

# Determinants of Santri's Decision to Enroll in Islamic Boarding Schools: The Role of Life Skills, Personal Branding, and Gender Equality Perception through Trust and Value

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## ABSTRACT

This study employed a quantitative approach involving 180 students of Pondok Pesantren Hasyim Asy'ari Bangsri Jepara, selected using the Slovin formula from a total population of 280 students. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results indicate that life skills have a positive and significant effect on the decision to enroll, both directly and indirectly through perceived trust and perceived value. Personal branding does not have a direct effect on the enrollment decision; however, it significantly influences perceived trust and perceived value. Perceived gender equality is found to have the strongest direct and indirect effects on the decision to enroll, as well as a significant effect on perceived trust and perceived value. Furthermore, perceived trust and perceived value play significant mediating roles, confirming that the decision to enroll is the result of an evaluative process based on trust and long-term perceived benefits. These findings suggest that enrollment decisions are not solely determined by institutional image, but rather by educational substance, environmental fairness, and the trust and value perceived by students and their parents. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools should prioritize strengthening life skills, fostering inclusive environments, and building trust as key strategies to attract prospective students.

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan responden sebanyak 180 santri Pondok Pesantren Hasyim Asy'ari Bangsri Jepara, yang ditentukan menggunakan rumus Slovin dari total populasi 280 santri. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa life skill berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keputusan memondok, baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung melalui perceived trust dan perceived value. Personal branding tidak berpengaruh langsung terhadap keputusan memondok, namun berpengaruh signifikan terhadap perceived trust dan perceived value. Persepsi kesetaraan gender terbukti memiliki pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung yang paling kuat terhadap keputusan memondok, serta berpengaruh signifikan terhadap perceived trust dan perceived value. Selanjutnya, perceived trust dan perceived value berperan signifikan sebagai mediator, yang menegaskan bahwa keputusan memondok merupakan hasil dari proses evaluatif berbasis kepercayaan dan manfaat jangka panjang yang dirasakan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa keputusan memondok tidak semata-mata ditentukan oleh citra lembaga, melainkan oleh substansi pendidikan, keadilan lingkungan, serta kepercayaan dan nilai yang dirasakan oleh santri dan orang tua. Oleh karena itu, pesantren perlu memprioritaskan penguatan kualitas life skill, lingkungan yang inklusif, dan pembentukan kepercayaan sebagai strategi utama dalam menarik minat santri.



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## INTRODUCTION

Educational transformation in the era of global competition and Society 5.0 positions educational institutions as strategic actors in the development of human resources based on values, skills, and social adaptability. Education is no longer understood solely as a process of knowledge transmission, but rather as a long-term investment that shapes individuals' capacity to participate productively in a dynamic society (OECD, 2019). In this context, religious-based educational institutions face a dual demand: maintaining their normative identity while responding to society's rational expectations regarding the quality, relevance, and sustainability of educational institutions.

Pesantren, as one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, has undergone significant transformation in recent decades. Pesantren not only functions as a center for religious education, but has also developed into a socio-educational institution that plays a role in strengthening human capital, developing life skills, and empowering the economic and social aspects of santri (students) (Azra, 2017; Hefner, 2018). A number of studies show that the modernization of Islamic boarding schools is characterized by the integration of formal curricula, the strengthening of vocational capacities, and increased openness to external networks and digital technology (Lukens-Bull, 2013; Raihani, 2012).

Amidst increasing competition among educational institutions, the decision of parents and prospective students to choose a boarding school is no longer entirely traditional or ideological, but rather the result of a decision-making process that involves simultaneous rational and emotional evaluation. In consumer behavior literature, the decision to choose an educational institution is influenced by perceived value and perceived trust in the institution (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). These values and trust are formed through various quality signals, such as the strengthening of life skills, institutional reputation, and perceptions of fairness and inclusiveness.

