Qualitative study on private school branding in Indonesia: Identifying barriers and strategies for school branding

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on understanding how private schools in Indonesia use branding to stay relevant and competitive. It explores the difficulties these schools face in branding and suggests potential solutions. The study employed a systematic review of literature, examining journal articles on school branding from 2016 to 2022. These articles, 20 in total, were found in the Google Scholar database in 2022. The research utilized Nvivo software to analyze the data and draw conclusions. Findings reveal two main types of challenges in school branding: internal and external. Internal challenges include insufficient quality of school staff and the lack of a clear brand identity and personality for the school. External challenges involve government policies, limited public understanding of private schools, and the public's perception of these schools. The study suggests four branding strategies for private schools: developing a brand identity and personality, positioning the brand effectively, and effective brand communication.

1. Introduction

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 era introduced significant, widespread, and concurrent transformations across multiple sectors, notably in education, a crucial area in human life's journey (Morrar et al., 2017; Spoettl and Tūtlys, 2020; Suharno et al., 2020). Education prepares individuals with the necessary mental readiness, attitudes, and character to assume various roles and professions, not only in the present but also in the future (Getie, 2020; Suseno et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2018). Life skills and knowledge are increasingly needed to provide solutions to various problems in the world of work, both currently occurring and to anticipate problems that are expected to occur in the future (Ali and Jalal, 2018; Silva and Garcia, 2019). Education is currently a community need to answer various problems in the world of work (Panadero, 2017).

The government, with support from various groups, has been striving to provide education that prepares the current generation for future challenges. In Indonesia, the government introduced a twelve-year compulsory education program aimed at eliminating ignorance. However, this program has not yet achieved its expected outcomes (Pairulsyah and Suwarno, 2022; Lestari et al., 2015). Research by Ahmadi et al. (2020), Djohar et al. (2020), and Malik (2018) showed that the need for school has been felt by the majority of the community. Apart from the declaration of the twelve-year compulsory education, the need for education arises because of the growing awareness of parents who want to send their children to school to prepare them for success in the future. Awareness that grows by itself in society about the need for education makes people start to make choices related to schools that are considered to be of the quality expected and become a bone of contention because there are many enthusiasts while their capacity is limited.

Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential (Fajarwati et al., 2016). Realizing educational goals can be done through educational institutions, namely places where the educational process takes place to change individual behavior in a better direction through interaction with the surrounding environment. Educational institutions offer formal education from pre-school to tertiary levels, general or special in nature. There are three types of educational institutions, namely formal educational institutions (schools), non-formal educational institutions (skills and courses), and informal

education (education that takes place in the family). One of the educational institutions that must be implemented is formal education in schools (Lim et al., 2021; Manurung et al., 2021; Rahma et al., 2019).

According to Hansmann (1980), schools are non-profit institutions, meaning their primary aim is not to generate profit. As non-profits, their planning and objectives are not driven by commercial interests. Despite this, schools engage in marketing activities as part of their daily operations. However, the purpose of marketing in education is not to commercialize the schools. Instead, it serves as a responsibility towards the government, acknowledging the use and benefits derived from public facilities provided by the state and to the broader community in terms of informing them about the educational services that have been, are currently, and will be offered (Harvey and Busher, 1996; James and Phillips, 1995; Kalenskaya et al., 2013; Umar et al., 2021). This approach is adopted to highlight the presence of the school, ultimately aiming to make it the preferred option for students, parents, the community, and industries that employ graduates (Cucchiara, 2008).

Schools that are negligent in carrying out their management process must be prepared that the school will be abandoned by the community (Gulla, 2015; Kushal and Nargundkar, 2021; Sholihah, 2018). Over time, public awareness of the right to education has also increased. Parents tend to be more selective in determining the right school for their children, with various considerations in terms of costs, facilities, and the quality of each school (Cucchiara, 2008). In Indonesia, there are two school bases, namely public schools and private schools (Bangkara et al., 2022; Hendajany, 2016; Kristiana, 2020; Marmoah et al., 2021; Suardi et al., 2021). Public schools are schools established by the government and fully managed by the government, while private schools are schools established by individuals or foundations, and management is entirely up to them without government intervention. There are several differences between public and private schools based on costs, facilities, curriculum, and teachers and students (James et al., 1996).

