



Creating Community Bond through Cultural Branding to Maintain Community-Based Schools

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Abstract

The increase in people's prosperity and education level create a change on their view about education and the need for it. Consequently, they choose an education institution in a more selective consideration. Schools under Ma'arif institution in Semarang regency faced some difficulties as the impact. They had negative students growth values in the last three years before the research was conducted. In order to survive, institution's management strategy needed to be evaluated. This research examined the interface between culture and school, with specific reference to branding. The purpose of this research was to develop a cultural branding model for junior high schools under Ma'arif institution. Therefore, it includes research and development (R&D) systematic activities. This study was carried out on a premise that creating a bond between a school and its community by adopting the community's culture in a formal education setting will help the school to gain certain positioning in their community. After a limited implementation on a Ma'arif's school, the pilot project school underwent a significant increase in a number of new students. The analysis on the fact resulted in a conclusion that implementation of cultural increase community's love, emotional attachment, and loyalty to the school. The study also suggested applying the model in a wider scope, at least in regency area as it is only implemented in a school as a pilot project. Applying the model in the different type of schools in wider scope will add the worthy value and benefit of the model.

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INTRODUCTION

A paradigm change in the community that initially saw educational institutions or foundations as a social activity into a business venture requires a change of strategy in the management of the institutions or foundations. Today, many capital owners who previously did businesses beyond the educational field began to shift their capital in education (Kusuma, 2006:76). It indicates that education has started to become a business area for some people. They manage education professionally just like the way they manage business; it is not surprising that they see education from a business perspective. On the other hand, many educational institutions still apply traditional management and consider education as a social institution. In fact, certain people still need these 'traditional' educational institutions for relatively low education fees. Unfortunately, both types of institutions compete at the same period of time. So 'traditional' educational institutions will require a change of management and strategy in order to survive and thrive in this tight competition.

Along with the increase of public awareness about the importance of qualified education, cheap or even free education no longer becomes a guarantee for an educational institution to be the people's choice in obtaining educational services for their children. Some people, particularly those from the middle to upper economic levels, prefer expensive educational services from trusted educational institutions to free educational institutions that managed carelessly. The condition described above brings logical consequences to education managers to see the needs for the future life of their institutions. It is also considered to be logical when education managers take anticipatory steps to prepare the necessary skills in order to survive in this era. Therefore, changes in community's views should also be accommodated by the manager or the committees of educational institutions so that the educational services they offer to the

community can be accepted and become the people's choice.

There is a new phenomenon emerged in the world of education lately, that is the establishment of new educational institutions that is instantly recognized by the public because it carries the vision of modern or future educational concept desired by the public, even overwhelming the existence of educational institutions or foundations that have been long established. This is certainly because of professional management by the managers, and often they use business management approach so that the customers' need (the public) as the educational service users has always been a major consideration. The institutions' profile is portrayed in certain ways through branding management in order to be accepted by the community. With a positive brand image, an educational institution will have a clear audience. Price is not an issue as long as the service matches with the quality assurance provided. In fact, there is often a false public mindset that qualifies education as an expensive education.

Brand and branding are not a new phenomenon, neither in businesses nor in academic fields. Almquist & Roberts in Hampf & Kirsti (2011:1) state that the concept of the brand actually has been used since the stone age when hunters used weapons of specific "brands" to succeed in the hunt. However, the term branding which has the same meaning as the current branding was introduced to the public in the 16th century when Josiah Wedgwood, a potter from England, and Rose Bertin, a French fashion designer, marketed their products. Since that time, the concept of branding has been growing rapidly both in theory and practice of this concept in the marketing of various types of products and services.

