School Branding: Strategies to Increase Interest Among New Students in Private Schools

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ABSTRACT	Published Online: August 20, 2025

The purpose of this research is to analyze educational marketing management through school branding in an effort to increase the number of new students, particularly in private schools. Educational marketing management through school branding is a crucial strategy for private schools to enhance their enrollment numbers.

Changes in student admissions, especially after the implementation of zoning by the government, have triggered intense competition in attracting prospective students. This impact is felt by private schools, which must work harder to attract new students in order to improve their reputation within the community. As a challenge, private schools are required to build sustainable appeal to remain the preferred choice amidst fierce competition. The success of a school in attracting community interest is often related to the uniqueness it offers, the positive reputation it has built, and the distinguishing attractiveness compared to others.

In this article, a descriptive qualitative method will be employed to deeply analyze marketing strategies and their impact on increasing student enrollment in privae schools. The results of this study emphasize that the community's trust in a school is significantly determined by the branding that is marketed to the public, leading educational service users to consider the school as their primary choice. Additionally, the paper outlines contextual marketing plans and strategies that align with current technological developments, with the aim of increasing the number of students in private schools.

The literature highlights four key activities in educational marketing management through school branding to boost new student enrollment in private schools. These activities begin with school marketing planning, which includes the development of the school identity, the development and implementation of content strategies, promotional activities, and the management of relationships and feedback.

KEYWORDS: Educational marketing management; branding of private schools; new student enrollment.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive educational landscape, private schools face significant challenges in attracting new students (Levy, 2013). With numerous options available, schools must not only offer a quality curriculum but also build a strong and appealing image. This highlights the importance of the concept of school branding, which is the process of creating and managing a school's identity that can influence the perceptions of prospective students and their parents (Elmore, 1996).

Education is experiencing dynamic changes over time. These changes reflect that education is always adapting to the needs of society and the complexities of the modern world. This adaptation includes changes in curriculum, learning technologies, teaching methods, assessment, and other dimensions. The goal of these adjustments is to ensure that the education system becomes more effective and relevant to current societal demands. Nowadays, we observe a phenomenon where new schools, especially private ones, are emerging with comprehensive facilities, triggering competition between newly established institutions and long-established private schools. This situation creates a dilemma where every school strives to create a positive image in the eyes of the public. To strengthen this image, schools need to

implement various strategies to introduce themselves to the public (Syukur, 2021).

Today, every business organization, including educational institutions, needs to possess specific skills to build and manage its image to operate effectively and optimally. Purwanto emphasizes that organizational image, in the context of institutional strategy as management, is closely related to how the public or society perceives that organization (Asfar et al., 2020). The enhancement of a positive image can be reinforced and expanded through the utilization of advancements in science and technology, particularly with the growth of the internet, which has become a primary driver in current developments (Hasanah, 2017).

In recent years, significant changes have occurred in private educational institutions following the issuance of the zoning policy by the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding the admission of new students. This phenomenon includes intense competition in attracting the interest of prospective students, particularly among private schools. This situation has a profound impact, especially on lesser-known private schools, prompting them to enhance their recruitment efforts. The challenge faced by private schools is to build appeal or distinctive elements that keep them as the top choice for the community. Successful schools in this regard generally possess unique characteristics, a positive image in the eyes of the public, and robust selling points (Sairin, 2011).

Educational service marketing, which was previously considered outdated due to its emphasis on business aspects and profit orientation, is now being conducted in a more open and transparent manner. In the context of a school's education, marketing is viewed as a social and managerial process aimed at fulfilling needs and desires through the creation of valuable educational services, as well as facilitating exchanges with others within the educational domain. Therefore, marketing is considered an integral part of school operations, aimed at supporting the delivery of educational services (Wijaya, 2016).

Educational marketing management plays a vital role in the sustainability of an educational institution, primarily focusing on understanding and meeting the needs and desires of consumers, in this case, the community. This demands educational institutions to possess competitive capabilities in a competitive environment (Opan Arifudin, Rahman Tanjung, Ifah Khadijah et al., 2020). The increasing number of emerging schools, both public and private, has opened up broader competitive spaces. Objectively, this may create difficulties for the community in determining suitable educational institutions.

