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Understanding the Drivers of Community Choice toward Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz: Integrating Religious Values and Educational Marketing Approaches

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the underlying drivers that influence the community's decision to enroll their children at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz. Anchored in the intersection of religious values and educational marketing, this research seeks to understand how faith-based orientation intertwines with modern educational expectations in shaping parental preferences. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, in-depth observations, and document analysis involving parents, teachers, and local community leaders. Findings reveal that religious commitment plays a pivotal role in constructing the community's perception of educational quality. The school's emphasis on Qur'anic literacy, moral discipline, and the integration of Islamic identity fosters a sense of spiritual assurance among parents. Beyond this spiritual dimension, educational marketing strategies such as transparent communication, community engagement, and reputation management emerge as complementary factors enhancing trust and loyalty. Parents tend to view the school not only as a center of religious learning but also as a platform that ensures academic competitiveness and social belonging for their children. The study highlights that the community's choice is neither purely rational nor emotional but a synthesis of both, embedded in cultural, religious, and social contexts. Ultimately, the findings suggest that effective educational marketing within faith-based institutions requires genuine alignment between institutional identity, moral values, and community aspirations. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious values can coexist harmoniously with strategic marketing practices in strengthening parental commitment and sustaining the relevance of Islamic education in a competitive educational landscape.

Keywords: Religious Values, Educational Marketing, Community Perception, School Choice, Qualitative Inquiry

1. Introduction

In recent years, the dynamics of community decision-making regarding Islamic educational institutions have undergone a profound transformation, influenced by both socio-religious awareness and the evolving landscape of educational marketing. The choice of Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah (MI) as an educational pathway is no longer merely a matter of religious obligation but increasingly a reflection of perceived quality, institutional credibility, and alignment with contemporary educational expectations (Ahmad & Rahman, 2020; Faridah, 2022). This shift reflects the broader theoretical framework of social practice proposed by Bourdieu (1990), in which social capital, habitus, and symbolic power shape the ways communities interpret and act upon educational preferences. The rapid growth of Islamic schools in Indonesia, particularly in Yogyakarta, demonstrates how institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz (MICBB) negotiate between preserving Islamic values and embracing modern educational management (Arifin, 2021; Hidayat, 2019).

Previous studies have identified multiple factors influencing school choice, including religious commitment, service quality, and institutional reputation (Kurniawan, 2018; Nugraha & Maulana, 2020; Hasanah, 2021). However, these studies often approach the issue from a quantitative lens, emphasizing measurable variables while overlooking the lived experiences, narratives, and emotional meanings that shape parental and community preferences. The present study seeks to fill this gap through a qualitative exploration grounded in the paradigm of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, this study is positioned within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework adapted to educational contexts, where marketing stimuli such as institutional image, communication strategies, and

religious narratives are interpreted by the community through cognitive and affective mechanisms, ultimately influencing behavioral intentions (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Integrating insights from educational marketing and religious sociology, the study investigates how spiritual values interact with perceived educational quality to construct an authentic institutional identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

The rationale behind conducting this research lies in the increasing competition among Islamic educational institutions and the community's growing demand for schools that offer both academic excellence and spiritual integrity (Muhsin & Fauzan, 2022; Suhartono, 2020). In the context of MICBB, the integration of Qur'anic values, character based pedagogy, and modern service delivery forms a unique case for understanding the interplay between religious symbolism and educational market positioning. Yet, scholarly understanding of how these factors translate into community trust, satisfaction, and long-term commitment remains limited (Alwi, 2018; Rohman, 2022). Accordingly, this research aims to address the following questions: How do religious values and educational marketing approaches influence the community's decision to choose Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz? and In what ways do parents and community members interpret their experiences and expectations toward the institution? Through a qualitative approach emphasizing narrative interpretation and reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), this study contributes a nuanced understanding of how Islamic education institutions can sustain authenticity and competitiveness. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative analytical lens that bridges religious sociology and marketing discourse to explore the affective, symbolic, and practical dimensions of community choice in Islamic education.

2. Research Methods

The present study adopted a qualitative interpretive paradigm to explore the underlying drivers influencing the community's decision-making process in selecting Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz (MICBB) as a preferred Islamic educational institution. Guided by the epistemological stance of constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the research sought to uncover how participants construct meaning through personal experience, religious values, and perceptions of institutional credibility. This methodological orientation aligns with the belief that human behavior particularly in religious and educational contexts is shaped by subjective interpretation, not merely observable patterns (Creswell, 2018; Bungin, 2015).

