

## Unlocking Success: Innovative Education Marketing Strategies for Elementary School Enrollment Growth

Kasmad Hasanudin<sup>\*1</sup> Fuad Srinio<sup>2</sup> Warti`ah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Pesantren Kh Abdul Chalim Mojokerto, Indonesia; [hasanudinkasmad@gmail.com](mailto:hasanudinkasmad@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Sekolah Fakhruddin Wittaya Waeng, Narathiwat, Thailand; [srinio.fuad@gmail.com](mailto:srinio.fuad@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Institut Agama Islam Daruttaqwa Gresik, Indonesia; [bunda\\_wartiah@yahoo.com](mailto:bunda_wartiah@yahoo.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Building upon the aforementioned principles, SD NU Kaplongan endeavors to consistently deliver top-tier educational services, encompassing excellent facilities, quality assurance, and holistic character development. To complement these efforts, effective marketing strategies and a proficient teaching staff are essential in executing prepared initiatives. This study adopts a qualitative methodology, chosen for its compatibility with existing research and its aptness in analyzing community issues and mitigation efforts. Findings reveal that SD NU Kaplongan's marketing strategy is spearheaded by a dedicated core team responsible for community outreach and program promotion. This includes engagement with the new student admissions committee, followed by a comprehensive four-step marketing approach. The school offers a range of academic and extracurricular programs, yielding notable achievements and preparing students for enrollment in esteemed institutions such as state junior high schools and Madrasah Tasanawiyah. Moreover, promotional activities are extensively conducted through various channels, particularly leveraging social media platforms and alumni networks. Additionally, the school actively engages in community-oriented initiatives, organizing events such as competitions and religious activities to foster social cohesion and outreach.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a social and managerial process whereby individuals and groups fulfill common needs and desires by creating, offering, and exchanging something of value with one another (Iffah & Fauziyah, 2021). A fundamental component for understanding the concept of educational marketing is the notion of the market. The market serves as a platform where various commodities by producers are transacted with what consumers need, want, and expect produced (Wahab, Khamidi, & Wardoyo, 2022). Marketing facilitates transactions aimed at enhancing the expectations, desires, and needs of potential customers, thereby stimulating them to acquire offered products through agreed rewards (Thomaidou Pavlidou & Efstathiades, 2021).

The implementation of an effective school education service marketing strategy is pivotal in fostering the growth and development of education within an educational institution. Ultimately, the outcomes of education, manifested in the form of human resources, become invaluable assets for both the broader community and the educational sector itself (Kotler & Fox, 1985). This principle holds in the realm of education, where although institutions may not operate for profit, their management cannot adhere to traditional practices alone (Alwi & Mumtahana, 2023; Attsaury, Hadiyanto, & Supian, 2024). It necessitates specialized abilities to ensure that educational outputs possess the requisite competitiveness to thrive on a global scale. Particularly in the contemporary social landscape, educational institutions are increasingly viewed through a corporate lens, where they are perceived as production entities delivering educational services to consumers (Hakim & Jamal, 2021; Sa'adah, Syafi'i, Khamim, & Muid, 2023). Failure to effectively market these services, due to quality deficiencies that fail to meet consumer expectations, results in stagnant service uptake.

The Green Campus stands as a symbol of organized, progressive, and contemporary Islamic education within the NU network in Indramayu. Its meticulously designed campus features impressive and modern school buildings housing educational facilities from kindergarten to vocational school levels. The Darul Ma'arif project represents a significant initiative within the NU organization aimed at modernizing the education system. Its presence is expected not only to enhance the organization's educational profile but also to positively impact the residents of Indramayu. Through the implementation of modern educational practices, the aim is to elevate the intellectual and religious knowledge of the local populace. Recognizing the evolving needs of the time, traditional pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) are compelled to adapt by integrating modern educational methodologies (WAHJOSUMIDJO, 2010). Thus, Pesantren Darul Ma'arif embraces a contemporary educational approach to meet these evolving demands.

Through preliminary research observations conducted at SD NU Kaplongan Indramayu, a school situated in the Karangampel District of Indramayu Regency, it becomes evident that it is a private institution chosen by the author for studying its educational marketing strategy. This choice is motivated by several factors, notably the school's attainment of A accreditation status. This accreditation achievement serves as a testament to SD NU Kaplongan's commitment to excellence, ensuring its continued relevance and desirability among prospective students. Within the context of marketing management, the pursuit of accreditation underscores the significance of strategic planning aimed at achieving desired objectives. While marketing is commonly associated with commercial ventures, in this instance, it serves as a means to foster community trust and engagement.

