Integrated Islamic School Marketing Management in Indonesia: Competitive or Business Oriented?

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ABSTRACT Marketing management at Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) is important amidst the tight competition between educational institutions, so a strategy is needed that can balance business orientation, Islamic preaching values, and improving the quality of education in the digital era. This study aims to provide insight into how effective marketing management can improve the competitiveness of SIT in Indonesia while also influencing the number of registrations and stakeholder satisfaction. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through interviews, observations, document analysis, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The data obtained were analyzed through the process of reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusion and validated using triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. The results of the study show that SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung has succeeded in implementing an effective educational marketing management strategy through careful branding planning, organizing resources and promotions, accepting new students, and quality control. School branding is built by prioritizing student achievement, OSIS leadership, publication of written works, and the Class Gazebo acceleration program. Resource organization is carried out by involving teachers, students, and parents in school promotion, while the promotion strategy combines digital and face-to-face media, including the parenting program (MAJELAS). The new student admission process is designed in stages to maintain quality and competitiveness. In contrast, quality control is carried out through evaluation of the quality assurance system and parental cooperation through the MoU. All of these strategies have a positive impact on parental satisfaction, strengthen the school's image, and increase the competitiveness of integrated Islamic educational institutions at the national level. The results of this study imply that planned marketing management, involving all elements of the school and integrating Islamic values, can improve the image, competitiveness, and satisfaction of stakeholders in integrated Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: *Marketing management, Integrated Islamic School (SIT), educational branding, competitiveness, educational business.*

INTRODUCTION

Marketing management in Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) is becoming increasingly important amidst the intense competition between educational institutions. Many schools have begun to implement quality management and service innovation to attract public interest (Doan, 2020; Klokar N et al., 2021). Parental awareness of quality education that prioritizes academic

aspects and Islamic values is also increasing, encouraging SIT to formulate effective marketing strategies to attract new students (Christie & Tippmann, 2024). As an institution that integrates general and religious education, SIT must understand the needs of the community and develop relevant programs (Abolhoseini et al., 2024). The marketing concept of Islamic education is not only business-oriented but must also be in line with Islamic values and community needs. Advantages such as character-based teaching, Islamic culture, and a conducive environment need to be strategically promoted to build a positive image and competitiveness (Ambarwati & Sari, 2024; Utami et al., 2024). An example, such as the Al Azhar Islamic Education Institute (LPI), shows how innovation and marketing strategies can expand the scope of da'wah and increase the attractiveness of the institution to parents. However, the main challenge in marketing SIT is balancing between competitive orientation and da'wah goals and educational quality (Juhaidi, 2024; Riofita, 2024). How does the marketing management of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) balance competitive strategies in attracting new students while maintaining the values of da'wah and improving the quality of education in an era of tight competition and the development of digital technology? Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether SIT marketing management is more oriented towards business competition or remains on the goal of da'wah and improving the quality of education.

The development of information and communication technology has also added a new dimension to educational marketing management. Social media and digital marketing have become important strategies to reach and engage prospective students and parents. This trend is reinforced by the results of mobile social media marketing research, which is an effective channel for digital natives (DN) in higher education, with usability, ease of use, critical mass, and social influence playing an important role in its adoption (Wong et al., 2022). Therefore, SITs must develop a strong online presence and present engaging and informative content (Irdiyanti et al., 2023).

In the last decade, research on marketing management of Islamic Schools in Indonesia has shown dynamic developments, with debates between competitive and business-oriented approaches in Islamic education marketing strategies. Mardia proposed the Blue Ocean Strategy as a solution for Islamic educational institutions to get out of direct competition with other schools and focus more on creating unique value for students (Mardia, 2011). On the other hand, Jafari & Sandıkcı emphasized the importance of understanding the dynamics of Islamic identity in educational marketing, given the complexity of the relationship between religion, marketing, and consumption (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2016). Ikhwan's study emphasized that competition in Islamic education marketing is increasing, encouraging schools to strengthen their unique identities and values (Ikhwan, 2020a). Kahar & Daeng Pabalik and Puspitasari highlighted that the success of SIT marketing is highly dependent on the school's ability to formulate a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) that is not only academically oriented but also forms a strong Islamic character (Kahar & Daeng Pabalik, 2018; Puspitasari et al., 2020). In the context of global competitiveness, Wulandari et al. identified that the 2013 Curriculum (K13) has the potential to improve the competitiveness of SIT, while Mehrdad Omidiyan Bavarsad et al emphasized that optimizing information systems and social media is a key factor in the effectiveness of Islamic education marketing strategies (Mehrdad Omidiyan Bavarsad et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2023). Recent research from Juhaidi et al. emphasized the importance of branding in improving the competitiveness of Islamic Higher Education, an approach that is also relevant for SIT in building its market advantage (Juhaidi et al., 2024). Overall, these studies reflect a shift in SIT marketing strategies from conventional competition to a more value-based, identity-based, and technology-based strategic innovation approach.

