Branding Image of Higher Education Quality Based on Islamic Boarding Schools

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the branding image development strategy of Islamic boarding school-based higher education. The study elevates the branding "Khairu Ummah Rahmatal Lil'alamin" as an institutional identity that combines academic excellence and Islamic values. This study uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method. This research was conducted at Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis techniques. The results of the study indicate that the branding strategy is carried out through strengthening religious values, improving the quality of academic services, and optimizing digital and traditional promotional media. The main supporting factors are the strong commitment of campus managers and the involvement of the academic community, while the main challenges come from competition between universities and changes in community preferences. This study recommends the need for continuous innovation to maintain the relevance of branding amidst the development of the times.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is one of the important pillars in forming a generation that is not only intellectually superior but also has a strong moral and spiritual character (Al-Asy'ari, 2024; Al-Fatih, 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024). During globalization and modernization, many higher education institutions have begun to integrate religious values as the identity and distinctive image of their institutions (Sahin, 2018; Schildermans & Tröhler, 2024). One of the models of higher education that is developing in Indonesia is Islamic boarding school-based higher education, which emphasizes the integration of general knowledge and Islamic values (Apriyanto & Hidayati, 2022).

Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University is one of the institutions that carries the concept of Islamic boarding school-based higher education. By bringing the strong

values owned by the Zainul Hasan Islamic boarding school itself, such as those in the santri satlogi (politeness, ajeg/istiqomah, advice, taqwallah, ridlallah, and ikhlas lillahi taála) and accompanied by simplicity, ukhuwah, and spirituality, this university strives to form an image of educational quality that is distinctive and relevant to the needs of the times. Image or branding image is an important part of public communication strategy, especially through digital media such as official websites and social media (Farkas & Bene, 2021).

Branding image not only reflects the academic quality of an institution but also reflects the values it upholds and how the institution wants to be perceived by the public. Branding image has become a strategic element in improving the quality and competitiveness of educational institutions (Manzoor et al., 2021; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). In the era of globalization and increasingly tight educational competition, brand image is a very valuable intangible asset because it is able to create a perception of quality, trust, and loyalty among stakeholders (Panda et al., 2019). This approach integrates Islamic values, holistic education, and managerial innovation to optimize the quality of education while strengthening the position of the institution in national and international competition. In the context of higher education based on Islamic boarding schools, the image that is built usually includes dimensions of religiosity, morals, knowledge, and social contribution (Chanifah et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how the institution's official publications and media represent this image. Websites and social media are now the new face of Islamic boarding schools in conveying Islamic values in the digital era (Kardi et al., 2023).

Improving the quality of higher education based on Islamic boarding schools through a consistent branding strategy can provide significant added value in achieving competitive advantage (Baharun et al., 2021; Rohman et al., 2023). Along with the increasing number of students and positive reputation, branding image also functions as a means of verifying the quality of education that can increase the attractiveness of institutions in the long term (Ghorbanzadeh & Sharbatiyan, 2024).

In the digital era, websites and social media have become the new face of Islamic boarding schools in conveying Islamic values (Muhith et al., 2023). Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University, for example, utilizes digital platforms such as its official website: https://youtube.com/@unzahgenggong6532?si=3-uhrDC17wk4GdI5n.ac.id and official Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/unzah_genggong?igsh=cXBsNnljYndkaHA=.

This study aims to analyze the representation of the image of the quality of higher education based on Islamic boarding schools in the publication media of the Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University. Through a qualitative approach with the content analysis method, this study will examine the contents of the university's official website and its social media accounts to reveal the narratives, symbols, and branding strategies used in building the image of quality education based on Islamic boarding school values. In the Islamic boarding school environment, branding image includes visual identity, core values, and consistent communication strategies to convey messages of excellence and quality of education. Previous studies, such as those at the Zainul Hasan Genggong

Islamic Boarding School, show that a structured branding strategy can increase interest in registration and public trust in the quality of Islamic boarding school education.

