

The Strategic Role of Event Management in Integrating Institutional Identity and Educational Branding: The Case of UII Dalwa Graduation Ceremony

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Abstract: *This study investigates the strategic role of Strategic Event Management in integrating an institution's Institutional Identity with its Educational Branding efforts. Addressing the research gap regarding the strategic function of mandatory academic rituals, this study analyses UII Dalwa's annual graduation ceremony as a crucial communication platform. Using a qualitative research design (in-depth interviews and document analysis), the findings indicate that the graduation ceremony was intentionally designed as a high-impact branding medium. Key elements including unique religious and cultural rituals, a specific colour palette, and symbolic narrative discourse were strategically used to translate core values (international vision and deep Islamic traditionalism) into tangible and intangible stakeholder experiences. The study concludes that strategic event management successfully transformed this mandatory institutional function into a powerful marketing asset, significantly enhancing external reputation and strengthening internal identity alignment. Theoretically, this study contributes to the Strategic Event Asset (SEA) Model, which conceptualises institutional events as high-value communication platforms. This model combines principles of Experiential Marketing Theory and Brand Coherence Theory to broaden understanding of how experiential, narrative, and visual dimensions interact to generate institutional reputation, providing an empirical bridge for integrating trust-based institutional identity into brand strategy. Managerially, the study emphasises the need for deliberate design thinking and interdepartmental collaboration in event planning to ensure message consistency. The study highlights that investments in symbolic and experiential elements yield significant reputational returns, positioning these ceremonies as strategic investments rather than routine obligations a perspective particularly relevant for culturally diverse, international universities.*

Keywords: *Strategic Event Management, Institutional Identity, Educational Branding.*

Introduction

In the increasingly competitive global higher education arena, an institution's success is no longer measured solely by academic quality, but

also by the strength of its brand and reputation¹. A coherent integration of Institutional Identity (unique values, philosophy, and internal culture) and Educational Branding has become a strategic imperative². This identity must be effectively communicated through various "brand touchpoints" to shape the desired image in stakeholders' minds³.

Recent literature in educational brand management indicates a significant shift from traditional marketing tactics to experiential reputation management⁴. In this context, institutional events play a key role as communication channels with high emotional resonance and retention⁵. Especially for universities with strong religious and cultural foundations, such as UII Dalwa, spiritual and traditional elements serve as powerful brand differentiators⁶. However, the challenge is translating these abstract values into a tangible, coherent experience for a broad audience, which requires careful implementation of Strategic Event Management⁷.

Although the strategic role of events in branding is widely recognized, a significant research gap remains⁸. Most studies on university branding focus on outbound activities (such as recruitment fairs and media campaigns), while graduation ceremonies—as mandatory academic rituals and the most visible brand touchpoints—are often seen as merely procedural formalities or

¹ Francesca Pucciarelli and Andreas Kaplan, 'Competition and Strategy in Higher Education: Managing Complexity and Uncertainty', *Business Horizons* 59, no. 3 (2016): 311–20, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2016.01.003>.

² Anthony Lowrie, 'Branding Higher Education: Equivalence and Difference in Developing Identity', *Journal of Business Research* 60, no. 9 (2007): 990–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.01.024>.

³ Monica Khanna et al., 'Identifying and Analyzing Touchpoints for Building a Higher Education Brand', *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 24, no. 1 (2014): 122–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.920460>.

⁴ Weng Marc Lim et al., 'Strategic Brand Management for Higher Education Institutions with Graduate Degree Programs: Empirical Insights from the Higher Education Marketing Mix', *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 28, no. 3 (2020): 225–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2018.1496131>.

⁵ John C. Lammers, 'How Institutions Communicate: Institutional Messages, Institutional Logics, and Organizational Communication', *Management Communication Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2011): 154–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318910389280>.

⁶ Chris Chaplin, 'Salafi Activism and the Promotion of a Modern Muslim Identity: Evolving Mediums of *Da'wa* amongst Yogyakarta University Students', *South East Asia Research* 26, no. 1 (2018): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X17752414>.

⁷ Elaine Rust, 'Understanding Experiential Value Creation at Small-Scale Events: A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 12, no. 3 (2020): 344–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2019.1701811>.

