

BUILDING THE IMAGE OF A QUALITY ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL: INNOVATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES THAT CHANGE PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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Abstract

This study focuses on the curriculum of the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School accredited by the Islamic University of Madinah-KSA, as well as the increasing number of enthusiasts every year. With adequate facilities and existing advantages, the researcher wants to investigate the marketing management implemented by the boarding school. This thesis explores two main aspects: (1) student admission management and (2) marketing strategies for new student admissions. This type of research is qualitative, with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analysis using the constant comparison method from Glaser and Strauss. The results of the study indicate that (1) the management of new student admissions at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School includes planning that sets quotas based on alumni and non-alumni categories; organizing that involves dividing the committee into classes; implementation that lasts for 2-3 months; and supervision that is carried out through performance evaluation during the activity. (2) The marketing strategy for new student admissions refers to the marketing mix theory, which includes: Product (choice of boarding school and full-day classes), Price (SPP, initial fees, and uniform costs), Place (strategic location in the city center), Promotion (word of mouth), People (teaching staff from the Middle East), Process (seven stages), and Physical Evidence (facilities, uniforms, and teaching staff).

Keywords: Management, Marketing, Islamic Boarding School

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren is an Islamic-based educational institution, where students study, deepen, and practice Islamic teachings. The main focus of pesantren is to prioritize religious manners and morals as a guideline in living everyday life. Each Islamic boarding school has a unique attraction for prospective students, which is influenced by the role of the management in providing information to the community. To market Islamic boarding schools, managers must have a good management strategy to attract prospective students and increase interest in the boarding school. Management is important because one of its basic principles is effectiveness.

Management includes the process of organizing, managing, arranging, and controlling to achieve the desired goals. Generally, management is carried out by high-ranking officials or owners of institutions to ensure that the command runs centrally and effectively. In marketing Islamic boarding schools, there are four components of management that need to be considered: planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising. Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, Mataram also applies this strategy in promoting Islamic boarding schools.

Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School was established in 2002 and is located on Jln. Majapahit No. 54 B, near the NTB Provincial Forestry Service and the University of Mataram. This Islamic boarding school offers high school level education through the Madrasah Aliyah Plus Abu Hurairah Mataram, with the flagship program of Madrasah Aliyah Keagamaan (MAK). In 2005, this Islamic boarding school opened the Abu Hurairah Mataram Integrated Islamic Junior High School, followed by the establishment of the Abu Hurairah Integrated Islamic Elementary School in 2006. The educational approach at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School is Salafi essentialist, developing a khalaqoh pattern that discusses sharia, bid'ah, superstition, and superstition, with the aim of straightening out thoughts and beliefs in accordance with the Qur'an and authentic Hadith.

Table 1.
Number of Students from 2019/2020-2023/2024

No.	Year	Number of Students Registered	Number of students accepted
1.	2019/2020	899 people	388 people

2.	2020/2021	973 people	423 people
3.	2021/2022	998 people	430 people
4.	2022/2023	1045 people	455 people
5.	2023/2024	1146 people	482 people

Sourch: Brochures, School Fees and Re-registration of Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School Mataram, quoted on September 14, 2023

Marketing carried out by the Abu Hurairah Mataram Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in attracting the interest of parents and prospective new students. This marketing process aims to achieve certain targets. They utilize various methods, including the role of other people, social media, brochures, and banners/billboards. In addition, the facilities and advantages offered, as listed in the table above, also support the existence of the Islamic boarding school. Therefore, the researcher is interested in investigating "Marketing Management of New Student Admissions at the Abu Hurairah Mataram Islamic Boarding School in 2022/2023."

This study draws on previous research to analyze student admissions. The first reference is a 2018 thesis by Irwan Nurhamzah, titled *Management of New Student Admissions at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hasyim Asy'ari Malang*, which employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Nurhamzah's findings indicate that admissions management involved planning for capacity, admission requirements, and administrative preparation; implementation through forming committees, assigning roles, organizing a selection team, setting selection timelines, and announcing results; and evaluating through committee reports, leading to successful admissions with high applicant acceptance. However, his study focused solely on management theory at the elementary school level, while this research integrates both management and marketing theories and spans educational levels from elementary through high school at Abu Hurairah Mataram. The second reference is a 2019 study by Mohamad Muspawi and Sustriana Rindhi, titled *Socialization of New Student Admissions with a Public Relations Management Approach*, which found that SMAN 7 Merangin's Public Relations (PR) program utilized billboards, socialization, and social media but faced challenges such as time, limited resources, and the school's transition from private to public. While both studies used qualitative methods and focused on new student admissions, this research goes further

by examining comprehensive marketing management strategies at multiple educational levels within the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School.

