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THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL IN IMPROVING SCHOOL BRANDING SMP MUH 2 KARTASURA

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ABSTRACTS

In the field of education, school branding is a complex phenomenon that has many aspects. Therefore, the principal needs to have skills in improving school branding in order to be able to face increasingly tight competition. This study aims to describe the role of the principal and the supporting and inhibiting factors in improving the branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach including field research. The results of the study indicate that the role of the principal in improving school branding includes: The principal ensures that the school account is running well. The principal maintains communication with the school, parents of students, and alumni. The principal improves the quality of teachers. The principal improves facilities and infrastructure. Supporting factors in improving school branding include: Professional teachers. Positive school culture. The inhibiting factors include: Lack of funding and the presence of competitors in the school's environmental zone.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education is a structured system that achieves a variety of goals, including everything related to physical growth, health, abilities, ideas, emotions, willpower, social interaction, and matters of belief or faith. This suggests that schools as formal educational institutions have a lot of work to do to achieve their goals. Even more so when it comes to speed. The current changes have a significant impact on the way students think, act and behave, especially for those who are still in a developmental period and are going through a transition phase where they are trying to find their own identity (Suwartini 2017).

One way people can obtain education is through educational institutions, such as schools. Quality educational institutions will also produce quality human resources, so that they are able to compete with other schools in capturing the attention of students and parents. Schools and madrasahs are excellent educational institutions that can attract customers; people will definitely have a positive opinion about them. Hence, it requires contemporary school support, well-equipped classrooms, qualified instructors, discipline, and innumerable achievements. Society craves for these criteria because they assume that only schools with quality and well-equipped facilities are capable of producing individuals who are intelligent, devoted, and have a promising future.

All aspects of life, including education, are changing along with the rapid changes of the times. As the basic educational institution of society, schools must constantly adapt to improve teaching standards. Schools that are able to react quickly to changes will be the ones to win the competition in the future. Schools are expected to make adjustments that are more sensitive to the environment. That is, schools must adapt to the requirements of the environment to prevent abandonment by society (Minanda 2022). According to Malik, in order to provide the best educational services to parents and children, educational institutions must implement branding tactics, as this is one of the approaches to increase product awareness and positioning, furthermore, the function of the principal cannot be separated from this concept (Riyono 2018).

According to Gunawan et al., (2021) the result of marketing initiatives that can show how a product is different from competing goods by highlighting its features is branding. As a result, brand development will not be affected by brand management. In the field of education, school branding is a complicated phenomenon that has many aspects (Syarif et al. 2023). The lack of awareness in schools regarding marketing initiatives that are only done through websites or school participation in exhibitions at educational institutions shows how school branding is developed. Although the foundation of school branding development is two-way communication between internal and external parties of the school, implementing and influencing madrasah programs is one of the responsibilities of the school principal (Oktaviani and Sutarsih 2024). As according to Wiyana et al., (2024) that in the digital era, the leadership of school principals needs careful consideration in order to become a motivational factor for educators who face change. Principals in this digital era must have a variety of skills to conquer the many challenges faced and adapt in the field of education with every problem becoming an opportunity to build schools that are able to graduate high-caliber students. The role of the principal as a leader must be able to come up with original and unique ideas when doing his work.

According to Wahyosumidjo, a functional teacher who is given the responsibility of supervising a school serves as the head of the institution (Munir 2010). Principals must have a well-thought-out strategy in addition to their role in the change process to ensure that the change is actually realized through the emergence of new innovations that have an impact on improving teaching standards in schools. As according to Nurrachmawati (2023) to brand a school in the eyes of the community, the principal should be able to make innovations so that people are interested in sending their children to the school, here the principal has a role to manage and coordinate all teachers to move together. So the principal has an important role in improving school branding, the continuity between the role of the principal and school branding makes it important to have a principal who has qualified competencies in order to implement the vision and mission and make schools that have quality and are attractive to the community.