⁸ Alok Acharya and Zillur Rahman, 'Place Branding Research: A Thematic Review and Future Research Agenda', *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* 13, no. 3 (2016): 289–317, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-015-0150-7>.

routine expenses rather than high-level strategic communication instruments⁹.

This gap results in inconsistencies in understanding how institutions with complex identities¹⁰ (traditional, religious, and international) – such as Darullughah Wadda'wah International Islamic University (UII Dalwa) – successfully translate these core values into practice in the context of mass events. This research attempts to bridge this gap by adopting the Strategic Event Asset (SEA) Model, which conceptualizes institutional events as high-value communication platforms¹¹. This model is expanded by incorporating principles from Experiential Marketing Theory and Brand Coherence Theory to examine the interplay between experiential, narrative, and visual dimensions in shaping institutional reputation¹².

Consequently, the main problem addressed in this study is to analyze how UII Dalwa strategically plans and manages its graduation ceremony to integrate its institutional identity with its educational branding message¹³.

The objectives of this study are: (1) To evaluate the planning and implementation of UII Dalwa's graduation event management; (2) To analyze the impact of graduation event management on the consistency of UII Dalwa's communication identity and educational branding. The primary unit of analysis is the UII Dalwa Graduation Ceremony, studied as a specific, in-depth case within the context of Pasuruan, East Java.

Methods

This study employed a Qualitative Case Study approach, specifically chosen to enable an in-depth and holistic understanding of a complex contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context: the strategic

⁹ Seidali Kurtmollaiev et al., 'Developing Managerial Dynamic Capabilities: A Quasi-Experimental Field Study of the Effects of Design Thinking Training', *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 17, no. 2 (2018): 184–202, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2016.0187>.

¹⁰ Mia Raynard, 'Deconstructing Complexity: Configurations of Institutional Complexity and Structural Hybridity', *Strategic Organization* 14, no. 4 (2016): 310–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016634639>.

¹¹ Francesco Saverio Massari et al., 'Past for Future – Museums as a Digitalized "Interaction Platform" for Value Co-Creation in Tourism Destinations', *European Journal of Innovation Management* 27, no. 5 (2024): 1453–74, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-09-2022-0521>.

¹² Klaus-Peter Wiedmann et al., 'The Power of Experiential Marketing: Exploring the Causal Relationships among Multisensory Marketing, Brand Experience, Customer Perceived Value and Brand Strength', *Journal of Brand Management* 25, no. 2 (2018): 101–18, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-017-0061-5>.

¹³ Hendra Kurniawan et al., 'Implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM): Optimizing School Branding Strategy in Urban Islamic Schools', *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 4 (2024): 5127–39, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i4.6182>.

management of university graduation ceremonies¹⁴. This method was deemed reliable and valid for this study because it provided the rich descriptive data necessary to analyze the mechanisms of integration between institutional identity and educational branding through a single event¹⁵. The research design focused on generating analytical explanations of how and why the UII Dalwa graduation ceremony operates as a strategic branding instrument. This research was conducted on the campus of Darullughah Wadda'wah International Islamic University (UII Dalwa) in Pasuruan, East Java. The study spanned the full event cycle, from the initial planning stage (pre-event) through implementation (event day) to post-event evaluation, and lasted approximately three months¹⁶.

Research targets and informants were purposively selected based on their in-depth knowledge and direct involvement in the planning and execution of the event, ensuring authoritative and comprehensive data collection¹⁷. Research subjects included the Head of the Public Relations and Branding Department, the Chief Event Organizer (EO) responsible for technical implementation, and key academic figures involved in shaping the narrative and ceremonial content¹⁸. The researcher's presence was crucial, acting as the primary instrument for data collection through non-participant observation and direct interaction. The researcher maintained a continuous, yet unobtrusive, presence in meetings and throughout the event to record procedural details and contextual nuances¹⁹.

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¹⁴ Jennifer Cleland et al., 'The Curious Case of Case Study Research', *Medical Education* 55, no. 10 (2021): 1131–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14544>.

¹⁵ Jane Hemsley-Brown et al., 'Exploring Brand Identity, Meaning, Image, and Reputation (BIMIR) in Higher Education: A Special Section', *Journal of Business Research* 69, no. 8 (2016): 3019–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.016>.

