

Enhancing School Brand Performance Through Internal Branding Strategies (A Case Study of LPI Al-Haromain Surabaya)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of internal branding in enhancing school brand performance, mediated by brand commitment and brand loyalty, within Islamic educational institutions. A quantitative approach was applied using data from 92 educators and staff members at five school units managed by LPI Al-Haromain Surabaya. The population of this study consists of all educators and staff members of LPI Al-Haromain Surabaya, totaling fewer than 100 individuals. Therefore, saturated sampling was applied, in which all population members were included as respondents. Data analysis was conducted through Structural Equation Modeling using the PLS-SEM method. The results indicate that internal branding significantly boosts brand performance and brand commitment, while its impact on brand loyalty does not lead to improved performance. Brand commitment acts as a key mediator, whereas brand loyalty lacks significant influence without active engagement. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Resource-Based View (RBV), Social Exchange Theory, and Brand Equity Theory, the study highlights internal branding as a strategic driver of employee alignment with brand values. The study contributes to the literature by addressing a population gap, as most internal branding studies have focused on industry and higher education contexts. It further introduces the concept of educators as internal brand ambassadors and "teachers as school ambassadors," affirming their role in embodying and delivering brand values in daily interactions with students and parents.

1. INTRODUCTION

School branding strategy is an important element for Islamic educational institutions to be able to compete and build a positive image in society, especially in private schools (Sholihah, 2018). Strategic brand management plays a critical role in this context, helping schools create long-term value through structured efforts in building, measuring, and managing brand identity. As brands serve to differentiate institutions and foster both functional and emotional connections with stakeholders, school branding strategies have become essential tools for attracting and retaining students, thereby directly influencing brand performance (Kucharska, 2020).

Brand performance, as defined by Punjaisri & Wilson, (2017), the extent to which an employee performs his/her role in the brand promise delivery based on the brand standards in which the brand values are embedded. Iyer et al., (2018) classify it into both financial and non-financial outcomes. In education, especially in private Islamic institutions, brand strength has been shown to boost student enrollment by up to 20% (Soleimani et al., 2023).

This study is grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, originally introduced by Barney in 1991, which emphasizes that internal organizational assets—such as engaged employees and a culture aligned with brand values—are vital for achieving long-term competitive advantage (Barney & Hesterly, 2019). Internal branding, which involves internal communication and training to align staff with brand identity, plays a crucial role in boosting brand performance by fostering employee commitment (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017).

Social Exchange Theory explains how reciprocal relationships between organizations and employees foster emotional attachment, loyalty, and brand-supportive behaviors. Employees are more inclined to show brand commitment and loyalty when they feel acknowledged and rewarded by their organization (Gulati et al., 2023).

In addition to these viewpoints, Brand Equity Theory model highlight that brand performance is shaped by factors such as brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and the consistent delivery of value (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017). Within the educational context, this is reflected in how teachers represent the institution's values through their everyday interactions with students and parents.

This study integrates three theoretical lenses to capture the multilevel mechanisms linking internal branding and brand performance. RBV provides the strategic rationale by framing internal branding as an intangible resource. Social Exchange Theory explains the psychological process through which internal branding fosters brand commitment and loyalty. Finally, Brand Equity Theory situates these internal outcomes within the broader institutional branding context. Theories are thus not used in isolation, but form a complementary structure that

supports both variable development and mediation pathways. A conceptual diagram showing their integration is presented in Figure 1.

