



The Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres in the Decision to Register Students at the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Selong, East Lombok

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ABSTRACT

The Muhammadiyah boarding school (MBS) in Selong, part of Muhammadiyah's philanthropic educational institution, faces significant challenges marked by stagnant student enrollment. After four years of operation, the institution only accommodates 68 students amidst a persistent downward trend, despite a broad network of Muhammadiyah cadres throughout East Lombok. This qualitative-descriptive study aims to examine three dimensions: the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in shaping enrollment decisions, the factors driving these decisions, and strategic steps to optimize cadre involvement in institutional promotion. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and documentation analysis. The findings identify four key cadre roles: information agents, local opinion leaders, trust brokers, and decision facilitators. Enrollment decisions are shaped by rational factors such as perceived educational quality, tuition fees, physical facilities, and the institutional appeal of MBS Selong as a modern Islamic boarding school capable of integrating formal general academic education, religious instruction, and competitive extracurricular programs into a cohesive educational framework, social recommendations, and emotional closeness to cadre figures. This study contributes a new conceptual framework by integrating educational consumer behavior theory with community-based da'wah mobilization, introducing the concept of da'wah-based marketing actors as a new analytical lens for understanding student selection behavior in the context of the Muhammadiyah organizational ecosystem.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah cadres, registration decisions, Islamic boarding schools, educational marketing

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are traditional Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia that have existed and developed for centuries. These institutions play an important role in shaping individual character and morals and disseminating Islamic values within society. Islamic boarding schools are also known as educational centers that instill high moral values within society. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools are recognized as institutions capable of producing quality human resources, particularly in the field of Islamic education [1]. Islamic boarding schools have an important contribution to the intellectual life of the nation because they function as educational institutions that equip students with a deep understanding of Islamic religious knowledge. Through this educational process, Islamic boarding schools are expected to produce cadres of ulama who play a role in da'wah activities and the spread of Islamic teachings, while also being a bulwark in maintaining the morals and ethics of society [2]. However, in the era of globalization and rapid technological development, Islamic boarding schools face various challenges in transforming and adapting to the demands and needs of the times [3].

Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions have a strategic role in shaping character, increasing religious literacy, and instilling moral values in the younger generation [4], [5]. Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions have a strategic role in producing cadres of ulama who not only have a deep mastery of religious knowledge but also have moral integrity and leadership. [6].

In its development, Islamic boarding schools are no longer viewed solely as traditional educational institutions, but have undergone a transformation into modern educational institutions that integrate religious education, formal academics, and student skills development. This transformation is evident in the emergence of various modern Islamic schools and boarding schools that offer an integrated blend of religious education, science, technology, and character building [7], [8]. This condition has led to increasingly competitive competition among Islamic educational institutions, requiring Islamic boarding schools not only to excel in educational quality but also to be able to build effective communication and promotion to attract public interest. Islamic boarding schools also face competition from officially recognized formal education.

Many parents may be more inclined to send their children to formal schools that can provide certificates and official recognition [9]. Many Islamic boarding schools still face difficulties in communicating their unique values and advantages to prospective students and parents. Limitations in implementing effective marketing strategies, a lack of understanding of target market preferences, and the less than optimal use of digital technology as a promotional medium are factors that limit the competitiveness of Islamic boarding schools compared to other educational institutions [10].

In the context of modern Islamic education, parents' decisions in choosing an educational institution for their children are influenced by various factors, such as academic quality, character building, educational facilities, costs, environmental security, and the image of the Islamic boarding school [11]. To attract the attention of prospective students and their guardians, Islamic boarding schools must not only maintain the quality of religious education, but also pay attention to other aspects that influence the process of selecting an educational institution. Some important factors that need to be considered are promotion, facilities, and quality of service [12]. In addition to these rational factors, there are also social and cultural factors that influence student registration decisions, such as kinship relationships, emotional closeness, the influence of community leaders, and the role of religious organizations in the social environment [13]. This shows that student registration decisions are not only influenced by the institution's formal promotional strategy, but are also influenced by social actors who have legitimacy and influence in society.