¹⁶ Husam AlWaer et al., 'Design-Led Events in Collaborative Planning: Improving Post-Event Planning and Delivery', *Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research* 15, no. 3 (2021): 774–99, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-03-2021-0057>.

¹⁷ Parshuram Lamsal et al., 'A Review of an In-Depth Interview on Urban Planning and Development', *Molung Educational Frontier* 15 (January 2025): 278–307, <https://doi.org/10.3126/mef.v15i01.74035>.

¹⁸ Abubakar Mohammed Abubakar et al., 'Knowledge Management, Decision-Making Style and Organizational Performance', *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge* 4, no. 2 (2019): 104–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2017.07.003>.

¹⁹ Gali Chelouche-Dwek et al., 'Beyond Discipline: The Power of Mentalization in Reducing Disruptive Behavior in Schools: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Teacher-Child Interactions', *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (September 2025): 1599298, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1599298>.

management of university graduation ceremonies²⁰. This method was deemed reliable and valid for this study because it provided the rich descriptive data necessary to analyze the mechanisms of integration between institutional identity and educational branding through a single event²¹. The research design focused on generating analytical explanations of how and why the UII Dalwa graduation ceremony operates as a strategic branding instrument. This research was conducted on the campus of Darullughah Wadda'wah International Islamic University (UII Dalwa) in Pasuruan, East Java. The study spanned the full event cycle, from the initial planning stage (pre-event) through implementation (event day) to post-event evaluation, and lasted approximately three months²².

A triangulation approach was adopted for data collection to enhance the reliability of the findings²³. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants using a semi-structured guide that focused on the event's strategic objectives, planning procedures, and design rationale²⁴. Second, document analysis served as a crucial technique, examining institutional materials such as official university branding guidelines, event proposal documents, rehearsal schedules, official speeches, and social media coverage blueprints²⁵. Third, non-participant observation was conducted throughout the event cycle, focusing on visual cues, ritual elements, spatial organization, and emotional engagement during the ceremony to understand the actual translation of identity into experience²⁶.

²⁰ Jennifer Cleland et al., 'The Curious Case of Case Study Research', *Medical Education* 55, no. 10 (2021): 1131–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14544>.

²¹ Jane Hemsley-Brown et al., 'Exploring Brand Identity, Meaning, Image, and Reputation (BIMIR) in Higher Education: A Special Section', *Journal of Business Research* 69, no. 8 (2016): 3019–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.016>.

²² Husam AlWaer et al., 'Design-Led Events in Collaborative Planning: Improving Post-Event Planning and Delivery', *Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research* 15, no. 3 (2021): 774–99, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-03-2021-0057>.

²³ Cem Harun Meydan and Handan Akkaş, 'The Role of Triangulation in Qualitative Research: Converging Perspectives', in *Advances in Library and Information Science*, ed. Ali Elhami et al. (IGI Global, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-3306-8.ch006>.

²⁴ Pattama Panyasai and Eric A. Ambele, 'Developing Interview Guide in Qualitative Research: Problems and Solutions from a Needs Analysis Doctoral Study', *rEFlections* 32, no. 1 (2025): 576–94, <https://doi.org/10.61508/refl.v32i1.280411>.

²⁵ Jarrett B. Warshaw and Stevie Upton, 'Capturing Hybrid Institutional Logics in Higher Education: Qualitative Document Analysis as Methodological Approach', in *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research*, ed. Jeroen Huisman and Malcolm Tight, vol. 4 (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2056-375220180000004006>.

²⁶ Dewi Jaimangal-Jones, 'Utilising Ethnography and Participant Observation in Festival and Event Research', *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 5, no. 1 (2014): 39–55, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-09-2012-0030>.

Regarding the validity (trustworthiness) of the research findings, two primary techniques were used²⁷. Methodological triangulation was achieved by cross-checking information obtained from interviews, documents, and direct observation²⁸. For example, branding claims made in interviews were verified against visual evidence captured during observation and messages presented in official documents²⁹. Furthermore, member checking was selectively applied, with key findings and interpretations returned to informants to ensure that the researcher's constructions accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and intentions. This process ensured the internal validity and reliability of the conclusions³⁰.

