

# Quality Improvement As A Strategy to Build Pesantren's Brand Credibility

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## ARTICLE INFO

### *Keywords:*

Quality improvement;  
Credibility; Pesantren;  
Quality Service

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### *Article history:*

Received 2021-08-14

Revised 2021-11-12

Accepted 2022-01-17

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to understand quality improvement as a strategy to build brand credibility in one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo Regency. This research uses a qualitative case study approach. Interviews, observations, and documentation are used to obtain data in the field. The informants in this study consisted of pesantren leaders, administrators, teachers, students, and alumni. Milles and Huberman's design is used in the data analysis, including collecting data, reducing it, presenting it, and drawing conclusions. The results showed that the quality improvement carried out by one of the pesantren in Probolinggo Regency in building its brand credibility was through; the benefit of technology integration, harmonized relationship with alumni, cashless, service quality, and benchmarking. This study has implications for the importance of the credibility of pesantren in increasing bargaining power and public trust so that pesantren are no longer used as educational institutions that are underestimated.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding school implicitly connotes a traditional Islamic educational institution, but that does not mean that all Islamic boarding schools are closed with innovation (Najili, 2018; Muali, Rofiki, & Sholeh, 2021; Arif & Pratama, 2021). The presence of Islamic boarding schools in the community initially did not only function as educational institutions but also as public teaching institutions and even Islam. Islamic boarding schools have many advantages and uniqueness compared to formal educational institutions (Angga, 2019; Raupu et al., 2021). With the development of the era, the position of Islamic boarding schools is increasingly in demand by the wider community. Therefore quality improvement strategies must continue to be carried out (Nuraeni & Irawan, 2021). Change is a new challenge for pesantren to innovate so that pesantren education can exist and have a competitive

advantage in meeting the complexities of community demands and the times and global developments (Baharun & Intania, 2020; Yunus et al., 2019).

Quality improvement must continue to be done so that the image of the pesantren still exists in the community (Rahman, 2020). Brands significantly impact people's perceptions of an educational institution's positive and negative aspects, which influences their decision to participate in an educational institution (Dwiayama and Nurhasanah 2020). As this research site, one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo previously lacked the awareness to build brand sustainability and develop management quality. Meanwhile, quality development must continue to be carried out by the times so that the wider community easily recognizes pesantren in Probolinggo. Management that is left behind will experience insignificant development and impact the quality of the pesantren so that the achievements that have been achieved cannot be recognized and appreciated. Service quality will encourage customers to commit to the products or services provided by an organization (Angga, 2019).

However, currently, pesantren in Probolinggo Regency can compete with other superior Islamic boarding schools. This is evidenced by the many services provided by the pesantren to students and the community as a strategic step to positively impact the pesantren. These services include; educational services, cashless payment services, foster care services, health services, religious guidance services for students, counselling services, and various other services, which make customers feel at home and satisfied with the offerings of this pesantren. Through various strategic steps the pesantren takes, it can attract and make people interested in the various services it displays. The pesantren strives to continue to innovate and improvise by the demands of society and the dynamics of the times.

In the context of the management of Islamic education, in today's era of competition, Islamic educational institutions must also be able to organize all aspects of their control as the bargaining value of marketing Islamic education so that they can compete in the competitive arena of various educational institutions (Angga 2019; Br & Asiya, 2021). Education is the spearhead of a country's progress. In this case, education is the primary need for a nation that wants to develop, advance, and be competitive globally (Intania, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for Quality Improvement to maintain good Brand Credibility. That way, consumers or the public are easily attracted, and pesantren can strengthen public trust. Public trust needs to be fought for because it forms an image that influences the existence of Islamic boarding schools in education (Baharun and Intania 2020).

From several studies, it has been found that by increasing the quality, the brand image can survive and can grow consumer loyalty. Vikaliana et al. (2021) said that brand credibility shows trust, expertise, and strength, contributes positively to linking consumer attitudes with brand loyalty, and Reitsamer (2021) said that brand credibility is also conveyed has to do with place credibility and consumer loyalty. Likewise, in research Asy'ari et al. (2019), improving the quality of management and curriculum also affects the quality output of pesantren. According to a study, Afdoludin et al. (2020) show a significant increase in quality will impact student satisfaction. The rate of academic graduates increases, which offers management has been oriented toward customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, according to (Faizin, 2020), Total Quality Management (TQM) can be a strategy to manage quality-based Islamic boarding schools.

