

Effectiveness of City Branding "Santri City" in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi Against the Decision of Studying Religion

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of the *Santri City* branding in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, as part of a strategic effort to shape the region's image. The research aims to analyze how city branding constructs Wajo Regency's identity and its impact on public perception, particularly in relation to religious education. Employing a qualitative descriptive analysis, this study explores the conceptualization of Wajo Regency as a brand, considering its multidimensional nature, which includes functional, emotional, relational, and strategic elements. The findings reveal that the *Santri City* branding effectively enhances the recognition of Wajo Regency as an Islamic educational hub. This strengthened identity influences the decisions of surrounding communities in seeking religious education. Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on city branding by highlighting the role of religious identity in shaping regional branding strategies.

Keywords: Effectiveness, City Branding, Santri City, Wajo Regency.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas branding *Santri City* di Kabupaten Wajo, Sulawesi Selatan, sebagai bagian dari upaya strategis dalam membentuk citra daerah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana city branding membangun identitas Kabupaten Wajo serta dampaknya terhadap persepsi masyarakat, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan keagamaan. Dengan menggunakan metode analisis deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi konseptualisasi Kabupaten Wajo sebagai sebuah merek, yang mencakup aspek fungsional, emosional, relasional, dan strategis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa branding *Santri City* secara efektif meningkatkan pengenalan Kabupaten Wajo sebagai pusat pendidikan Islam. Identitas yang semakin kuat ini memengaruhi keputusan masyarakat sekitar dalam memilih pendidikan keagamaan. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskursus city branding dengan menyoroti peran identitas keagamaan dalam strategi pembentukan citra daerah.

Kata Kunci: Efektivitas, City Branding, Kota Santri, Kabupaten Wajo.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is ranked fourth in the world in terms of population size. According to data released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Indonesia had approximately 275.77 million people as of mid-2022, reflecting a 1.13% increase from the previous year

(Statistics, 2022). This significant population growth has implications for various sectors, including education, economy, and urban development. In particular, Wajo Regency in South Sulawesi has a total population of 397,810 people, with the majority—402,270 individuals—identifying as Muslims, followed by Hindus (2,003), Protestants (660), Catholics (127), and Buddhists (177) (BPS Wajo, 2022). The dominance of the Muslim population in Wajo Regency is evident in the presence of numerous Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which serve as educational institutions that shape religious identity and social values in the region. However, whether this religious landscape aligns with city branding strategies to enhance educational attractiveness remains an issue that needs further exploration.

This research investigates the effectiveness of City Branding in Wajo Regency concerning religious learning decisions. City branding, as a strategic effort, aims to construct a distinctive identity for a city, influencing perceptions and behaviors among residents and potential visitors. Sardiman (2010) argues that human actions are driven by various motivating factors, including biological needs, instincts, and psychological elements, which ultimately propel individuals toward specific actions. Applying this theory to city branding, it can be argued that a well-executed city branding initiative has the potential to generate motivation among the local population to engage more actively in religious education. If stakeholders successfully implement city branding strategies, it could create a cultural shift that fosters belief and commitment to the region's Islamic identity. However, the extent to which city branding influences educational decision-making requires empirical validation.

The concept of City Branding has been widely discussed in the literature, particularly regarding its role in regional development. Simon (2007) defines City Branding as an idea that encapsulates how a city constructs and communicates its identity, often akin to branding strategies used for products, to create distinct characteristics that stakeholders can leverage for added value. Some scholars argue that effective City Branding not only enhances a region's economic and tourism appeal but also shapes its sociocultural and educational dimensions (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Meanwhile, others contend that city branding risks oversimplifying the complexity of local identities, as branding efforts might not always align with the lived realities and expectations of the community (Govers & Go, 2009). In the case of Wajo Regency, it remains crucial to assess whether branding

the region as *Santri City* genuinely strengthens its identity as an Islamic educational hub or whether it merely serves as a superficial label without substantive impact on religious learning decisions.

