel 4.2. Axial Coding**

Kategori Utama	Sub-Kategori	Kode dari Open Coding
A. Identitas dan Filosofi Sekolah	Sejarah dan nilai dasar	1, 2, 3
	Orientasi spiritual dan karakter	3, 4, 7
B. Strategi Branding Sekolah	Pilar strategi branding	9
	Peran guru dan media sosial	10, 17
	Dukungan yayasan dan platform digital	15

Kategori Utama	Sub-Kategori	Kode dari Open Coding
C. Diferensiasi dan Keunggulan Kompetitif	Program khas (KKN Siswa)	8
	Pendekatan personal dan pembiasaan adab	5, 6, 4
	Integrasi kurikulum umum dan Islam	1, 7
D. Manajemen dan Implementasi Strategi	SDM dan evaluasi	9, 11, 16
	Koordinasi yayasan-unit sekolah	15, 17
E. Nilai dan Visi Jangka Panjang	Nilai-nilai inti lembaga	13
	Citra ideal lulusan	13
	Target masyarakat dan inklusivitas	14
	Visi jangka panjang sebagai benchmark	12

**Tabel 4.3. Thematic Coding**

Tema Utama	Deskripsi Tematik
1. Branding Sekolah Berbasis Nilai Islam Terpadu	Branding SDIT Nurul Ilmi dibangun di atas fondasi integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dan kurikulum umum, dengan fokus pada pembentukan karakter Islami, adab, dan orientasi akhirat.
2. Diferensiasi Melalui Program Inovatif dan Keteladanan Guru	Keunikan utama sekolah terletak pada program-program khas seperti <i>KKN Siswa</i> , pembiasaan bahasa, dan pendekatan personal antara guru dan siswa yang memperkuat emotional branding.
3. Strategi Internal dan Kolaborasi Yayasan-Sekolah	Strategi branding diformulasikan berdasarkan tiga pilar utama (SDM, program, kehumasan), dengan dukungan penuh dari yayasan yang memfasilitasi media seperti Nuril TV dan Radio Nuril.
4. Tantangan Manajemen dan Penguatan SDM	Keterbatasan SDM menjadi tantangan utama dalam konsistensi branding. Guru yang merangkap peran humas membutuhkan manajemen waktu dan dukungan struktural yang lebih baik.

Tema Utama	Deskripsi Tematik
5. Visi Transformasional dan Inklusif dalam Pendidikan Islam	Nurul Ilmi berorientasi menjadi sekolah rujukan yang tidak hanya unggul secara akademik dan spiritual, tetapi juga inklusif, terbuka bagi masyarakat dari berbagai lapisan ekonomi.

## 5. AS

**Table 5.1 Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Thematic Coding**

No	Open coding (kutipan ringkas / kode awal)	Axial coding (tema antara / kategori)	Selective / Thematic code (tema utama)
1	“Bermula dari sekelompok ibu-ibu pengajian; didirikan 2007”	Sejarah & asal yayasan; fondasi komunitas	Identitas & Filosofi Institusional (Foundational Identity)
2	“Tujuan: membentuk generasi qurani, rabbani, akidah lurus”	Visi spiritual; tujuan pendidikan karakter	Identitas & Filosofi Institusional
3	“Memiliki jenjang TK–SMA; 9 unit”	Ekspansi unit; struktur organisasi yayasan	Struktur Organisasional & Skala Operasi
4	“Metode IWR (Iman Waruhan) — penekanan ruh & adab”	Pendekatan pedagogis khas; metode tahfiz	Diferensiasi Kurikulum & Program Unggulan
5	“Program MTQ untuk akselerasi (target 2 juz)”	Program tahfiz & MTQ; pembinaan agama intensif	Diferensiasi Kurikulum & Program Unggulan
6	“Smart Class — Abel (iPad/tablet) untuk kelas 4–6”	Digitalisasi & edutech; mobile device management	Inovasi Pendidikan / Digital Branding
7	“Excellent service; guru 24 jam untuk wali murid”	Layanan (service quality); customer care orang tua	Service Orientation & Relationship Management
8	“Warna hijau sebagai identitas visual”	Visual branding; identitas simbolik	Visual & Identity Branding
9	“Rapat pekanan dan rapat pimpinan (evaluasi branding)”	Proses perencanaan & evaluasi berkala	Manajemen Strategis & Governance
10	“Tim marketing / SPMB; humas yayasan & unit”	Struktur humas/marketing formal	Organisasi Kehumasan & Kapasitas Komunikasi

No	Open coding (kutipan ringkas / kode awal)	Axial coding (tema antara / kategori)	Selective / Thematic code (tema utama)
11	“Sasaran: masyarakat menengah atas, tapi inklusif (beasiswa/orang tua asuh)”	Segmentasi pasar & kebijakan aksesibilitas	Segmentasi & Social Responsibility
12	“Kendala: persepsi ‘sekolah mahal’; keterbatasan SDM buat konten digital”	Tantangan reputasi & kapasitas SDM	Tantangan Operasional & Digital Capacity
13	“Orang tua mendapat info dari tetangga; word of mouth kuat”	Reputasi lewat rekomendasi; experiential branding	Trust Building via Community Engagement
14	“Penyeragaman persepsi guru tiap Sabtu; pelatihan S2 untuk guru”	Capacity building; alignment internal	Internalization of Brand Values / Internal Branding
15	“Kotak saran jarang dipakai; komunikasi lewat wali kelas/WA”	Kanal feedback informal; preferensi komunikasi langsung	Stakeholder Communication Practices
16	“Rencana jangka panjang: menjadi pilihan utama; cita-cita perguruan tinggi”	Visi jangka panjang & aspirasi institusional	Strategic Visioning & Long-term Positioning

## DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Islamic Value-Based Branding as a Core Identity

Across the five SIT schools, Islamic values form the foundation of their institutional identity, expressed through structured *tahfidz* programs, character-building rituals, daily worship routines, and moral discipline.

