

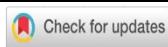
HOW PRINCIPAL BRANDING SHAPES INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION: INSIGHTS FROM SMPN 1 MEGALUH

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OPEN ACCESS



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34125/jmp.v11i1.1206>

Sections Info

Article history:

Submitted: 23 November 2025

Final Revised: 11 January 2026

Accepted: 16 January 2026

Published: 13 February 2026

Keywords:

Role of the School Principal

Strategies

School Principal Branding



ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of school principal branding in enhancing institutional image at SMPN 1 Megaluh through a descriptive qualitative approach, the descriptive qualitative approach is intended to describe the findings obtained after the research. This research method is carried out in depth through interviews with several sources, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the principal acts as a leader, motivator, innovator, and facilitator who actively develops a branding strategy rooted in local character, such as the use of the school logo and the slogan "SEMANGKA" (Spirit of Learning and Creating), professional utilization of social media, and empowerment of teachers, students, and the community in implementing agrarian-based school programs. This strategy not only strengthens the school's identity but also increases public trust, as evidenced by parent involvement, growing digital presence, and the emergence of a positive perception regarding the school's educational quality. The research matrix indicates a significant positive impact on the formation of a strong and authentic institutional image, achieved through the integration of branding into all managerial and learning aspects of the school.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan peran branding kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan citra lembaga di SMPN 1 Megaluh melalui pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dimaksudkan untuk mendeskripsikan hasil temuan yang diperoleh setelah penelitian. Metode penelitian dilakukan secara mendalam melalui wawancara dengan beberapa narasumber, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah berperan sebagai pemimpin, motivator, inovator, dan fasilitator yang aktif mengembangkan strategi branding berbasis karakter lokal, seperti penggunaan logo dan slogan "Semangka" (Semangat Belajar dan Berkarya), pemanfaatan media sosial secara profesional, serta pemberdayaan guru, siswa, dan masyarakat dalam pelaksanaan program sekolah berbasis agraris. Strategi ini tidak hanya memperkuat identitas sekolah tetapi juga meningkatkan kepercayaan masyarakat, ditunjukkan dengan keterlibatan orang tua, meningkatnya eksistensi di media digital, dan terbangunnya persepsi positif terhadap mutu layanan pendidikan. Matriks hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya dampak positif secara signifikan terhadap pembentukan citra lembaga yang kuat dan autentik, yang dicapai melalui integrasi branding dalam seluruh aspek manajerial dan pembelajaran sekolah.

Kata kunci: Peran Kepala Sekolah, Strategi, Branding Kepala Sekolah

INTRODUCTION

Education continues to evolve along with the times and competition among educational institutions ([Rahmadani, 2023](#)). The development of modern technology today has intensified competition between educational institutions ([Azizah et al., 2022](#)). Educational institutions are being challenged to compete optimally in meeting or even exceeding the expectations of the public as users of educational services by making improvements in various aspects of education to enhance educational quality ([Faizah et al, 2024](#)). In this era of globalization, many educational institutions emerge competing to attract more students without neglecting educational quality ([Rohman et al., 2023](#)). This competition forces educational institutions to utilize service marketing to bridge the competitive rivalry ([Zuriati, 2024](#)). Therefore, building a school brand or image becomes crucial as an attraction for students and parents in choosing the right place of education ([Azizah et al., 2023](#)).

Developing a brand or image in educational institutions is very important for creating a positive perception in the eyes of the public ([Azizah et al., 2023](#)). As information and communication technology continues to grow, school branding becomes increasingly significant parents and prospective students can easily search for information about schools via the Internet ([Ardhani et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, schools are required to establish a branding strategy so as not to fall behind other schools. Moreover, branding plays a role in improving educational quality, the teaching process, and strengthening the school's position in society ([Tutik Saptaningsih, 2021](#)). Branding is not only a promotional tool, but also a differentiating factor that makes an educational institution more attractive than others. If all educational institutions are the same, their appeal in society will diminish. Therefore, the expected branding of each educational institution must be different ([Wardani, 2021](#)).