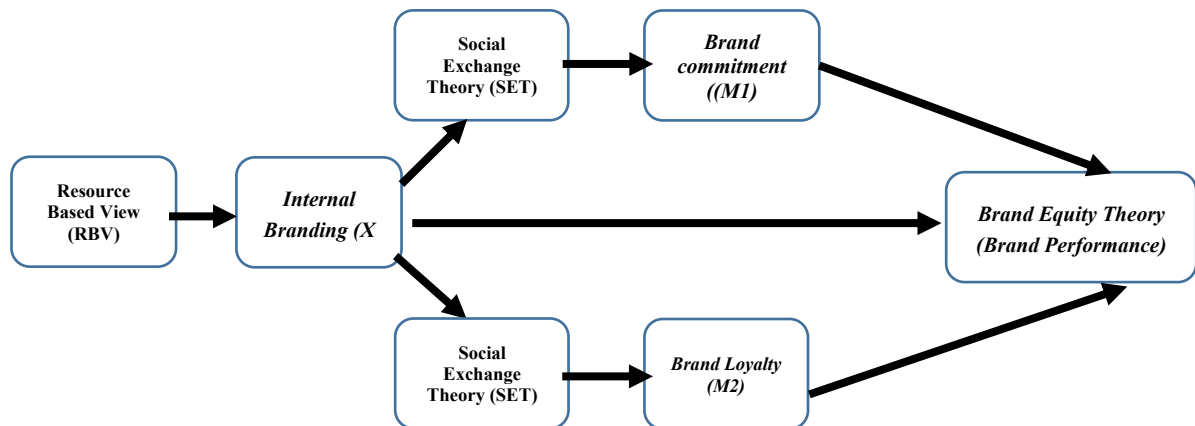


Figure 1. Conceptual framework integrating RBV, SET, and Brand Equity Theory.

Source: Research Data (Processed), 2025.

Although internal branding has been extensively studied in industrial and higher education contexts (Clark et al., 2020; El Sheikh et al., 2024; Kolla et al., 2019; Özçelik & Fındıklı, 2014), research at the school level remains scarce, particularly within Islamic institutions. However, existing international evidence confirms the positive influence of internal branding on brand performance (Aslam et al., 2023; Iyer et al., 2018; Ngo et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022), mediated by brand commitment and brand loyalty (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017; Yu et al., 2019).

This study investigates these relationships within LPI Al-Haromain Surabaya, an Islamic educational foundation managing five school units. Enrollment data reveal distinct trends: while SD Ghilmani and TK Wildani 2 exhibit stable or rising enrollment—indicating strong brand performance—KB Wildani 1, KB Wildani 2, and TK Wildani 1 show inconsistencies, suggesting potential weaknesses in internal branding execution. Preliminary surveys also reveal that 28% of staff have not received branding-related training or guidance, despite 94% of parents holding a positive perception of the school's brand.

Building on these insights, this study seeks to examine both the direct impact of internal branding on school brand performance and its indirect effects mediated by brand commitment and brand loyalty. The study contributes both theoretically—by enriching branding literature in Islamic education—and practically—by offering actionable insights for educational leaders seeking to strengthen institutional performance through internal branding.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address several key research questions: whether internal branding has a direct effect on brand performance; whether brand commitment and brand loyalty individually influence brand performance; whether internal branding contributes to the development of brand commitment and brand loyalty; and finally, whether brand commitment and brand loyalty serve as mediators in the relationship between internal branding and brand performance. The novelty of this research lies in its strategic transfer of internal branding

approaches commonly applied in the industrial sector into the educational context, particularly Islamic schools, while simultaneously introducing a dual mediating model through brand commitment and brand loyalty to enrich the theoretical framework.

RESEARCH METHODS

A quantitative approach was applied in this research. This study consists of four main variables: the independent variable (X), internal branding; two mediating variables, brand commitment (M1) and brand loyalty (M2); and the dependent variable, school brand performance (Y). Internal branding refers to the school's internal effort to build and manage its brand through brand-centered training, internal brand communication, and brand-oriented leadership. The measurement of internal branding is adapted from Zhang et al., (2022). Brand commitment, defined as employees' emotional attachment and identification with the school's brand, is measured using items adapted from Bieñkowska et al., (2020). Brand loyalty, representing employees' willingness to remain loyal to the school brand, is measured using items from Punjaisri & Wilson, (2017). School brand performance is defined as the extent to which employees understand, support, and consistently represent the brand values in their daily work, using indicators adapted from Punjaisri & Wilson, (2017) and Kucharska, (2020). Each construct in this study was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, enabling participants to indicate the extent of their agreement with the statements provided.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Research Variables

