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Building Customer Loyalty Through Local And Religious Values

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how value-based marketing management rooted in local and religious values can strengthen customer loyalty toward Islamic boarding schools, with a focus on Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the role of marketing management based on religious and local values at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The data were then analyzed using an interactive model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The study reveals that value-based marketing management rooted in religious and local culture at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung builds strong trust and loyalty among parents. Aligning institutional and parental values creates emotional bonds and reinforces confidence in the education provided. Integrating local customs and religious traditions strengthens the school's identity and connection with the community. These findings highlight the effectiveness of value-based strategies in building long-term relationships and competitiveness. Educational institutions can adopt similar approaches by embedding cultural and religious values into programs and activities, thus enhancing trust, loyalty, and institutional relevance in their communities.

Keywords: Local Values, Customer Loyalty, Marketing Management, Education Sector, Marketing Strategy

A. INTRODUCTION

In the education sector, marketing management plays a crucial role in creating value and building customer loyalty among students and parents (Nayal et al., 2023; Almofeez et al., 2024). Education is no longer considered a basic necessity; rather, it has evolved into a long-term investment that is significantly influenced by the reputation and credibility of the institution offering it (Siegel, 2021). In the face of competition among educational institutions, these institutions must prioritize not only academic aspects but also the establishment of distinct local and religious values (Chang & Chuang, 2021).

This study was motivated by the challenges experienced at the Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi educational institution, which faces competition from other public and private schools. In this context, local pesantren values such as simplicity, independence, and character building based on Islamic values have become the main foundation known as the “pillars of values.” These pillars of values include: (1) education quality based on morality, (2) an Islamic values-based learning approach, and (3) a commitment to holistic character development of students’ morals (Puyo, 2021). These elements were then used to develop a marketing strategy to build long-term loyalty.

As a pesantren-based institution, Muadalah Ulya uses its proximity to the local community and its alumni's track record as social capital to build customer loyalty (Tjizumaue & Olusegun Atiku, 2024). In this context, loyalty is not solely determined by academic achievement. It is also influenced by the ability to provide an educational experience that leaves a lasting emotional and spiritual impact. Personal relationships between teachers and students’ guardians, active involvement in religious activities, and success stories of alumni are key factors that strengthen the emotional bond between the institution and its customers (Gonu et al., 2023; Mishra et al., 2024).

However, pesantren face challenges in preserving their traditional identity while maintaining relevance in the contemporary era due to social transformations and the digitalization of education (Tan, 2021; Meria et al., 2023). Therefore, educational marketing managers must develop competencies to align cultural and religious values with innovative and contextual promotional strategies. This involves more than institutional branding; it also involves building long-term relationships based on shared values, satisfaction, and trust (Shehzadi et al., 2021; Berndt et al., 2023).

Previous research has highlighted the importance of local and religious values in strengthening the image of educational institutions within the community. King (2019)

emphasizes that integrating religious values and academic quality can enhance parental satisfaction and loyalty. Meanwhile, a study by Anggadwita et al., (2021) emphasizes the importance of customer loyalty in the context of Islamic boarding schools. This loyalty is built not only through service but also through emotional and spiritual closeness.

This study presents a novelty by specifically examining how marketing strategies based on local and religious values can serve as a competitive advantage in building customer loyalty within the pesantren environment. The value approach is considered a distinguishing element that has not been extensively examined in the field of Islamic education marketing studies (Almohaimmeed, 2019; Gunawan et al., 2020). This study explains “das sein” (what is happening) and offers “das sollen” (what should be done), namely a marketing model for education that integrates local wisdom with Islamic principles to address the challenges of educational globalization.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how value-based marketing management, grounded in local and religious values can strengthen customer loyalty toward Islamic boarding schools, particularly at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi. In an increasingly competitive world, educational institutions must expand their approach to improve academic quality and build emotional and spiritual connections with students and parents. The integration of cultural and religious values becomes a factor that differentiates institutions and contributes to their long-term growth and sustainability.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung, an Islamic educational institution based in a pesantren located in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia. The pesantren provides upper secondary education, integrating Islamic teachings with general subjects. The community's cultural values are deeply rooted, and the institution is recognized for its strong community ties and emphasis on character education based on religious principles. This location was selected due to its consistent implementation of marketing strategies based on Islamic and local cultural values, making it an ideal case study for examining the influence of these values on customer loyalty (Ramdhan, 2021).

