

School Marketing Management based on Customer Preferences in an Educational Setting

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Abstract:

This study aims to understand school marketing management based on customer preferences. It is grounded in the reality that factors such as declining enrollment rates, academic achievement, school facilities, and teacher quality influence parents' decisions in choosing a school. Therefore, this research focuses on how marketing management strategies are formulated based on the preferences of prospective students and their parents. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation techniques. The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and verification. The findings reveal that customer preference-based school marketing strategies are implemented through customer preference research and identification, strengthening school image and branding, and continuous evaluation and improvement.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami manajemen pemasaran sekolah berbasis preferensi pelanggan. Penelitian ini didasari oleh kenyataan bahwa penurunan jumlah pendaftar, prestasi akademik, fasilitas sekolah, dan kualitas guru memengaruhi keputusan orang tua dalam memilih sekolah. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini difokuskan pada bagaimana strategi manajemen pemasaran berbasis preferensi calon siswa dan orang tua. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Data yang telah dikumpulkan selanjutnya dianalisis dengan mengacu pada model analisis data dari Miles dan Huberman, yang mencakup reduksi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi pemasaran sekolah berbasis preferensi dilakukan melalui riset dan identifikasi preferensi pelanggan, penguatan citra dan branding sekolah, serta evaluasi dan perbaikan secara berkelanjutan.

Keywords:

Customer Preference-Based Marketing, Educational Marketing Strategies,
Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren)

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Introduction

The marketing of pesantren-based schools today relies not only on the intrinsic strengths and advantages of pesantren – such as the quality of religious instruction, curriculum, and facilities – but also incorporates a customer preference-based marketing approach. Understanding the wants, needs, and expectations of prospective students and their parents as education consumers is key to developing an effective marketing strategy (Pereira Filho, Añez, Nobrega, & Fernandes, 2024). This reflects a shift toward educational modernization, where pesantren not only offer educational products but also seek to understand and fulfill the desires of parents and students (Riccomini, Cirani, Pedro, Garzaro, & Kevin, 2024). This transformation makes pesantren more proactive in adapting their educational programs to remain competitive and become a preferred choice in the education sector (Yusuf, Yusuf, & Sanusi, 2024).

Several factors contribute to changes in public preference regarding educational quality, including a decline in the number of applicants, curriculum and teaching approach reforms, increased competition among schools, rising operational costs, and evolving marketing strategies (Rasheed & Rashid, 2024). Academic achievement, facilities, teacher quality, school performance, and discipline significantly influence parents' school choices (Welsh, 2023). Additionally, factors such as tuition fees, strategic location, and the integration of religious values also play important roles in parental decision-making (Junaidi, Anwar, & Sahrir, 2023). Private Islamic schools, in particular, incorporate ideological, educational, structural, economic, and pragmatic motives in their marketing strategies (Utami, Ikhsan, Dartanto, & Mallarangeng, 2024). Despite this, many schools continue to focus primarily on promotional strategies emphasizing academic excellence and physical infrastructure, highlighting their ability to provide adequate facilities as a determinant of successful educational service marketing.

Previous research has explored various approaches to pesantren-based educational marketing, often emphasizing the internal strengths of pesantren and aligning with the preferences of prospective students and parents. For example, a study by Sing & Maxwell (2024) highlights how pesantren promote themselves through religious values and character education, with increased student enrollment reflecting high community trust. Similarly, research by Wu (2024) underscores the importance of leveraging technology – particularly social media – and developing market-oriented curricula to enhance a school's reputation and community engagement. Meanwhile, a study by Ambarwati and Sari (2024) shows that marketing strategies using social media significantly influence the interest of prospective students by promoting academic content, enrollment information, activities, and institutional achievements.

This study shares similarities with the aforementioned research in its focus on Islamic boarding school marketing. Previous studies have demonstrated that customer-based marketing strategies can enhance public trust and increase student enrollment (Marhumah, 2020; Arifin, 2021). Social media has also been effectively used to strengthen school branding and reach digital-native audiences (Muzakki, 2022). Furthermore, the application of relationship marketing is seen as effective in fostering emotional connections with students' guardians. These findings underscore that marketing in Islamic boarding schools is not only relevant but essential for sustaining the presence and growth of Islamic-based educational institutions. However, this study differs in its focus, placing greater emphasis on understanding the individual preference factors that influence parents' decisions in selecting pesantren. Therefore, this research aims to address gaps in the existing literature by developing a preference-based marketing model, offering new insights into the dynamics of pesantren marketing in the modern era.