The impact of not branding the school in accordance with technological development, especially digital marketing, is that the school may be abandoned by parents as customers. This happens because parents do not know the school's information or brand. Parents may perceive the school as uninnovative or outdated, since it does not follow technological development ([Wahyunto et al., 2024](#)). Previous studies have investigated aspects of branding in educational institutions. For example, research was conducted at SMP 3 Slahung Ponorogo, which emphasized Islamic character and the concept of an Adiwiyata school ([Arifin, 2019](#)). In addition, there are studies focusing on branding as an entrepreneurial school at TK Khalifah Sewon Yogyakarta ([Mushlih, 2019](#)), and on branding strategies implemented at SDI Plus Masyitoh Kroya Cilacap ([Jamaluddin, 2021](#)). Other research highlighted branding strategies in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri in Purbalingga Regency from 2018 to 2020, with an emphasis on public trust ([Karsono et al., 2021](#))

School branding, or school branding, is an effort to give a name to an educational institution with the aim of highlighting its advantages and uniqueness to attract the interest of prospective students and parents ([Rizkiyah et al., 2020](#)). School branding is not just about the logo, colors, and slogan, but encompasses all aspects that reflect the school's identity and the quality of education provided ([Fadli et al., 2020](#)). One of the benefits of school branding is improving education quality, because with a good image, the school can attract quality prospective students to enroll ([Azizah et al., 2023](#)). A leader must work hard to build a high reputation by actively designing strategies and actions to optimize resources to meet the increasing expectations of customers ([Zuriati, 2024](#)). A key factor in maintaining the sustainability of an educational institution is the continuous improvement of quality. The principal plays a major role in the institution's development because an institution cannot develop optimally without a good relationship with the surrounding community. The

presence of the principal is very important as a leader and a driving force for school resources; with effective leadership, a team can be formed to create a good image in the public eye ([Agfariza, 2023](#))

Schools need to design appropriate strategies to become effective institutions in building a positive image, thereby accelerating their quality improvement ([Mukhafadlo, Nafisatul, 2022](#)). Schools need to have a clear vision and mission, a professional principal and teaching staff, a supportive and student friendly environment, strong management, a broad yet balanced curriculum, a meaningful assessment and reporting system, as well as active involvement from parents and the community in the educational process ([Rahmadani, 2023](#)). Based on the results of interviews, at SMPN 1 Megaluh a school branding has been prepared. The school, located in an agrarian area where most residents work in agriculture, has designed its branding in line with its surrounding environment namely in the field of agriculture. The way the school does this branding is by focusing on the P5 (Presumably a program) in agriculture. This agricultural P5 activity has been running for about two years. Before the full school branding, each class has its own branding for example, there is a tomato class, an eggplant class, a bok choy class, and others. In the P5 activity, students are taught how to plant, care for, and harvest vegetables. SMPN 1 Megaluh has a school icon "SEMANGKA" (Semangat Berkarya / Spirit of Creating). The school wishes to create another icon related to agriculture. The school invites several resource persons from Megaluh's agriculture sector and holds workshops for teachers on agriculture. The Jombang Regency Education Office requires every school to have its own branding. Therefore, SMPN 1 Megaluh decided that its school branding would be agriculture.

Based on previous studies, the principal's branding strategy has an important role in building a positive image of an educational institution. Research by Putri Rahmadani (2020) emphasizes seven functions of the principal's leadership as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, innovator, motivator, and leader in guiding teachers, students, and fostering external cooperation to strengthen public trust. Meanwhile, Ema Kusuma ([Wardani, 2021](#)) shows that faith-based (Islamic) school branding is carried out through habituation of Islamic manners, a tahfidz program, and active promotion via social media. A study by Sesi Triana Rahayu (2024) found that brand image development was performed systematically through SWOT analysis, strategy implementation via social media, accreditation improvement, and regular evaluation. All four studies show that effective branding is done by strengthening leadership, improving facilities, and leveraging technology to build trust and character among students.