No	Variable	Indicator	Item
1	Internal Branding Strategy (X) (Punjaisri et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2022)	Brand-Centered Training (X1)	X1.1 Regular training on the school mission.
			X1.2 Regular training on the brand.
			X1.3 Regular skills development training.
			X1.4 Training on roles within the brand.
			X1.5 Training is varied and flexible.
		Internal Brand Communication (X2)	X2.1 Regular brand-related discussion meetings.
			X2.2 Brand information dissemination.
			X2.3 Inter-departmental communication.
			X2.4 Availability of brand communication channels.
			X2.5 Communication of brand performance.
		Brand-Oriented Leadership (X3)	X3.1 Supervisor as a branding role model.
			X3.2 Supervisor works in alignment with branding.
			X3.3 Supervisor is attentive to staff branding.
			X3.4 Supervisor shares branding understanding.
			X3.5 Supervisor communicates branding values.
2	Brand Commitment (M1) (Bieñkowska et al., 2020)	Personal Success for Brand Success	M1.1 Branding success is employee success.
		Pride in the Brand	M1.2 Proud to be associated with the brand.
		Brand Preference	M1.3 Brand is a personal choice.

No	Variable	Indicator	Item
3	Brand Loyalty (M2)(<i>Punjaisri et al., 2017</i>)	Long-Term Commitment	M2.1 Willingness to pursue a long-term career.
		Belief in Self-Competence	M2.2 Confidence in own capability.
4	Brand Performance (Y)(<i>Punjaisri, 2017; Kucharska, 2020</i>)	Employees Fulfill Brand Promises According to Standards (Y1)	Y1.1 Service delivery aligns with branding standards. Y1.2 Accountability according to branding standards. Y1.3 Delivering branded services to customers. Y1.4 Customer requests are handled according to branding standards.
		Positive Customer Relationships (Y2)	Y2.1 Customers rate employee performance positively. Y2.2 Customers have a positive perception. Y2.3 Customers increase business revenue. Y2.4 Customers expand organizational reach. Y2.5 Customers improve organizational profitability Y2.6 Customers enhance brand visibility.

Source: Adapted from *Punjaisri et al. (2017)*, *Zhang et al. (2022)*, *Bieñkowska et al. (2020)*, and *Kucharska (2020)*.

The population of this study consists of all educators and staff members of LPI Al-Haromain Surabaya, totaling 92 individuals. Therefore, saturated sampling was applied, in which all population members were included as respondents. This approach ensures full representation and eliminates sampling bias. The research subjects are educators and administrative staff who are directly involved in implementing internal branding strategies and embodying brand values.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires and documentation, using validated instruments adapted to the Islamic education context. The analysis included both descriptive and inferential techniques. Descriptive statistics summarized demographics and construct tendencies, while inferential analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method via SmartPLS software, which is appropriate for small sample sizes and complex models involving latent variables.

This method allows simultaneous testing of the measurement model and the structural model, including seven hypothesis testing and mediation analysis. The conceptual model of this study examines the role of internal branding in enhancing school brand performance, mediated by brand commitment and brand loyalty, the research model can be seen in Figure 2.