The Hasyim Asy'ari Islamic Boarding School in Bangsri, Jepara, is an example of a modern Annahdhiyah-based Islamic boarding school that integrates religious education with the strengthening of life skills, institutional personal branding through social media and external networks, as well as a commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. These practices are reflected in the involvement of female students in internal organizational structures, equal academic mentoring, and external support in the form of scholarships and capacity-building programs from institutions such as BAZNAS. The pesantren's digital activities also serve as a means of communicating values and reputation, which strengthens the public's perception of the institution's quality.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the integration of several approaches. Human Capital Theory views the strengthening of life skills as an investment in the future that increases the value of education for santri (Backer, 1993). Signaling Theory explains that personal branding and institutional reputation serve as signals of quality in conditions of information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). Perceptions of gender equality are related to Gender Equality Theory, which emphasizes the importance of fairness and inclusivity in shaping individuals' psychological evaluations of institutions (Sen, 1999). Furthermore, Perceived Value Theory and Trust Theory explain how benefit evaluation and trust are key prerequisites in decision-making in the value-based service sector (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Zeithaml, 1988). All of these mechanisms are integrated into the Theory of Planned Behavior, which views decisions as the result of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

Previous studies have shown that life skills have a positive and significant effect on decision-making abilities in the context of consumer education and general formal education (Olson et al., 2014; Oshio, 2024). Value has also been shown to have a positive influence on individual decisions, but the study has not yet integrated life skills and gender perceptions simultaneously into a single research model (Sirgy, 2020). On the other hand, research on perceptions of gender equality in the selection of educational institutions shows insignificant results, especially in the context of patriarchal culture, thus giving rise to differences in empirical findings (Putri et al., 2023). Inconsistent results were also seen in the effect of life skills on educational decisions, where some studies found a significant effect, while others showed insignificant results (Sari & Nugroho, 2020). In addition, trust has been proven to have a positive

effect on the decision to choose an educational institution, but its role as a mediating variable between life skills and decisions has not yet been studied (Rahman & Aziz, 2022). Furthermore, research in the context of Islamic boarding school education is still dominated by traditional and family factors, with limited studies on personal branding, life skills, and perceptions of gender equality, and has not yet integrated the role of trust and values in shaping students' decisions (Huda et al., 2023). This condition indicates a research gap that confirms the need for comprehensive research on the determinants of santri decisions in choosing Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

This research is important because studies of Islamic boarding schools from the perspective of educational marketing are still relatively rare, while Islamic boarding schools are currently facing dynamic competition from other educational institutions that requires an understanding of the decision-making behavior of prospective students and their parents. Most previous studies have focused on normative, traditional, and ideological aspects, leaving an empirical gap regarding how life skills, personal branding, and perceptions of gender equality shape trust and values, which ultimately influence students' decisions to enroll in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by presenting an integrated Islamic boarding school education decision model based on a marketing approach.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of life skills, personal branding, and perceptions of equality on the decision to enroll in boarding school through the mediating role of perceived trust and perceived value at the Hasyim Asy'ari Bangsri Jepara Islamic Boarding School. This study uses a quantitative approach with a structural model to test the direct and indirect relationships between variables.

### ***Hypothesis Development***

#### ***The Influence of Life Skills on Boarding School Decisions, Perceived Trust, and Perceived Value***

Life skills are non-academic abilities that include communication, leadership, problem solving, and social adaptation, which are important for individual success in society. According to Human Capital Theory, education that emphasizes the development of life skills is considered a long-term investment because it increases individual success and productivity (Backer, 1993). Recent research shows that parents and prospective students tend to choose educational institutions that offer practical benefits and life skills, not just academic achievement (Ansari & Suraijiah, 2024).

Furthermore, life skills also play a role in building perceived trust in educational institutions. Institutions that consistently strengthen life skills are considered more competent and reliable, thereby increasing the trust of prospective students and their guardians (Halim, 2023; Hasan & Huda, 2023). In addition, strengthening life skills increases the perceived value of education because individuals assess the benefits received to be greater than the sacrifices made (Garton, Miltenberger, & Pruett, 2007; Nasution, Siregar, Sundari, & Anwar, 2024).

Based on these theories and empirical findings, the hypothesis proposed is:

H1: Life skills have a positive effect on the decision to board.

H2: Life skills have a positive effect on perceived trust.

H3: Life skills have a positive effect on perceived value.

### ***The Influence of Personal Branding on Boarding House Decisions, Perceived Trust, and Perceived Value***

Institutional personal branding refers to the efforts of Islamic boarding schools to build their image, reputation, and identity through social media, external communications, and public engagement. According to Signaling Theory, personal branding serves as a signal of the quality and credibility of an institution when information about the quality of education is limited for prospective students and their guardians (Spence, 1973). Consistent branding activities create a positive perception and build trust in the institution's ability to educate and guide students (Maemunah, 2025).