Research by Abu Hanafi (2024) and Chandra Winata & Muhammad Fadhli (2024) affirms that school branding can also be optimized through improving the quality of educational services, teacher training, internal and external cooperation, as well as relevant extracurricular activities. For instance, at SMKN 3 Medan, branding is focused on developing extracurricular activities such as robotics, multimedia, and entrepreneurship, which are creatively publicized via digital media to attract public attention. Overall, these studies share a common emphasis the principal plays a central role in driving school branding through promotional strategies, collaboration, and continuous innovation, with differences lying in the focus of implementation from religious values, strengthening facilities, to developing flagship programs. Based on the background and previous studies, the purpose of this research is to understand and describe the role and branding strategies of the principal in building the institutional image at SMPN 1 Megaluh. This research focuses on how the principal serves as a leader, motivator, innovator, and facilitator in developing school branding based on local

character, and how branding strategies are effectively implemented through various programs and school activities to strengthen identity, enhance public trust, and form a positive image of the educational institution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to describe the findings obtained after the research. The study is a natural observation type, meaning that the research is conducted under real and natural conditions without manipulating the situation ([Afriani et al., 2025](#)). The research methods are carried out in-depth through interviews with several resource persons, observation, and documentation. The researcher is directly involved in field activities, noting every event that occurs, conducting reflective analysis of various documents acquired in the field, and preparing a detailed research report. The interviews are structured to explore respondents' views on the role and strategies of principal branding in improving the image of SMPN 1 Megaluh, including how the school branding strategy is implemented and promoted. Observation is planned to cover branding activities, morning assemblies, ceremonies, and the principal's guidance. Documentation is used to reinforce the data via evidence such as photos of school activities, student awards, branding activities, and the organizational structure of SMPN 1 Megaluh. The research location is SMPN 1 Megaluh, located at Jl. Raya Megaluh, Dusun Paritan, Desa Sudimoro, Kecamatan Megaluh, Kabupaten Jombang, East Java.

The study uses two data sources: primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data is obtained through written or verbal statements using interviews conducted with the Principal, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Public Relations, two students, and parents/community at SMPN 1 Megaluh. Secondary data sources are obtained through observation to see the ongoing school activities for example, observing the branding strategies implemented at SMPN 1 Megaluh and the role of the principal in improving the school's image and documentation such as photos of the school's vision mission, assemblies, creative works, student achievement awards, the principal conveying the school branding, and written archives.

Data analysis techniques are carried out through data reduction, by simplifying, sorting, and summarizing information so that it aligns with the research objectives. Then, data presentation is done in the form of a narrative text, using a matrix. The final step in qualitative data analysis is drawing conclusions or verification. The data conclusions serve to answer the research questions that have been formulated. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher uses techniques such as member checking, increasing researcher persistence, and triangulation. Triangulation is done in three ways: by source, technique, and time. Source triangulation is done by comparing data from different informants such as the principal, vice principal for student affairs, teacher, public relations, and students. Technique triangulation checks data from one source using different methods; for example, comparing interview data with observation and documentation. Time triangulation is carried out by doing interviews at different times to obtain data in varying conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Role of the Principal in Building the Institutional Image at SMPN 1 Megaluh Coordination Ability and Optimization of Resources at SMPN 1 Megaluh

School branding activities are carried out through a participatory process that begins with deliberation or discussions involving all relevant parties, such as the principal, teachers,

and staff. This process aims to evaluate the school's image based on data and information previously collected by the school. The evaluation becomes the basis for formulating more effective branding strategies to enhance the school's image and competitiveness. This is consistent with the statement by Mr. AS, the Principal of SMPN 1 Megaluh: "By involving initial deliberation or discussion and evaluation on school branding through data sources already collected by the school." (Interview, principal)

The principal actively involves teachers in forming the school's branding and promoting it through social media to enhance the image of SMPN 1 Megaluh in the eyes of the community. This aligns with the statement from Mrs. RPA, the public relations officer of SMPN 1 Megaluh: "Teachers serve as facilitators and document every school event, then upload it to the school's social media." (Interview, public relations) Thus, the principal's role at SMPN 1 Megaluh is not only as the leader of an institution. The principal also acts as a supporter, implementer, and coordinator by involving all school stakeholders in the formulation, implementation, and promotion of the school's ongoing branding efforts.

