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Reconstruction of Brand Image Theory in Education Management: Conceptual Study, Technology, and Transformation Direction

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A B S T R A C T

This article presents a conceptual study on the reconstruction of brand image theory in the context of primary education management, as a strategic response to the growing need for adaptive, sustainable, and value-based institutional image development. The core issue addressed is the limitation of conventional brand image approaches, which are not fully aligned with the characteristics of non-profit institutions such as elementary schools. Using a systematic literature analysis approach, this study identifies that the development of an educational brand image must integrate institutional internal values, optimize digital communication strategies, and actively involve the community in the co-creation process. The result is a conceptual model of brand image for primary schools based on three pillars: internal value integration, digital-affective communication, and community co-creation, which synergistically support the formation of an authentic and trustworthy institutional identity. This article contributes to the formulation of a new theoretical framework that not only expands the scope of brand image theory from business to education but also opens strategic opportunities in managing school reputation in the era of digital transformation. The theoretical and practical implications of this study provide directions for future research and the development of policy based on institutional branding.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entering the 21st century, basic education faces the complexity of new challenges that resemble the dynamics of competition in the business world. This phenomenon is inseparable from the increasing public expectations of the quality of educational services, openness of information, and school choice policies that provide greater space for the public to choose educational

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institutions based on perceptions of image and reputation (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024). In this framework, brand image is no longer just a term in commercial marketing strategies, but has experienced an expansion of meaning and function in the basic education sector (Dwiyama & R, 2020; Malik et al., 2012; Sya'idah & Jauhari, 2024). The school's brand image forms the public's perception of educational institutions, including academic quality, the values upheld, and the emotional impressions that arise from interactions with the school community (Susanti et al., 2024).

Building a brand image in the world of education today has become very important, including elementary education, increasing the competitiveness of each elementary education unit is a demand to continue to maintain quality in the eyes of the community as users of education. In Indonesia, the reality in various regions, including South Kalimantan, shows that not all schools are able to build a strong and consistent image. Many private schools based on religious values have begun to adopt branding strategies to assert their existence amidst competition (Sumardi et al., 2023; Walid & Malik, 2023; Zakaria et al., 2023), but the success of its implementation varies widely. Although many have developed slogans, symbols, and digital campaigns, these approaches are often not based on a structured theoretical framework. This creates a gap between the ideal expectation of an authentic and consistent brand image and branding practices that tend to be symbolic and momentary (Dwiyama, 2019). However, as shown by Rahmawati et al. (2022) dan Vingirayi (2021), A strong and valuable brand image can be a strategic instrument in increasing public loyalty and ensuring the sustainability of the institution.

Along with the development of theories in marketing science, the concept of brand image has been adapted in the field of education, especially elementary education management. (Munjin, 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2022). Unlike profit-oriented companies, schools must combine branding approaches with educational values, institutional integrity, and the uniqueness of organizational culture. This adaptation process opens up space to build a new conceptual framework, which does not only emphasize image differentiation, but also the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. (Han-Zu, 2006; Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024). Therefore, it is important to reconstruct the brand image theory to align with the characteristics of basic educational institutions, especially in the context of digital transformation, demands for community participation, and the dynamics of social change.

This study has a novel value in highlighting the direction of brand image theory transformation from a commercial approach to an educational approach based on values, culture, and institutional identity. This article also responds to the gap in national literature that examines in an integrative manner between marketing theory, branding strategy, and basic education management. (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024; Sumardi et al., 2023). In the last seven years, global research trends show a shift in focus on the image of educational institutions through digital, participatory and credible approaches. (Rahmawati et al., 2022; Wang, 2021). Therefore, the development of a new theoretical framework based on educational values and community participation is urgent to strengthen the legitimacy of schools in building long-term relationships with stakeholders.

