Reframing Strategic Marketing Management for Islamic Educational Institutions in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Declining student enrollment has become a critical challenge for Islamic educational institutions in maintaining institutional continuity and educational quality, including SMP Qur'an As-Salam. The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of marketing management through the Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling (POAC) framework to enhance institutional attractiveness and public image. This study used a descriptive qualitative methodology, with data collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Participants included school leaders, administrative staff, teachers, and parents directly involved in marketing-related activities. Data were analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion formulation, while data validity was ensured through source and methodological triangulation. The findings of this study indicate that SMP Qur'an As-Salam's marketing planning aligns with its Qur'anic vision and mission, emphasizing Islamic character development, a Qur'an memorization program, and academic excellence. Promotional practices integrate direct outreach activities such as community engagement, brochures, banners, and social events with digital platforms, including social media, websites, and educational content. Therefore, continuous innovation, digital marketing capacity building, and collaborative partnerships are recommended to strengthen sustainability in the digital era.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) play a central role in fostering moral character, spiritual depth, and intellectual development among Muslim generations. Since the seventeenth century, pesantren have existed as distinctive educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago, contributing significantly to the preservation of Islamic identity and the formation of socially resilient and ethically grounded Muslims (Jallow, 2023).

Pesantren are structurally characterized by five essential components: kiai (religious leaders), santri (students), pondok (boarding facilities), masjid (mosques), and pengajian kitab (classical Islamic learning) (Hirzulloh, 2023). The interaction among these elements forms an integrated educational ecosystem that blends spiritual cultivation, moral education, and social responsibility. Through this holistic approach, pesantren continue to maintain their relevance across generations while adapting their educational and da'wah functions to contemporary societal demands without abandoning their traditional Islamic foundations (Rosita et al., 2024).

Despite their historical and social significance, pesantren today face increasingly complex challenges. In addition to competing with public schools and modern madrasahs that emphasize academic achievement and technological advancement, pesantren must also sustain institutional credibility and a positive public image (Elyati, 2024). Globalization, changing parental preferences, and the rapid growth of digital culture have compelled Islamic educational institutions to reassess their management and promotional strategies.

Moreover, internal institutional regulations, such as restrictions on the use of electronic devices and student mobility, are often perceived by the public as rigid and less accommodating. These perceptions can negatively affect the attractiveness of pesantren for prospective santri and their families, particularly in an era where flexibility and digital access are highly valued (Abdurrahman et al., 2025).

These challenges are empirically evident in the declining trend of student enrollment at SMP Qur'an As-Salam over the last five years. Institutional records indicate a substantial decrease in applicants, from 146 in 2020 to only 82 in 2025, representing a decline of more than 40%. This downward trend reflects shifting public interest and reinforces the urgency of strengthening marketing management within Islamic boarding schools to enhance competitiveness and institutional sustainability (Bin Lahuri et al., 2024).

Table 1. Data on the number of students who enrolled at SMPQU As-salaam Karanggan

No	Year	Applicants	Admitted
1	2020	146	131
2	2021	145	125
3	2022	129	108
4	2023	140	118
5	2024	123	109
6	2025	82	75

Source: SMP Qur'an As-Salam Karanggan (2025)

This empirical challenge is clearly reflected in the trend of new student enrollment at SMP Qur'an As-Salam over the past five years. Institutional records indicate a consistent decline in both the number of applicants and admitted students, suggesting a weakening public interest in the institution. To provide a clearer overview of this phenomenon, Table 1 presents data on new student admissions at SMP Qur'an As-Salam from 2020 to 2025.

As shown in Table 1, the number of applicants decreased significantly from 146 in 2020 to 82 in 2025, representing a reduction of more than 40 percent within a five-year period. A similar downward trend is observed in the number of admitted students, which declined from 131 to 75 during the same timeframe. Although a slight increase occurred in 2023, this improvement was not sustained in subsequent years, indicating that the decline is not incidental but rather structural in nature.

This persistent decrease in enrollment highlights a shift in community perception and educational preferences toward Islamic boarding schools. It also reinforces the urgency for Islamic educational institutions to strengthen their marketing management practices in order to enhance institutional visibility, rebuild public trust, and remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic educational environment. Consequently, these data provide a strong empirical foundation for examining the implementation of strategic marketing management, particularly through a POAC-based approach, as a means of revitalizing institutional image and student enrollment.

Marketing management in Islamic educational institutions has distinctive characteristics, as it prioritizes value internalization, efficiency, and creativity rather than profit orientation. In contemporary educational contexts, marketing strategies encompass the seven elements of the service marketing mix: product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process (Mutakin et al., 2024).The use of digital platforms, including websites, social media, and online content, provides pesantren with strategic opportunities to promote flagship programs, showcase student achievements, and reach broader audiences (Imroni, 2024).