Effective marketing practices play a pivotal role in ensuring that the community is well informed and appreciative of the educational offerings provided by SD NU Kaplongan. Structured marketing strategies are essential for the successful execution of programs aligned with the institution's objectives. Consequently, the implementation of these strategies has contributed to a notable increase in student enrollment, reflecting heightened interest in SD NU Kaplongan's educational services.

In light of SD NU Kaplongan's dedication to delivering exemplary educational services, encompassing superior facilities, quality assurance, and character development, it is imperative to complement these efforts with robust marketing initiatives and proficient educators capable of executing prepared strategies. Motivated by these considerations, the researchers are driven to explore the marketing strategy employed by SD NU Kaplongan in attracting new students, focusing specifically on its impact within the Karangampel District of Indramayu Regency.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, which does not rely on statistical rules and quantification. The chosen approach for this study is the case study method (Moleong, 1989). The research was conducted at SD NU Kaplongan in Karangampel, Indramayu, spanning from December 12, 2022, commencing with the planning phase (initial survey), until July 12, 2023.

Data collection techniques employed in this study include observation, documentation, and interviews, utilizing triangulation for data validation. Data analysis follows four stages based on (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). theory: 1) data collection, 2) data reduction, 3) data presentation (data display), and 4) verification and conclusion drawing. Triangulation, as a technique for ensuring data validity, involves cross-referencing findings from the primary informant with those from other informants.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Education Marketing Strategy in Attracting Students

Nahdatul Ulama Elementary School (SD NU) employs a learning system similar to that of most public elementary schools in Indramayu, namely a formal system. The educational objective is to cultivate students into the Quranic generation, instilling a commitment to making the Quran a guiding principle in daily life. Proficiency in reading and writing the Quran accurately is not only a target but also the primary and foremost goal for every student. Hence, students are required to undergo a Quran literacy test during the admission process.

Supporting materials are provided only after students enter the advanced program, serving as supplementary resources subsequent to Quranic studies. Participation in Quran literacy activities is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors encompass personality traits and innate predispositions. Children raised in religious family environments, supported by communal surroundings, are more inclined towards religious practices, finding joy in emulating their peers engaged in Quranic studies. Fundamentally, all individuals possess an inherent inclination towards monotheism. Students following Quranic studies are greatly influenced by the teaching methods employed by their educators. Although the influence of teachers on students' upbringing is significant, it is noteworthy that Quranic reading precedes all activities in the teaching process, with a dedicated 30-minute session dedicated to Quranic recitation prior to learning activities.

The marketing strategy aimed at increasing prospective students for SD NU Kaplongan involves several steps, including market identification (competitors) and segmentation, as well as positioning and ownership. Market identification involves analyzing competitors and determining immediate goals post-promotion. Research is conducted to understand the target audience, primarily comprising the communities residing in Kaplongan village and Kaplongan Lor village. Additionally, market analysis assesses current conditions, needs, and desires of potential customers. This entails conducting market research to determine educational equipment preferences and mapping neighboring schools. By expanding the customer base, SD NU Kaplongan conceptualizes marketing strategies to promote its achievements while engaging with other schools through socialization activities such as school visits and home visits, accompanied by teachers.

Market segmentation entails dividing buyer groups based on differing needs, while positioning involves highlighting product features and differentiation to distinguish SD NU Kaplongan from other educational institutions. The goal is to

establish and communicate the competitive advantage of the school in the minds of consumers. Effective positioning requires interaction between service providers and users, ensuring clear communication of the school's unique offerings and benefits.

Moreover, marketing readiness activities are essential, such as developing innovative program ideas to maintain service quality. SD NU Kaplongan implements various activity programs annually to enhance its service quality and reputation. These strategies collectively contribute to the school's efforts to attract and retain prospective students, positioning itself as a leading educational institution in the region.

The planning of new student admissions at SD Nahdatul Ulama Kaplongan adheres to established standards, evident in various indicators such as class size considerations, prospective student criteria, and the implementation of an objective, transparent, and accountable admission system. Standard procedures are systematically applied throughout the admission process, ensuring fairness and consistency. These procedures encompass committee formation, determination of new student needs, assessment of capacity, formulation of admission criteria and selection systems, announcement dissemination, registration, selection processes, acceptance determination, announcement of accepted students, and registration/re-registration for new students. This meticulous approach ensures the smooth implementation of new student admissions at SD Nahdatul Ulama Kaplongan.