2.   METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis to examine how the quality of Islamic boarding school-based higher education is represented at Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University. This method aims to reveal the symbolic, narrative, and visual meanings contained in the university's official digital media. The following is a presentation of the model for the content analysis method in Figure 1 (Kyngäs, 2019).
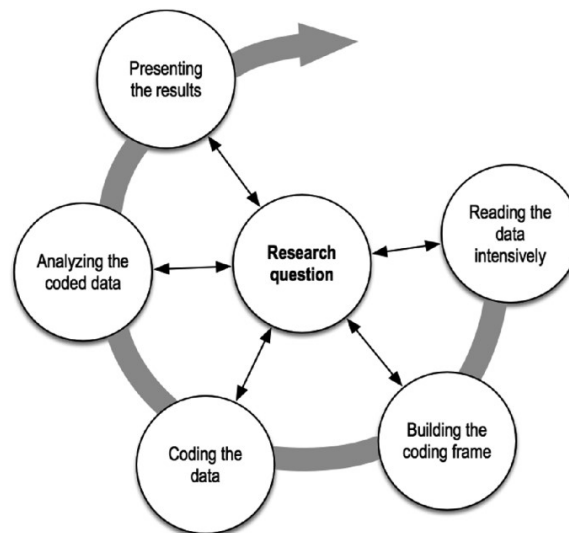

Figure 1. The Content Analysis Method

The main data sources were obtained from digital content published on the campus's official website, Instagram account (@https://www.instagram.com/unzah_genggong?igsh=cXBsNnljYndkaHA=), and the university's YouTube channel (https://youtube.com/@unzahgenggong6532?si=3-uhrDC17wk4GdI5n.ac.id), which were accessed during the period January to March 2025. Documentation techniques were used to collect data in the form of social media uploads, website articles, and campus videos that reflect the values of Islamic boarding schools and the quality of Islamic higher education.

In addition to documentation, this study also uses non-participatory observation of campus communication activities on social media to understand the pattern of consistent message delivery. We limited the use of interview techniques to clarify data discovered during the content analysis process. We conducted data analysis using the interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which encompasses data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This model allows researchers to explore data in depth, especially in the context of symbolic representation and messages that educational institutions want to convey to the digital public.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Islamic Boarding School Values in Digital Content

Building upon the results of the analysis of the official website and social media of the Islamic University of Zainul Hasan Genggong, it was found that the typical values of Islamic boarding schools are consistently represented in various forms of digital content. These values include politeness, istiqamah, religious advice, piety to Allah, Allah's pleasure, and sincerity for the sake of Allah. This representation is not only conveyed through narrative text but also through visuals, symbols, and digital practices that reflect the culture of Islamic boarding schools.

Representation on Official Website

The official website can be found at https://youtube.com/@unzahgenggong6532?si=3-uhrDC17wk4GdI5n.ac.id, and the official Instagram account is located at https://www.instagram.com/unzah_genggong?igsh=cXBsNnljYndkaHA=. The vision of the university is written, which reads, The main vision of the Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University (UNZAH) is "Inspiring Through Quality Islamic Education." UNZAH also has a broader vision, namely to create a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, moral, and empowered. explicitly stated vision: "To become a leading Islamic university with a national perspective that excels in the fields of education, research and community service." Research by Rizqon & Fimaisarah (2024) shows that mature digital marketing planning and continuous evaluation can increase the visibility of Islamic educational institutions. This is in line with the findings in a study by Munawwaroh & Rahayu (2024), which stated that Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions are now increasingly active in building branding identities based on inclusive Islamic values and rahmatan lil 'alamin in their digital media. This kind of representation has also been proven in a study by Solahudin & Fakhruroji (2019), which found that the existence of digital content containing religious identity has contributed to the formation of public perceptions of the quality of Islamic education. The following is the official UNZAH YouTube in Figure 2.
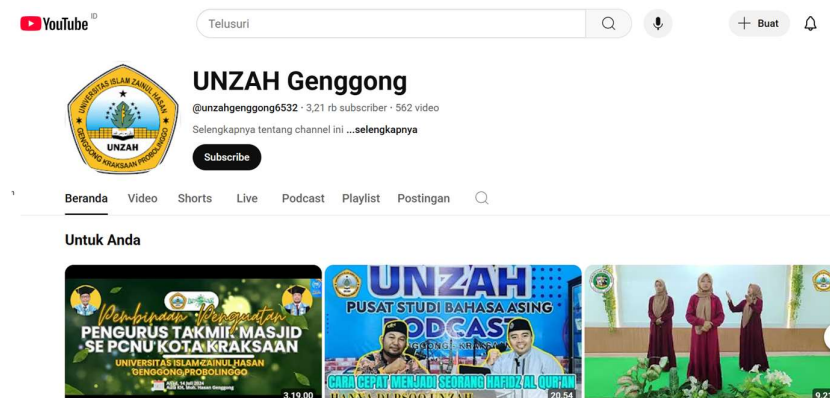

