

THE PRINCIPAL'S INNOVATION MANAGEMENT IN BUILDING A SUPERIOR SCHOOL BRAND BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM

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ABSTRAK

Di tengah tantangan globalisasi, sekolah dituntut tidak hanya unggul secara akademik, tetapi juga memiliki identitas yang kuat dan berbeda. Salah satu cara membangun keunggulan tersebut adalah melalui branding sekolah yang autentik dan relevan secara kultural. Sayangnya, masih banyak sekolah yang mengabaikan potensi nilai-nilai kearifan lokal dalam strategi pengembangan citra institusinya. Padahal, pendekatan ini telah terbukti efektif, baik dalam meningkatkan daya saing melalui strategi brand image berbasis positioning, identity, dan personality. Di sisi lain, inovasi pendidikan berbasis budaya lokal sejak usia dini sebagai pondasi karakter peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kepala sekolah mengelola inovasi manajerial dalam membangun branding sekolah unggul yang berakar pada kearifan lokal. Meskipun banyak studi sebelumnya menyoroti pentingnya inovasi kepemimpinan dan strategi branding sekolah, namun integrasi keduanya dengan pendekatan berbasis kearifan lokal masih banyak dikaji secara mendalam. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dari berbagai jurnal terkini, bertujuan untuk memberikan pemahaman menyeluruh tentang fenomena yang diteliti berdasarkan interpretasi terhadap data teks, tanpa pengukuran numerik atau eksperimen. Integrasi nilai-nilai kearifan lokal ke dalam visi, misi, program unggulan, serta komunikasi sekolah terbukti mampu meningkatkan daya saing sekaligus memperkuat karakter peserta didik. Melalui kajian ini, diharapkan diperoleh pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif mengenai keterkaitan inovasi kepemimpinan, nilai lokal, dan strategi branding sebagai satu kesatuan dalam mewujudkan sekolah yang unggul dan berkarakter.

Kata kunci : manajemen inovasi, kepala sekolah, branding sekolah, kearifan lokal, sekolah unggul.

ABSTRACT

In the midst of the challenges of globalization, schools are required not only to excel academically, but also to have a strong and distinct identity. One way to build this excellence is through school branding that is authentic and culturally relevant. Unfortunately, there are still many schools that ignore the potential of local wisdom values in their institutional image development strategies. In fact, this approach has been proven effective, both in increasing competitiveness through a brand image strategy based on positioning, identity and personality and emphasizing its importance. On the other hand, educational innovation based on local culture from an early age is the foundation for students character. This research aims to analyze how school principals manage managerial innovation in building superior school branding that is rooted in local wisdom. Although many previous studies highlight the importance of leadership innovation and school branding strategies, the integration of both with local wisdom-based approaches has still been studied in depth. Through literature study with a descriptive qualitative approach from various current journals. The integration of local wisdom values into the school's vision, mission, superior programs and communications has been proven to be able to increase competitiveness while strengthening the character of students. Through this study, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding will be obtained regarding the relationship between leadership innovation, local values, and branding strategies as one unit in creating superior and characterful schools.

Keywords : *innovation management, school principal, school branding, local wisdom, superior schools.*

INTRODUCTION

21st century education demands that schools not only produce academically superior graduates, but also form strong character and identity in accordance with local values. In the era of globalization, many schools compete to highlight their institutional advantages to attract public interest. School branding is now one of the important strategies in building competitiveness, trust, and public loyalty to educational institutions. However, effective school branding is not enough to be based only on visual imagery or academic achievement, but must also reflect noble values and local wisdom that live in the culture of the local community (Prayogi & Muslihun, 2024).

On the other hand, the leadership innovation of school principals plays a strategic role in encouraging school transformation. School principals as agents of change are required to be able to create an adaptive, collaborative, and value-based strategy. The combination of management innovation, strengthening local cultural values, and branding strategies is an integral approach that is able to distinguish superior schools from others (Idhayani et al., 2023). Thus, the urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding the role of school principals as innovators in building school branding that is not only competitively superior, but also culturally meaningful.

Although school branding is starting to be widely practiced, the reality on the ground shows that most of the implementation is still partial and symbolic. Many schools only highlight promotional aspects through social media, slogans, or other visual displays, but fail to build authentic values and identities in the eyes of the public (Budiarti et al., 2023). Branding that is not based on local cultural values tends not to make an emotional impression and does not create a long-term attachment between the school and its community.

In addition, local wisdom as a source of value has not been fully integrated in school management policies. Many schools still consider local wisdom only as a local content in the curriculum, as a source of inspiration in the management and development of the institution's image (Maisaroh et al., 2022). This leads to the loss of the unique differentiation potential of each school. On the other hand, principals often still play the role of administrative managers, rather than strategic innovators who build connections between management, local character, and branding (Rosyidi et al., 2024). As a result, cultural potential and local excellence have not been optimally utilized to build a school branding with character and competitiveness.