Several studies have proven that improving quality can maintain brand sustainability because brands significantly affect consumer interest in educational institutions or companies. Therefore, improving the quality of an institution or company continues to be carried out continuously. Quality education is allegedly contributing to the improvement of people's lives in Indonesia and the process of introducing the values of *santri* to the Indonesian Muslim community (Muhith, 2018). The quality of the pesantren is formulated based on management, which is carried out in actual processes beginning with planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring, all of which are carried out to determine or complete predetermined objectives (Muhith 2018; Mahmud et al., 2021; Musliadi et al., 2021).

In essence, Islamic boarding schools have a vision and mission to provide services to consumers or students, and the wider community is known as stakeholders. Everything boils down to satisfying consumers or stakeholders. This is the true goal of Islamic boarding school marketing to help customer

service. The more satisfied consumers are, the more their loyalty or loyalty to a particular brand increases (Khoirum & Wilopo, 2018). Companies or educational institutions that have brand credibility will be easier to accept and remember by potential consumers. In addition, companies and academic institutions will also find it easier to survive in times of crisis compared to companies that have an image but cannot maintain it. This is because consumers today have knowledge and experience, so they are more selective in choosing products (Triyono & Febriani, 2018).

One of the pesantren in the Probolinggo, East Java, attracts researchers to focus their studies on understanding how strategies are being used to improve quality in building good brand credibility pesantren is considered the best pesantren in Probolinggo district.

## 2. METHODS

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach, whose research procedures will focus on in-depth understanding and then data collection techniques with observation, interviews, and documentation (Sugiono, 2017). The informants in this study consisted of pesantren leaders, administrators, teachers, students, and alumni. Researchers also choose case study research because case study research seeks to describe human life and actions specifically in specific locations with some instances. Milles and Huberman's design is used in the data analysis, including collecting data, reducing it, presenting it, and drawing conclusions. Using case study research is not just to explain what the object under study looks like but also to explain how it exists and why the case can occur.

This research will be conducted at one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo Regency because this boarding school has the best quality in the district to maintain the brand credibility of the pesantren. How can this Islamic educational institution improve the quality of management so that brand credibility can survive along with the times and is also easily recognized and trusted by the wider community?

## 3. FINDINGS

The results of the study indicate that improving the quality of one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo Regency so that brand credibility can be built through;

### **Benefits of Technology Integration**

This technology has the advantage of one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo Regency; the wider community can easily recognize the pesantren. Social media has had a reasonably strong influence in recent years, so it would be a shame if Islamic boarding schools did not take advantage of it. Digital media is an essential means of broadcasting pesantren as an educational institution.

As the secretary of pesantren in Probolinggo Regency, FS said that in the use of technology, pesantren in Probolinggo has two parts, the first part in the field of Public Relations and the second part in the IT field. The two areas collaborate to improve the pesantren Brand. These two sections publish activities and create content distributed through various social media platforms to know about them. Islamic boarding schools must try to make positive perceptions in the hearts of relevant stakeholders, especially the community, because this will give confidence, trust, and interest. By providing creative content, the public will be easily attracted to the existence of Islamic boarding schools.

AFS, as the Head of IT Division of pesantren in Probolinggo Regency, also said that Multimedia IT is more about technical production for concepts and ideas as part of public relations. These two parts complement each other's ideas so that social media accounts provide consumer interest and confidence. To inform pesantren in Probolinggo Regency that the pesantren exists, the pesantren develops, and the pesantren operates. Not only the activities of the students, but the media is also a place to show their achievements. SY, one of the guardians of the students, said that the social media account of pesantren

in Probolinggo is perfect and can provide accurate information so that the satisfaction of the guardians of the students and the trust of the guardians of the students can be obtained. The existence of social media accounts can improve relations between the community because the information is easier to get and easily accessible to the public.