Furthermore, SD NU Kaplongan employs a standard marketing strategy to promote its educational services. In addition to manual socialization efforts, the school utilizes social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to disseminate information and engage with potential consumers. Consistent with theoretical principles, the marketing strategy emphasizes clear communication of the school's offerings and the exploitation of market opportunities. Establishing trust within the community is paramount, necessitating proactive promotion and socialization efforts to convey the reliability and quality of the products/services provided by SD NU Kaplongan.

Currently, the competition among educational institutions, including SD NU Kaplongan, has intensified, necessitating effective strategies to maintain competitiveness. SD NU Kaplongan employs a comprehensive approach to educational service marketing, encompassing both internal and external marketing strategies.

The initial phase involves internal marketing, which is rooted in research findings and feedback from returning customers, namely the school staff and community. By prioritizing customer satisfaction and building loyalty within the school community, SD NU Kaplongan aims to cultivate a supportive environment that extends to external customers. According to the head of SD NU Kaplongan, the

primary target for attracting customers is the school's human resources, whose satisfaction and engagement can significantly influence prospective customers.

Furthermore, internal marketing concepts play a pivotal role in fostering organizational cohesion and enhancing overall performance. Thus, prioritizing community satisfaction, particularly that of students' guardians, is imperative. When the community is satisfied with the school's offerings, they are more inclined to advocate for the school and participate in the marketing process. Additionally, involving students in the marketing process by encouraging them to invite family and friends to visit SD NU Kaplongan further enhances the school's outreach efforts.

However, challenges may arise during the implementation of marketing strategies, including resource constraints, time limitations, and execution issues. One notable challenge is the absence of dedicated marketing personnel within the school. To overcome this obstacle and ensure an optimal marketing process, SD NU Kaplongan must prioritize the recruitment of innovative and professional human resources or teachers with expertise in marketing. This proactive approach will facilitate the effective implementation of marketing strategies and enhance the school's competitive edge in the educational landscape.

#### **Implications of New Student Admission at SD NU Kaplongan Karangampel**

The marketing strategy at SD NU Kaplongan is spearheaded by the marketing team, serving as the core unit responsible for promoting the school's programs to various stakeholders, including the New Student Admission committee (PSB). This cohesive marketing approach is a continuation of previous promotional efforts undertaken by the school. Moreover, SD NU Kaplongan has established a dedicated marketing team tasked with presenting and promoting the school to the broader public, leveraging its strong vision and mission.

The initial step in developing a school marketing plan involves defining the school's vision, mission, and overarching goals. Subsequently, the marketing team devises strategies to realize these objectives effectively.

The marketing activities at SD NU Kaplongan are structured around a 4-step marketing strategy, incorporating elements of a planned marketing mix strategy. These steps include: a) Target Market Segmentation: Identifying the target market, namely preschools with average to above-average economic conditions, aligning with SD NU Kaplongan's high-quality facilities and services. The school's 4 Khasanah fidatun programs, including Marketing Education Services, are tailored to meet the needs of this target market. b) Market Segmentation: Grouping prospective student tutors based on their abilities and desires, with a focus on community groups from middle to upper economic status seeking English fluency. This aligns with SD NU Kaplongan's flagship English-language program.

Promotional activities are conducted both offline and online. Traditional methods include organizing kindergarten-level competitions such as drawing, coloring, and singing contests, as well as creating posters commemorating special occasions like Teachers' Day and National Education Day. Additionally, online promotions encompass activities such as posting internal school event photos and producing flyers for school promotion, new student admissions, and teacher recruitment. Furthermore, SD NU Kaplongan's YouTube channel features comprehensive videos showcasing various school activities, including profiles, counseling sessions, awareness initiatives, and craft activities.