A relevant study conducted by Santoso (2017) titled *The Influence of City Branding "Friendly and Religious" and City Image "Kota Santri" on the Decision to Study Religion* examined the role of branding in Jombang Regency, particularly in relation to major pesantren such as Tebuireng, Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas, Mamba'ul Ma'arif Denanyar, and Darul Ulum Rejoso. The study found that effective City Branding with the theme "Friendly and Religious" significantly increased individuals' interest in pursuing religious studies. However, Santoso's research employed a quantitative approach using surveys and observations, whereas this study adopts a qualitative descriptive analysis method. Additionally, differences in geographical and sociocultural contexts between Jombang and Wajo require a separate investigation to determine whether the findings are applicable across different regions.

By situating this research within the broader academic debate on City Branding and religious education, this study seeks to contribute new insights into the effectiveness of branding strategies in influencing educational choices. While existing studies highlight the potential of City Branding in fostering regional identity, there remains a gap in understanding its long-term impact on religious learning decisions, particularly in regions like Wajo. Through a qualitative analysis of stakeholders' perspectives and community engagement, this research aims to provide a nuanced evaluation of the branding initiatives in Wajo Regency and their implications for Islamic education. Furthermore, this study aspires to bridge theoretical discussions on branding with practical considerations in policy-making, ensuring that City Branding efforts align with local aspirations and sustainable educational development.

METHOD

In the research entitled *The Effectiveness of City Branding "City of Santri" in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi on the Decision to Study Religion* using a qualitative descriptive analysis research method. According to (Agustinus, 2014) this type of research is an inductive approach so that in the process a thinking process is carried out by looking for

similar themes, analytical categories that originate from valid data, rather than looking for evidence in the data before collecting and analyzing the data.

The analytical method used is a qualitative descriptive method with the aim of revealing events and data that are relevant to the research. In line with this (Sugiyono, 2008) states that the qualitative descriptive method is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism which is sometimes used to conduct research with naturally objective conditions and the researcher as a small instrument in it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

City Branding

City Branding is an effort by a region to shape its image. (Gustiawan, 2011) stated that city branding is a process of forming a city brand which will become an identity, logo or symbol. In the process, strategies need to be developed so that the results are more effective. There are several requirements for City branding put forward by (Sugiarsono, 2009):

- a. Attributes: This is a description of the character and identity of the region in question.
- b. Message: The ability to describe an area with a positive message.
- c. Differentiation: An innovative mind is needed so that it is different from other areas.
- d. Ambassadorship: Become an inspiration to be liked by people with the aim of getting them to stay or visit.

The beginning of the formation of the city branding concept began with thinking about the concept of city planning. In the process there are three ways of using communication, namely secondary communication, primary communication and tertiary communication. These three things have their own relationships, such as secondary and primary communication taking a role so that tertiary communication can be better, stronger and become positive communication that is easily accepted.

There are several opinions about City Branding and some of them have differences and similarities. One opinion from Kavaratzis who created the city branding concept and in it discussed communication strategies, internal culture and matters relating to the region's infrastructure.

Results of Studying Religion

According to (Warsita, 2008) Learning in Greek is called "instructus" or "intruder" which means stating what one is thinking so that learning is a conveying of thoughts that have their own meaning which is then conveyed in the learning and teaching process. (Majid, 2012) states that learning in Islamic Religious Education is an effort so that students understand, behave positively, and most importantly do things based on religious teachings that exist in the Al-Qur'an and Hadith.

According to (Narayan & Corcoran-Perry, 1997) Decision making is a process and interaction between problems that want to be given a solution and humans who are looking for solutions related to the situations they face in their environment.

Decision making is an event commonly faced by social creatures. This is related to something uncertain. There are several ways to reduce these factors by searching for information that is relevant to the matter of concern. Decision making in the learning process is a form of a person's response to the environment they live in. From this opinion it can be concluded that the decision to study religion is a desire that grows because of awareness of the expansion of religious knowledge.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

City Branding is an effort to identify a brand owned by a city or region and this is a process in forming an identity. If Wajo Regency is successful in carrying out City Branding as a Santri City, then of course the local community and the wider community will know the city as a Santri City. According to (Babadu, 2001) in City Branding activities it is hoped that each region can create a certain image so that an identity is formed that becomes the character of the city.

Image The city of Islamic boarding schools is closely related to Islamic boarding schools. Remembering that Islamic boarding schools are the residence and place of education for students. According to (Rahardjo, 1985) Islamic boarding school is an Islamic educational institution which has several general characteristics in it, namely having a kyai as a central figure, there is a dormitory as a building where students live and there is a mosque as a center for Islamic education and learning activities.