Recent research shows that educational institutions with strong personal branding increase perceived trust because prospective students view the institutions as competent, transparent, and reliable (My et al., 2023). In addition, personal branding also strengthens perceived value, because a positive image of the institution increases the evaluation of benefits relative to the costs, time, and energy expended (Roosdhani, Komaryatin, Arifin, Ali, & Huda, 2024; Yum & Kim, 2024). Thus, personal branding not only shapes reputation but also influences strategic decisions in choosing a boarding school.

Based on this theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the hypothesis proposed is:

H4: Personal branding has a positive effect on boarding school decisions.

H5: Personal branding has a positive effect on perceived trust.

H6: Personal branding has a positive effect on perceived value.

### ***The Influence of Perceived Equality on Boarding School Decisions, Perceived Trust, and Perceived Value***

Perceived equality describes the extent to which prospective students and their guardians believe that Islamic boarding schools treat all students fairly and inclusively, including gender equality and access to educational resources. According to Gender Equality Theory, perceptions of fairness and inclusiveness play an important role in shaping individuals' attitudes and decisions toward institutions (Sen, 1999). Institutions that are perceived as fair tend to increase the sense of security and comfort of prospective students, thereby influencing their decision to enroll.

Recent research shows that equality and inclusivity in educational institutions contribute to the level of perceived trust that prospective students have in the institution, because they believe that the institution has integrity, consistency, and attention to the needs of all students (Bahri, 2025). In addition, the perception of equality also increases perceived value, because prospective students and their guardians consider the benefits of a fair and supportive learning environment to be greater than the sacrifices that must be made (Dongrey, Rokade, & Society, 2022).

Based on this theory and empirical evidence, the hypothesis proposed is:

H7: Perceptions of equality have a positive effect on the decision to board.

H8: Perceptions of equality have a positive effect on perceived trust.

H9: Perceptions of equality have a positive effect on perceived value.

### ***The Role of Perceived Trust and Perceived Value in Boarding School Decisions***

Perceived trust is the belief of prospective students and their guardians that the Islamic boarding school has the integrity, competence, and commitment to fulfill its educational promises. According to Trust Theory, this level of trust is an important prerequisite in decision-

making in institutions based on values and long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Recent studies show that the higher the perceived trust built through reputation, transparency, and service quality, the more likely individuals are to choose that institution as their place of education (Yum & Kim, 2024).

In addition, perceived value describes the overall evaluation of prospective students and their guardians regarding the benefits obtained compared to the sacrifices made, including costs, time, and energy. Based on Perceived Value Theory, individuals are more likely to decide to enroll in a boarding school that is considered to provide higher benefits than the sacrifices that must be made (Ali, 2021). Recent empirical research also confirms that perceived value has a significant influence on educational decisions, as prospective students assess the relevance and quality of education holistically (My et al., 2023).

Based on this theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the hypothesis proposed is:  
H10: Perceived trust has a positive effect on the decision to board.

H11: Perceived value has a positive effect on the decision to board.

### *The Mediating Role of Perceived Trust and Perceived Value*

In the context of boarding school decision-making, perceived trust and perceived value act as mediators that explain the mechanism of how life skills, personal branding, and perceptions of equality influence individual decisions. According to Trust Theory and Perceived Value Theory, prospective students and their guardians not only assess the attributes of the institution directly, but also evaluate trust and relative benefits as important conditions in decision-making (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Recent research shows that perceived trust can mediate the influence of educational programs or institutional image on educational decisions, because trust channels the positive effects of institutional quality and reputation to the final decision (My et al., 2023). Meanwhile, perceived value mediates the influence of institutional attributes on decisions because individuals assess the benefits obtained to exceed the sacrifices made (Mukhlas, Yunus, & Husna, 2025).

Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, the proposed mediation hypothesis is:

H12: Perceived trust mediates the influence of life skills on the decision to board.

H13: Perceived value mediates the influence of life skills on the decision to board.

H14: Perceived trust mediates the influence of personal branding on the decision to board.

H15: Perceived value mediates the influence of personal branding on boarding decisions.

H16: Perceived trust mediates the influence of perceived equality on boarding decisions.