Although various studies have examined the marketing strategies of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) from a competitive perspective, Islamic identity, and the use of technology, there is still a gap in understanding how SIT can balance competitive marketing strategies while maintaining the values of da'wah and improving the quality of education. Previous studies have focused more on creating unique value through the Blue Ocean Strategy (Mardia, 2011), understanding Islamic

identity in marketing (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2016), and the importance of a Unique Selling Proposition based on academics and Islamic character (Kahar & Daeng Pabalik, 2018; Puspitasari et al., 2020). In addition, studies on the impact of curriculum and social media optimization on the competitiveness of SIT have shown the relevance of digital strategies in marketing Islamic education (Mehrdad Omidiyan Bavarsad et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2023).

However, there has not been much research that comprehensively explores how SIT marketing management can integrate competition-based marketing strategies with the vision of preaching and strengthening the quality of education in the context of tight competition and the development of digital technology. Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining SIT marketing management that can balance business and preaching aspects in SIT marketing, as well as how digital media optimization can be used without reducing the essence of Islamic values in the implementation of education. The purpose of this study is to provide in-depth insight into how effective marketing management can improve the competitiveness of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) in Indonesia, as well as influence the number of enrollments and stakeholder satisfaction.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to identify and describe the marketing management of Integrated Islamic Schools *(SIT: Sekolah Islam Terpadu)* in Indonesia. The qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because it allows this study to identify and describe the marketing strategy of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) in depth in the context of competition and the development of digital technology (Cresswell, 2015). This method is in accordance with the objectives of the study, which focus on the balance between competitive marketing strategies and the vision of da'wah so that it can explore the perspectives and practices applied by SIT. In addition, this approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the role of optimizing digital media in SIT marketing without reducing the essence of Islamic values.

This research was conducted at Al-Azhaar Tulungagung Islamic Junior High School *(SMPI: Sekolah Menengah Pertama Islam).* This study uses interviews with various stakeholders, including the Head of the Foundation, Head of the School, Committee, and School Supervisor, as well as teaching staff, the surrounding community, guardians, students, and alums, as a representation of the graduate output. Meanwhile, the documents analyzed were the curriculum, strategic plan, and newspaper clippings. Furthermore, the researcher observed the class process of teaching and learning activities and extracurricular activities based on improving students' mental personalities. Research data were obtained from structured interviews, document analysis, and observation. In addition, data was obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with several foundations, teachers, and students whose answers and responses could represent all the sources. Triangulation was conducted from all data and summarised according to the research problem by eliminating unnecessary data (Ikhwan, 2020b). Interviews were recorded and transcribed by classifying the information according to the research objectives. Analysis was conducted in the following stages: data reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). During data reduction, all unnecessary information was eliminated. Data from document analysis, observation, and FGDs were analyzed by coding, finding themes and categorizing. Data validity checking used triangulation: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study found that SIT marketing management began with formulating a branding concept based on student achievement, program branding (acceleration, *tahfidz*, and inclusion classes), and branding based on 13 Quality Assurance. Promotional activities were carried out using digital

methods (websites and social media) and direct (brochures and parenting classes). Student admission activities were carried out by opening three waves of registration followed by leadership training. Figure 1 shows SIT marketing management.
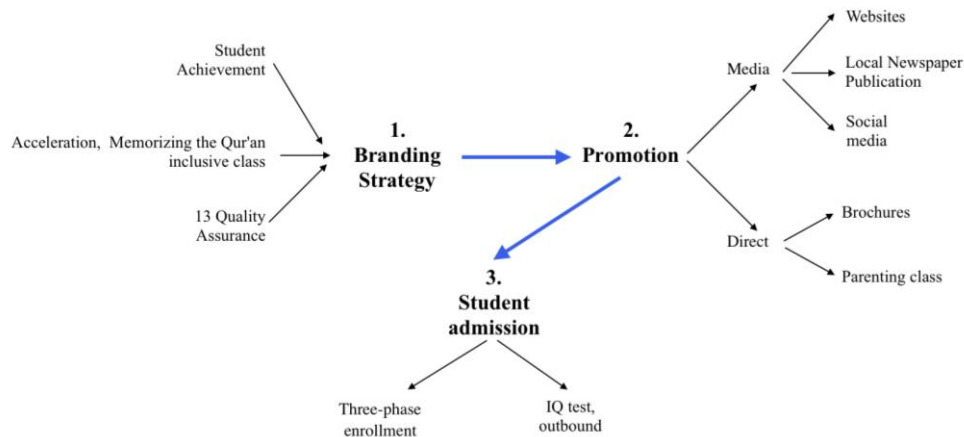

Figure 1. SMPI Al Azhar Marketing Management Flow

Branding Strategy

SMPI Al-Azhar Tulungagung uses a branding strategy through student achievements through OSIS students. OSIS students will welcome elementary school students who will join SMPI Al-Azhaar by introducing various events and providing entertainment. In addition, SMPI Al-Azhaar also holds orientation programs and school visits by presenting several OSIS members as testimonials. Through these testimonials, the leadership spirit of OSIS students can be displayed as an example for prospective students while introducing the role of leadership in the elementary school environment.

As stated by the principal:

"Students demonstrate extraordinary leadership. OSIS plays an active role in introducing extracurricular activities to prospective students, including literacy through book works, making rhymes, and writing guidance for new students" (Haryati, 2024).

SMPI Al-Azhaar provides a means for students to express their interests through written works in the form of books. In addition to publishing books written by students, this school also organizes activities that support the competitiveness of the institution, one of which is JOIS (Journalis Ozataru Al-Azhaar). This program functions as a forum and learning tool for students who have interests and talents in journalism.