In the Wajo Regency area there are several Islamic boarding schools which researchers found from the official website of the Wajo Ministry of Religion. Here are some of them:

Table 1. Data on Islamic Boarding Schools in Wajo Regency

| No | Islamic Boarding Schools | Adress | Distric | Village |
|----|---------------------------------|---|-------------|---------------|
| 1 | Darussalam | Tellesang | Pitumpanua | Tellesang |
| 2 | Ponpes Al Hadi Al Islami | Jl. Irigasi Lawatanae | Maniangpajo | Sogi |
| 3 | PP Darun Naim As'adiyah Poatoa | Jl. Paotoa | Pitumpanua | Maccolliloloe |
| 4 | Darul As'adiyah Ongkoe | JL. Kemakmuran No.100 Ongkoe | Belawa | Ongkoe |
| 5 | Nurul As'adiyah Callaccu | Jl. H.A. Ninnong No. 8 Sengkang | Tempe | Teddaopu |
| 6 | As'adiyah Nurul Yaqin Atapange | Jl. Maddukelleng No. 44 Atapange | Majauleng | Rumpia |
| 7 | Al-Mu'minin | Jl. Trans Sulawesi, Poros Makassar-Palopo | Pitumpanua | Tellesang |
| 8 | Hilaluddin As'adiyah Bolaaserac | Bolaaserac | Belawa | Leppangeng |
| 9 | Daarul Mu'minin Doping | Jl.KH.Muh.As'ad No.7 Doping | Penrang | Doping |
| 10 | Al Mubarak DDI Tobarakka | Jl. Poros Palopo Makassar – Palopo 277 | Pitumpanua | Tobarakka |
| 11 | Al-Mukhlisin DDI Paria | Jl. Makmur Kelurahan Paria | Majauleng | Paria |
| 12 | As'adiyah Pusat Sengkang | Jl. Veteran No. 46 Sengkang | Tempe | Lapongkoda |
| 13 | Al- MUJAHIDIN KAMPIRI | Pallawarukka | Pammana | Pallawarukka |
| 14 | Hurriyatunnas Bakti | Dusun Dake | Keera | Awo |
| 15 | Muhammadiyah Jauhpendang | Jauhpendang | Pitumpanua | Jauhpendang |
| 16 | Nurul Ulum Pammana | Maroanging | Pammana | Pammana |
| 17 | Nurul Qur'an As'adiyah | Jl. Akasia Sengkang | Tempe | Bulupabbulu |

The presence of several Islamic boarding schools in Wajo is a sign that Islamic developments have spread in the region so that this fact is fundamental in supporting the image of Santri City in this region. According to (Hamdan, 2005) the presence of Islamic Boarding Schools is a hope that a change will occur in social society. It is also hoped that Islamic boarding schools will be able to dedicate the knowledge and skills they have by carrying out activities and liberation work among the community from negative things, such as immoral acts, political oppression, obscuration of the law, impoverishment of knowledge, economics, culture and other similar things. This explanation was explained again by (Azyumardi, 2001) that Islamic boarding schools have the functions of: (a) spreading Islamic religious education (b) maintaining Islamic traditions; (c) defend religious teachings.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that in general, Islamic boarding schools have a positive image in society so that their existence can help the formation of

city branding. Currently there has been a stage of social and cultural change in the Islamic boarding school environment, at this stage it has given rise to understanding among the community. (Rahardjo, 1985) stated that Abdurrahman Wahid described the function and purpose of Islamic boarding schools, namely taking a role in religious learning, in the form of basic values and elements of Islamic rituals. In detail, this opinion states that Islamic boarding schools are social and cultural institutions, which means their functions and roles can be aimed at forming an ideal society and there are social and political power functions in them.

The vision of the Islamic boarding school is certainly related to Islamic teachings, so this will have an influence on the surrounding community. The effect of habits on an environment will have an influence on those around it. If Wajo Regency had effectively carried out City Branding "Student City" it would have created a similar environment, but if it was done ineffectively the result would be the opposite.