Brand refers to a specific thing that is possessed only by an object (product or service that distinguishes it from other objects). Ghodeswar (2008:4) defines a brand as "a

distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors". From the cognitive aspect, Chang (2013:1) defines a brand as " a set of hooks that one's mind uses to organize his or her experience of a commercial offering. Businesses and manufacturers recognize the truth that brands help to boost sales. Analogically, school branding is a unique attractor to parents and students. Furthermore, from the customer's point of view, Kapferer in Ghodeswar (2008:4) defines a brand as "the total accumulation of all his/her experiences, and is built at all points of contact with the customer". The image attached to a product or service creates an indirect tie between producers and consumers that protect both sides from the competitors who try to provide products or services that are similar or looks alike. By brand, the consumers identify the identity of a product or service and select them based on certain considerations.

Today, along with the change of how people view education and the tight competition in the educational world to gain public sympathy, some educational institutions implement a number of strategic changes by creating a specific image (brand) to their institutions that make it different from that of other institutions and eventually becomes the people's choice. Based on research conducted by Mourad (2011), the brand and the factors

associated with it such as creating a brand image and positioning contributed significantly to the decision-making process by the community, including how they choose schools. Therefore, understanding the criteria in the selection of an ideal school by people has become a necessity for an educational institution manager. A Strong image of an educational institution will emit a strong signal to the public about the identity of the institution that it will influence people in choosing the school.

Many people assume that a school is known and becomes a choice because of the school ranking factor set by the government (the ministry of education) or the achievements of the students in national examinations. Actually, there are several other factors that make a school known and become people's choice. In addition to the above two factors, Chang (2013:5) indicates that the school also established the brand as the culture of the organization (school), learning atmosphere, and mindset or behavior developed at the school. There are several factors that determine the building of a successful brand. As cited in Chang (2013:5), some researchers in this field (Jobber, 2001; King, 1991; Doyle, 1989) have claimed that some of the very important factors involved in building a successful brand are quality, positioning, repositioning, communications, long-term perspective, and internal marketing. The relationship between these components to build a brand can be seen in Figure 1.

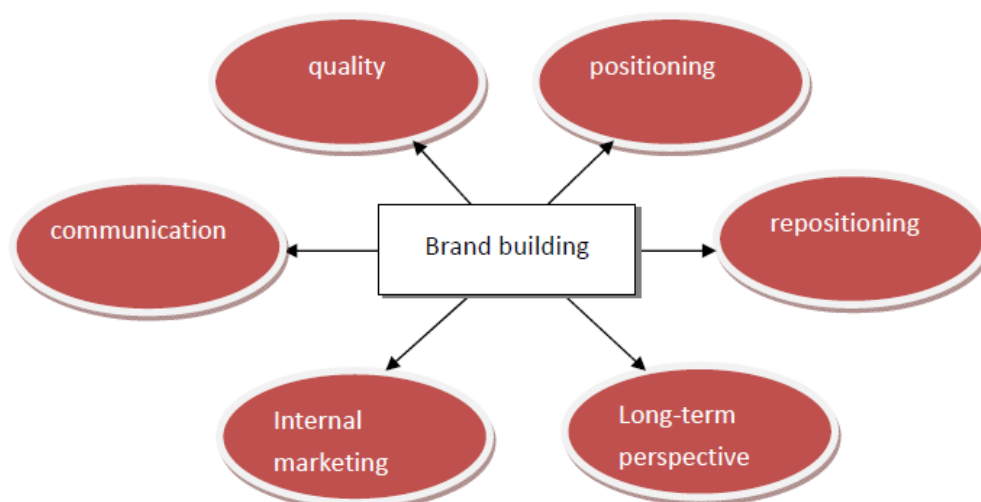


Figure 1. Components of brand building
(Source: Chang, 2013:6)

Quality is surely a major element in brand building. When a school has a high credibility and consistency of achievement, it will have a high market share and profitability. Positioning is also very important to build a successful brand. Some efforts to do positioning, according to Chang (2013:7), include logos, institutions image, and service standards. Positioning is used by consumers to judge a brand in the market. The most obvious example of a successful positioning is Honda, particularly the motorcycles types. When people refer to a motorcycle, the one that comes first in public's mind is the brand. This is, of course, an advantage for manufacturers to push the marketing of their motorcycle product. Repositioning serves to maintain the brand by looking at the extent of how far public accept their product as well how the product accommodates their changing tastes. Communication is also necessary to build public awareness about the brand as well as to reinforce the perception of it. All of the above components are very useful to create an institution that lasts long but remains to be public choices.