One religious organization with a strong social network in society is Muhammadiyah. As a modern Islamic organization engaged in preaching, education, and social work, Muhammadiyah has a network of cadres down to the grassroots level spread through branches, sub-branches, mosques, schools, and various Muhammadiyah Business Units (AUM). To date, Muhammadiyah has developed around 180 Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in various regions of Indonesia. The presence of the Muhammadiyah Islamic Boarding School (PontrenMu) as a form of modern Islamic education is part of Muhammadiyah's efforts to provide an alternative education that can overcome the limitations of traditional Islamic boarding schools, particularly in developing the overall abilities of students, both in religious aspects, academics, and life skills in an integral and holistic manner [14].

In the context of education, the existence of Muhammadiyah cadres not only functions as agents of da'wah, but also has the potential to become a liaison between Muhammadiyah educational institutions and the community. The social closeness, moral legitimacy, and emotional connection that cadres have allows them to play a role in building public trust in Muhammadiyah educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools. However, most previous research still focuses on the formal marketing aspects of educational institutions, such as institutional branding, service

quality, educational promotion, and customer satisfaction [15], [16]. Research on the role of religious organization cadres in influencing student registration decisions is still very limited. Studies on Muhammadiyah cadres have been more directed at aspects of da'wah, political education, and socio-religious movements [17], [18], [19], while the role of cadres in supporting the promotion and recruitment of Muhammadiyah educational institutions has not been studied in depth. As a result, there is no comprehensive understanding of how Muhammadiyah cadres influence parents' decisions in choosing Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools for their children.

This research gap becomes even more significant when linked to the development of the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) in Selong, East Lombok. As one of Muhammadiyah's charitable organizations in education, MBS Selong presents a modern educational concept that integrates formal academic education, religious instruction, character building, and competitive extracurricular programs. Theoretically, this educational model has strong appeal to the community because it offers a balance between religious education and formal academics. However, this institutional appeal has not yet been able to optimally increase the number of student enrollments.

Empirically, MBS Selong, which began operating in 2021, still faces challenges in increasing the number of students. In recent years, the number of students accepted has tended to stagnate or even decline. This situation is paradoxical because Muhammadiyah in East Lombok has an extensive cadre network extending to the branch and sub-branch levels. This cadre network actually has significant potential to disseminate information, build communication with the community, and influence parents' decisions in choosing an educational institution. However, this potential has not been optimally and systematically managed to support the promotion and recruitment of students at MBS Selong.

From the perspective of educational consumer behavior, interpersonal communication and recommendations from trusted individuals have a significant influence on the decision to choose an educational institution [20]. In the context of Muhammadiyah, cadres have a strategic position because they are not only seen as members of the organization, but also as social and religious figures trusted by the community. Therefore, Muhammadiyah cadres have the potential to become effective agents of communication and promotion based on da'wah in introducing and building a positive image of Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools in the community.

However, to date, there has been little research integrating the perspective of educational consumer behavior with a cadre-based da'wah approach in the context of Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools. Previous research tends to separate rational factors in educational marketing from normative factors based on religious organizations. However, in the context of

religious communities, educational decisions are often influenced by a combination of rational considerations and ideological and emotional closeness to a particular organization. Therefore, research is needed that can comprehensively explain how the role of Muhammadiyah cadres influences student enrollment decisions at Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools.

Based on this description, this study is important to analyze the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in student registration decisions at the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) in Selong, East Lombok. This study focuses on examining the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in the communication and educational promotion process, the factors influencing student registration decisions, and strategies for optimizing the role of cadres in supporting the increase in the number of students at MBS in Selong.