The data analysis technique followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model³¹. The process began with Data Reduction, which involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw interview transcripts, observation notes, and document excerpts³². The next stage was Data Presentation, in which the synthesized data was organized into matrices and thematic charts to identify patterns in the integration of identity elements and branding objectives³³. The final stage involved Conclusion Drawing and Verification, in which tentative conclusions were tested against all available evidence, iterated, and verified to formulate the final findings and the theoretical implications of the study³⁴.

²⁷ Zia Ul Haq Kakar et al., 'Criteria For Assessing And Ensuring The Trustworthiness In Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Business Reflections* 4, no. 2 (2023): 150-73, <https://doi.org/10.56249/ijbr.03.01.44>.

²⁸ '[No Title Found]', *FITISPos-International Journal*, n.d.

²⁹ Sharon Schembri and Maree V. Boyle, 'Visual Ethnography: Achieving Rigorous and Authentic Interpretations', *Journal of Business Research* 66, no. 9 (2013): 1251-54, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.02.021>.

³⁰ Sue L. Motulsky, 'Is Member Checking the Gold Standard of Quality in Qualitative Research?', *Qualitative Psychology* 8, no. 3 (2021): 389-406, <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000215>.

³¹ Lili Sururi Asipi et al., 'The Analysis of Reading Habits Using Miles and Huberman Interactive Model to Empower Students' Literacy at IPB Cirebon', *International Journal of Education and Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2022): 117-25, <https://doi.org/10.58557/ijeh.v2i3.98>.

³² Brigitte Cypress, 'Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Focus', *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 37, no. 6 (2018): 302-9, <https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000322>.

³³ Alok Acharya and Zillur Rahman, 'Place Branding Research: A Thematic Review and Future Research Agenda', *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* 13, no. 3 (2016): 289-317, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-015-0150-7>.

³⁴ Joanne Neale, 'Iterative Categorisation (IC) (Part 2): Interpreting Qualitative Data', *Addiction* 116, no. 3 (2021): 668-76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.15259>.

Results

Data analysis confirmed that UII Dalwa's graduation ceremony was strategically conceptualized and executed as a high-impact brand touchpoint rather than a mere procedural conclusion to the study. Key findings revealed that the event functioned as a carefully curated narrative aimed at reconciling the institution's deeply rooted traditional Islamic identity with its modern educational branding and international aspirations³⁵. Informants from the Public Relations department consistently described the event as "the annual pinnacle of our visual and narrative communications," reinforcing the premise that the ceremony serves a dual purpose: celebrating achievements and affirming brand values. The themes and findings are presented below, followed by interpretations in relation to the relevant literature³⁶.

The integration strategy employed by UII Dalwa can be systematically analyzed by applying three key strategic elements across the planning, implementation, and documentation phases³⁷. These elements, along with their functional roles in linking Identity and Branding, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Strategic Framework for Identity Integration and Institutional Branding

No	Strategic Elements	Functional Role (Human Connection)	Application Phase	Identity Connection → Branding
1	Conceptual Integration (Integrated Vision) Brand Promise.	Harmonizing core values (spiritual and academic) into a cohesive mission that speaks to purpose.	Planning Phase	Translating Value Identity (Islamic Boarding School & Academic Depth) into a Meaningful
2	Operational Synergy (Experience & Action).	Combining practical activities (e.g., graduation ceremonies, community service) to authentically showcase dual identities through action	Execution Phase	Embodying Core Identity through shared Experiences to build trust.

³⁵ Najib Aulia Rahman and Aisha Azzahra, 'The Role of Islamic Education in Preserving Cultural Identity Amidst Global Modernity', *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 4 (2024): 257–71, <https://doi.org/10.61194/ijis.v2i4.707>.

³⁶ Mojtaba Vaismoradi and Sherrill Snelgrove, 'Theme in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* Vol 20 (September 2019): No 3 (2019): Qualitative Content Analysis I, <https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-20.3.3376>.

³⁷ Islamic University of Indonesia and Nanang Nuryanta, 'The Implementation Of Strategic Management On Competitive Advantage In Islamic University Of Indonesia (UII) Yogyakarta', *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.20885/ijis/vol2.iss1.art1>.