METHODS

This research aimed to develop a cultural branding model for junior high schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution. Therefore, it includes research and development (R&D) systematic activities. The resulted product of this study was a model.

Based on Boeg and Gall (2007: 590), there are ten steps in applying the R&D activities. They are (1) the preliminary study, (2) the research plan, (3) the development of model design, (4) the limited field tryout, (5) the revision of the tryout, (6) the main implementation, (7) the revision of the implementation, (8) the feasibility test, (9) the final revision, and (10) the dissemination and the final product implementation. The ten steps were simplified into five in this study considering the limited time provided to conduct this undertaking as follows: (1) the preliminary study, (2) the development of the cultural branding design, (3) the expert and practitioners validation through forum group discussion, (4) the limited field tryout, and (5) the revision of the tryout to develop a final model. The procedural scheme of the cultural branding development for junior high schools under the Ma'arif institution is described in Figure 2.

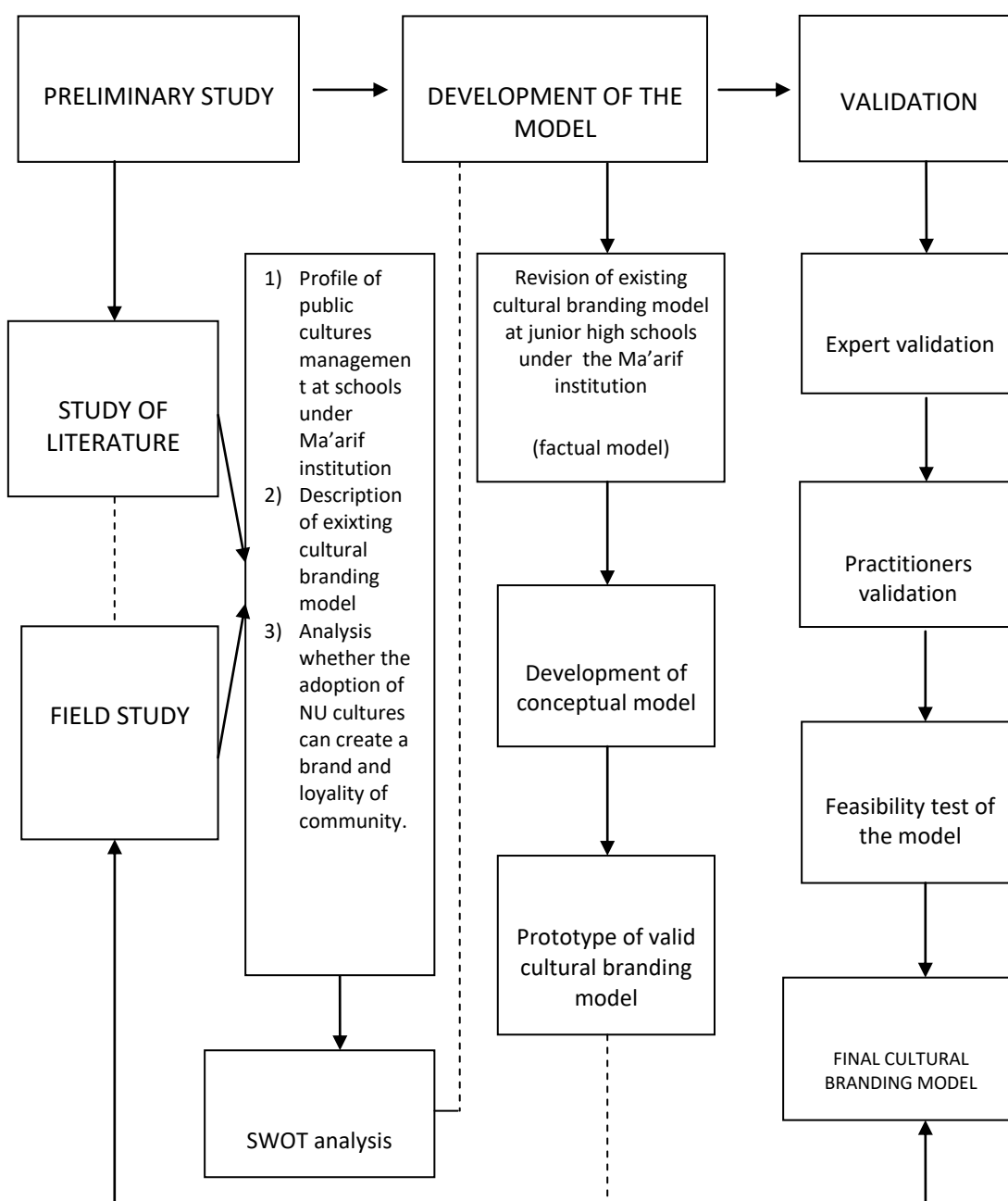


Figure 2. Procedures of cultural branding model development for junior high schools under the Ma'arif educational institution in Semarang Regency

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phenomenon of the Schools under the NU Ma'arif Educational Institution

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the biggest religious and social organization in Indonesia. As the biggest organization, NU has militant members which spread in most provinces in Indonesia. To run the organizations, NU has

formed a number of divisions based on certain expertise and the Ma'arif Educational Institution is one of its divisions which handles educational activities. The forming of the Ma'arif institution aimed to transfer beliefs and NU cultures to their generations through formal education.

The Ma'arif institution then established schools to achieve the goal, from kindergarten until senior high school. These formal schools

are supposed to facilitate the NU members to get a formal education. The schools can also serve as the place for them to inherit their belief and cultures to their generation. In short, NU members are recommended to choose these community schools to maintain their organization life.

