

Promotion, Positioning, and School Choice: The Mediating Role of Brand Equity in an Indonesian Islamic Senior High School

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Abstract

The decision-making process of students and parents in selecting a school is increasingly influenced by marketing-oriented factors such as promotion, positioning, and brand equity. In a competitive educational landscape, schools are required not only to deliver quality learning but also to communicate their value effectively to prospective students. This conceptual paper aims to explore the relationships between school promotion and positioning on school choice, with brand equity serving as a mediating variable. Drawing upon theories of consumer behavior and educational marketing, the study positions school promotion as the strategic communication efforts to attract prospective students, while positioning represents the distinct identity created in the minds of the community. Brand equity, in turn, functions as a psychological bridge that enhances trust, reputation, and perceived value of the school, which can ultimately shape students' decisions to enroll. This research adopts a quantitative explanatory design, proposing a structured survey distributed to students and parents at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta (MAS) Cendikia Bunayya, Kabanjahe, North Sumatra. Data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test both direct and mediating effects. The expected contribution of this paper is twofold: theoretically, it extends the application of brand equity as a mediating construct within the educational marketing domain; practically, it provides actionable insights for school managers and policymakers to strengthen strategies that align promotion and positioning with brand equity, thereby enhancing competitiveness in the education sector.

Keywords: Customer Reviews, Influencer Endorsements, Trust, Purchase Decisions, GoFood, Conceptual Research.

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Introduction

Education plays a central role in shaping human capital, and schools are increasingly required to compete for students in a rapidly changing social and economic environment. In the past, the choice of school was largely determined by geographic proximity or family tradition. Today, however, students and parents make educational decisions based on perceived value, quality, and reputation, factors that are strongly influenced by modern marketing practices such as promotion, positioning, and brand equity.

In Indonesia, the competition among private and public schools has intensified over the last decade. The proliferation of new schools, coupled with rising expectations from parents, has pushed educational institutions to adopt more strategic approaches to attract students. Particularly in Islamic schools such as Madrasah Aliyah Swasta (MAS), maintaining a distinctive image and clear identity is essential to remain competitive. Despite the unique religious and cultural positioning of Islamic education, many schools still face challenges in translating their values into effective communication strategies that resonate with prospective students and parents.

Promotion is one of the key strategies in this context. Effective school promotion through digital platforms, community engagement, and alumni networks creates awareness and interest among prospective students. Studies in educational marketing have shown that promotion significantly influences school choice by highlighting not only academic programs but also extracurricular opportunities and institutional values [1], [2].

Positioning, on the other hand, is about how a school differentiates itself in the minds of its target audience. A strong positioning strategy communicates what makes the school unique, whether through academic excellence, religious values, affordable tuition, or community service. Research indicates that effective positioning builds a distinct identity and facilitates long-term preference among families evaluating multiple school options [3], [4].

Brand equity serves as the connecting link between promotion, positioning, and actual decision-making. It encompasses awareness, perceived quality, trust, and loyalty associated with the school's name. In the context of education, brand equity reflects how the school is valued beyond its physical resources capturing intangible elements like reputation, credibility, and emotional attachment [5], [6]. As a mediating variable, brand equity translates promotional efforts and positioning strategies into stronger school choice decisions.

The case of MAS Cendikia Bunayya in Kabanjahe, North Sumatra, illustrates this dynamic. As a private Islamic senior high school, it operates in a competitive educational environment where parents have numerous alternatives, ranging from public schools to other private Islamic institutions. While MAS Cendikia Bunayya has a distinctive vision rooted in Islamic values and community service, its ability to attract students depends on how effectively it communicates this vision through promotion and positioning, and how these efforts shape brand equity in the eyes of the community.

Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the interplay between promotion, positioning, brand equity, and school choice, positioning brand equity as a mediating construct. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how marketing strategies in education can shape the decision-making process of students and parents, while offering actionable implications for school management in Indonesia's increasingly competitive educational landscape.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Educational institutions today operate in a highly competitive environment where families evaluate multiple options before deciding on the most suitable school for their children. Marketing strategies, particularly promotion and positioning, play a crucial role in shaping such decisions. However, these strategies may not directly translate into enrollment unless they build brand equity the intangible value associated with a school's name and reputation.

2.1 Promotion and School Choice

Promotion in educational settings refers to activities that communicate the school's offerings, values, and advantages to prospective students and parents. Research has consistently shown that effective promotional strategies such as the use of digital platforms, community-based campaigns, and alumni testimonials positively influence decision-making in school selection. Parents and students are more likely to choose schools that actively and persuasively communicate their uniqueness [7]. Thus, it is expected that promotion has a significant influence on school choice.

H1: Promotion positively influences school choice.

2.2 Positioning and School Choice

Positioning enables schools to occupy a distinct place in the minds of their stakeholders. By highlighting unique attributes such as religious values, academic excellence, or affordability schools can strengthen their attractiveness in the eyes of prospective parents. Recent studies suggest that positioning strategies are directly linked to decision-making in educational markets, particularly when schools are competing with institutions offering similar curricula [8].

