

Marketing Strategy of Educational Services in Improving the Image of Institutions at Institut Agama Islam Al-Quran Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify and analyse the marketing strategies used by the Institut Agama Islam Al-Quran Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya (IAIQI) to improve the image of their institutions. This study aims to address the following issues: (1) Analysis of the marketing strategy carried out by the IAIQI to enhance the image of the institution. The research method used is a qualitative approach. The data collection procedure involves the collection of information from Deputy Rector I and Deputy Rector III, as well as students and the public acting as informants. Data collection is done through observations, interviews, and documentation. The most effective promotional efforts undertaken by the IAIQI include advertising, word marketing, public relations, and collaboration. In order to enhance the reputation of educational at IAIQI, cooperation efforts are being made by these institutions in partnership with the government as well as with national and international public and private colleges, high schools, and teachers. Based on this research, SWOT analysis shows that the right strategy to use is the SO strategy, which is to take advantage of the power over the existing opportunities. It can be concluded that the marketing strategy of educational services in improving the image of institutions like IAIQI has been implemented by making planning through identification, segmentation, differentiation, and marketing mix elements quite well. However, it would be even better to document the promotion activities thoroughly for further improvement.

Keywords: Educational Services Marketing, Institutional Image, SWOT Analysis

A. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, it is very important to keep up with rapid technological advances. In the education sector, it is clear that educational institutions are very competitive in providing services to potential consumers. As a result, these institutions need effective marketing strategies to attract the public and ensure the best services available (Maulana & Afifi, 2021).

Effective administration of educational services is necessary in public education, regardless of whether the institutions are publicly or privately funded. The increase in private education schools, which provide significant benefits, adds to the challenge of competition between educational institutions. According to a study conducted by Faridah in 2020, marketing plays an important role in building a favorable reputation for educational institutions (Labaso, 2019).

The concept of marketing in education may seem unfamiliar to our culture, because the term marketing is usually associated with the corporate domain. Education is a philanthropic endeavor (Iqbal, 2019). Marketing is an important procedure that universities must carry out to ensure satisfaction among stakeholders and the community. Every organization must prioritize satisfying stakeholders to remain competitive.

Colleges are educational institutions that offer advanced academic and professional courses after completing secondary education. Colleges, sometimes known as universities or institutions, offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in many areas of study. Higher education plays an important role in growing a skilled workforce, enhancing individual abilities and skills, and making significant contributions to a country's social and economic progress (Kholili & Fajaruddin, 2020).

Globalization and digitalization of education have led to intense competition in the education sector (Prihatin & Ahmad, 2020). This shift in education management involves a transition from considering it solely as a means to support the educational process of institutions, to prioritizing the transformation of education users into education consumers. (Customer education). The objectives of educational marketing are two: to disseminate information to the public and to generate interest in educational institutions' offerings. In addition, it aims to facilitate evaluation, promote excellence, and ensure the long-term presence of educational institutions in society.

Fathurrochman et al., (2021) emphasizes the need to implement effective and appropriate marketing strategies for educational institutions. This approach aims to educate the public about the importance of choosing educational institutions that offer superior and high-quality educational programs. In the competitive world of education, where institutions strive to provide superior and quality education, it is very important for educational institutions to fulfill and effectively implement the required aspects.

For an educational services marketing strategy to be successful and achieve its goals, it is vital that the plan's objectives are accurate and effectively promote the services in a way that is attractive to customers. Marketing strategies are very important

because they cover a wide range of activities and have a significant influence on the sales process. Therefore, organizations or institutions must use the right marketing tactics to optimize, grow and ensure smooth product sales.

Fradito et al., (2020) stated that educational institutions must consistently update strategies to ensure compliance with environmental requirements and maintain competitive advantages based on their internal capabilities. Along with effective management strategies in educational institutions, it is very important to actively promote and market the institution's services in society. This is very important to improve the reputation of the institution and generate sales for the offer, because internal factors also contribute to increasing sales of its products.

In open times like today, it is important for schools to build a favorable reputation so that they can be seen as institutions that can meet society's needs and quickly adapt to society's progress (Eko Ariwibowo, 2019). The aim of implementing academic activities in higher education is to ensure the quality of lecturers, who are responsible for providing effective and efficient services to students. This ensures that students receive a high-quality educational product and can complete their education within the specified time frame. Therefore, it is very important to foster positive public perception of educational institutions through improving educational services and providing high-quality education. This can be achieved by improving the educational standards and facilities offered by these institutions.

Marketing in the education sector aims to foster favorable perceptions among the general public and potential clients, thereby generating interest in the educational services provided by the institution. An image is a representation or interpretation that arises from understanding, explaining, and assimilating factual data. If the image of an educational institution is formed appropriately and reflects the educational institutions that society needs, it can effectively increase the effectiveness of marketing plans implemented for that educational institution (Sintasari & Afifah, 2022).