Figure 2. The official UNZAH YouTube

Representation on Instagram and Social Media

On the campus' official Instagram, the uploaded content displays religious activities such as:

a. Study of classic books (Quran)

b. Joint shalawatan activities

c. Daily moments of students wearing white clothes, a symbol of purity and submission

d. Quotes from Islamic scholars and Islamic boarding school masyayikh containing moral and spiritual messages

Islamic educational institutions use social media not only for communication but also as a digital means of da'wah and to build their spiritual image in a digital society (Mustofa et al., 2023). A similar study by Steiner (2018) stated that the strategy of visualizing da'wah through social media has been proven to be able to increase engagement while strengthening branding based on Islamic values in higher education institutions.

Visual Narrative and Islamic Aesthetics

From a visual aspect, the Instagram content of Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong displays a lot of Islamic aesthetics: arabesque ornaments, the dominance of white and green colors, and typography that resembles calligraphy. Reflecting the spiritual values of Islamic boarding schools, especially the simplicity and sincerity in conveying da'wah, shows that the main goal is not just commercial aesthetics, but da'wah and spiritual values. The following is the official UNZAH Instagram presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The Official UNZAH Instagram

Islamic Boarding Schools as Digital Identity

A successful digital branding strategy for contemporary Islamic boarding schools must emphasize local and religious values as a distinguishing factor from conventional institutions. This is supported by the opinion of Riyadi et al. (2023), who stated that an effective digital branding strategy for modern Islamic boarding schools must prioritize

local and religious values as a differentiator from general campuses. According to a study by Munawwaroh & Rahayu (2024), the integration of traditional values with a digital approach strengthens the effectiveness of Islamic boarding school branding. This emphasis on local values is also recognized by Aishah & Nurdin (2022), who emphasized that Islamic boarding schools must be able to narrate their identity contextually to remain relevant and superior in the midst of the era of disruption.

Critical Analysis

According to the representations found, it appears that Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University actively integrates Islamic boarding school values into its digital platform. Such an approach is a form of response to the challenges of the digital era, where institutional identity needs to be expressed strategically but remains authentic. This approach also shows that Islamic boarding school, as a traditional institution, is no longer marginalized but is able to compete and preach in the digital space with a modern aesthetic and communicative approach.

Visual and Symbolic Strategy in Building Branding

The campus branding image is also built through a consistent visual strategy. The use of green and white colors that dominate the website page and social media displays reflects the cool and religious identity of the pesantren. Symbols such as mosques, yellow books, and Arabic calligraphy are visual elements that strengthen the university's Islamic image. This is in line with the concept of representation according to Aspara et al. (2014), that media does not merely display reality but also forms meaning through symbolic construction.

Claims of Academic Quality and Integration of Islamic Values

The university's website actively displays information about accreditation, academic collaboration, and the achievements of lecturers and students. However, all of these academic achievements are still associated with Islamic values. For instance, the narrative in the campus profile video on YouTube asserts that academic excellence necessitates the presence of manners and morals.

This reinforces that campus quality branding is not only cognitive, but also affective and spiritual, in line with the philosophy of Islamic boarding school education that prioritizes manners above knowledge. Research by Rizqon & Fimaisarah (2024) shows that mature digital marketing planning and continuous evaluation can increase the visibility of Islamic educational institutions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University consistently builds the image of the quality of higher education based on Islamic boarding schools through digital publication media, both through its official website and social media. The typical values of Islamic boarding schools, such as sincerity, spirituality, and ethical morals, are

represented narratively and visually, which strengthens the Islamic identity of the campus. The branding strategy is carried out through the integration of academic quality and religious values, which are reflected in the vision-mission narrative, visual symbols, and campus activity content that is displayed routinely. This representation strengthens the public's perception of the campus as a higher education institution that is not only intellectually superior but also deeply rooted in Islamic boarding school values.

This research is expected to be a reference for other higher education institutions in developing branding strategies based on local values and religiosity. Further research can expand the object of study by involving students' or alumni's perceptions of the effectiveness of the branding.

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