This study aims to explore school marketing management strategies based on customer preferences, addressing gaps in existing research. While prior studies have focused largely on the internal aspects of pesantren – such as religious values and educational quality – few have examined how marketing strategies can be aligned with the preferences and needs of customers, namely prospective students and their parents. Each market segment tends to exhibit similar characteristics, needs, or preferences (Cha, Jo, Lee, & Hyun, 2024). Therefore, referring to marketing theory – which emphasizes understanding the market and consumer needs – enables schools to target consumers more effectively and develop appropriate strategies (Zarubina, Zarubin, Yessenkulova, Salimbayeva, & Satbaeva, 2024). This study seeks to develop strategies that incorporate appropriate market segmentation, educational product adaptation, and effective communication with customers. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for pesantren managers in designing marketing strategies that are responsive to the evolving dynamics of the education market and capable of attracting prospective students with diverse preferences. In this way, pesantren can compete more effectively within the educational landscape.

The urgency of this research lies in the recognition that school marketing is no longer merely about promoting educational institutions but about building customer-oriented schools that understand and respond to the expectations of their target audiences. The current gap lies in the limited number of empirical studies exploring how pesantren implement market-driven strategies based on student and parent preferences. The novelty of this research is its approach to integrating modern marketing principles with pesantren values, offering a contextualized framework for customer-oriented educational marketing. School marketing management strategies based on customer preferences can be explained through the application of the marketing mix concept developed by Kotler & Keller (2016), which includes Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (4Ps). In the context of pesantren-based schools, the “Product” includes religious education programs such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and akhlaq, alongside academic programs aligned with contemporary developments (Mukhibat, Effendi, Setyawan, & Sutoyo, 2024). Additionally, differentiation through curriculum innovation and unique facilities helps schools appeal to a broader segment of

prospective students (Shofiyah & Masnawati, 2024). These programs are designed to provide formal education equivalent to public schools while maintaining modern standards and facilities (Al Husaeni, Nandiyanto, Rokhman, Chalim, Chano, Al Obaidi, & Roestamy, 2024).

The second element, "Price," must be aligned with the targeted market segment. Ensuring a balance between educational quality and the economic capacity of customers enhances a school's competitiveness, whether through competitive or premium pricing strategies (Prasetyo, Cahigas, Patrick, Rodney, Nadlifatin, & Persada, 2024). The third element, "Place," refers to school accessibility – both physical and digital. Ensuring easy access to the school, along with providing comprehensive information online and offline, is crucial for reaching prospective students and their families (Salim, Ivander, & Cahyadi, 2023). The use of online platforms not only extends market reach but also allows the provision of supplementary services such as e-learning, thereby increasing the school's appeal (Nayga, Liu, & Kassas, 2024). Finally, "Promotion" should focus on effective communication through various media channels, such as social media, brochures, and school events like open houses. Effective marketing strategies – including alumni testimonials, school tours, and digital promotional campaigns – can significantly influence prospective students' perceptions by presenting an accurate and compelling portrayal of the school's strengths, tailored to customer preferences (Orgilés-Amorós, Ruiz Moreno, Penagos-Londoño, & Tabuenca-Cuevas, 2024).