Previous research conducted by Mustika (2020) states that the school's strategic actions to improve competitiveness include: a) accreditation of skills programs, b) ISO 9001: 2008, c) positive student behavior, d) students' academic and non-academic achievements, e) quality of graduates, and f) superior skills programs. Internal factors that support the development of school branding in improving competitiveness include: a) the quality of teachers' human resources, b) the length of time teachers teach, c) teaching according to competence, and d) good school promotion. Meanwhile, the growing competitive forces hinder the development of school branding. These factors include: a) lack of student motivation to improve their competence in accordance with the skills program; b) the appearance of the school building; c) lack of cleanliness; and d) the location of the school in the village center.

Research conducted by Zuriati et al. (2024) showed that in SMPN 2 Meurah Mulia and SMPN 7 Sawang, facilitative efforts have successfully built the school's reputation as a superior cooperative institution. Student achievement, facility management and collaboration with outside parties all point to this success. But until now, educational tactics have not been fully successful in building the desired brand image, especially in SMPN 2 Meurah Mulia, where there are still some obstacles that must be overcome to motivate teachers and make improvements. Meanwhile, the persuasive tactics used in both schools have effectively increased the involvement of parents and the school community, thus helping to improve the school's reputation. In addition, coercive tactics have successfully increased participation and discipline, thereby improving the school's standing in the community. With an emphasis on cooperation, communication, and adaptation to current challenges, this study concludes that an innovative combination of educational strategies, including facilitative, educative, persuasive, and coercive strategies, is necessary for success in building a brand image for attending excellent collaborative schools.

Research conducted by Hanafi (2024) showed that 1) The strategy of the head of school branding development at SMA Cendana Pekanbaru which includes: 1) improving the quality of educational services, defining the output character, maximizing the use of technology in the implementation of promotions, conducting training and development for all teachers and staff, cooperating with internal and external parties, and conducting continuous evaluation; 2) supporting and inhibiting factors for the development of school branding at SMA Cendana Pekanbaru, which include: the completeness of school facilities, community participation, and school cooperation

both inside and outside the school; Meanwhile, the lack of motivation to learn according to the school program, the inability of the community to access system services, and the absence of feedback.

In contrast to the three studies above, this study will discuss the role played by the principal with a focus on improving school branding as well as supporting and inhibiting factors, this research was conducted in a different location, namely at Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura Junior High School. The purpose of this study is to describe the role of the principal as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in improving the branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura.

B. METHOD

Researchers use qualitative descriptive research techniques. Sugiyono (2016) states that the descriptive qualitative method is a postpositivist research approach used to study the state of natural objects. The type of research used is field research. Field research is defined as research whose primary data sources are collected directly from sources in the field (Sugiyono 2018). The purpose of this research is to present a comprehensive picture of the principal's efforts in playing an important role in improving the school branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura. This research uses qualitative research, which focuses on understanding the unique aspects of the phenomenon, including causes, effects, relationships, and all inherent factors. This research uses a phenomenological approach, because it examines the role of the principal in branding SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura. The subject of this research is a principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura. The data collection technique used interviews, observation, and documentation. Furthermore, data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman method, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Principal's Role in Improving the Branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura

Leaders are closely related to leadership, leadership is the key to the success of an organization or community group to bring about change because leadership can only be carried out by a leader. Therefore, it is very important for the presence of a leader in an organization or community (Arifin, 2015 in Primawan et al., 2020). Although leadership is an innate quality that can influence others, the leader or principal is a figure who has the highest authority, power, and all their actions have an impact on the course of the organization (Zukhruf and Azani 2023). A person is considered an effective leader if he can improve the organization and followers he manages through perseverance and planned results without causing harm to others (Anshari and Zahara 2017). Principals have an important role in improving school branding. Regarding branding, it is a way of introducing a product to be recognized and embedded in the minds of consumers (Wijaya, 2013 in Susilo, 2022). As the role of the principal of SMP 2 Muhammadiyah Kartasura in the results of data analysis including:

a. Ensuring the school account is running well

The Head of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura always looks at the school account to ensure optimal utilization of social media to convey information on activities at school, and maximize all social media such as Instagram, YouTube and Facebook and create a

new website for the school. SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura also organizes events that can be seen directly by the community, such as parenting seminars and trainings for parents, this effort is made so that the community sees that this school has progressed and grown with new management. These activities are always posted on the school's account so that they can be recognized by the wider community. In addition, new student admission pamphlets are also posted in this account.