Pesantren is not only active inside but also communicates outside. By utilizing technology, it can be shown that this pesantren is developing along with the times and can compete with other pesantren. AFS, as the Head of Multimedia Division of pesantren in Probolinggo, said that for the upload of the significant day commemorations, it had been written and made seven days before the upload, so there was no sudden deadline. For this reason, Islamic boarding school social media will never be missed in the uploading process. Likewise, pesantren's social media accounts do not break from daily content with online recitations.

AIW, one of the alumni of pesantren in Probolinggo, also said that with the online recitation, which was carried out by live streaming on Facebook and YouTube, the pesantren in the Probolinggo by the IT team of one pesantren in Probolinggo could provide convenience in attending the recitation from their respective homes. This online recitation, which is carried out live streaming, has many benefits besides staying in touch and reciting directly to the Kiai. Also, the online recitation delivered by the Kiai can be appropriately stored in the media account he uses.

To inform the wider community, the sophistication of internet information is very helpful for business people in developing their businesses (Harto et al., 2019). Likewise, pesantren marketing needs to be supported by using social media accounts. A positive perception undoubtedly supports the productive, creative, and innovative use of information technology (Rahman, 2021). For this reason, aspects of the development of Islamic boarding schools can also be seen on the platform of Islamic boarding schools' social media accounts; the more creative and productive the pesantren's social media accounts, the more they will give trust to the broader community. Then, Islamic studies can be accessed by utilizing technology with online recitations without spending energy to go to an assembly, but simply by activating virtual-based online media. They can be followed quickly and more effectively. Social media has an important role; it is designed to make socializing and communicating with other people easier. This platform is also helpful in establishing friendships and adding relationships. Many people use it to show their work, making it very easy to introduce pesantren.

### **Harmonized Relationship with Alumni**

One of the pesantren in the Probolinggo established the pesantren and alumni organization to achieve cooperation between pesantren and alumni. This organization is a forum for alumni of pesantren in Probolinggo to continue contributing to the pesantren. The process carried out by pesantren in Probolinggo is to create harmonious relationships with alumni by grouping alumni according to their respective cities. An organization called the Assistant Board for pesantren in Probolinggo will be formed.

Like pesantren in Probolinggo secretary, FS said that by empowering alumni through pesantren in Probolinggo Assistant Manager (P4NJ), pesantren could build brand credibility. Relationships with alumni still need to be done to make the brand credibility of the pesantren and provide a space for friendship with fellow alumni. This relationship is a relationship of mutualism for the alumni and the pesantren.

P4NJ is encouraged to do whatever becomes its strength for pesantren, for example, in business development and development facilities. In developing the pesantren business, alumni are the most significant contribution to the pesantren business and are known by the wider community. Likewise, alumni also participated heavily in developing Islamic boarding school facilities. YC, a member of P4NJ Bondowoso, said that with P4NJ, he could establish close communication between alumni, from senior to junior alumni. Alumni can also continue to contribute to one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo, such as helping to donate funds to construct pesantren facilities, etc. The alumni are considered very

important for the pesantren to exchange ideas so that the pesantren continues to develop and advance in facing global challenges.

The introduction of pesantren can also be seen in several pesantren businesses, such as pesantren products. Pesantren in Probolinggo has mineral water products (Nurja Water), and this mineral water can also provide a brand for the pesantren. In this case, alumni become the best distributors in this business. Pesantren in the Probolinggo has a forum for alumni called "Assistant Manager of the Pesantren Nurul Jadid (P4NJ)", which aims to establish friendships and support pesantren activities they can maintain *rabhithatul ma'had*. Therefore, the development of Islamic boarding schools is easy to improve.

SH, pesantren in Probolinggo alumni, said that not all alumni contributed because some alumni had busy activities, so they could not contribute. In general, alumni also have their respective activities after getting married, so they cannot take an active role. In this case, not all alumni can contribute to the development of the pesantren business. The alumni's strategic partnership and collaborative role must be built because alumni are an integral part of progress (Rahman 2021). Alumni function as a medium that conveys the institution's vision to the global world. For this reason, alumni can also determine the institution's quality where alumni carry out their education because alumni are products of an educational institution.