H17: Perceived value mediates the influence of perceived equality on boarding decisions.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey design to test the decision-making model at the Hasyim Asy'ari Islamic Boarding School in Bangsri, Jepara. The research population consisted of 280 male and female students who were active at the boarding school. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 5%, resulting in 180 representative respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to students and their guardians. However, the majority of responses were obtained from students, and the analysis in this study primarily focuses on students as the main unit of analysis. This approach was taken to ensure consistency in measuring variables such as life skills, personal branding, perceptions of equality, perceived trust, perceived value, and

boarding school decisions. All variables were measured using a 1–10 Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), which had been adapted from previous research instruments and adjusted to the context of inclusive Islamic boarding schools. This study used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as a data analysis technique to simultaneously test the direct and indirect relationships between variables in the research model, including double mediation by perceived trust and perceived value. This approach also allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the validity and reliability of the instruments and the strength of each variable's influence on the decision to enroll in boarding school.

## RESULTS

The characteristics presented in Tables 1 and 2 mainly describe the profile of student respondents, who constitute the majority of the sample. Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents were in the >18 age group, accounting for 55.56%, followed by the 15–18 age group at 27.78%, and the <15 age group at 16.67%. The dominance of the >18 age group indicates that most respondents were in the late adolescence to early adulthood phase, thus having a relatively good level of maturity in making educational decisions, including the decision to study at a pesantren.

**Table 1 Respondent Characteristics**

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
< 15 years old	30	16,67
15–18 years old	50	27,78
> 18 years old	100	55,56
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	57	31,67
Female	123	68,33
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
SD	17	9,44
SMP	28	15,56
SMA/SMK	106	58,89
Diploma	2	1,11
Bachelor's Degree	25	13,89
Master's Degree	2	1,11
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Furthermore, female students dominated the respondents at 68.33%, while male students accounted for 31.67%. This composition shows that female participation in Islamic boarding school education is quite high, which is relevant to studies on perceptions of gender equality in educational decision-making. The majority of respondents had a high school/vocational school education background (SMA/SMK) (58.89%), followed by junior high school (SMP) (15.56%), bachelor's degree (13.89%), and elementary school (SD) (9.44%), while diploma and postgraduate graduates each accounted for 1.11%. These results indicate that most santri enter pesantren after completing their secondary education, which allows them to have life skills and rational considerations in determining their educational choices.

**Table 2 Characteristics of Pondok Respondents**

Student Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
New Students	6	3,33
Old Students	174	96,67
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>
<b>Long Boarding School</b>		
< 1 years old	6	3,33
1-3 years old	39	21,67
> 3 years old	135	75,00
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>
<b>Region of origin</b>		
Jepara	175	97,22
Outside Jepara	5	2,78
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>
<b>Participation in Activities</b>		
Yes	127	70,56
No	53	29,44
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents were long-term students (96.67%), while new students only accounted for 3.33%. The dominance of long-term students indicates that respondents had sufficient experience in the pesantren environment, so their assessments of trust, value, and image of pesantren tended to be more mature and based on real experience. Most respondents had been studying for >3 years (75.00%), followed by those who had been studying for 1-3 years (21.67%), and <1 year (3.33%). This shows that the respondents had undergone a fairly long process of internalizing the values and culture of the pesantren, which had the potential to influence the formation of their values, trust, and perceptions of the pesantren.

The majority of respondents came from Jepara (97.22%), while respondents from outside Jepara only accounted for 2.78%. The dominance of local santri indicates that the decision to study at a pesantren is greatly influenced by geographical proximity and the local socio-cultural context. A total of 70.56% of respondents stated that they had participated in boarding school activities or extracurricular activities, while 29.44% stated that they had never participated. The high level of participation of santri in extracurricular activities shows that Islamic boarding schools not only serve as religious educational institutions but also as a means of developing life skills and the potential of santri.

The results of the convergent validity testing of this study can be observed using the outer loading values summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3. Validity Test**

Variable	Factor Loading	Percentage of variance explained	Conclusion
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Life Skill	0.717	0.602	Valid
	0.793		
	0.811		
	0.772		
	0.784		
Personal Branding	0.814	0.597	Valid
	0.877		
	0.713		
	0.721		
	0.709		
Perceptions of Gender Equality	0.877	0.713	Valid
	0.795		
	0.807		
	0.893		
	0.846		
Perceived Trust	0.866	0.755	Valid
	0.870		
	0.885		
	0.858		
	0.867		
Perceived Value	0.837	0.693	Valid
	0.836		
	0.893		
	0.842		
	0.802		
Boarding School Decisions	0.977	0.935	Valid
	0.951		
	0.957		
	0.981		

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on Table 3, the overall outer loading value is  $> 0.70$  and the AVE value is  $> 0.50$ . These results indicate that all items in the Life Skills, Personal Branding, Gender Equality Perception, Perceived Trust, Perceived Value, and Boarding Decision instruments used in this study are valid.

