

Creative Marketing Strategies in Building the Brand Image of Value-Based Educational Institutions

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of creative marketing strategies in building the brand image of value-based educational institutions. Specifically, it examines digital creative execution, customer retention strategies, and the mediating role of consumer insight alignment. The research employed a qualitative case study approach conducted at Labs School Kaizen, a value-based educational institution in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 informants consisting of management, marketing staff, and parents. This was complemented by digital activity observation and documentation analysis of 124 social media posts over a six-month period. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings reveal that value-based positioning emerges as the dominant strategy in differentiating the institution through the integration of spiritual and academic values. Digital creative execution is reflected in student storytelling content, parenting education content, and parent testimonials, which collectively enhance emotional engagement and institutional credibility. Furthermore, customer retention strategies implemented through relational communication, parenting webinars, and parent communities significantly strengthen trust, loyalty, and word-of-mouth advocacy. The study also demonstrates that consumer insight alignment particularly parents' concerns about moral degradation and their aspirations for academic-spiritual integration plays a crucial mediating role in reinforcing the relationship between creative marketing strategies and brand image formation. This study contributes to the literature by extending existing marketing communication theories to incorporate a values-driven perspective in educational branding. Practically, the findings advise educational managers to prioritize parenting education content and parent-community building as core branding tools, shifting from transactional promotions to trust-based relationship management.

Keywords: *Creative Marketing, Brand Image, Consumer Insight Alignment, Customer Retention, Value-Based Education.*

Introduction

The rapid growth of the education sector in Indonesia has created increasingly intense competition among educational institutions, particularly among value-based institutions that integrate academic achievement with moral and spiritual development. The expansion of private schools and faith-based institutions has shifted competition beyond curriculum quality and infrastructure toward the ability of institutions to build a strong institutional reputation in the public sphere. In this context, marketing communication plays a strategic role in shaping the institutional brand image and influencing parents' decisions when selecting schools for their children (Aaker, 2018; Keller, 2017). Unlike commercial industries, educational institutions must communicate not only functional benefits such as academic excellence but

also emotional and value-based aspects including character development, ethical formation, and long-term life preparation. The concept of creative marketing has emerged from the development of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), which emphasizes the integration of consistent messaging across multiple communication channels (Batra & Keller, 2016; Keller, 2016).

In the digital era, educational institutions increasingly rely on creative storytelling, social media engagement, and experiential communication to attract and maintain relationships with stakeholders (Kotler et al., 2021; Stephen, 2016; Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Previous studies have shown that marketing communication strategies significantly influence brand perception and consumer decision-making (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2017). For example, research on educational marketing indicates that brand image strongly affects parents' school selection decisions, while digital communication platforms have become essential tools for shaping institutional reputation and increasing public trust.

Several recent studies highlight the importance of digital marketing and social media engagement in educational institutions. These specific digital executions have been found to improve audience interaction and strengthen emotional connections with prospective students and parents, moving beyond mere content delivery to foster deeper engagement (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Godey et al., 2016). Other studies also emphasize the importance of customer retention strategies in the education sector, where long-term relationships with parents and alumni contribute significantly to institutional reputation and word-of-mouth promotion (Hollebeek et al., 2017; Ismail, 2017; Dwivedi, 2015). However, many of these studies tend to focus on specific aspects of marketing communication such as digital promotion, brand image formation, or customer loyalty without integrating them into a comprehensive conceptual framework.

Despite the growing body of research on educational marketing communication, a critical gap remains in understanding how these diverse strategies function cohesively. What is fundamentally missing from the current literature is a unified conceptual framework. Previous studies often analyze creative marketing strategy, digital creative execution, and customer retention in isolation (Nguyen et al., 2015; Rauschnabel et al., 2019), failing to prioritize how they interact. Furthermore, the mediating role of consumer insight alignment in bridging these strategies to form a strong brand image has been largely overlooked. Additionally, customer retention is frequently framed merely as an outcome of satisfaction or loyalty, rather than being examined as an integral, active component of creative marketing communication that reinforces brand image formation.

Based on these limitations, this study aims to explore how creative marketing strategies contribute to the formation of brand image in value-based educational institutions by integrating strategic, digital, relational, and consumer insight dimensions. The fundamental novelty of this research lies in proposing an integrative conceptual model that explicitly links creative marketing strategy, digital creative execution, consumer insight alignment, and customer retention strategy in explaining the formation of brand image in value-based educational institutions. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions: (1) How does creative marketing strategy influence the brand image of value-based educational institutions? (2) How does digital creative execution contribute to strengthening institutional brand image? (3) What role does customer retention strategy play in reinforcing brand image? and (4) How does consumer insight alignment mediate the relationship between creative marketing strategies and brand image formation? This study contributes both theoretically to

the literature on educational marketing communication and practically to educational managers seeking to build sustainable and trust-based institutional branding.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore the implementation of creative marketing strategies in building the brand image of value-based educational institutions. The qualitative case study design was considered appropriate because the research aimed to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, specifically how a unique value-based branding model operates under the complex dynamics of digital marketing and parent-school relationships, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative surveys (Yin, 2018). Through this design, the study was able to examine the interaction between creative marketing strategy, digital creative execution, customer retention strategy, and consumer insight alignment within a real institutional context.

