

MPI LEADERSHIP PERSONAL BRANDING: BUILDING SCHOOL AUTHORITY AND REPUTATION THROUGH DIGITALLY LITERATE LEADERS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran personal branding kepemimpinan dalam Manajemen Pendidikan Islam (MPI) yang berbasis literasi digital dalam membangun otoritas dan reputasi sekolah. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi dan wawancara mendalam kepada pimpinan, guru, tenaga kependidikan, serta pengelola media lembaga. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan kondensasi, penyajian, dan verifikasi dengan pendekatan analisis isi, wacana, dan interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa personal branding kepemimpinan yang efektif dibangun melalui autentisitas pemimpin, literasi digital sebagai instrumen strategis, serta integrasi nilai-nilai keislaman. Autentisitas memperkuat kepercayaan dan otoritas, literasi digital memungkinkan pengelolaan narasi publik secara terarah, sementara nilai keislaman menjadi fondasi dalam membangun kredibilitas lembaga. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penguatan personal branding berbasis nilai dan peningkatan literasi digital merupakan faktor penting dalam membangun reputasi sekolah yang adaptif dan berdaya saing di era digital.

Kata kunci: Personal Branding Kepemimpinan, Literasi Digital, Reputasi Sekolah

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of personal branding of leadership in Islamic Education Management (MPI) based on digital literacy in building the authority and reputation of schools. The method used is a qualitative approach with a case study design, with data collection techniques through observation and in-depth interviews with leaders, teachers, education staff, and institutional media managers. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of condensation, presentation, and verification using content analysis, discourse, and interpretative approaches. The results of the study indicate that effective personal branding of leadership is built through leader authenticity, digital literacy as a strategic instrument, and the integration of Islamic values. Authenticity strengthens trust and authority, digital literacy enables the management of public narratives in a targeted manner, while Islamic values serve as the foundation for building institutional credibility. The implications of this study emphasize that strengthening personal branding based on values and increasing digital literacy are important factors in building a school's reputation that is adaptive and competitive in the digital era.

Keyword: Personal Branding Leadership, Digital Literacy, School Reputation

INTRODUCTION

Modern educational leadership emphasizes the importance of building a strong personal image as a strategic tool to enhance an institution's standing and reputation (Adole, 2024; Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Madufo, Scott, & Scott, 2024). Leaders with a solid and strong self-image are believed to be able to influence public opinion and increase stakeholder trust (Bernerth, Carter, & Cole, 2022; Carnevale & Gangloff, 2023; Gan & Trupp, 2025; Wright, 2023). However, in practice, many educational institution leaders, particularly in Islamic education management, still do not utilize the digital space as a means to build a leadership image (Baroudi, 2026; Ibrahim, Abdullah, Ismail, & Asimiran, 2024; Riaz, Baloch, Siddiqui, Ejaz, & Bashir, 2023). This is evident in the weak digital presence of principals and religious school leaders, both on social media and professional platforms (Golan & Don, 2022; Hefner, 2022; Zaid, Fedtke, Shin, El Kadoussi, & Ibahrine, 2022). This discrepancy indicates that the theory of the importance of digital leadership has not been fully absorbed into educational leadership practice. Consequently, there is a clear gap between the ideals of digital image building theory and the traditional reality. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct an in-depth study of the contributing factors and their impact on school reputation.

Looking at the practical reality, we find that leadership in many educational institutions remains oriented toward administrative and bureaucratic patterns, rather than enhancing public image. This is due to limited digital literacy, resistance to change, and the belief that a school's reputation is determined solely by academic achievement. In many schools, including Islamic schools, for example, the distribution of activities remains sporadic, not strategically managed, and fails to reflect good leadership values. In fact, many institutional leaders delegate all digital matters to staff without personal involvement. As a result, the leadership narrative is not authentically formed in the public sphere. This situation is exacerbated by rising public expectations, as the public now judges the quality of an institution based on its digital presence. Therefore, this reality highlights the need for leadership transformation toward a more agile and digitally efficient model to meet the demands of the times and enhance the institution's standing in the public eye.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of digital leadership and personal branding in educational institutions. These studies generally confirm that a leader's presence in the digital space contributes to increased engagement, transparency, and public trust (Lansing et al., 2023; Laufer, Deacon, Mende, & Schäfer, 2025; Shaik, 2025; Stasik & Jemielniak, 2022; Tong & Chan, 2022). For example, research on digital transformational leadership shows that leaders who develop effective communication channels through digital media tend to be more effective in mobilizing resources and building a positive institutional image. However, most research still focuses on the technical aspects of technology use, rather than integrating personal branding, leadership values, and the context of Islamic education. Furthermore, studies specifically linking a leader's personal branding to school reputation from the perspective of Islamic

educational institutions are relatively limited. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between leadership personal branding, digital literacy, and the reputation of Islamic educational institutions more comprehensively.