The evaluation results show that all constructs have met the criteria required for convergent validity. All indicators have adequate loading values, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each construct has exceeded the acceptable limit, so that the measurement model is declared valid and ready for further analysis.

Discriminant validity testing was conducted using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). In the discriminant validity test, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion values must be greater than 0.70 for each construct.

**Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)**

Variable	Boarding School Decisions	Life Skill	Perceived Trust	Perceived Value	Perceptions of Gender Equality	Personal Branding
Boarding School Decisions	<b>0.866</b>					
Life Skill	0.685	<b>0.807</b>				

Perceived Trust	0.729	0.629	<b>0.897</b>			
Perceived Value	0.695	0.734	0.774	<b>0.872</b>		
Perceptions of Gender Equality	0.673	0.706	0.749	0.811	<b>0.810</b>	
Personal Branding	0.531	0.534	0.600	0.605	0.580	<b>0.800</b>

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 4, the square root of AVE for most constructs is higher than the correlations with other constructs, indicating acceptable discriminant validity. However, a marginal issue is observed between Gender Equality Perception and Perceived Value, where the correlation slightly exceeds the square root of AVE, suggesting a potential overlap between these constructs.

**Table 5. R-Square value**

Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Perceived Trust	0.531	0.523
Perceived Value	0.598	0.591
Boarding School Decisions	0.961	0.960

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on the results presented in Table 5, the R-square value shows that Perceived Trust has an R-square of 0.531 (adjusted R-square = 0.523), and Perceived Value has an R-square of 0.598 (adjusted R-square = 0.591). Furthermore, Boarding School Decision has an R-square of 0.961 (adjusted R-square = 0.960). This indicates that the exogenous constructs collectively explain 96.1% of the variance in the decision to attend boarding school, demonstrating a very strong explanatory power of the model.

However, the R-square value for Boarding School Decision is relatively high compared to typical behavioral research. This may be influenced by the specific context of the study, in which respondents come from a homogeneous environment and have relatively similar experiences (e.g., students who have stayed in the boarding school for more than three years). Therefore, the model tends to capture most of the variance in the dependent variable. Future studies are recommended to test the model in different contexts or populations to improve generalizability.

**Table 6. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Values**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Life Skill	0.834	0.838
Personal Branding	0.864	0.871
Perceptions of Gender Equality	0.899	0.902
Perceived Trust	0.919	0.920
Perceived Value	0.911	0.915

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 6 shows that all latent variables in this study meet the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of  $> 0.70$ . This means that all variables or instruments used as research measurement tools in this study are reliable or consistent.