### Using E-Bekal

The characteristics of electronic money are essentially cash without physical money (cashless); that is, all transactions will be recorded in detail so that users can track and control them (Nadiyah & Muthmainnah, 2021). At pesantren in Probolinggo, cashless or commonly known as E-Bekal, has been used. E-Bekal is a mobile application to make it easier for the guardians of the students of pesantren in Probolinggo to make payments for boarding school meals for students, sending supplies for daily shopping for students so that students can immediately make non-cash transactions in the area of pesantren.

FS, the secretary of pesantren in Probolinggo, said that the cashless system, commonly called E-Bekal, can build the pesantren's brand credibility; this E-Bekal system has several positive benefits; the first can increase the profit of the pesantren so that the pesantren can increase the yield. Second, it can limit students' spending or be more efficient because this system can monitor students' respective children's expenses. Third, minimize losses caused by criminal acts in theft; with cashless, the rate of theft or loss of money will decrease. From this, it can be concluded that the use of E-Bekal has benefits for Islamic boarding schools, students, and guardians of students.

FS as the secretary of one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo, said that the cashless system or commonly called E-Bekal at pesantren in Probolinggo, could build the pesantren's brand credibility; this E-Bekal system has several positive benefits; the first can increase the profit of the pesantren so that the pesantren can increase the yield. Second, it can limit students' spending or be more efficient because this system can monitor students' respective children's expenses. Third, minimize losses caused by criminal acts in the field of theft; with cashless, the rate of theft or loss of money will decrease. From this, it can be concluded that the use of E-Bekal has benefits Islamic boarding schools, students, and guardians of students.

This E-Bekal card also has two functions, the first function can be used for electronic transactions, and the second function can be used for student identity cards (KIS). S, one of the guardians of the students at pesantren in Probolinggo, said that the use of E-Bekal can monitor the expenses of each child. However, some sellers still do not use E-Bekal, so cash is needed. In sending money, there are still difficulties because it cannot be accessed using M-banking. Because the money transfer process can only be done at the bank, this difficulty occurs if one of the guardians of the *santri* has working hours from Monday to Saturday. So when the process of sending money, the guardian of the *santri* must take a day off from work to queue for the money transfer process at the bank.

Likewise, what was said that SY, one of the guardians of the students, said that with the existence of E-Bekal, the guardians of the students were more accessible and more practical in the process of sending money than using cash as before. All quality improvements by related parties continue to be carried out to provide convenience to customers to remain loyal and continue to contribute.

The use of E-Bekal has positive and negative impacts. Therefore pesantren must continue to improve quality so that the sustainability of the pesantren Brand can be well maintained. RH, one of the students, also said that one of the obstacles in using E-Bekal is that there is no wifi, so when the lights go out, the E-Bekal access cannot be used. In this case, the pesantren must also evaluate so that activities that have been carried out well can be developed. Any deficiencies that still exist need to be improved in the future. Various improvements to the quality of pesantren have been carried out to provide satisfaction for customers. One of them is the cashless payment method, a practical payment method. At pesantren, they have made a payment method using the E-Bekal card; this E-Bekal application is a tool to make it easier for students to make payment transactions and make it easier for *santri* guardians to control *santri* finances (Sari & N P, 2020). So that the payment of the students' food costs, the delivery of supplies, and the students' daily shopping money can be obtained made with non-cash payments in pesantren in the Probolinggo area using an E-Bekal card which can be monitored directly by the guardian of the *santri*. This system can also find out what is purchased and how much balance is owned by the *santri*. It is easy for the guardians of the *santri* to control the financial expenditure of the *santri* and minimize the theft of money and loss of money.