Whether the purpose of the Ma'arif school establishment meets the expectation, a limited scope study was held at Ma'arif schools in Semarang regency in the level of junior high school. The study tried to map people's interest toward the Ma'arif schools in the region as NU members have been the majority there. The result showed that most of the NU members did not choose Ma'arif schools for their children or families and preferred public schools (school under the government management). Out of the three categories attributed to the schools, that is Ma'arif schools, private non-Ma'arif schools, and public schools, Ma'arif schools had the lowest developmental values (i.e. -5.01%, 0.21%, 5.35% in 2013 and -2.17%, 2.59%, 1.71% in 2014 respectively).

It is undeniable that high loyalty of the NU members to their organization is one of the key factors of the existence of the schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution. The study which aimed to reveal the reasons why parents decided to choose schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution rather than other schools found that 90.48% of the respondents did it because of their relationship (loyalty) to NU. By choosing the schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution, they expect that the school will teach their children about the NU belief, values, and cultures because they believe in the truth in them. However, different opinions

occurred after their children entered the schools. Further study was carried out to measure their satisfaction towards the schools. The data show that the user satisfactory index towards the schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution was on the value of 2.80 from the range 0 – 5. The value was in the medium category. This means that the schools could not truly fulfill their expectations, especially about the inheritance of the NU belief, values, and cultures to their children. The medium value signifies an alert for the institutions which run on service-based activities including education field. The medium value of user satisfactory index towards the schools had an impact on their loyalty. The data also showed that the user loyalty index was on the value of 2.93 that is also attributed to the medium category. As their satisfaction level was low, their loyalty decreased. This fact seems to be the cause why the developmental value of the schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution had negative values for several years although they were settled in the NU community.

