
SCHOOL BRANDING STRATEGIES BASED ON SCHOOL IDENTITY TO BUILD COMMUNITY TRUST AND INTEREST IN CHOOSING A SCHOOL

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi school branding berbasis identitas sekolah dalam membangun kepercayaan dan meningkatkan minat masyarakat memilih sekolah. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus yang didukung library research. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penguatan identitas sekolah menjadi strategi utama dalam membangun school branding, yang diwujudkan melalui tiga temuan utama: (1) konsistensi nilai dan karakter sekolah dalam budaya serta layanan pendidikan, (2) pengembangan program unggulan dan prestasi sebagai pembeda sekolah, dan (3) komunikasi identitas sekolah secara konsisten melalui media digital dan interaksi langsung dengan masyarakat. Ketiga strategi tersebut membentuk citra sekolah yang lebih autentik dan mudah dikenali, sehingga memperkuat kepercayaan orang tua serta meningkatkan ketertarikan calon peserta didik dalam memilih sekolah. Implikasi penelitian menunjukkan bahwa school branding perlu dibangun dari identitas internal yang nyata dan konsisten, bukan sekadar aktivitas promosi, sehingga dapat menjadi strategi berkelanjutan dalam memperkuat daya saing dan hubungan sekolah dengan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *School Branding, Identitas Sekolah, Kepercayaan Masyarakat*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze an identity-based school branding strategy in building public trust and increasing community interest in choosing a school. The study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design supported by library research. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that strengthening school identity serves as the primary strategy for developing school branding, reflected in three main findings: (1) the consistency of school values and character in educational culture and services; (2) the development of flagship programs and achievements as distinctive features of the school; and (3) consistent communication of school identity through digital media and direct interaction with the community. These three strategies contribute to establishing an authentic and recognizable school image, thereby strengthening parents' trust and increasing prospective students' interest in choosing the school. The implications of this study suggest that school branding should be grounded in an authentic and consistent internal identity rather than merely promotional activities, enabling it to serve as a sustainable strategy for strengthening school competitiveness and fostering relationships with the community.

Keywords: *School Branding, School Identity, Public Trust*

INTRODUCTION

Changes in community preferences regarding educational institutions indicate that the decision to choose a school is no longer based solely on academic performance, facilities, or tuition fees, but also on how schools build an image and identity that are easily recognized by the community. This condition has emerged due to increasingly open access to information through digital media, enabling parents and prospective students to compare various schools before making their decisions (Purnama & Asdlori, 2023). Schools with a strong identity, consistent communication, clearly defined flagship programs, and a positive reputation tend to gain greater public attention and trust. Conversely, schools that possess distinctive strengths but are unable to communicate their identity effectively may be less recognized and less considered by prospective students. This phenomenon indicates that strengthening school branding has become a strategic necessity for schools to authentically articulate their characteristics and strengths, enabling them to build a positive perception amid growing competition among educational institutions (Cahyanto, 2025).

Nevertheless, school branding practices are still often understood merely as school promotion and publicity activities rather than as a strategy rooted in institutional identity. A branding approach that focuses solely on promotion may result in an image that does not fully reflect the actual experiences of students and the community with the school (Purwanto, 2023). There is a gap between the identity that a school seeks to project and the public's perception when its values, culture, flagship programs, achievements, and characteristics are not communicated consistently and supported by genuine educational service experiences. Therefore, a school branding strategy is needed that positions school identity as the primary foundation for building trust, rather than merely as a marketing instrument. This perspective is important because public trust serves as a connecting factor between awareness of a school and the emergence of interest in choosing that school (Wahono, 2023).

Hart & Rodgers, (2024) In their research on school branding, they found that branding plays an important role in building the image and competitiveness of educational institutions. Walid & Malik, (2023) It also shows that branding strategies can be implemented through strengthening school identity, flagship programs, service quality, public communication, and the use of digital media. Schools that are able to identify their uniqueness and strengths and then communicate them consistently have greater opportunities to build a positive image in the eyes of the community. Ahmadi, (2025) Their research shows that school branding is not merely concerned with increasing school name recognition, but also with the process of building positive perceptions and experiences that distinguish one school from other educational institutions.

Other studies have largely linked school image, service quality, reputation, and communication strategies to the decisions or interests of the community in choosing educational institutions. Parents' trust is an important aspect because school selection is associated with expectations regarding the quality of education, character development, safety, and children's future. However, research that specifically integrates school identity as the basis of a school branding strategy with the process of building community trust and interest in choosing a school

remains relatively limited. Some studies tend to discuss branding from the perspectives of promotion, image, or educational marketing separately, so the relationship between a school's identity, its communication strategies, community trust, and school choice decisions has not yet been examined comprehensively.