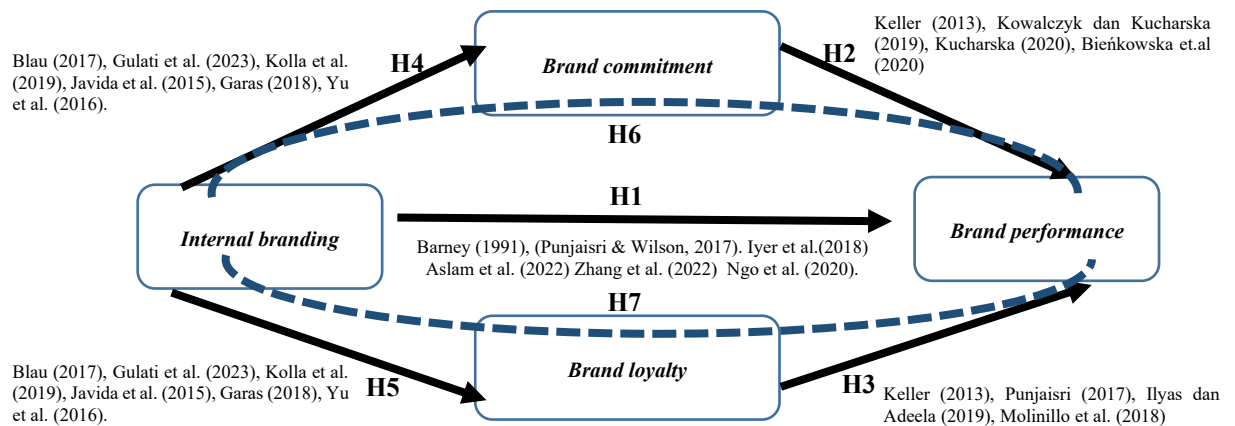


Figure 2. Model illustrating how internal branding influences brand performance through brand commitment and brand loyalty, based on RBV, SET, and Brand Equity Theory.

Source: Reserch Data (Processed), 2025

2. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized in this research to explore both direct and mediated relationships among internal branding (X), brand commitment (M1), brand loyalty (M2), and brand performance (Y) in the context of Islamic educational institutions. The study involved 92 educators and staff members from five school units affiliated with LPI Al-Haromain in Surabaya.

Based on the results of the measurement model evaluation, the research instrument demonstrates strong evidence of both validity and reliability. Convergent validity, which assesses the extent to which indicators of the same construct are highly correlated, was confirmed by two key measures, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Outer Model Evaluation – Construct Validity and Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho _a)	Composite Reliability (rho _c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Commitment	0.852	0.854	0.931	0.871
Brand Loyalty	0.913	0.914	0.958	0.920
Internal Branding	0.968	0.970	0.971	0.689
Brand Performance	0.960	0.961	0.966	0.737

Source: Research Data (Processed), 2025

All indicators showed loading factor values above 0.70, indicating that each item effectively represents its intended latent construct. Second, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming that more than half of the variance in the indicators is accounted for by the constructs themselves.

Since all data in this study were collected using self-report questionnaires from a single source, the potential for common method bias (CMB) was considered. To assess CMB, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The results showed that no single factor accounted for the majority of variance (<50%), indicating that common method variance is unlikely to bias the results significantly.

To further ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were adapted from well-established instruments in previous studies (Zhang et al., 2022; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017; Bieńkowska et al., 2020). A pilot test involving 10 respondents outside the main sample was also conducted to refine the wording, especially for items integrating value-based and religious elements.

Discriminant validity, which ensures that each construct is distinct from others within the model, was also established. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was met, as the square roots of AVE for each construct were greater than the correlations with other constructs. Additionally, cross-loading analysis showed that all indicators loaded highest on their respective constructs, further affirming discriminant validity.

In terms of reliability, the model demonstrated excellent internal consistency. All constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, indicating stable responses across indicators. Composite Reliability (CR) values were also above 0.70 for all constructs, confirming strong construct reliability. Overall, these findings provide clear support for the goodness of fit of the measurement (outer) model. Therefore, the instrument used in this study can be considered both valid and reliable for further structural model analysis

Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Coefficient (β)	p-value	Result
H1	Internal Branding → Brand Performance	0.360	0.000	Supported
H2	Brand Commitment → Brand Performance	0.478	0.000	Supported
H3	Brand Loyalty → Brand Performance	0.070	0.517	Not Supported
H4	Internal Branding → Brand Commitment	0.740	0.000	Supported
H5	Internal Branding → Brand Loyalty	0.622	0.000	Supported
H6	Internal Branding → Brand Performance (via Brand Commitment)	0.354 (indirect)	0.000	Supported
H7	Internal Branding → Brand Performance (via Brand Loyalty)	0.043 (indirect)	>0.05	Not Supported