Generally, public schools do not charge tuition fees as they receive financial support from the government, allowing students to study without worrying about costs. In contrast, private schools often impose significant fees, including entry fees or other charges, at the beginning of the new school year. Consequently, parents tend to prefer public schools due to their cost-free nature and the capacity to accommodate many students, especially with the introduction of new majors. This preference for public schools has posed a challenge for private schools in Indonesia, as they struggle to attract students who are mostly enrolled in public institutions (Cahyaningtyas and Jupriyanto, 2022; Devi and Suyatno, 2022; Hapsari and Wardana, 2023; Stern and Smith, 2016). In Indonesia, the number of public schools is more dominating than

private schools (Hapsari and Wardana, 2023). The abundance of public schools capable of enrolling large numbers of students has led to a shift in the presence of private schools, making it challenging for them to attract new students. As a result, private schools must exert additional effort to become known to the public and ultimately appeal to parents and students, encouraging them to choose private education (Suardi et al., 2021). One way that private schools can maintain their existence is through school branding (Ainunnisa, 2022; Dimartino and Jessen, 2014; Gulla, 2015; Varadarajan and Malone, 2018). Branding is a way of building perceptions and positioning a product (Pratisthita et al., 2022; Holmberg and Strannegård, 2015; Hung and Fu, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2021). In addition to introducing the existence of the school to the community, branding is also carried out to maintain the trust that has existed in the community so far (Nasib et al., 2021). Despite these efforts, evidence indicates that private schools continue to face obstacles in branding, as shown by studies reporting a decline in new student enrollment. Consequently, this study aims to identify the challenges private schools encounter in branding and to explore strategies that can be implemented to maintain their visibility and relevance to the public.

2. Literature review

A brand is one of the most important parts of a product/service. According to Gensler et al. (2013), branding (brand) is explained as a process of creating a product with a unique image that differentiates it from competing products. They further explained that the most successful brands are those that are able to create long-term relationships with their customers. The image of a brand is widely agreed upon as a customer's perception of a brand, which is reflected in the brand associations stored in the memories of customers (Tokunaga, 2018). These associations can be derived from information obtained from market offerings or the customer's direct experience of shopping with the brand (Keller, 1993). A collection of customer feelings, attitudes, and ideas about brands is very important for their buying behavior (Hollenbaugh and Ferris, 2014; Oh et al., 2014).

Branding is a way of building perceptions and positioning a product (Nguyen et al., 2021), so educational institutions need a branding strategy to offer the best educational services for parents and students. Different schools naturally employ distinct strategies from one another (Karsono et al., 2021). Each school's branding approach is unique, as is the positive reputation or image it creates. Societal trends compel all schools to continuously evaluate and innovate their strategies in building their brand. Every aspect of a school, including leadership, teachers and staff, curriculum, extracurricular activities, evaluation systems, artistic and academic achievements, and community relations, can be effectively used to enhance its brand (Sholihah,

2018). These components can be utilized optimally as a means for the most effective and efficient school branding. Examples of school brands include Adiwiyata schools, driving schools, centers of excellence, international schools, model schools, natural schools, digital innovation schools, green schools, healthy schools, literacy schools, child-friendly schools, and disaster preparedness schools (Puspaningtyas et al., 2022). Several schools are innovating to make school programs that are superior to school brands, such as industrial classes, teaching factories, sports schools, as well as sports and art schools.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to describe the results of the study. The research method used is a systematic literature review.
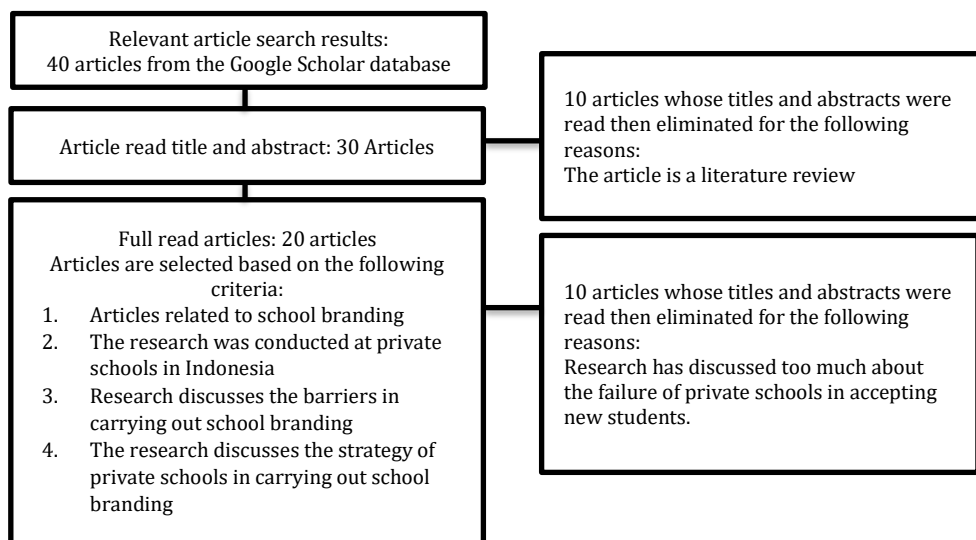
Systematic literature review is used for various purposes, such as identifying, reviewing, evaluating, and interpreting various research topics of interest to be discussed. This study used a literature review to identify barriers and strategies for branding private schools in Indonesia.