Principal's statement:

"Our student magazine is called JOIS (Journalist Ozataru al-Azhaar). The ones who manage it are also children from journalist circles" (Haryati, 2024).

The school's strategy in attracting public interest is realized through an acceleration program at SMPI Al-Azhaar known as the Gazebo Class. This program is included in the acceleration class category, with a uniquely designed curriculum that allows students to complete their studies one year faster than regular classes. The Gazebo Class is a special education service designed for students with extraordinary intelligence and a high enthusiasm for learning. This program is one of the leading programs that is able to compete with other educational institutions under the auspices of Al-Azhaar, making this school more competitive and in demand by the community.

As stated by the Gazebo Class teacher:

"Gazebo Class is an acceleration program for students without limitations in following *tahfidz* or *Yanbu'a*. Students who have a high enthusiasm for learning are encouraged to develop without being separated from their group. They are trained to perform and present in small groups, with materials that can be taken from the internet and supported by presentation making. This approach emphasizes student-centered learning, where teachers act as facilitators, while parents are expected to understand and support the school's quality assurance system. There are 13 types of quality assurance that must be met, and teachers are responsible for observing and discussing student development with parents" (Kumaidah, 2024).

Gazebo Class is a special education service designed for students with extraordinary intelligence and high learning enthusiasm. This program is included in the accelerated class category, with a uniquely designed curriculum that allows students to complete their studies one year faster than regular classes.

The Gazebo Class Teacher also added:

"The program for female students has been running well, showing their creativity. However, challenges still exist, especially among teenage and middle-aged students who are less enthusiastic, as well as the tendency of the majority of students to play online games. Limited teacher supervision, especially when students are at home, is an additional obstacle. Therefore, the pilot program is focused on female students, which continues to run as one of the flagship programs" (Kumaidah, 2024).

To support competitive SIT marketing, SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung provides a forum for students who are interested in literacy. Currently, educational output is expected to be in the form of works that have functional value. For example, at SMPI Al-Azhaar, students in special groups (inclusive classes) are able to produce works in the form of books.

Chairman of Al-Azhaar Foundation Tulungagung:

"Inclusive classes provide literacy through a collection of children's books and displays of student and teacher work to maintain motivation. Each semester, the school creates special moments for student work to be part of the branding" (Yayasan, 2024).

The targets of SMPI Al-Azhaar have been stated in the school profile, better known as the alum profile, which includes 13 Quality Assurances. One of them is so that students, after graduating, are ready to become preachers, of course, according to the capacity and ability of each student. For example, if it is still in the volume stage and has not stepped on the Al-Qur'an, which is generally at the elementary school level, then the way to become a preacher is to be able to read fluently and be able to guide or correct if there are friends who cannot read correctly. Initially, the volume was not an aspect that was considered for promotion or graduation. However, for now, the volume has become a mutual agreement to be used as one of the considerations for promotion or graduation.

Quality Assurance (QA) in integrated Islamic education refers to standards and procedures designed to ensure that the educational process runs effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with Islamic values. Table 1 contains 13 aspects of QA implemented at SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung:

Table 1. Quality Assurance (QA) Aspects of SMPI Al-Azhaar

No	Quality Assurance (QA)	Description	Application
1	Qur'an and Sunnah	The curriculum should be	Establishment of *tahfidz* class,

		designed by integrating Islamic values, the Qur'an and Sunnah as the primary foundation in all subjects.	MAJELAS as parenting class between school and students integration of curriculum at school and home
	Based Curriculum		
2	Competent and Honorable Teachers	Teachers have adequate academic and pedagogical competence and good morals as student role models.	Annual workshop to update teachers' pedagogical competence
3	Holistic Learning	The learning process must include intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects to form *insan kamil* (complete human being).	Inclusion class, gazebo class (accelerated class), *tahfidz* class, extracurricular *dakwah* training, leadership training during New Student Admission (PPDB) time
4	Continuous Evaluation	The evaluation system should be conducted periodically and comprehensively to ensure students' academic and moral development.	National, provincial, district and sub-district competitions; competition between SIT networks (annual)
5	Islamic Education Environment	Schools should create an environment supporting Islamic values like cleanliness, discipline, and harmony.	Student's guardian statement, yellow book (discipline book)
6	Transparent and Accountable Management	School management must be managed with Islamic law principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness.	Information & Technology (IT) based dashboard system https://smp.alazhaar.org/
7	Parent and Community Participation	Involving parents and the community in the education process to support students' all-round development	MAJELAS student guardian parenting class on the concept of religious studies
8	Islamic Character Development	Character development programs should focus on forming noble morals like honesty, responsibility, and social care.	Leadership programs during PPDB fosters a sense of responsibility, leadership and confidence.
9	Supportive Infrastructure	School facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and places of worship should be adequate and support the learning process.	Complete infrastructure and extracurricular activities, including the inclusion, gazebo class (accelerated class), and *tahfidz* class.
10	Qur'an *Tahfidz* and *Tahsin* Programs	Provide special programmes for memorizing (*tahfidz*) and improving the recitation (*tahsin*) of the Qur'an as an integral part of the curriculum.	*Tahsin* is made a requirement for grade promotion, the existence of *the tahfidz* class, which became the first flagship program in Tulungagung since the 1990s.
11	Strengthening *Aqidah* (Tauhid) and *Ibadah*	Ensure students understand and practice the correct *aqidah* and worship according to the guidance of the Prophet	Integrated into the school curriculum