Based on this background, this article aims to reconstruct the theory of brand image in the context of elementary education through a conceptual approach and transformation direction. This study will trace the theoretical roots of brand image in marketing literature. (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024), evaluate its implementation in educational institutions (Sumardi et al., 2023), and explore new models that are relevant to elementary schools (Dwiyama & R, 2020) . In addition, this article will propose the integration of values, culture, and digitalization as a strategic direction for theory renewal. With this approach, it is hoped that a theoretical

foundation will be formed that can bridge the idealism of education and the needs of strategic school management in a competitive era.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a conceptual research method based on systematic analysis of literature and theoretical synthesis. The main objective of this approach is to explore, classify, and reconstruct brand image theory within the framework of basic education management, especially in facing the dynamics of digital transformation and demands for institutional values. The data in this study are in the form of relevant scientific documents, such as indexed journal articles (Scopus, WoS, SINTA), academic books, proceedings, and empirical study results published in the last 10 years. Data sources were obtained through structured searches on electronic databases such as ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar.

The data collection technique was carried out through a gradual literature curation stage, starting from identifying keywords including "brand image", "school branding", "education management", "elementary school", to "digital identity in education". Each literature was evaluated based on thematic relevance, recency, and conceptual contribution to theory development. Documents that did not meet the exclusivity criteria, for example, were descriptive without a clear theoretical construction, were excluded from the analysis. The implementation procedure involved three main phases: (1) literature exploration and concept categorization, (2) mapping of brand image models and dimensions in the context of elementary education, and (3) reconstruction of theoretical synthesis through thematic analysis and narrative triangulation. In this process, the researcher used Zotero software tools for reference management and NVivo 12 for systematic thematic coding of the literature.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis techniques to identify key patterns in brand image theory thinking and their correlation with elementary education management. Each emerging theme was validated through constant comparison techniques between literature and compared with elementary school managerial practices in Indonesia identified in field research publications. The results of the analysis were arranged in the form of a synthesis matrix that displays the development of the theory, the main dimensions of brand image, and the recommended direction of transformation. Conceptual validity was maintained through peer debriefing with education management experts and cross-checking with previous research results. Thus, this method provides a strong foundation for developing a new theory that is contextual, applicable, and replicable in other elementary education studies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reconstruction of brand image theory in the context of elementary education management requires a deep understanding of the paradigm shift in educational institution management from an administrative approach to a strategic approach based on values (value-driven education). Brand image theory, which was originally widely applied in the realm of business marketing, has now developed as an important framework in shaping public perception and trust in elementary schools. In this context, educational brand identity is not only built through symbols or logos, but through a transformational process that touches on aspects of quality, learning experience, and social relations between schools and communities. (Suriansyah & Aslamiah, 2018).

The results of the literature synthesis show that brand image theory in the context of elementary education tends to undergo a transformation from a single-dimensional approach to a multidimensional approach that combines cognitive, affective, and conative aspects. As seen

in Table 1, the majority of publications in the last seven years, especially studies by Rahmawati et al. (2022), Sya'idah & Jauhari. (2024) dan Ed et al. (2024) emphasizes the need for holistic brand image mapping, not only based on perceptions of service quality, but also on the emotional experiences and behavioral tendencies of stakeholders towards schools.

Table 1. Dimensions of School Brand Image in Elementary Education Literature

Researchers	Year	Brand Image	Institution	Strategic
Malik et al.	2012	Cognitive-Affective	Elementary school	Position value and reputation
Walid & Malik	2023	Cognitive-Affective-Cognitive	Madrasah	Parental loyalty
Roskoša & Stukalina	2021	Emotional, Symbolic	European Education	Identity and Trust
Sya'idah & Jauhari	2024	Cognitive-Behavioral	MTs Indonesia	Intention to choose a school

Further findings show that an effective elementary school brand image is not only built through external communication strategies, but must be rooted in the school's internal identity which includes vision, mission, organizational culture, and institutional values. In the literature, the concept of brand identity alignment (Slavov & Zlatanova, 2018) become an important basis in the reconstruction of the theory. Schools that succeed in building a strong image generally have alignment between public narratives and internal value practices, as reinforced in the study (Harisatunisa & Muslimah, 2024).

Digital transformation is a key driver in adjusting the branding approach of elementary schools. Data exploration shows that since 2020, digital platforms, especially Instagram and YouTube, have undergone significant changes as strategic media in shaping public perception. Zaini (2023) noted that optimizing interactive content on social media increases public affectivity and participation in getting to know schools. Therefore, the integration of digital literacy into brand image strategy becomes an important aspect in the new theoretical framework.