Based on this condition, another study was conducted to develop a model that adapts the NU belief, values, and cultures into school cultures. The study was conducted under premises that a community-based school will develop if there is a bond between the schools and their community. In this context, adapting the NU cultures into school cultures will create the bond. This study aimed to create a cultural branding model for the schools under the Ma'arif Educational Institution based on the NU cultures and values. The framework of the study can be seen in Figure 3.

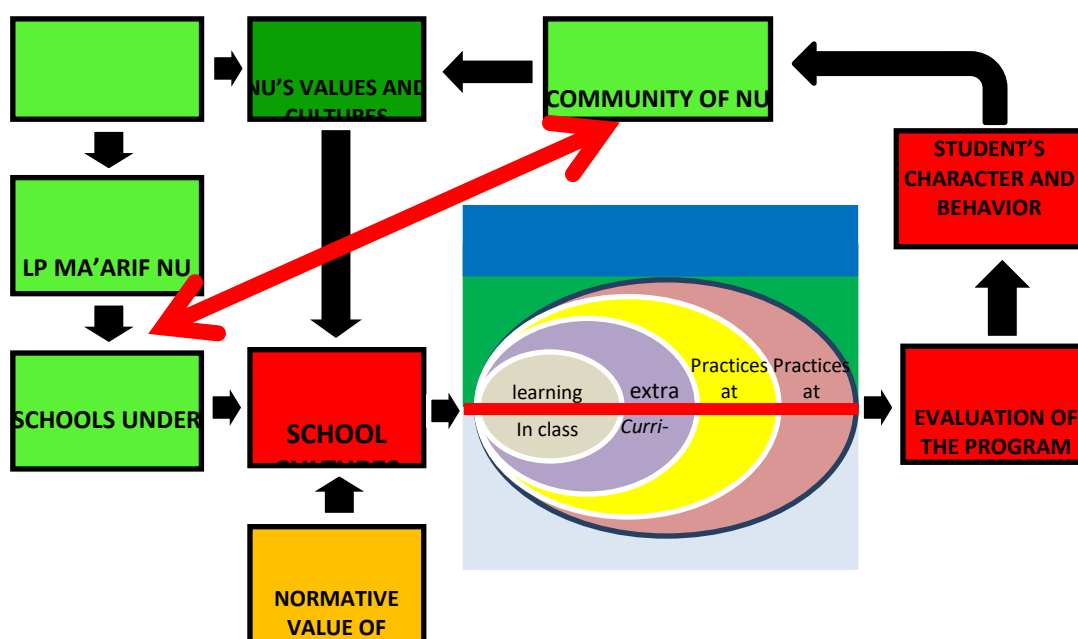


Figure 3. The framework of the developmental study

After the model was ready, a junior high school under the Ma'arif Educational Institution in Semarang Regency was appointed as a pilot project to implement the model. Previously, the school received 176, 191, 206, 217 and 227 students in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 respectively. The enrollment of the new students is held in July every year. If the data to in percentage growth of the new students' acceptance, It had steady developmental value in terms of the new students' acceptance as high as 8.52% in 2012, 7.85% in 2013, 5.34% in 2014, and 4.61% in 2015. Although the school received more students each year, the percentage growth tends to decline in the last four years. After the implementation of the developed model at the schools for about six months, the schools received 296 new students in July 2016. It means that there was a 30.40% improvement compared to previous year. It was a significant improvement. If the decision of choosing a school is associated with their trust towards the school, the implementation of cultural branding based on NU belief, values, and cultures at the schools under After the model was ready, a junior high school under LP Ma'arif in Semarang Regency was appointed as a pilot project to implement the model. Previously, the

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Creating Community Bond through Cultural Branding

In this era of competition, branding has become a very important aspect of any organization's management strategy, including schools. Besides providing tangible services, today's education also provides intangible services to their students. According to Lovelock & Wirtz (2011) in Chang (2013:4), these services are process-orientated including people processing (students' physical entrance to the school field), possession processing (students' knowledge and skill possession), mental stimulus processing (students' ethical standard establishment and maintenance), and information processing (other related intangible form of service). In fact, it is only the transfer of ownership that is not included in the service. In addition, like business programs, the services a school provides are also characterized and assessed by their quality after consumption (Chen, 2008).