The research was conducted at Labs School Kaizen, a value-based educational institution that actively implements digital marketing communication strategies and value-oriented branding. The subjects of this research consisted of key stakeholders who were directly involved in marketing communication activities and institutional decision-making. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria: (1) management and marketing staff must have a minimum of two years of active involvement in designing the school's communication strategy; and (2) parents must have enrolled their children for at least one academic year and actively follow the school's social media platforms. A total of 15 informants participated in this study, consisting of school management, marketing and communication staff, teachers involved in branding activities, and parents of students. This sampling technique was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information from individuals who possess direct experience with the institution's marketing communication strategies.

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted offline at the school premises, lasting between 45 to 60 minutes per session. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informants' consent to explore their perspectives regarding creative marketing strategy formulation, digital campaign implementation, customer retention activities, and parental insight regarding educational expectations. Unstructured, non-participant observations were carried out to examine the implementation of digital marketing activities, social media engagement, and communication practices between the institution and parents, focusing on the organic flow of interaction without researcher interference. In addition, documentation analysis was conducted on institutional promotional materials, strategic communication documents, and digital marketing content. The documentation analysis procedure utilized a content-thematic approach, where visual and textual elements of the documents were systematically extracted and aligned with the main research variables. As part of the documentation process, the researcher analyzed 124 social media posts published by the institution over a six-month period in order to understand patterns of digital creative execution and communication themes.

The data collected in this research were analyzed using the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. The analysis consisted of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2018). During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts and observational notes were subjected to open

coding to identify initial concepts, followed by axial coding to categorize these concepts into relevant thematic patterns based on the core variables. The data display stage involved organizing the categorized data into thematic matrices to identify relationships between variables such as creative marketing strategy, digital execution, consumer insight alignment, and brand image formation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through continuous comparison between interview findings, observational data, and documentation. To ensure the reliability and credibility of the findings, the researcher employed method triangulation (cross-verifying interviews with observation and document data) and member checking, where preliminary findings were returned to key informants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. This systematic analytical procedure enabled the researcher to comprehensively interpret the role of creative marketing strategies in strengthening the brand image of value-based educational institutions.

Results

The Influence of Creative Marketing Strategy on the Brand Image of Value-Based Educational Institutions

The analysis of interview data from 15 informants consisting of 5 management representatives (33%), 4 marketing staff (27%), and 6 parents (40%) indicates that value-based creative marketing strategies play a dominant role in shaping the brand image of the institution. From a total of 286 coded statements obtained during the data analysis process, several major themes emerged through open coding procedures.

Table 1. Intensity of Theme Occurrence (Open Coding)

Representative Statement	Initial Code	Number of Citations	Percentage of 286
"We always emphasize moral values before academic achievement."	Value-based positioning	78	27.30%
"Most of our content tells the stories of students' journeys."	Emotional storytelling	46	16.00%
"Parents are afraid their children will be influenced by negative social environments."	Moral anxiety	64	22.40%
"We regularly organize online parenting classes."	Digital retention strategy	49	17.10%
"This school is known as a modern tahfidz school."	Religious-academic image	69	24.10%

The data indicate that value-based positioning appeared most frequently with 78 coded citations (27.30%). This finding shows that the institution consistently emphasizes moral and spiritual values as its primary positioning strategy. Another important theme emerging from the analysis is religious-academic image (24.10%), which reflects how stakeholders perceive the institution as combining religious education with modern academic approaches. The theme of moral anxiety (22.40%) also emerged strongly in parents' statements, indicating that parental concerns about children's moral development and social influences significantly shape school selection decisions.

Additionally, digital retention strategy (17.10%) and emotional storytelling (16.00%) were also identified as relevant elements in the institution's creative marketing communication. When categorized conceptually, the findings show the following distribution: value-based positioning (27.3%), big idea and core narrative (18.1%), emotional storytelling (16.0%), institutional differentiation (14.3%), and brand image perception (24.1%). The theme of

spiritual values as institutional differentiation appeared in 13 of the 15 informants (87%), indicating a strong consistency in the perception of the institution's identity.

Creative Execution in the Digital Era in Building Brand Image

Creative execution was analyzed through documentation of the institution's digital marketing content over a six-month period, covering a total of 124 social media posts. The analysis identified several major content categories used by the institution in its digital marketing strategy.