This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study proposes the development of the concept of Muhammadiyah cadres as actors in the communication and marketing of da'wah-based education. Furthermore, this study integrates the theory of educational consumer behavior with the Muhammadiyah cadre movement approach in the context of selecting Islamic educational institutions. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for MBS Selong and other Muhammadiyah educational institutions in designing more effective promotion and student recruitment strategies by strengthening the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a naturalistic paradigm to deeply understand the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in the decision to register students at the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) in Selong, East Lombok. This approach was chosen because the phenomenon studied is social, contextual, and related to community interactions, thus requiring an in-depth understanding through natural conditions without variable manipulation. The study was conducted at MBS Selong, East Lombok, using a purposive sampling technique. The research informants consisted of the leadership of the Muhammadiyah East Lombok Elementary and Secondary Education Council, Muhammadiyah cadres, Islamic boarding school administrators, new students of the 2025/2026 academic year, and students' guardians.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and focus group discussions (FGDs), while secondary data was obtained from Islamic boarding school documents, student admission data, activity archives, and relevant literature. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observation, FGDs, and documentation studies to obtain comprehensive information regarding the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in the promotion process and student enrollment decisions.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included data introduction, coding, theme grouping, theme review, and data interpretation. This analysis was used to identify patterns and relationships related to the roles of cadres, communication strategies, and factors influencing student enrollment decisions. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking to ensure the validity of the research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres in Improving Student Registration Decisions

The findings of this study were obtained through data triangulation involving in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with Islamic boarding school administrators, Muhammadiyah cadres at the regional and branch levels, students, and parents. The thematic analysis identified four main roles of Muhammadiyah cadres in influencing student enrollment decisions at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Selong, East Lombok, namely as information agents, local opinion leaders, trust mediators, and decision facilitators.

The first role identified was that of cadres as information agents. Interviews with school administrators and Muhammadiyah cadres revealed that cadres play an important role in disseminating information regarding the vision and mission of MBS Selong, its flagship programs, integrated educational system, facilities, tuition fees, and student development opportunities. Observational data further showed that information dissemination was commonly carried out through the distribution of brochures and pamphlets as well as presentations during Muhammadiyah organizational activities. According to Ustaz AR, one of the school administrators, Muhammadiyah cadres at the regional level have contributed to introducing MBS Selong to the wider community; however, these efforts have not yet been implemented systematically or intensively. This statement was supported by Mrs. UH, the principal of MBS Senior High School, who explained that only a limited number of Muhammadiyah Branch Leaders (PCM) in East Lombok actively participate in promoting the institution. Data triangulation indicated that the limited involvement of cadres has constrained the dissemination of information regarding the existence and advantages of MBS Selong, particularly in communities with limited interaction with active Muhammadiyah networks.

The second role is that of cadres as local opinion leaders. Interviews with parents and school administrators indicated that Muhammadiyah cadres who are actively involved in mosques, schools, religious gatherings, and Muhammadiyah autonomous organizations are regarded as influential figures in educational decision-making within their communities. Through personal testimonies, direct experiences, and their moral authority, cadres contribute to shaping positive perceptions of MBS Selong. Observational findings showed that the boarding school has attempted

to strengthen its public image by involving Muhammadiyah religious teachers (ustaz and ustazah) in religious studies and community learning forums. However, FGD participants highlighted that these efforts have not yet achieved optimal results due to the absence of a coordinated and consistent communication strategy among cadres across different regions. Consequently, the information conveyed to the public often varies in content and intensity. In response to this challenge, school administrators have initiated plans to conduct more systematic outreach through direct visits to Muhammadiyah Branch Leaders (PCM), combining religious activities with institutional socialization programs.

The third role identified was that of cadres as trust mediators. Interviews with parents revealed that enrollment decisions were influenced not only by formal promotional activities but also by the level of trust placed in the individual's providing recommendations. One parent, Mr. SA, explained that his decision to enroll his child at MBS Selong was strongly influenced by the recommendation of a trusted community member. Observational data further demonstrated that social relationships and emotional closeness between cadres and community members play an important role in strengthening parental confidence in the quality of education and student guidance provided by the school. Triangulated findings confirmed that trust in the institution is more easily established when information is delivered by respected community figures or cadres with strong social connections. Nevertheless, dependence on personal networks limits the reach of promotional activities, confining their influence primarily to specific social circles.