Source: Research Data (Processed), 2025

As summarized in Table 3, hypotheses H1, H2, H4, H5, and H6 were supported, showing significant direct and indirect relationships among the variables. However, hypotheses H3 and H7—both involving the role of brand loyalty in predicting brand performance—were not supported. This suggests that while internal branding strengthens brand loyalty, such loyalty does not translate into meaningful performance improvements unless accompanied by deeper engagement or commitment. These relationships are visually presented in the inner model results shown in Figure 3.

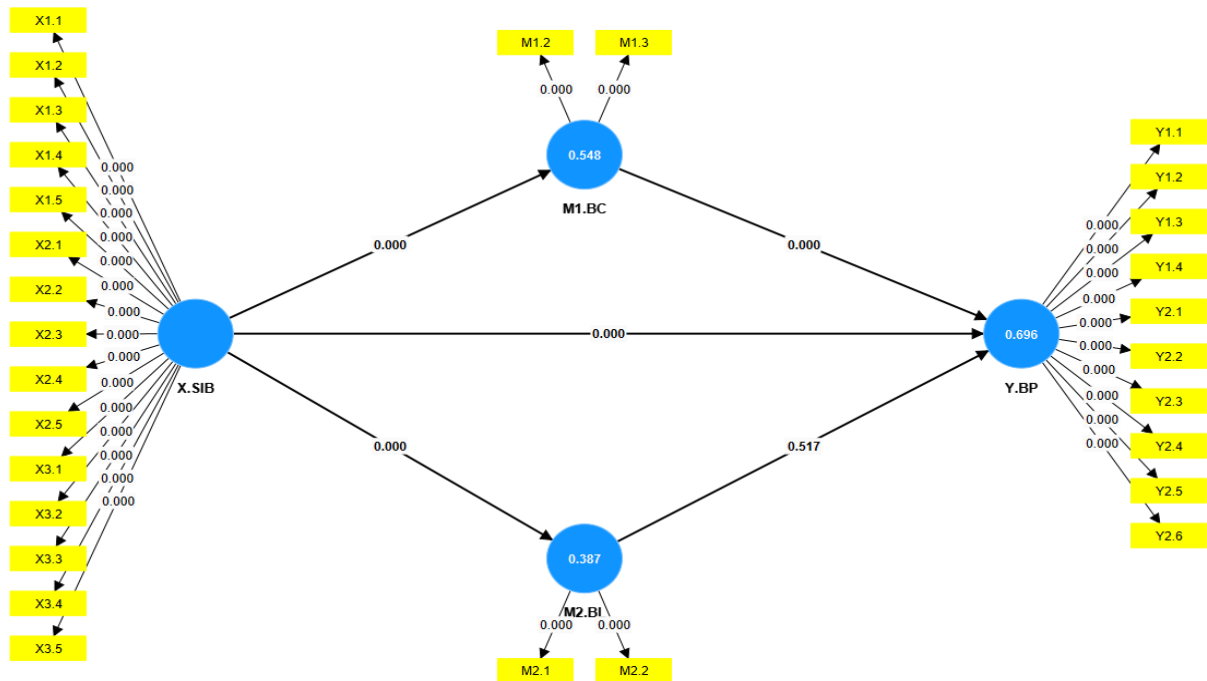


Figure 3. Inner Model Results from SEM-PLS Analysis Showing The Relationships Among Internal Branding, Brand Commitment, Brand Loyalty, And Brand Performance.

Source: Research Data (Processed), 2025

The results align with the principles of the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, affirming that internal capabilities such as committed and loyal staff can become valuable strategic resources for educational institutions. The significant impact of internal branding on both brand commitment and brand performance indicates that fostering shared values, identity, and a sense of purpose among educators is crucial.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017) also finds support in this context. Educators who perceive value and recognition from the institution through structured internal branding initiatives demonstrate higher emotional commitment. However, the non-significant impact of brand loyalty on performance suggests that passive loyalty without active engagement does not enhance brand outcomes.