Environmental Factors

(Cicourel, 2013) states that social culture can be assessed in a certain way in a local area. Usually, it is considered bureaucratically and is something that is neatly arranged, experiencing development, cultured, including theories of thought, belief systems and applying them as daily activities. According to this opinion, social culture is sometimes described as something that is difficult for the mind and common sense to grasp or beyond the ability of the five senses of humans in general.

The formation of city branding does not just focus on creating slogans and logos but must go through understanding the meaning contained in the brand, it should even have a spirit that is expected to describe a city's activities. It can be assessed from the activities of the people, the character of the bureaucracy, and the infrastructure that supports the city, which is widely known.

These considerations will influence the city branding strategy in increasing awareness of the surrounding community, so that these habits can become a pattern in the area. It has become a culture that is often carried out on a person and the surrounding environment.

If we look at human behavior patterns, milieu (environmental) factors are one of the reasons that form a habit. According to (Rusdiana, 2015) the environment is a place where

a person lives and resides, searches for, and has unique characteristics and functions and is reciprocally related to the existence of the living creatures that inhabit it, especially for humans who have more numerous and real roles.

(Christie, 2013) states that environmental components consist of two factors, namely abiotic factors (soil, water, air, weather, temperature) and biotic factors (plants, animals and humans). From these two things, it can be said that the environment is divided between the natural environment created by God and the artificial environment.

The nature that surrounds humans is a factor that can influence and shape a person's behavior. This natural environment can provide positive and negative things, can make a person broken or, conversely, be a reason for the growth of a person's abilities and creativity. On the other hand, if you are in bad natural conditions, this can be an inhibiting factor in developing a person's talents, so that you can only carry out activities according to the current conditions. On the other hand, if it is supported by good natural conditions, then of course it will be easier to channel and develop the talents you are born with. So it can be said that natural conditions can be an effective factor in a development in planning.

Apart from the natural environment created by Allah, there is what is called the artificial environment. One of them includes the social environment which is a place where various activities take place, such as social interaction and communication between people.

The environment is a place where humans live and the interaction process takes place, the social environment includes the social environment. According to (Ahmadi and Uhbiyati, 2001) association is direct contact between one individual and another. So the social environment can be a factor in forming a person's character. (Zahrudin, 2004) states that the social environment is divided into social environments that are free and general in nature.

Domestic environment: the father's and mother's morals at home can be a reflection for their children.

- a. Work environment: The atmosphere in the office or workplace can be an influencing factor in how employees think and behave.
- b. School environment: Children's character can be shaped by the school environment and the teachings of their teachers.

- c. Congregational organizational environment: a person who is a member of an organization (congregation) will usually make the organization's vision and mission the guide of his life.
- d. Economic circulation environment (trade): Economic problems are fundamental in human life, economic relations can influence a person's thoughts and character.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that environmental factors can be factors that influence the development and formation of a person's behavior, both psychological and physical environments. Whether it is the formation of individual morals or character. Basically, humans cannot escape absolutely from the environmental factors available around them.

City Branding Criteria

City Branding is a strategy for a region as a strong positioning and has a target market, just like the positioning of a product or service, so that a region can be widely known throughout the world (Gustiawan, 2011). According to (Ivani, 2015) there are several criteria for creating city branding. The following include:

- a. Attributes, city branding can provide an overview of the character and personality of a city.
- b. Message provides an image through the message so that the image is easy to remember.
- c. Differentiation, innovative thinking to create an impression of this city so that it looks different from other cities.
- d. Ambassadorship, providing inspiration and images for people to come and settle in that place.

According to (Kavaratzis, 2004) communicating a city brand with an image can be channeled through several types of communication, namely, primary communication, secondary communication and secondary communication. From this explanation it can be concluded that the criteria for carrying out city branding can be carried out in several communication models.

Various Decisions

According to (Loudon, 2008) decisions are classified as structured, semi-structured and unstructured decisions. Some explanations below were written by Loudon:

- a. Unstructured decisions are decisions made without the need for assessment, evaluation and more detail in solving the problem. Each of these decisions is something that is considered important and new but is carried out irregularly.
- b. Structured decisions, different from before. This decision has the nature of being carried out repeatedly and there are clear procedures in the process and it is not treated as if it were new.
- c. Semi-structured decisions are decisions that are generally found at lower organizational levels, where not all problems have clear answers.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the decision to study religion is an education that considers that the entire series of life, both physical and spiritual life, provides understanding so that humans can reach a high level in the sight of Allah SWT. People who choose to study religion can make decisions both structured and unstructured.