3.1. Search process

Researchers used secondary data derived from research journal articles obtained from the Google Scholar database. The journal articles used are for the period 2016-2022. Search articles using the keywords 'school branding, private school, and school in Indonesia. More than 1.000 articles were found, but after being selected, 40 articles were found that met the criteria and were published by reputable publishers. The articles used were selected based on the following criteria in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1: Article selection criteria

3.2. Data analysis

The analysis of this research is also assisted by using Nvivo software to classify data and make conclusions, with the following steps:

a. Import the selected article into Nvivo.
b. Make coding and do the coding of each article.
c. Create a project map for visualization of results.

4. Findings and discussions

There are 20 articles reviewed in this study. It should be emphasized that this research focuses on 20 related journals and articles with the following criteria: related to school branding, the research

subjects are all private schools in Indonesia, contain barriers to branding and branding strategies to overcome existing barriers. There are various private schools ranging from elementary to secondary education, which are the subject of this article. Given that school branding is very important for the survival of private schools (Ainunnisa, 2022), then an analysis of articles from various levels of education is carried out in order to obtain conclusions that can represent it in general. Table 1 shows data on private schools in Indonesia which have experienced a decline due to operational closures and unable to compete with other schools in the last three academic years (2020-2022).

Table 1: Private school data in Indonesia

School level	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Elementary school	18.585	17.685	17.628
Junior high school	17.924	16.297	16.280
Senior high school	7.167	6.966	6.950
Vocational high school	10.667	10.449	10.449

This article review will address the issues hindering schools from effectively implementing branding and the strategies that can be employed to overcome these obstacles in line with the formulated research questions. The study identifies various challenges in school branding, which can be categorized into internal and external barriers. The proposed branding strategies are diverse and have been classified into four categories: brand identity, brand personality, brand positioning, and brand communication.

4.1. Barriers to school branding

Barriers to carrying out school branding based on the results of article reviews can be illustrated in Fig. 2, using the help of Nvivo software version 12.
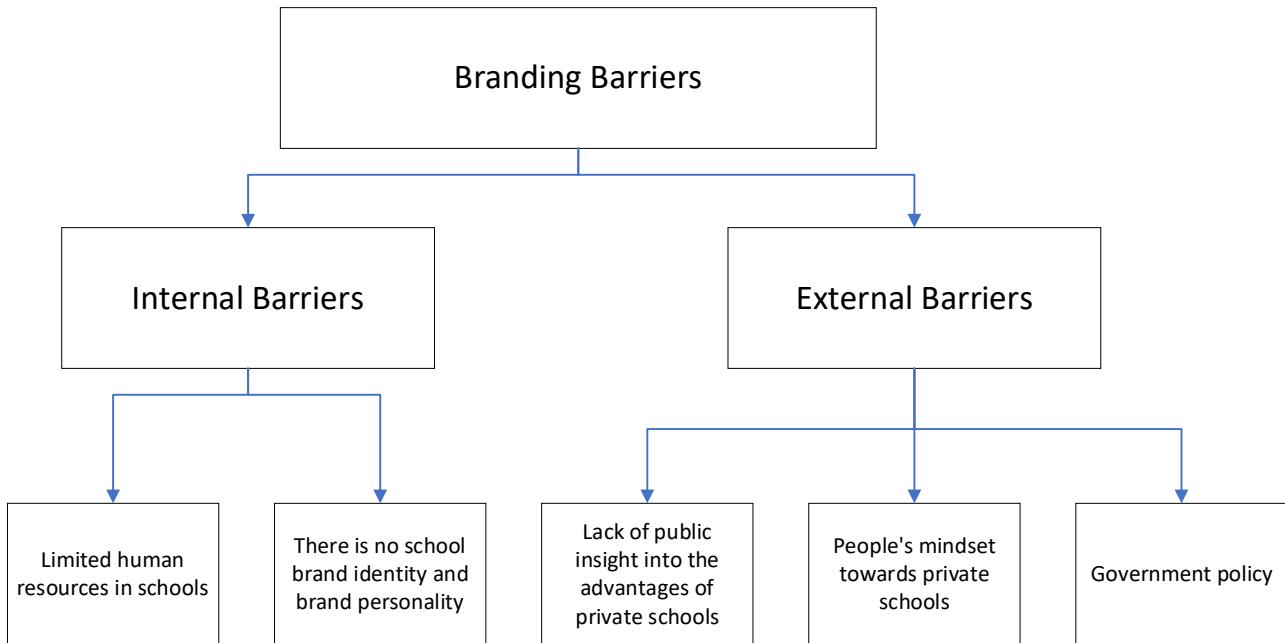