Following Yin (2018), this study utilized a case study design, chosen for its strength in examining contemporary social phenomena within their real-life contexts. The case of MICBB was selected due to its distinctive blend of Islamic moral values, educational innovation, and strategic marketing communication. This institutional context allowed for a holistic understanding of how religious authenticity intersects with modern marketing approaches, creating a unique educational identity (Arifin, 2021; Hidayat, 2019). The study was conceptualized through interpretive fieldwork that allowed continuous interaction between the researcher and participants. Data collection took place over six months to ensure temporal depth (Adam, 2013; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). This extended engagement enhanced the credibility and contextual sensitivity of the analysis, consistent with the naturalistic inquiry principles of Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, emphasizing diversity of perspectives across stakeholders: parents, teachers, school management, and local religious leaders. The inclusion criteria were based on participants' active involvement in decision-making processes related to school selection and their familiarity with MICBB's educational philosophy. This approach followed Patton's (2015) principle of information-rich cases seeking depth over breadth. In total, twenty-three participants were interviewed, representing varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Parents constituted the largest group, followed by teaching staff, community figures, and alumni. Such diversity allowed the researcher to trace multiple layers of meaning behind the concept of "choice" ranging from spiritual trust (amanah), perceived quality, to emotional attachment to Islamic identity (Ahmad & Rahman, 2020; Hasanah, 2021; Suhartono, 2020).

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews followed an open-ended conversational format inspired by narrative inquiry (Czarniawska, 2004; Coley et al., 2024; Colla & Kurtz, 2024). Each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, conducted in a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese to ensure natural expression. Questions were designed to elicit participants' lived experiences, emotional connections, and reflections on educational and religious expectations. Participant observation was conducted during school events, religious gatherings, and marketing campaigns. These observations helped the researcher interpret social behaviors and symbolic actions such as the use of Qur'anic

language in promotional messages or parents' expressions of trust during admission periods (Nugraha & Maulana, 2020; Faridah, 2022). Complementary to these, institutional documents such as brochures, mission statements, and social media content were analyzed to understand how MICBB frames its image through educational marketing discourse (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Usman, 2023). The triangulation of data sources strengthened the validity of findings, allowing patterns of meaning to emerge through multiple perspectives rather than a single account (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Faisal, 2014).

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024). This process followed six interrelated phases: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) narrative synthesis. The analysis was inductive yet theoretically informed, enabling the researcher to interpret the narratives in light of social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Greenwood, Hinings, & Suddaby, 2002). The thematic development was complemented by the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), which organizes data into first-order (participant) concepts, second-order (researcher) themes, and aggregate dimensions. Through this process, three interpretive clusters emerged: religious legitimacy, perceived educational excellence, and community trust as emotional capital. In addition, the analysis incorporated narrative structuring (Langley, 1999; Ghanbar, 2024; Ku, 2025) to trace the temporal evolution of participants' perceptions—how trust and reputation were built over time through repeated interactions between the school and its stakeholders. Such longitudinal narrative attention resonates with Pettigrew's (1990) perspective that organizational meaning unfolds dynamically rather than statically.

Given the interpretive nature of this study, reflexivity was integral throughout the research process. As emphasized by Finlay (2002), Alvesson, Hardy, and Harley (2008), and Cunliffe (2004), reflexivity entails recognizing one's assumptions, biases, and cultural positioning in the field. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal documenting methodological decisions, emotional responses, and critical reflections. This practice supported transparency and interpretive awareness, ensuring that meaning was co-constructed rather than imposed. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledged his own familiarity with Islamic education systems as both an insider and observer. This dual positionality demanded a careful balance between empathy and analytical distance, consistent with Van Maanen's (2011) notion of ethnographic authenticity.

The study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement and triangulation of methods. Member checking was conducted by returning synthesized interpretations to selected participants for feedback. Transferability was achieved through thick description (Moleong, 2018; Wahyuni, 2017), allowing readers to assess contextual resonance. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting analytic decisions, while confirmability was supported by peer debriefing and external validation (Rahardjo, 2017; Tracy, 2010). Ethical procedures were carefully observed. Informed consent was obtained, participants' anonymity preserved, and their right to withdraw respected. The research process followed the ethical values of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *amanah* (trustworthiness), reflecting the moral underpinnings of Islamic scholarship (Bungin, 2015; Suryana, 2021).