H2: Positioning positively influences school choice.

2.3 Promotion and Brand Equity

Brand equity captures the added value associated with a school's identity, trust, and reputation. Promotion plays a pivotal role in building such equity by enhancing awareness and reinforcing positive perceptions. Schools that consistently communicate their strengths and values are more likely to strengthen parents' trust and loyalty, which are critical dimensions of brand equity [9].

H3: Promotion positively influences brand equity.

2.4 Positioning and Brand Equity

A well-defined positioning strategy not only differentiates a school but also strengthens its perceived quality and credibility, both of which are key components of brand equity. When positioning resonates with stakeholders' expectations, the school's brand becomes more valuable and sustainable in the long term [10].

H4: Positioning positively influences brand equity.

2.5 Brand Equity and School Choice

Brand equity serves as a bridge between marketing efforts and actual decision-making. Families tend to choose schools that are perceived as trustworthy, reputable, and aligned with their values. In recent research, brand equity has been shown to directly impact parents' choice of school by reinforcing emotional attachment and perceived quality [11].

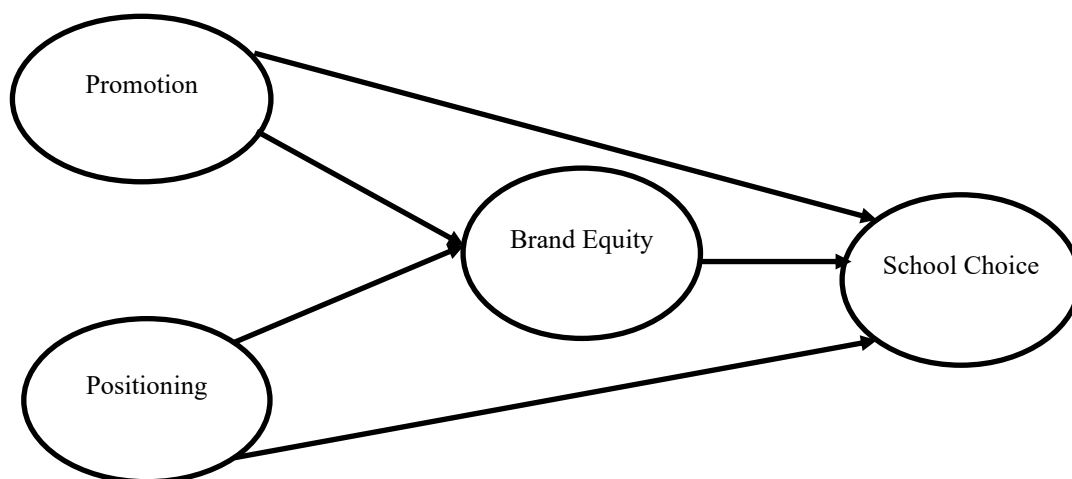
H5: Brand equity positively influences school choice.

2.6 Mediation Role of Brand Equity

While promotion and positioning directly affect school choice, their impact is often strengthened through brand equity. When parents perceive a school's brand as valuable and credible, promotional messages and positioning strategies are more likely to translate into concrete enrollment decisions. Hence, brand equity acts as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between promotional strategies, positioning, and school choice [12].

H6: Brand equity mediates the relationship between promotion and school choice.

H7: Brand equity mediates the relationship between positioning and school choice.



Picture 1. Research Framework

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, explanatory research design aimed at examining the relationships between promotion, positioning, brand equity, and school choice in the context of private Islamic senior high schools (*Madrasah Aliyah Swasta*) in Kabanjahe, North Sumatra. The model emphasizes the mediating role of brand equity in linking promotional and positioning strategies with parents' school choice. The research is conceptual in nature and will be empirically tested in the full journal article.

3.1 Population and Sample

The target population comprises parents or guardians of students enrolled or intending to enroll in *Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Cendikia Bunayya*, Kabanjahe. Given the school's size and accessibility, a sample of approximately 150–200 respondents will be selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that participants have been directly involved in the decision-making process.

of choosing the school. This sample size is considered sufficient for structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis [13].

3.2 Research Instrument

The study will employ a structured questionnaire with validated measurement items adapted from prior research, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The instruments are organized as follows:

- a) Promotion: Adapted from [9], covering communication channels, promotional appeal, and message clarity.
- b) Positioning: Items adapted from [8], reflecting uniqueness, differentiation, and perceived relevance.
- c) Brand Equity: Measured using dimensions of awareness, perceived quality, and trust [11].
- d) School Choice: Adapted from [7], focusing on decision confidence, preference, and satisfaction with the selected school.

