

## Founder's Personal Branding in Islamic Boarding School Education in Madura

Dewi Quraisyin

Communication Science Study Program  
Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Trunojoyo University, Madura  
([dewiq@trunojoyo.ac.id](mailto:dewiq@trunojoyo.ac.id))

### Abstract

For the Madurese people, Islamic boarding schools remain the main reference in looking for educational institutions. The Madurese people's trust in Islamic boarding schools cannot be separated from the influence of the kiai as founders. Kiai has the most important role in the development of an Islamic boarding school. As a founder, the kiai is the "soul" of the Islamic boarding school. Personal branding and a strong professional image of a kiai will become "buzz" in building public trust in the Islamic boarding school he leads. The founder's personal branding will have a significant impact on the credibility and level of public trust in the Islamic boarding school. This will also make it easier to attract public interest in Islamic boarding schools, as well as build wider connections and networks which will provide many benefits for the sustainability of Islamic boarding schools. Moreover, if the Islamic boarding school is a new Islamic boarding school that is competing fiercely with other Islamic boarding schools that previously existed in Madura and had a good reputation. The competence of the founder (kiai) in religious knowledge, his dedication and integrity as an Islamic religious leader, and supported by other essential abilities, will become a Unique Value Proposition (UVP) for a kiai. This UVP will form a reputation that will stick in the minds of the public as a kiai's personal branding. This personal branding will highlight the personal strengths that kiai have to build reputation, build trust, and communicate the differentiation that kiai have in developing their Islamic boarding school. Kiai will appear as the "face" of his Islamic boarding school. This "face" will appear in society so that people choose the Islamic boarding school they lead as a place of learning for themselves or their children. This qualitative research will examine the UVP owned by the founder of the Nahdlatut Ta'limiyah Pamekasan Madura Islamic boarding school, namely kiai Musleh Adnan. Kiai Musleh Adnan was previously a religious preacher whose name was widely known to the public, especially in Madura. With the ability to lecture using simple, relaxed and entertaining sentences but full of meaning and religious advice, Muslim kiai are easily accepted by the public. For this reason, this Islamic boarding school, which was only established in 2019, currently has more than seven hundred students and more than a thousand congregants attending the recitations which are regularly conducted by the kiai every week.

*Keywords:* Boarding school, *Personal Branding*, *Professional Image*, Madurese.

### I. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools are the most elite religious educational institutions for Muslim communities in Indonesia, especially in the area which has a fairly high level of religious diversity, such as on the island of Madura (Jannah 2019). The existence of Islamic boarding schools is built based on social construction and the social epistemology that creates them transcendence on the course of social history. Islamic boarding schools have enormous potential to have an absolute influence on society. However, Islamic boarding schools are actually personal because whether or

not an Islamic boarding school develops really depends on the figure of the Kiai and the quality of knowledge he has. Likewise, in Madura, the figure of the kiai is a central figure who has significant power in the lives of the Madurese people (Quraisyin 2022).

One of the boarding schools that is currently growing very rapidly in Madura is the Nahdhatut Ta'limiyah boarding school. The boarding school established by KH. Musleh Adnan in 2019 already has almost a thousand santri and thousands of pilgrims. The rapid and significant increase in the popularity and trust of the community in this pesantren educational institution cannot be separated from the figure of Kiai Musleh Adnan as its founder. Kiai Musleh already has a strong enough brand attached to the minds of the community. So that the community easily entrusts their religious education to Nahdlatut Ta'limiyah pesantren like they already believe in kiai Musleh as a role model.

Everything that has a name is a brand, including humans. Humans as individuals are also brands. A person's efforts to build their own image so that they have a good and strong image is what is called personal branding (Ayu Yunita 2010). The study and discussion of personal branding is something that is considered very important nowadays. Talking about personal branding is talking about someone's values. Personal branding is positioning ourselves in mind others. It's not just about who we want to be judged as, but more about who we want to be. Building personal branding is building a label given to someone. Personal branding is an effort to show a person's unique abilities, personality and character and then package it so that they can have a personal identity or distinctive characteristics compared to other people (Setiawan, Sumijaty, and Astuti 2022), this is what is called a Unique Value Proposition (UVP) .

This research is a form of character study that is included in qualitative research studies. Character studies are a type of qualitative research. The essence of character studies is an in-depth, systematic, critical study of the history of characters, ideas or original ideas produced by the figure being studied (Mustaqim n.d.).

## **II. Unique Value Proposition in Kiai Musleh Adnan's Personal Branding**

Unique Value Proposition (UVP) is a description of what a brand offers to its consumers. The same as the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) in a brand that sells a product, UVP to become a marketing strategy that aims to differentiate a brand from other similar brands. UVP is a combination of the uniqueness of an individual and the benefits and values that the brand will provide to its consumers that are not provided and are not owned by the brand. other brands (Anggrianto, Shaari, and Hamid 2017).

## 2.1 Humor in Preaching

One of the UVP that is significant enough to differentiate between Kiai Musleh Adnan and other kiai is the humor that is always present in every talk. The lectures delivered by this young kiai are always suitable for all groups, from small children to the elderly. His delivery is always punctuated with fresh humor that is always new and appropriate to the context, making his audience feel like they are not being lectured or advised with religious messages which are sometimes considered too boring. The audience even feels like they are watching stand-up comedy which invites laughter and is full of entertainment.