In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, school marketing strategies can integrate the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Advancements in ICT provide new options that drive rapid changes in society, including in the field of education. Marketing becomes a tool for educational institutions to face challenges and seize opportunities from the Fourth Industrial Revolution to keep pace with developments (MY et al., 2022).

Branding strategies for private schools to increase the number of new students involve enhancing quality, particularly in fostering curiosity and creativity. School leaders are expected to design competitive marketing strategies by considering the characteristics of students through anthropological approaches and segmentation, as well as formulating strategies aligned with the school's mission and vision. To achieve competitive advantage, the educational programs offered must support students' talents and interests, both in academic achievements and extracurricular activities. Involving students in various competitions can boost their confidence and competitive abilities (Nur Sekreningsih & Mia Juliana, 2021).

A crucial asset for the long-term and sustainable success of an institution or organization is the trust and image built in the eyes of educational service users. Building this image requires deliberate efforts to create positive impressions. One important task for institutions or organizations is to identify the image they want to create in the public's perception so that it can be directed according to expectations (Soemirat, S. & Ardianto, 2017). Creating a positive school image involves providing information to service users about the services offered, so that their experiences can shape important perceptions in the decision-making process regarding school selection. To attract interest, schools need to consider ways to grab attention through the creation of impressive and appealing images (Hidayat, A. & Machali, 2012).

Image refers to the perception or impression held by the public about an object based on their experiences and understanding, which then becomes the basis of trust. When the object in question is a school, the image formed encompasses the community's attention and views towards that school, which are then widely communicated to the public. The strength of communication reinforces the school's image in society. Even after an image has been established, efforts must continue to maintain and inform it, as an individual's experience with a school may differ from others' experiences at a given time (Kotler, 2008; Kotler, P., & Keller, 2016).

To meet the satisfaction levels of educational service users, schools must focus on optimal service delivery, including aspects of the school's physical appearance, available facilities, and staff who prioritize customer satisfaction. When these actions are consistently implemented, they will have a tangible impact on customers, creating positive impressions of the school. In efforts to attract community interest and build a positive image, several elements identified by Alma serve as foundational in shaping the school's image, including: the service from teachers and staff, the physical condition of the buildings, academic activities, religious activities, arts, extracurricular activities, promotions through print or electronic media, the

organization of exhibitions or events, school publications, fees, alumni, library facilities, laboratories, and the environment or location of the school (Alma, 2009).

Another factor challenging the existence of private schools is relatively limited financial support compared to public schools, which receive greater government funding. In contrast, private schools rely more on funds from parents. This naturally leads to varying quality among private schools, depending on the economic status of students' parents. The community contributions received by schools necessitate that private institutions demonstrate good quality to gain trust and recognition from parents.

Based on the background provided regarding educational marketing management and showcasing school strengths, it is essential to analyze in-depth how effectively school strategies can increase the quantity of new students each year. This research aims to understand the contribution of educational marketing management through school branding to the increase in the number of new students in private schools. The study brings significant benefits from two perspectives: theoretical and practical. In terms of theoretical benefits, the research findings are expected to contribute to the development of knowledge related to educational management, particularly in the application of marketing management and branding theories as strategies in the educational context. These theoretical benefits include enhancing knowledge that will enrich scientific literature, providing valuable contributions, and serving as a reference for future research in this field. Additionally, from a practical standpoint, the findings of this research are anticipated to serve as a guide for educational institutions and related parties aiming to improve their institutional marketing through the implementation of educational marketing management and branding strategies.

METHODOLOGY
This article employs a literature review approach to delve deeper into the research topic under investigation. The process begins with searching for relevant articles related to the research topic through references, data sources from books, and articles in scholarly journals that are connected to the core issue. These data are then analyzed through critical thinking, considering the perspectives of experts, and interpreting the information contained within them. This research is a series of activities focused on data collection from various library sources, including reading, note-taking, and managing research materials (Sugiyono, 2010). The purpose of this literature review is to understand the existing level of knowledge regarding the topic, identify gaps or voids in the current knowledge, and design a solid theoretical framework to support the upcoming research. From this perspective, the researcher believes that human "behavior" is not merely an automatic and mechanical response to stimuli, as suggested by the behaviorist view. Instead, human actions are the result of choices made "consciously," influenced by