			Muhammad.
12	Life Skills Development	Equipping students with life skills by Islamic values, such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving.	Complete extracurricular activities at SMPI al-Azhaar Tulungagung, such as archery, swimming, speech, etc.
13	Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation	Regular monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of education should be conducted to ensure that quality continues to improve.	Many achievements win competitions, high school index National Exam scores (Mahendra, 2023)

Principal's Statement:

"There are 13 Quality Assurances in the alumni profile. One of the main aspects is the readiness of students as preachers according to their capacity. Many students come from public elementary schools and have completed the volume readings, although initially, they were not able to focus. To overcome this, female teachers are given the responsibility of providing volume commitments as a condition for class promotion. The principal is not the center of teaching but ensures that there is a commitment that is agreed upon from the start. All of these rules and commitments are stated in a letter of understanding, yellow book, guidance and counselling book, and student code of conduct book" (Haryati, 2024).

Talking about the volumes that are considered for class promotion, SMPI Al-Azhar uses the yanbu'a method (the name of the method of reading, writing, and memorizing the Qur'an). Students will use the *yanbu'a* method, starting with students who have reached volume 4, which volume has begun to be able to read long and short and can be harmonized. With the *yanbu'a* method, children automatically have the provisions to continue to the Qur'an. Meanwhile, for the junior high school level in the field of tahfidz, the target for students in the Gazebo Class category is 10 juz. In comparison, the regular class has a smaller target of 6 juz divided into 6 semesters for 3 years.

Principal's statement:

"In this volume 4, there is a point where they have started to have long and short ones. They have started to read and come to the Quran. With the *yanbu'a* method, children automatically have a warning" (Haryati, 2024).

Promotion

Promotional activities of SMPI Al-Azhaar by implementing the concept of competitive Integrated Islamic School (SIT) management are carried out through digital promotion, namely through websites and social media, as well as direct promotion, such as distributing brochures and holding parenting classes. Regularly published in local newspapers with a regular budget by highlighting school achievements and alums testimonials, both those who are still in high school and college or those who have worked. Digital promotion includes the publication of various student activities as well as testimonials from the Intra-School Student Organization (OSIS).

As stated by the principal:

"We implement competitive strategies by promoting the school through websites, brochures, and social media, as well as including testimonials from OSIS members" (Haryati, 2024).

Technically, OSIS students will welcome elementary school students who register at SMPI Al-Azhaar by holding entertainment activities. In addition, SMPI Al-Azhaar also organizes orientation programs and visits to schools by presenting several OSIS members as sources of

testimonials. Direct promotional activities to parents are carried out through the MAJELAS parenting class program or the regular *Dzikir* Assembly, which is mandatory not only for students but also for parents of students.

Principal's statement:

"This institution has a MAJELAS (*Majelis Zikir*) program that requires the presence of parents as part of the joint learning process. Experience shows that parental absence often leads to disagreements with school policies. To overcome this, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) containing 24 points of agreement that parents must approve is implemented. If a parent is absent three times in a row, the homeroom teacher will be notified, and they will be called for confirmation. This program has the full support of junior high school guardians, creating good synergy between the school and parents" (Haryati, 2024).

Student Admission

Information regarding the implementation of the registration stages and selection tests is conveyed until the announcement of new student admissions, which is carried out in several waves. Based on the interview results, new student admissions are divided into three waves. In the first wave, the target for student admissions is around 50 people. Furthermore, in the second wave, the number of students accepted ranges from 100 to 200 people. Meanwhile, in the third wave, there is no maximum limit on the number of applicants, so all prospective students can register without any time restrictions.

Principal's Statement:

"The new student selection process takes place in three waves. In the first wave, the target for admission is more than 50 students. Prospective student data is collected and put into a WhatsApp group. Guardians of students who have confirmed their willingness are asked to fill out a form and complete the administrative requirements, including a statement of seriousness" (Haryati, 2024).

Of the three available registration waves, parents or guardians who have officially registered their children are asked to submit the prospective student's personal data as part of the registration process (filling). In addition, they are also required to fill out a statement of seriousness or ability. This statement is binding, both for students and guardians, to comply with the regulations and follow the programs implemented at SMPI Al-Azhaar.

In addition to the administrative process, a selection test is also carried out during registration. This test aims to determine the learning model that will be applied to students in the future. SMPI Al-Azhaar has its approach to organizing intelligence (IQ) tests. This test aims to obtain information about prospective students, which the school then processes as a basis for implementing various learning models that are tailored to the character of the students.

In addition, SMPI Al-Azhaar also implements outbound hunting activities, which are carried out before the start of education and before students enter learning in the first semester. This outbound activity not only contains games or entertainment but also has a special purpose. Teachers use this activity to identify the character of each student so that they can provide more appropriate treatment and direct their talents and interests optimally.

The results of the outbound activities are then mapped based on the similarity of student characters. This step is carried out based on experience and evaluation from previous years to anticipate potential imbalances in class dynamics. With this mapping, schools can prevent unconducive class conditions, overcome problems of students with quiet or low-confidence characters, and facilitate better communication. In addition, this strategy also aims to facilitate the learning process and character strengthening in the classroom.

