

Community-Based and Digital Marketing Strategies in Early Childhood Islamic Education: A Case Study at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo implements strategic educational marketing to increase new student enrolment amid growing competition, particularly in religious-based early childhood education. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The study examines the planning, implementation, and evaluation of marketing strategies, involving school principals, teachers, staff, and parents. Findings reveal that a combination of community-based outreach and digital promotion—especially through word-of-mouth and social media—has led to a 16% increase in student enrolment over the past two years. These strategies also helped enhance the institution's public image and parental trust. The study provides practical recommendations for educational institutions seeking to improve enrolment through adaptive, low-cost, and community-integrated marketing approaches.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational marketing management has a very crucial function in determining the success of an educational institution in attracting new students. (Mukaromah & Fadly, 2022) Educational marketing in early childhood education institutions, especially in RA (Raudhatul Athfal), does not only focus on the commercial aspect, but more on how the institution is able to promote the educational values offered to the community. (Jannah et al., 2021) In the context of RA, educational marketing aims to increase the attractiveness of the institution, so that parents are interested in enrolling their children. However, in reality, many RAs still experience difficulties in achieving the target of accepting new students every year

Marketing management contributes to understanding the needs and expectations of students for educational institutions, while also recognizing new opportunities in the realm of the education market. (Mukhtar, 2017) With a deep understanding of the market, educational institutions can design educational programs that suit the needs of the market, increasing their competitiveness. Additionally, the role of marketing management helps educational institutions to respond to changing educational

environments and trends, allowing them to remain relevant and adaptive to future challenges.(Wijaya, 2022, p. 29)

One of the factors causing the gap between expectations and reality is the lack of understanding and implementation of effective marketing management in educational institutions.(Malik & Saputra, 2024) Ideally, RAs should have a marketing strategy that is structured and oriented to market needs, especially in understanding parents' preferences for early childhood education. A number of RA institutions compete to attract the attention of parents and the local community so that they choose the institution as a place to educate early childhood children.(Raya, 2016). Ideology and values in society are one of the important factors in the competition of education marketing. Ideology encompasses the values, beliefs, and outlook on life held by people, which can influence their preferences for certain types of education.(Dacholfany, 2017) For example, in a society that has strong ties to certain religious values or traditions, schools that conform to that ideology are usually prioritized.(Kholil et al., 2024)

Theoretically, education marketing management should involve several strategic steps such as market segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP), as well as the use of promotional media that are in accordance with the target market.(Armstrong et al., 2014, pp. 77–78) In practice, many RA institutions have not implemented these concepts to the fullest. In today's digital era, social media should be one of the main marketing tools that can be used by educational institutions to increase the admission of new students.

This reality is inversely proportional to the development of the world of education in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, where the use of technology and digital media has become a necessity in marketing products and services. According to Kotler & Keller, marketing strategies that do not adapt to technological developments will face difficulties in reaching consumers, in this case the parents of prospective students. Educational institutions, including RAs, should be able to utilize social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as effective means of communication and promotion. In addition, another obstacle faced in marketing management in RA is the lack of synergy between institution managers and parents in promoting educational institutions. Parents who are satisfied with the educational services in RA should be able to become effective promotional agents through word-of-mouth marketing. In this case, educational institutions that are able to adjust their curriculum, values, and teaching approaches in accordance with the ideology of the local community can gain a competitive advantage. In addition, institutions that can optimize the use of digital assistance can win the competition. For example, in areas where the majority of the population is Muslim, Islamic boarding schools or madrasas that offer digitization of education based on Islamic values tend to be more popular. This is also true in societies that emphasize education based on nationalism, freedom of thought, or technological innovation.

This condition attracts the attention of researchers, especially in the context of how marketing management is applied in RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak. Researchers wanted to know what strategies these institutions use to promote their educational services, as well as how they communicate with the community to attract parents. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak seems to have found an effective and relevant approach to the needs of today's society. The educational institution has an A accreditation predicate and has a large number of students(*Tabel Informasi RA & Madrasah Rekap Satuan Pendidikan*, n.d.). RA Muslimat 016 Mayak has a vision "The realization of an early childhood education institution that is able to form an Islamic generation with an educational sunnah wal jamaah perspective that is educative, religious, humanist, and techno. From this vision, it can be seen that this institution carries a certain ideology. In addition, even though the location of the educational institution is not in the middle of the city, it has received high public trust with evidence of a stable number of students from year to year.