However, even though it was delivered with humor, the religious messages conveyed were actually well understood by the congregation. The religious lectures delivered by Kiai Musleh are always weighty and current according to the problems contemporary but delivered with humor. Because of that humor, people who are being lectured can still always laugh even though they are actually being criticized advice-religious advice. Speaking while remaining humorous while conveying serious religious values at the same time is difficult and not many people can do it.

## 2.2 Simple Diction in Preaching

Kiai Musleh has excellent public speaking powers. When delivering religious advice, he conveys it with a relaxed intonation like someone who is talking to a close friend. The words used to deliver lectures are also very simple and very easily understood by all groups. The skill of choosing a language is not an easy thing. Because only intelligent people can choose the right words that can suit their audience.

Kiai Musleh Adnan has a congregation that is mostly people from remote villages. In delivering his religious lectures, he always uses simple words that can be understood by everyone, without exception. In fact, to provide maximum understanding to the audience, Muslim kiai often use regional languages compared to Indonesian.

## 2.3 Understanding Community Needs

In preaching, the content of lectures from the Musleh kiai is always relevant to current conditions. Even in some of his lectures in a few places, kiai Musleh often covers stories that are going viral on social media. Religious lectures delivered by kiai Musleh are always related to problems that often occur in society. So that people always feel that they get answers to every problem they face when they listen to lectures from kiai Musleh.

The talk Kiai Musleh is always fresh because he knows the trends that are developing. It knows what's going viral on Facebook. He also knows what is going on *fyp* TikTok. This combination is what makes the congregation so happy to follow his lectures. When giving religious

lectures, Muslim kiai always place themselves in the same position as the audience. Namely as an ordinary human being who has many sins. He never considered himself superior to his audiences.

#### **2.4 Build Personal Branding First Before Building an Islamic Boarding School**

Personal branding can be the process of leaving a mark on someone in mind and in the hearts of consumers. This will influence the attitudes and views of the consumer audience towards that person (Amir, Muhammad Taufiq 2022). In an era of intense competition in the labor market, personal branding is very important, not only for individuals but also for organizations as an effort to build reputation.

Before being known as founder of Nahdhatut Ta'limiyah Boarding School, Kiai Musleh was first known as a preacher. The self-competence possessed by him as a santri with very extensive religious knowledge, made Kiai Musleh often invited to give religious lectures in many places. With the knowledge of Islam that he possesses, kiai musleh is able to answer various kinds of religious problems that arise in the life of the community.

The uniqueness and difference that kiai musleh has with other preachers, makes kiai musleh have its own place in the minds of the community. Humor and relaxed delivery make kiai musleh easily accepted by the community. Especially people in rural areas. The consistency of kiai musleh in preaching, made him famous and grew the community's trust in him.

### **3 The Power of Founder's Personal Branding in the Development of Islamic Boarding School Education**

The rapid development of the Nahdhatut ta'limiyah Islamic boarding school cannot be separated from the personal branding power of its founder, namely Kiai Musleh Adnan. One of the things that makes the Nahdhatut Ta'limiyah Islamic boarding school educational institution develop very rapidly is the personal branding of its founder. Kiai Musleh is the face of the Nahdhatut ta'limiyah Islamic boarding school. The strong personal branding of Muslim kiai has become a "buzz" for the Islamic boarding school he founded. The public's interest in undergoing religious education at the Nahdhatut ta'limiyah Islamic boarding school is their interest in the figure of the founder, namely kiai musleh Adnan.

Apart from that, with the power of personal branding that had been built by Muslim kiai before building the Nahdhatut ta'limiyah Islamic boarding school, it made it easier for people to trust the Islamic boarding school he built. Because a kiai's good personal branding reputation will also be in line with the reputation of the educational institution he built. Because the community believes that the vision brought by the Nahdhatut ta'limiyah Islamic boarding school is

also the vision of the Muslim kiai as a preacher who already has a good reputation among the community.

#### 4 Conclusion

The development of the concept of personal branding continues to progress and develop. Personal branding has become a necessity for career advancement and the increasing complexity of social organizations in society. One of them is an Islamic boarding school educational institution. The sustainability of an Islamic boarding school cannot be separated from the figure of the kiai as the founder of the Islamic boarding school. The Kiai's Unique Value Proposition also plays a big role in the progress of Islamic boarding schools. Because the reputation that the kiai has is also considered to represent the reputation of the Islamic boarding school educational institution that he built. This is because the kiai is the face of the Islamic boarding school.

#### References

- Amir, Muhammad Taufiq, Bambang Sukma Wijaya. 2022. "Making Personal Branding Work Better : The Role of Positive Communication in Organization." *Social and Behavioural Sciences* (January).
- Anggrianto, Christian, Nassiriah Shaari, and Abdul Hamid. 2017. "The Most Important Factors in Building a Unique Selling Proposition to Reach Indonesian Middle Class Consumers." 17(1):30–36.
- Ayu Yunita, Dyah. 2010. "Online Personal Branding." Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta.
- Jannah, Hasanatul. 2019. "Islamic boarding schools as centers of authority for Madurese ulama." (2):79–93.
- Mustaqim, Abdul. n.d. "Character Research Model (In Theory and Application)."
- Quraisyin, Dewi. 2022. "Kiais , Authoritarianism , and Sinful Tourism in Madura." *Essence Journal of Ushuluddin Sciences* 23 (1):125–36.
- Setiawan, Asep Iwan, Siti Sumijaty, and Dyah Rahmi Astuti. 2022. "Personal Branding Model of Conventional Kiai in Broadcasting Islamic Religion in Islamic Boarding Schools." 16(November):327–44.