The fourth role is that of cadres as decision facilitators. Interview findings indicated that cadres assist parents in understanding admission procedures, administrative requirements, educational program options, and the suitability of the boarding school environment for their children. However, observations and FGDs revealed that this role is currently performed more intensively by internal stakeholders, particularly teachers and students, than by external Muhammadiyah cadres. Ustaz AR explained that all teaching staff are involved in the student recruitment process, while students receive guidance before school holidays to enable them to introduce MBS Selong within their respective communities. This statement was reinforced by Mrs. UH, who noted that promotional activities are frequently conducted through direct interpersonal approaches, including door-to-door visits to prospective students' homes. The triangulated data suggest that such personalized approaches are effective in supporting parents' enrollment decisions. However, these initiatives remain heavily dependent on the internal capacity of the institution and have not yet developed into a sustainable and measurable recruitment system supported by a broader cadre network.

The findings demonstrate that Muhammadiyah cadres play a significant role in the student recruitment

process at MBS Selong through interconnected functions as information agents, opinion leaders, trust mediators, and decision facilitators. Together, these roles form a community-based marketing mechanism that operates beyond the institution's formal promotional channels. This finding extends the concepts of reference groups and opinion leadership proposed by Kotler and Keller by incorporating dimensions of ideological and religious legitimacy within the context of Muhammadiyah's da'wah movement. In this context, cadres function not only as providers of information but also as trusted representatives of Muhammadiyah values and organizational identity. Their social and ideological legitimacy enhances the credibility of their recommendations compared with formal institutional promotions. Moreover, the active involvement of cadres in Muhammadiyah educational, religious, and social activities contributes to strengthening the public image of Muhammadiyah as a socially engaged organization, thereby fostering trust in Muhammadiyah educational institutions, including MBS Selong [21].

These findings also highlight the importance of word-of-mouth communication in shaping educational choices [22], [23]. In the case of MBS Selong, however, word-of-mouth communication is reinforced by organizational affiliation and ideological proximity to Muhammadiyah. This is reflected in the dominant influence of recommendations from cadres and alumni during the student recruitment process. Consistent with the findings of [24], who identified word-of-mouth communication as the most influential factor in choosing Muhammadiyah schools, most students at MBS Selong obtained information through personal recommendation networks rather than formal promotional campaigns. This situation reveals a gap between the institution's educational potential and its current promotional practices. Although MBS Selong possesses competitive educational advantages, these strengths have not been fully communicated to the wider community due to the absence of a structured cadre empowerment strategy. This finding supports [25], who emphasized that the effectiveness of community-based da'wah actors depends largely on planned and sustainable institutional support. Therefore, the concept of da'wah-based marketing actors proposed in this study suggests that Muhammadiyah cadres can serve as highly effective promotional agents when supported by an organized and systematic institutional framework.

Factors Influencing Student Enrollment Decisions

The findings of this study, derived from in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), indicate that parents' decisions to enroll their children at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Selong are influenced by two interrelated dimensions: rational factors and normative factors. Data triangulation involving parents, students, Muhammadiyah cadres, and school administrators provided a comprehensive understanding of how these factors shape enrollment decisions within the local community.