This study combined narrative inquiry and thematic interpretation, allowing participants' stories to guide theoretical construction. Following Mazzei (2021) and Zhang (2025), this hybrid qualitative framework acknowledges that lived experiences in educational contexts are both personal and collective, shaped by institutional discourses and community values. The integration of religious perspectives within marketing research responds to the call for more contextualized inquiry into non-Western educational phenomena (Islam, 2024; Islam, 2025a; Yu & Cheng, 2025). By situating educational marketing within a faith-based paradigm, this study departs from conventional managerial perspectives and moves toward a relational epistemology where trust, devotion, and moral identity become central elements of choice behavior (Rohman, 2022; Kurniawan, 2018). In essence, this qualitative methodological framework offers an interpretive lens to understand how Islamic values and marketing strategies interact in shaping community preferences toward MICBB. By integrating case study rigor, narrative depth, and reflexive awareness, the research aims to reveal not only the functional but also the spiritual logic that governs school choice in contemporary Muslim society. Through the synthesis of diverse scholarly traditions from Bourdieu's (1990) Logic of Practice to Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory the study bridges micro-level meaning-making with macro-level institutional forces. It ultimately provides a culturally rooted understanding of educational decision-making that extends the boundaries of marketing and Islamic educational research alike.

3. Results and Discussions

The qualitative inquiry into the factors shaping community choice toward Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz revealed an intricate interplay between religious values, marketing communication strategies, institutional trust, reputation, and service quality. Drawing on interviews with parents, teachers, and school administrators, as well as direct observations and document analyses, the study employed a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Creswell, 2018) to interpret how participants' lived experiences inform their educational preferences. Four major themes emerged: (1) religious authenticity as a foundation of trust, (2) integrative marketing communication and community engagement, (3) service quality and parental satisfaction, and (4) institutional reputation as a consolidating force in decision-making. Religious values surfaced as the central motif guiding parental choices, resonating with prior studies emphasizing the moral and spiritual orientation of Islamic schooling (Ahmad & Rahman, 2020; Rohman, 2022; Suhartono, 2020). Parents perceived the Madrasah not merely as an educational institution but as a sanctuary of iman cultivation and moral reinforcement. Authenticity manifested through the consistency between the school's declared mission and its daily practices was crucial in establishing emotional resonance and credibility. This aligns with Ashforth and Mael's (1989) social identity theory, where alignment between personal and institutional values fosters identification and loyalty.

Observations highlighted that teachers integrated Qur'anic ethics into classroom interactions, reinforcing not only academic excellence but also character formation (akhlak). Parents' narratives often underscored the sense of peace (*ketenangan batin*) derived from entrusting their children to an environment guided by *nilai-nilai tauhid*. This sense of spiritual assurance became a symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1990) that differentiated the Madrasah from other educational alternatives. Such authenticity nurtures long-term trust—a dynamic trust cultivated through perceived moral integrity rather than promotional rhetoric. Parallel to its spiritual appeal, the Madrasah employed integrative marketing communication to reach its surrounding community effectively. Document analysis revealed the strategic use of both traditional channels (Friday sermons, religious gatherings) and digital media (official website, WhatsApp groups, short video campaigns) to build awareness and engagement. However, rather than emphasizing commercial persuasion, communication was designed to reflect sincerity and transparency, consistent with Islamic communication ethics (Hidayat, 2019; Arifin, 2021).

Parents and teachers described these messages as “inviting” rather than “selling.” This discursive subtlety illustrates what Brown and Humphreys (2006) termed discursive hegemony of meaning, where institutional narratives are shaped by shared moral vocabularies rather than market-centric tropes. The Madrasah's marketing narrative was therefore constructed around service to the ummah, parental collaboration, and the embodiment of Islamic virtues in education. In essence, marketing communication operated as *da'wah* through education a form of persuasive sincerity that transformed public perception from mere institutional promotion into relational engagement. Consistent with Alwi (2018) and Kotler and Keller (2016), the research found that service quality both tangible and intangible plays a pivotal role in shaping satisfaction and reinforcing word-of-mouth advocacy. Parents emphasized responsiveness, discipline, and the teachers' personal attention to students as key determinants of satisfaction. Clean and safe facilities, disciplined routines, and transparent administration further strengthened perceptions of professionalism.