This article is urgent because there has been no study that discusses the marketing management of the Abu Hurairah Mataram Islamic boarding school. Thus, the focus of this article is insight and innovation in the marketing management of Islamic boarding schools. The focus of this research is to analyze management of new student admissions at the Abu Hurairah Islamic boarding school in Mataram and to find out the marketing strategy for accepting new students at the Abu Hurairah Islamic boarding school in Mataram.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach centered on a natural context, where humans serve as the primary instrument. The focus is on process rather than results, with a flexible design that ensures data validity through established criteria, allowing for findings that researchers and participants agree upon. To investigate the marketing management of new student admissions at Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School in Mataram, data is collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Primary data comes directly from firsthand interactions and observations of words and actions, while secondary data includes related documents that indirectly support the study. The data collection procedure integrates observation of the boarding school environment, teaching staff, and students; interviews with nine key participants, including the Head of School, managers, students, and parents; and documentation of school profiles, brochures, website, and social media to verify information. Data is analyzed through the constant comparison method by Glaser and Strauss, involving data reduction, categorization, synthesis, and hypothesis formulation to develop meaningful conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSS

Management of New Student Admissions at Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, Mataram

Management can be defined as the art of organizing and administering. The process of management consists of several stages, namely planning, organizing, implementing, and

supervising. This series of processes aims to achieve the targets that have been set. The planning stage is very important because it determines the steps that will be taken in the future and plays a major role in determining the success of a plan.

New Student Admissions (PPDB) is a program that is carried out every year to welcome the new school year at school. This process greatly affects the sustainability of the school, both in the coming years and in the long term. The more new students accepted each year, the better the school's value or accreditation. Therefore, PPDB is very important, because without students, there is nothing that can be fostered by the teaching staff at school.

At Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, the management of New Student Admissions (PPDB) involves a structured approach that encompasses planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision. The planning phase begins with disseminating information about admissions through various social media platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. This is coupled with setting student quotas, determining admission requirements, and establishing selection systems, including assessment criteria and graduation processes. Interviews with Ustad Muhammad Sidik, the Head of SMPIT Putri and PPDB treasurer, revealed that the goal of PPDB is to recruit new students while maintaining a high-quality Islamic education.

Determining the student quota involves assessing the number of available classrooms and adhering to government guidelines. In 2023, 1,146 applicants were recorded, with only 431 accepted, resulting in a 37% acceptance rate. The committee also sets specific admission requirements, differentiated between alumni and non-alumni pathways. Various media, including brochures and promotional videos, are utilized to spread information effectively, emphasizing a personal approach where current guardians share details within their communities.

Administrative preparations ensure that necessary forms, furniture, and facilities are ready before testing begins. Organizing involves forming a committee with designated roles, such as chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, and treasurer, all of whom are selected during a leadership meeting. Specific divisions of tasks ensure accountability and efficiency throughout the admission process.

Implementation of the admissions process consists of forming a selection team responsible for conducting various tests for prospective students. These tests assess academic potential and moral character, with additional psychological evaluations for non-alumni. The scheduling is meticulously planned, with separate timelines for alumni and non-alumni to facilitate smooth operations.

The announcement of accepted students is done online, allowing parents to access results easily through a designated link shared on social media platforms. The final phase, supervision, includes direct interactions during tests to maintain integrity and fairness in the selection process. An evaluation meeting follows the admission period to assess the success of the process based on the number of students registered and accepted. The thorough management of PPDB at Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School reflects adherence to established management theories, ensuring a structured approach from planning through to supervision while also identifying areas for future improvement.

Marketing Strategy for Accepting New Students at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, Mataram

In this study, the researcher refers to the 7P marketing mix theory proposed by Philip Kotler, which includes: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. Marketing strategy is a step to market a product with a prepared tactical plan, so that it can increase sales. The role of marketing strategy is very important for companies or institutions, because it can affect economic value, both from the price of goods and services. Every organization needs to implement a marketing strategy to attract public attention; without this strategy, it is difficult for the organization to gain interest. An example is the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School in Mataram, which has an effective marketing strategy for accepting new students, so that the number of interested parties continues to increase every year.