2. METHODS

In order to achieve a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the research focus, the researcher chose to use a qualitative approach with the type of case study. The definition of a qualitative approach according to Bogdan and Taylor is a research method that is descriptive in nature and uses

written or spoken words to describe people and behaviors observed. Guba and Lincoln (in Moleong) identify the (Moleong, 2021, p. 8) characteristics of qualitative research, including natural setting, the role of the researcher as the main instrument, inductive data analysis, application of grounded theory, focus on description, and more emphasis on process than outcome.

The type of research used in this study is a case study, which is a series of scientific activities that are carried out carefully, in-depth, and in detail related to a program, event, or activity, either at the level of individuals, groups of people, institutions, or organizations. This research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of these events. The hallmark of qualitative research lies in the active involvement of the researcher in observation, since the role of the researcher is the one that determines the entire research scenario. Researchers here are key instruments. (Sugiyono, 2008, p. 79) in recording words, collecting data through the interview process, observing research objects and collecting documents in the field and always using research ethics. (Spradly, 1997, p. 98) The location of the research is at the RA Muslimat 016 Mayak Ponorogo institution.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Education marketing management is generally divided into 3 (three) stages, starting from the preparation of planning, then continuing the implementation of marketing, and then the evaluation of the marketing activities that have been carried out. The planning stage is the process of preparing an educational marketing program and organizing the parties involved. Furthermore, the implementation stage is the implementation of a plan that has included identifying the target market to the use of marketing mix and media used in marketing. The last stage is the evaluation stage which is a stage to find out the challenges/obstacles that occur during the implementation, and is the initial stage of preparing a follow-up plan for the following year.

3.1. Analysis of Education Marketing Planning at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo

Marketing planning in educational institutions is a complex and strategic process to achieve the goal of increasing the number of students. In this context, marketing planning not only focuses on delivering information, but also includes market analysis, goal setting, as well as the implementation of a comprehensive marketing strategy. To understand how the stages of marketing planning are carried out by RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo, it is important to juxtapose it with the theories of marketing planning in education.

The first stage in marketing planning is situation analysis, which is understanding the internal and external conditions of the institution. In the context of RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo, RA management conducts a situation analysis by identifying their main target market, namely parents who want Islamic-based education with a modern approach. They also evaluate the external environment, including demographic conditions, the needs of the surrounding community, and challenges in attracting students in an era of increasingly fierce educational competition. In Kotler's educational marketing theory, segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) (Kotler & Keller, 2008, pp. 227–246) is a key step. Market segmentation at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo is carried out by dividing the target market based on parents' preferences for religion-based education and Islamic character. After segmentation, they target parents who are more open to the concept of modern early childhood education based on Islam. The position taken by RA is as an educational institution that combines traditional approaches with modern technology to meet the needs of education in the digital era.

The development of marketing strategies at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo involves a combination of traditional and digital approaches. Marketing strategies must be comprehensive and adaptive to market needs. This RA utilizes direct promotional activities through socialization in the surrounding environment, open house activities, and workshops for parents of prospective students. On the other hand, they also leverage social media to reach a wider target at a cost-efficient rate. One of the important elements in the marketing strategy of RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak is promotion through word of mouth, which according to Bancin (Bancin, 2021), is one of the most effective forms of

promotion in education marketing. Guardians, both active and alumni, play a significant role in recommending these RAs to their families and communities. Positive testimonials from guardians improve the institution's reputation, build trust, and create a continuous, natural promotion cycle.

Marketing management in educational institutions is inseparable from budget management. Based on an interview with the head of RA, one of the main obstacles faced by RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak is the limited marketing budget. To address this, they opt for efficient and low-cost promotional media, such as social media. This budget management is in line with marketing theory by Kotler, which emphasizes the importance of efficient allocation of resources in achieving marketing goals without sacrificing the quality of education. In addition to direct and digital promotion, RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak is also involved in community activities to strengthen their brand image. Involvement in social and community activities can strengthen the institution's relationship with the community and increase parental loyalty. Activities such as parenting seminars, recitations, and other social activities help RA build a positive reputation as an educational institution that cares about children's social and spiritual development.