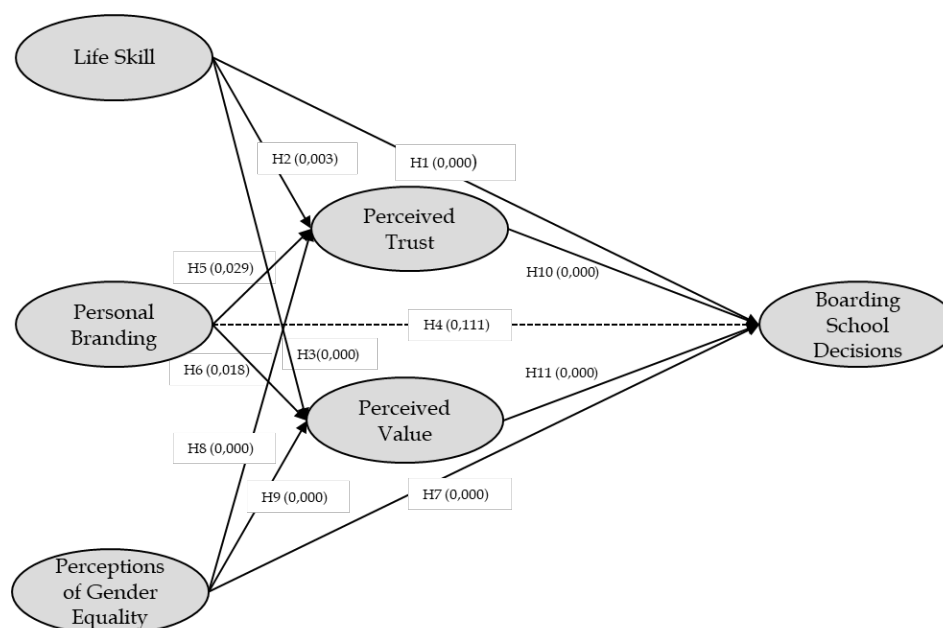


Figure 1. Model Bootstrapping PLS

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Figure 1 shows the bootstrapping model used in this study, which includes mediation testing and hypothesis testing.

Table 7. Mediation Analysis

Variable	Original Sampel (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
LS -> PT -> BSD	0,061	0,062	0,020	2,998	0,003
LS -> PV -> BSD	0,103	0,105	0,029	3,540	0,000
PB -> PT -> BSD	0,032	0,033	0,015	2,138	0,033
PB -> PV -> BSD	0,065	0,063	0,027	2,435	0,015
PGE -> PT -> BSD	0,110	0,109	0,027	4,028	0,000
PGE -> PV -> BSD	0,159	0,161	0,032	4,977	0,000

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on Table 7, the indirect effect of Life Skills (LS) on the Boarding School Decision (BSD) through Perceived Trust (PT) is positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.061$ ;  $T = 2.998$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ). This finding indicates that an increase in students' life skills can increase their level

of trust in boarding schools, which ultimately encourages the decision to enroll in boarding school. In addition, the indirect effect of Life Skills through Perceived Value (PV) is also proven to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.103$ ;  $T = 3.540$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that life skills contribute to shaping the perception of the value of pesantren education in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the indirect effect of Personal Branding (PB) on Boarding School Decision (BSD) through Perceived Trust (PT) showed positive and significant results ( $\beta = 0.032$ ;  $T = 2.138$ ;  $p = 0.033$ ). This confirms that the image and reputation of Islamic boarding schools play a role in building the trust of prospective students and parents. Meanwhile, the mediating path of Personal Branding through Perceived Value also shows a positive and significant effect ( $\beta = 0.065$ ;  $T = 2.435$ ;  $p = 0.015$ ), which means that personal branding also increases the perceived value of boarding schools.

The indirect effect of Perceived Gender Equality (PGE) on the Decision to Board (BSD) through Perceived Trust (PT) was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.110$ ;  $T = 4.028$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding shows that the perception of a fair and gender-equal pesantren environment can increase students' trust in the institution. In addition, the mediating path of Gender Equality Perception through Perceived Value shows the strongest positive and significant influence among all mediating paths tested ( $\beta = 0.159$ ;  $T = 4.977$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that gender equality perceptions contribute greatly to increasing perceived value and strengthening boarding school decisions.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that Perceived Trust and Perceived Value function as significant mediators in the relationship between Life Skills, Personal Branding, and Perceptions of Gender Equality on the Decision to Board. These findings indicate that the decision to board is not only influenced by individual characteristics and the image of the institution directly, but also through the formation of perceived trust and value towards the boarding school.

**Table 8. Hypothesis Test Result**

Hypothesis	Analysis
Life Skill → Boarding School Decisions	Coefficient = 0,238 Sample Mean = 0,237 Standard Deviation = 0,028 T-Statistics = 8,588 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Life Skill → Perceived Trust	Coefficient = 0,256 Sample Mean = 0,265 Standard Deviation = 0,085 T-Statistics = 3,015 P-Value = 0,003 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Life Skill → Perceived Value	Coefficient = 0,290 Sample Mean = 0,294 Standard Deviation = 0,077 T-Statistics = 3,759 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>

