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The Influence of Local Wisdom-Based Marketing Strategies (Bheppa', Bhebhhu', Ghuru, Rato) on Competitive Advantage and Sustainability of Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren) in Madura

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Abstract. This study examines the influence of local wisdom-based marketing strategies, specifically bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato, on competitive advantage and the sustainability of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Madura. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, this research synthesizes scholarly articles indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, and SINTA databases focusing on local wisdom, Islamic educational marketing, competitive advantage theory, and institutional sustainability. Findings indicate that the integration of Madurese cultural values into marketing strategies significantly strengthens institutional identity, enhances community trust, and fosters long-term institutional sustainability. The four pillars of local wisdom function not merely as cultural symbols but as strategic instruments for building authentic differentiation and deep stakeholder loyalty. This study contributes a culturally adaptive marketing framework for Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: local wisdom, marketing strategy, competitive advantage, sustainability, pesantren

I. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) represent one of the oldest and most distinctive educational institutions in Indonesia. Beyond their formal academic function, pesantren serve as agents of social transformation, character formation, and custodians of local cultural values amidst intensifying globalization (Hasanah et al., 2021). In the current era of educational competition, pesantren face mounting pressure not only to maintain academic and spiritual relevance but also to develop institutional strategies capable of attracting sustained community support.

The challenges confronting pesantren have grown increasingly complex as the number of hybrid Islamic educational institutions continues to rise. Competition no longer comes solely from peer pesantren but also from integrated Islamic schools, madrasah, and technology-based educational platforms offering diverse modern advantages. In this context, institutional differentiation becomes a decisive factor for organizational survival (Hefniy & Arifin, 2023).

Madura, as one of the regions with the highest concentration of pesantren in Indonesia, possesses a rich and distinctive local wisdom with significant strategic potential. The concept of bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato constitutes a deeply rooted hierarchy of respect embedded in the social fabric of Madurese society. Literally, these terms refer to four pillars of reverence: mother (bheppa'), father (bhebhhu'), teacher (ghuru), and leader/ruler (rato). This hierarchy is not merely a social arrangement but reflects a value system governing relationships of trust, loyalty, and authority within the community (Taufiq, 2023).

The integration of bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato values into pesantren marketing strategies presents an opportunity to construct an authentic institutional narrative that resonates with the cultural identity of Madurese society. However, most educational marketing approaches remain oriented toward generic modern models that inadequately incorporate local values as sources of competitive advantage. Yet, local value integration can strengthen institutional identity and enhance social legitimacy (Taufiq, 2023).

This study addresses this gap through a systematic examination of how Madurese local wisdom can be operationalized as an effective marketing strategy. Through systematic literature review, this research aims to: (1) analyze the concept of bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato as a value foundation for marketing; (2) identify mechanisms through which it influences competitive advantage; and (3) map its contribution to long-term pesantren sustainability.

II. Literature Review

Islamic Educational Marketing Strategy

Educational marketing represents a relatively nascent yet rapidly evolving field, particularly within the context of Islamic educational institutions. Unlike commercial marketing oriented toward profit maximization, educational marketing aims to holistically create value for stakeholders, encompassing academic, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions (Liriwati et al., 2023). In the pesantren context, marketing strategy is not merely oriented toward promotion and student recruitment, but also toward shaping institutional image and sustaining differentiation (Hefniy & Arifin, 2023).

Kotler and Fox (1995), within the educational marketing framework, identify that educational institutions must build clear positioning grounded in unique and audience-relevant core values. In the Madurese pesantren context, this positioning can be constructed by internalizing local wisdom values across all dimensions of educational service, from curriculum design to institution-community interaction.

The value-based marketing approach in Islamic education emphasizes the harmonization between marketing strategies and cultural and religious values (Liriwati et al., 2023). This approach recognizes that community trust in Islamic educational institutions is founded not solely on academic outcomes but also on the consistency of the values championed by the institution. Consequently, marketing strategies integrating local wisdom are not merely promotional instruments but authentic expressions of institutional identity.