This study confirms brand equity theory, especially the importance of internal stakeholder alignment. Schools where teachers internalize and embody the institution's core values are better positioned to build trust and loyalty among parents and the broader community.

Internal Branding and Brand Performance. The findings of this study reveal that internal branding has a significant and positive influence on school brand performance, with a path coefficient of 0.608 and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This confirms that the more effectively an educational institution implements internal branding strategies, the stronger the public per-

ception of the school's brand performance becomes. In the context of Islamic education, internal branding extends beyond institutional messaging to include the integration of spiritual values, especially Qur'anic principles, into teachers' daily practices.

Qualitative data supports this quantitative outcome: consistent teacher training on Qur'an instruction, such as the KKG program at SD Ghilmani, represents a structured brand-centered training initiative. Although branding is not always formally labeled in these settings, the repeated reinforcement of institutional values in teacher development programs functions as a strategic branding approach.

Furthermore, school principals serve as internal brand ambassadors, reinforcing brand values through leadership and daily interactions. The positive relationships between teachers and parents, built on trust, patience, and shared values, contribute significantly to the school's brand reputation and parent loyalty—factors that were clearly articulated in stakeholder interviews. Thus, internal branding not only cultivates internal cohesion but also translates into external credibility. Ultimately, this study affirms that internal branding strategies help strengthen institutional identity and performance, with teachers playing a central role as brand ambassadors.

Brand Commitment and Brand Performance. The results of Hypothesis 2 testing reveal that brand commitment significantly influences brand performance, with a coefficient of 0.623 and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that educators' emotional and moral attachment to the institution's values and vision plays a key role in shaping positive perceptions of school brand performance. In Islamic educational settings, brand commitment extends beyond loyalty to employment—it reflects a deep identification with the school's mission of *dakwah* and value-based education. Qualitative insights support this finding, showing that regular spiritual forums, such as the *taklim* with a respected mentor and open internal dialogues like *info sekolah*, foster a strong sense of belonging and shared purpose among teachers. These practices reinforce institutional identity and motivate teachers to embody the school's brand values in their everyday roles. Hence, brand commitment, rooted in value alignment and participatory culture, serves as a vital driver of school brand performance.

Brand Loyalty and Brand Performance. The results of Hypothesis 3 testing indicate that brand loyalty does not have a significant effect on brand performance, with a coefficient of 0.241 and a p-value of 0.517. This suggests that although teachers may demonstrate long-term commitment and emotional attachment to the institution, such loyalty does not necessarily translate into active contributions to the school's brand performance. In many cases, teacher loyalty manifests passively—through job stability and comfort with institutional culture—without driving innovation, excellence, or participation in strategic branding efforts. Interviews with school leaders confirm this, revealing that some long-serving staff perform only to minimum standards and show low responsiveness to institutional quality demands. This type of loyalty, while valuable for organizational continuity, lacks the proactive engagement needed to strengthen the school's brand. Therefore, in the educational context, loyalty alone is insufficient to enhance brand performance unless it is accompanied by value alignment, motivation, and a sense of accountability. These findings highlight the need for strategic internal branding and

performance management to ensure that loyalty contributes meaningfully to institutional reputation and growth.

The results of H3 show that brand loyalty has no significant effect on brand performance. This may reflect the presence of passive loyalty—emotional attachment without proactive brand-supportive actions. In Islamic school settings like LPI Al-Haromain, such loyalty may stem from moral alignment rather than active engagement. Additionally, organizational culture dynamics could play a role. In cultures where hierarchy is strong and innovation is not structurally encouraged, loyal employees may default to routines and minimum performance standards. Cultural factors such as hierarchical structure and lack of innovation incentives may further limit impact. These findings highlight the need to transform passive loyalty into active contribution through leadership, feedback, and recognition.