A unique aspect of this research lies in the integration of the concepts of personal branding, digital leadership, and values within an Islamic educational management framework. This approach views personal branding not only as a communication strategy but also as a reflection of the values, integrity, and vision of leadership grounded in Islamic principles. Unlike previous studies that tend to be biased, this study develops an analytical framework that systematically links a leader's digital identity to the formation of an organization's reputation. Furthermore, it highlights the role of authenticity and consistency in leadership discourse in building public trust in the digital age. This approach is expected to offer a new perspective in the study of Islamic educational leadership, which has been dominated by normative methodologies. Therefore, this research makes theoretical and practical contributions to enrich the dialogue on Islamic educational leadership in facing the challenges of the digital era.

This study aims to explore how building personal branding among digitally literate leaders in Islamic boarding schools contributes to the sustainable improvement of their reputation and standing. These objectives are summarized in several research questions: How do Islamic educational leaders practice personal branding in the digital space? What factors influence its effectiveness? And how does this influence public perception of the institution? Based on preliminary research, it is hypothesized that leaders who can manage their digital identity strategically, authentically, and with strong values will be able to build trust more easily and increase the institution's competitiveness. This is supported by the public's increasing reliance on digital information to assess the institution's credibility. Therefore, the study's main argument is that leadership personal branding, integrated with digital literacy and Islamic values, is key to improving the reputation and standing of Islamic boarding schools in the era of digital transformation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the phenomenon of leadership brand building in a real-world context. This approach was chosen because of its ability to uncover the meaning, experience, and dynamics of leadership, which cannot be explained by numbers alone. The research was conducted at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, located on Nurul Jadid, Tanjung Lor Village, Karanganyar District, Paiton, Probolinggo Regency, East Java. This location was chosen because of its unique characteristics, combining traditional Islamic boarding school values with digital transformation efforts in institutional management, making it suitable for the research focus.

Data sources for this study consisted of purposefully selected respondents and key experts. Respondents included teachers, educational staff, and students who provided insights into their perceptions of leadership. Key experts included the Islamic boarding

school administration, heads of educational units, and the institution's media and publishing team directly involved in digital brand building practices. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews. Observations were used to monitor leadership activities and digital communication practices, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights into strategies, motivations, and challenges faced.

Data analysis was conducted in three phases: data condensation, presentation, and validation. In the condensation phase, the data was reduced and focused according to the research theme. It was then presented in a descriptive narrative format to facilitate understanding and analysis. The final phase was validation, which involved drawing conclusions by ensuring the consistency and accuracy of the data. This process utilized content analysis to examine digital content, discourse analysis to understand the construction of leadership narratives, and interpretive analysis to interpret the meaning of personal branding practices. Therefore, this analysis is expected to produce comprehensive and contextual results.

RESULTS

Personal Branding Authenticity as a Source of Leadership Authority

At the operational level, building an authentic personal image is defined as the alignment between a leader's values, behavior, and communication style, both face-to-face and through social media (Beebe, Mottet, & Frei, 2025; Wang & Wang, 2022; Yang & Lin, 2023). Authenticity is not limited to what a leader says, but is also reflected in the consistency of their daily actions, which are observed by the school community. In this context, leaders not only build a stereotypical image but also express their identity with honesty and transparency, thereby fostering trust (Bartlett, 2025; Lee & Mitson, 2025; Seijts & Milani, 2022). In this way, leadership authority transcends its structural nature, evolving into a moral and social authority recognized by the community. Therefore, honesty is a fundamental foundation for building strong and sustainable leadership legitimacy.