Based on previous studies, school branding has predominantly been examined as a promotional and image-building strategy, while the relationship between school identity, community trust, and interest in choosing a school has not been sufficiently explored in an integrated manner. This study addresses this gap by positioning school identity, including values, character, culture, flagship programs, achievements, and school uniqueness, as the foundation of school branding, which is communicated consistently to build community trust and encourage interest in choosing a school. Thus, the novelty of this study lies in developing the relationship school identity → communication → community trust → interest in choosing a school, emphasizing that the effectiveness of school branding depends not only on the intensity of promotion but also on the authenticity and consistency of the school identity with the community's actual experiences.

This study aims to analyze an identity-based school branding strategy in building community trust and increasing community interest in choosing a school. This study argues that a strong and authentic school identity can serve as a core value in developing sustainable school branding. When this identity is communicated consistently through school programs, institutional culture, service quality, achievements, community relations, and communication media, it creates positive perceptions that foster community trust. Furthermore, this trust becomes an important asset in increasing the interest of parents and prospective students in choosing the school. Therefore, identity-based school branding can be viewed as an educational management strategy that not only strengthens school competitiveness but also builds long-term relationships between schools and the community.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design, supported by library research to strengthen the theoretical and conceptual foundation. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of identity-based school branding strategies in building community trust and increasing interest in choosing a school. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation, with informants purposively selected to include the principal, school managers/public relations staff, teachers, and parents or community members who understood the school branding process. The interviews focused on branding strategies, school identity, distinctive strengths, communication patterns, and community perceptions of the school. Observations were conducted on school culture, flagship programs, school activities, and forms of identity communication, while documentation included school profiles, programs, social media, brochures, photographs, videos, and school publication archives. Library data were obtained from academic books, journal articles, proceedings, and previous studies relevant to school branding, school identity, trust, and interest in choosing a school. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and

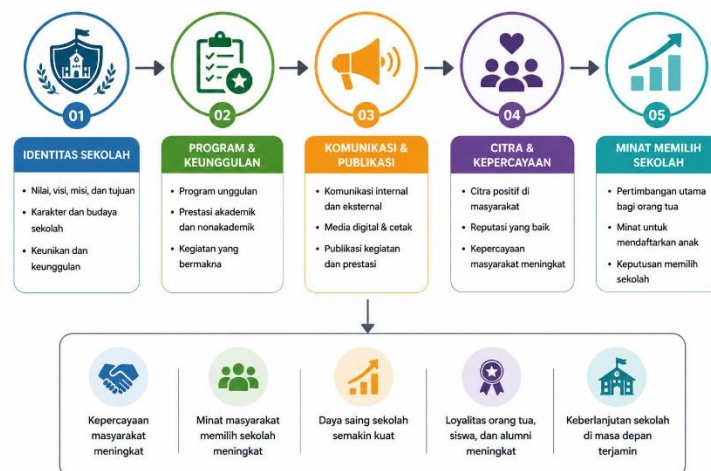
Saldaña through the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Mizwar, 2026). Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, documentation, and literature sources to obtain credible findings regarding identity-based school branding strategies in building community trust and interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effective school branding begins with a strong and authentic school identity, which is consistently communicated to build trust and encourage community interest. The discussion focuses on three main aspects: strengthening school identity, branding communication strategies, and building community trust and interest in choosing a school.

School Branding Strategies for Strengthening School Identity

The research findings indicate that school branding strategies are not merely focused on promotional activities but are also part of the school's efforts to strengthen its institutional identity. This identity is developed through the values that characterize the school, flagship programs, school culture, student achievements, service quality, and distinctive characteristics that differentiate the school from other educational institutions. A strong identity is then communicated consistently through various school activities and communication media. This finding is consistent with previous research by Ansori, (2023) which indicates that school brand identity represents the values, culture, and social capital of the institution. Thus, identity functions not only as an external image but also as an integral part of the institution's organizational character.



Picture 1: School Branding Strategies for Strengthening School Identity

The figure above illustrates that strengthening school branding begins with the school's values and characteristics, which are translated into programs and distinctive strengths and then manifested through the culture and real experiences of the school community. These elements of identity are subsequently communicated consistently through various media and publicity activities, thereby creating a strong school identity that is easily recognized by the community. This process

confirms that effective school branding does not rely solely on promotion but is built upon an authentic identity reflected in the school's practices and experiences (Faizin, 2024).

Strengthening school identity is achieved by integrating school values into daily educational practices. Flagship programs, student activities, academic and non-academic achievements, as well as school culture, serve as tangible evidence of the identity offered to the community. Thus, branding does not stop at the use of logos, slogans, or promotional materials but is manifested through the real experiences of the school community. This finding reinforces previous research by Mahmud, (2026) which found that effective school branding strategies combine academic excellence, skills development programs, character development, institutional culture, and communication through various channels to build school credibility.

In addition to internal activities, school identity is strengthened through digital communication, particularly social media. Digital media enables schools to communicate their programs, achievements, student activities, institutional values, and various forms of services to the community more quickly and openly. Consistency between the identity developed within the school environment and the identity presented through digital media is an important factor in ensuring that branding does not create a gap between image and reality. Research by Hadrianingtyas & Haq, (2026) This indicates that optimizing public relations through social media can be used to systematically manage school identity while simultaneously strengthening the school's reputation and public trust.