In addition, this strategy can be strengthened by adopting the relational marketing approach proposed by Christian Grönroos (1994), which emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers rather than focusing solely on one-time transactions or sales. Pesantren-based schools can foster two-way communication with prospective students and parents through platforms such as forums, satisfaction surveys, and educational consulting services. These initiatives help create mutually beneficial relationships and foster trust between schools, parents, and students (Songmuang, Boonsuk, & Assalihee, 2024). This approach enables schools to better understand the specific needs of their customers and tailor marketing strategies accordingly (Baskoro, Tjahjono, Beltran, Bogush, & Wang, 2024). The goal is not merely to 'sell' education, but to establish strong, lasting bonds with students and parents (Harris, 2024). Such relationships can foster loyalty, reduce uncertainty, and generate sustainable value for all parties involved. By responding to customer preferences and offering competitive pricing without compromising educational quality, institutions like Nurul Jadid Paiton Junior High School, Zaha 1 Genggong High School, and Madrasah Al-Hikmah Jelebu have enhanced both accessibility and market appeal. These schools create more personalized learning experiences and build strong reputations within their communities (Ghorbanzadeh & Sharbatian, 2024). As a result, they benefit from increased loyalty and valuable word-of-mouth promotion. Therefore, marketing management strategies based on customer preferences should not only aim to attract initial interest but also foster long-term satisfaction. This contributes to sustainable school growth by minimizing risk and maintaining strong communication and customer satisfaction over time.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore and analyze education marketing management based on customer preferences. In a case study, the focus lies in the specification of a particular case – be it an individual, a cultural group, or a portrait of life. Accordingly, this research focuses on both internal school stakeholders (principals, vice principals, teachers, and marketing staff) to understand the implementation of marketing strategies, and potential customers (students, parents or guardians, and community members) to examine their responses to marketing activities. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with strategic roles and relevance to the research objectives. This was followed by snowball sampling to identify additional participants who possess sufficient knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon under study. The primary aim was to ensure high-quality data relevant to customer preference-based marketing in pesantren-based educational institutions, specifically Nurul Jadid Paiton Junior High School, Zaha 1 Genggong High School, and Madrasah Al-Hikmah Jelebu.

The selection of these three research sites was based on several considerations: (1) they represent pesantren-based institutions that actively implement marketing strategies in a competitive educational environment; (2) each institution is situated in a distinct socio-cultural context, allowing for comparative insights into context-sensitive marketing approaches; and (3) all schools demonstrated openness and readiness to collaborate in academic research, which is essential for obtaining rich and valid qualitative data. These considerations support the relevance and feasibility of conducting in-depth exploration in the selected settings. The researchers acted as key instruments in collecting, processing, and analyzing data. Semi-structured interview protocols were developed, focusing on themes such as customer satisfaction, school branding, communication strategies, and decision-making factors influencing school choice. Interviews were conducted in person, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. To minimize bias, the study employed data triangulation across the three pesantren-based schools and investigator triangulation by involving peer reviewers to validate the interpretation of findings. The primary methods of data collection included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Then, credibility and trustworthiness were strengthened through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and methodological triangulation, ensuring that the findings provide a rigorous and credible understanding of marketing practices in pesantren-based educational settings.

Results and Discussion

The preference-based school marketing management in an educational setting, as referred to in this study, is a strategic approach used by pesantren-based educational institutions to understand and meet the needs and expectations of their customers. To

achieve this, schools employ a data-driven approach by analyzing customer preference data. This process includes conducting surveys, trend analysis, and direct interactions to identify the preferences of prospective students and parents. Efforts to strengthen school image and branding are aimed at creating, reinforcing, and maintaining a positive public perception. These efforts are guided by an understanding of customer needs, expectations, and preferences. Continuous evaluation and improvement are essential for addressing weaknesses, ensuring that marketing strategies are developed based not on assumptions, but on evidence-based insights. The customer preference-based marketing management described in this study involves active engagement with students, parents, guardians, and the broader flow of information to accurately determine their needs and expectations. The following section outlines the specific strategies implemented by schools to align with customer preferences.

Research and Identify Customer Preferences

In formulating a marketing strategy based on customer preferences at MP Nurul Jadid Paiton, SMA Zaha 1 Genggong, and Madrasah Al-Hikmah Jelebu, it is essential to analyze the needs and expectations of key stakeholders, including students, parents/guardians, and the surrounding community. The identification of these needs involves several strategic steps. These begin with establishing positive and long-term relationships between the educational institutions and their customers, and continue through to the evaluation phase to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with customer expectations. *"We seek to understand people's preferences through trend analysis, surveys, and direct interaction with prospective students and guardians. The school's way to support customer loyalty is by strengthening emotional connections through promotions that showcase student achievement and the school's flagship programs. In addition, our school is active in the use of social media to provide relevant information, such as student achievements, school activities, and new services,"* This was conveyed by the principal, Jufri. The interview results indicate that the school adopts a proactive approach to understanding community preferences. This is achieved through trend analysis, surveys, and direct interactions with prospective students and their guardians. Additionally, the school's promotional efforts emphasize student achievements and flagship programs, which not only enhance the institution's public image but also foster a sense of pride among its stakeholders.