Although previous studies have discussed marketing practices in Islamic education, limited attention has been given to the integration of digital marketing strategies with Islamic values within the Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling (POAC) framework. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the marketing management of SMP Qur'an As-Salam by examining how POAC-based strategies are implemented to strengthen institutional attractiveness and image. The findings are expected to contribute to Islamic education management literature and offer practical guidance for pesantren in developing sustainable, value-based marketing strategies in the digital era.

2. METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the planning, implementation, and supervision of digital marketing activities at SMP Qur'an Assalam. The focus of the research was to understand the practical application of marketing management strategies within the institution.

Research participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in promotional activities. The key informants consisted of the Deputy Chair of the SMP Qur'an Assalam Foundation, who also serves as the public relations officer, and the Vice Principal for Student Affairs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, including promotional materials and institutional records.

The data were analyzed using qualitative techniques comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This methodological design enabled an in-depth and contextual understanding of the institution's marketing management practices, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced in strengthening its competitiveness within contemporary Islamic education.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Marketing Planning for Islaming Boarding Schools

Planning in marketing management constitutes a fundamental stage that determines the success of institutional strategies, including in Islamic boarding schools (Rohidin & Nugraha, 2025). According to Kotler et al., (2022), marketing planning is a systematic process that involves analyzing market opportunities, setting objectives, formulating strategies, and implementing measurable marketing programs. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, marketing planning extends beyond commercial objectives to encompass da'wah, education, and community empowerment. Consequently, marketing management at SMP Qur'an As-Salam functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a strategic instrument to sustain institutional existence and enhance competitiveness amid growing competition among formal and non-formal educational institutions.

The initial stage of marketing planning at SMP Qur'an As-Salam involves a situation analysis that considers both internal and external factors. Internally, the institution benefits from strengths such as

an integrated curriculum combining formal education with tahfidzul Qur'an programs, dormitory-based character development, and educators with strong pesantren and Islamic higher education backgrounds (Sari et al., 2025). However, several weaknesses persist, including limited technological infrastructure, underutilized social media promotion, and a student admission system that has not been fully digitalized (Apriyanto & Hidayati, 2022). Externally, opportunities arise from increasing parental demand for Qur'an-based and character-oriented education, supported by Ministry of Religious Affairs data indicating growing interest in pesantren-based schools (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023). At the same time, threats emerge from negative media coverage of misconduct cases in certain pesantren and intensified competition among traditional and modern Islamic boarding schools, requiring stronger institutional branding strategies (Hasanah et al., 2025).

Based on this analysis, SMP Qur'an As-Salam has formulated clear short-term and long-term marketing objectives. In the short term, the institution aims to increase new student enrollment by 10–15 percent annually, while its long-term objective is to position the school as a regional center for Qur'anic education that integrates memorization, formal curricula, and Islamic character development. These objectives align with strategic planning principles that emphasize realistic, measurable, and vision-oriented goals (Thoif dan Sudjanto, 2020),

To achieve these objectives, SMP Qur'an As-Salam applies a marketing strategy based on segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP). Market segmentation is conducted using demographic, geographic, and psychographic criteria, focusing on Muslim families with junior high school aged children who prioritize Qur'anic education and Islamic values (Fachri et al., 2022). Targeting encompasses families from middle to lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds as well as middle-upper groups seeking affordable yet high-quality education with Qur'anic added value. Positioning emphasizes the school's identity as a Qur'anic-based formal educational institution with strong Islamic character development, distinguishing it from general schools and traditional pesantren that emphasize classical Islamic texts alone (Hishnuddin & Jazilurrahman, 2025).

The implementation of marketing strategies at SMP Qur'an As-Salam is reflected in the application of the seven elements of the marketing mix (7P). The institution offers an integrated product combining the national curriculum with tahfidzul Qur'an, supported by extracurricular activities such as scouting, Qur'anic arts, and entrepreneurship. Tuition fees are maintained at an affordable level through cross-subsidization and scholarship schemes. The school's location is relatively accessible and supported by essential facilities, although technological resources remain limited. Promotional activities involve community religious events, printed media, and digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, complemented by alumni and parental testimonials. Human resources including teachers, kiai, students, and alumni—play an active role in maintaining the pesantren's positive image. Meanwhile, the admission process remains largely manual but is gradually transitioning toward digitalization, with physical facilities and student achievements serving as tangible indicators of educational quality.