Table 2. Digital Content Composition over Six Months (n = 124 posts)

No	Content Type	Number	Percentage
1	Student storytelling	35	28%
2	Parenting education	27	22%
3	Parent testimonials	22	18%
4	Academic information	21	17%
5	Events and experiential activities	19	15%
Total		124	100%

The findings show that student storytelling content dominates the digital campaign strategy (28%), followed by parenting education (22%) and parent testimonials (18%). These results indicate that the institution prioritizes emotional engagement and relational communication rather than conventional promotional strategies.

Customer Retention Strategy in Strengthening Institutional Brand Image

Customer retention strategies were analyzed through observations of parental communication platforms, institutional activities, and community engagement initiatives. The institution maintains three active WhatsApp parent groups with a total of 248 members and organizes six parenting webinars within one academic semester. Interaction analysis shows that the average number of daily interactions in parent groups ranges between 45 and 60 messages. Webinar participation rates reach approximately 72% of active parents, indicating high levels of engagement. Additionally, 64% of newly enrolled parents reported that they learned about the school through word-of-mouth recommendations. Coding analysis also identified 49 statements related to trust building and 37 statements related to parental loyalty, indicating that relational communication strategies significantly contribute to strengthening institutional brand equity.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Insight Alignment

The findings also show that creative marketing strategies do not automatically generate a strong brand image unless they align with parental insights and expectations. Interviews with six parent informants revealed several dominant concerns influencing school selection decisions.

Table 3. Identification of Parental Pain Points

No	Pain Point Dimension	Number of Informants (n=6)	Percentage
1	Concern about children's moral degradation	5	83%
2	Influence of digital media and peer environment	4	67%
3	Lack of character education in public schools	3-4	58%

In addition to these concerns, several dominant parental aspirations were identified. All informants (100%) expressed the expectation that schools should integrate academic excellence with moral and character education. Around 75% of parents expected systematic

monitoring of students' character development, while 67% emphasized the importance of transparent communication between the institution and parents.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that creative marketing strategies grounded in value-based positioning play a pivotal role in shaping the brand image of value-based educational institutions. The prominence of value-based positioning themes indicates that institutional differentiation is no longer constructed solely through academic performance indicators, but increasingly through the integration of spiritual values, moral education, and character-building elements. This suggests that branding in the educational sector operates within a broader socio-cultural and emotional framework, where parents seek alignment between institutional values and their personal aspirations for their children. This finding is consistent with brand theory, which posits that brand image is formed through strong, favorable, and unique associations that resonate with consumers' beliefs and values (Aaker, 2018; Keller, 2017).

In this context, value-based educational institutions are able to create a distinctive positioning by embedding ideological and ethical dimensions into their brand identity. Unlike conventional schools that emphasize academic outcomes as the primary differentiator, value-based institutions leverage symbolic meaning such as spirituality, discipline, and moral integrity to establish a deeper connection with their target audience. This reinforces the argument that contemporary branding, particularly in service industries, requires the integration of functional and emotional value propositions. Moreover, the findings reveal that digital creative execution plays a significant role in strengthening emotional engagement between institutions and their stakeholders. The dominance of storytelling-based content indicates that narrative-driven communication is more effective in capturing attention and fostering emotional bonds compared to traditional promotional messages. Storytelling allows institutions to present authentic experiences, highlight student development journeys, and demonstrate the practical implementation of institutional values. As a result, stakeholders are not only informed but also emotionally involved in the institution's narrative. This aligns with the principles of integrated marketing communication (IMC), which emphasize the importance of delivering consistent, coherent, and emotionally meaningful messages across multiple communication channels (Batra & Keller, 2016; Keller, 2016).

In the digital era, where audiences are increasingly exposed to information overload, emotionally engaging content becomes a key differentiator. The use of storytelling, testimonials, and educational content reflects a shift from transactional marketing to engagement-based communication strategies. This shift is particularly relevant in educational contexts, where decision-making processes are often influenced by emotional considerations and long-term aspirations rather than immediate functional benefits. In addition, the study highlights the critical role of customer retention strategies in reinforcing brand image. The findings show that relational communication particularly through parental communities, webinars, and continuous interaction significantly contributes to the development of trust and loyalty. This suggests that brand image is not only formed during the initial stages of customer acquisition but is continuously shaped and reinforced through ongoing relationships. The strong influence of word-of-mouth recommendations further underscores the importance of relational networks in educational marketing. This finding is in line with the brand equity framework, which identifies trust and loyalty as fundamental components of sustainable brand

strength (Hollebeek et al., 2017; Ismail, 2017). In the context of value-based educational institutions, trust is built through consistent delivery of promised values, transparent communication, and meaningful engagement with parents.