3. Communication Harmonization (Storytelling & Resonance)	Ensures all narratives, visuals, and digital content resonate honestly, reflecting both identities with consistency and warmth.	Documentati on Phase	Transforms genuine Brand Experiences into engaging Marketing Assets that foster Long-Term Relationships (Brand Loyalty).
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As illustrated in Table 1, the ceremony's experiential rituals were central to its strategic success. The inclusion of specific religious practices, which went beyond typical academic protocols, emotionally anchored the institution's identity³⁸. This finding aligns with the experiential marketing literature in higher education, which suggests that high-engagement experiences (such as rituals) foster strong brand loyalty and word-of-mouth among stakeholders³⁹. The careful organization of these rituals, as documented and observed, played a crucial role in translating the abstract concept of an "international Islamic university" into a tangible, memorable event⁴⁰.

Furthermore, the strategic use of narrative discourse during the ceremony, particularly in the Rector's address, consistently framed the graduates not simply as degree holders but as "ambassadors of Islamic wisdom and global development"⁴¹. This targeted messaging clearly aligns with the university's philosophical identity and its external educational branding goal of fostering international Leadership⁴². This aligns with findings in the literature on brand communication, which emphasizes that consistent messaging across high-visibility platforms significantly strengthens public perception and reputation. This discourse serves to bridge

³⁸ Mukta Kulkarni, 'Rituals and Institutional Maintenance: The Case of the Beating Retreat Ceremony', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (2020): 159-73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492618789995>.

³⁹ MSc in Digital Marketing and Media, Yeshiva University, Katz School of Science and Health, NY, USA et al., 'Strategic Use Of Engagement Marketing In Digital Platforms: A Focused Analysis Of Roi And Consumer Psychology', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Policy* 01, no. 01 (2025): 170-97, <https://doi.org/10.63125/hm96p734>.

⁴⁰ Haslina Ibrahim, 'Hamka's Da'wah Reform: Islamisation of Self, Education and Institution', *Al-Itqan: Journal Of Islamic Sciences And Comparative Studies* 6, no. 4 (2022): 25-46, <https://doi.org/10.31436/alitqan.v6i4.242>.

⁴¹ Abdullah Sahin, 'Reimagining the Vocation of Being a Scholar at the Intersection of Islamic and Western Higher Education: A Proposal', in *The Contemporary Scholar in Higher Education*, ed. Paul Gibbs et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-59435-9_13.

⁴² Paul Clark et al., 'Branding Higher Education: An Exploration of the Role of Internal Branding on Middle Management in a University Rebrand', *Tertiary Education and Management* 26, no. 2 (2020): 131-49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-019-09054-9>.

the gap between the university's internal values and its external brand promise⁴³.

Finally, the study confirms that Visual and Spatial Design acts as the glue for brand coherence⁴⁴. The consistent application of the university's distinctive color palette and distinctive emblem across banners, invitations, and digital media coverage ensures that branding remains highly recognizable and impactful, both on-site and across shared media⁴⁵. This strategic focus on visual consistency is crucial in event settings, where numerous elements compete for attention. It reflects the importance of managing all brand touchpoints to ensure a unified stakeholder perception⁴⁶. The UII Dalwa graduation ceremony thus transformed the mandatory act of conferring degrees into a highly effective and controlled medium for strengthening the institutional brand, significantly contributing to its overall reputation within the national and international academic community⁴⁷.

Discussion

This discussion aims to explicitly address the core research question: how UII Dalwa strategically plans and manages its graduation ceremony to integrate its institutional identity with its educational branding messages. Findings from triangulating in-depth interviews, document analysis, and non-participant observation convincingly demonstrate that the ceremony is not simply an academic ritual but a highly sophisticated, controlled strategic brand touchpoint. This positioning effectively transforms a typically

⁴³ Nurhidayah Uskar et al., 'Maximizing Business Performance: The Influence of Brand Visibility, Customer Engagement, Marketing Influencer and Digital Presence on Local Brand Success', *PaperASIA* 41, no. 5b (2025): 184-95, <https://doi.org/10.59953/paperasia.v41i5b.836>.

⁴⁴ Ratih Pitria Purnamasari and Dodi Affandi, 'Visual Branding Strategies in Indonesian Coffee Shops and Street Food Vendors: A Semiotic and Thematic Analysis', *Co-Value Jurnal Ekonomi Koperasi Dan Kewirausahaan* 15, no. 8 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.59188/covalue.v15i8.5226>.