Various studies have tried to address the problem through a variety of approaches. Prayogi and Muslihun (2024) examined the brand image-based branding strategy implemented at MAN 2 Yogyakarta. They showed that the implementation of *brand positioning*, *identity*, and *personality strategies* succeeded in strengthening the school's image and increasing public interest in madrasas. These findings emphasize the importance of a consistent, value-based

branding strategy. Meanwhile, Harisatunisa and Muslimah (2024) discussed the implementation of a curriculum based on local culture in an effort to build school branding. Their study shows that the application of Local Excellence-Based Education (PBKL), such as batik skills, can be a hallmark of a strong school and easily recognizable by the community.

At the primary education level, Idhayani et al. (2023) examined early childhood learning innovations based on local wisdom, with the result that the integration of local culture can strengthen character values and form the foundation of educational identity from an early age. In addition, Aprilia et al. (2023) examined the role of school principals in building a positive culture and school branding, while Budiarti et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of a planned and consistent branding strategy as a means of increasing public trust in schools. Although these studies make important contributions to understanding school branding and the role of local wisdom, there are fundamental weaknesses in the integration of three key elements: leadership innovation, strategic branding, and local values. Most research focuses on only one or two aspects, such as school branding or character education, but has not comprehensively examined how principals manage innovation to integrate branding with local wisdom values.

The research of Prayogi and Muslihun (2024), for example, strongly emphasizes branding strategies through *brand image*, but does not explicitly explain the role of school principals as cultural and managerial innovators. Likewise, the study of Harisatunisa and Muslimah (2024) has succeeded in showing branding based on batik culture, but the aspects of innovative leadership in orchestrating these strategies have not been discussed in depth. Similarly, the approach of Idhayani et al. (2023) in the context of early childhood education shows the success of local value-based innovations, but has not been directly linked to school branding. Thus, there is still a gap in understanding in full how school principals lead managerial innovation to build branding based on local wisdom within the framework of superior schools.

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to analyze in depth the role of school principals in managing managerial innovation that is integrated with branding strategies and local wisdom values. The main focus of this research is to

uncover how school principals can play a role as strategic innovators who initiate, facilitate, and direct the transformation of schools towards superior educational institutions that have a distinctive identity based on local culture. This research also aims to fill the gap in literature that still separates the concept of management innovation, branding approach, and education based on local wisdom. By systematically examining various literature sources, including the studies of Prayogi and Muslihun (2024), Harisatunisa and Muslimah (2024), and Idhayani et al. (2023), this study aims to formulate a conceptual framework that explains the integrative relationship between the innovative leadership of school principals and the development of superior school branding based on local values.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide inspiration and guidance for school principals, education policy makers, and educational institutions in developing culture-based managerial strategies that are able to improve the competitiveness and character of schools in a sustainable manner.

DISCUSSION

Synergy of Principals' Innovation Management and Local Wisdom in Branding Superior Schools

In building superior schools that have competitiveness and strong character, school principals are required not only to play the role of administrators, but also as strategic innovators. This role is very important in creating a school branding strategy that is rooted in local wisdom. School branding is not just visual image or promotion, but an effort to build public identity, values, and trust in schools. In the context of multicultural Indonesia, the integration of local cultural values with management innovation is a strategic approach to create differentiation and strengthen the position of schools in the midst of competition among educational institutions (Prayogi & Muslihun, 2024).

Glikman (2010) stated that today's school principals are not enough to be administrative leaders, but must be able to carry out their role as cultural reformers (*transformer culture*). This is in line with the findings of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) who emphasized the importance of "professional capital" in education management, which is a combination of professional, social, and moral expertise in

driving value-based change. In the Indonesian context, education management that is able to bridge systemic innovation and local culture is believed to be able to encourage the formation of a superior school identity that is rooted in its social environment.

Furthermore, according to Mulyasa (2013), school principals must have *value-based leadership* competencies, namely the ability to integrate noble values and local wisdom into school managerial practices. In the context of branding, school principals are tasked with creating school differentiation and positioning through excellent programs, strategic communication, and strengthening authentic school culture. Therefore, the principal's skill in reading the richness of local culture and transforming it into an institutional strength is important in a branding strategy based on local wisdom.

The Importance of Managerial and Cultural Innovation in School Branding Strategies

Strong school branding is built on the school's internal excellence, including the quality of education, values adhered to, and a vibrant cultural climate. Principals as innovative leaders have a central position in designing the school's vision, aligning programs with local cultural characters, and ensuring that the branding built is authentic and sustainable (Rosyidi et al., 2024).

A study by Budiarti et al. (2023) shows that successful branding is not only based on academic excellence, but also on the peculiarities and values that the school has. Meanwhile, Aprilia et al. (2023) emphasized that the role of school principals in building a positive culture has a direct impact on the school's image. This is strengthened by the findings of Harisatunisa & Muslimah (2024), which states that school branding can be strengthened through the integration of a curriculum based on local culture such as batik at Sokaraja High School.