A positive brand image has been shown to have a strong correlation with stakeholder loyalty and the tendency to recommend schools voluntarily (DAM, 2020; Rodrigues & Brandão, 2021). Studi Juliana & Johan (2020) shows that the affective dimension of brand image increases the probability of individuals to spread positive information through word-of-mouth, which in the school context plays a major role in recruiting new students. This finding supports the argument that the behavioral dimension of brand image should not be ignored in the formulation of new models (DAM, 2020; Rodrigues & Brandão, 2021).

Madrasahs and schools based on religious values demonstrate a unique branding model, as they integrate spiritual values into the institutional image strategy. (Walid & Malik, 2023). This model shows that differentiation is not only done through superior academic programs, but also through an emphasis on moral character and social values. This means that brand image can function as a representation of values as well as a cultural selection filter in attracting ideologically appropriate stakeholders.

One of the significant findings is the emergence of a *co-creation* pattern in the development of a school's brand image, wherein teachers, students, parents, and alumni actively participate in shaping the institution's public narrative. Schools that encourage community engagement in digital storytelling and promotional efforts tend to exhibit a stronger and more authentic brand image. This approach also aligns with the principles of community-based school branding, which has been demonstrated to be particularly relevant within the Indonesian educational context (Wahid et al., 2021).

The synthesis also reveals that the theoretical framework of brand image, originally rooted in the business domain, is undergoing a paradigmatic adaptation when applied to non-profit institutions such as primary schools. Aaker's concept of brand equity and Keller's customer-based brand equity are being progressively modified into what may be termed *school-based brand equity*, with an emphasis on social value, institutional credibility, and the educational utility perceived by stakeholders. This transformation is evident in the approach proposed by Melewar et al. (2016), particularly through the BIMIR model, which strategically aligns corporate branding structures with the unique characteristics of educational institutions (Melewar et al., 2016).

To strengthen the validity of the findings, a thematic synthesis matrix was prepared (see Table 2) that summarizes the relationships between dimensions, institutional contexts, and managerial implications. This matrix facilitates the visualization of key elements in the reconstruction of brand image theory and the direction of its future transformation.

Table 2. Synthesis Matrix of Elementary School Brand Image Reconstruction Findings

Dimensions	Manifestation	Strengthening Strategy	Implications
Cognitive	Quality of service, facilities	Accreditation, flagship program	Perception of quality increases
Affective	Feeling of trust, pride	Success stories, visual content	Loyalty & affiliation increased
Conative	Recommendations, participation	Public events, alumni testimonials	Registration and support increased

As a final result, this study produces a conceptual model of the reconstruction of the brand image theory of elementary education consisting of three main pillars: Internal Value Integration, Digital-Affective Communication, and Community Co-Creation. The three are the foundations that support each other in the formation of a sustainable institutional image. Figure 1 below presents a visual illustration of the model.