The study found that parental satisfaction was not only a reaction to educational outcomes but a reflection of experiential interaction, or what Patton (2015) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as trustworthiness of service encounters. Teachers' humility and communicative openness during regular meetings cultivated relational intimacy. Satisfaction, thus, was less transactional and more relational grounded in gratitude (*syukur*) and mutual respect. These findings support the argument of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) that meaning in qualitative data is socially co-constructed through affective experience, not merely functional evaluation. A recurring narrative across all participant groups was the perception of institutional reputation as a cumulative outcome of authenticity, quality, and continuity. The Madrasah's affiliation with the Islamic Centre Bin Baz, known for its consistency in religious discipline, acted as a legitimacy anchor that reinforced public confidence. This finding resonates with institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Greenwood et al., 2002), wherein symbolic legitimacy becomes a stabilizing factor in sustaining organizational trust.

Reputation also functioned as an interpretive frame parents assessed the Madrasah's reputation not only through official accreditation or external rankings but through communal narratives transmitted via *majlis taklim*, alumni networks, and word-of-mouth. The dynamic is consistent with Van Maanen's (2011) notion of field storytelling, where reputation circulates as a narrative currency within social fields. Thus, the school's social image was not static but continuously reaffirmed through collective discourse and community storytelling, sustaining the moral

authority of the institution over time. Synthesizing these themes suggests an interwoven model where religious authenticity acts as the core, marketing communication as the bridge, service quality as the enabler, and institutional reputation as the reinforcing structure. This layered relationship mirrors the structuration theory proposed by Giddens (1984): individual agency (parents' decisions) and institutional systems (Madrasah practices) recursively shape each other.

Parents' choice emerges not merely as a rational act of evaluating alternatives but as a moral decision influenced by perceived integrity and spiritual congruence. Hence, educational marketing in Islamic contexts must be understood as value-laden communication rather than neutral persuasion. The study extends the framework of religious-based educational choice (Kurniawan, 2018; Darmawan & Nuryadin, 2020) by showing that trust and authenticity serve as mediating variables bridging religious values and community behavior. In alignment with Finlay (2002), Alvesson et al. (2008), and Cunliffe (2004), the reflexive stance of the researcher became essential in interpreting participants' meanings within their lived cultural and religious frameworks. Being aware of the researcher's positionality allowed for a deeper understanding of how narratives of faith, reputation, and satisfaction intersected. Reflexivity also illuminated that the school's success in attracting families lies not solely in its curriculum but in its embodiment of Islamic sincerity (*ikhlas*).

Theoretically, the findings advance the literature by bridging educational marketing and Islamic identity formation, an area underexplored in previous works (Faridah, 2022; Muhsin & Fauzan, 2022; Usman, 2023). Practically, the study underscores that Islamic educational institutions must articulate marketing messages through authentic moral lenses while maintaining service excellence and transparent management. The community's choice toward Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz is a multidimensional phenomenon informed by faith-based authenticity, communicative sincerity, experiential satisfaction, and enduring institutional reputation. The interrelation of these factors suggests that effective educational marketing within Islamic contexts should not prioritize visibility alone but must deeply align with iman-driven trust and *akhlaq*-centered service. The findings confirm that in contexts where faith and education intertwine, the sustainability of institutional growth depends on maintaining the delicate balance between spiritual authenticity and managerial professionalism. By situating the discussion within reflexive qualitative methodology (Tracy, 2010; Gioia et al., 2013; Miles et al., 2014), this study not only elucidates how individuals make meaning of their choices but also contributes to a nuanced understanding of the moral dimensions underpinning marketing practices in Islamic education—an area that continues to evolve at the intersection of faith, culture, and educational management.

4. Conclusions

This qualitative study explores how religious values, institutional reputation, service quality, and educational marketing communication shape community preferences toward Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Islamic Centre Bin Baz. Using interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research reveals that parents' decisions are influenced not only by practical considerations but also by moral aspirations, trust, and spiritual identity. The school is viewed as more than a place for formal education—it represents a spiritual environment that fosters Islamic ethics, discipline, and communal harmony. Trust and reputation serve as the foundation of the school's credibility, linking its religious values to perceived service quality. Rather than relying on persuasive advertising, the institution strengthens its image through consistent ethical behavior, transparency, and active community engagement. Marketing communication functions as a medium of authenticity and reinforcement of values, especially through word-of-mouth and visual representation of religiosity. The findings show that the school successfully integrates faith-based education with modern marketing principles without losing its spiritual integrity. This balance demonstrates how Islamic educational institutions can maintain competitiveness while staying true to their core values. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of educational marketing by positioning religious values as a core epistemic element that drives trust and decision-making. Methodologically, the research applies a reflexive thematic approach, recognizing the researcher as part of the meaning-making process. Practically, it suggests that sustainable Islamic schools must prioritize relational trust, consistent service quality, and alignment between values and actions rather than focus solely on promotional strategies.

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