Brand Image of SMPN 1 Megaluh

To improve the institutional image, the principal plays a role in shaping students' character so they are known as well-mannered individuals who behave positively in society. In addition, every student achievement in academic and non-academic fields is recognized and publicized through the school's social media as a branding strategy to strengthen the school's positive image. As stated by Mr. AS: "By shaping good character in students so that the community sees that SMPN 1 Megaluh students are polite and behave well, and by appreciating every student achievement both in academic and non-academic fields and uploading them to the school's social media for the public to see." (Interview, principal). From the interview, it is shown that the principal serves as a role model for all members of the school. Character formation aims to create a positive image within the community. Furthermore, in strengthening the institution's image, the principal maintains the quality of school facilities through routine evaluations and repairs. Image improvement is also reinforced by encouraging the professional performance of teachers as part of efforts to enhance the quality of educational services.

Principal's Branding Strategies in Building the Institutional Image at SMPN 1 Megaluh

Formulating and Planning Branding Strategies at SMPN 1 Megaluh

The principal formulates branding strategies by involving school stakeholders and the community through discussions or questionnaires to evaluate whether the school's vision and mission remain relevant. The results become the foundation for designing branding action plans, equipped with indicators of success such as increased public trust and interest in the school. As stated by the principal: "Encouraging all school members and parents or the community to discuss, either through questionnaires or directly, whether the school's vision and mission are still aligned with the school's goals. Our branding action plan is prepared based on the school's vision and mission, then developed into indicators to measure the success of the school branding targets." (Interview, principal). In planning, teachers act as facilitators, students as program implementers, and parents as motivators. This collaboration becomes part of the participatory branding strategy led by the principal.

Implementation of Branding Strategies at SMPN 1 Megaluh

The involvement of teachers and staff in school branding programs motivates them to actively promote the school and innovate in creating advantages that distinguish SMPN 1

Megaluh from other institutions. Branding implementation also targets students. The principal integrates branding strategies through entrepreneurship values, such as business skills and marketing techniques. The "Gelar Karya" exhibition becomes a platform for students to express creativity and showcase their products, strengthening the school's positive image. As stated by TWP, a student of SMPN 1 Megaluh: "Entrepreneurship lessons teach students how to run a business and good marketing techniques; the exhibition was the best experience because we could express or showcase the products we made." (Interview, student).

The "Semangka" Logo of SMPN 1 Megaluh

The school uses a watermelon-themed logo representing "semangat berkarya" (spirit of creativity). This logo is unique, attractive, and rarely used by other schools, with modern colors aligned with the school's branding goals. This is confirmed by parents and community members, BE and ST: "The school has a watermelon logo meaning spirit of creativity; it is unique and attractive. It's rare for schools to have this kind of logo, and the colors are modern and match the school's branding purpose." (Interview, parent/community). The watermelon logo is also used on the school's batik uniform as a symbol of the school's branding. The green batik uniform featuring the logo becomes a source of pride for students and reflects positive values. As stated by TWP: "The green batik uniform has the watermelon logo; I'm proud to wear it because it teaches positive values and creates an inspiring environment." (Interview, student).