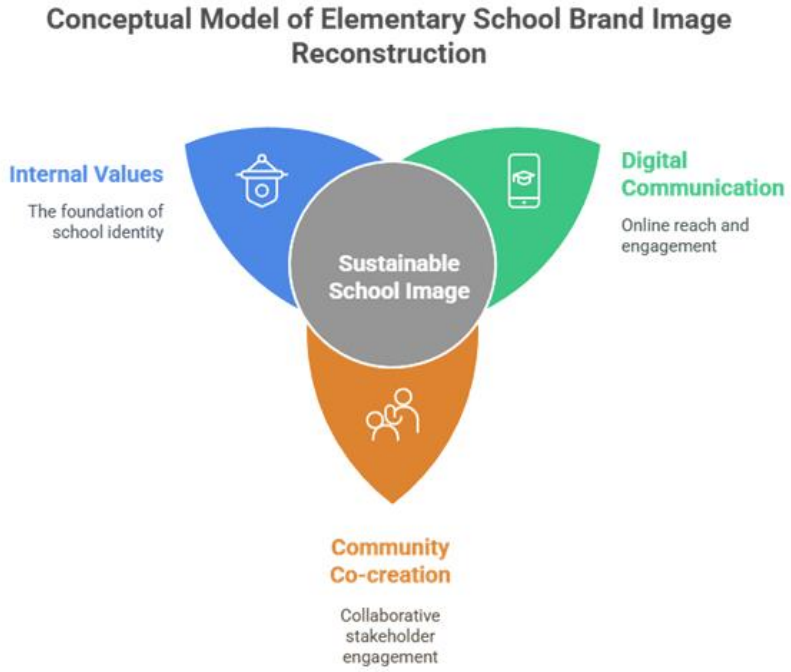

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Elementary School Brand Image Reconstruction

The figure describes the image as a triangle diagram with three main sides: Internal Values; Digital Communication – Community Co-creation; in the middle: Sustainable School Image. The findings of this study recommend the need for a transformation of the elementary school brand image management approach towards a more integrative, digital, and value-based direction. Schools need to build an image consciously and strategically by combining service quality, identity narratives, and two-way digital interactions. On the other hand, stakeholder involvement as value creators and not just recipients of information is a key element in the success of school branding. Thus, this reconstruction of brand image theory offers conceptual and practical guidance that can be further replicated and tested in local and global contexts.

3.1 Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that a multidimensional approach encompassing cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions constitutes the most representative framework for understanding the formation of brand image in primary schools. This supports the foundational assertions of Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991), who posited that brand image is a complex perceptual construct formed through both rational and emotional associations with an entity (Malik et al., 2012). In the context of primary education, this resonates with the study by (Ismail et al., 2021), which highlights that public perception of schools is shaped not only by academic quality, but also by the emotional undertones cultivated through experiential interactions.

The discrepancy between a school's internal identity and the external perceptions held by the public has emerged as a critical concern within the branding literature. This study affirms the approach proposed by Hemsley-Brown et al. (2016), which emphasises that the success of a brand image is highly contingent upon the alignment between brand identity and brand meaning. In practice, primary schools that possess a strong vision and core values, yet fail to communicate them effectively, are likely to develop a weak public image. Consequently, this discussion underscores the importance of ensuring consistency between institutional narratives and the lived experiences perceived by stakeholders.

The brand image of an educational institution is shaped by the alignment between the internal perceptions of school members teachers, students, and educational staff and the external perceptions held by the broader community. Any incongruence between the school's actual quality and the brand communication it conveys may generate cognitive dissonance, potentially undermining public trust. Therefore, the enhancement of brand image in primary education management must be approached comprehensively. This includes the deliberate construction of a conducive learning environment, the application of participatory leadership, and the integration of innovative teaching practices (Baihaqi et al., 2024). Findings from Suriansyah dan Aslamiah (2018) reveal that school climate and the learning environment significantly influence teacher job satisfaction, which in turn affects the quality of educational services. These findings indicate that strengthening brand image cannot be separated from the internal development of quality, including teacher welfare, reward systems, and the meaningful involvement of teachers in decision-making processes. In other words, brand image is not merely the result of visual design or promotional strategy, but rather a reflection of the overall integrity and quality of the educational organisation. Moreover, the enhancement of brand image in primary education is closely linked to stakeholder engagement, including parents, local government bodies, and partner institutions. The research by Suriansyah dan Aslamiah (2018) underscores the critical role of school community participation in fostering a healthy and enjoyable learning environment. Such participation not only enriches the school's resources but also cultivates a sense of ownership and emotional attachment that collectively reinforce the school's brand image.

The findings of this study contribute to the modification of traditional brand image models originally developed within the commercial sector. While the models proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) in their seminal works have predominantly focused on consumer-based brand equity in profit-driven contexts, this research offers a contextual adaptation relevant to non-profit educational institutions. Malik et al (2012) The models place a greater emphasis on brand equity and consumer memory; however, within the context of schools, these concepts have been modified into *school-based brand equity*, which prioritizes values, credibility, and community engagement. This modification aligns with the approach of Melewar et al. (2021), who assert that in non-profit organizations, reputation and shared values play a more critical role than purely competitive aspects.