perception, interpretation, and specific factors (Kusumastuti A. & Khoiron, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Marketing Strategy
Strategic planning is an essential activity to clarify the future direction of an organization. Therefore, it is important to develop a coherent foundation for decision-making and to establish priorities for improving the performance of the school organization (Susar et al., 2022). A marketing strategy is a planned and integrated approach in the domain of marketing products and services. Simply put, a marketing strategy encompasses a series of objectives, policies, and guidelines that direct marketing activities of products and services toward optimal results. It involves thorough thinking to achieve specific targets and maximize the success of marketing goods or services. In his explanation, Kotler (2000:93) describes that marketing strategy is the main foundation for all marketing activities and serves as the basis for achieving marketing goals. This includes decision-making related to the company's marketing costs. Winardi (2001:93) further adds that a company's marketing strategy involves a combination of various marketing elements to achieve the established goals.

In broad terms, a marketing strategy is a series of directed steps aimed at achieving specific targets. It involves creative and innovative thinking to face both internal and external changes that may impact the interests and future of the company itself. One common marketing strategy is the marketing mix. The marketing mix includes strategic planning and the delivery of products or services that meet the needs of specific market segments, aimed at attracting consumers and stimulating purchases. According to Kotler (2000:13), marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals or groups obtain the products and values they need and desire through exchange with others.

Basic Concepts of Educational Marketing
Education is an effort to develop individuals within society. Etymologically, the meaning of education is the process of developing individual capabilities and strengths. Without education, society in general will live in regression, leading to moral decline (Susar et al., 2024).

To enhance educational marketing, a basic concept of educational marketing refers to the marketing process as a system that involves planning, pricing, promoting, and distributing goods and services that meet the needs of both existing and prospective buyers. On the other hand, education, as a service product, is immaterial but can meet consumer needs through interaction between educational service providers and their users. This interaction does not result in the transfer of rights or ownership. In the context of educational marketing, marketing is a social and managerial process aimed at fulfilling needs and desires through the creation of offerings, value exchanges, and valuable

educational products with others within the educational sphere (Wahyudi, 2018).

The concept of educational marketing includes six long-established marketing concepts that can be applied in the context of educational marketing.

The first concept is the "production concept," which emphasizes high efficiency and wide distribution in educational institutions. Here, demand exceeds supply, making marketing play a less dominant role. The focus is on improving production and distribution efficiency. This concept is generally applied by educational institutions in remote areas or with limited access.

The second concept is the "product concept," where educational institutions strive to produce high-quality educational services. Managers believe that consumers tend to choose quality products, resulting in a balance between supply and demand. The focus is on product quality, with the belief that consumers are more interested in the best quality for their investments. Organizations are responsible for continuously improving product quality to attract and retain customers. This is typically applied by educational institutions with a high commitment to quality, such as those with accreditation or superior international standards.

The third concept is the "selling concept," where educational institutions prioritize increasing sales volume. Management focuses on boosting sales volume through intensive sales and promotional activities. In this concept, marketing efforts are made to align offerings with demand. This approach assumes that consumers make purchasing decisions based on efforts to increase interest in the product. It includes understanding that consumers generally will not purchase services if they are not deemed important. Therefore, efforts are needed to encourage purchases through various initiatives and marketing tools. Management is responsible for organizing sales teams focused on attracting and retaining customers. This concept is commonly applied by educational institutions that offer various types of educational services, such as international classes, tahfiz classes, or foreign language classes.

The fourth concept is "marketing," which emphasizes that the key to the success of educational institutions is their ability to understand and meet market needs and desires more effectively and efficiently than competitors. This concept includes three basic principles: planning and execution focused on customer needs and desires, good coordination among marketing activities, and ultimately fulfilling the needs of educational institutions while maximizing customer satisfaction.

The fifth concept is "social marketing," which emphasizes that marketing management should not only focus on satisfying customer needs and achieving goals but also aim to provide social benefits for all parties involved in marketing, including the welfare of teachers, educational staff, students, and other stakeholders. This approach highlights the importance of educational institutions understanding and meeting consumer and societal needs in the long term. The goal is to provide long-term benefits for individuals and society, not just to satisfy customer desires.