Offline enrollment efforts persist despite limitations imposed by the pandemic, albeit to a lesser extent than before. These efforts include kindergarten safaris, during which the marketing team conducts school program socialization and establishes memorandums of understanding or collaborations with kindergartens. The marketing implementation process at SD NU Kaplongan follows these steps: a) Formulating competitive strategies, which involve identifying market segmentation, targeting, and positioning. b) Executing marketing tactics, which include emphasizing SD NU Kaplongan's positive distinctions from other institutions, applying marketing mix theory by offering high-quality products, competitive pricing, leveraging the strategic geographical location, and conducting promotional activities. c) Demonstrating the added value of marketing at SD NU Kaplongan, which encompasses showcasing the school's brand, delivering excellent service, and ensuring a quality coaching process (Anwar, Rahman, Nurwahidin, Sutrisno, & Saputra, 2023; Aprilianto & Fatikh, 2024; Haq & Roesminingsih, 2024).

Supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of marketing strategies at SD NU Kaplongan are as follows: Supporting factors: 1) SD NU Kaplongan operates under the leadership of the Darul Maarif Foundation. 2) The school has clear segmentation. 3) There is a relatively high level of trust among the community and elders. 4) SD NU Kaplongan is situated in a highly strategic location. Inhibiting factors: 1) Lack of a dedicated promotion team. 2) Absence of a systematic concept in marketing educational services at SD NU Kaplongan.

The process of admitting prospective new students involves several stages, beginning with the acceptance of registration requirements and concluding with the decision to accept or reject students. Schools must offer various forms of selection tests to assess students' abilities in line with their desired enrollment (Charina, Kurnia, Mulyana, & Mizuno, 2022; Wahab et al., 2022). The New Student Admission (PSB) selection process at SD NU Kaplongan Seluma encompasses three paths: the regular track, the achievement track, and the environmental development track. The environmental development track, also known as the community development

route, is a special pathway designed to facilitate the enrollment of underprivileged children residing in the vicinity of the school.

Based on this data, there has been a fluctuation in the number of new students admitted to SD NU Kaplongan over the past few years. In the academic year 2019/2020, there were 86 new students, followed by a decrease to 69 new students in 2020/2021. However, there was an increase to 95 new students in 2021/2022, equivalent to an increase of 3 additional classes. Subsequently, in 2022/2023, the number decreased to 75 new students, and in 2023/2024, there was a further decrease to 74 new students.

In terms of marketing, SD NU Kaplongan employs various strategies to attract prospective students and engage with the community. These strategies include highlighting the school's achievements over the years, collaborating with community leaders for socialization efforts, and defining specific target groups.

The process of accepting new students at SD NU Kaplongan begins with prospective students registering for admission. Registration is a crucial step overseen by the admissions committee to ensure compliance with school requirements. Upon registration, students are informed of the necessary criteria for enrollment at SD NU Kaplongan.

Once students are registered, the admissions committee proceeds to announce the list of accepted students. This announcement signifies the completion of the selection process and provides clarity to both the school and prospective students.

Following the announcement, the admissions committee conducts registration or re-registration for accepted students. Re-registration serves to confirm students' enrollment and gather any additional requirements needed for their admission. This stage is vital for collecting essential student data and ensuring a smooth transition into the school community.

In summary, the registration and re-registration processes play crucial roles in the acceptance of new students at SD NU Kaplongan, facilitating the integration of students into the school and ensuring compliance with necessary requirements.

### **Discussion**

All educational institutions must regularly conduct school assessments and analyze internal and external factors to enhance and sustain the quality of education, thereby gaining the trust of the community (Alimohammadlou & Eslamloo, 2016; Karakose, Polat, & Papadakis, 2021). Moreover, effective promotion of the school is crucial, as without proper promotion, schools may fail to attract many students (António Porfírio, Augusto Felício, Carrilho, & Jardim, 2023). It is imperative for schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of rival schools, to leverage opportunities and mitigate potential threats. According to



Hamel and Prahalad, strategy entails incremental and continuous action, focusing on future customer expectations rather than current circumstances. Thus, adapting to evolving market innovations and consumer trends is essential (Sari & Wijaya, 2020).

Research on educational marketing strategies to attract new students to SD NU Kaplongan reveals that the school offers reputable academic programs and extracurricular activities. These programs have yielded successful graduates accepted into various junior high schools, state Tasanawiyah madrasahs, and national standard Islamic boarding schools. SD NU Kaplongan provides education free of charge, with nominal monthly tuition fees and scholarships available for deserving students, including recipients of the Smart Indonesia Cards (KIP), outstanding students, tahfidz, and orphans.