Hypothesis	Analysis
Personal Branding → Boarding School Decisions	Coefficient = 0,022 Sample Mean = 0,022 Standard Deviation = 0,014 T-Statistics = 1,592 P-Value = 0,111 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Not Significant</b>
Personal Branding → Perceived Trust	Coefficient = 0,134 Sample Mean = 0,138 Standard Deviation = 0,061 T-Statistics = 2,178 P-Value = 0,029 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Personal Branding → Perceived Value	Coefficient = 0,183 Sample Mean = 0,179 Standard Deviation = 0,077 T-Statistics = 2,362 P-Value = 0,018 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Perceptions of Gender Equality → Boarding School Decisions	Coefficient = 0,278 Sample Mean = 0,277 Standard Deviation = 0,027 T-Statistics = 10,436 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Perceptions of Gender Equality → Perceived Trust	Coefficient = 0,519 Sample Mean = 0,503 Standard Deviation = 0,123 T-Statistics = 4,230 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Perceptions of Gender Equality → Perceived Value	Coefficient = 0,448 Sample Mean = 0,452 Standard Deviation = 0,080 T-Statistics = 5,577 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Perceived Trust → Boarding School Decisions	Coefficient = 0,239 Sample Mean = 0,237 Standard Deviation = 0,028 T-Statistics = 8,622 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>
Perceived Value → Boarding School Decisions	Coefficient = 0,356 Sample Mean = 0,356 Standard Deviation = 0,025 T-Statistics = 13,994 P-Value = 0,000 T-Statistics > T-Critical → <b>Significant</b>

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on the results of hypothesis testing, Life Skills were proven to have a positive and significant effect on the decision to attend boarding school, with a coefficient value of 0.238, T-statistics of 8.588, and a p-value of 0.000. A T-statistic value greater than the critical T-value (1.96) and a p-value less than 0.05 indicate that the life skills of students play an important role in encouraging the decision to board at a pesantren. In addition, Life Skills also have a positive and significant effect on Perceived Trust ( $\beta = 0.256$ ;  $T = 3.015$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ) and Perceived Value ( $\beta = 0.290$ ;  $T = 3.759$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that the better the life skills possessed by students, the higher the level of trust and value perceived towards the Islamic boarding school.

Furthermore, the test results show that Personal Branding does not have a significant direct effect on the decision to enroll in a boarding school, with a coefficient of 0.022, T-statistics of 1.592, and a p-value of 0.111. This insignificance indicates that the image or reputation of Islamic boarding schools is not yet strong enough to directly influence students' decisions, because the decision to enroll is more based on substantial factors such as educational benefits, religious values, and the level of trust in the institution. However, Personal Branding has been proven to have a positive and significant effect on Perceived Trust ( $\beta = 0.134$ ;  $T = 2.178$ ;  $p = 0.029$ ) and Perceived Value ( $\beta = 0.183$ ;  $T = 2.362$ ;  $p = 0.018$ ), indicating that personal branding still plays an important indirect role through the formation of perceived trust and value.

Perceptions of gender equality show a positive and significant influence on the decision to enroll in boarding school, with a coefficient of 0.278, T-statistics of 10.436, and a p-value of 0.000. These findings confirm that perceptions of a fair and gender-equal boarding school environment are an important factor in students' decisions to enroll in boarding school. Perceptions of gender equality also have a positive and significant effect on perceived trust ( $\beta = 0.519$ ;  $T = 4.230$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and perceived value ( $\beta = 0.448$ ;  $T = 5.577$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), which indicates a strong contribution to building trust and perceived value in boarding schools.

In addition, Perceived Trust was proven to have a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Board, with a coefficient of 0.239, T-statistics of 8.622, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the higher the level of trust of students in the pesantren, the greater the tendency to decide to board. Meanwhile, Perceived Value shows the most dominant and significant influence on the decision to enroll in boarding school, with a coefficient of 0.356, T-statistics of 13.994, and a p-value of 0.000, which confirms that the perceived value of education is a major factor in the decision to choose a boarding school.

Overall, these results indicate that the decision to board students is influenced by a combination of individual factors, social perceptions, and psychological mechanisms in the form of perceived trust and value. These findings also reinforce the role of Perceived Trust and Perceived Value as key variables in bridging the influence of Life Skills, Personal Branding, and Perceptions of Gender Equality on the Decision to Board Students.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that life skills have a strong direct and indirect influence on the decision to enroll in a boarding school, both through perceived trust and perceived value. These findings indicate that the life skills of students, such as independence, adaptability, and self-management, are not only rational considerations in choosing a boarding school, but also shape the trust and perceived value of education. This suggests that life skills function as a core determinant in the decision-making process, reinforcing both cognitive and evaluative considerations. This is in line with previous research Halim (2023) which confirms that

perceived functional, social, and emotional values (perceived value) significantly influence decision-making.