Evaluation and coordination are conducted through regular monthly meetings involving pesantren leaders, administrators, teachers, and students. These meetings function as forums for planning, committee formation, and assessment of marketing programs, reflecting a participatory management approach consistent with the Islamic principle of shura (consultation) (Ikhwan & Qomariyah, 2022). Empirical observations further indicate that pesantren with systematic marketing planning tend to experience stronger institutional growth. Successful examples include Pondok Pesantren Sidogiri and Pondok Pesantren Daar El-Qolam, which have developed strong branding through curriculum specialization and consistent digital promotion (Ikhwan et al., 2025). SMP Qur'an As-Salam has begun adopting similar practices, although limited human resources remain a significant constraint.

Marketing evaluation at SMP Qur'an As-Salam is carried out by monitoring enrollment trends, assessing community responses, and surveying parental satisfaction. These evaluations have generated recommendations for strengthening digital promotion, innovating flagship programs, improving

technological infrastructure, and enhancing staff competencies in digital marketing and public relations. Despite systematic planning efforts, fluctuating enrollment data—particularly the sharp decline in 2025 indicate the need for continuous adaptation (Budiarti & Amin, 2025). In line with Hemsley-Brown, (2023), the sustainability of educational branding depends on responsiveness to market dynamics and societal change. By reinforcing digital promotion, diversifying flagship programs, digitalizing admissions, and strengthening human resource capacity, SMP Qur'an As-Salam has the potential to restore positive enrollment trends and reinforce its reputation as a credible and competitive Qur'anic educational institution (Kartiko & Rohmania, 2025).

3.2. Organizing Marketing In Islamic Boarding Schools

After the planning stage has been established, the next critical function in marketing management is organizing. This function plays a central role in coordinating available resources, both human and non-human, to ensure that marketing strategies are implemented in a systematic, directed, and effective manner (Okolie et al., 2021). Organizing involves structuring various organizational components so that they are integrated and mutually supportive in achieving institutional goals (Yuliana, 2024). In management practice, organizing refers to the process of grouping people, activities, authority, tasks, and responsibilities into a coherent system that operates efficiently and effectively (Nairi, 2024). Through this process, each member of the organization performs roles aligned with their competencies, collectively supporting the achievement of the institution's vision and mission (Sonmez Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020).

From an Islamic perspective, organizing human resources is closely associated with the concept of insan kamil, which views every individual as an amanah entrusted by Allah. Consequently, human resources must be managed wisely, not only in terms of technical skills but also ethical conduct and personal potential, to maximize their contribution to the institution(Hadi & Lari, 2024). In this regard, SMP Qur'an As-Salam assigns personnel based not only on functional needs but also on individual competencies, moral values, and relevance to institutional objectives.

Field findings indicate that organizing in marketing management at SMP Qur'an As-Salam is primarily realized through the formation of a structured new student admissions committee. This committee comprises school leaders, ustadz and ustadzah, administrative staff, and senior students, each with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Teachers serve as academic representatives and information sources for prospective parents, while senior students function as pesantren ambassadors by sharing their learning experiences and daily life in the boarding school environment. Such role distribution ensures that promotional activities are conducted collaboratively and coherently.

The establishment of this committee reflects the principle of departmentalization, where related activities are grouped to enhance coordination and operational efficiency. Beyond managing admissions, the committee is responsible for designing and executing promotional strategies, including brochure distribution, social media management, and the organization of open house and outreach events. In addition, organizing is carried out through collective participation involving teachers, administrators, students, and alumni. Alumni contribute by sharing post-graduation success stories, which are disseminated through official digital platforms to strengthen the pesantren's public image and credibility (Risuhawianto & Yuliana, 2024).

Organizing also encompasses the management of non-human resources, particularly financial allocation. SMP Qur'an As-Salam designates specific budgets to support marketing activities such as digital content production, media publications, and the hosting of inter-school events. Adequate budgeting is viewed as a fundamental managerial requirement, as marketing initiatives cannot be implemented optimally without sufficient financial support (Yuwanda et al., 2023). Overall, organizing at SMP Qur'an As-Salam emphasizes empowerment, participation, and clarity of roles. This approach minimizes task overlap, enhances coordination, and fosters a sense of shared responsibility among organizational members, aligning with contemporary management perspectives on empowerment and organizational effectiveness. Moreover, the structured and transparent organizational system

contributes to positive public perception and strengthens community trust in the pesantren as a professionally managed Islamic educational institution.

