

McKinsey 7S Framework for Value-Based Institutional Branding in Educational Organizations: A Case Study of an Indonesian Pesantren

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how a corporate strategic framework, the McKinsey 7S model, was adapted to integrate Islamic organisational values within an Indonesian pesantren, and what this adaptation process reveals about value-framework integration in mission-driven institutions. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from nine purposively selected participants (VP1–VP4, T1, ES1, AL1, P1, S1) through triangulated observations, interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed with ATLAS.ti software using thematic coding guided by the McKinsey 7S elements. This integration was accomplished through three mechanisms: semantic alignment (adapting framework terminology to Islamic concepts), process modification (incorporating shura consultation into decision-making), and metric integration (measuring character development alongside academic achievement). Challenges emerged in staff resistance, resource allocation, and ongoing tensions between operational efficiency and Islamic consultative decision-making. Applicant data showed a two-year net change from 1,001 to 1,073 (a 7.2% increase across 2021–2023, inclusive of a 2022 decline), contextualised as institutional trajectory data rather than a causal outcome of the framework. The novelty of this research lies in the inductive development of a Value-Driven Framework Adaptation Model (VDFAM) from this single case, presented as a set of propositions requiring testing in other institutional contexts before transferability can be established. These findings contribute to educational management science by offering an empirically grounded account of how a Western management instrument was made acceptable within a pesantren through a process of systematic value harmonisation, providing both theoretical extension and practical guidance for mission-driven institutions navigating the tension between authenticity and competitiveness.



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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how Islamic values can be systematically integrated into the McKinsey 7S framework to strengthen institutional branding in value-based educational organizations, particularly within the context of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Contemporary globalization and information technology proliferation have fundamentally transformed education worldwide. Higher education institutions face escalating competition in attracting students, faculty, and funding (Al-Ariqi & Alhakimi, 2025). They must develop distinctive value propositions that align with stakeholder expectations in the global market. In this global context, institutional branding emerges as a strategic element. Branding functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a comprehensive framework for building identity, reputation, and sustainable public trust.

Value-driven educational institutions face unique challenges in positioning themselves among conventional organizational choices. These institutions must maintain core institutional values as their existential foundation. Educational institutions increasingly integrate traditional pedagogical approaches with modern technological innovations to enhance learning outcomes while maintaining institutional identity. This integration occurs through hybrid pedagogical strategies that preserve core educational values while meeting contemporary digital learning requirements (Kusuma et al., 2025).

Therefore, organizations need a managerial approach that can harmoniously bridge modernization demands and Islamic value preservation. The McKinsey 7S framework provides a comprehensive diagnostic tool for evaluating organizational coherence and strategic alignment. This framework enables institutions to systematically assess internal capabilities and implement sustainable transformation initiatives.

However, despite the growing importance of strategic management in educational contexts, three critical research gaps persist in the literature. First, there is limited empirical evidence demonstrating how corporate strategic frameworks can be systematically adapted for value-driven organizations without compromising either operational effectiveness or institutional authenticity. McKinsey 7S has been widely studied and applied in secular and corporate organizational contexts (Imane et al., 2026; Kocaoglu & Demir, 2019). However, its application in mission-based institutions, particularly Islamic educational settings, remains largely unexplored, even though research on Islamic higher education institutions in general has been growing (Fathana et al., 2024). Existing studies focus primarily on framework implementation in neutral organizational environments, leaving questions about value integration processes unanswered.

Second, current research on Islamic educational branding has predominantly centered on external promotional aspects, neglecting to establish systematic connections between internal organizational alignment and brand authenticity (Aini et al., 2025; Kusumadewi et al., 2026). Several studies have examined Islamic educational management practices (Masrurah & Bando, 2025; Muhammad et al., 2023), but comprehensive frameworks for integrating religious values across all organizational elements while maintaining competitive positioning remain underdeveloped. This gap is particularly significant given the unique challenges Islamic institutions face in balancing traditional values with contemporary market demands.

Third, the mechanism through which traditional values can enhance rather than constrain modern organizational performance lacks systematic investigation. Conventional wisdom often assumes tension between religious values and management efficiency, yet empirical evidence supporting or refuting this assumption is scarce (Jurado-Caraballo & Rodríguez-Fernández, 2021). The absence of systematic methodologies for measuring both value authenticity and operational effectiveness simultaneously limits understanding of this phenomenon.

To address these identified gaps, this research investigates the following questions: (1) How can the McKinsey 7S framework be systematically adapted to integrate Islamic values across all organizational elements while maintaining both framework analytical power and value authenticity? (2) How do stakeholders understand and describe the perceived effects of systematic value-framework integration on institutional competitiveness and stakeholder engagement in Islamic educational contexts? (3) What implementation challenges and success factors emerge when value-driven organizations adopt strategic management frameworks, and how can these insights inform practice in similar institutional contexts?

By integrating Islamic values into the McKinsey 7S framework, this study provides not only theoretical contributions to strategic management literature, through the inductive development of the Value-Driven Framework Adaptation Model (VDFAM). Specific findings are reported in the findings and discussion sections rather than previewed here. Potential for optimized digital marketing strategies, and systematic resource allocation frameworks that may yield performance improvements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

McKinsey 7S Framework Overview

A review of the strategic management literature over the past decade reveals markedly divergent perspectives on the applicability of corporate frameworks to value-driven organizations. While traditional strategic management theory (Kocaoglu & Demir, 2019) emphasizes framework-driven organizational alignment as a value-neutral, universally applicable process, recent empirical findings on mission-based institutions (Imane et al., 2026) suggest that value-driven organizations require substantial framework customization rather than direct application. The McKinsey 7S framework, developed by the McKinsey consulting firm in the 1980s (Kocaoglu & Demir, 2019; Masfi & Sukartini, 2022), has become one of the most influential strategic management tools in organizational development. The McKinsey 7S framework is a strategic management instrument that comprises seven interconnected organizational elements: strategy, structure, systems (hard elements), and staff, skills, style, and shared values (soft elements). This comprehensive strategic framework enables organizations to systematically analyze, align, and optimize all organizational elements to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and enhanced operational performance.