An interview with an administrator, the director of an educational unit, revealed that he stated: "In leading this Islamic boarding school, I prioritize honesty and humility. This way, teachers and students accept me more easily, because I feel like a friend to them, rather than a superior-subordinate dynamic." Meanwhile, one of the teachers surveyed stated, "I have great respect for Islamic anointed leaders because their words and actions align with their authenticity, both in person and online, and they are very tech-savvy." Based on these two statements, the researchers argue that cultivating an authentic personal image not only fosters emotional connection but also strengthens perceptions of the leader's integrity. The trust generated by this alignment forms the basis of genuine authority, not merely a symbolic position

Observations showed that leaders actively participated in various institutional activities, both formal and informal, and demonstrated an open and transparent communication style. In face-to-face interactions, leaders tended to use a conversational approach, while in the digital realm, they conveyed messages aligned with the values prevailing within the Islamic school. Researchers noted little discrepancy between the image portrayed in digital media and their actual behavior. This reinforces the impression that personal branding is not simply a contrived image but a reflection of a person's true character. This contributes to increased respect and trust among members of the school community.



Figure 1: The Relationship between Personal Branding Authenticity and Strengthening Leadership Authority

A clear pattern in the data demonstrates a consistent relationship between building an authentic personal image and strengthening leadership authority. When leaders consistently demonstrate consistency between their words and actions, both in face-to-face interactions and in digital spaces, they foster a sense of honesty and integrity within the school community. This perception develops into trust, which in turn translates into social legitimacy. This pattern is linear and continuous: authenticity breeds trust, trust fosters acceptance, and acceptance leads to collectively recognized authority. Therefore, the more consistently a leader demonstrates authenticity, the stronger their leadership authority within the educational institution.

Digital Literacy as a Strategic Instrument in Building School Reputation

Digital literacy in leadership is defined as a leader's ability to understand, use, and strategically manage digital technology to support institutional communication (Ben Ghrbeia & Alzubi, 2024; Gagne-Pratte, Mosconi, & Jorge, 2022). This literacy extends beyond technical skills in using devices or platforms; it also encompasses skills in crafting effective narratives, managing information, and maintaining the institution's image in the public digital space. In this context, leaders play a crucial role in shaping the institution's digital communication strategy, whether through social media, official websites, or other

communication channels. Digital literacy is a strategic tool because it empowers leaders to control the flow of information, enhance the school's identity, and build broader relationships with the community.

In an interview, a member of the media management team stated, "When I create content, I always receive guidance on what needs to be improved, and I am continuously involved in digital content creation. Therefore, the goals I want to convey to the community are clear and specific." Meanwhile, a teacher commented, "Alhamdulillah, the principal's involvement in social media at an Islamic boarding school has made our school more trusted and dynamic in the community." Based on these two statements, the researcher argues that a leader's digital literacy is not only a communication tool but also a symbol of adaptive and responsive leadership. Leaders' direct involvement in the digital realm enhances the credibility of their messages and enhances the organization's public image.

Observations show that organizations actively utilize a variety of digital platforms to disseminate information about their activities, achievements, and values. Leaders appear to not only approve but also actively participate in coordinating content and guiding communications. Furthermore, the messaging style is consistent, reflecting the organization's identity. Researchers have observed that effectively managed digital activities result in increased public engagement, such as positive feedback, more followers, and faster audience response. This suggests that leaders' digital literacy directly contributes to the development of a sustainable positive organizational image.

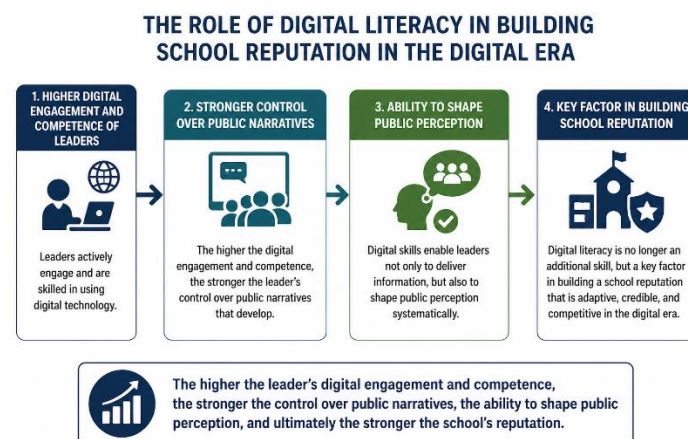


Figure 2: The Role of Digital Literacy in Building Reputation

Overall, this research demonstrates that digital literacy is a strategic tool for building and managing a school's reputation through targeted, consistent, and effective communication. It is clear that the more a leader engages with and develops digital skills, the greater their control over the evolving public discourse. These skills enable leaders not only to convey information but also to systematically shape public perception. Therefore, digital literacy is no longer just an additional skill, but a fundamental factor in

building a school's reputation, making it adaptive, credible, and competitive in the digital age.