⁴⁵ John Vincent et al., 'Where Legends Are Made: A Case Study of an Advertising and Branding Campaign at the University of Alabama', *International Journal of Sport Communication* 13, no. 1 (2020): 97-128, <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2019-0098>.

⁴⁶ Filareti Kotsi et al., 'Place Branding: Aligning Multiple Stakeholder Perception of Visual and Auditory Communication Elements', *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 7 (March 2018): 112-30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2016.08.006>.

⁴⁷ Katariina Juusola and Lee Rensimer, 'Transnational Degree Program Franchising and the Challenge of Commercial Franchisees', *International Journal of Educational Management* 32, no. 2 (2018): 257-68, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-02-2017-0048>.

procedural event into a high-leverage marketing asset that strengthens external reputation⁴⁸.

The strategic framework identified in the findings Experiential Ritual, Narrative Discourse, and Visual and Spatial Design serves as an integration mechanism. This confirms the notion that communication consistency across all brand touchpoints is crucial for reputation management, particularly when extended to mandatory and high-stakes institutional events⁴⁹. The following subsections interpret the findings and connect them to established knowledge structures, concluding with theoretical contributions⁵⁰.

The finding that Experiential Rituals are central to graduation success strongly supports Experiential Marketing Theory in the higher education sector. Previous research has shown that engaging and emotionally engaging events significantly increase perceived quality and brand loyalty⁵¹.

In the case of UII Dalwa, the unique blend of Islamic and boarding school traditions in the ceremony serves as a powerful brand differentiator unavailable to competitors. The ritual serves to emotionally embed the institution's identity particularly its commitment to traditional wisdom in stakeholders' minds⁵². By making this identity tangible and participatory, the university ensures that brand memory is not only cognitive (name and title) but also affective (feelings of belonging and spiritual pride). This is consistent with findings on institution-specific cultural events, where unique heritage elements proved to be essential levers for differentiating institutional offerings⁵³.

⁴⁸ Volker Nissen, 'Digital Transformation of the Consulting Industry – Introduction and Overview', in *Digital Transformation of the Consulting Industry*, ed. Volker Nissen, Progress in IS (Springer International Publishing, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70491-3_1.

⁴⁹ Hope Jensen Schau et al., 'Organizational Resiliency through Practice Innovation: Forced Brand Evolution in a Prolonged Exogenous Service Ecosystem Disruption', *Journal of Service Management* 36, no. 2 (2025): 241–69, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-03-2023-0115>.

⁵⁰ Richard Makadok et al., 'A Practical Guide for Making Theory Contributions in Strategic Management', *Strategic Management Journal* 39, no. 6 (2018): 1530–45, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2789>.

⁵¹ Halil Erdem Akoglu and Oğuz Özbek, 'The Effect of Brand Experiences on Brand Loyalty through Perceived Quality and Brand Trust: A Study on Sports Consumers', *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* 34, no. 10 (2022): 2130–48, <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-05-2021-0333>.

⁵² Saouré Kouamé et al., 'Creating and Sustaining Stakeholder Emotional Resonance with Organizational Identity in Social Mission-Driven Organizations', *Academy of Management Journal* 65, no. 6 (2022): 1864–93, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.1143>.

⁵³ Meiying Jing et al., 'Higher Education Digital Academic Leadership: Perceptions and Practices from Chinese University Leaders', *Education Sciences* 15, no. 5 (2025): 606, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15050606>.

The strategic use of narrative discourse, particularly framing graduates as "ambassadors of Islamic wisdom and global development," demonstrates a strong application of Brand Coherence Theory⁵⁴. The discourse explicitly connects the university's internal philosophical identity (*khalifah fil ard*) with its external promise (skilled international graduates)⁵⁵. By consistently conveying this message through the highest authority figure (the Rector) at the event's conclusion, UII Dalwa effectively bridged the perceived gap between its traditional roots and its international aspirations.

This interpretive finding aligns with communication studies that emphasize the importance of a straightforward, goal-oriented narrative for building public trust and support⁵⁶. Furthermore, consistency across the narrative discourse and the visual and spatial design (specific colors and symbols) prevented fragmentation, ensuring that visual and verbal messages reinforced each other, as suggested by the literature on effective corporate identity programs⁵⁷.