Promotions at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak are not only carried out during the registration period, but also continuous throughout the year. This is important to maintain public awareness of the existence of RA and its flagship programs. According to Kotler, continuous marketing is one of the important strategies in maintaining a reputation and attracting potential learners consistently. (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 249) In addition to active guardians, RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak alumni also play an important role in promoting word of mouth. Alumni who are satisfied with the education they received will voluntarily recommend this RA to their families and communities. Alumni are an important asset in education marketing, as their testimonials have a high credibility value in the eyes of prospective students' parents.

RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak also improved facilities as part of its promotion strategy. The quality of facilities is one of the factors considered by parents in choosing an educational institution for their children. By improving facilities, such as comfortable classrooms, internet access, and educational aids, this RA is able to attract more prospective students. Strong communication with parents is an important element in the marketing strategy of RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak. They regularly hold meetings and activities with parents to build closer relationships and get input. According to marketing theory by Kotler, effective communication with stakeholders can increase parental loyalty and trust in educational institutions. Finally, RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak emphasized the importance of character education in each of their promotions. This emphasis is in line with the theory of educational marketing by Kotler and Keller, which states that character-value-based differentiation can be a major attraction for prospective learners. (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 301) Islamic character education is one of the main selling points promoted by this RA, so that they succeed in attracting the interest of parents who prioritize moral education for their children.

The stages of marketing planning carried out by RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo reflect a comprehensive strategic approach, starting from situation analysis to evaluation of marketing results. By juxtaposing this stage with the theories of marketing planning in education, it can be seen that RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak has succeeded in formulating a marketing strategy that is in accordance with market needs and internal conditions of the institution. Strategies involving digital promotion, word of mouth, and product quality improvement have contributed significantly to increasing the number of students.

3.2. Analysis of Education Marketing Implementing at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo

The implementation of marketing at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo includes strategic steps in attracting the interest of prospective students through a structured approach. Based on interviews, this RA has carried out several stages of marketing implementation that can be analyzed through the theory of educational marketing planning. Theories such as Segmentation, Targeting,

Positioning (STP) to the use of marketing mix (Arifudin & et al, 2020, p. 109) can help understand this implementation process more deeply. The analysis of these stages is as follows.

a. Segmentation

The first stage in marketing implementation is segmentation, which is separating the market based on different characteristics. In the context of RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo, segmentation is carried out by dividing the market into several groups, such as parents who want faith-based education with a modern approach, as well as families from areas around and outside Ponorogo. This segmentation allows institutions to focus more on offering programs that are relevant to specific market needs. Based on the theory of market segmentation in education, proper segmentation helps institutions convey messages that are appropriate to each target group.

b. Targeting

After segmentation, the next stage is targeting, which is choosing the most potential market segment to reach. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo targets parents who prioritize Islamic character education for early childhood children. This target market is identified through a direct-to-family promotional approach, both through social media and community activities. According to Kotler's theory of educational marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 227), effective targeting involves a deep understanding of the preferences of potential learners and parents, so that marketing strategies can be tailored to their needs.

c. Positioning

After determining the segment and target market, the next stage is positioning, which is determining how the institution will be placed in the minds of prospective parents and the community. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo positions itself as an educational institution that not only emphasizes on academic aspects, but also on the formation of strong Islamic character. Based on the positioning theory by Kotler and Keller (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 291), clear and consistent positioning helps differentiate an institution from competitors and creates a positive perception in the eyes of the public. This RA utilizes this approach to attract the interest of parents who care about moral and religious education.

In addition to STP (Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning) marketing theory, RA also uses a marketing mix (Arifudin & et al, 2020, pp. 37-47) in carrying out its marketing. The marketing mix used includes:

a. Product

In educational marketing, products refer to educational programs offered by institutions. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo offers early childhood education based on Islam with a modern curriculum approach. This superior product is promoted as a combination of religious education and social skills required in the modern era. Educational products must be relevant to the needs of prospective students and parents in order to attract interest in enrollment.

b. Price

Pricing in the education marketing mix refers to the costs charged for the education provided. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak sets affordable costs to ensure accessibility for families from various economic backgrounds. Pricing in education marketing must consider the balance between the value provided and the ability of prospective students to pay. This RA seems to understand this by setting competitive costs without sacrificing quality.

c. Place

The element of place in the education marketing mix refers to the location and accessibility of the educational institution. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak is located in a strategic area that is easily accessible to the local community, as well as close to religious centers, such as mosques. A strategic location can increase the visibility and accessibility of the institution, making it easier for parents to make the decision to enroll their children. (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 86)



Gambar Lokasi RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak

d. Promotion

Promotion is an important element in the marketing mix that involves communication with potential learners and parents. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak uses various promotional tools, including social media, community activities, and word of mouth from parents of students and alumni. The theory of promotion in education states that promotion must be informative, persuasive, and educate prospective students and parents about the values offered by the institution. This RA maximizes the potential of social media to reach more prospective students and provide a clear picture of their programs.