The brand identity of an educational institution lies in its name, which, in this case, is Pondok Pesantren Abu Hurairah. The school is named after Abu Hurairah, a notable companion of the Prophet known for narrating a large number of hadiths, aligning with the school's emphasis on hadith memorization; students are expected to memorize 100 hadiths per semester. As noted by one source, "Abu Hurairah was a renowned companion and prolific transmitter of hadiths. Initially established as a foundation called Al-Hunafa', it later transformed into an

Islamic boarding school named Pondok Pesantren Abu Hurairah, with a goal of producing graduates who have memorized hadiths." This branding choice is strategic, as it creates an association with an esteemed Islamic figure, enhancing its appeal and distinguishing it from other institutions. The researcher suggests that this branding is an example of cultural borrowing that enhances the school's marketing approach, despite the school being an Indonesian institution.

The motto of Pondok Abu Hurairah Mataram, "Character with Knowledge, Good Deeds, and Manners," also plays a crucial role. It emphasizes that education is not solely about acquiring knowledge but also about embodying that knowledge in actions, sharing it with the community, and upholding respectful behavior in spreading knowledge and performing good deeds.



Image 1.

Logo of Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, Mataram.

The logo of Pondok Pesantren Abu Hurairah (PAH) Mataram holds significant meaning: (1) the eight angles represent the spread of knowledge in all directions as a key mission; (2) the mosque symbolizes the role of the institution as a center for education and a foundation of Islamic civilization; (3) the book and light signify the Qur'an and As-Sunnah, sources of knowledge that serve as guiding lights in life; (4) the gold color represents the aspiration to nurture a "golden generation" akin to the Prophet's companions (*radhiallahu anhum*). This symbolism reflects the high ideals and educational focus of the institution.

The school offers a variety of educational levels and programs, including SDIT Putra and Putri (elementary), SMPIT Putra, Putri, and Fullday (junior high), and SMAIT Fullday and MA Plus (high school). According to the researcher, these offerings highlight the institution's strengths and appeal to potential students and their families. The school aims to develop

students who not only have memorized verses of the Qur'an but also a substantial number of hadiths, aligning with the school's name and mission.

The institution's motto, "Character with Knowledge, Good Deeds, and Manners," emphasizes that education should not only impart knowledge but encourage students to apply it in their lives, especially in their communities, and to do so with respect and integrity. This aligns well with the logo's deeper symbolism, such as the eight angles which imply that the institution is inclusive of students from all backgrounds, even offering special quotas for those from remote areas.

PAH Mataram offers various programs, including options for full-day or boarding school for elementary through high school levels, allowing prospective students to choose between these different formats. Pricing is structured according to the level and type of program chosen, as tuition rates influence interest and accessibility among prospective students and their families. This pricing strategy is managed carefully to align with the institution's values and ensure access to quality Islamic education.

Price in the context of education is the total cost incurred by students to obtain education offered by schools/Islamic boarding schools. In the price element of educational institutions, pricing is considered (for example, building costs, tuition fees, laboratory costs, and other costs).

Based on the table above, it shows that there are differences in the costs that will be incurred by group 1 to group 3, indicating that the difference in these groups is the difference in income earned by the parents of prospective new students. According to the researcher, this is a good strategy because from this it can be explained according to the ability of the parents of prospective students to pay for their child's school. However, it is better to minimize the price determination because when re-registering, some new students withdraw due to cost issues. In this way, the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School can provide prospective new students who want to get good quality education and adequate facilities, but are hampered by costs, so it would be better if there were scholarships with criteria for students who are unable but have achievements, so that it will boost the image of the Islamic Boarding School.

When re-enrolling, accepted students at Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School are required to pay a re-registration fee, an initial fee, and a uniform fee. Mrs. Eriwati, a parent

from Bima whose daughter attends SMPIT Putri, shared her perspective: "As part of fee group 2, the initial cost was nearly 10 million, and with uniforms, it exceeded 11 million. Though it's expensive, it feels worth it for the quality of education and facilities our children receive." Mrs. Eriwati's comment reflects that while the entry fee at Abu Hurairah is relatively high reaching millions of rupiah it is justified by the level of knowledge and facilities provided.