Fig. 2: Mapping the barriers in carrying out school branding

Based on the results of a review of journal articles, two barriers were found in implementing school branding, namely internal and external barriers.

Internal barriers: They are challenges that originate from within the school itself. These barriers are linked to the limited capacity of the school's staff in managing and promoting school activities to the community. Additionally, they involve the absence of a distinct identity, characteristics, and strengths that schools can showcase. Specific internal factors that impede branding efforts are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Internal factors inhibiting school branding

Internal factors	#	%
Human resources in schools	16	67%
Brand identity and brand personality	8	33%

Human resources in schools: Sholihah (2018) noted that a key barrier to effective school branding is the lack of human resource capability in creating engaging content and developing an attractive brand image. Utilizing information technology to manage educational institutions involves various stages, including recruiting prospective students. However, the majority of private schools (70%) lack the qualified resources necessary for these tasks. This deficiency hinders school branding efforts, as schools struggle to address arising issues or even to promote themselves effectively through print and social media to garner public interest.

There is no school brand identity or brand personality: Private schools greatly benefit from having a distinct identity. Schools with unique identities or characteristics can establish a specific place in society. A school's identity encompasses its background, principles, goals, and aspirations. Brand identity differentiates one brand from others. However, most private schools in Indonesia lack distinctive features to differentiate themselves from others, leading to branding failures. Three primary factors contribute to these failures: lack of differentiation from the parent brand, poor school quality, and insufficient marketing support. These factors are commonly identified as causes of branding failure (Roziqin and Rozaq, 2018). A school might attract many students at one point, but later, it may no longer appeal to the community.

External barriers: They refer to challenges that arise from outside the school. The review identified three factors that impede schools in their branding efforts, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: External factors inhibiting school branding

External factors	#	%
Government policy	18	45%
Community insight	10	25%
Community view	12	30%

Government policy: As times evolve, Indonesia's education policies have undergone significant and comprehensive changes, all aimed at achieving quality education. A notable policy is the Admission of New Students, which employs a zoning system. This system addresses disparities in educational access and seeks to promote equal educational opportunities across Indonesia. The zoning policy prioritizes the proximity between a student's home and the school in decisions about new student admissions, leading to mixed reactions and debates. This policy significantly affects the enrollment process in private schools, as they face challenges in attracting new students. Ainunnisa (2022) noted that this policy particularly complicates branding efforts for private schools, as most students are already enrolled in public schools.

Community insight: The shortage of private schools is a huge variation in quality. Unlike public schools, which receive a larger injection of government funds, private schools depend more on funding from students' parents (Ainunnisa, 2022; Hapsari and Wardana, 2023). If the community is not active in seeking information and private schools do not have the media to disseminate information about the advantages possessed by their schools, then the public's knowledge of these schools is also not good, causing information inequality, which results in the lack of recognition of private schools among the public (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Community view: The public's view of private schools that are not good is one of the barriers to schools carrying out branding. No matter how hard the school does branding, if the public's view is not good, it will cause failure in the branding (Devi and Suyatno, 2022). Most people still choose public schools to continue their education with various considerations and the future of their children.