As according to Hia et al., (2020) schools need to utilize technology, especially the internet and websites, to do school branding or marketing. Because, with the advancement of internet technology and being able to facilitate everything, schools should take advantage of it to disseminate information in an attractive way and also more easily accessible to the wider community. According to Robby et al. (2024) because digital platforms offer continuity and broad visibility, digital marketing branding is an important component. The image and reputation of the school that one wants to brand through digital marketing can be given and enhanced by digital marketing branding. Reaching out to prospective parents and students to get them to enroll in the targeted school is another way to achieve this. So digital media can also increase student recruitment. By providing prospective students with accurate information about school programs or education packages, school branding can increase the number of prospective students.

b. Maintaining communication between the school, parents, and alumni

The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura always maintains communication with all school parties regarding the continuity of education, provides evaluation as a provision for a better school, and maintains good relations in order to work together optimally and get satisfactory results as well. The principal also maintains communication with parents through meetings and WhatsApp groups to assess student progress and complaints from students and parents at home. In addition, the principal maintains communication with alumni who have continued their higher education and collaborate to expand the network. This aims to build a better school, establish relationships and the school can be well known in the surrounding community.

Understanding the relationship between the school's internal and external educational communities is essential for effective principal leadership in schools. This is because one's social environment which includes interaction and communication with teachers, TU staff, students, parents, community, government, and other relevant stakeholders is an important part of the principal's daily tasks as an educational leader (Sutapa 2006). The process of communicating or conveying meaningful news or information from a person or location to another in an effort to achieve mutual understanding is known as communication (Wursanto, 1990 in Rosyid & Yogi, 2021).

c. Improving teacher quality

The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura often involves teachers in training activities to encourage competency improvement and thus help improve their quality. Since students will directly feel the impact, high-quality education is of course the main branding element.

As stated by Simarmata et al. (2024) that the positive aspect of training is that teachers can better understand and apply local wisdom-based learning concepts when receiving training that emphasizes hands-on practice and the use of local props. This approach makes the material easier to understand and apply in an authentic classroom environment. Sitopu et al. (2023) also reported that several provinces in Indonesia have

experienced significant improvements in teacher professional development as a result of training to improve teacher quality through Zoom Cloud Meetings. Measurable and evaluable results have been obtained through a carefully planned training process that emphasizes technology proficiency, curricular integration, and the development of creative teaching techniques.

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d. Improving infrastructure

The head of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura has a role in developing school facilities, because it is important. Because, infrastructure facilities that can be used by students must be upgraded or improved and have been done in the early stages, namely revitalizing in order to improve the school. This is related to making students feel comfortable and providing a positive image that can be seen by the community.

As according to Maharani & Fathurrohman (2022) that principals play three roles in improving the infrastructure and facilities of the education system: managers (as organizers, managers, and motivators), administrative administrators, and leaders. According to Widiensyah (2018) that the main responsibilities of school principals are managing teaching staff and students, developing a curriculum that meets the needs of students, maintaining educational records, and providing specialized services for schools and educational facilities so that teachers and students are satisfied with their working conditions.

Supporting and Hindering Factors in Improving Branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura

a. Supporting Factors

Conditions that encourage an activity to continue are called supporting factors. The factors that support the role of the principal in improving the branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura include:

1. Professional teachers

Teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura are professional, young, creative, innovative, and progressive which is a high carrying capacity. This will create students who excel and succeed so that they can be recognized in the wider community.

According to Jahiriansyah et al., (2013) professional teachers carry out their teaching responsibilities in the classroom with high pedagogical competence, ensuring that students have a high-quality learning experience. The quality of student learning

achievement provides an overview of the learning process implemented by the teacher. The process can be assured if students obtain a high level of learning. The quality of the teacher's teaching is excellent. One sign of the high quality of education provided in schools is the high learning achievement of students. Dewi (2014) states that teachers play an important role in the growth of the country, especially in the field of national education.