Internal Branding, Brand Commitment, and Brand Loyalty. Hypothesis 4 testing revealed a substantial and statistically significant relationship between internal branding and brand commitment, evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.717 and a p-value of 0.000. This confirms that consistent internal branding strategies effectively build emotional attachment and professional commitment among educators. In the school context, brand commitment goes beyond loyalty—it reflects teachers' personal alignment with the institution's values and mission. A key factor is brand-oriented leadership, particularly leaders who genuinely care about their staff. Interviews reveal that school leaders actively mentor new or underperforming teachers, guiding them not only in skill development but also in internalizing the institution's vision. Such personal engagement fosters deeper value alignment and long-term commitment. Additionally, Hypothesis 5 confirms that internal branding also significantly influences brand loyalty (coefficient = 0.608; $p = 0.000$), suggesting that caring leadership helps establish relational loyalty—an essential foundation for institutional sustainability, even if it doesn't directly boost brand performance.

Mediation Analysis. The test of Hypothesis 6 shows that brand commitment significantly mediates the relationship between internal branding and brand performance (indirect effect = 0.354). This indicates that internal branding impacts brand performance not only directly but also through strengthening educators' commitment to the institution's values and goals. In contrast, Hypothesis 7 reveals that brand loyalty does not significantly mediate this relationship (indirect effect = 0.043), suggesting that while internal branding increases loyalty, it may remain affective rather than leading to concrete actions that enhance brand performance.

Main Research Findings. Overall, the findings highlight internal branding as a central strategy in shaping school image and reputation by aligning organizational values with individual behavior. Importantly, the findings highlight the role of teachers as both internal brand ambassadors and external representatives. The internal branding process equips teachers not only to

understand but also to reflect the school's mission and identity in their daily conduct. This reinforces the concept of the "teacher as school ambassador," demonstrating that teacher behavior directly influences how the brand is perceived by students, parents, and the wider community.

This research also contributes to the literature by addressing a population gap. While internal branding has been widely studied in industrial and higher education contexts (Iyer et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022), its application in primary Islamic education remains underexplored. The results demonstrate the relevance of these strategies in non-commercial settings, revealing that structured internal branding can support performance even in value-driven institutions.

Theoretical Implications. The integration of three management theories in this research—Resource-Based View (RBV), Social Exchange Theory, and Brand Equity Theory—has provided a comprehensive lens through which the internal branding strategy is analyzed. The dual-mediation model in this study is not a new theoretical integration but a contextual extension of existing frameworks. By positioning brand commitment and brand loyalty as mediators between internal branding and brand performance, the model illustrates how internal capabilities drive brand outcomes. It offers a refined application of these theories within the specific context of Islamic educational institutions.

The findings underscore that internal branding holds a strategic role in managing human resources, strengthening social relations within the organization, and holistically constructing brand perception. This study makes several scholarly contributions. First, it extends the application of the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory to Islamic basic education by demonstrating that human resources grounded in institutional values can function as a source of competitive advantage. Second, it affirms the reciprocity mechanism of Social Exchange Theory through internal branding practices focused on value reinforcement and leadership care. Third, it broadens the application of Brand Equity Theory within educational settings by highlighting the critical role of internal actors in shaping and sustaining institutional brand equity.

Consequently, the results not only support existing theoretical frameworks but also enrich the understanding of branding strategies within value-based, non-commercial organizations such as Islamic educational institutions.

This study contributes to both theoretical and practical discourses on branding strategy. While most internal branding research has focused on industrial or higher education sectors, this study validates the relevance of internal branding in school-level educational institutions. Offering empirical evidence that internal branding principles and mechanisms can be contextually adapted to primary education institutions with significant outcomes on teacher commitment and perceptions of brand performance. Highlighting the importance of value-driven approaches and participatory leadership in fostering brand commitment among teachers in Islamic schools. This research not only expands the literature on branding strategies but also provides actionable insights for schools to enhance organizational quality and competitiveness through internal, value-oriented approaches.