4.2. Private school branding strategy

Based on the results of the article review, there are branding strategies that can be applied by private schools to maintain their existence, namely brand personality, brand positioning, brand identity, and brand communication. Each of these branding strategies can be seen in the Fig. 3.
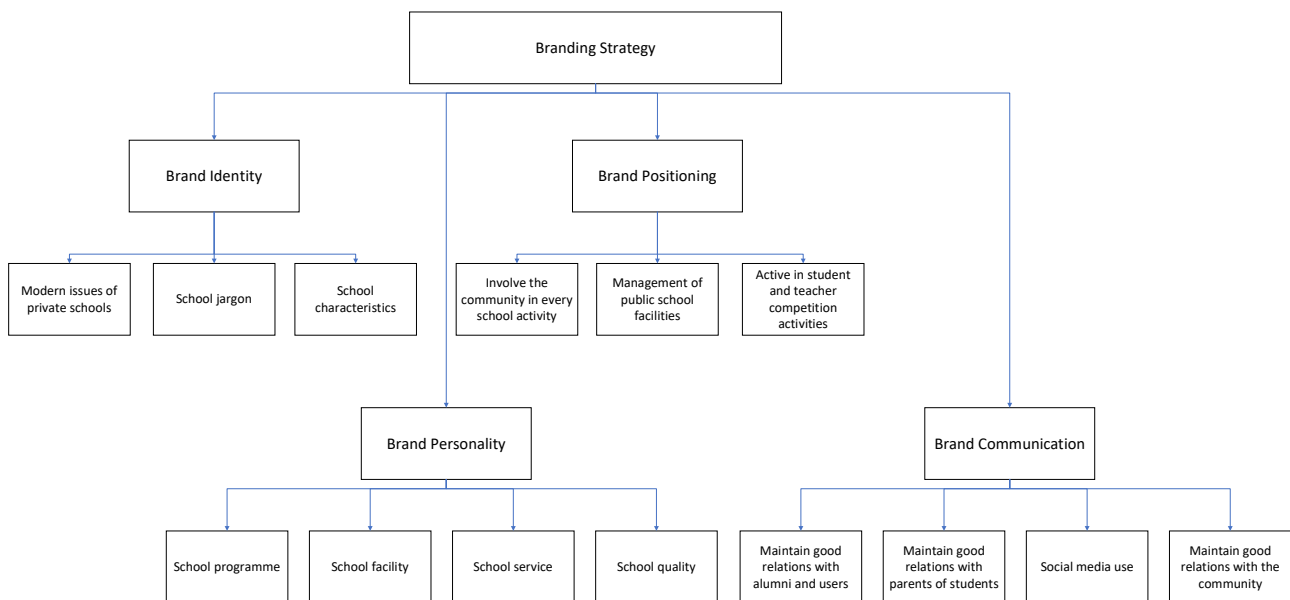
Fig. 3: Mapping branding strategy for private school

Brand personality: It is a brand that is built with full planning so that it can attract the attention of consumers or the public and can be used to convince consumers or the public that the brand is the best (Aagerup et al., 2022; Keni and Esmeralda, 2022). In brand personality, there are strategies that can be carried out.

Introduction to school programs: Evidence of a school's commitment to building its brand can be demonstrated through social media, showcasing various school activities. For instance, schools can use their websites to inform about specific programs like Adiwiyata schools, centers of excellence, and others (Puspaningtyas et al., 2022).

Introduction to school facilities: Formation of brand personality can also be done by providing good facilities so as to create a good image and attract public attention to the school (Suharno et al., 2020).

Providing the best school services: A school's brand personality can also be developed by delivering exceptional services to both the community and its users.

School qualities: Good quality schools are able to attract the attention of the community. Good school quality can be obtained through improving quality management both school accreditation and USI quality management, improving the quality of learning output and learning outcomes such as improving student, teacher, school and alumni achievement, developing excellent programs that are the hallmark of schools, organizing programs supporting the school's vision and mission, organizing new student selection programs as well

as promotional events, improving excellent service for educators and education staff, increasing school selling points through the intensity of uploading each school event in online and offline media, increasing the work of school principals, educators, and education staff, providing AMT to teachers to upgrade their knowledge and regenerate the enthusiasm to introduce schools to their prospective students so that they can increase the willingness of school applicants, improve excellent academic and non-academic services, improve the quality of instant internal resources, improve the quality of learning which can later attract the interest of new students as an increase in school branding. The quality of schools greatly influences the community's interest in schools.