Since education has become a commodity across the globe, educational administrators consider students as customers, representing major stakeholder groups in an education in line with the inquiry these days. The service provided by schools should be consumer-based oriented. Therefore, the process of decision making on schools should consider and accommodate their needs.

Schools can not stand alone without community. They have a very strong relationship that develops naturally. Schools do not exist in vacuum or isolation; it takes place in a community, taking many advantages from it. Accordingly, the community needs schools to help them develop their children based on their ideals. Education in school, stated by Daramola (1985:1), is "seen as a means of cultural transmission from one generation to another in any given community. Community is defined as the whole range of social relationships of people living in a certain geographic territory and having a sense of belonging to the same group". In other words, there is a mutual relationship between schools and their community.

Unfortunately, there are numerous schools in the community that compete to be the community's choice. They compete to create an image that their school performs the best among the schools in the community. The common thing they consider is mostly about the school ranking. All efforts are made to achieve a higher ranking than others. In this context, each school actually has created a brand image that is attributed to the school. However, branding does not merely concern about school ranking and test scores but also about its culture, atmosphere, and mindset (Chang, 2013:5). Therefore, placing a school at a certain position in the community will be beneficial for schools to market their service in this tight competition. Positioning, as stated by Ghodeswar (2008:6), is related to "creating the perception of a brand in the customer's mind and of achieving differentiation that it stands apart from competitors' brands/offering and that it meets the consumer's needs/expectations". By positioning, consumers (community) will have a clear insight about school brand. This will help a school to gain special attention from the community.

There are some ways to do positioning for a school. Positioning through academic quality is the best way in branding a school. Its consistency and credibility are usually expected in the consumers' minds; that is why higher quality brands achieve a higher market share and higher profitability (Shaharudin et al., 2010). However, positioning schools on quality-based are not easy; it is quite complicated. It requires many resources – high budget, pivotal attention, time-consuming, planned actions, and others – to realize. Positioning with specific reference to school branding can also be done through the adoption of community's culture into school's culture. In this context, school functions as community's agent to bequeath and develop the community's culture to their generation. By doing so, school establishes a mutual and reciprocal relationship with the community to preserve their norms, values, and cultures.

Positioning school through cultural branding has some advantages compared to another strategy of branding. Chang (2013:5) noted that research on cultures for years (e.g. Gregory & Munch, 1996; Shulruf, Hattie, & Dixon, 2011; Wagner III, 1995) has asserted that Asian people care more about their group and family, different from Western people who are more individual-oriented. They have more consideration on collectivists that have a great emphasis on the importance of groups and family and think more in terms of “we,” that is different from western people who are more individualist in that they mostly think about themselves as individuals. Consequently, choosing a school tends to be family’s or even community’s mission rather than a personal mission for an Asian student. Therefore, applying cultural branding will create a cultural bond between the school and its community. This is because “human beings tend to like people (and also organizations including school) with whom they share common traits. The same notion applies to brand-consumer interactions”

(Aaker, 1996 in Hwang, 2012:99). Branding through culture is also simpler and consumes less budget. The school managers need to map what community’s norms, values, or cultures are to be adopted in school’s culture and plan the activities to make it a school habit that finally develops into school behavior.

As noted earlier, the current study focuses on some factors on community – school relationship related to cultural branding model, that is – culture and its representation in cultural branding, brand love, and emotional attachment – and their impact on personal commitment (loyalty). In particular, the model includes:

- The cultural representation of community’s culture in cultural branding developed by school;
- the positive impact of cultural concept on emotional attachment, brand love, and loyalty; and
- the positive effect of brand love and emotional attachment on consumer loyalty within a luxury fashion cultural brand context (see Figure 4).