This study also highlights the urgency of adopting a *co-creation of brand* approach in the development of primary school brand image. The findings support the theory of *service-dominant logic* proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004), which posits that value is collaboratively created between the organisation and its service users. In the educational context, parents, students, and alumni are not merely passive recipients of the school's image but active agents in shaping its narrative and reputation. Accordingly, the strengthening of community engagement constitutes an inseparable dimension of school brand image strategies. This perspective resonates with the principles of *Total Quality Management (TQM)*, which emphasise the importance of stakeholder involvement in enhancing the quality of educational services encompassing teachers, parents, and the wider community (Sulistiyana et al., 2019).

In this conceptual study, the author identifies the need for a theoretical reconstruction of brand image to align with the distinctive characteristics and complexities of primary educational institutions. The existing theory, which has predominantly focused on consumer perception, must be expanded to incorporate participatory engagement of school stakeholders, the dynamics of social relationships, and the development of a sustainable culture of quality. Consequently, the orientation of brand image shifts from a transactional approach to one that is transformational and collaborative (Baihaqi et al., 2024; Noorhapizah N, Prihandoko Y, Pratiwi DA, 2023).This reconstruction is consistent with the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education, which prioritise a culture of quality, team-based collaboration, and the internalisation of shared values across all managerial processes within schools (Suriansyah, 2017).

The reconstruction of brand image theory also necessitates innovation in the domains of media and technology. This study demonstrates that digital channels—such as Instagram, YouTube, and other online communication platforms—have become strategic media for cultivating the affective and conative dimensions of institutional image. These findings reinforce those of Jędrzejczyk and Brzeziński (2021), as well as Maresova et al. (2020), who argue that digital branding strategies are effective in fostering emotional engagement and public trust. Hence, digitalisation is not merely a tool for communication but constitutes an integral part of institutional image infrastructure.In the context of Total Quality Management (TQM), digital technologies are also employed in the comprehensive planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational services to ensure the sustainability of quality enhancement. This is exemplified by the TQM-based student guidance services at SMAN 2 Banjarmasin, where digital media serve as interactive and evaluative instruments for improving service delivery (Sulistiyana et al., 2019).

In the study conducted by Noorhapizah et al. (2023), the "BANGKIT" programme—an acronym for *Berkarakter* (Character Building), *Agamis* (Religious Values), *Numerasi & Literasi* (Numeracy & Literacy), *Gerakan Peduli Lingkungan* (Environmental Awareness Movement), *Kolaborasi* (Collaboration), and *Teknologi Informasi* (Information Technology)—was found to be effective in supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* within

primary schools situated in wetland environments. The programme's contribution extends beyond the development of student competencies; it also fosters a unique and contextually grounded school identity, ultimately strengthening the school's brand image in the eyes of the local community.In the broader context of educational management transformation, the integration of initiatives such as the "BANGKIT" programme serves as a catalyst for constructing a school brand image that is not only locally relevant but also responsive to national educational dynamics. The implementation of branding strategies grounded in the Merdeka Curriculum enables schools to communicate value differentiation authentically to the public an approach that enhances their strategic positioning amidst the competitive landscape of primary education institutions (Noorhapizah et al., 2024).

On the other hand, this discussion also underscores the necessity of brand literacy among school principals and teachers. When educational leaders possess the competence to manage public perception and articulate the unique identity of their institution, the school branding process becomes more strategic and purposeful. This skill is increasingly vital in the digital era, where a school's presence is shaped not solely by academic achievement, but also by how it constructs and communicates its image narrative across various platforms (Baihaqi et al., 2023).

The theoretical reconstruction of brand image proposed in this article simultaneously challenges the conventional assumption that school quality can be adequately measured by examination scores or accreditation alone. A strong school image is, in fact, built upon the integrity of its management system, the clarity of its vision and mission, the sustainability of its innovations, and the trust of its service users. Consequently, the future direction of transformation places emphasis on the integration of strategic management, the strengthening of organisational culture, and the exploration of each school's distinctive identity (Suriansyah & Aslamiah, 2018).