Table 1: Identification of Customer Preferences

Method	Main Purpose	How to Implement	Key Results/Findings
Trend Analysis	Understand the needs and people's desires	- Conducting a technology-based education trend analysis	- Technology-based learning is the main preference of the community
		- Observing marketing	- Social media is effective as a channel to convey school achievements and innovations

		strategies through social media	
Survey	Collecting opinions directly from prospective students and guardians of students	- Distribute online and offline questionnaires	- High interest in digital learning programs
		- Using structured interviews	- Less desirable programs can be identified for improvement or replaced with more relevant ones
Live Interaction	Getting closer to prospective students and guardians	- Hold an open house	- Parents believe more in schools that are responsive to the needs of the community
		- Provide consultation sessions with school staff	- Immediate information increases confidence in the quality of the school

From the table above, it can be understood that all three schools strive to understand community preferences through trend analysis, surveys, and direct interactions. These efforts enable the schools to gain a clearer understanding of parents' needs, desires, and expectations. The summarized data indicate that the main factor attracting student interest is the offering of technology-based learning. Additionally, marketing through social media has proven highly effective in communicating school achievements and innovations. Furthermore, schools identify both high-demand and low-demand programs through surveys, allowing them to improve or discontinue programs that are no longer relevant to community needs. Direct interactions with prospective students and their guardians also help schools foster long-term relationships and build public trust. By providing information directly and personally, schools are better positioned to demonstrate the quality of education they offer and to strengthen community engagement.

"After the school conducted a survey, for example, the survey results showed high interest in technology-based learning, then we promoted the Digital Learning program that we have developed through social media and school brochures. In addition, the results of surveys often inform us about programs that are less in demand, so that we can improve them or replace them with more relevant ones. Overall, this research helps us not only understand customer needs but also strengthen our position as an educational institution that is responsive to the changing needs of society". As stated by Taufik, as a public relations staff member,

As described above, schools employ a data-driven approach to identify and respond to community preferences. Surveys serve as a vital tool in understanding the needs and expectations of key stakeholders, including students, parents/guardians, and the broader community. The data indicate that technology-based learning is the most highly demanded educational offering. Additionally, surveys help schools identify programs that are less attractive or no longer relevant. In response, schools have taken strategic steps such as

promoting digital learning initiatives through social media and brochures, and revising or improving programs that are less in demand. This reflects the school's ability to adapt its services in accordance with customer expectations. By integrating preference-based research with effective program implementation – and leveraging communication channels such as social media – schools are able to reach a broader audience and increase their relevance.

This approach aligns with Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes the importance of building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships to retain customers by fostering strong, sustainable engagement (Badrinarayanan & Ramachandran, 2024). Educational institutions can cultivate loyalty through personal interaction and consistent communication with students, parents, and the wider community (Almanwari, Saad, & Zainal, 2024). Meeting customer needs, delivering relevant services, and ensuring satisfaction serve to further strengthen these relationships (Ibrahim & Rasheed, 2024). In the context of this study, the identification of customer preferences is carried out through surveys, trend analysis, and direct interaction – tools that enable schools to understand and respond to evolving community expectations. This strategy illustrates that relationship marketing in education focuses on developing long-term, trust-based connections. It also highlights the importance of continuous communication and responsiveness. Surveys, in particular, help identify both high-demand and low-demand programs, allowing schools to demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to changing needs (Kulik, Alperin, Barrett, Bekemeier, & Kenefick, 2024). Ultimately, this approach enables educational institutions to understand customer preferences deeply and build emotional connections that are critical for meeting societal educational needs (Ardhana, Alfiyan, & Bellini, 2024).

Strengthening School Image and Branding

Strengthening the image and branding of schools in this study refers to a series of strategic efforts undertaken by educational institutions to create, reinforce, and sustain positive public perceptions—particularly among prospective students and their parents. These efforts are grounded in an understanding of customer needs, expectations, and preferences. By aligning school identity with these factors, institutions aim to cultivate an educational environment that is perceived as high-quality, innovative, and responsive to community demands. As Abdullah stated, *"We focus on creating quality, innovation, and in accordance with the needs of the community. One of the ways we strengthen our image is by ensuring that the school's flagship programs can run consistently, such as technology-based learning, varied extracurricular activities, and curricula that are relevant to the times. In addition, we integrate character values in every school activity, so that students are not only academically intelligent but also have good personalities. We are also active in establishing relationships with parents and the community through communication forums, seminars, and social media to convey the school's various achievements."* The statement indicates that the school adopts a strategic approach to building its image and branding by aligning its programs with the needs of the community. Emphasizing quality education, innovation, and the integration of character values reflects a holistic effort that goes beyond academic