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 informants: three members of the school management (marketing and administration divisions), four teachers, and five parents of students. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: active involvement in the institution's

management or teaching, direct interaction with students and parents; and experience in observing the impact of the institution's marketing strategies. The parents were selected based on their active role in school activities and long-term engagement with the institution.

The observations were carried out in various institutional settings, including classrooms, public meetings, and promotional events, to capture the real-time dynamics between the institution and its stakeholders. The documentation included school profiles, promotional materials, newsletters, social media content, and internal memos. These documents collectively offer insight into marketing practices and value integration.

To maintain objectivity and avoid researcher bias, triangulation was employed through cross-checking of data from various sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to informants for confirmation and validation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of data analysis of Enders (2022). This model consists of three main components: (1) Data reduction: Filtering and coding raw data to focus on aspects related to the integration of local and religious values in marketing. (2) Data display: Organizing the data in matrices and narrative form to identify emerging patterns and relationships between marketing strategies and customer loyalty. (3) Drawing and verifying conclusions; interpreting the findings by connecting them with existing theories and confirming them through continuous comparison with field data (Schoch, 2020; Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Although the study is limited to one case location, the findings are expected to provide insights that can be applied to other pesantren-based or Islamic educational institutions with similar socio-cultural contexts. However, caution is needed when generalizing the results to setting beyond similar educational institutions due to the unique socio-religious characteristics of the research site.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an increasingly competitive educational era, educational institutions are required not only to offer academic quality but also to create strong and lasting relationships with students and parents. At Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung, the implementation of local and religious values-based marketing management strategies plays an important role in building customer loyalty. This study reveals how marketing strategies emphasizing these values can strengthen the emotional bond and trust between educational institutions and their communities. The following are the three main findings of this study:

1. The Importance of Local Values in Building Identity

The study found that integrating local values, particularly Blokagung's customs and traditions, is a strategic element in forming institutional identity at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung. These values are implemented through specific educational programs and extracurricular activities such as traditional dance, hadrah, local arts appreciation clubs, and community clean-up efforts (*gotong royong*). These initiatives are not merely cultural ornaments; they foster emotional attachment and loyalty between the school, its students, and their families. In an interview with informant A, a subject teacher and extracurricular coordinator emphasized the importance of local values:

"We always try to incorporate local values into every aspect of our education. For example, during extracurricular activities such as hadrah or Blokagung traditional dance, students learn about the culture and feel that they are part of something greater. This creates a sense of belonging for both the students and their parents."

The integration of these programs reflects the **embeddedness theory proposed by Wigren-Kristoferson et al., (2022)**, which states that institutions rooted in local social and cultural structures are more likely to gain legitimacy and community acceptance. By aligning educational practices with local traditions, the school develops a form of **value congruence (Dunaetz et al., 2022)**, increasing parental trust and loyalty.

This phenomenon is also consistent with the concept of **social capital**. Buonanno et al., (2024) identified trust and shared norms between institutions and communities as essential for sustainability. Through its engagement with traditional arts and community activities, the school fosters cultural transmission and strengthens its relational capital with stakeholders, particularly parents.

However, it should be noted that the current data reflect only one informant's perspective. Future research would benefit from triangulating these findings with insights from multiple stakeholders, such as parents, school leaders, and alumni, to provide a more comprehensive view of the impact of local values on identity formation. Additionally, it remains unclear whether this model can be generalized to other pesantren or if it is uniquely effective due to Blokagung's strong cultural identity.

The school's practice supports Chibuye & Singh's, (2024) perspective on culturally responsive education: integrating local heritage into school programs enhances both participation and parental engagement. Similarly, T. Zhang et al., (2019) highlight

that aligning institutional identity with local values can increase stakeholder loyalty, a concept commonly applied to corporations but now extended to rural Islamic education.

Figure 1 illustrates how local values are preserved and translated into school activities and relationships with stakeholders. These models are considered scientifically valid when they are based on a thorough data analysis and validated against competing institutional engagement models.