Slogan 'Semangka' (Enthusiasm for Learning and Creating) of SMPN 1 Megaluh

The principal created the slogan "SEMANGKA" (Semangat Belajar dan Berkarya / Spirit of Learning and Creating), combining educational values with Megaluh's local identity, which is known for its watermelon products. The slogan is used as a greeting during morning assemblies and incorporated into the batik design. This strengthens emotional connections with the community, fosters school pride, and builds a positive institutional image. As explained by the principal: "Yes, the slogan 'SEMANGKA' was chosen because watermelon is Megaluh's signature product. Its meaning is that SMPN 1 Megaluh is part of the Megaluh community and proud of it. It stands for 'spirit of learning and creating.' It is promoted through greetings in morning assemblies and used as a logo on school batik." (Interview, principal). The slogan also encourages teachers to promote creativity through projects such as writing, art, and scientific experiments showcased in the exhibition, strengthening the school's public image.

Utilization of Social Media at SMPN 1 Megaluh

The principal uses digital platforms such as the school website and Instagram for promotion and information dissemination. Branding is strengthened through the school journalism extracurricular, which manages content showcasing achievements and school activities. The principal ensures content consistency through SOPs, requiring the use of the official logo and hashtags such as #spijimega and #spijimegahebat.

Branding consistency is supported through promotional media like banners and continual use of social media. Achievement posts on Instagram are the most memorable for the public due to their neat and attractive presentation. This is supported by the testimony of BE, a parent: "Often. The most impressive content is the achievement posts because the layout and design are very neat and appealing." (Interview, parent/community) This shows the school's success in strengthening its reputation through professional and informative visual content.

Extracurricular Programs as Branding at SMPN 1 Megaluh

To strengthen branding, the P5 (Pancasila Student Profile Project) activities at SMPN 1 Megaluh focus on agricultural innovation, such as the hydroponics extracurricular as part of the "cakap bertani" (skilled in farming) program with a modern approach. The school also attracts students through high-achieving extracurriculars such as paskibraka, which frequently wins competitions. As stated by the principal: "P5 activities focus on developing school branding through new innovations in farming. The hydroponics extracurricular is being planned as part of the 'skilled in farming' program but with a modern style. Some students choose SMPN 1 Megaluh because of the paskibraka extracurricular, which often wins competitions." (Interview, principal).

Extracurricular programs attract prospective students and parents. They are considered effective, proven by frequent achievements. As stated by ST, a parent: "Yes, the extracurricular programs at SMPN 1 Megaluh are very interesting and seem well organized, evident from the many achievements." (Interview, parent). To strengthen its institutional image, the school showcases extracurricular demonstrations during the MPLS (school orientation week). The paskibraka team is one of the highlights, with achievements such as winning 1st place in Mataram Vol. 1 and other competitions at district and provincial levels.

Discussion

The Role of the Principal in Building the Institution's Image at SMPN 1 Megaluh

As the leader of an educational institution, the principal plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of the institution under their leadership. The principal is expected to serve as the key decision-maker, so strategic steps taken to build the school's image hold significant influence ([Mukhafadlo et al., 2022](#)). Every activity in the school is always preceded by a planning stage and concluded with an evaluation. This approach is also applied by the principal of SMPN 1 Megaluh in efforts to create a positive school image by implementing various managerial stages to achieve predetermined targets.

The role of the principal of SMPN 1 Megaluh in enhancing the school's image is as a coordinator who involves all elements within the school environment. The initial step is carried out through deliberation and evaluation based on internal data to formulate appropriate promotional strategies. Discussions with teachers and staff are conducted to obtain ideas and solutions to existing problems. In promoting the school, the journalism team receives continuous guidance to produce social media content that is consistently updated, informative, and engaging. Additionally, students actively participate in the school branding process, while teachers act as facilitators of activities and document each event for publication through the school's social media accounts. All these activities reflect collaborative synergy in strengthening the school's presence and reputation within the community.