Similarly, Ustadz Muhammad Abdul Ma'ad remarked on the pricing structure, explaining, "The fees correlate with the quality of facilities and education offered here. The costs are fair considering the range of amenities, including boarding, activities, and commuting services, which makes it affordable." Thus, although the re-registration fee can range from Rp. 8,000,000 to Rp. 15,000,000 and monthly fees for dormitory residents are between Rp. 850,000 and Rp. 1,000,000, these expenses support the quality teaching staff, specialized programs, and resources that make Abu Hurairah graduates highly competent.

The researcher observes that these fees are relatively high, making the school more accessible to families with higher incomes, potentially limiting access for low-income students. To bridge this gap, scholarships could be provided for talented students from lower-income backgrounds. The pricing model is also considered well-structured, as it is divided into three groups based on income levels and available quotas, allowing parents to contribute according to their financial means.

The Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School in Mataram is advantageously located in the city center on Jl. Majapahit No. 54B, Kekalik Jaya, Sekarbela District. Its proximity to Mataram University and the NTB Provincial Forestry Service makes it especially convenient. Muhammad Sidik highlights this, stating, "Abu Hurairah has the most strategic location in Mataram, positioned in the city center, adjacent to a university and various offices."

The campus layout thoughtfully separates different facilities, such as classrooms, mosques, and fields. Student Rachel Fa'iz mentions, "Classrooms are well-arranged; the junior high and high school girls' buildings are in the same structure but divided by floor, with junior high on the first floor and high school on the second. Male and female areas are separated, with a central field between them. The junior high school girls' area is near the canteen." While detailed, the division between elementary and junior high sections is less clearly defined.

The researcher notes that the location of the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School is well-placed in the city, making it highly visible and accessible to both students and parents. However, they suggest adding a prominent gate or marker at the entrance from the main road to clearly signal the institution's presence. For a product to gain traction and attract demand, a company must have an effective promotional strategy to inform and engage the public. Similarly, the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School in Mataram must strategically convey its offerings and benefits, helping families see it as an excellent choice for their children's education.

Direct outreach between schools has not been conducted in the past 5-6 years. However, the school remains well-regarded due to the parents' word-of-mouth promotion, as families often recommend it to others within their networks. Muhammad, a student at SMAIT Putra, shared, "I learned about this school through relatives; in my family, many children attend Abu Hurairah, so I was encouraged to enroll here." However, word-of-mouth can also have limitations, as perceptions of high fees may deter some, and it is challenging to control misinformation that may circulate.

The Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School has a strong presence on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. This online promotion helps the institution reach a larger audience, generating interest and engagement among prospective families and students. Through these platforms, Abu Hurairah can share updates and highlights, further enhancing its visibility and appeal.



Figure 2

Instagram account of Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, Mataram



Figure 3

Facebook Account of Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, Mataram



Figure 4

Abu Hurairah Mataram Islamic Boarding School Youtube Account

Researchers have found that the institution effectively enhances its branding through social media by consistently sharing updates about activities at the Islamic boarding school. This includes promoting competitions held at the school and utilizing various regional languages to reach a broader audience, especially during new student admissions. Additionally, the institution highlights student achievements with congratulatory posters on social media, showcasing that the Abu Hurairah Mataram Islamic Boarding School not only instills values of etiquette and religion but also prepares students to compete at the local, provincial, national, and even international levels.

Banners and billboards are displayed during the New Student Admissions period and are removed once the admissions process concludes. The goal of these advertisements is to provide information to parents of prospective students. Brochures are distributed via social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, as well as handed out to visiting parents at the

Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School in Mataram. This approach helps to disseminate information to a wider audience. To further enhance outreach, the institution could consider collaborating with well-known influencers to attract greater interest from the community.

The people at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School primarily refer to the teaching staff, many of whom hold Master's degrees and even Doctorates. Several educators are graduates from prestigious institutions abroad, particularly in the Middle East. The school facilitates students' access to continue their studies at universities in that region. The teaching staff includes qualified individuals such as Ustad Fakhruddin Abdurrahman, Lc., a graduate of Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya and the school's leader; along with Ustad Mashuri Badrian, Lc., Ustad Zahid Zuhendra, Lc., Ustad Mizan Qudsiah, Lc., and many others, all holding similar degrees.