The first rational factor identified was the perceived quality of educational services. Interviews with parents revealed that perceptions of quality were formed not only through formal promotional materials but also through direct observations of alumni performance and reputation within the community. One parent, Mr. H, explained that his decision to enroll his child at MBS Selong was influenced by the positive character, communication skills, and social competence demonstrated by the school's alumni. Observational findings further confirmed that alumni often serve as visible representations of the institution's educational outcomes, thereby strengthening public confidence in the quality of education provided. In addition, parents highlighted the modern educational system implemented at MBS Selong as a major attraction. The institution is perceived as offering a balanced integration of religious and formal academic education, enabling students to achieve both spiritual and intellectual development. Ms. NA stated that she selected MBS Selong because it ensured her child would receive a strong academic foundation while maintaining a comprehensive Islamic education. Similar views were expressed by the parent of student SM, who learned through online information that MBS Selong integrates the national curriculum with Qur'an memorization (tahfiz) and character-building programs. Furthermore, FGDs with school administrators revealed that extracurricular activities, including muhadharah, leadership training, sports, and arts programs, further enhance the image of MBS Selong as a modern Islamic boarding school that supports the holistic development of students.

Another rational factor influencing enrollment decisions is the affordability of educational costs and the availability of financial assistance schemes. Interviews with school administrators indicated that the monthly tuition fee of IDR 500,000 covers both accommodation and meals for students. In addition, MBS Selong provides tuition fee reductions of up to IDR 250,000 for economically disadvantaged families and offers educational support through the Child Welfare Institution (LKSA), which is funded by donors. According to Mrs. UH, these initiatives reflect the institution's commitment to expanding educational access for lower-middle-income families. Nevertheless, triangulated data revealed that many community members remain unaware of these financial support programs, resulting in the persistent perception that Islamic boarding school education is expensive. This finding suggests that information regarding educational affordability has not yet been communicated effectively to the wider community.

The study also identified facilities and environmental security as important rational considerations in the enrollment process. Observational data showed that MBS Selong possesses adequate facilities, including a mosque, separate dormitories for male and female students, and a well-organized boarding school system. However, interviews with several parents revealed that negative perceptions

regarding certain physical conditions of the school environment still exist. For example, Mr. SA expressed concerns about the maintenance of a particular area within the boarding school based on information received from his child. This finding indicates that discrepancies may exist between the actual conditions of school facilities and public perceptions, largely due to limited communication between the institution and parents regarding facility development and maintenance.

Beyond rational considerations, the findings also highlight the importance of normative factors in shaping enrollment decisions. One prominent normative factor is the ideological image of Muhammadiyah. Interviews with parents revealed that Muhammadiyah's identity as a moderate, progressive, and education-oriented Islamic organization strongly influenced their decision to choose MBS Selong. Ms. NA explained that her family's long-standing affiliation with Muhammadiyah contributed significantly to their trust in Muhammadiyah educational institutions. FGDs with Muhammadiyah cadres further confirmed that organizational loyalty and confidence in Muhammadiyah's charitable and educational endeavors encourage parents to place their children in Muhammadiyah schools. However, observations suggest that this ideological appeal remains particularly strong among Muhammadiyah members and has yet to be fully extended to the broader Muslim community.

Another important normative factor is the influence of recommendations from cadres, family members, and alumni. Interview findings indicated that personal recommendations from trusted individuals play a decisive role in enrollment decisions. Mr. HR, a parent from outside Lombok, reported that he first learned about MBS Selong through the recommendation of his nephew, an alumnus of the institution. Similar patterns were identified among students from Sembalun, many of whom enrolled after receiving recommendations from the same alumni network. Triangulated data consistently showed that word-of-mouth communication remains the dominant mechanism for student recruitment at MBS Selong because it is perceived as more trustworthy and persuasive than formal promotional activities.