Practical Implications. The results offer several strategic implications for the leadership and management of LPI Haromain in designing internal policies, human resource development, and enhancing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. First, internal branding should be positioned as the foundation for institutional culture. Institutional values must be communicated systematically and consistently to all school personnel, especially teachers and staff. Rather than being treated as a ceremonial activity, internal branding should serve as a core component of human resource management. Institutions across all educational levels should integrate Islamic principles and the school's vision into internal programs such as teacher training and policy development.

Second, school leaders must be empowered as internal brand ambassadors. Principals are not just administrators but also custodians of institutional values and culture. They need value-based leadership skills to align the foundation's vision with everyday practices. Personalized communication with teachers to convey values and expectations is essential but often overlooked. LPI Haromain can develop specialized training programs to prepare principals as internal branding agents who embed the institution's identity into school culture.

Third, teachers should be seen as the public face of the institution. Their daily interactions with students and parents directly reflect the school's brand image. When teachers internalize institutional values, these values are naturally communicated in their relationships with families. Therefore, teacher development must move beyond pedagogy to foster awareness of their role as brand ambassadors.

Fourth, brand commitment should be a central component of teacher development. As a proven mediator between internal branding and brand performance, brand commitment must be cultivated intentionally. This can be achieved through value-based learning forums, one-on-one mentoring, and recognition programs that reward teachers' alignment with the school's identity and goals.

Fifth, the concept of loyalty should go beyond tenure. Long service does not always translate to high performance or brand contribution. LPI Haromain should promote active loyalty, characterized by initiative, participation in school values, and growth mindset. Loyalty indicators should focus on value-based contributions rather than mere years of service.

Lastly, internal branding at LPI Haromain should be deeply rooted in Islamic values. Instead of adopting generic corporate approaches, branding strategies must reflect the principles of da'wah, trust (amanah), and brotherhood (ukhuwah). This makes value internalization more meaningful and context-specific. Branding does not always require corporate language; rather, consistent expression of values in everyday actions is more impactful. School leaders must ensure these values are embedded in routines and behaviors, not just displayed as slogans on the walls.

Beyond LPI Haromain, the study also contributes strategically to the broader management of schools in Indonesia, particularly in terms of quality competition, public trust, and the growing demand for teacher professionalism. The study affirms that internal branding—originally developed in industrial contexts—can be meaningfully and effectively adapted for educational institutions, particularly at the early childhood and primary levels. This presents a compelling argument that schools, as service organizations, also require strategic branding approaches to build reputation and trust.

Findings demonstrate that a school's reputation is shaped not only by academic outcomes but also by how educators and staff embody institutional values, culture, and service. As such, schools must design teacher training and evaluation systems that assess both technical performance and the extent to which staff represent the school's brand values. Local governments, foundations, and educational stakeholders can use these findings as a foundation for developing education policies focused on organizational culture, school identity, and human resource engagement.

3. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

This study underscores the strategic importance of internal branding in Islamic educational institutions. By building strong internal cohesion and commitment, schools can significantly enhance their brand performance. Brand commitment emerges as a critical mediator, while brand loyalty requires deeper engagement to translate into brand performance.

Practically, the findings suggest that school leaders should invest in structured internal branding programs, including value-based training, inclusive leadership, and internal communication. These initiatives not only enhance staff alignment but also promote a culture where educators serve as both internal brand ambassadors and public-facing school ambassadors.

Theoretically, the integration of RBV, Social Exchange Theory, and Brand Equity Theory into the educational context enriches our understanding of branding in non-profit, value-based institutions. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and comparative studies across different types of educational settings to deepen insights.

In summary, this research offers a renewed perspective that branding is not exclusive to products or corporations; it is also a strategic necessity for educational institutions. In an increasingly competitive educational landscape, internal branding forms the backbone of sustained performance, loyalty, and institutional reputation. Therefore, these findings should inspire reflection and concrete action among school leaders to manage values as a strategic asset and position human resources as the true ambassadors of the brand.

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