Here is the principal's statement:

"Schools implement IQ tests to identify appropriate learning models for prospective students. In addition, outbound hunting activities are carried out before formal learning begins to map students' characters, talents, and interests. This mapping helps schools place students appropriately, prevent adaptation difficulties, and support optimal learning. Without this step, adjustments to learning strategies can be delayed until the next semester, so that early mapping becomes a preventive effort in supporting student development" (Haryati, 2024).

Marketing Management Implications of SIT

Based on information from the principal, the level of satisfaction of parents of students with the results of education at SMPI Al-Azhaar is generally in the category of "satisfied" and "very satisfied." The development of SMPI Al-Azhaar from year to year cannot be separated from the efforts of all elements that synergize with each other to advance and realize an education system that is in accordance with the expectations of the community. These efforts are made by following the direction of the principal, as well as playing an active role in marketing and introducing the integrated Islamic education system. The education provided does not only focus on religious knowledge but also includes general knowledge, making SMPI Al-Azhaar an educational institution that is highly competitive.

As explained previously, the implications of marketing management at SMPI Al-Azhaar include the fulfilment of comprehensive quality assurance indicators as well as a commitment to the development of science and increasing mastery of the method of reading the Qur'an, especially the *Yanbu'a* method. By implementing 13 aspects of quality assurance, integrated Islamic education at SMPI Al-Azhaar is expected to produce graduates who are not only academically superior but also have noble morals and a strong Islamic personality.

SIT Marketing Management Barriers

The main obstacles in the branding strategy of SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung have the potential to arise in several aspects. First, the effectiveness of the branding approach through OSIS and student testimonials depends on the consistency of their involvement and the quality of their communication with prospective students. If not well structured, this approach can be less effective in attracting public interest. Second, flagship programs such as Gazebo class and JOIS require adequate resource support, both in terms of competent teaching staff and supporting facilities, so that achievement-based branding remains relevant and sustainable. Third, the involvement of parents and the community in supporting school branding is also a challenge, especially in understanding and supporting school programs that are different from the conventional education system. Fourth, competition with other schools that also implement achievement-based branding strategies and educational innovation can be an obstacle to maintaining competitiveness. Finally, changes in educational trends and public expectations of the quality of integrated Islamic education are also factors that must be anticipated so that school branding remains effective in the long term.

The main obstacle in the promotional activities of SMPI Al-Azhaar in the context of marketing management of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) is the resistance of prospective parents to mandatory programs, such as MAJELAS (*Majelis Dzikir*). Although this program is designed to build synergy between the school and parents, not all prospective parents may agree with the requirement to attend the activity. Some parents may feel burdened by the obligation to attend MAJELAS, especially if they have limited time or different views on parental involvement in their children's education. In addition, in digital promotion, the main challenge that can arise is the lack

of accessibility of promotion among prospective students and parents who are not active on social media or are less familiar with technology. Meanwhile, in direct promotion, the effectiveness of the distribution of brochures and OSIS testimonials can be limited if not accompanied by a strong and attractive communication strategy for prospective students and parents. Therefore, schools need to develop a more flexible approach and a more inclusive communication strategy so that promotions can run more effectively.

In the context of integrated Islamic school marketing management, there are several obstacles that have the potential to arise in the student admission process. One of the main obstacles is the level of readiness of prospective students and parents in fulfilling administrative requirements, including filling out forms and letters of seriousness. Although this process aims to ensure their commitment, some prospective students may have difficulty in completing the administrative stages on time, which can hinder the smooth recording of data and initial selection. In addition, the implementation of IQ tests as part of student selection also has the potential to cause obstacles, especially if prospective students experience anxiety or are not familiar with the test format, which can affect the assessment results. Another challenge arises in outbound hunting activities, which, although aimed at mapping student character, still have risks such as students' unpreparedness in adapting to a new environment or significant differences in the social and emotional levels of students. If this mapping is not carried out carefully, there is a potential for imbalance in class dynamics, which can ultimately impact the effectiveness of learning. In addition to technical obstacles, external factors such as changes in parental preferences for educational models or competition with other schools can also affect the number of applicants in each wave of admissions. Therefore, adaptive school marketing strategy management is the key to overcoming these obstacles to ensure optimal student acceptance in accordance with the vision of an integrated Islamic school.

Discussion

Planning by Brand Strategy

Careful planning involves formulating policies based on mutual agreement, including regular publication in the mass media, budgeting for promotions on social media, and strengthening branding through various internal and external strategies. From a marketing management perspective, branding strategy aims to build a strong school identity and differentiate it from competitors (Irdiyanti et al., 2023; Varadarajan & Malone, 2018). SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung implements a branding strategy based on student achievement and leadership. One approach used is to utilize the role of OSIS students in welcoming prospective new students and providing testimonials about their experiences at school. This is in line with branding theory, which emphasizes that the image and reputation of an institution can be built through the active involvement of students in promoting the school (Kotler et al., 2016; Varadarajan & Malone, 2018).