Another theoretical implication is the significance of a value-based branding approach within primary educational institutions. The finding that schools with strong value integration such as religious principles, local cultural heritage, or moral character excel in shaping an authentic brand image is consistent with the study by Walid and Malik (2023). This suggests that, in the educational context, brand image is not merely constructed through service differentiation, but rather through the reinforcement of moral and social identity as expressed in the learning experience and the everyday culture of the school.

From the analysis results, this article proposes a modification to the brand image theory by adding transformational elements: (1) school values and culture as the core of identity, (2) digital interactivity as the main channel of communication, and (3) stakeholder participation as a value shaper. This model is not only adaptive to the context of basic education, but is also prospective in facing the challenges of image management in the information age. This is an important update that expands the scope of the theory from a commercial orientation to an educational orientation.

In comparison to the studies Alkhawaldeh et al. (2020), which examined brand image in higher education institutions, the findings of this study reveal that the dynamics at the primary education level possess distinct characteristics. For instance, parental motivation in selecting a school is often influenced not solely by academic reputation, but also by emotional security, religious values, and social proximity. Consequently, this discussion underscores the need for brand image theory development in primary education to adopt a more humanistic and relationship oriented approach.

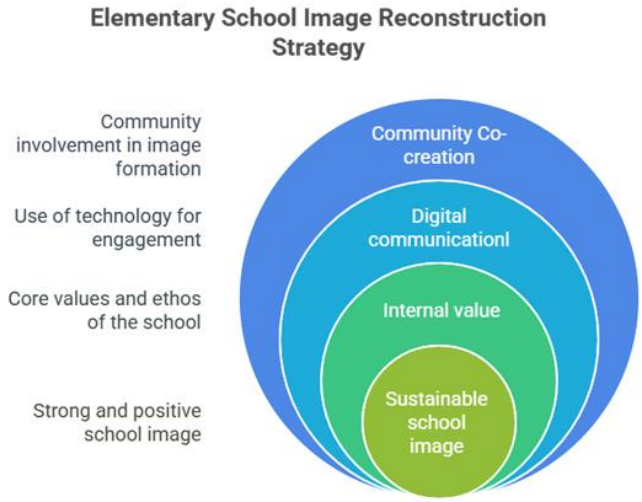

Figure 1. Elementary School Image Reconstruction

The main implication of this discussion is the importance of making brand image part of a sustainable elementary education management strategy. The branding approach is no longer an institutional accessory, but a strategic instrument in winning the hearts of the community, maintaining the existence of schools, and creating meaningful educational experiences. Thus, the reconstruction of brand image theory not only answers current challenges, but also forms a strong foundation for the future of elementary education in Indonesia. From a practical perspective, this finding has strategic implications for education management, especially school principals and foundations. This reconstruction of the theory demands a change in perspective that brand image is not a momentary promotional activity, but rather an ongoing process that involves managing service quality, communicating values, and social interaction. The principal needs to act as a brand steward, namely maintaining the integrity and consistency of the school's image that is based on educational values and community collaboration.

Overall, this discussion concludes that the reconstruction of brand image theory in the context of elementary education not only enriches the literature on education management but also opens up interdisciplinary paths with the fields of marketing, strategic communication, and educational technology. The theoretical contribution of this article lies in the proposal of a new conceptual framework that is responsive to social and technological changes, and is relevant to be applied in the context of value-based educational institution policies and development.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the synthesis and conceptual discussion, it can be concluded that the reconstruction of brand image theory in the perspective of elementary education management is a strategic need to answer the complex challenges of educational institutions in the era of digital technology and competition. This reconstruction confirms that a sustainable school image is built through the synergy of three main pillars, namely strengthening the school's internal values, optimizing affective digital communication, and actively involving the community in the process of co-creating institutional identity. This finding expands the theory of brand image from mere consumer perception to a representation of authentic educational values and experiences. The conceptual model produced in this study not only functions as a new theoretical reference, but also has the potential for broad application in the development

of school branding strategies, both to increase institutional competitiveness, strengthen stakeholder loyalty, and as a foundation for value-based education policy design. In the future, further research can be directed at empirical validation of this model in local and national contexts, as well as the development of comprehensive and adaptive elementary school brand image measurement indicators to the socio-cultural dynamics of Indonesian education.

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