In addition, emotional closeness to Muhammadiyah cadres emerged as a significant factor influencing enrollment decisions. Interviews revealed that interpersonal relationships developed through neighborhood interactions, religious activities, and community engagement foster strong emotional bonds that shape public trust. Ms. NA explained that she personally consulted a member of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership (PDM), who was also her neighbor, before deciding to enroll her child at MBS Selong. Observational findings similarly demonstrated that community members tend to place greater trust in information conveyed by individuals they know personally than in information obtained through formal promotional channels. These findings suggest that social relationships and emotional proximity function as

important mechanisms through which trust is established and maintained within the community.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that parents' decisions to choose MBS Selong result from the interaction between rational and normative considerations. Rational factors include perceptions of educational quality, affordability, facilities, and environmental security, while normative factors encompass Muhammadiyah's ideological image, recommendations from trusted individuals, and emotional closeness to cadres. These findings are consistent with [11], who identified educational quality, teacher characteristics, tuition costs, facilities, and safety as major determinants in selecting Islamic boarding schools. However, the present study extends previous findings by showing that perceptions of educational quality are constructed primarily through social proof represented by alumni achievements rather than through formal promotional efforts. Alumni function as tangible evidence of the institution's success and play a crucial role in strengthening public trust.

The findings also support Kotler and Keller's perspective on utilitarian motivation, whereby parents evaluate educational institutions based on the practical benefits and future opportunities offered to their children. The integration of formal education, religious instruction, Qur'an memorization programs, and extracurricular activities positions MBS Selong as a modern educational institution capable of attracting not only Muhammadiyah families but also a broader segment of the Muslim community. At the same time, normative and social considerations remain equally influential. Consistent with [26], the findings demonstrate that religious values and organizational identity continue to shape educational choices. Furthermore, the strong influence of recommendations from cadres, alumni, and family members supports the findings of [27], who emphasized the role of trusted interpersonal communication in educational decision-making. Therefore, enrollment decisions at MBS Selong cannot be understood solely through a rational marketing perspective but must also be interpreted through the lens of social trust, emotional attachment, and ideological affiliation embedded within the Muhammadiyah cadre network.

Strategic Steps to Optimize the Role of Cadres

Based on the findings derived from in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), this study formulated a strategic model for optimizing the role of Muhammadiyah cadres in supporting student enrollment decisions at Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Selong, East Lombok. The model was developed through data triangulation involving school administrators, Muhammadiyah cadres, parents, and newly enrolled students. The findings revealed that although Muhammadiyah cadres have substantial potential to support student recruitment, their involvement remains largely informal, fragmented, and dependent on individual initiatives. Consequently, six strategic actions were identified to strengthen the effectiveness and

sustainability of cadre participation in school promotion and recruitment activities.

The first strategy is the establishment of a cadre-based promotion team at the Muhammadiyah branch and sub-branch levels. Interviews with school administrators revealed that cadre participation in promoting MBS Selong is currently conducted on an individual basis rather than through a structured organizational mechanism. According to Mrs. UH, only a few Muhammadiyah Branch Leaders (PCM), particularly those in Lepak, Sembalun, and Pohgading, consistently participate in promotional activities. Observational findings further indicated that promotion is generally carried out during religious gatherings and organizational events rather than through a systematic recruitment program. These findings suggest the need for a formal promotion team that can coordinate outreach activities, standardize communication efforts, and ensure the continuity of cadre involvement across different regions.

The second strategy involves strengthening cadres' competencies in persuasive communication and digital literacy. Interviews and FGDs revealed that many cadres still rely on conventional face-to-face communication methods when introducing MBS Selong to the community. At the same time, interviews with parents indicated that digital media increasingly serves as an initial source of information for prospective students and their families. One parent, Ms. SM, explained that she first became aware of MBS Selong through an online search before seeking additional information directly from trusted individuals. This finding highlights the importance of equipping cadres with digital communication skills that enable them to utilize social media, online content, and digital platforms more effectively. Such capacity building is essential for expanding the reach of pesantren promotion, particularly among younger generations and technologically active parents.

The third strategy is the development of a unified institutional narrative or core message. Data triangulation revealed that information communicated by cadres regarding the strengths of MBS Selong remains inconsistent across different communities. Interviews with school administrators identified several institutional advantages, including the integration of formal and diniyah education, teachers with Middle Eastern educational backgrounds, Qur'an memorization programs, classical Islamic text studies, and the use of Arabic in daily learning activities. However, observational findings indicated that these strengths have not yet been packaged into a consistent promotional narrative. As a result, community members often receive different information depending on the source from which they obtain it. Developing a unified institutional narrative is therefore important for strengthening institutional branding, ensuring message consistency, and enhancing public trust.