Another branding strategy is through the publication of student writing in the form of books and journalistic magazines, such as the JOIS (Journalist Ozataru Al-Azhaar) program. This approach reflects the concept of brand identity, where institutions create differentiation through intellectual and academic products produced by students (Hemsley-Brown, 2023). By presenting students as the main subject in branding, schools build a reputation based on superior academic and extracurricular quality.

The Gazebo Class acceleration program is one of the main branding strategies that increase the school's competitiveness. According to the market segmentation theory in marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2023), this program leads to academic-based segmentation, where schools target high-achieving students who want to complete their studies in a shorter time. This program strengthens the school's positioning as a leading educational institution that provides services according to the needs of students who have a high enthusiasm for learning (Perera et al., 2022).

Planning is a fundamental process in every human action that aims to achieve goodness, both in the context of individuals and organizations. In Islam, the concept of planning is in line with the principle of Allah's destiny, as stated in QS. Al-Hadid [57]: 22, which emphasizes that Allah has determined everything in *Lauhul Mahfudz*. Thus, Islamic educational institutions can learn from this concept to prepare for mature and strategic planning. This process is the initial step that determines the success of a goal, especially in the utilization of available resources. In institutional management, planning is an initial stage that cannot be ignored, because it involves strategic thinking about the steps that must be taken to achieve goals with the best results (Thoif & Sudjanto, 2020). Without careful planning, the implementation of an activity tends to be unfocused and risks producing less than optimal results (Ataullahjan et al., 2019).

From the Islamic perspective, the concept of Human Resources (HR) is often referred to as Islamic Resources, which emphasizes the development of complete human beings or *insan kamil* as the main asset in supporting various activities (Ikhwan & Yuniana, 2022). Therefore, Islamic Resources must be prepared by considering the aspects of quantity and quality. If the number of human resources is too high without good planning, there will be waste, while inaccuracy in qualifications can hinder the effectiveness of the organization (Hadis Hadi, Masoud Taheri Lari, 2024).

As a basic process in management, planning is a key element in decision-making and implementation of actions, especially in various types of organizations, including educational institutions. Educational institutions require comprehensive planning to ensure program effectiveness and achievement of academic and moral goals. Every activity in an organization, whether in the education sector, companies, or society, requires careful planning so that it can run in accordance with the established vision and mission (Dacholfany & Ikhwan, 2024). In addition, planning is an integral part of every management function because, without clear planning, these functions cannot be carried out optimally (Ikhwan & Qomariyah, 2022).

Organising

Once the planning is established, the next step is to organize existing resources, both human resources and budget, so that the marketing strategy runs effectively. SMPI Al-Azhaar organizes a publication system with a structured budget allocation, involves students in marketing strategies to increase public trust, and builds branding through inclusive programs and academic and non-academic achievements.

The school distributes tasks to various parties, including OSIS students, teachers, and parents. OSIS plays a role in promotion through testimonial activities and welcoming prospective students, while teachers manage acceleration and literacy programs. In addition, the MAJELAS program strengthens parental involvement in supporting school policies. From an Islamic perspective, optimal human resource organization is included in the concept of insan kamil, where HR must be managed well in terms of quality and quantity in order to provide maximum benefits to the organization (Hadis Hadi, Masoud Taheri Lari, 2024).

Actuating or Promotion Strategy

The promotional strategy implemented by SMPI Al-Azhaar includes two main approaches, namely digital promotion and direct promotion. Digital promotion is carried out through the school website and social media, which display various student activities and testimonials from OSIS members. This approach is in accordance with the concept of digital marketing, which emphasizes the importance of audience engagement through online platforms to increase the attractiveness of the school (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Direct promotion is done through the distribution of brochures and parenting classes, such as the MAJELAS (*Majelis Dzikir*) program. In marketing management, this approach is known as a relationship marketing strategy, which aims to build long-term engagement between schools and

parents (John & De Villiers, 2024). By involving parents in religious and academic activities, schools strengthen emotional connections that can increase loyalty to the institution (Shams et al., 2024).

In addition, direct promotion is also carried out through school visits to elementary schools and new student orientations involving OSIS members. Students' involvement in branding strategies shows that they are confident and capable, which further increases public trust in the quality of the institution. According to the theory of integrated marketing communication, this strategy is effective in building positive first-hand experiences for prospective students and parents, thereby increasing the likelihood of them choosing the school (Belch & Belch, 2018).

In Islam, the importance of conveying the goodness that Allah has given is emphasized in QS. Adh-Dhuha [93]: 11: "And as for the favour of your Lord, you should mention it (with gratitude)." The concept of *tahadduts bin ni'mah* is also relevant in the positive branding of educational institutions, namely publishing achievements as a form of *syiar*, not for arrogance, but to increase public trust (Labib, 2022).

New Student Admissions Strategy

The strategy for accepting new students at SMPI Al-Azhaar is divided into three waves, with targets determined at each stage. This strategy reflects the concept of demand management, where schools set admission quotas in stages to ensure the stability of the number of students and the optimization of resources. According to the theory of educational service marketing, the implementation of a phased admission system can increase the competitiveness of schools by providing flexibility to prospective students and parents in determining the appropriate registration time (Zeithaml et al., 2018).

The selection process also reflects the target marketing strategy, where the school adjusts the selection stages to the segmentation of prospective students based on interests and academic abilities. By providing wider opportunities in the final wave without limiting the number of applicants, the school implements an inclusive strategy that can increase the number of students without reducing the standard of education quality.