The sixth concept is "global marketing," where managers strive to understand all environmental factors affecting marketing through strong strategic management. The goal is to meet the desires of all parties involved in the company, including the global market. This concept underscores the importance of adjusting marketing strategies to the dynamics of the global market and complex environments in an effort to satisfy the needs of a broader market.

Private Schools

Private schools are educational institutions operated by the community or foundations with legal status. They operate independently, meaning their management does not depend on local or national governments like public schools. Private schools can be established by individuals, groups, or foundations with various purposes, such as religious, cultural, or regional objectives.

The management of private schools focuses on responding to market demands and needs, which means that their primary priority is to meet the needs of the community or users of educational services. Furthermore, the quality of education provided by private schools greatly depends on various elements within the educational process. These elements include students as the subjects of learning, educators who provide instruction, the interaction between educators and students, educational goals, learning materials, teaching methods, and the educational environment where the learning process occurs.

This educational environment is often referred to as the three centers of education: family, school, and community. Additionally, the role of the instructional leadership of a school principal is crucial for enhancing teacher professionalism and is an important factor in improving the effectiveness of school organization performance, which can enhance the school's branding and interest in attracting new students to private schools (Susar et al., 2023).

Education Branding for Schools

Literature research reveals that there are four stages in managing educational marketing through branding strategies to increase the number of new students in private schools. The first stage is school marketing planning. Planning is essentially a careful and mature process of determining actions to be taken in the future to achieve established goals (Fajri & Wiyani, 2019). In the context of educational marketing management, planning is the first step before other actions can be implemented. The initial stage in educational marketing management through school branding to attract new students in private schools is formulating the goals of the school branding strategy. In management, goals serve as a reference point for the organization's movements, including in the context of schools (Herlina et al., 2020).

To attract prospective students, promotions are carried out by distributing brochures and placing banners on supporting roads, elementary schools, and several public secondary schools in limited numbers. Additionally, another promotional tactic is through a "door-to-door" approach, where school staff directly visit children considered potential students for private schools. Data on these children is obtained from previous schools and teachers. The children recorded in this data are then visited, provided information about the advantages of the private school, and if there are financial obstacles, they can be considered for scholarships and school uniforms.

The use of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and Instagram has become an essential part of the promotional strategy for private schools. Based on literature research, promotions for private schools on platforms like Facebook tend to showcase the school's flagship programs and photos of activities depicting school life. On the other hand, in WhatsApp groups such as alumni groups or teacher groups, promotions are more often in the form of videos, photos, and direct communication within the group. These social media platforms not only serve as promotional tools but also play a significant role in building the school's image. The hope is that positive information or experiences shared by group members can spread widely to other members, indirectly becoming a powerful promotional message.

Educational institutions strive to build a positive image to attract the interest of prospective students. When someone purchases a product, they are not just looking for practical needs but also seek meaning and an image associated with the product, created by the organization. Therefore, it is important for organizations, including schools, to provide information to the community to build a positive image. The image perceived by the community is akin to a brand that needs to be maintained or even enhanced through branding practices. Through school branding activities, each prospective user of educational services can choose a school that meets their needs. Branding is the process of defining promises, values, and elements of the entity. Thus, the effort of school branding aims to attract attention and be chosen by the community (Sholihah, 2018).

Schools viewed by the community as playing a significant role in achieving national education goals are those considered quality schools. Typically, educational institutions attempt to showcase themselves through various media, including print, electronic, and online platforms. All this is done to gain the community's trust by publicizing facilities, student achievements, faculty rankings, extensive alumni networks, and other aspects. Schools as educational institutions must now have branding strategies that are applied and managed consistently. A proper branding strategy will help schools become recognized by the community. Many products, services, and even organizations require public recognition to provide a clear image of those products, services, or organizations. With the increasing competition among private schools to attract new students each year, back-to-school activities become very important. At that time, educational institutions focus on two main aspects: efforts to attract new students that align with their objectives, both in terms of quantity and qualifications of prospective students (Budiarti et al., 2023).