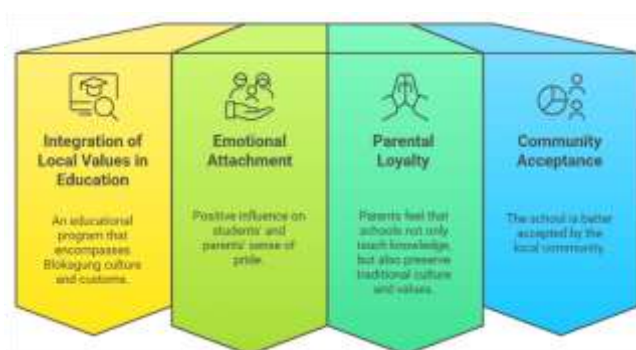


Figure 1. Preserving Local Values in Education

The implementation of local values in education at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung has proven to have a significant positive impact on the sustainability of the relationship between the school and the community. The institution's initiatives, including traditional dance and *gotong royong*, serve to introduce local culture to students while strengthening parents' sense of pride and emotional connection among parents towards the school. This not only increases parents' loyalty as customers but also helps strengthen the social bond between the school and the community, increasing the acceptance of the school within the local community. This well-integrated application of local values in education is an important example of how cultural values can function as a mechanism in the development of the identity and sustainability of educational institutions.

2. Parental Loyalty Based on Value Congruence

Parents tend to be more loyal to institutions that reflect and reinforce their own religious and cultural principles. This study found that marketing management strategies grounded in such values, when embedded in both academic and non-academic programs, can significantly enhance parental trust, a key determinant of student retention. Specifically, at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung, an institution known for integrating Islamic teachings and Blokagung's cultural heritage, value-based strategies

have been central in shaping parental perceptions and loyalty. One of the informants, referred to as Informant S, a parent of a current student, shared the following:

"Since my children have been attending school here, I have felt more at ease knowing that the education covers general subjects and aligns with the religious values we teach at home. They are taught to be devout, while at the same time respecting our culture and traditions. This makes me feel more confident that I have made the right choice for my children's future."

This testimony suggests a strong sense of value congruence between the institution and the parent, thereby reinforcing the *Value Congruence Theory of Byza et al.*, (2019) which argues that individuals tend to form deeper relationships with organizations that share their values. In this context, the alignment of religious and cultural values functions as both a differentiator and a trust-builder, thereby contributing to what Goutam, (2020), describes as "loyalty through emotional commitment."

More broadly, this finding contributes to the growing body of literature on religious and cultural branding in education. For example, Iswan & Kihara, (2022) emphasize that religious branding in educational management can significantly strengthen stakeholder engagement in faith-based communities. However, our study introduces a novel dimension by integrating local cultural identity, an area that has been largely under-explored in the context of rural Islamic educational institutions.

This integration is especially relevant in rural areas such as Blokagung, where communal traditions like *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and local arts (e.g., traditional dance, *hadrah*, and local music) are preserved and celebrated through extracurricular activities and daily institutional life. These traditions are not merely cultural ornaments; they serve as symbolic reinforcements of identity and belonging. Integrating these practices into school programming strengthens the social capital identified by Buonanno et al., (2024): the trust, norms, and networks that facilitate collective action.

Reliance on a single informant limits the generalizability of conclusions. While the parent's perspective is valuable, a more empirically robust approach would be to triangulate this view with insights from multiple parents, school administrators, and students. Future research could explore whether such loyalty remains stable over time and across different demographic backgrounds.

It is also important to recognize that this model may not apply universally to all pesantren. Those situated in more urbanized or heterogeneous cultural settings might not benefit from the same levels of embeddedness. According to Wigren-Kristoferson et al., (2022), *institutional embeddedness*—the extent to which an organization is rooted in its

local social and cultural environment—is a critical factor in legitimacy and effectiveness. When local values are absent or weakly integrated, the emotional connection between stakeholders and the institution weakens, reducing loyalty and increasing student turnover.

Thus, Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung offers both a theoretical and practical model of value-based educational management, especially in rural, community-oriented settings. Its success demonstrates how localized identity frameworks, when integrated with religious education, can foster trust and promote long-term sustainability. However, more comparative research is needed to evaluate the transferability of this model to other types of Islamic educational institutions.