achievement to include the development of students' character and identity. Consistency in implementing flagship programs plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining a positive perception of the school. Furthermore, the school maintains strong relationships with the community through communication forums and active engagement on social media, fostering trust and a sense of involvement. This approach demonstrates the school's deep understanding of the importance of communication, innovation, and program relevance in constructing a strong and competitive image amid the growing demands of today's educational landscape. Effective communication strategies – utilized across multiple platforms and public activities – serve as essential tools in reinforcing the school's position and appeal. As conveyed by the dual "*public relations, ensure that all school activities are well communicated to the public. We utilize various platforms, such as social media, official websites, and local media, to highlight student achievements, school activities, and facility excellence. The branding that we carry is a school that is technology-friendly and oriented towards building student character. In addition, we also hold open events, such as open houses and competitions between schools, to get closer to the community.*"

Nurul Jadid Paiton Middle School emphasizes the consistent implementation of flagship programs, such as technology-based learning and the strengthening of student character, as the core foundation of its image. Branding activities are focused on fostering long-term relationships with parents through regular communication forums and community-based engagement. Meanwhile, Zaha 1 Genggong High School highlights its superior facilities and student achievements through various digital platforms, including social media and its official website. This school actively and consistently promotes its programs to the public, positioning student accomplishments as a representation of the school's success in delivering quality education. Then, Al-Hikmah Jelebu Madrasah adopts a different branding approach by organizing public events such as open houses and inter-school competitions, thereby fostering direct engagement with the community. This institution seeks to project an image of being both technology-friendly and committed to religious values and character development. The study's findings reveal that schools develop branding and image enhancement strategies by first analyzing customer needs and preferences. Once these needs, desires, and expectations are identified, schools align their programs and services accordingly, improving and expanding the most in-demand offerings. Structured communication is then used to disseminate information effectively to the public. This includes promoting school activities and achievements through multiple online platforms such as social media, school websites, and local media outlets. By doing so, schools increase transparency, broaden their reach, and reinforce a public image that emphasizes technological advancement and character formation – traits that align with community expectations and foster trust and loyalty (Olsson, Eriksson, & Carlsson, 2024).

In today's competitive educational environment, institutions must prioritize innovation and customer satisfaction to secure loyalty (Ghosh, Aggarwal, Verma, Bhattacharya, Thakur, & Kumar, 2024). Strengthening school image and branding becomes essential in this context (Wu & Cheong, 2024). This aligns with Aaker's Brand Identity System, which posits that a school's core identity – encompassing academic excellence,

character development, and inclusivity – forms the basis for building a positive, relevant image (Mallarangan, Rahman, Nur, Lathifah, & Lubis, 2024). The extended identity, such as flagship programs, modern technological facilities, and student achievements, enhances the school's unique value proposition (Wu & Yu, 2024). A compelling value proposition offers functional, emotional, and social benefits that differentiate a school from others, making it more attractive to customers (Russo, Mele, & Russo Spena, 2024). By addressing these dimensions, schools can build consistent, meaningful branding that resonates with their target audience (Nwagwu & Akintoye, 2024). Ultimately, this helps establish a strong institutional image, enhances stakeholder loyalty, and builds long-term public trust (Huang, 2024).

Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

Social media plays a critical role in supporting schools' efforts to ensure transparency in the evaluation process. Beyond serving as a communication platform, it also enables schools to identify areas of weakness based on community feedback and public perception. As a result, schools can develop strategies that are grounded not in assumptions, but in factual data and insights shared by their stakeholders. This approach strengthens the school's responsiveness and accountability. As stated by Abdullah, *"Evaluations at schools are carried out periodically through various methods, such as parent and student satisfaction surveys, internal meetings of the management team, and analysis of new student registration data. We ensure that any input from parents, such as those related to learning programs, facilities, or extracurricular activities, is used as evaluation material. In addition, we also monitor the results of marketing strategies, such as the effectiveness of social media campaigns or the number of visits during open houses, to determine whether the approach used is in line with customer needs."* The results of the interviews indicate that the schools conduct regular evaluations to ensure consistency in meeting community needs. These evaluations are carried out through student and parent satisfaction surveys, as well as internal management team meetings, all of which reflect a commitment to the continuous improvement of educational quality and marketing services. Feedback from parents regarding learning programs, facilities, and extracurricular activities provides valuable insights into the extent to which customer needs are being met. Monitoring the effectiveness of each strategy demonstrates that the schools are highly aware of the importance of measuring impact to remain relevant and competitive in a dynamic educational landscape.