3.3. Implementation of Marketing in Islamic Boarding Scholls

Implementation represents a pivotal management function that follows planning and organizing, serving as the stage where strategies are translated into concrete actions. It refers to the mobilization of human and non-human resources to ensure that predetermined plans are executed effectively (Siagian, 2010). Terry (2006) emphasizes that implementation constitutes the core of management, as it is through this process that strategic ideas are tested in practice. Within Islamic educational institutions, marketing implementation is not merely directed toward increasing student enrollment, but also toward strengthening Islamic values, reinforcing institutional image, and fostering community empowerment.

At SMP Qur'an As-Salam, marketing implementation is conducted through a combination of digital and direct promotional strategies. Digital promotion utilizes official social media platforms, the school website, and messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram to disseminate information on student activities, flagship programs, and testimonials from parents and alumni. This approach reflects digital marketing principles that prioritize online engagement as a means of enhancing institutional visibility and public interest (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Alongside digital efforts, direct promotion remains an integral component of marketing implementation. Activities such as brochure distribution, safari dakwah to mosques, outreach programs to elementary schools, and parenting sessions through religious gatherings are regularly conducted. These initiatives illustrate relationship marketing practices, which emphasize building long-term emotional and spiritual connections between the pesantren and parents (John & De Villiers, 2024). Through sustained interaction, the pesantren strengthens trust, loyalty, and parental involvement in the educational process (Shams et al., 2024).

Student participation also plays a significant role in implementation. Members of OSIS are actively involved in welcoming prospective students, sharing personal learning experiences, and supporting promotional activities during open house events. This strategy aligns with Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory, which underscores the importance of consistent messaging delivered by multiple stakeholders to establish a strong institutional image (Belch & Belch, 2018). The visibility of confident and high-achieving students who embody Islamic values provides authentic representations that enhance parental trust.

Marketing implementation at SMP Qur'an As-Salam is further reflected in its structured admissions system, which adopts a multi-wave enrollment model. Each wave is assigned specific targets and selection criteria based on applicants' academic abilities, interests, and talents. Early admission waves prioritize high-achieving candidates, while subsequent waves offer broader access to the community. This approach demonstrates demand management in educational administration by balancing enrollment capacity with quality assurance (Abidin, 2020).

Operationally, the admissions committee functions through clear task distribution based on individual competencies, including digital content creation, registration management, outreach coordination, and social media handling. This reflects participatory leadership, where pesantren leaders actively guide, support, and resolve challenges through musyawarah or collective deliberation (Kemal et al., 2023). From an Islamic standpoint, promotional efforts are understood as tahadduts bin ni'mah, a form of da'wah that communicates institutional achievements as expressions of gratitude rather than self-promotion (QS. Adh-Dhuha [93]:11; Labib, 2022).

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of marketing management at SMP Qur'an As-Salam is systematic and inclusive. The synergy between digital and direct promotion, combined with strong leadership and stakeholder involvement, enables the institution to expand its reach while maintaining close emotional ties with parents and the wider community. Through this integrated approach, SMP Qur'an As-Salam has strengthened its position as a credible, adaptive, and competitive Islamic educational institution in the contemporary educational landscape (Zulkarnain, 2023).

3.4. Evaluating and Implication of the Marketing Management

Evaluation, or controlling, constitutes a fundamental management function that ensures marketing strategies are aligned with institutional objectives and implemented effectively within Islamic educational settings. Controlling involves establishing performance standards, monitoring actual outcomes, and implementing corrective measures when deviations arise, thereby enabling organizations to achieve their goals optimally. In educational marketing management, evaluation functions not only to measure promotional effectiveness but also to assess the degree of public trust generated through marketing activities (Iffah & Fauziyah, 2019).

At SMP Qur'an As-Salam, marketing evaluation is conducted systematically at the end of each student admission cycle. The evaluation focuses on three primary dimensions: service quality delivered to the community, the effectiveness of promotional activities, and consistency between implementation and predetermined plans. This evaluative approach reflects the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasize continuous improvement through stakeholder involvement, including school leaders, teachers, students, and parents (Afrin & Mohiuddin, 2024).

Empirical findings from interviews and observations indicate that promotional activities such as mosque-based safari dakwah, school outreach programs, brochure distribution, and social media engagement were positively received by the community. Nevertheless, a decline in enrollment compared to previous years suggests that these strategies have not yet fully translated into increased student numbers. This gap indicates that while promotional visibility exists, its persuasive impact on enrollment decisions remains limited.

Evaluation is further reinforced through internal committee meetings held after each promotional phase. These forums serve as reflective spaces to identify constraints such as limited promotional funding, underutilization of digital platforms, and inconsistent parental participation. Such reflections align with feedback control theory, which emphasizes the use of performance data as the basis for strategic adjustments and managerial decision (Kotler et al., 2023).