### Service Quality

As consumers, they have the right to quality pesantren services. Service quality must start from customer needs. This is because the quality of service can affect customer loyalty directly or indirectly. FS said that the management of human resources by selecting the recruitment of educators needs to be done so that consumers are satisfied with the services provided by the pesantren. Human resources are one of the determinants of whether a service is good or not; not only human resources but also Islamic boarding schools facilities, learning methods, etc. need to be improved, for example, by holding student visits despite the covid pandemic, improving educational institution facilities so that students remain comfortable in the teaching and learning process. All of this is done for the convenience of consumers.

One of the pesantren in the Probolinggo evaluates services to remain reliable. According to FS, this evaluation is carried out every month on the first Sunday of the week, attended by all staff. This evaluation is carried out together to discuss things that have been carried out or not carried out. All complaints from staff can be expressed by all so that solutions can be made by mutual agreement. In conducting the evaluation, it must be continued by making a report to be a reference for making activities in the future. Furthermore, the review can run well if all relevant parties attend without exception. To find out what the obstacles are. As the students' guardian, SY said that the service quality of one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo has been excellent, and there have never been any problems. Likewise, S said that the service at the Islamic Boarding School was quite good, and there had never been any complaints from his daughter. She was currently studying at pesantren in Probolinggo. Thus, the pesantren has made very significant improvements. The statement expressed by the guardian of the *santri* above shows that pesantren in Probolinggo implement quality service. Quality service significantly affects customer satisfaction because customer satisfaction is the main thing that can make the good name of one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo grow.

Customer Satisfaction is one of the superior parameters (Sidik & Marcellinus Logahan, 2021). It is necessary to pay attention or prioritize orientation to serve customers (Sidik and Marcellinus Logahan 2021). Improvement of service in various aspects needs to be done to attract customer satisfaction and create good brand credibility in customers' eyes.

## Benchmarking

Islamic boarding schools require periodic benchmarking, given the recommendations for quality improvement. *Benchmarking* is a comparison method that is carried out continuously to improve the quality of an organization so that it produces the best quality (Billah, 2020). Like one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo secretary, FS said that one of the pesantren in the Probolinggo had carried out benchmarking to improve the quality of the pesantren. Whatever good things are done in other pesantren, they are also applied to the pesantren in the Probolinggo, such as boarding houses for students, room mapping, foster care systems, student learning methods, etc. From this, it can be understood that Islamic boarding schools need to improve quality by using benchmarking methods to find innovations in the development of pesantren. The goal is to add insight and knowledge that will be applied better. Activities like this are indeed perfect for the development of a pesantren.

The pesantren has benchmarked against other pesantren (Gontor Islamic Boarding School, Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School, Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, etc.). This is done to improve the quality of the pesantren in the Probolinggo, and other pesantren also benchmarking against in the Probolinggo. Some even invite them to share about management at pesantren in Probolinggo. With benchmarking, pesantren can have an idea of what things can be applied to see promising developments from other pesantren.

RM, one of the students of the pesantren in Probolinggo, said that the development of pesantren in Probolinggo from year to year was increasing, as was what N as one of the guardians of the pesantren in the Probolinggo students, said that, pesantren in Probolinggo had a sound system in boarding school management. Benchmarking in pesantren is very important to make observations of other pesantren that have quality above it to make comparisons.

Benchmarking is done to self-introspection by improving quality to compete and increase self-potential (Br & Asiya, 2021). Therefore, benchmarking is carried out on other institutions with better quality to get a new formula to improve the quality of these institutions. The benchmarking method can be a reference for the best implementation of a pesantren. In this case, the pesantren has high aspirations to improve the quality so that the brand credibility of the pesantren can be built so that customer trust can be achieved.

## 4. CONCLUSION

From the results of this study, the quality improvement in building brand credibility at the pesantren in the Probolinggo is very concerned with making it more attractive and providing convenience to consumers through various aspects. With several aspects of quality improvement such as using technological sophistication properly, pesantren still has good relations with alumni, improving quality both with students and guardians of students, using e-Bekalcards as a transaction tool and benchmarking method so that the brand credibility of pesantren in Probolinggo can be built properly. From this, it can be underlined that consumer trust is the most crucial thing in building brand credibility. Researchers hope that further research will improve quality to build brand credibility to complement the study's limitations.

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