The evaluation practices of the three schools involved in this study reflect a serious commitment to aligning marketing strategies with customer preferences. Periodic evaluations – conducted two to three times per year – include satisfaction surveys targeted at students and parents. These surveys are distributed through both online platforms, such as Google Forms and social media, and offline methods, including physical forms shared during committee meetings and parent-teacher gatherings. The survey instruments cover key areas such as the quality of instruction, available facilities, flagship programs, and the effectiveness of school communication. The number of respondents ranges from 120 to 300 individuals, depending on the scale and objectives of each school. The collected data

are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the findings serve as the basis for leadership discussions and corrective action. To ensure transparency and accountability, each school shares its evaluation results through social media platforms or community forums. This approach helps schools align their branding strategies and service offerings with the actual needs and expectations of the community, thereby enhancing trust, responsiveness, and long-term stakeholder engagement.

Following the evaluation process, it is essential for schools to implement improvements in both activities and facilities. This demonstrates the school's responsiveness to customer preferences – specifically, the needs, desires, and expectations of parents and the broader community. *"Based on the results of the evaluation, we often make updates to programs that are less in demand or ineffective. For example, if there is feedback about the lack of focus on learning technology, we will improve the digital infrastructure and provide training to teachers. In addition, we added new extracurricular programs at the request of students and parents, as well as improved communication with parents through more structured forums. These measures ensure that the school remains relevant and responsive to customer preferences,"* said Jurfi. The interviews revealed that the school takes a proactive approach in responding to customer complaints and suggestions. Evaluation results play a crucial role in ensuring the ongoing relevance and quality of school services. Based on these evaluations, the school updates programs that are less in demand or ineffective, while enhancing those that are highly sought after. This demonstrates the school's ability to adapt its strategies in alignment with customer needs.

Moreover, the improvement of digital infrastructure and the implementation of teacher training programs represent the school's response to feedback related to technology-based learning. These actions also strengthen the school's image as an institution prepared to address the challenges of modern education. This is reflected in the introduction of new extracurricular programs based on student and parental requests, improved communication through structured forums, and a clear commitment to transparent and collaborative relationships with parents. In this context, social media serves as an important tool for promoting transparency in the evaluation process. It helps schools identify community needs and address weaknesses using valid data from surveys – rather than relying solely on assumptions – to ensure that customer needs, wants, and expectations are effectively met.

This strategy is designed to enhance the relevance and quality of school services through periodic evaluations, including satisfaction surveys, internal management meetings, and analysis of new student enrollment data. Feedback from parents regarding academic programs, facilities, and extracurricular activities forms the foundation for responsive updates that align with customer preferences. By focusing on improving underperforming programs, upgrading digital infrastructure, providing teacher training, and adding extracurricular activities tailored to demand, this strategy helps schools remain competitive in a modern educational landscape. Furthermore, these initiatives support the delivery of data-driven services and reinforce collaborative relationships with parents through structured communication forums. These actions reflect the school's

commitment to establishing a positive institutional image – one that is responsive to both contemporary challenges and community needs. Thus, continuous evaluation and improvement are essential components in ensuring that school marketing strategies achieve their intended goals, particularly in enhancing service quality and fostering customer loyalty. This study highlights the importance of a data-driven approach in school marketing, the strategic integration of technology to boost service effectiveness, and the use of evaluation as a foundation for decision-making that adapts to the evolving needs of the community.