Integrating Islamic Values into Personal Branding as a Strengtheners of Public Trust

Integrating Islamic values into leadership development is defined as a leader's consistent effort to demonstrate values such as integrity, honesty, good behavior, and responsibility in their actions, communications, and public appearances, including in digital media (Hasan, 2025; Hayati & Caniago, 2025). These values are not merely symbolic or rhetorical expressions, but are embodied in daily leadership practices that directly impact the school community. In this context, leadership development is not limited to improving public image but extends to instilling these values in people's minds, which are then translated into concrete actions. Thus, integrating Islamic values is fundamental to building public trust, as public evaluation encompasses not only the leader's competence but also their moral and spiritual integrity.

An interview with a faculty member revealed, "We feel confident and comfortable in the role of leaders because we know they always act with integrity and consistency in fulfilling their duties." Meanwhile, a parent stated, "We trust this institution because we see firsthand how its leaders uphold Islamic values, both in their activities and social media interactions." Based on these statements, the researchers believe that integrating Islamic values not only strengthens internal trust within the institution but also expands public trust. The consistent embodiment of these values is a key indicator in assessing the credibility of leaders and institutions.

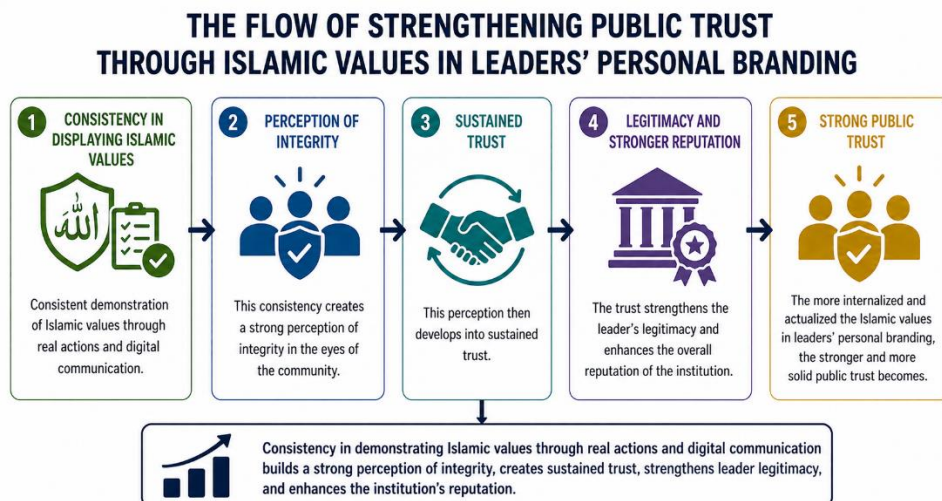


Figure 3: The Role of Integration of Islamic Values in Strengthening Public Trust

Observations show that leaders effectively embody Islamic values in various activities, such as setting a good example in religious discipline, disseminating ethical messages at every opportunity, and maintaining ethical communication in the digital realm. Content published on the institution's digital media also reflects these values, whether in narrative, visual, or interactive forms. Researchers found no discrepancy

between stated values and actual practices. This reinforces the belief that Islamic values are an integral part of the leadership identity, not simply a communication strategy. This contributes to the creation of a trustworthy and credible image of a religious institution.