Based on these findings, an identity-based school branding strategy can be understood as a process of building an authentic and meaningful distinction for the community. Schools are not sufficient merely to claim that they excel; rather, they need to demonstrate their strengths through programs, culture, services, achievements, and the experiences of the school community. Through this approach, the school's identity becomes more easily recognized and remembered by the community while simultaneously establishing a distinctive positioning compared to other schools. This is consistent with Chen, (2024), who found that parents tend to choose schools whose brands communicate educational characteristics that align with their preferences.

School Branding in Building Community Trust and Interest

The research findings indicate that school branding is closely associated with the development of community trust in schools. Trust emerges when the community perceives consistency between the identity communicated by the school and the quality of services and actual experiences provided by the school. Flagship programs, learning quality, teacher competence, school culture, achievements, and information transparency serve as indicators used by the community to assess the credibility of the institution. Thus, effective branding does not merely generate popularity but also helps reduce community uncertainty regarding the school's quality and commitment. This finding is consistent with the study by Taufiq & Citraningsih, (2026), which emphasizes that school branding is a sustainable managerial strategy encompassing the quality of educational services, information transparency, academic reputation, and the use of digital media to build public trust.

This trust subsequently contributes to the emergence of community interest in considering the school as an educational option for their children. Parents do not merely consider promotional information but also take into account the school’s reputation, the experiences of others, the quality of services, and the school’s consistency in implementing the values it offers. Research by Aritonang, (2026) This indicates that school image and service quality have a positive influence on the decision to choose a school, while parental trust is the most dominant factor in that decision. This suggests that the stronger the school’s credibility, built through branding and service experiences, the greater the likelihood that the community will develop confidence in choosing the school.

Table 1: The Relationship Between School Branding Strategies, Community Trust, and Interest

<i>School Branding Strategy</i>	Form of Implementation	Impact on the Community
School Identity	School values, characteristics, vision, and uniqueness	Helps the community more easily recognize the school’s identity
Flagship Programs	Academic, religious, character development, and talent development programs	Improves perceptions of school quality
Service Quality	Learning, student services, and communication with parents	Builds trust in the school
School Achievements	Student, teacher, and institutional achievements	Strengthens the school’s reputation and credibility
Communication Media	Website, social media, brochures, and publicity activities	Expands information access and increases the school’s reach
Positive Experiences	Testimonials, interactions, school activities, and alumni	Encourages recommendations and <i>word of mouth</i>
Community Trust	Consistency between promotion and actual conditions	Increases parents’ confidence in the school
Interest in Choosing the School	Parents’ and prospective students’ considerations and preferences	Encourages the decision to choose the school

The table above shows that school branding builds community interest through a gradual process. School identity, flagship programs, service quality, and achievements shape positive

perceptions, while consistent communication and real experiences strengthen community trust. This trust then becomes the basis for developing interest in choosing the school.

The research findings also reveal that community experiences and word-of-mouth communication play an important role in strengthening the effects of school branding. Information obtained from parents, alumni, students, or community members who have interacted with the school tends to be perceived as more authentic than promotional messages originating solely from the institution. Research by Zahida, (2025), This indicates that word of mouth has a direct influence on parents' decisions when choosing a school, as experiences and recommendations from others provide information about educational quality, facilities, curriculum, and the learning environment. Therefore, schools need to create positive experiences that can naturally generate positive recommendations from the community.

Thus, school branding can establish a strategic pathway from school identity → communication and positive experiences → community trust → interest in choosing the school. Strong branding not only makes a school more recognizable but also helps the community understand why the school is worthy of being chosen. These findings reinforce the view that image, attractiveness, experience, and trust are interconnected elements in the school selection process (Kurniawan, 2026). Research on private school choice also shows that school image is an important predictor of parents' decisions, both directly and through school attractiveness. Therefore, the success of school branding is largely determined by the school's ability to maintain alignment between the identity it offers, the quality it provides, and the perceptions formed within the community.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that identity-based school branding is a strategic process that connects school identity, branding communication, community trust, and interest in choosing a school in a sustainable manner. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in strengthening the perspective that school identity is not merely an element of image formation but serves as the primary foundation for building community trust and encouraging interest in choosing a school. The novelty of this study lies in integrating these four aspects into the sequence school identity → identity communication → community trust → interest in choosing a school, indicating that branding effectiveness is determined not only by the intensity of promotion but also by the authenticity and consistency of school identity with the community's actual experiences. Practically, schools need to identify and strengthen their values, character, culture, flagship programs, achievements, and service quality as core elements of their identity before developing external communication strategies. The limitation of this study lies in its limited research context and informant coverage; therefore, future research should involve more schools and geographical areas and employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to examine these relationships more systematically.

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