On the other hand, Idhayani et al. (2023) highlight how learning based on local wisdom from an early age is able to instill character values and build the foundation of school identity. Values such as mutual cooperation, honesty, simplicity, and responsibility can be strategic resources in building school differentiation and positioning.

Kotler and Fox (2012) stated that the branding strategy in educational institutions must be built on the basis of strong positioning, clear differentiation, and *authentic brand personality*. This is where the principal must play a dual role: as *a change leader* and a *custodian of local values*. In other words, the principal is the link between the institutional strategy and the cultural wealth that the school has.

The importance of managerial and cultural innovation in school branding strategies is also emphasized by Rijal (2019), who states that culture-based leadership encourages schools to not only excel academically, but also have cultural and spiritual significance in their communities. A branding strategy built from within, namely from the principal's innovative vision and the meaning of local values, creates an institutional positioning that is firmly rooted and not easily displaced by external competition.

Study and Synthesis of Findings

1. School Branding Through Local Culture (SMA Sokaraja) study Harisatunisa & Muslimah (2024) examines how SMA N 1 Sokaraja develops branding through a curriculum based on local culture, namely batik. The school integrates batik learning in the curriculum and makes it a flagship program. As a result, the high school is known as a unique "Batik School" and has a strong positioning in the community. The role of the principal is very significant in supporting and facilitating the implementation of this program, starting from the provision of facilities, teacher training, to cooperation with the local batik community.
2. Brand Image of MAN 2 Yogyakarta Prayogi & Muslihun (2024) said that the head of MAN 2 Yogyakarta succeeded in building a brand image through positioning strategies (tahfidz classes, multimedia), identity (religious and professional values), and personality (technology-friendly schools). School principals are the main actors in formulating branding strategies and innovating institutional structures. This strategy has succeeded in significantly increasing public trust and the number of new students.
3. Locally-Based Early Childhood Learning Innovation Idhayani et al. (2023) provide a concrete example that a local wisdom-based approach is effective from an early age. Local values are integrated in play activities, folklore, traditional

games, and environmental introductions. This shows that local wisdom can be an instrument for the formation of school identity starting from the daar's education level, especially if managed innovatively by the head of the education unit.

4. Samin Culture in Putri Character Education et al. (2024) describes the application of Samin values, such as honesty and simplicity, in school practices in Bojonegoro. The principal encourages the integration of local culture into a variety of student activities, including cultural festivals, pitutur luhur poetry, and local economy-based activities. This strategy not only strengthens the character of the students, but also builds the image of the school that is rooted in the identity of the community.

CONCLUSION

In facing the challenges of educational transformation in the era of globalization, schools can no longer rely solely on academic excellence as the only indicator of success. Local identity, values, and uniqueness are now strategic factors that determine the competitiveness and sustainability of an educational institution. This research reveals that the key to building authentic and competitive school branding lies in the synergy between the principal's managerial innovation and the integration of local wisdom values into the education system. The principal as a transformational leader plays a central role in building a branding strategy that doesn't just focus on the outward image, but is rooted in the school's internal excellence and cultural character. Innovation in leadership is not just about creating new programs, but building systems that are able to revive local values in daily educational practices. When innovation is imbued with wisdom, schools not only become academic institutions, but also spaces for culture and the preservation of the nation's noble values. Various literature studies analyzed in this study show concrete evidence that the integration of local wisdom in school management can strengthen the identity, character, and attractiveness of schools in the eyes of the public. Sokaraja High School, with the branding of "Batik School", or MAN 2 Yogyakarta with *a brand image strategy* based on religious and technological superior classes , is a clear example of the success of this synergy. At the early

childhood education and basic education levels, local values such as traditional games, folklore, and customs have proven to be effective means in building the foundation of student character and institutional identity. From the management side, school principals must have *value-based leadership competencies*, strategic thinking skills, and sensitivity to the potential of local culture around them. Without innovative and culturally insightful leaders, school branding tends to be a project that is not rooted in values. Therefore, a successful branding strategy is one that is built from within – that is, from the vision, culture, and practice of education that is integrated with the lives of local communities. Thus, it can be concluded that superior school branding based on local wisdom will not be effective without strong managerial innovation from the principal. Innovation without cultural value tends to lose direction, while cultural value without innovation can become frozen and not develop. The synergy between the two not only forms a distinct school identity, but also strengthens the school's position as a socially relevant, culturally dignified, and educationally competitive institution. The success of superior school branding based on local wisdom is highly determined by the ability of the principal to integrate managerial vision and local cultural values in institutional strategy. Government policy support, culture-based leadership training, and partnerships with local communities are complementary elements in building an education ecosystem that is not only smart, but also characterful and cultured.

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