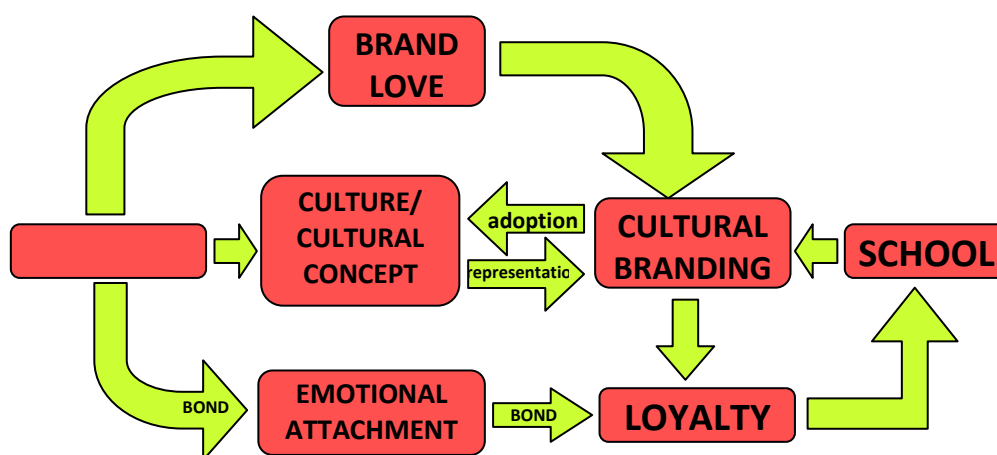


Figure 4. Community-school relationship framework in cultural branding

The figure shows that there is a reciprocal relationship between school and community indirectly. Both sides get in touch through culture-community related to school through school’s culture represented from the community’s culture and the school gets along with the community by developing a branding

strategy adopted from community’s culture. As cultural branding developed by school introduces a representation of community’s culture, this will potentially create a ‘special’ relationship between the community and the school manifested into brand love. When the community believes that education in school

truly serves as a means of cultural transmission from one generation to another to preserve it, there will grow a personal attachment called "cultural bond".

CONCLUSION

In order to survive, a school needs to create a strong brand. The community-based school is a school type that is established from and for the community. The community members are the main consumers and the users of the school's educational services. Doing a positioning in the community will give advantages to school in relation to the effort to build a strong brand because school locates in the community and always depends on it. Positioning strategy suggested in this paper is called 'cultural branding'. This type of branding needs a consistency and commitment of the school to maintain and preserve the community's culture, and this will help the school to obtain loyalty.

The implementation of cultural branding model with specific reference to NU belief, cultures and values at school under the Ma'arif Educational Institution has proven to be effective to maintain the development of the school, especially in terms of the loyalty of the community. Some conclusions from this practice can be stated as follows.

C1: The community's good perception of cultural-concept in connection with the cultural branding developed by the school will increase their brand love and emotional attachment to school.

Cultural branding facilitates the relationship between the school and the community because the school's cultures are the representation of the community's cultures. The community gets attached to the school because it is the right place for their generation to inherit the community's cultures through formal education. Hence, the school has developed a certain positioning in the community and perceived by them as the brand that differs the

school from others. This 'special' relationship is manifested into the brand love that makes the community get a more emotional attachment to the school, which is the initial stage called the cultural bond.

C2: School's commitment and consistency to preserve and maintain community's culture continuously through school branding will increase their loyalty to the school.

After a certain period of time, after the culture changes into school habit and behavior, when the community believes that school's program is a sustainable action to preserve their norms, values, or cultures, brand love and personal attachment change into loyalty. Loyalty is a relational outcome expected by schools in this branding matter as Oliver (1999) in Hwang (2012:101) argues that "brand loyalty, the core of brand equity, is a key indicator of the sustainability of a brand because being loyal to a brand makes its consumers less likely to switch to competitive brands even when the competitors offer more benefits". Thus, the involvement of community cultures into school cultures can improve the loyalty of the community towards the school.

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