From a service quality perspective, SMP Qur'an As-Salam is perceived positively by prospective parents, particularly in terms of responsiveness and clarity of information. This finding is significant, as service quality plays a critical role in educational marketing and parental decision-making processes. One parent explicitly stated that the institution's prompt and courteous communication strongly influenced their enrollment decision.

The evaluation mechanism also incorporates parental engagement through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which outlines shared responsibilities and expectations. This instrument functions as a form of accountability and quality assurance, reinforcing relationship marketing principles that prioritize long-term trust and collaboration between institutions and stakeholders (John & De Villiers, 2024).

From an Islamic viewpoint, evaluation and controlling resonate with the concept of hisbah, emphasizing supervision and accountability to ensure alignment with Sharia objectives. This principle is grounded in QS. Al-Hasyr [59]:18, which underscores the importance of reflection and responsibility in preparing for the future. Consequently, evaluation at SMP Qur'an As-Salam serves not only managerial purposes but also moral and spiritual accountability.

Overall, while the marketing strategies implemented at SMP Qur'an As-Salam have not yet resulted in increased enrollment, they have contributed to strengthening the institution's image and public trust. Periodic evaluations have enabled administrators to identify supporting factors such as student involvement in promotion and obstacles requiring improvement, particularly in digital outreach. Thus, the institution's marketing management can be categorized as structured, reflective, and value-oriented.

The findings of this study reveal that parents generally express high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education at SMP Qur'an As-Salam. This satisfaction reflects the synergy among school leaders, teachers, students, and parents in developing an educational ecosystem that aligns with

societal expectations. Such synergy is facilitated by visionary leadership and collective participation in marketing and image-building initiatives.

SMP Qur'an As-Salam implements an integrated educational model that combines Islamic studies with general academic subjects. This approach ensures that graduates are both religiously grounded and academically competitive within the national education system. Consequently, the institution's marketing strategy emphasizes internal quality enhancement as the foundation of its external image, positioning educational substance as the core of promotional credibility.

The practical implications of marketing management are evident in improved teacher competencies, structured quality assurance mechanisms, and students' mastery of Qur'anic recitation through the Yanbu'a method. The implementation of 13 quality assurance indicators further strengthens institutional standards. Graduate achievements ranging from acceptance into reputable schools to scholarship attainment and community leadership roles demonstrate that quality-driven marketing is more sustainable than image-based promotion alone.

Moreover, the development of adaptive extracurricular programs, including tahfiz, tilawah, Islamic arts, and information technology, serves as a strategic differentiation tool. These programs enhance the institution's perceived value and respond to contemporary parental expectations, reinforcing an innovation-based marketing approach rather than mere promotional exposure.

From an Islamic educational philosophy, the institution's marketing practices align with maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, which prioritize communal welfare and holistic human development. The Qur'anic command Iqra' (QS. Al-'Alaq: 1–5) underpins this approach, emphasizing intellectual growth, critical reflection, and skill development as integral components of Islamic education. Accordingly, marketing is viewed as inseparable from the mission of nurturing insān kāmil.

This study also contributes to existing literature by highlighting distinctions from prior research. Unlike Western contexts where marketing may divert resources from academic priorities (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016). SMP Qur'an As-Salam demonstrates a balanced model that integrates promotion with quality enhancement. Additionally, while external market responsiveness is important, this study underscores the significance of internal collaboration as social capital in building public trust.

In conclusion, the marketing management model at SMP Qur'an As-Salam represents a hybrid approach that integrates internal quality strengthening with adaptive market engagement. By embedding Islamic values across planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation, the institution sustains credibility, competitiveness, and moral integrity amid the challenges of educational globalization.

4. CONCLUSION

Qur'an As-Salam has been systematically implemented in accordance with the POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling) framework. The planning stage is reflected in clearly formulated objectives aimed at increasing public interest and institutional trust through the promotion of flagship programs, including Qur'anic memorization (tahfidz), character education, and the integration of religious and general curricula. Furthermore, a participatory management structure involving school leaders, teachers, students, and parents supports the effective execution of marketing strategies through both conventional and digital promotional channels. These collective efforts have contributed to strengthening the school's public image as a credible, integrated, and community-responsive Qur'an-based educational institution.

For future development, SMP Qur'an As-Salam is encouraged to further enhance its digital marketing initiatives by optimizing social media utilization, producing more creative and engaging content, and maintaining a consistently updated and informative official website. Future studies may investigate the quantitative effects of digital marketing innovations on student enrollment trends or conduct comparative analyses of POAC-based marketing practices across different Islamic educational institutions. Such research would contribute to the advancement of Islamic education management

literature and offer practical insights for developing sustainable and competitive marketing strategies in the digital era.

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