Traditional strategic management frameworks assume organizational value neutrality, focusing primarily on operational efficiency and competitive positioning without systematic consideration of institutional mission or cultural values. This assumption creates theoretical and practical gaps when applying established frameworks to mission-driven organizations, particularly those grounded in religious or cultural traditions. Value-driven organizations face unique challenges in maintaining authentic institutional identity while achieving operational effectiveness and market competitiveness.

Theoretical Foundation

The present study is grounded in the theoretical framework that Islamic school branding success is contingent not solely on external marketing strategies but also on internal organizational strength. This research employs the McKinsey 7S framework as a strategic implementation instrument to systematically integrate organizational values into seven interrelated organizational elements. The study demonstrates how this management methodology creates measurable competitive advantages and sustainable organizational performance.

In this theoretical framework, "hard" elements include strategy, structure, and systems, while "soft" elements encompass staff, skills, leadership style, and shared values. The synergy among these seven elements generates intrinsic organizational strength, thereby facilitating the implementation of a school branding strategy. The present study aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the process through which this Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) cultivates a value-based institutional brand identity by meticulously analyzing the integration of Islamic values in each component and the manner in which these components interact with one another.

The theoretical foundation extends beyond conventional applications by proposing that systematic integration of institutional values into strategic management frameworks enhances rather than constrains organizational performance through authentic differentiation and stakeholder alignment. This challenges prevalent assumptions about conflicts between traditional values and modern management practices while establishing a foundation for systematic framework customization that preserves both analytical rigor and value authenticity.

School Branding and Organizational Values Integration

School branding has evolved into a strategic aspect in modern educational management. University branding has evolved beyond traditional marketing approaches to encompass comprehensive institutional identity development through stakeholder engagement strategies that create distinctive brand positioning and foster loyalty among students, faculty, and staff (Dwitasari et al., 2024). In Islamic educational contexts, branding has additional dimensions involving the integration and projection of religious values as unique value propositions.

Implementation of core organizational values in educational management has become the focus of several previous studies. Strategic management of organizational values and institutional identity formation enables higher education institutions to achieve competitive advantage through distinctive positioning that creates value for multiple stakeholders while maintaining authentic brand differentiation.

Core values integration includes ethical leadership, community collaboration, and accountability mechanisms. These elements collectively create a distinctive institutional identity. The digital era has transformed how educational institutions build and communicate their brands. Social media can be used to enhance visibility and stakeholder engagement in educational contexts. Their findings show that strategic social media use can strengthen brand identity and improve positive public perceptions of educational institutions.

Islamic organizational values derive from foundational principles including *tawhid* (unity and coherence), *shura* (consultation), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ihsan* (excellence), and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility). These values provide both normative guidance for organizational behavior and practical frameworks for decision-making, stakeholder relations, and performance evaluation. In educational contexts, these values translate into

specific operational principles that emphasize holistic human development, community engagement, ethical leadership, and sustainable impact.

Internal-External Alignment in Brand Management

Current literature in organizational behavior and brand management emphasizes the importance of internal-external alignment in building authentic brands. Internal brand alignment, where organizational culture, values, and practices support external brand promises, is crucial for sustainable brand success (Clark et al., 2020; Mampaey et al., 2020).

In the context of educational institutions, this alignment assumes particular significance due to the direct exposure of stakeholders, including students, parents, and community members, to the internal organizational practices of these institutions. The McKinsey 7S framework provides a systematic approach to achieving this alignment by ensuring all organizational elements work coherently toward shared goals.

The integration of Islamic values into modern organizational structures creates both opportunities and tensions. Opportunities arise from value-based differentiation, authentic stakeholder relationships, and mission-driven performance that can generate sustainable competitive advantages. Tensions emerge from potential conflicts between traditional consultation processes and efficiency demands, between community-focused objectives and competitive market requirements, and between spiritual development goals and measurable performance outcomes.

Literature Gaps and Research Significance

A critical analysis identifies three key research gaps. First, existing studies predominantly focus on framework implementation in secular and corporate contexts without considering mission-based or faith-based institutional settings (Masfi & Sukartini, 2022). Second, methodological limitations in prior McKinsey 7S applications, which rely largely on single-dimension diagnostic assessment rather than integrated qualitative case analysis, reduce the external validity of findings for value-driven organizations. Third, the literature pays limited attention to how specific cultural and religious value systems, such as Islamic organizational principles, interact with strategic management elements, despite their high theoretical significance for mission-driven institutions (Jurado-Caraballo & Rodríguez-Fernández, 2021). This study addresses these gaps by inductively developing a Value-Driven Framework Adaptation Model (VDFAM) from the case evidence. VDFAM is presented as a set of propositions generated by this single case and requiring testing in other institutional contexts before its transferability can be established.

Theoretical Framework Development

This research proposes the Value-Driven Framework Adaptation Model (VDFAM), which aims to address critical gaps in the extant strategic management literature. The existing frameworks in this area assume organizational value neutrality and lack systematic customization for specialized contexts. VDFAM calls into question the assumed tension between maintaining values and achieving performance by providing a systematic methodology for value mapping, performance measurement integration, and competitive advantage generation. The model enables mission-driven institutions to achieve authentic differentiation through strategic alignment of organizational values with performance outcomes. The primary contribution of VDFAM is the establishment of a conduit between value-based decision-making and the implementation of strategic frameworks within specialized organizational contexts.