3. Positive Image Through Religious and Social Programs

The institution actively organizes religious and social programs involving students and parents, including recitations and social activities. These programs strengthen the institution's image as one that prioritizes not only academic education but also character-building based on religious values. This is the main reason for customer loyalty. Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung focuses on academic aspects, but also actively organizes various religious and social programs involving students and parents. Activities such as recitation and other social programs positively impact the institution's image, strengthening its commitment to character development, particularly those based on religious values. These programs enrich students' educational experience and strengthen parental loyalty because parents feel that the school supports the development of individuals in line with their religious and social teachings. An interview with informant H, a parent of a student, revealed:

"As a parent, I am very satisfied with the religious programs organized by the school. The regular recitation activities and other social events not only enrich our children's education and shape them into better individuals. These programs make us feel more connected to the school because we see that it educates children not only in academically, but also morally and spiritually."

The interview shows that Informant H is very satisfied with the religious programs, such as regular recitation activities and other social programs. These programs enrich the children's academic education and play an important role in shaping their moral and spiritual character. The interview confirms that these programs strengthen the school's positive image as a holistic educational institution, strengthening parents' loyalty to the school.

The implementation of these programs at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung illustrates their important role in building student character. The table below further explains these aspects.

Table 1; Aspects of Religious and Social Programs

No.	Aspects	Description
1	Religious Program	Regular recitation and other religious activities involving students and parents.
2	Parental Involvement	Parents are involved in religious and social activities, strengthening their connection to the school.
3	Character Building	Religious and social programs focus on character building based on religious values.
4	Positive Image of the Institution	Schools are known as institutions that prioritize not only academics but also moral and spiritual values.
5	Parental Loyalty	Religious and social activities strengthen parents' loyalty because they feel that the school supports the development of good character.

The religious and social programs implemented by Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung enrich academic education and play a crucial role in shaping students' moral and spiritual character. Parents' participation in activities such as *pengajian* and other social events strengthens their connection of attachment to the school. This contributes to the institution's positive image as a committed provider of holistic education, covering academic, moral, and spiritual aspects. These programs strengthen parents' loyalty to the school because they feel that the institution supports their children's all-around personal development.

These findings confirm the importance of religious and social programs in building a positive image of educational institutions, which ultimately strengthens parental loyalty. From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the concept of Institutional Image described by Simpson et al., (2019), which stated that a positive reputation built through programs relevant to customer values can enhance emotional connection and trust. Religious programs such as recitation and social activities not only demonstrate the institution's commitment to building students' character and create differentiation in the competitive education sector.

This study aligns with Wongsansukcharoen, (2022) research on relationship marketing, which demonstrates that programs that foster emotional connections with

customers can lead to greater loyalty. In this context, Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung utilizes a value-based approach to build close relationships with the community. This makes the institution more than just an educational service provider; it also becomes a center of faith-based and social community.

The findings also extend the literature on value-based education. This literature suggests that a holistic education combining moral, spiritual, and academic aspects not only affects students but also creates a strong emotional connection for parents (Widodo, 2019). In comparison, similar programs focusing on community engagement have also proven effective in various global educational contexts, for example, the study conducted by Sakaue et al., (2023) on parental involvement in community-based learning. However, Muadalah Ulya's uniqueness lies in its specific application of local religious values, which contributes significantly to best practices for building a positive image of faith-based educational institutions. This suggests that this holistic approach creates loyalty and enhances the community's perception of the institution's quality.

D. CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that religious and local cultural value-based marketing management at Muadalah Ulya Darussalam Blokagung plays an important role in fostering trust and loyalty among parents towards educational institutions. The alignment between the values practiced by the school and the principles of the parents' lives creates a deep sense of trust and strengthens the belief that the education their children receive is in line with the family's expectations, both academically and spiritually. The strengthening of institutional identity through the integration of local values, such as Blokagung customs and religious activities characteristic of Islamic boarding schools, has created emotional and social closeness between the school and the community. These findings confirm that educational marketing strategies emphasizing value alignment can form long-term bonds between institutions and parents. In the context of globalization and institutional competition, a value-based approach provides significant differentiation, particularly in regions with robust cultural and religious identities. Therefore, other educational institutions seeking to build sustainable parental loyalty can learn from this approach by exploring and integrating local and religious values into all aspects of institutional life. This approach strengthens parental and community involvement and ensures that all educational programs and services reflect highly esteemed values. This strategy strengthens the institution's social standing and enhances its competitiveness by building trust and loyalty based on authentic values.

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