Furthermore, an interesting finding in this study is that Personal Branding has no significant direct effect on the decision to enroll in a boarding school, even though Personal Branding has been proven to have a significant effect on Perceived Trust and Perceived Value. These results show that the image, reputation, and communication of boarding schools are not yet strong enough to directly influence decisions, but rather work through psychological mechanisms. This indicates that personal branding plays an indirect role and must be translated into trust and perceived value before influencing decisions. The serious and long-term nature of boarding school decisions makes students and parents prioritize educational substance, religious values, and tangible benefits over mere symbolic image or institutional popularity (Ansari & Suraijiah, 2024). This finding is in line with several previous studies which state that the personal branding of educational institutions or organizations does not always have a direct impact on decisions, but is more effective when mediated by factors of trust and perceived value (Ali, 2021). Thus, personal branding acts as a supporting factor, not the main determining factor in the decision to stay at a boarding school.

Perceptions of gender equality have been proven to be the variable with the strongest direct and indirect influence on boarding school decisions. These findings confirm that perceptions of a fair, inclusive, and non-discriminatory pesantren environment are an important consideration for students and parents when choosing an educational institution (Hefner, 2018). A positive perception of gender equality can increase trust in pesantren management and reinforce perceived educational values, thereby significantly impacting the decision to enroll in a pesantren (Dongrey & Rokade, 2022). This highlights that socio-cultural values, particularly gender equality, serve as a dominant factor in shaping educational decisions in the pesantren context. In modern society, Islamic boarding schools are assessed not only based on religious aspects, but also on social justice values (Azra, 2017).

The role of perceived trust and perceived value as significant mediators further emphasizes that the decision to enroll in a boarding school is the result of a complex cognitive and affective process. Trust reflects students' belief in the integrity and competence of the boarding school, while perceived value reflects their evaluation of the benefits gained compared to the sacrifices made (Bhatt et al., 2021). These findings confirm that trust and perceived value act as key mediating mechanisms linking institutional attributes to decision making.

Overall, this discussion confirms that the decision to enroll in boarding school is not solely influenced by the image of the institution, but is more determined by the substance of the benefits, trust, and social values that are perceived. Life skills and perceptions of gender equality play a fundamental role, while personal branding serves as an effective supporting instrument when it is able to build trust and perceived value (My et al., 2023). This study contributes by demonstrating that trust and perceived value are essential pathways through which educational attributes influence students' decisions, emphasizing the importance of substance over image in pesantren-based education.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that Life Skills and Perceptions of Gender Equality have been proven to positively and significantly improve boarding school enrollment decisions at the Hasyim Asy'ari Islamic Boarding School in Jepara. This means that the better the life skills developed by the boarding school, such as independence, adaptability, and self-management,

and the stronger the perception of a fair and inclusive boarding school environment, the more likely students and parents are to choose to enroll in the boarding school. These findings highlight that functional competencies and socio cultural values play a more decisive role than institutional image in shaping educational decisions. However, not all factors have a direct influence. The personal branding of the Hasyim Asy'ari Islamic Boarding School in Jepara was not proven to have a direct influence on the decision to enroll in boarding school, but through perceived trust and perceived value, its influence was still able to have a significant impact.

In addition, the results of the study also confirm that Perceived Trust and Perceived Value can act as mediating variables in explaining the relationship between Life Skills, Personal Branding, and Perceptions of Gender Equality on the Decision to Board. This means that even though not all variables have a direct effect, through the mediating role of perceived trust and educational value, the influence is still conveyed and has a real impact on the decision to board students. This indicates that trust and perceived value function as essential mechanisms that translate institutional attributes into actual decision-making.

As a result, the Hasyim Asy'ari Islamic Boarding School in Jepara needs to focus its management strategy on strengthening the life skills program for students and creating an environment that promotes gender equality, while also optimizing personal branding to build trust and enhance the perceived value of education. This study contributes by proposing an integrated decision-making model in which life skills, gender equality, and personal branding influence decisions through trust and perceived value, offering both theoretical and practical insights for educational marketing in pesantren contexts. In this way, the boarding school will not only be able to increase interest in boarding, but also create sustainable educational excellence that is relevant to modern social demands.

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