Branding, or the effort to create a positive image for educational institutions, plays a very significant role. A school brand built through careful planning, consistency with the school's vision and mission, and attractiveness can open opportunities for schools to attract students that meet both quality and quantity needs. To achieve the goals and quality of students, skills such as communication skills and information transmission, as well as awareness and effective promotion related to the educational institution, are needed to convey information to the community accurately without creating perceptual differences. However, schools must realize that in today's competitive landscape, they must maintain quality and attract new students while considering location or distance factors.

Therefore, private schools need to compete to increase the number of new students each year and maintain the quality of their graduates. One strategy that can be used is to think about branding strategies to provide a positive impression to the community. This strategy could involve socialization or fostering a spirit of learning. A brand has several very valuable functions (Mardikaningsih & Sinambela, 2016).

Marketing Management with School Branding for Private Schools

Building a school's image, often referred to as school branding, is one of the efforts made by educational institutions to enhance the attractiveness and promotion of the school. The goal of this is to ensure that the school's existence is well maintained in a healthy competitive environment and is well accepted by the community. The right strategy in this process is crucial as it can foster a harmonious relationship between the school and the community. Thus, a well-developed and appropriate branding strategy will significantly contribute to creating a positive reputation for the school (Hasim, 2020). Branding strategies focus on: (a) improving school quality management as a strong step to enhance community interest. High accreditation, such as A accreditation, indicates the trusted quality of the school. The use of SWOT analysis tools and compliance with national education standards strengthens the foundation of the school as the primary choice in its community. With good and consistent accreditation, the school's reputation can grow, influencing the quality of learning, academic achievements, and the performance of students, teachers, and alumni. Moreover, this also shapes the character of students as prospective university students and graduates who become members of the community, including in the context of postgraduate users (Hasim, 2020; Muktafin & Kusrini, 2021).

(b) The implementation of various unique programs such as nature schools, child-friendly schools, Quran memorization schools, and entrepreneurship programs (Mushlih, 2019) that support the school's vision and mission. For example, programs such as archery, swimming, horseback riding, and others that align with the school's focus. For instance, SDIT Alam Biruni has implemented various programs such as field trips, swimming, fun cooking, market day, group prayers, communal breakfast, Quran memorization and recitation, movement activities, correct prayer recitation, accurate memorization of Juz 30 of the Quran, dormitory activities, student transportation to school, religious visits, and coloring competitions (Hasim, 2020).

There are several things that should be avoided in the school branding process to ensure its effectiveness. One of them is not to focus solely on visual aspects without improving the substance or quality of the educational institution itself. Effective branding must be more than just a visual image; it should also reflect real improvements in learning outcomes, such as increased achievements of students and teachers. If not carried out professionally, ineffective branding can negatively impact the school's image, diminishing community trust in the educational institution.

Brands or branding that do not align with the school's image or do not meet market needs should be avoided, taking into account several factors, as highlighted in the following examples: (a) Alignment with School Image: An example of a nature school that does not reflect behaviors supporting the vision and connection with nature is a significant case. If a school claims to be a nature school, all aspects of learning and extracurricular activities at that school should support and reflect principles of nature, sustainability, and connection with nature. Such misalignment can damage community trust and reduce the school's appeal. (b) Responsiveness to Market Needs: Conversely, a quick response to changing market needs is essential. When the community seeks higher Quran memorization methods, holding higher-level Quran memorization courses is a wise step. This strategy is more beneficial than developing an image or brand that does not align with or is undesirable to the community at this time. (c) Competition in Education: Increasing competition among schools emphasizes the need to continually adapt and offer programs that meet community demands. Schools must strive to gain a central role in the community and maintain their appeal. Schools that are unable to compete in this regard risk falling behind and may even have to cease operations.

In conclusion, the alignment between the school brand and the image it projects, as well as responsiveness to changing market needs, are crucial factors in maintaining the reputation and success of the school. Schools need to continuously monitor the situation and strive to meet community expectations while committing to maintaining the integrity of their brand to remain relevant and competitive in the educational landscape.