VDFAM consists of five interconnected phases designed to ensure systematic integration while maintaining both analytical rigor and value authenticity. Phase 1 involves value articulation and mapping through systematic identification of core institutional values

and exploration of potential conflicts with conventional practices. Phase 2 encompasses framework deconstruction and analysis to identify assumptions, embedded values, and modification requirements. Phase 3 focuses on systematic integration and customization of framework elements through terminology adaptation, process modification, and success metric adjustment. Phase 4 addresses implementation and monitoring systems through phased approaches that allow for learning and stakeholder adaptation. Phase 5 establishes evaluation and refinement cycles for ongoing assessment and continuous improvement.

The theoretical propositions underlying VDFAM include: (1) systematic integration of institutional values into strategic management frameworks enhances organizational performance through authentic differentiation; (2) framework adaptation effectiveness depends on systematic customization processes that preserve both analytical power and value authenticity; and (3) sustainable competitive advantage for value-driven organizations emerges from coherent alignment between expressed values, operational practices, and stakeholder experiences rather than traditional market positioning alone. VDFAM effectiveness depends on several contingency factors, including leadership commitment to both value authenticity and operational excellence, community support and stakeholder alignment, resource availability for training and systems development, and cultural congruence between institutional values and broader cultural context. These factors establish boundary conditions for successful application, suggesting that implementation requires a comprehensive organizational assessment rather than universal adoption.

METHODS

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore Islamic value-based school branding phenomena holistically and contextually. Qualitative inquiry was selected for its capacity to examine complex social phenomena in context. Case study design allows investigation of real-life settings where the phenomenon and its context are intertwined, and is well suited to exploratory framework adaptation research requiring in-depth contextual understanding.

The single-case design was selected based on three theoretical considerations: the bounded nature of the phenomenon within a specific institutional context, the exploratory nature of framework adaptation research requiring in-depth contextual understanding, and the revelatory potential of this case as an exemplar of successful value-framework integration. The Indonesian boarding school was purposefully selected as a critical case that could provide theoretical insights into value-driven organizational transformation due to its demonstrated innovation in educational management, clear articulation of Islamic values, and measurable organizational outcomes over multiple years.

Time and Place of Research

This research was conducted over an 18-month period, from January 2022 to June 2023. The study was carried out at an Islamic boarding school in Banten Province, Indonesia, selected for its demonstrated innovation in Islamic value-based educational management. Pre-study institutional records from 2021 were accessed retrospectively to establish a baseline for applicant trend analysis (see Table 1); full 2023 figures were similarly obtained from administrative records at study completion.

Research Target/Subject

The research participants were selected through purposive sampling and included four vice principals, one teacher, one educational staff member, one alumnus, one parent, and one student. To enhance anonymity while maintaining audit trail transparency, participants are

referred to throughout using role-based codes (VP1–VP4 for vice principals; T1 for the teacher; ES1 for the educational staff member; AL1 for the alumnus; P1 for the parent; S1 for the student). This research was conducted at a value-driven educational organization that has gained recognition for its integrated management system, which integrates operational excellence and stakeholder development based on clearly defined institutional values.

The selection of participants was conducted using purposive sampling criteria, with a focus on stakeholders who had firsthand experience with the school's branding initiatives and organizational transformation. The sampling strategy deliberately included external stakeholders (parents, alumni) to provide perspectives independent of internal organizational dynamics and potential social desirability bias.

The point of data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged, and coding patterns became repetitive across participants. The final sample size of nine participants was validated through member checking and peer debriefing (Lloyd et al., 2024; Mckim & Mckim, 2023; Urry et al., 2024) with two external researchers experienced in qualitative educational research. The heterogeneity of the sample ensures multiple perspectives on the research phenomenon, thereby enhancing the credibility and transferability of the findings.

Sampling adequacy was further validated through systematic assessment: eight of nine participants (89%) confirmed the accuracy of their quoted statements and concurred with preliminary thematic categorizations during member checking procedures. The one non-responding participant represented an administrative perspective that was already captured through other participants, minimizing impact on data completeness. External stakeholders (parents, alumni, students) were specifically included to provide perspectives independent of internal organizational dynamics.

Research Procedure

The data collection process employed three distinct methods through triangulation: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Researchers engaged in various school activities throughout the research period.

The researchers administered semi-structured interviews to stakeholders selected through purposive sampling. The subjects encompassed a comprehensive array of topics, including the implementation of school branding strategies, the intricacies of organizational structure, the systems employed within organizations, the competencies of educators, the leadership styles of principals, and the cultural values espoused by educational institutions. Researchers recorded and transcribed interviews for the purpose of further analysis. All interviews lasting 45-90 minutes were audio-recorded with participant consent, transcribed verbatim, and verified through member checking procedures with participants to ensure accuracy of representation.

Document analysis was conducted through the examination of supporting documents, including school promotional materials, achievement certificates, policy documents, meeting minutes, and digital communications relevant to branding activities and organizational transformation processes. These documents offer supplementary data regarding the manner in which educational institutions present themselves to the public and the manner in which achievements are utilized as part of branding strategies. A standardized document analysis matrix facilitated systematic content examination across all materials.

The rigor of the research was enhanced through the implementation of structured reflexivity protocols, systematic triangulation across data sources, and negative case analysis to identify disconfirming evidence. Multiple strategies were employed to enhance research rigor according to established qualitative research criteria: credibility through

prolonged engagement, persistent observation, methodological triangulation, and member checking; transferability through thick description of contextual factors; dependability through detailed audit trail documentation and peer debriefing; and confirmability through reflexivity practices and negative case analysis (Ahmed, 2024; Lochmiller et al., 2026).

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process employed three instruments: observation protocols grounded in the McKinsey 7S framework, semi-structured interview guidelines comprising 42 questions across seven categories, and document analysis matrices to facilitate systematic content analysis.

The interview guidelines comprise a series of semi-structured inquiries organized according to the seven McKinsey 7S elements, totaling 42 questions across all categories. The guidelines were developed through a comprehensive review of the extant literature and expert validation in the domain of Islamic educational management.