Overall, the data from this study indicates that integrating Islamic values into personal branding plays a significant role in enhancing public trust. The emerging pattern is that consistently demonstrating these values, both through concrete actions and digital communications, leads to a strong perception of integrity among the public. This image, in turn, develops into sustained trust, which not only enhances the leader's legitimacy but also enhances the institution's overall reputation. Therefore, the more Islamic values are internalized and applied in building a leader's personal branding, the stronger the public's trust in him.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that building a personal brand for leadership, based on authenticity, digital skills, and the integration of Islamic values, significantly contributes to improving a school's standing and reputation (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022; Qizam, Berakon, & Ali, 2025; Shaikh & Alam Kazmi, 2022). This finding aligns with previous research on transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of integrity and consistency as the basis for leadership legitimacy (Fan, Feng, Robin, & Huang, 2023; Mexhuani & Mexhuani, 2023; Muthi'ah Rahman et al., 2026; Zhang & Huang, 2024). While previous research focused on personal branding as a communication strategy for building a public image, this study demonstrates that, in the context of Islamic leadership programs, personal branding is more fundamental because it is rooted in concrete values and practices (Muthi'a Rahman et al., 2025; Rizaneh, 2025). This, while this study is consistent with theories emphasizing the importance of a leader's credibility, it also broadens understanding by demonstrating that authenticity is a key factor linking personal identity to social acceptance. Therefore, personal branding cannot be reduced to a mere image-building technique but must be understood as a continuous process of instilling values.

Furthermore, the findings regarding digital skills as a strategic tool reinforce previous research showing that leadership in the digital age requires adaptive, technology-based communication skills (Okunlola & Naicker, 2025; Muthi'a Rahman, Hikmah, Khofsah, & Najiburrohman, 2026; Shahzad, 2024). However, this study reveals an important distinction: digital literacy is not only a means of disseminating information but also a mechanism for shaping public discourse. In this context, leaders who are active in the digital realm can more effectively influence public opinion. These findings imply that a school's reputation is no longer built automatically, but rather through consciously and systematically designed communication strategies. This suggests that while digital literacy can enhance an institution's image, it can also be detrimental if not managed effectively, potentially leading to negative perceptions.

From the perspective of integrating Islamic values, this study expands the

literature on Islamic educational leadership, which previously focused on normative aspects. The study demonstrates that values such as honesty, integrity, and exemplary behavior are not only ethical principles but also strategic elements in building public trust. This aligns with social trust theory, which emphasizes that integrity is the foundation of the relationship between leaders and followers. However, this study adds a new dimension: integrating Islamic values, consistent with the digital realm, can extend the reach of trust to the broader world. This suggests that Islamic values are not only important within the internal context of an institution but also influence its reputation in the wider community.

The findings of this study confirm that building a successful leadership brand directly impacts a school's standing and reputation. The authority gained is no longer merely structural but develops into a collectively recognized cultural reference point. Taken together, the emerging causal pattern suggests that consistency between values, communication, and actions forms the basis for building trust. Digital literacy accelerates this process, while Islamic values strengthen it. Thus, these three elements are interconnected in building effective leadership in the digital age.

Overall, this study demonstrates that building a leadership image in the context of the Indonesian Islamic Students Association (MPI) is a complex concept encompassing personal, social, and technological dimensions. These findings have practical implications for educational leadership development, particularly the need to enhance digital literacy, encompassing not only technical aspects but also strategic and value-based dimensions. Furthermore, educational institutions should encourage leaders to cultivate an authentic personal identity rooted in Islamic values as a core element of their identity. Thus, this study not only strengthens existing theory but also offers new contributions to understanding how educational leadership can adapt and keep pace with the rapid development of digital transformation.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that building personal branding for leadership in the context of Islamic educational management is not simply an image-enhancing strategy, but rather an integrated process that connects self-authenticity, digital literacy, and Islamic values to build a school's authority and reputation. The most significant finding of this research is that strong leadership authority stems from consistency between values, communication, and actions, which is evident both in face-to-face interactions and in the digital space. Digital literacy serves as a strategic tool that expands a leader's influence, while the integration of Islamic values forms a key foundation for building sustainable public trust. From an academic perspective, this research contributes to updating the understanding of personal branding in Islamic educational leadership, moving beyond a purely technical-communicative approach to authentic and contextual value construction. Furthermore, this research integrates leadership, digital technology, and Islamic values within a relatively comprehensive analytical framework.

However, this research has several limitations that should be considered. The study focuses on a single case study, and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other educational institutions with different characteristics. Furthermore, the diversity of respondents is still limited to specific categories, which does not fully represent

perspectives based on differences in gender, age, or broader social background. Methodologically, the use of a qualitative approach provides analytical depth, but it still cannot quantitatively describe trends on a broader scale. Therefore, broader research is needed, covering a variety of topics and using survey or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive picture. These findings are expected to provide a stronger foundation for formulating policies to develop adaptive and responsive educational leadership in the digital age.

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