The marketing strategy of SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung shows the effective application of marketing management concepts in the context of education. Branding based on achievement and student leadership builds a strong school identity, digital and direct promotions strengthen the institution's appeal, and flexible student admission strategies increase the number of applicants (Naidoo et al., 2014). With an approach that is oriented to the needs of students and parents, SMPI Al-Azhaar is able to increase its competitiveness in the integrated Islamic education sector.

Controlling

SMPI Al-Azhaar ensures the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by conducting periodic evaluations of branding and promotion programs. A quality assurance system consisting of 13 aspects is the main tool in maintaining the quality of education. At the same time, the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with parents helps ensure the sustainability of the program. Control in Islam is also reflected in the importance of supervision and balance in resource management (Mtitu, 2025), as in the hadith of the Prophet, which emphasizes the need for balance between human efforts and the decree of Allah.

Periodic evaluation through 13 aspects of quality assurance supports the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic education (Bulbul Afrin & Mohiuddin, 2024). This study shows that systematic and sustainable quality control, including parental involvement through MoU, can improve stakeholder satisfaction and school competitiveness.

Marketing Management Implications of SIT

The level of satisfaction of guardians of students with the results of education at SMPI Al-Azhaar is generally in the category of "satisfied" and "very satisfied." This shows that the development of the school cannot be separated from the synergy of all elements that strive to

realize an education system that is in accordance with the expectations of the community. These efforts are carried out through the direction of the principal and active involvement in marketing and introducing the integrated Islamic education system. Education at SMPI Al-Azhaar not only focuses on religious knowledge but also includes general knowledge, making it an educational institution that is highly competitive at the national level.

The implications of marketing management at SMPI Al-Azhaar include the fulfilment of comprehensive quality assurance indicators, commitment to scientific development, and increasing mastery of the Qur'an reading method, especially the Yanbu'a method. By implementing 13 aspects of quality assurance, integrated Islamic education at SMPI Al-Azhaar is expected to be able to produce graduates who excel academically, have noble morals, and have a strong Islamic personality. This implication is reflected in several aspects, such as increasing the insight and competence of educators through training, workshops, and the Subject Teacher Deliberation (MGMP) and Teacher Working Group (KKG) forums. In addition, the success of graduates in meeting quality assurance indicators, such as becoming young preachers, fluent in reading the Qur'an (*tahsin*), being accepted at leading high schools, and obtaining achievement and talent scholarships, shows the effectiveness of the educational marketing strategy implemented (Mareta et al., 2024).

Developing extracurricular programs that are adapted to the demands of the times is also part of efforts to increase the competitiveness of institutions. Superior programs such as Tahfiz Al-Qur'an, which have measurable indicators of success, make SMPI Al-Azhaar one of the integrated Islamic schools capable of producing graduates with academic excellence and Islamic character. Islam itself emphasizes the importance of education, which includes knowledge based on revelation, research and rational thinking. Knowledge originating from revelation (the Qur'an and Hadith), as well as the results of *ijtihad*, *burhani* (observation and experimentation), and *irfani* (mujahadah and muraqabah), are the main foundations in the formation of Islamic knowledge (Dimyati et al., 2021).

Islam highly values scientific research, as reflected in the first command revealed in the Qur'an, namely reading (*Iqra'*) in Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1-5. Reading in this context is not only limited to written texts but also includes observation, discussion, analysis, and skill improvement through training and seminars. The Prophet Muhammad SAW was also known as *al-Mu'allim* (teacher) and *al-Muaddib* (educator), which emphasized the importance of managing Islamic educational institutions in disseminating knowledge (Muttaqin et al., 2023). Therefore, the Islamic world continues to encourage the birth of innovative ideas to face global challenges while maintaining Islamic values as the main foundation for building a generation of knowledge and noble character.

To maintain and improve the quality of education, it is necessary to strengthen faith and develop self-potential through various training programs and seminars. This is in accordance with the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW who emphasized the importance of utilizing time well: "Take advantage of five things before five things: (1) your youth before your old age comes, (2) your health before your illness comes, (3) your wealth before your poverty comes, (4) your free time before your busyness comes, (5) your life before your death comes" (HR. Bukhari & Muslim) (Pusaka, 2011). Thus, the competence of a Muslim must always be honed so that there is no decline in the quality of self, both in terms of knowledge and morality. Therefore, it is important to continue to practice the knowledge that has been obtained and find the best way to apply it in everyday life.

The results of this study show differences with the findings of DiMartino and Jessen, who revealed that educational marketing still faces serious challenges, such as unpreparedness of educational actors, reactive marketing, unclear information conveyed to the public, and concerns about shifting budget allocations from academic needs to promotional activities. In addition, marketing practices in public schools create a dilemma between efforts to create inclusivity or strengthen exclusivity, thus triggering ethical debates regarding educational justice (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016). Other differences are also apparent when compared to Goh's research, which emphasizes the focus of marketing strategies on efforts to understand the needs and perceptions of

prospective students from outside to design effective promotions. Meanwhile, research at SMPI Al-Azhaar emphasizes strengthening the internal image and collaboration of the school community, such as teachers, students, and parents, to attract new students. Although they have different focuses, both studies emphasize that school marketing management must be adjusted to the characteristics of the institution and the target market (Goh et al., 2017). On the other hand, the results of this study are in line with the findings of Adamba, which both emphasize the importance of building a positive image of the institution to increase competitiveness. However, the approach is different; where research in Indonesia highlights the internal processes and tactics of implementing marketing management, while research in Ghana focuses on external factors and the behaviour of prospective students in choosing a college, including the importance of involving third parties such as teachers and counsellors in marketing strategies (Adamba, 2020).