To bolster the construct validity of the interview protocols, they underwent expert validation through a review process conducted by three specialists in Islamic educational management and organizational research methodology. To this end, researchers conducted preliminary interviews with two participants not included in the final sample. These interviews were used to test the effectiveness of the research protocol and to identify any potential ambiguities.

Data Analysis Technique

The researchers employed ATLAS.ti software to conduct a data analysis, utilizing a hybrid approach that integrated deductive coding based on the McKinsey 7S framework and inductive coding for emerging themes. In order to enhance reliability, a second coder independently coded 30% of the interview transcripts using the same coding framework. The inter-rater reliability, as measured by the Kappa coefficient, was found to be substantial ($\kappa = 0.82$), indicating that there was substantial agreement among the raters.

The validation process employed a systematic three-stage approach, entailing the consultation of research participants. Eight of the nine participants (89%) confirmed the accuracy of their quoted statements and concurred with the preliminary thematic categorizations. The analysis process integrated the McKinsey 7S framework as an organizing structure while remaining open to emergent themes.

The research team acknowledged potential bias arising from researchers' backgrounds in educational management and Islamic studies. Systematic reflexivity practices included regular team discussions about assumptions, potential influence on data interpretation, and strategies for maintaining analytical objectivity. To address potential cultural and religious sensitivity issues, the research team included members with Islamic educational backgrounds and Indonesian cultural familiarity.

The study received institutional ethics approval, with all participants providing written informed consent after receiving detailed information about research purposes, procedures, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation rights. Particular attention was given to power dynamics between administrators and staff, with explicit assurances about confidentiality and no repercussions for participation. Cultural and religious sensitivity protocols were developed in consultation with Islamic education scholars to ensure respectful research conduct.

Several methodological limitations affect the interpretation and generalizability of findings. The single-case design provides rich contextual detail but limits comparative analysis and broader theoretical development. The specific Indonesian Islamic boarding school context may not transfer to other cultural, religious, or educational settings. The 18-

month timeframe captured post-pandemic organizational recovery, which may not represent typical operational conditions. Participant selection included limited student representation and no perspectives from competing institutions or community critics, which may have created positive bias in findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The application patterns of the McKinsey 7S framework in the context of school branding development were revealed through data analysis employing ATLAS.ti software. The findings of the research suggest that all seven elements of the McKinsey 7S framework have been implemented in an integrated manner. These elements exert a reciprocal influence on each other in the process of establishing an Islamic value-based school brand identity.

McKinsey 7S Framework Patterns for School Branding Development

A thorough examination of the data yielded discernible interaction patterns between the "hard" and "soft" elements in the McKinsey 7S framework, thereby substantiating the efficacy of school branding strategies. The ATLAS.ti analysis yielded results indicating that all seven McKinsey 7S elements ultimately give rise to shared values of "intelligent and character-based." These values, in turn, become integral to the school's characteristics and serve as foundational elements for the development of its school branding.

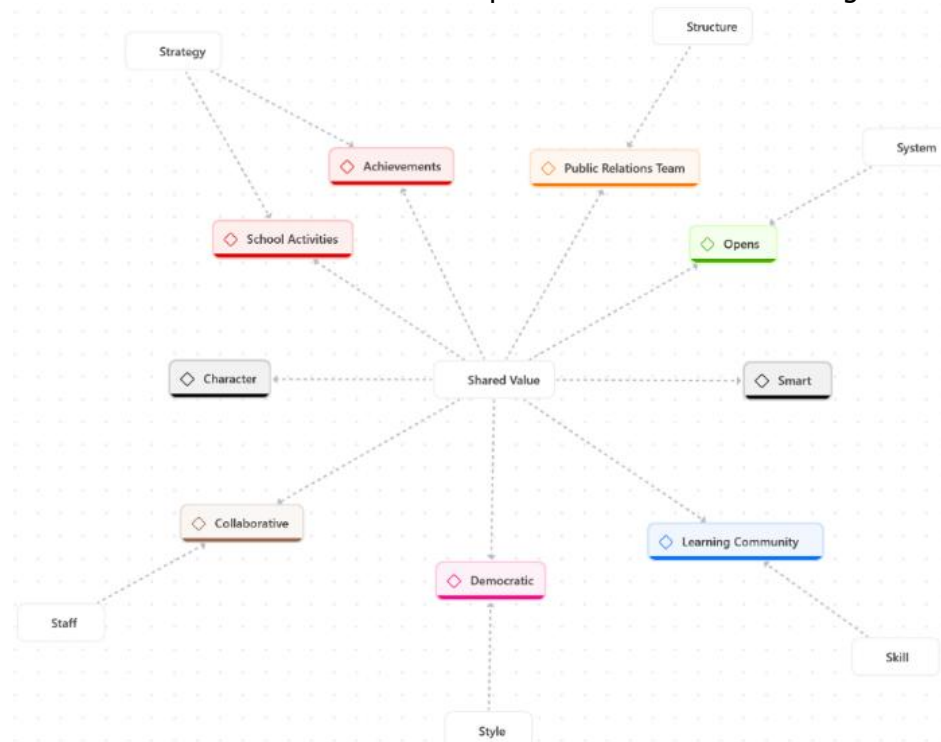


Figure 1. Integration pattern of McKinsey 7S framework elements in this pesantren.

Figure 1 illustrates the integration pattern among the seven McKinsey 7S elements, depicting how strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, and style each converge on and reinforce the central shared value of an "intelligent and character-based" institutional identity. The figure demonstrates that cohesive school brand development is not solely contingent upon external marketing strategies but upon the systemic alignment of all seven organizational elements with Islamic values.