In the SIT context, brand identity is value-driven, shaped by:

1. Religious values (akhlak and worship routines)
2. Behavioral expectations (discipline, mannerliness, adab)
3. Integrated academic–religious framework

SIT schools demonstrate this alignment through consistent practices, visual cues (an Islamic environment), and behavioral norms that align with their religious mission.

The SIT identity model matches this theoretical expectation by embedding Islamic values into daily pedagogical practices.

## 4.2 Program Excellence as a Differentiation Strategy

The flagship programs developed by the five SIT schools—Tahfidz intensification (An-Nahl, Ash-Shiddiqi), academic rigor (Al-Azhar 57), progressive Islamic learning (Ahmad Dahlan), and character-based discipline (Nurul Ilmi)—serve as unique value propositions. Each school formulates a distinct “signature program” that becomes its branding centerpiece.

Furthermore, the program-based differentiation supports Porter’s (1985) Competitive Advantage Framework, particularly:

1. Differentiation strategy (unique educational experiences)
2. Focus strategy (targeting parents seeking Islamic-modern schooling)

The SIT programs also reflect the principles of Islamic Pedagogical Leadership, which hold that leadership models combine moral purpose, instructional effectiveness, and community expectations.

Thus, program excellence becomes the strategic mechanism through which SIT schools create brand value and communicate distinctiveness to the market.

## 4.3 Service Quality as Emotional Branding

The strongest finding across the five SIT schools is the centrality of service quality—particularly teacher responsiveness, parent–school engagement, and safe learning environments—in shaping parental emotional satisfaction. These align closely with the service quality dimensions identified in the SERVQUAL model:

1. Responsiveness
2. Assurance
3. Empathy

In the SIT ecosystem, emotional branding emerges through relational interactions rather than promotional materials. This experiential branding concept, where emotional, relational, and sensory experiences strongly shape brand perception.

Parents reported that their trust is built through:

1. Daily teacher communication
2. Prompt responses in WhatsApp groups
3. Safety and discipline assurance
4. Consistent religious and academic routines

Thus, emotional branding in SIT schools operates through relational professionalism, which becomes a distinctive Islamic service ethos.

## 4.4 Digital and Community-Based Branding

The five SIT schools employ a hybrid communication strategy:

### Digital Channels

1. Daily Instagram updates
2. Short-form video documentation
3. YouTube showcases
4. Website-based transparency

### Community Channels

1. Parenting seminars and Islamic lectures
2. Mosque-linked community events
3. Open houses and parent gatherings

This multichannel engagement reflects the theory of digital–educational communication, emphasizing the importance of storytelling, visibility, and authenticity in school branding.

Additionally, the SIT approach aligns with Social Capital Theory, which holds that community involvement strengthens trust and shared identity. Parent engagement (e.g., pengajian, Jam’iyyah) builds bonding social capital, which enhances word-of-mouth and reputation—an important component of Islamic education management.

The digital community synergy demonstrates that branding in SIT schools is not promotional, but relational and participatory.

#### **4.5 Brand Trust as the Final Output of the Branding Cycle**

Brand trust emerges as the outcome of SIT branding strategies, built through a combination of:

1. Program credibility
2. Consistent communication
3. Transparent governance
4. Teacher professionalism
5. Emotional satisfaction
6. Positive parental testimonials

This is strongly supported by the Commitment–Trust Theory, which establishes trust as the cornerstone of long-term relationship-building in service organizations.

Trust in educational institutions is shaped by perceived reliability, honesty, and competence. All five SIT schools demonstrated consistency in these components.

The resulting model—SIT Brand Trust Cycle—reflects cyclical branding logic similar to Aaker’s (7) Brand Equity Model, where identity, value, and emotional associations form the basis of trust and brand loyalty.

Thus, trust in SIT schools is not incidental; it is the cumulative product of integrated identity, programs, services, and communication.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study develops a comprehensive, theoretically grounded branding model for Integrated Islamic Schools (SITs) in Jambi Province. The findings reveal five interconnected components shaping SIT branding:

1. Islamic value-based brand identity
2. Program excellence and differentiation strategies
3. Service quality and emotional branding
4. Digital–community communication approaches
5. Brand trust and reputation formation

These five components function as a cohesive system described in the SIT Brand Trust Cycle, demonstrating that branding in Islamic schools is a value-driven, relational, and strategic process that sustains institutional competitiveness and public trust.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating Islamic educational management, strategic branding, and service quality frameworks into a unified model for Islamic school branding. Practically, the model can guide SIT school leaders across Indonesia in designing and sustaining branding strategies rooted in identity, quality, and trust.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

“The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.”

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## DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE

This study used artificial intelligence (AI) tools and methodologies in the following capacities:

1. **Data analysis and modeling:** Machine learning algorithms, including [specific algorithms or techniques], were used to analyze the dataset and predict outcomes.

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