These findings offer significant modifications and extensions to existing event branding theory. While established literature recognizes events as critical brand touchpoints, it often overlooks mandatory procedural events, such as graduations, in favor of voluntary events, such as open days or alums gatherings⁵⁸.

This study provides confirmation and extends the Strategic Event Asset (SEA) Theory. The Modified SEA Model proposed in this study holds that any required institutional function, when intentionally managed across experiential, narrative, and visual domains, can be transformed from a necessity into a strategic communication investment that yields reputational benefits⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ Muhammad Fawwaz Bin Muhammad Yusoff, 'Tracing the Tracts of Qaşaş: Towards a Theory of Narrative Pedagogy in Islamic Education', *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): 1299, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101299>.

⁵⁵ Bin Muhammad Yusoff, 'Tracing the Tracts of Qaşaş'.

⁵⁶ T. E. McGraw et al., 'Mutagenesis of the Human Transferrin Receptor: Two Cytoplasmic Phenylalanines Are Required for Efficient Internalization and a Second-Site Mutation Is Capable of Reverting an Internalization-Defective Phenotype', *The Journal of Cell Biology* 112, no. 5 (1991): 853–61, <https://doi.org/10.1083/jcb.112.5.853>.

⁵⁷ George Morcos, 'Concept, Components, And Contributions Of Visual Communication In Designing Corporate Identity', 13 *الدورية العلمية لكلية الفنون الجميلة*, no. 1 (2025): 106–20, <https://doi.org/10.21608/sjfa.2025.364285.1101>.

⁵⁸ Farrington, Ashley, *The Art Of Listening: A Phenomenological Case Study Exploring The Lived Experiences Of Alumni Donors At A Private Graduate School*, College of William and Mary - School of Education, n.d., <https://doi.org/10.25774/W4-DJN3-ZG95>.

⁵⁹ Christina Kelly et al., 'Conceptualising Change in Marine Governance: Learning from Transition Management', *Marine Policy* 95 (September 2018): 24–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2018.06.023>.

This confirmation is highly relevant to the field of Educational Management Science, where managers often focus on the costs rather than the marketing outcomes of administrative functions⁶⁰. By successfully integrating a deeply non-secular identity (traditional Islamic values) with a modern commercial objective (educational branding), UII Dalwa offers a model for other faith-based or culturally unique institutions seeking to enhance their competitive position. These results provide new empirical evidence by filling the gap identified in the introduction and demonstrating how cultural distinctiveness, when strategically managed, becomes a commercial strength⁶¹.

Conclusion

This research effectively demonstrates that the strategic management of UII Dalwa's graduation ceremony serves as a high-impact platform for institutional communication, seamlessly weaving together its deep-rooted Islamic boarding school traditions with a modern brand identity focused on global leadership and academic excellence. By meticulously orchestrating experiential rituals, narrative discourse, and visual design, the institution transforms a standard administrative procedure into a profound brand statement that bridges the gap between its traditional character and an international profile. These insights, gathered through a qualitative case study and validated via triangulation of interviews and observations, reveal how such deliberate practices translate into measurable reputational gains and strengthened stakeholder loyalty through the lenses of Experiential Marketing and Brand Coherence theories.

The study further contributes to the academic landscape by proposing the Strategic Event Assets (SEA) Model, which redefines mandatory institutional functions as high-value strategic investments rather than mere operational expenses. This model is particularly vital for faith-based educational institutions seeking to leverage their unique cultural identities for a competitive advantage in a globalized market. Looking forward, this research opens significant avenues for quantitative follow-up studies to measure the direct correlation between ceremony quality and key branding metrics, such as alumni engagement and social media resonance, while encouraging comparative studies across diverse cultural contexts to refine the model's global applicability.

⁶⁰ Philip Hallinger and Jasna Kovačević, 'A Bibliometric Review of Research on Educational Administration: Science Mapping the Literature, 1960 to 2018', *Review of Educational Research* 89, no. 3 (2019): 335–69, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319830380>.

⁶¹ Eric Yanfei Zhao et al., 'Optimal Distinctiveness: Broadening the Interface between Institutional Theory and Strategic Management', *Strategic Management Journal* 38, no. 1 (2017): 93–113, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2589>.

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