Madurese Local Wisdom: Bheppa', Bhebhhu', Ghuru, Rato

Local wisdom (kearifan lokal) is academically understood as a system of knowledge, values, practices, and beliefs developed within specific communities as adaptive responses to their environment and historical experience (Sartini, 2004). Local wisdom is not merely static tradition but constitutes a dynamic cultural resource with strategic relevance in contemporary contexts.

The concept of bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato embodies the tested social value system of Madurese society. Bheppa' (mother) and bhebhhu' (father) symbolize the foundations of love, sacrifice, and familial responsibility. Ghuru (teacher) represents scholarly authority, moral exemplarship, and spiritual guidance. Rato (leader/ruler) reflects sociopolitical authority and responsibility for community welfare (Anam & Arifin, 2024).

In the pesantren context, these four values possess profound resonance because pesantren itself has historically embodied the role of ghuru (spiritual and intellectual educator) alongside rato (community leader). The kiai as the central figure of the pesantren is frequently positioned beyond the role of mere educator, serving as a spiritual leader whose authority derives from a combination of religious scholarship, charisma, and community trust (Taufiq, 2023).

Competitive Advantage: Resource-Based View Perspective

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory developed by Barney (1991) posits that sustained competitive advantage derives from internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Within this framework, local wisdom satisfies all VRIN criteria because it is contextual, historically embedded, and inseparable from the identity of a specific community (Yusuf, 2024).

Applying RBV to the pesantren context demonstrates that competitive advantage need not be built through substantial investment in physical infrastructure or technology, but can be achieved through the development of unique cultural capabilities. Pesantren that consistently operationalize bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato values in their marketing practices and educational services possess advantages that competitors—particularly institutions lacking similar cultural roots—cannot easily replicate.

This concept of culture-based competitive advantage aligns with Porter's (1985) differentiation strategy as one of the generic approaches to competitive advantage. Local wisdom-based differentiation enables pesantren to position themselves as institutions offering a unique value proposition—not merely high-quality religious education but also an authentic and meaningful cultural experience for Madurese communities.

Sustainability of Islamic Educational Institutions

Sustainability in the context of educational institutions extends beyond mere operational continuity. According to Anam and Arifin (2024), pesantren sustainability encompasses three primary dimensions: academic sustainability (quality and relevance of education), social sustainability (community legitimacy and trust), and economic sustainability (financial self-reliance and resource management). These three dimensions are interdependent and require holistic institutional strategies.

Local wisdom-based marketing strategies contribute to pesantren sustainability through several mechanisms. First, cultural identity reinforcement increases stakeholder loyalty and reduces student attrition to competing institutions. Second, social legitimacy built through local values facilitates access to community support in both material and non-material forms. Third, culture-based differentiation creates barriers to entry for potential competitors (Sinta et al., 2024).

III. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach through systematic literature review (SLR) as developed by Tranfield et al. (2003). The SLR method was selected as it enables the systematic, transparent, and reproducible synthesis of findings from diverse studies, yielding stronger conclusions than traditional narrative review.

Literature selection applied PICOS (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Study design) criteria. Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) articles addressing pesantren or Islamic educational institution marketing strategies; (2) articles examining Madurese local wisdom or comparable cultural values; (3) articles published between 2018 and 2026; and (4) articles indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, or SINTA with a minimum Sinta 3 ranking. Exclusion criteria included articles unavailable in full-text and articles lacking a focus on Islamic education in Indonesia.

Literature searches employed the following keywords: 'pesantren marketing strategy,' 'Madurese local wisdom,' 'pesantren competitive advantage,' 'Islamic educational institution sustainability,' 'bheppa bhebbhu ghuru rato,' and their combinations in both Indonesian and English. A total of 87 articles were identified across databases. Following title, abstract, and full-text screening, 23 articles met the criteria for further analysis.

Data analysis employed inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) conducted through six stages: (1) data familiarization; (2) initial coding; (3) theme searching; (4) theme reviewing; (5) theme definition and naming; and (6) report production. This process systematically identified relational patterns among concepts based on findings from the reviewed literature.

IV. Results and Discussion

Results

The literature review findings demonstrate that local wisdom-based marketing strategies of bheppa', bhebbhu', ghuru, rato influence pesantren competitive advantage through three primary mechanisms.