Brand positioning: It is a branding strategy that shows the advantages and differences of a brand with other brands. Schools need to show the community the strengths that the school has. Brand positioning strategies that can be carried out by schools include:

Management of school facilities for the wider community: Private schools can be active in managing business units, especially in the facilities that these schools have. Starting from an auditorium that can be rented out for official or non-official events, then sports fields that can be borrowed from other schools so that the school continues to collaborate with various parties, starting from those under certain auspices and certain non-academic ones.

Creating a harmonious relationship between the school and the community: Private schools can employ strategies to foster a harmonious relationship between the school and the community. This collaboration benefits both parties and contributes to enhancing the quality of education. The community can show their support by offering student classrooms in their homes, especially when school facilities are limited. Additionally, they can engage in regular community service activities for school construction, open donations for school facilities, and willingly assist with school activities (Karsono et al., 2021).

School participation in student and teacher competition activities: The school's activeness in participating in competitions, both in the academic and non-academic fields, will increasingly make the school known to the wider community, especially if it can win the competition. Schools that have many achievements will become the target of the community so that they can determine the success and survival of the school.

Accommodation of school activities to the community: Educational institutions need to possess the capability to assess the external environment and competitors while also considering their internal strengths. This enables them to formulate effective strategies to excel in the competitive landscape without compromising the core principles of education. Schools should aim to facilitate the growth of their members in both academic and

moral aspects and actively engage with the community to attract prospective students who may be considering other options.

Branding identity: Branding identity, or brand identity, is a brand that shows the background, principles, goals, and ambitions of the brand (Wijaya, 2013). Brand identity will show the difference between a brand and other brands. Brand identity strategies that can be carried out by schools include:

School characteristics: A school's brand identity can be emphasized by using distinct school attributes, such as providing holistic education and being a pioneer in education. This identity can be associated with the school in the community's perception. To establish school branding, schools can implement various programs, including the "Adiwiyata School Program." The success of the school branding program aims to create a unique image or identity for the school that sets it apart from others. Schools should also innovate in their approach to building school branding by utilizing online media and taking advantage of school websites and social media platforms to showcase various activities, accomplishments, and testimonials related to the school.

School jargon: Institutions establish the distinctive identity of a school. To create engaging jargon, taglines, or slogans, schools often develop programs. The strategy employed involves providing training based on standard operating procedures (SOPs) and using social media as examples to showcase the school's unique characteristics.

Creation of modern issues against private schools: Issues related to modern school branding, namely, students are positioned in a market orientation so that education is no longer based on knowledge and the needs of students' talents, and there is a financing gap in the world of education (Dwiyama, 2019).

Brand communication: It is a brand that collaborates with partners related to the brand (Ellitan and Pradana, 2022; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Voorveld, 2019). The brand communication strategy can be carried out in the following ways.

Strengthen school cooperation with the community and other agencies: School-community relations is a process of communication between schools and the community to increase community understanding of educational needs and activities and to encourage community interest and cooperation in improving and developing schools. Public participation in education includes the participation of individuals, groups, families, professional organizations, employers, and community organizations in the implementation and quality control of educational services. Communities can participate as sources, implementers, and users of educational outcomes.

Building a network (network) with parents and the community: This branding strategy includes holding coordination meetings with parents/guardians of students, activities of the

school and parents of students, introducing the school to new students, publicizing the advantages of the school through the media, achieving achievements by successfully obtaining accreditation A, school excellence in the process teaching and learning based on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), a fun teaching system by HR (teachers) according to their educational qualifications, based on monotheism, excelling in achievement, caring for the environment, publishing activities, school programs by making documentary films to be sent and distributed to social media, making advertisements through print media newspapers, radio, television, distributing brochures, banners to schools, agencies, direct contact with the community, and inviting officials, community leaders to events or activities held by the school (Sholihah, 2018).

Establish and maintain communication with alumni and users: This branding strategy can be implemented by utilizing word-of-mouth communication. It involves alumni recommending the school and guardians of students spreading positive feedback within their respective networks.

Social media use: The branding strategy implemented to be able to compete with private schools and public schools is to use social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and the school's website. Social media has a big influence so that it can reach students from outside the area.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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