The stages of marketing implementation at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo include a comprehensive strategy, starting from segmentation, targeting, to positioning, as well as the implementation of a marketing mix that includes products, prices, venues, and promotions. By adopting marketing planning theories in education, this RA succeeds in attracting the interest of prospective students and increasing the number of new student enrollments every year. Digital and community-based marketing strategies, as well as promotion through word of mouth and parental involvement, are key factors in the success of marketing implementation in this school.

3.3. Analysis of the Impact of Educational Marketing Management in Increasing Student Admissions at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo

The implementation of marketing management at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo shows a significant impact in increasing the number of new students every year. The success of these strategies can be analyzed using marketing theories in education, which highlight various important aspects of designing, implementing, and evaluating effective marketing strategies in educational institutions. Some of the impacts that can be seen from marketing management that have been implemented are as follows.

a. Increase in the number of new students

One of the real impacts of the implementation of marketing management at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo is the increase in the number of new students. Based on interviews (I. Mar'atul Muflichati, personal communication, June 10, 2024), this RA recorded a significant increase in the number of registrations compared to previous years. Successful marketing in education should result in increased demand for educational services, which is evident from the increase in enrollment. A well-planned marketing strategy, including promotion through social media, word of mouth, and community activities, has achieved the expected targets.

b. Changes in Student Demographics

In addition to the increase in numbers, there are also changes in the demographics of students. RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo has managed to attract more students from outside the region, an indication that their marketing strategy has managed to reach a wider target market. Market segmentation theory in education by Kotler (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 86) emphasizes the importance of identifying different market segments based on needs and preferences, as well as directing marketing messages accordingly. This demographic change shows that these RAs have succeeded in conveying their value of excellence to a wider segment.

c. Impact on Institutional Performance

The increase in the admission of new students has a positive impact on the overall performance of the institution. With the increasing number of students, RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak can increase income which can then be used to improve the quality of educational facilities and services. Effective marketing not only increases the number of learners, but also improves the image and reputation of the institution in the long run.

d. Improving Reputation of the Public

The implementation of a consistent and effective marketing strategy also has an impact on improving the reputation of RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak in the eyes of the public. This good reputation is one of the important factors in attracting the interest of prospective students. The reputation theory in education marketing in Mundir states that a positive reputation can increase public trust and preference for educational institutions, thereby strengthening its position in the market. (Mundir, 2015)

Based on marketing theories in education, the impact of marketing management at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo has proven to be effective in increasing the admission of new students. The marketing strategies implemented, including the use of social media, participation in community activities, word of mouth promotion, and the development of personalized promotional materials, showed significant results. The success of this strategy not only increases the number of students, but also strengthens RA's reputation in the community, builds good relationships with parents and alumni, and improves the overall performance of the institution.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that education marketing management at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak Ponorogo plays an important role in increasing the admission of new students. The marketing planning process is carried out in an inclusive manner by involving all staff, teachers, and foundation administrators. In this planning, the institution develops a strategy that prioritizes Islamic vision and values that are relevant to the needs of the community, as well as incorporating modern promotional aspects. The implementation of marketing in RA has succeeded in attracting the interest of parents through community-based marketing strategies and direct communication, such as *word-of-mouth* from parents and alumni. The use of social media is also an effective means of introducing RA's flagship programs to the wider community. In addition, RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak also held promotional activities such as *an open house* that provided opportunities for prospective parents to get to know the vision and programs of the institution more closely. Regular annual evaluations of marketing results ensure the effectiveness of the strategy and allow for adjustments accordingly to changing needs. The result of this strategic marketing approach can be seen from the stable number of new student admissions at RA Muslimat NU 016 Mayak, which reflects the success of the institution in building trust and a positive image in the surrounding community.

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