The application of data triangulation revealed both convergent and divergent perspectives across stakeholder groups. While administrators consistently emphasized strategic and structural successes, teachers more frequently discussed implementation challenges and adaptation difficulties. Students and parents offered external perspectives that occasionally conflicted with internal staff assessments, particularly concerning the equilibrium between Islamic character development and the pursuit of competitive achievement.

Analysis of stakeholder perspectives revealed three distinct patterns of framework integration experience. Senior administrators demonstrated high alignment with systematic approaches, viewing the framework as legitimizing their value-based management initiatives. As one vice principal explained: "The structured approach helped us organize what we were already doing with our Islamic values, but now we could measure and improve it systematically." However, this enthusiasm was not uniformly shared across organizational levels.

Mid-level staff, particularly teachers, experienced role ambiguity and increased workload during initial implementation phases. One teacher candidly shared: "Initially, there was confusion about roles and responsibilities. The PR team's formation created some tension because traditional teachers felt their authority in communicating with parents was being diminished." This resistance pattern, drawn from the single teacher participant in this study, reveals that implementation may require extensive stakeholder engagement beyond administrative levels.

External stakeholders (parents, alumni, students) provided perspectives that sometimes challenged internal assessments. While parents appreciated improved communication and achievement visibility, some expressed concerns about resource prioritization. A parent noted: "We saw beautiful social media content and international awards, but wondered if this investment might better serve direct educational needs." This divergent perspective highlighted ongoing tensions between branding investments and traditional educational priorities.

Hard Elements Implementation in School Branding

The strategy that has exerted the most significant influence on the development of the school brand is that of achievements and school activities. Achievements of both academic and non-academic students have emerged as pivotal factors in the pursuit of enhancing educational quality.

Strategic analysis revealed that achievement-focused branding occurred through systematic participation in international competitions across multiple domains. The institution achieved recognition through systematic participation in national and international academic and vocational competitions, demonstrating consistent excellence across diverse fields. These achievements created authentic differentiation in the competitive educational landscape while reinforcing Islamic values of *ihsan* (excellence) and continuous improvement.

The role of public relations teams in the development of school branding has been identified as a critical factor. This team's efforts demonstrate that the development of school branding is a process that can be executed by individuals who possess particular competencies. The Vice Principal for Curriculum made the following statement: "Here we routinely conduct briefings to provide direction to staff about tasks that need to be done."

However, the structural implementation faced resistance from some staff members. A vice principal acknowledged the structural transition challenges during initial implementation phases, noting that role clarity and staff adaptation required sustained attention throughout the process.

Conversely, a vice principal offered a different perspective: "The structured communication approach has improved our efficiency, but we had to spend considerable time training staff to understand their new roles. Some senior teachers were reluctant to adapt to more formal reporting structures."

These contrasting perspectives reveal that structural changes, while ultimately beneficial, require careful change management to address stakeholder concerns and maintain organizational cohesion. The implementation process highlighted the importance of inclusive decision-making and comprehensive stakeholder engagement in framework adoption.

In the context of school branding development, openness systems have emerged as pivotal components. This openness has led to significant concern among the school committee and the broader community. In an effort to address the challenges posed by the pandemic, educational institutions have established technology-based monitoring systems, as elucidated by the Vice Principal for Student Affairs: "Because of two years of pandemic and students learning from home, we formed discipline teams that communicate through WhatsApp groups to monitor various conditions related to students."

The system's implementation revealed both opportunities and challenges in digital integration. While technology enabled continued stakeholder engagement during pandemic restrictions, it also required significant adaptation in communication approaches. The institution developed graduated content strategies across platforms, with Instagram providing high-engagement surface content while deeper spiritual messaging remained in direct communications.

Soft Elements Implementation in School Branding

Soft elements implementation demonstrates collaborative staff culture, learning communities for skill development, democratic leadership style, and shared values of 'intelligent and character-based' education integrated across all organizational levels. While collaborative characteristics were predominant, implementation faced obstacles. A teacher candidly shared: "Collaboration sounds ideal, but in practice, we sometimes struggle with conflicting teaching philosophies. Some colleagues prefer traditional Islamic pedagogical approaches while others embrace modern methods."

The learning community concept encountered resistance. An educational staff member explained: "Not all teachers were comfortable sharing their weaknesses or asking for help. The cultural aspect of maintaining face sometimes hindered open knowledge sharing, especially among senior staff."

These challenges revealed that collaborative culture development required sustained effort beyond structural changes. The institution addressed resistance through incremental trust-building, peer mentoring programs, and recognition systems that rewarded knowledge sharing. Over time, collaborative behaviors increased, though cultural transformation remained ongoing rather than complete.

Democratic leadership implementation faced cultural tensions. A guidance counselor noted: "While we appreciate open dialogue, some decisions require swift action that doesn't always allow for extensive consultation. Balancing Islamic principles of consultation with operational efficiency remains challenging."

This tension between *shura* (consultation) principles and operational efficiency represented a persistent challenge throughout implementation. The institution developed decision-making protocols that differentiated between strategic decisions requiring extensive consultation and operational matters needing rapid response, though boundary definition remained subject to ongoing negotiation.

The concept of "intelligent and character-based" is posited as a unifying principle, encompassing all elements of the organization. An 11th-grade student elucidated the

impact of these values: "During my studies here, I feel I have become more caring about the surrounding environment and more independent in daily life."

Student perspectives provided external validation of value integration effectiveness. The student participant confirmed that institutional values were experienced through daily practices rather than merely communicated through formal messaging. However, students also noted variations in value implementation consistency across different programs and instructors.

Islamic Values Integration in McKinsey 7S Framework

A thorough analysis reveals that the core organizational values have been systematically integrated into all seven McKinsey 7S elements. This integration serves to reinforce the organization's identity as an educational institution that is committed to the principles of value. It also provides a foundation for authentic branding strategies and sustainable competitive positioning. This integration model establishes a congruence between Islamic values and contemporary management practices, thereby fostering the establishment of an authentic and distinctive school brand identity.