In the field of education, especially in Indonesian higher education, there is quite interesting competition, because various teachers try to surpass each other in implementing effective marketing strategies to convince the public to take advantage of their educational services, positioning themselves as institutions where individuals can gain knowledge and improve their intellectual abilities. Private colleges are sometimes considered a secondary option when choosing an institution in a community, and they may be seen as accepting the remaining students not accepted by state universities. The perception that state universities are superior to private universities is largely influenced by the important role of image building in the eyes of the public. As a result, officials and students at these institutions must actively work to improve their image as part of their marketing activities.

In addition, research conducted by (Usania, 2021) highlights the importance of certain factors in supporting technical and commercial efforts, thereby influencing the reputation of educational institutions. A SWOT analysis includes an examination of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. To compete effectively in comparable businesses, education must analyze the possibilities, strengths, threats and challenges that must be faced.

One of the educational institutions within the Al-Qur'an Al-Ittifaqiah Islamic Religious Institute (IAIQI) Indralaya is the focus of this research. The institution also makes efforts to apply various marketing techniques to its educational services, with the aim of establishing and improving the institution's image. The mission of this institution is to educate and train aspiring Islamic scholars who will be useful to society. The goal is to develop individuals who have a strong faith and fear of God, engage in acts of charity, have love for their homeland, and possess extensive knowledge and skills. These individuals will be independent and ready to become scientists, researchers, educators, guides, and leaders for people. Additionally, they will serve as a resource for the entire world and benefit religion. The Institute has been involved in competition in the education sector by using a marketing approach that involves advertising, promotions, inter-community and public relations, using promotional words, and developing collaborations with other related entities. As a private institution, IAIQI has the advantage of being more autonomous in the competitive field of education. One of these initiatives is establishing a marketing team, namely a student admissions committee, with the aim of marketing, introducing and promoting the institute to increase public knowledge about its presence.

Statistics regarding the number of tertiary institutions in Indonesia can be seen that IAIQI has the potential to be chosen by prospective students as one of the tertiary institutions among the many choices available in Indonesia. Differences in enrollment among colleges suggest that candidates will only choose teachers with favorable organizational reputations. A positive reputation of a college can be established by effective marketing strategies, which in turn can influence the perceptions of potential students.

IAIQI students come from various high school, vocational and MA graduates located in the Ogan Ilir area and environments in South Sumatra. This institution specifically focuses on potential consumers, especially those in the lower middle economic group. Apart from that, the institute also set the motto "Studying while working, just at IAIQI", to attract people who work but want to pursue further education. Table 1 provides data on new students at IAIQI from 2019 to 2022.

Table 1. Data New Students at IAIQI

Year	Number of Student Registrants
2019	390
2020	371
2021	432
2022	344

Based on the facts shown in table 1 the researcher concludes that targeted implementation of the strategic plan is critical to increasing enrollment in IAIQI. Table 1 also explains that the accumulation of new students has a tendency towards stability. Therefore, the author's suggestion relates to the need to implement a specific strategic plan to further increase the enrollment of the required number of students. Regarding the need for a SWOT analysis, IAIQI must have the ability to complete four specific tasks. The first step is to check the strength. Strengths checks should involve generating data relating to the capabilities and strengths of the IAIQL. This data will serve as the basis for the promotional context that will be presented to potential consumers. The second aspect involves examining and evaluating deficiencies. Institutes must conduct a weakness analysis to then develop an evaluation approach. The third aspect involves examining and assessing possible favorable circumstances. Evaluation of this opportunity can be done by examining the implementation process involved in each strategic action to be taken. To remain competitive in the education sector, IAIQI must create a strategic plan that thoroughly evaluates all potential opportunities in relation to the organization's vision and goals. This is done to ensure that each strategy is appropriately adapted to the specified objectives. The fourth aspect relates to the study of potential hazards or risks. The final step involves conducting an analysis to identify potential dangers that IAIQI agents may encounter in the future.

Every institution must have the ability to understand the circumstances surrounding societal progress, technological advances, and digitalization to produce analyzes that can predict the real risks that organizations will face. This task is necessary to ensure that IAIQI does not face challenges in formulating strategies, given its ability to precisely predict potential hazards that may negatively impact educational institutions.

Since March 12 2021, the Al-Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an Tarbiyah Science College (STITQI) has changed its status to the Al-Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an Islamic Religious Institute (IAIQI) Indralaya. These changes reflect the institution's commitment to enhancing its reputation and increasing its visibility. The institute offers a variety of study programs and services to increase choice, including well-maintained facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, academic services, and human resources. Alumni, staff and employees are also involved in introducing and promoting the institution as a form of marketing the Institute.

With various efforts, the Institute has implemented a service marketing strategy and has effectively enhanced its image as a supporter of this plan through various activities. However, these efforts have not made substantial progress in attracting potential new students.

Considering the phenomenon described, researchers are motivated to investigate further and develop in more depth an appropriate marketing strategy to improve the image of the educational institution with the title Marketing Strategy for Educational Services in Improving the Image of the Institution at the Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya Islamic Religious Institute.

B. Methods

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is a natural research paradigm, namely trying to find theory by exploring data originating from the real world, namely data obtained from research locations carried out at the Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya Islamic Religious Institute. with a research focus, then conceptualized into a particular theory.