The fourth strategy focuses on strengthening alumni networks as a source of social testimony and institutional credibility. Interviews with parents and

school administrators consistently demonstrated that alumni play a significant role in shaping positive public perceptions of MBS Selong. Several parents reported that their enrollment decisions were influenced by observing the achievements, character, and social success of alumni within their communities. School administrators also explained that alumni have increasingly been involved as speakers and role models in various institutional activities. Observational findings confirmed that community members tend to place greater trust in concrete evidence of educational outcomes than in formal promotional messages. Therefore, systematic documentation of alumni achievements, testimonials, and success stories can serve as an effective strategy for strengthening public confidence in the institution.

The fifth strategy is the integration of community-based promotion with the institution's official digital media platforms. Interviews revealed that MBS Selong has established communication channels with parents, primarily through messaging groups used to share information regarding student development and school activities. However, observations indicated that activity documentation and social media publication remain inconsistent due to the absence of a dedicated team responsible for digital content management. FGDs further revealed that digital platforms owned by Muhammadiyah branches and cadre networks have not yet been optimally utilized to support school promotion. Consequently, integrating community-based promotional efforts with official digital communication channels is essential for creating broader, faster, and more sustainable dissemination of information.

The sixth strategy is the implementation of scheduled engagement programs involving cadres, parents, and community members. Interviews revealed that MBS Selong has already established regular parent visitation programs, particularly on Sundays, which provide opportunities for communication and relationship building between the institution and families. Observational findings showed that direct interpersonal interactions are highly effective in fostering emotional closeness and strengthening trust compared to formal promotional activities. However, FGD participants noted that these activities are not yet systematically coordinated with the broader Muhammadiyah cadre network. Therefore, strengthening institutional coordination is necessary to

transform these visitation activities into structured community engagement programs that support both student recruitment and long-term relationship building.

Overall, the findings indicate that optimizing the role of Muhammadiyah cadres requires a combination of organizational strengthening, communication capacity development, institutional branding, alumni engagement, digital transformation, and community relationship building. These strategies were formulated in response to the implementation gap identified in the field, namely the underutilization of the Muhammadiyah cadre network as a strategic resource for student recruitment. This finding supports [28], who argued that community-based marketing becomes more effective when supported by organized and coordinated networks. In the context of MBS Selong, promotional activities remain heavily dependent on individual initiatives rather than institutionalized mechanisms.

Furthermore, the findings align with [29], who emphasized that communication competence is a critical factor in shaping the image of educational institutions. Consequently, training in persuasive communication and digital literacy is essential to ensure that cadres can convey information effectively and consistently. The development of a unified institutional narrative also supports the findings of [16], who highlighted the importance of brand consistency in building public trust. Likewise, strengthening alumni networks and integrating digital media are expected to expand promotional reach and improve the visibility of the institution among prospective students and parents.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the promotion of Islamic boarding schools should not rely solely on formal marketing approaches but should be integrated with community-based strategies rooted in Muhammadiyah's social and organizational networks. Muhammadiyah cadres function not only as information disseminators but also as da'wah actors who possess social legitimacy, emotional credibility, and ideological influence within the community. Therefore, the concept of da'wah-based marketing proposed in this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of sustainable marketing strategies for Islamic educational institutions, particularly Muhammadiyah boarding schools. A concise summary of the strategic model is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Findings on the Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres in the Decision to Register Students at MBS Selong