The strategic location of SD NU Kaplongan, close to the Pantura cross highway and accessible by public and private transportation, enhances its appeal. Despite its proximity to the highway, the school ensures a safe and comfortable learning environment conducive to focused learning. Promotional efforts by SD NU Kaplongan include social media campaigns, alumni endorsements, and community engagement through events such as competitions, religious activities, and communal iftars. Additionally, the school actively promotes itself by visiting nearby schools and engaging with prospective parents in Kaplongan village and its vicinity.

### **Implications of Education Marketing at SD NU Kaplongan**

The implications of admitting new students at SD NU Kaplongan are evident in the motivation of students to actively engage in all academic and extracurricular programs, as well as in the initiatives taken by students and the community to promote the school. The educators and staff at SD NU Kaplongan are highly qualified, with many being certified civil servants and holding master's degrees. Consequently, the acceptance of new students at SD NU Kaplongan is expected to encourage parents and guardians to contribute to the school's advancement.

The facilities and infrastructure at SD NU Kaplongan are sufficient and conducive to the teaching and learning process. The school boasts an effective and efficient learning environment, supported by well-organized curriculum guidelines, competent teachers, and adequate facilities and infrastructure.

Marketing strategy planning at SD NU Kaplongan is integral to every promotional activity, particularly during the New Student Admission (PSB) process. All marketing activities are meticulously planned, considering budgetary constraints and other factors that may support or hinder their implementation. Planning involves collaboration among the principal, student vice-principals, and the school marketing team. After the planning phase, marketing activities for new

student admissions must proceed smoothly (Azizah, Jariah, & Aprilianto, 2023; Evan & Rahmat, 2023; Nitami & Mubarak, 2023; Rofiq & Khoirinnada, 2024).

The implementation of marketing strategies at SD NU Kaplongan commences with identifying the target market, primarily preschools. Subsequently, the market is segmented based on consumer groups' abilities and preferences. The school promotes itself by applying the 7 elements of the marketing mix and strives to provide exemplary service to the community (Varouchas, Sicilia, & Sánchez-Alonso, 2018).

Marketing Strategy Assessment at Kaplongan Elementary School (SDNU) comprises monthly, end-of-semester, and end-of-school-year evaluations. These assessments involve discussions on conducted activities, addressing existing obstacles promptly, and maximizing available opportunities.

During the 2022-2023 academic year, SD NU Kaplongan faced challenges in organizing direct promotions to preschools, conducting regular discussions with school administrators, and hosting face-to-face events or collaborations due to the pandemic and financial constraints. Nonetheless, the marketing team endeavored to execute various marketing activities effectively despite these challenges.

The school marketing strategy at SD NU Kaplongan holds significant importance, particularly given its status as a newly established private school. As such, engaging in marketing activities is imperative for the school's growth and visibility (Setyorini & Khuriyah, 2023). The implemented marketing strategy at SD NU Kaplongan not only affects the internal dynamics of the school but also influences the performance of teachers and staff, fostering a more focused and coordinated approach to work across all activities.

Beyond its internal implications, marketing strategies also extend to the external community surrounding the school (Bahri & Arafah, 2020; Nilda, Hifza, & Ubabuddin, 2020). Through effective marketing, the performance of the marketing team improves, facilitating easier access to information about SD NU Kaplongan for the general public. This, in turn, yields positive outcomes for the school as it enhances its visibility and reputation. Consequently, the findings of this study underscore the theory that activities initiated with careful planning and strategic implementation are more likely to achieve desired goals.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The marketing strategy planning at SD NU Kaplongan is meticulously carried out, encompassing various promotional activities, particularly those related to New Student Admission (PSB) endeavors. All planning initiatives are conducted with careful consideration of budget constraints and the supporting and inhibiting factors involved. This planning process involves key stakeholders such as the principal, student

Wakasek, and the school marketing team. A crucial aspect of this planning includes establishing the structure of the RAB committee for New Student Reception at SD NU Kaplongan. Educational institutions must effectively compete in meeting or surpassing the wants and needs of the community as consumers or customers of educational services. This necessity underscores the importance of well-managed marketing strategies by educational institutions. The management of marketing strategies directly influences the enrollment rate of students. Continuous improvements and a robust marketing strategy contribute to an increased number of consumers or customers availing educational services. Marketing in education encompasses establishing trusting relationships through effective communication, covering various aspects including the programs offered, the learning process stages, infrastructure, and human resources (HR). Both lecturers and staff play pivotal roles, as do students and graduates, who ultimately impact society as a whole. Therefore, an education marketing strategy must be meticulously structured to effectively compete with other educational institutions.

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