This preference-based school marketing management framework is grounded in understanding the needs, desires, and expectations of students, their guardians, and the broader community. The findings align with the study by Suyatna, Alam, and Putri (2024), which emphasizes the importance of strengthening community engagement, communication, and institutional reputation through a structured approach encompassing three key stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. The planning stage focuses on aligning public relations strategies with the school's vision and mission. Implementation highlights the importance of maintaining a consistently positive reputation as a valuable institutional asset, while the evaluation stage serves as a reflective process to assess program effectiveness and inform future improvements through periodic identification, monitoring, and written documentation of deficiencies. Similarly, Suyatna, Alam, and Putri (2024) found that by understanding the preferences, behaviors, and needs of prospective students on social media platforms, schools can develop more targeted and market-responsive strategies. Building on these insights, this study emphasizes a customer preference-oriented school marketing management approach that introduces a distinct strategy grounded in data. The approach includes trend analysis, surveys, and direct engagement to identify relevant and high-demand programs, such as technology-based learning, which has emerged as a key area of interest. A novel contribution of this study is the integration of social media as the primary platform for disseminating school innovations and achievements – thereby expanding outreach and promoting transparency in school-community communications. Furthermore, schools conduct ongoing evaluations to assess the effectiveness of their strategies and make informed improvements based on empirical evidence rather than assumptions.

What sets this study apart is its emphasis on strengthening school image and branding through a combined focus on academic excellence, character development, technological innovation, and service inclusivity. Through this multidimensional approach, schools are positioned to respond effectively to customer needs while fostering long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with students, parents, and the broader community. This reflects a modern, adaptive strategy aligned with the demands of a rapidly evolving educational environment. The distinctive feature of customer preference-based school marketing management in this study is the use of a data-driven approach integrated with technological innovation and character values in marketing, branding, and service evaluation. This approach is designed not only to fulfill customers' functional needs – through flagship, technology-enhanced programs – but also to nurture strong emotional

and moral relationships with stakeholders. By leveraging social media effectively, schools can transform traditional marketing methods into more modern, inclusive, and evidence-based practices.

From these findings, the study introduces the "Integrated Data-Driven Emotional Branding Framework," a model that encapsulates a customer preference-based school marketing strategy through three core elements: data analysis (surveys and direct engagement), technological innovation (especially via social media), and emotional branding grounded in character development and religious values. This framework synthesizes concepts from the Brand Identity System and Relationship Marketing theory, with an emphasis on fostering long-term loyalty through emotional connection and contextual relevance. As such, the strategy not only addresses customers' rational needs but also establishes lasting loyalty by resonating with their deeper values in an era of constant change.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that school marketing management strategies based on customer preferences in pesantren-based educational institutions are implemented through three main strategies: (1) research and identification of customer needs, (2) strengthening institutional image and branding, and (3) evaluation and continuous improvement. These strategies are designed to ensure that institutions effectively understand and meet the expectations of students, parents, and the broader community. The identification of customer needs is conducted using a data-driven approach involving surveys, trend analysis, and direct engagement. Strengthening the school's image and branding is achieved by promoting superior programs that align with the evolving needs of modern society. Furthermore, schools must demonstrate a sustained commitment to improving the quality of both educational and marketing services through regular evaluation processes. However, this study has limitations. The data were collected from only three schools, which means the findings may not be generalizable to other institutions. Additionally, the study focuses solely on internal factors – specifically the strategies schools employ in marketing themselves – without addressing external influences that may also shape customer preferences, such as economic conditions, geographical location, and competition from other schools.

These limitations offer opportunities for future research. Further studies could expand the sample size by including a broader range of pesantren-based schools across various regions to enhance generalizability. Future researchers may also consider incorporating external factors that influence school choice, such as market competition, regional educational policies, and global educational technology trends, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the educational marketing landscape. Competitive analysis should be integrated into the evaluation process to determine a school's positioning relative to other institutions. Additionally, subsequent research could explore the link between preference-based marketing strategies and measurable student outcomes, such as academic achievement and character development, thereby offering a more holistic assessment of marketing effectiveness in the context of Islamic education.

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Ethical Statement

This research was conducted in accordance with recognized ethical standards to ensure the protection, welfare, and rights of all participants. Necessary permissions and approvals were obtained before the study commenced. Throughout the research process, ethical procedures were aligned with institutional regulations and international guidelines, maintaining the transparency and integrity of the study.

CRedit Author Statement

- **Author 1:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original draft preparation.
- **Author 2:** Conceptualization, Writing – Reviewing and Editing.
- **Author 3:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available upon reasonable request

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