Loyalty, on the other hand, is reflected in continued enrollment, active participation in institutional programs, and voluntary advocacy through recommendations. This highlights the need for institutions to adopt a long-term relational perspective rather than focusing solely on short-term enrollment targets. Furthermore, the findings suggest that customer retention strategies are closely linked to emotional satisfaction and perceived value congruence. When parents perceive that the institution genuinely understands and supports their expectations particularly in terms of moral and character development they are more likely to develop a strong emotional attachment to the brand. This emotional attachment enhances not only satisfaction but also commitment, leading to stronger and more sustainable relationships. Therefore, retention strategies should be viewed as strategic investments in brand building rather than merely operational efforts to maintain enrollment numbers. A key contribution of this study lies in identifying the mediating role of consumer insight alignment in the relationship between creative marketing strategies and brand image formation.

The results indicate that the effectiveness of marketing strategies is significantly influenced by the extent to which they align with the underlying concerns, values, and expectations of parents. In this case, parental concerns about moral degradation, character formation, and the integration of academic and spiritual education emerge as dominant themes influencing their perceptions. When marketing messages successfully address these concerns, they create a strong sense of relevance and emotional resonance. This alignment enhances the effectiveness of communication by increasing both cognitive acceptance and emotional engagement. Consequently, the brand is not only recognized but also internalized as a meaningful and trustworthy choice. On the contrary, when there is a mismatch between institutional messaging and consumer insights, the impact of marketing efforts is weakened. Messages may generate awareness, but they fail to create lasting impressions or influence decision-making processes. This finding underscores the importance of adopting a consumer-centric approach in educational marketing. Institutions must continuously explore and understand the evolving needs, expectations, and concerns of parents through systematic research and feedback mechanisms.

By doing so, they can develop more targeted and relevant communication strategies that resonate with their audience. This perspective aligns with contemporary marketing approaches that emphasize personalization, data-driven decision-making, and value co-creation between organizations and consumers. In addition, the study highlights the interdependence between strategic positioning, digital execution, relational communication, and consumer insight alignment. These elements function as an integrated system that collectively shapes brand image. Strategic positioning provides the foundation by defining the institution's core values and identity. Digital creative execution translates these values into engaging and accessible content. Relational communication ensures continuous interaction and trust-building, while consumer insight alignment ensures that all communication remains relevant and impactful. The integration of these elements suggests that effective branding in value-based educational institutions requires a holistic and coordinated approach. Fragmented or inconsistent strategies may weaken brand coherence and reduce the overall effectiveness of marketing efforts. Therefore, institutions must ensure that all aspects of their marketing activities are aligned with their core values and stakeholder expectations. Overall, the findings confirm that in value-based educational institutions, brand image is a multidimensional construct shaped by

a combination of value communication, emotional engagement, relational interaction, and consumer insight alignment.

This extends existing branding and marketing communication theories by highlighting the importance of value-driven strategies in the educational context. It also provides practical implications for educational managers, emphasizing the need to design integrated, consistent, and stakeholder-oriented marketing strategies. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that successful brand building in value-based educational institutions requires more than conventional promotional activities. It necessitates a deep understanding of stakeholder values, consistent communication of institutional identity, and sustained relational engagement. By integrating these elements, institutions can develop a strong, credible, and sustainable brand image that resonates with parents and supports long-term organizational success.

Conclusion

This study analyzed how creative marketing strategies build the brand image of value-based educational institutions. Four key conclusions emerged. First, value-driven positioning—integrating spiritual values with academic excellence—creates a distinctive identity that fosters deep emotional connections with parents. Second, digital creative execution, particularly through storytelling and parenting education content, enhances institutional credibility and makes educational values highly relatable. Third, customer retention strategies implemented via interactive parent communities and webinars actively build trust, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth. Fourth, consumer insight alignment mediates this process; when marketing strategies explicitly address parents' concerns about moral degradation and character education, overall branding effectiveness increases significantly.

Theoretically, this research extends traditional service marketing literature by shifting from a functional-benefit approach to a values-driven model, positioning parent-school alignment on moral and spiritual development as the core driver of brand image. Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its single-case qualitative design and its primary focus on parental and institutional perspectives, which restricts generalizability. To address this, future research should employ quantitative methods across multiple institutions to statistically test the mediating role of consumer insight alignment. Additionally, incorporating alumni and student perspectives would help evaluate the long-term impact of value-based branding. Practically, this study provides actionable insights for educational managers. To build sustainable and trust-based relationships, institutions should transition away from traditional hard-selling promotional tactics and instead prioritize digital storytelling and interactive parenting webinars that deeply resonate with stakeholders' core values.

Acknowledgment

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