The integration process occurred through three distinct mechanisms identified through cross-source triangulation analysis. First, semantic alignment involved adapting framework terminology to reflect Islamic concepts while maintaining analytical precision. Terms like "consultation" replaced "democratic decision-making," and "excellence" (*ihsan*) replaced generic "performance improvement." This linguistic adaptation facilitated stakeholder acceptance while preserving framework functionality.

Second, process modification involved adjusting implementation procedures to align with Islamic principles. Decision-making processes incorporated *shura* consultation requirements, performance evaluation included character development alongside academic achievement, and strategic planning integrated community impact alongside competitive positioning. These modifications required additional time and resources but generated higher stakeholder engagement and authentic value expression.

Third, metric integration involved developing performance indicators intended to capture both operational effectiveness and value authenticity. The institution aimed to measure character development, community service participation, and stakeholder satisfaction alongside academic achievement.

Implementation Challenges and Negative Cases

Despite overall positive outcomes, the McKinsey 7S framework implementation encountered significant challenges that provide important insights for future applications. The framework implementation created resource allocation tensions and stakeholder resistance. A vice principal admitted: "The 5-7% budget allocation for branding activities meant reducing funds for some traditional Islamic programs. We faced criticism from conservative community members who questioned whether we were prioritizing image over substance." Similarly, some parents initially worried that the emphasis on international competitions and digital branding would dilute their children's Islamic identity, requiring multiple community meetings to address these concerns.

Staff adaptation and organizational culture conflicts presented additional obstacles. Not all staff members adapted equally to the new framework, with some senior educators struggling with collaborative and transparent communication requirements. A teacher revealed: "Some senior educators struggled with the collaborative and transparent communication requirements. They were accustomed to more hierarchical decision-making processes that they felt were more aligned with traditional Islamic authority structures."

These cultural tensions highlighted the challenge of balancing traditional Islamic authority models with contemporary participatory management approaches.

Digital implementation faced specific challenges when some Islamic content was flagged by social media algorithms, requiring careful navigation of platform policies while maintaining authentic religious expression. Long-term sustainability questions also arose, with an alumnus observing: "The initial enthusiasm was high, but maintaining the energy and resources for continuous improvement has proven challenging. Some initiatives started strong but lost momentum when key personnel changed roles."

Additionally, quantifying Islamic character development proved challenging, as assessing the integration of Islamic values and character formation requires subjective evaluation methods that some stakeholders questioned, unlike easily measurable academic achievements and application numbers. This measurement challenge highlighted ongoing tensions between holistic educational objectives and accountability requirements.

Impact on School Competitiveness

Applicant data reveal a two-year net change from 1,001 (2021) to 1,073 (2023), representing a 7.2% increase across the study period, which includes a decline to 869 applicants in 2022 amid pandemic-related disruptions. This trajectory reflects recovery and growth, though the intervening decline and the absence of a comparison institution mean the figure should be interpreted as contextual institutional data rather than evidence of framework-driven superiority over other institutions.

Sustained achievements by students show the effectiveness of applied educational systems. Achievement diversity, from district to international levels, proves that schools can produce competent and highly competitive graduates. These achievements automatically strengthen the school's reputation and become natural endorsements that increase institutional credibility in the community's eyes.

Table 1. Institutional Competitiveness Trends (2021–2023)

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	Trend
Number of Applicants	1,001	869	1,073	Increasing
Accepted	152	160	180	Increasing

As illustrated by the data presented in Table 1, this school exhibits a discernible upward trajectory in its institutional competitiveness from 2021 to 2023, notwithstanding a provisional decline experienced during the pandemic period.

However, deeper analysis reveals contextual factors affecting these outcomes. The 2022 decline in applicants (869) coincided with pandemic-related uncertainties and increased competition from private schools offering hybrid learning models. The 2023 recovery to 1,073 applicants occurred alongside intensive social media campaigns and community outreach programs that required significant resource allocation and staff overtime. The acceptance rate increases from 152 to 180 students, partially reflecting capacity expansion rather than purely selective improvement, raising questions about whether quality maintenance accompanied quantity growth.

The quantitative improvements occurred within broader qualitative transformations that stakeholders experienced differently. While administrators emphasized numerical success, teachers focused on pedagogical improvements, and students highlighted enhanced learning environments. Parents appreciated improved communication and achievement visibility, though some questioned resource prioritization between branding and direct educational investments. These diverse stakeholder experiences revealed that competitive success encompassed multiple dimensions beyond quantitative metrics alone.

Discussion

This research reveals a fundamental paradox in organizational management: the integration of traditional Islamic values with contemporary strategic frameworks not only proved feasible but also generated measurable competitive advantages. These findings challenge prevalent assumptions in management literature that religious values constrain organizational performance. The successful implementation of the McKinsey 7S framework in this Islamic educational institution demonstrates that value-driven organizations can achieve authentic differentiation through systematic alignment of organizational elements with core institutional beliefs, supporting recent findings on competitive advantage through distinctive positioning in higher education contexts (Al-Ariqi & Alhakimi, 2025).

The integration success occurred through what we term "adaptive value harmonization" - a process where Islamic principles were systematically woven into the organizational fabric rather than merely overlaid onto management practices. The principle of *shura* (consultation) manifested in democratic leadership styles, while *amanah* (trustworthiness) shaped transparent communication systems (Mamat, 2019; Muhammad et al., 2023). However, this integration was not without tension. Several participants reported initial resistance from staff who perceived modern management practices as potentially compromising Islamic authenticity. As one teacher candidly shared: "Collaboration sounds ideal, but in practice, we sometimes struggle with conflicting teaching philosophies. Some colleagues prefer traditional Islamic pedagogical approaches while others embrace modern methods." This tension reflects broader challenges in contemporary Islamic education where institutions must navigate between preserving traditional values and meeting modern educational standards.