These highly qualified educators, many of whom have studied in the Middle East, serve as a strong incentive for parents and prospective students. Additionally, the presence of alumni among the teaching staff reinforces the school's reputation. The involvement of Middle Eastern graduates enhances the institution's appeal, suggesting that students will have ample opportunities for higher education both domestically and internationally.

According to Zeithmal and Bitner, the process is defined as a procedure, mechanism, and series of activities to deliver services from producers to consumers. (Buchori Alma, 2008) So the process is one of the factors that influences marketing, especially in the form of services. At the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, the entry process from the beginning to becoming a student goes through several stages as shown in the table below:

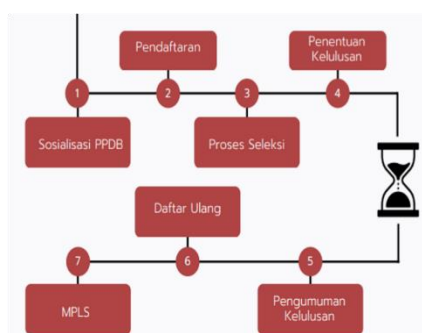


Figure 5

**The Process Of Opening Registration For New Students Until
The Announcement Of Graduation.**

Based on the image above, the explanation is that: The process of becoming a student at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, firstly, conducting socialization from the institution in order to disseminate information to the entire community, secondly, registration by prospective new students through links distributed via the internet and social media, thirdly, conducting a selection process which goes through test stages held by the Islamic Boarding School itself, fourthly, holding a meeting to determine graduation where the leaders evaluate who is worthy of being accepted and must be in accordance with the scores obtained, fifthly, announcement of graduation, sixthly, students who have been declared to have passed must re-register, seventhly, students who have passed all the stages of the process can take part in the MPLS (School Environment Introduction Period).

Physical Evidence (Physical evidence).

Physical Evidence(physical evidence), is the physical environment in which services are created, which directly interacts with consumers. Physical evidence in the marketing mix is divided into two types, namely: first, the design and layout of buildings such as school buildings, classrooms, fields, libraries and others. Second, supporting evidence is added value such as report cards, student records and others. An important component that influences consumer decisions is also in physical facilities, so that consumers have an interest in entering the school/boarding school. There are several examples of physical evidence owned by the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, including:

- a. Adequate facilities (mosque, comfortable classes, complete dormitories, laboratories, culinary rooms, libraries, sports fields, cooperatives, canteens)
- b. 3 sets of uniforms for students.



Figure 6

Scout uniforms are worn on Fridays.



Figure 7

Uniforms worn on Wednesdays and Thursdays



Figure 8

Uniforms worn on Monday and Tuesday

According to researchers, from the physical evidence obtained by students starting from 3 sets of uniforms, 1 set can be worn in 2 days, such as white and red/blue/gray clothes for Monday and Tuesday. In this case, the uniforms they use can differentiate on the following days. Uniforms can give them an identity that they are students at the Abu Hurairah Mataram Islamic Boarding School, because there is a logo on the pocket. In addition, uniforms can also attract the hearts of prospective students, because if the uniforms they use are good and attractive, then other people who see them are interested in the uniforms they use. Apart from the uniforms, namely the facilities they get. The facilities they get are quite adequate and able to support teaching and learning between students and teachers. Facilities can also provide comfort, such as sports fields, laboratory rooms, libraries, canteens, computer rooms, air conditioning, whiteboards, and many more.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that the management of new student admissions at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School is structured and effective. The application of Philip Kotler's 7P marketing mix theory highlights the importance of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence in attracting prospective students. Notably, the emphasis on the product, which includes comprehensive services and facilities, serves as a key attraction for potential students, allowing them to choose according to their own potential and interests. This research also provides insights into the importance of teaching quality and facility management in creating a positive experience for students.

This research contributes to the literature on educational management, particularly in the context of Islamic boarding schools. The findings can serve as a reference for other educational institutions in formulating more effective and efficient new student admission strategies. Additionally, these findings enhance the understanding of the application of marketing theory in the context of Islamic education, which can help improve the competitiveness of institutions.

However, this research has limitations, such as not including the perspectives of students and parents in the admission process. Further research is needed to explore the factors influencing their decisions in choosing an Islamic boarding school. Moreover, there is a need for more in-depth studies on the effectiveness of the promotional strategies used and their impact on prospective students' interest, in order to better accommodate the needs and expectations of the community.

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