Main Theme	Subthemes	Data Sources	Research Findings
The Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres	Information Agent	Interviews with managers, cadres, and observations	Cadres disseminate information regarding the programs, fees, and educational system of MBS Selong through religious studies, brochures, and organizational activities, but this remains situational and unstructured.
The Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres	Local Opinion Leader	Interviews with managers, cadres, and guardians	Muhammadiyah cadres are viewed as community leaders, so their recommendations influence the community's positive perception of MBS Selong.
The Role of Muhammadiyah	Trust Broker	Interviews with guardians and	Parents' decisions are influenced by their level of trust in cadres, who are known personally and

Main Theme	Subthemes	Data Sources	Research Findings
Cadres		cadres	have a good reputation in the community.
The Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres	Decision Facilitator	Interviews with managers, students, and guardians	Cadres help parents understand registration procedures and program options, and provide guidance in the educational decision-making process.
The Role of Muhammadiyah Cadres	Perception of Education Quality	Interviews with guardians, observations	The quality of alumni, the integration of formal and religious education, and extracurricular programs are key considerations in choosing MBS Selong.
Rational Factors	Education Costs and Assistance	Interviews with managers and guardians	The relatively affordable tuition fees and the availability of discount schemes are attractive to the community.
Rational Factors	Facilities and Security	Observations and interviews with guardians	The condition of the dormitories, worship facilities, and environmental security influence parents' perceptions of the Islamic boarding school.
Rational Factors	Muhammadiyah's Ideological Image	Interviews with guardians and cadres	Muhammadiyah's identity as a modern and moderate Islamic movement increases community trust in MBS Selong.
Normative Factors	Social Recommendations	Interviews with guardians and alumni	Information from cadres, families, and alumni is more credible than formal institutional promotions.
Normative Factors	Emotional Closeness	Interviews with guardians	Personal relationships and emotional closeness with Muhammadiyah cadres strengthen students' enrollment decisions.
Normative Factors	Cadre-Based Promotion Team	Interviews with managers and alumni	The establishment of a structured promotional team at the Muhammadiyah branch and sub-branch levels is necessary.
Optimization Strategy	Communication and Digital Training	Interviews with guardians	Cadres require training in persuasive communication and digital promotion to make their campaigns more effective.
Optimization Strategy	Core Narrative of the Institution	Interviews with managers and focus groups	A consistent message regarding the excellence of MBS Selong is needed to strengthen the institution's image.
Optimization Strategy	Strengthening the Alumni Network	Interviews with guardians and cadres	Alumni have the potential to be an effective social testimonial platform for building public trust.
Optimization Strategy	Digital Media Integration	Interviews with managers	Social media and digital channels have not been optimally utilized in promoting Islamic boarding schools.
Optimization Strategy	Scheduled Visits	Interviews with managers and guardians	Visits by cadres and students' guardians are considered effective in building interpersonal communication and public trust.

CONCLUSION

This study yields three key interrelated findings. Muhammadiyah cadres play four crucial roles in the student or santri admission process: information agents, local opinion leaders, trusted mediators, and decision facilitators. However, these roles have not been systematically managed by the institution, creating an implementation gap between the potential for a broad cadre network and low recruitment effectiveness. The decision to enroll at MBS Selong is shaped by a combination of rational and normative factors, with cadre-based social beliefs and Muhammadiyah ideological affinity proving to be as important as considerations of quality, cost, and facilities. Beyond these established determinants, the findings also

confirm that enrollment decisions are significantly shaped by guardians' and prospective santris' perceptions of MBS Selong as a modern Islamic boarding school capable of integrating religious instruction, nationally equivalent formal general education, and competitive extracurricular programs within a cohesive institutional framework. This perception of educational modernity serves as an independent rational pull factor that broadens the institution's enrollment appeal beyond ideologically committed Muhammadiyah families to a broader segment of the Muslim community that prioritizes holistic, academically credible, and competency-oriented education for their children. To close this gap, a six-step optimization model was formulated that

integrates structural cadre empowerment with strengthening digital communication and alumni networks. Further research is recommended to test this model longitudinally in the broader context of AUM Muhammadiyah Islamic boarding schools.

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