Figure 2 shows the practical contribution of SIT marketing management based on a comparison of previous research results and current research findings. First, educational institutions need to develop a systematic and planned marketing strategy, not just reacting to market dynamics, as the challenges found in DiMartino and Jessen's (2016) research. To avoid unclear information and maintain a balanced budget allocation between academic and promotional needs, educational institutions must design marketing messages that are honest, accurate, and reflect the quality of educational services in real terms. Second, in line with the findings of Goh et al. (2017), schools need to understand the needs and perceptions of prospective students and parents as target markets by combining strategies that focus on strengthening the school's internal image through community collaboration (teachers, students, and parents) and external strategies that reach the wider community. Third, as emphasized by Adamba (2020), schools need to build a positive image that reflects the advantages and unique characteristics of the institution, both through academic achievements and distinctive religious programs.
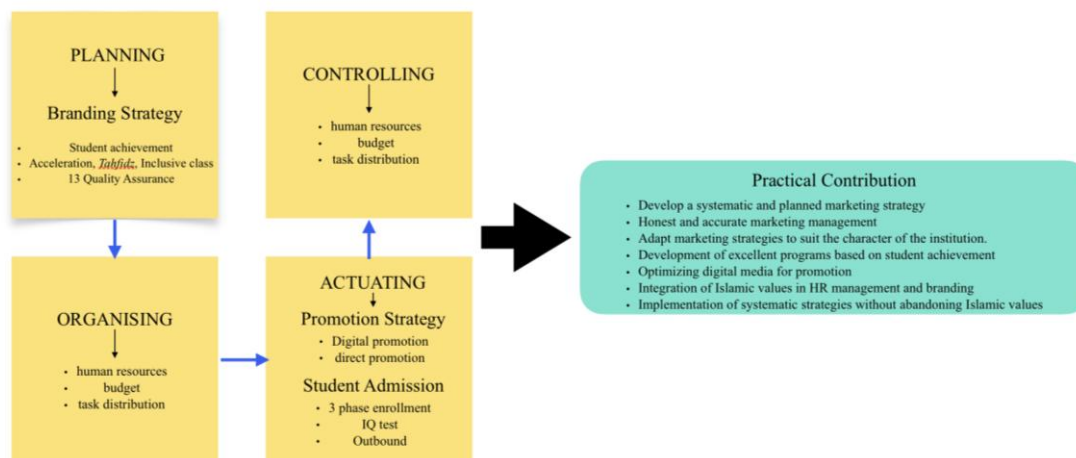

Figure 2. *Practical Contribution of Research Results on Marketing Management of Islamic Educational Institutions*

In addition, Islamic educational institutions can adopt the Integrated Islamic School (SIT) marketing management model by adjusting marketing and branding strategies based on Islamic values and institutional identity. Strengthening superior programs based on student achievement, using digital media to expand promotions, and integrating Islamic values in every marketing activity are important steps to increase competitiveness. Marketing must also include organizing professional and moral human resources so that the promotion process is not only oriented towards achieving the number of students but also maintaining the integrity and goals of Islamic education. With a holistic marketing strategy—including planning, organizing, promotion, and periodic

evaluation—Islamic educational institutions can build public trust, expand reach, and maintain a balance between market interests and educational missions.

CONCLUSION

The marketing management of Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) plays an important role in increasing the competitiveness of institutions, especially in influencing the number of new student registrations and stakeholder satisfaction, through the implementation of integrated strategies based on the POAC principle (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling). A study at SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung showed that branding planning was carried out carefully by prioritizing student achievement, OSIS leadership, publication of written works, and the Class Gazebo acceleration program, as well as utilizing social media, websites, and student testimonials to build a superior image and attract public interest. The process of organizing resources actively involves teachers, students, and parents in promotion. In contrast, the promotion strategy is combined between digital and face-to-face media, including the MAJELAS parenting program, to increase public involvement. The new student admission procedure is designed in stages with innovative techniques, such as OSIS leadership training and selection based on character mapping. It is equipped with quality control through evaluation of the quality assurance system and parent cooperation through the MoU. In addition, SIT also offers excellent programs such as Gazebo classes (acceleration), inclusive classes, and tahfidz to increase public trust, accompanied by positive consequences in the form of improving the quality of educators, graduate standards, and the creation of academic and extracurricular programs that are relevant to the needs of the times.

This study broadens the understanding of how marketing management theory and educational management can be synergized with Islamic principles in building competitive advantages for educational institutions. The limitations of this study lie in its focus on only one institution, namely SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung, so the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other integrated Islamic schools with different characteristics. Further research can examine the effectiveness of the educational marketing management strategy implemented by SMPI Al-Azhaar Tulungagung by comparing it to other integrated Islamic educational institutions to see the differences in impact on the competitiveness and image of the school.

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