City Branding is a change that developed from Place Branding proposed by Philip Kotler in 1993 (Kotler, 2002) starting from that, so there are many definitions of city branding put forward by experts. According to (Aaker, 2004) City Branding is a strategy that has a conceptual focus on a region as a brand. A brand in this case is a complex thing and consists of functional elements, a response and a strategy whose final result is society's assessment. Meanwhile (Theodori and Quirico, 2014) in their research expressed the opinion that branding a region has the aim of giving a positive impression to that region.

In some of the definitions above, it can be concluded that City Branding "Student City" in the Wajo Regency area needs to take an approach that focuses on regional development, ideas and planning which includes functional, emotional and relational elements.

According to (Riyanto, et al. 2010) in looking at the effectiveness of city branding it can refer to several things, as below:

- a. Image, which is a picture of a concept of "student city" in Wajo Regency;
- b. Recognition, namely how the manager processes information.
- c. Differentiation, namely what advantages exist in the Wajo Regency area so that it becomes something unique;
- d. Brand messages are messages created to support the image of the santri city in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi

- e. Brand consistency, namely the truth of a message conveyed. For example, Wajo Regency is imaged as a Santri City, so it is also supported by infrastructure and levels that validate the image of Santri City.
- f. Emotional response, namely how the manager's actions influence visitors' feelings.
- g. Expectation is the conformity between the message conveyed in forming an image and the reality of being in Wajo Regency.

Murfianti (2010) states that City Branding is often used in cities throughout the world to improve the image of the region. This certainly provides its own advantages. Likewise, if Wajo Regency is imaged as a "Student City" it will certainly have a beneficial effect on the area. Several things can be an advantage. The following include: High awareness, giving rise to positive perceptions. Specific purposes, when Wajo Regency is known as "Santri City" people will designate the city as a special purpose as it has been imaged.

If the effectiveness of City Branding in this area is good, it will create a sense of peace and prosperity for the surrounding community and will of course have an effect on visits from people outside the area. (Hadi, 2014) states that regional development does not only have an impact on investment, but will touch on social, cultural and environmental aspects.

This research focuses on social, cultural and environmental aspects for society. If people experience awareness of studying religion, it will provide more focused guidance in life, especially since Wajo Regency has many Islamic boarding schools that support the development of the image of "City of Santri". According to (Muhaimin, 2002) when studying Islam, it will lead a person to a process of belief, understanding, appreciating His creation, and implementing the Islamic religion through learning activities and attending several special trainings taking into account the demand to uphold the value of tolerance towards other people's beliefs to create harmony and peace.

From the explanation above, researchers draw the conclusion that the effectiveness of city branding requires a strategy as explained above. If it takes place effectively, it will certainly affect the results. The wider community will know Wajo Regency as "Santri City." And this identity will influence people's religious learning decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that effective city branding, such as *Santri City*, plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of a region's identity. This branding is not merely a regional marketing strategy but also serves as a means to establish a distinctive image that influences people's decisions, particularly in choosing a location for religious education. A well-developed city branding identity enhances the appeal of a region as an Islamic educational hub, making it a key consideration for individuals seeking deeper religious understanding. Therefore, the success of city branding is not solely determined by visual and promotional aspects but also by the consistency of the values it embodies and the active participation of various stakeholders in reinforcing the region's image.

Furthermore, the decision-making process regarding the selection of a religious-based educational environment can be categorized as either structured or unstructured. Structured decisions are typically based on clear information and rational considerations, such as the availability of high-quality Islamic educational institutions, adequate infrastructure, and the region's reputation as a center of Islamic learning. In contrast, unstructured decisions are more influenced by emotional, social, and collective perceptions of the region's identity, which are shaped through city branding efforts. In this context, the success of *Santri City* branding in Wajo Regency can contribute to fostering public awareness and interest, whether through direct experience or socially constructed narratives. Therefore, city branding initiatives that emphasize religious identity must be strategically designed to ensure a long-term impact in building a sustainable and recognizable regional identity.

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