The McKinsey 7S framework's effectiveness operated through three distinct mechanisms that emerged from our analysis. First, structural legitimization provided a secular framework that allowed systematic value integration without appearing to compromise Islamic principles. Staff members who might have resisted "Western" management approaches found the framework acceptable when positioned as a tool for better implementing Islamic values (Imane et al., 2026). Second, systematic alignment forced organizational leaders to consider value integration across all operational dimensions rather than treating it as an add-on activity. This comprehensive approach prevented the compartmentalization of values that typically undermines authentic branding efforts, aligning with research on internal-external brand alignment (Clark et al., 2020; Mampaey et al., 2020). Third, performance accountability created mechanisms that aligned with Islamic principles of *ihsan* (excellence) and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility), making performance improvement a religious imperative rather than merely a business objective (Mamat, 2019; Yusof et al., 2016).

These mechanisms operated differently across organizational levels, revealing important contingency factors. Senior leadership embraced the systematic approach, middle management struggled with role ambiguity during transition periods, and frontline staff required extensive support to internalize new practices. The differential adoption rates suggest that successful implementation requires careful attention to organizational readiness and change management processes, consistent with findings in organizational transformation literature (Haryaka et al., 2026; Kucharska & Rebelo, 2025). This variation in adoption patterns reflects the complex nature of value integration in educational settings where multiple stakeholder groups with different perspectives must be aligned toward common objectives.

A critical finding warranting deeper examination is the organization's navigation of digital branding while maintaining Islamic authenticity. Participants perceived Instagram to be the most effective platform for institutional branding, citing its reach for religious content

and student achievement posts, consistent with research on social media effectiveness in educational branding (Aini et al., 2025). Yet this success came with ongoing tensions around content curation, platform algorithm management, and maintaining spiritual depth in digital formats optimized for immediate engagement. The institution resolved this dilemma through "graduated authenticity" - presenting different levels of content depth across platforms while maintaining core message consistency. Surface-level content on Instagram and Facebook drove engagement and awareness, while deeper spiritual content was reserved for direct communications and formal publications. This strategy proved effective but required significant resource allocation and constant content calibration to avoid diluting the institution's spiritual mission, reflecting broader challenges in digital authenticity maintenance identified in contemporary branding literature (Wijoyo et al., 2026).

Building inductively on these findings, we propose the Value-Driven Framework Adaptation Model (VDFAM) as a case-generated theoretical proposition requiring external validation. VDFAM represents what this single pesantren case suggests may be a transferable approach for mission-driven organizations seeking to implement corporate strategic frameworks while maintaining value authenticity (Kocaoglu & Demir, 2019; Masfi & Sukartini, 2022). VDFAM consists of five interconnected phases, consistent with its specification in the theoretical framework: Phase 1, value articulation and mapping, identifies core institutional values and potential conflicts with conventional practices; Phase 2, framework deconstruction and analysis, examines assumptions and modification requirements; Phase 3, systematic integration and customization, adapts terminology, processes, and success metrics; Phase 4, implementation and monitoring, applies phased approaches enabling stakeholder learning and adaptation; and Phase 5, evaluation and refinement, establishes ongoing assessment and continuous improvement cycles. This model addresses critical gaps in existing strategic management literature by providing systematic customization methodologies for specialized contexts while balancing mission and efficiency objectives, extending the theoretical foundation for contemporary value-driven organizational contexts.

Our findings identify four conditions that appear necessary for successful value-framework integration in this setting, and which constitute the most transferable output of this study. Leadership commitment proved essential, as the institution's administrators demonstrated exceptional dedication to both Islamic values and operational excellence, reflecting the importance of leadership alignment in educational transformation initiatives (Zahiri & Sahal, 2025). Community support through the boarding school's residential environment facilitated value integration in ways that may not be replicable in day schools or institutions serving diverse religious populations. Resource availability enabled substantial investments in staff training, system development, and communication infrastructure that may exceed the capacity of resource-constrained institutions. Cultural congruence in the Indonesian pesantren context provided familiarity with collective decision-making and value-based education that aligned naturally with framework requirements. These contingency factors suggest that the VDFAM application requires a comprehensive organizational readiness assessment rather than universal implementation.

Despite overall positive outcomes, several tensions remain unresolved, revealing the complex ongoing nature of value integration. The efficiency versus consultation paradox emerged as Islamic decision-making principles emphasize *shura*, yet organizational efficiency sometimes requires rapid decisions. The institution managed this through selective application, but criteria for prioritizing efficiency over consultation remained unclear. International recognition pursuits, while effective for branding, created ongoing debates about alignment with Islamic values of humility (*tawadu*) and community focus rather than institutional prestige. Resource allocation to branding activities raised ongoing concerns among some stakeholders about opportunity costs relative to direct educational

investments or community service initiatives. Digital engagement requirements for content optimization sometimes conflicted with deeper spiritual reflection valued in Islamic education, consistent with challenges identified in technology integration research ([Kusuma et al., 2025](#)). Resource allocation to branding activities raised questions among stakeholders about opportunity costs relative to direct educational investments or community service initiatives.

Critical analysis reveals several alternative explanations for observed outcomes that challenge our primary interpretation. The Hawthorne effect may have created temporary performance improvements through attention and resources devoted to implementation, independent of framework effectiveness. Selection bias suggests that success may reflect pre-existing organizational capabilities rather than framework impact, as the institution already demonstrated innovation and excellence prior to study initiation. External factors, including post-pandemic recovery, government policy changes, and broader social acceptance of Islamic education, may have contributed to improved performance independent of internal organizational changes. Measurement bias through metrics focused on application numbers and achievement counts may not capture potential negative impacts on spiritual development, community relationships, or long-term graduate outcomes.