This aligns with the Vroom-Yetton participatory leadership model, which is a strategic approach that encourages the involvement of all parties including teachers, students, and parents in the decision making process ([Masruhin, 2022](#)). This approach emphasizes active participation by both the principal and stakeholders, resulting in more accurate and effective decisions that positively impact educational quality. The model guides leaders to work more collaboratively with their teams by considering factors such as decision urgency, expected quality, and stakeholder involvement. Implementing this model in educational settings reduces common challenges such as resistance to change, lack of communication, and dissatisfaction within the team. Through participatory leadership, leaders can exchange ideas during problem-solving and decision-making processes ([Recky, 2019](#))

In building a positive institutional image, the principal of SMPN 1 Megaluh plays the

role of educator by shaping polite and well-behaved students, and encouraging academic and non-academic achievements published on school social media. As an effort to enhance institutional reputation, SMPN 1 Megaluh conducts regular evaluations, improves facilities (including internet services and learning spaces), enhances teacher professionalism, and strengthens administrative response. These initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to quality and a comfortable learning environment. The strategy is supported by extracurricular activities (Volleyball, Paskibraka, PMR, and scouting), which collectively reflect SMPN 1 Megaluh as a high-quality, adaptive, creative institution oriented toward community satisfaction. This approach aligns with effective school branding practices that emphasize management quality, facilities, public communication, and student success to strengthen public trust ([Susilo, 2022](#))

This role aligns with transformational leadership theory, which highlights the leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers to exceed expectations and achieve outstanding results ([Arif et al., 2020](#)). By developing shared visions and goals, leaders foster collective enthusiasm and unity among the school community. Charisma and enthusiasm act as key drivers that motivate others to believe in the potential for change and improvement in educational quality ([Armiyanti et al., 2023](#))

Principal's Branding Strategy in Building the Institutional Image at SMPN 1 Megaluh

In today's educational context, school branding plays a highly important role. A school's image that is strengthened through effective branding strategies not only enhances institutional reputation but also builds public trust in choosing the school as a place for their children's education. At SMPN 1 Megaluh, the principal employs several branding strategies to improve the school's public image, including:

Formulation and Planning of Branding Strategies at SMPN 1 Megaluh

The principal actively formulates branding strategies through a participatory process involving teachers, students, parents, and the community. The principal does not work alone but leads the branding formulation collaboratively, encouraging the involvement of all stakeholders within the school environment. This approach reflects participatory leadership, which emphasizes cooperation, deliberation, and empowerment of all school components ([Kamaludin, 2024](#)). Before determining the branding strategy, the school's vision and mission are reviewed to ensure alignment with long-term institutional goals. Branding is not only about visual appearance, but also the representation of values, excellence, and objectives the school aims to achieve. Strategies are established based on the evaluation of the school's vision and mission, carried out through various roles: teachers as facilitators, students as implementers, parents as supporters, and the community as partners.

Brand communication is carried out through various media such as ceremonies, social media, and posters to build a positive institutional image more comprehensively. Ceremonies are used to deliver school values regularly social media is used to reach the wider public and present school activities in real time; posters and other visual media reinforce brand messages within the school environment. All strategies aim to create positive public perceptions, increasing student enrollment and broader support from stakeholders ([Putri et al., 2023](#)).

Implementation of Branding Strategies at SMPN 1 Megaluh

The principal plays a central role in implementing branding strategies by providing exemplary leadership, actively socializing programs, and involving and motivating teachers, staff, and students in activities that reflect social and entrepreneurial values ([Primasary,](#)

[Amalia, 2023](#)). This approach aligns with the concept of the principal as an edupreneur someone visionary who creates superior programs and builds strategic collaborations to enhance institutional quality and competitiveness ([Salsabilah et al., 2025](#))

Through inclusive involvement of school and community elements, branding programs not only enhance the institution's positive image but also foster innovation and excellence that distinguish the school from others. This leadership model builds a reputation for producing achievements and readiness to compete in changing times ([Ritonga, 2022](#)).