Strategies to Increase the Number of New Students in Private Schools

It is fascinating to see how the term "strategy," derived from the Greek word "strategos," which originally referred to a series of tactics to defeat an enemy in battle, now has wide applications in various contexts, including the process of New Student Admissions (PPDB). PPDB is a crucial step for every prospective student who wants to continue their studies at a higher level. The acronym reflects the stages of administrative and academic selection that must be passed to enter higher education.

The new student admission process often serves as an initial step that involves screening prospective students (Suryosubroto, 2014). New student admissions represent a critical moment that has a significant impact on the operations of the school. Research focusing on the new student admission process, especially in private schools, provides a deep understanding of how schools conduct this activity each year to ensure the smooth operation of the educational process and the sustainability of the school itself (Suharsimi, 2012).

The new student admission process is a very important stage in running educational activities at a school. Mistakes or inaccuracies in this process can have long-term effects on the smoothness of education at that school. It is essential for all parties involved to understand the importance of this stage and to carry it out with full responsibility and seriousness.

Schools or madrasahs must have a well-thought-out strategic plan for implementing this admission process. The goal is to attract quality students who can contribute positively to the learning environment and to ensure that the learning process runs effectively and efficiently thereafter. This effectiveness will impact the overall quality of the school. Sometimes, in the new student admission process, schools conduct pre-screening or selection of prospective students based on various considerations. This often occurs when the number of applicants exceeds the capacity the school can accommodate, especially if the school is already known as an outstanding or popular institution. Occasionally, selection is conducted to identify specific talents or abilities possessed by prospective students.

The aim of this pre-screening or selection is to map the potential of students so that the school can create an environment that supports the development of suitable academic and extracurricular programs. However, it is important to remember that low subject grades or final exam scores from previous schools do not always reflect a student's ability to learn at the next school. Therefore, it is vital to view these pre-screening or selection practices wisely and ensure that the process is transparent and fair. Occasionally, there are negative accusations that schools only conduct selections for their own interests, so all parties must be cautious in evaluating these practices.

In the context of schools or educational institutions, excellence is an essential element in ensuring school quality. In other words, a quality school is one that possesses competitive and comparative advantages. Both types of excellence are important because they build community trust and prevent schools from being abandoned, as they provide assurances of high educational quality.

Marketing in educational institutions indeed differs significantly from marketing in commercial organizations. Educational institutions tend to focus on service marketing, which demands a more comprehensive approach to introducing the values and benefits of the educational services they offer. Providing free uniforms, donating school supplies, and various other strategies are often employed to enhance the attractiveness of educational institutions and respond to the increasingly tight competition within them. The advancement of educational institutions requires strategies that effectively meet objectives, which can be regional, group-oriented, or otherwise. From the researcher's experience, many long-established educational institutions have yet to thrive. One way to attract prospective students is by developing an education system or curriculum that offers the community more freedom to choose educational institutions that meet their needs. In many cases, private schools have greater flexibility compared to public schools that must adhere to zoning regulations. At the very least, private schools are not selective in accepting students as long as they can meet tuition costs. Even though the fees are higher, many parents do not mind paying more because they feel that the quality of education they receive is worth the expense and is even considered more valuable. The increasing popularity of private schools should serve as a warning for public educational institutions that their long-established systems are inefficient. Therefore, innovation and change in the education system are crucial to maintaining attractiveness and high-quality education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that private schools currently need to implement branding strategy management consistently. Proper branding strategy management will help schools build an image that is recognized by the community and increase the number of students. In today's era, technology plays a significant role in determining the existence of educational institutions or schools. The use of technology, especially in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has become an integral part of providing educational services in various areas. However, there are several shortcomings and barriers that can hinder building the school's image. Some of these include the lack of a planned and systematic promotional program, the absence of a dedicated public relations division, inadequate documentation in promotions, the lack of a specific promotional team, limited outreach in target promotion, insufficient appeal in promotional content,

budget limitations for promotion, limited human resources, lack of intensive communication with the church, lack of innovation in promotional forms, insufficient active involvement from committees and foundations in promotions, and a lack of teacher involvement in building the school's image.

To overcome these obstacles and build a strong school image, there needs to be a planned and systematic effort in managing branding strategies. Thus, schools can be more effective in marketing themselves and increasing their attractiveness in facing the increasingly competitive educational landscape.

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