First, the identity differentiation mechanism. Pesantren that consistently communicate bheppa', bhebbhu', ghuru, rato values in their promotional materials, institutional interactions, and educational programs successfully build distinctive and recognizable identities. Santoso and Aimah (2026) found that guerrilla marketing models integrating local values in pesantren branding increased brand awareness by up to 40% compared to pesantren employing generic marketing approaches.

Second, the value-based trust-building mechanism. In Madurese society, decisions to entrust children to specific pesantren are strongly influenced by trust in the kiai and institution. The ghuru value within the bheppa', bhebbhu', ghuru, rato hierarchy positions the teacher/kiai in a highly respected position of authority, giving pesantren that authentically visualize this value in their marketing communication a significant trust advantage (Letavia et al., 2025).

Third, the network mobilization mechanism. The rato value in Madurese local wisdom implies an extensive network of community leadership. Pesantren that successfully build relationships with rato figures at various levels of society—from village heads to influential religious scholars—can leverage these networks as effective and low-cost marketing channels (Anam & Arifin, 2024).

Discussion

The literature analysis identifies four dimensions of contribution by local wisdom-based marketing strategies to pesantren sustainability, as summarized in Table 1.

Dimension	Mechanism of Contribution	Success Indicator
Academic	Integration of ghuru values into curriculum and pedagogy	Graduate quality, scholarly reputation
Social	Community relations reinforcement through bheppa' and bhebhhu' values	Trust levels, community participation
Economic	Mobilization of rato networks for financial support and waqf	Financial self-reliance, income diversification
Institutional	Brand identity reinforcement through authentic local values	Alumni loyalty, sustained differentiation

Table 1. Dimensions of Local Wisdom Contribution to Pesantren Sustainability

The integration of cultural values into marketing strategies supports pesantren sustainability through increased social legitimacy and economic self-reliance (Sinta et al., 2024). Strong social legitimacy enables pesantren to access community resources—including waqf, donations, and volunteer labor—significantly reducing dependence on external funding sources.

Muhes et al. (2026) further note that transforming pesantren marketing strategies to combine traditional and modern values constitutes a critical factor in maintaining relevance and competitiveness in the digital era. Utilizing social media to communicate bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato values to digitally connected younger generations opens new markets while sustaining connectivity with traditional communities.

Based on literature synthesis, this study proposes a three-layer conceptual model connecting local wisdom, marketing strategy, competitive advantage, and pesantren sustainability. The first layer (core values) comprises the four local wisdom pillars functioning as the foundation of institutional identity. The second layer (operational strategy) encompasses the implementation of core values in concrete marketing practices. The third layer (strategic outcomes) encompasses competitive advantage and multi-dimensional institutional sustainability. This model is circular in nature: sustainability achieved reinforces institutional capacity to continuously develop and internalize local wisdom values, creating a self-reinforcing cycle supporting long-term competitive advantage.

V. Conclusion

This study concludes that local wisdom-based marketing strategies of bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato exert significant positive influence on pesantren competitive advantage and sustainability in Madura. These findings are supported by evidence from multiple studies demonstrating that the integration of authentic cultural values into institutional marketing practices creates strong differentiation, builds community trust, and drives long-term stakeholder loyalty.

The novelty of this research resides in three aspects. First, the utilization of the bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato concept as an analytical framework in educational marketing, an approach largely unexplored in Islamic educational management literature. Second, the development of a three-layer conceptual model linking core values, operational strategy, and strategic outcomes within a coherent framework. Third, the identification of specific mechanisms through which local wisdom influences competitive advantage, encompassing identity differentiation, value-based trust-building, and network mobilization.

The practical implications of this research indicate that pesantren must optimize local values as sources of strategic advantage in confronting modern educational competition. Concretely, this entails: (1) consistently and authentically integrating bheppa', bhebhhu', ghuru, rato values into institutional narratives; (2) training all pesantren members to understand and implement these values in daily stakeholder interactions; and (3) developing local value-based partnership programs involving rato figures in surrounding communities.

Future research is recommended to employ empirical approaches using mixed-methods involving quantitative surveys and in-depth case studies to validate the conceptual model proposed herein. Comparative exploration with local wisdom from other regions will further enrich understanding of local wisdom's potential as a source of competitive advantage in Islamic education more broadly.

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