School Logo and Slogan 'Semangka' (Spirit to Learn and Create)

The SMPN 1 Megaluh logo plays a crucial role in building school identity and positive image. With a modern design that reflects openness, creativity, and continuous growth, the 'Semangka' logo is used consistently across various media and school attributes. This strengthens branding and builds pride and inspiration among students, teachers, and staff ([Novembrianto et al., 2024](#)). The green batik uniform featuring the Semangka logo strengthens school identity and fosters belonging, while representing character, discipline, and solidarity.

The SEMANGKA slogan (Spirit to Learn and Create) effectively integrates educational values with local identity through ceremonial greetings and batik designs, building emotional and community pride. The integration of the slogan into learning activities, discussions, assignments, and extracurricular programs demonstrates that it functions not merely as a symbol but as a real cultural guideline. This aligns with strong school branding principles that create unique identity, strengthen belonging, and increase stakeholder engagement and achievement ([Azizah et al., 2023](#))

Utilization of Social Media at SMPN 1 Megaluh

The principal of SMPN 1 Megaluh strategically utilizes digital media such as the website and Instagram to strengthen school branding through the journalism extracurricular team that manages content related to achievements and activities with a strict SOP and visually consistent design templates. By being responsive to public comments and feedback, the school applies continuous evaluation to maintain communication quality and institutional image. This aligns with findings that structured and creative social media management increases brand awareness, positive perception and public trust in educational institutions ([Cry et al., 2022](#)).

Extracurricular Activities as Branding at SMPN 1 Megaluh

SMPN 1 Megaluh utilizes P5 activities through modern agricultural innovations such as hydroponics in the 'Cakap Bertani' program and non-academic achievements such as Paskibraka, which consistently wins championships, to enhance reputation and attract new students. Documentation and publication of achievements on social media support branding strategies, evident from high user engagement through likes, comments, shares, and positive impressions. Hydroponic activities provide hands-on learning, while Paskibraka builds discipline, nationalism, leadership, and cooperation.

This aligns with findings that well-managed and achievement-based extracurricular activities strengthen positive school image and attract prospective students and parents. The combination of modern agricultural learning and high-quality non-academic activities illustrates how SMPN 1 Megaluh integrates operational branding values with real practices that support character development and a strong institutional image ([Juhairin, 2019](#)).

CONCLUSION

The branding strategies implemented at SMPN 1 Megaluh demonstrate the important role of the principal as the driving force in building a positive image of the educational institution. The principal not only serves as an administrative leader but also as an inspirer and coordinator who encourages the active involvement of the entire school community in the branding process. The strategies involve collaborative discussions, evaluation of the school's vision and mission, and the formulation of branding plans based on character values and local strengths. The implementation of branding strategies encompasses various aspects, ranging from character-building for students and strengthening the role of teachers as facilitators to engaging students in real activities that support the school's identity. Branding activities are not only visible through promotional media but are also reflected in comfortable learning facilities, a positive school culture, and active extracurricular participation. The principal also performs a transformational leadership role by setting an example, motivating the school community, and fostering an innovative culture that supports institutional image building.

The school's visual identity is reinforced through the use of the "Semangka" logo and the slogan "Semangat Belajar dan Berkarya" (Spirit to Learn and Create), which reflect local spirit and character education values. The logo is used consistently across various attributes and media, while the slogan is integrated into teaching and learning activities as well as student programs. This identity not only builds a sense of pride among the school community but also strengthens public trust in SMPN 1 Megaluh as a creative institution focused on character development. Social media serves as a key channel in the digital branding strategy. The journalism extracurricular team is encouraged to document and publish school activities regularly. With engaging, consistent, and professionally prepared content, the school's social media platforms function as an effective window of information for the public. The consistent use of logos, hashtags, and visual design templates forms part of the strategic efforts to strengthen the school's digital image. Finally, the success of school branding is reinforced by flagship programs such as P5 activities themed around modern agriculture and the achievements of the Paskibraka extracurricular team. These activities attract both students and parents, positioning SMPN 1 Megaluh as an institution superior in character development and skill-building. Overall, the structured and collaborative branding strategies have successfully built a strong, competitive, and trusted school reputation within the wider community.

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