According to (Fradito et al., 2020) defining descriptive research is research on problems in the form of current facts from a popularization. Qualitative research is a naturalistic investigation process that seeks a deep understanding of natural social phenomena.

The instruments used in this research were interview guides, observation sheets, and document studies. Research data obtained from various sources using data collection techniques is carried out continuously, as stated by Miles and Huberman, that the data analysis process in qualitative research is carried out during data collection and after data collection is completed within a certain period.

C. Results and Discussion

The Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya Islamic Religious Institute is one of the Al-Quran-based Islamic higher education institutions in South Sumatra, making it easier for IAIQI to attract its target market. As explained in the segmentation of the Al-Qur'an Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya Islamic Institute, one of them is the Islamic community.

IAIQI also pays great attention to the principle of justice on the one hand, namely implementing an equality system in accepting new students without discrimination, gender, social and political status, and on the other hand, IAIQI also has dedication to students who have academic potential and are economically and physically disadvantaged.

IAIQI is an educational institution that has advantages that differentiate it from other educational institutions. And as said by (Sugiyono, 2023) in his book, one of the marketing strategies used to compete with other educational institutions is:

1. Differentiation is where this strategy provides a different offering from its competitors. And it can be seen from the description above that IAIQI has different offerings, namely the religion and Al-Qur'an taught.
2. Cost leadership is a strategy that makes an institution's costs more efficient. IAIQI is a private university which is classified as having very affordable fees and provides several reductions in payment, of course with certain conditions.
3. Focus is a strategy that pays attention to a marketing target, carried out by educational services that have special characteristics. IAIQI is a university that has a special character by prioritizing the Al-Qur'an in its activities, where IAIQI graduates are known for being good at reciting the Al-Qur'an.

The collaboration carried out by IAIQI is a manifestation of the academic community's need for an institution that specifically and intensively handles sources of collaboration, both at home and abroad, for the purposes of image, networking, funding and institutional empowerment in IAIQI apart from providing concepts and building cooperation, this institution is also expected to fulfill the principles of science, togetherness, unity and prosperity according to their respective standards and performance. Therefore, a Blue Print for the field of cooperation was prepared, the cooperation carried out focuses on the Tri Dharma of Higher Education process. IAIQI is following up on collaboration by improving the quality of facilities and infrastructure, learning processes and intensifying relations with other agencies.

In marketing educational services, the initial stage is identifying and analyzing the market. This stage requires research regarding market expectations and conditions, including finding out what the needs and desires of education consumers are as well as mapping existing competitors to make it easier for the institute to adapt to what society needs.

In this step (Machali & Hidayat, 2018) stated that to find out market conditions and expectations as well as consumer interests and needs, educational market research is needed. It can be seen that from a simple marketing perspective, the educational services market is grouped into two market segments, namely, the emotional market segment, which means that customers who join this educational institution are driven by emotional considerations. And the rational market segment means customers who join their educational institution because they really pay attention and are sensitive to the development and quality of their education.

The results of observations that researchers found at IAIQI identified the market in improving the image of the institution, namely by developing existing potential and

in accordance with consumer interests to suit market needs. Apart from that, researchers found that the institutions themselves were adapting to current developments by carrying out evaluations and revitalization. The considerations made by IAIQI in identifying markets are by considering aspects of the consumers' backgrounds, existing potential, and future community needs.

IAIQI has determined market segmentation based on researcher observations. The targeted demographic category consists of those who are Muslim, have noble morals, are able to read the Koran, maintain good physical and spiritual health, and have no legal problems. Regarding the socio-economic characteristics of IAIQI's clientele, a typical economist in the low to middle income group may witness an increase in the number of less qualified students applying for scholarships and unimpressive student attendance is common. However, it should be noted that not all of them are from lower middle-class economists, there are also those from higher middle-class economies. Meanwhile, the IAIQI geographical segment is located on the eastern main road and there are various high schools and Islamic boarding schools nearby.

Market segmentation is dividing buyers into several groups based on needs, characteristics or behavior, to meet needs. The purpose of segmentation is to increase consumer satisfaction and strengthen a company's competitive advantage over its competitors, as well as drive sales, expand market share, promote and communicate effectively, and strengthen its brand image (Halim et al., 2021).

IAIQI itself has a characteristic that differentiates them from competitors, namely by instilling Islam and prioritizing Al-Qur'an values in its products. So, it creates a special attraction for existing people to continue their studies at the IAIQI.

D. Conclusion

The marketing strategy for educational services in improving the image of institutions carried out by IAIQI refers to the basic marketing concept, namely identification, segmentation, differentiation as planning and elements of the 7P marketing mix to complete marketing implementation. In terms of the basic concept, the Islamic Institute has implemented the strategy well, but there needs to be improvements such as services, infrastructure and updates in its promotional strategy. The strategy that IAIQI can use based on SWOT analysis, namely using the SWOT Matrix, is the SO (Strength-Opportunity) strategy, namely by continuing to improve and maximize the quality of service, education and capabilities, utilizing and maximizing cooperation with related parties, maximizing promotions both online and offline, maximizing pricing and providing variety in implementation.

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