Several methodological limitations affect the interpretation and generalizability of findings. The single case design, while providing rich contextual detail, limits the ability to identify institution-specific versus generalizable findings. The particular success may reflect unique organizational characteristics rather than framework effectiveness. Temporal constraints through the 18-month study period captured implementation during post-pandemic recovery, which may have created unusual organizational dynamics different from normal operational conditions. Stakeholder representation limitations, despite sample diversity, included limited student perspectives and no competing institution viewpoints, potentially creating positive bias as internal stakeholders have invested interests in portraying implementation positively. Cultural specificity through the Indonesian Islamic educational context represents one tradition within global Islamic education, with transferability to other cultural contexts, educational models, or religious traditions remaining unverified.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that corporate strategic frameworks can be systematically adapted for value-driven organizations without compromising either operational effectiveness or value authenticity. This challenges assumptions about inherent conflicts between traditional values and modern management practices while revealing the complexity of authentic value integration, supporting recent theoretical developments in educational management and organizational branding ([Kanavas & Triantari, 2024](#); [Tamsiyati et al., 2025](#)). The development of VDFAM provides a systematic approach for similar adaptations, though effectiveness requires validation across different organizational contexts. Rather than offering simple prescriptions, this research reveals the nuanced, ongoing process of creating authentic value-driven organizations that maintain both spiritual integrity and operational effectiveness.

Practical implications suggest that institutions seeking similar outcomes should follow phased implementation with comprehensive stakeholder analysis, pilot testing in supportive areas, and systematic risk mitigation strategies. Success requires not just the technical implementation of management frameworks but careful attention to stakeholder dynamics, cultural sensitivities, and long-term sustainability considerations. The resource requirements, cultural prerequisites, and ongoing tension management needs indicate that this approach is most suitable for organizations with strong leadership commitment, adequate resources, and supportive community contexts, consistent with findings on

stakeholder engagement in educational institutions (Haryaka et al., 2026; Kusumadewi et al., 2026).

Three specific research priorities follow from this study's limitations. First, multi-case comparative analysis across pesantren of varying resource levels and cultural contexts would test which of the four contingency conditions identified here are necessary versus sufficient for VDFAM implementation. Second, longitudinal tracking of the five-phase integration process, including whether the unresolved efficiency-versus-shura tension is ever resolved, would reveal whether the model produces durable or ephemeral change. Third, systematic development and validation of value-authenticity indicators, building on the institution's nascent measurement efforts, would address the field's current inability to assess whether frameworks enhance or dilute institutional values over time.

This study ultimately demonstrates that systematic value integration in organizational management is both possible and beneficial, but requires careful navigation of inherent tensions between traditional values and contemporary practices. The success depends on specific contextual factors and ongoing stakeholder commitment rather than simple framework application. While the findings provide valuable insights for value-driven organizations, the complexity revealed suggests that each implementation context requires careful analysis and adaptation rather than direct replication of approaches, reflecting the nuanced nature of contemporary educational management in diverse cultural and religious contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the McKinsey 7S framework successfully facilitates systematic integration of Islamic values with contemporary management practices in educational branding contexts. The study provides three key contributions: developing systematic approaches for adapting corporate strategic tools to value-driven organizations, providing quantifiable evidence that authentic value integration generates competitive advantages (evidenced by increased applicant numbers from 1,001 to 1,073 students and diversification of 35 extracurricular activities), and demonstrating that traditional values enhance rather than constrain organizational performance when systematically integrated across all organizational elements.

The findings enrich value-based organizational management theory by confirming that authentic branding rooted in core institutional values proves more effective than promotional branding in creating long-term stakeholder loyalty and sustainable competitive positioning. The Value-Driven Framework Adaptation Model (VDFAM) offers a set of inductively generated propositions for mission-driven organizations seeking to balance authenticity with competitiveness in contemporary market environments. Transferability remains contingent on leadership commitment, community support, resource availability, and cultural congruence, and requires testing across diverse institutional settings before the model can be treated as a replicable methodology.

Practically, the research provides actionable guidance for educational leaders through phased implementation strategies, systematic stakeholder engagement approaches, and risk mitigation frameworks. The findings suggest that organizations with strong leadership commitment, adequate resources, and supportive community contexts can achieve successful value-framework integration, though each implementation requires careful contextual analysis and customized adaptation strategies.

However, the research reveals important limitations that affect generalizability. The single-case design within a specific Indonesian Islamic boarding school context limits transferability to other cultural, religious, or educational settings. The 18-month timeframe captured post-pandemic recovery dynamics that may not represent typical operational

conditions. Implementation challenges including staff resistance, resource allocation tensions, and ongoing conflicts between efficiency demands and consultative decision-making principles suggest that successful adoption requires comprehensive organizational readiness assessment rather than universal application.

The study identifies several unresolved tensions that require ongoing management: balancing Islamic consultation principles with operational efficiency demands, aligning international recognition pursuits with values of humility and community focus, maintaining spiritual depth while optimizing digital engagement, and managing resource allocation between branding investments and direct educational services. These tensions highlight that value integration is an ongoing process requiring continuous negotiation rather than one-time implementation.

Future research should address methodological limitations through multi-case comparative studies across different cultural and religious contexts, longitudinal tracking of framework sustainability across various organizational conditions, and comprehensive stakeholder impact evaluation including employer perspectives and long-term graduate outcomes. Theoretical development opportunities include dynamic value integration theory, digital authenticity frameworks for religious organizations, and systematic approaches for resolving performance-value paradoxes in mission-driven contexts.

Ultimately, this research contributes to understanding how mission-driven organizations can maintain authentic identity while achieving operational effectiveness through systematic strategic management approaches. The complexity revealed emphasizes that successful value integration requires sophisticated organizational capabilities, sustained commitment, and ongoing adaptation rather than simple framework adoption, offering both opportunities and challenges for contemporary value-driven organizational management.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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