2. Positive school culture

The school culture at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura is internally built into a positive, inclusive school culture, and views every student from various backgrounds and students who have great potential. The principal maximizes students' potential and strives for students to win at least one competition while studying at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura.

School culture can have an impact on how students develop as individuals. According to Jareonstasin (2000 in Sukadari, 2020) shows that education has an impact on students' personal growth. Widyasneti & Supriyanto (2023) also stated that a school can differentiate itself from other schools by developing and displaying its uniqueness to the community through its culture.

3. The principal builds an MOU with FETT

The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura has built many MOUs with many faculties, one of which is FETT. The head of Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura Junior High School has often collaborated to improve the competence of teachers and students, as well as improving marketing techniques that are currently managed as a result of collaboration with universities. The support of parents and the community is quite high as evidenced by the construction of stage 1 revitalization for the construction of infrastructure, the community helps a lot. This can certainly improve school branding. According to Palupi (2015) collaboration is a process in which two people work together to achieve a common goal. Both meanings are included in this definition: the parties must agree on common goals and activities. Collaboration should benefit both parties. In addition, it conveys the idea that collaboration will lead to mutual trust and interactive interaction between the two parties. The involvement of both parties will result from the collaboration. Whether in the form of money or labor, involvement is the participation of a person or group of individuals in a particular activity. Santi & Fitrilia (2021) also stated that collaboration or teamwork is an excellent way of combining different skills and being able to offer creative and established solutions or methods. In addition to their expertise, members also have diverse expertise, even when compared to smart individuals, groups provide added value and increase profits.

b. Inhibiting Factors

Circumstances that hinder the smooth running of an activity are called inhibiting factors. The factors that hinder the role of the principal in improving the branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura include:

1. Lack of funding

SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura has limited costs which caused the school to almost stop. With limited funds, it becomes an obstacle to marketing activities. But currently, the school optimizes marketing through social media, while offline marketing is not carried out optimally due to limited funding such as the need for banner and brochure printing costs. Then for the expected event, it cannot be implemented as a whole. This

certainly resulted in people who did not follow social media not knowing SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura and activities could not run optimally.

Abidin (2017) states that providing high-quality education is always associated with the financial component. Accepting that high-quality education requires substantial financial support is simple. One of the problems of education in Indonesia concerns the distribution and calculation methods. According to Emiyati et al. (2022), achieving quality education requires adequate funding.

2. The existence of competitors

The inhibiting factor in increasing the branding of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura is the existence of many competitors in the school environment zone so that the community has other alternatives to become an option and automatically the community will compare between one school and another. Meanwhile, SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura is only in the process of physical revitalization at stage 2 and it is comparable to public or private schools in the upper middle class.

According to Juraerahı et al., (2023) that competition with other educational institutions, including public schools that provide free education, is one of the external challenges. The attractiveness of schools is affected by this competition, and more effort is needed to stand out. Rocio et al. (2016) stated that competition between public and private schools can improve the technical efficiency of institutions, resulting in higher quality teaching.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the role of the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Surakarta in improving school branding includes: The principal ensures that the school account is running well to show the activities carried out, achievements, and excellence to the community. The principal maintains communication with the school, parents, and alumni to establish relationships and assess the condition of students to increase student potential. Principals improve the quality of teachers by taking teachers to training activities. Furthermore, the principal improves the infrastructure needed by the school and repairs damaged infrastructure.

In carrying out the role of the head of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura, there are certainly factors that support and hinder the improvement of school branding. Supporting factors include: Teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura are professional, creative, and innovative in carrying out their duties. A positive, inclusive, school culture that views every student from various backgrounds and students who have great potential. The principal built an MOU with FKIP in an effort to improve the competence of teachers and students, as well as improving marketing techniques that are currently managed. The inhibiting factors include: Lack of funding and the existence of competitors in the neighborhood zone of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Surakarta.

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