Prior to distribution, the instrument will undergo content validity assessment by educational and marketing experts, followed by a pilot test with 30 respondents to evaluate reliability and clarity.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data will be collected through self-administered surveys, both paper-based and digital (Google Forms), to maximize response rates from parents. Ethical considerations will be maintained by ensuring anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The proposed analysis will employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) using software such as SmartPLS. This approach is suitable given its ability to handle complex mediation models with relatively small to medium sample sizes [13]. The analysis will involve:

1. Measurement Model Evaluation: Assessing validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE).
2. Structural Model Evaluation: Testing the significance of hypothesized paths (promotion → school choice, positioning → school choice, etc.) using bootstrapping.
3. Mediation Analysis: Examining the mediating role of brand equity in the relationships between promotion, positioning, and school choice.

Results and Discussion

Although this paper is conceptual in nature, several key results are anticipated based on the proposed framework. The integration of promotion, positioning, and brand equity within the context of educational marketing in Indonesian Islamic senior high schools is expected to generate meaningful insights into the school choice decision-making process.

First, promotion is projected to play a significant role in shaping awareness and consideration among both students and parents. In line with [14], marketing communication theory, schools that engage in consistent and credible promotional activities such as digital campaigns, community engagement, and alumni storytelling are more likely to be perceived as accessible and trustworthy educational institutions.

Second, positioning is anticipated to influence school choice by constructing a distinct identity that resonates with the values of prospective students and their families. Positioning in the context of Islamic education, as suggested by [15], extends beyond academic quality to include moral development, religious alignment, and cultural relevance. This aligns with the increasing demand for educational institutions that integrate both academic excellence and spiritual growth.

Third, brand equity is expected to function as a mediating variable that links promotion and positioning to school choice. Drawing on [5] brand equity theory, brand equity encompasses dimensions such as brand awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty. In educational settings, strong brand equity fosters trust, enhances reputation, and builds emotional attachment, all of which are critical determinants of parental decision-making [1]; [2].

From a theoretical standpoint, this study extends the application of consumer behavior models into the domain of educational marketing. It highlights how school choice decisions, traditionally framed as educational or social preferences, can also be understood through the lens of marketing constructs such as brand equity.

From a practical perspective, the model suggests that school managers should not only invest in promotional strategies but also carefully craft their institutional positioning in ways that align with community values. By reinforcing these efforts with strong brand equity, schools can create a psychological bridge that translates communication strategies into actual enrollment decisions.

In summary, the conceptual model underscores that:

1. Promotion creates awareness and attracts attention.
2. Positioning establishes distinctiveness and relevance.
3. Brand equity strengthens trust, reputation, and loyalty, thereby mediating the impact of promotion and positioning on school choice.

These expected outcomes contribute to both academic discourse and managerial practice, particularly within the competitive landscape of Indonesian Islamic senior high schools.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper highlights the importance of integrating promotion, positioning, and brand equity into the analysis of school choice within the Indonesian Islamic senior high school context. The proposed framework suggests that while promotion and positioning serve as direct drivers of school selection, it is brand equity that mediates these influences by fostering trust, enhancing reputation, and reinforcing perceived value. In doing so, the paper extends the application of consumer behavior and marketing theories into the domain of educational decision-making, offering fresh insights into how schools can remain competitive in an increasingly saturated educational market.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing literature on educational marketing by positioning brand equity not merely as a business construct but as a meaningful factor in shaping educational preferences. This underscores the relevance of marketing science in educational research and demonstrates how concepts traditionally applied to products and services can be adapted to explain the dynamics of school choice.

From a practical standpoint, the findings imply that school managers and policymakers should go beyond focusing solely on academic quality. They need to invest in sustained

promotion, craft a strong and distinct positioning aligned with community values, and nurture brand equity as a long-term asset. In particular, Islamic senior high schools should highlight their dual role in providing academic excellence and spiritual development, thereby resonating with the aspirations of students and parents alike.

Future Research

As this study is conceptual in nature, several avenues remain open for empirical exploration:

1. Quantitative Validation: Future research could employ survey-based methods with parents and students to test the mediating role of brand equity empirically, using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).
2. Comparative Studies: Studies could compare Islamic schools with non-Islamic institutions to assess whether the strength of promotion, positioning, and brand equity differs across educational sectors.
3. Digital Marketing Influence: Given the rapid growth of digital platforms, future investigations could examine how online branding and social media promotion influence school choice in ways that differ from traditional marketing channels.
4. Cultural and Regional Variations: Since Indonesia is culturally diverse, further research could explore how cultural values and regional differences shape the impact of promotion and positioning on brand equity and school choice.
5. Longitudinal Analysis: Long-term studies could track how consistent branding strategies contribute to sustained enrollment growth and reputation over time.

By pursuing these directions, researchers can move from conceptual exploration to empirical validation, thereby enriching both the academic literature and the practical guidance available to educational leaders.

In conclusion, this paper invites both scholars and practitioners to recognize that in today's competitive educational landscape, the decision to choose a school is not merely an academic or administrative matter it is also deeply shaped by marketing constructs such as promotion, positioning, and brand equity. When aligned strategically, these factors can provide schools with a sustainable path toward greater relevance, credibility, and competitiveness.

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