

Educational Marketing Strategies Based On Kotler's Theory in Enhancing School Selection Competitiveness in Digital Era

Gheitsaa' Zaahira Shoofiya¹, Laily Rohmatillah²,

¹ Universitas Nurul Jadid, gzaahira@gmail.com

² Universitas Nurul Jadid, lailly@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

*Education marketing;
Kotler's Theory;
Digital promotion*

Article history:

Received 2025-05-05

Revised 2025-06-06

Accepted 2025-07-07

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze Kotler's theory-based educational marketing strategy in increasing the competitiveness of school selection in the digital era, with a focus on Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School. In facing the increasingly fierce competition of basic education institutions, schools are required to have marketing strategies that are not only conventional, but also adaptive to digital developments. Kotler's theory that includes seven elements of the marketing mix (7Ps): product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence, is used as the basis for evaluating the strategies implemented. This research used a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results showed that Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School has made strategic efforts through digital promotion which includes social media, making school profile video content, and online interaction with prospective guardians. The school also emphasizes the excellence of Islamic programs, character strengthening, and integrated curriculum as the main selling points. However, the limited human resources who manage digital marketing and the lack of market analysis are challenges. This study recommends digital marketing training for school promotion teams and the development of data-based strategies to be more responsive to community needs. The findings provide a practical contribution for primary schools in improving competitiveness through a targeted and sustainable marketing approach.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.



Corresponding Author:

Gheitsaa' Zaahira Shoofiya

Universitas Nurul Jadid, gzaahira@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly competitive digital era, educational institutions are no longer merely providers of learning services; they are also expected to have robust marketing strategies to attract public interest (Sudirjo et al., 2023). Social realities show that parents are becoming more selective in

choosing schools for their children, taking into consideration various aspects such as curriculum, Islamic values, teacher quality, and even the school's image on social media (Susanti, Mustar, & Sumarto, 2024). This phenomenon places schools, including those at the primary level, in an ever-tightening competitive landscape

From a theoretical perspective, Kotler (2017) asserts that marketing is not limited to commercial products but can also be applied to service sectors, including education (Kusumawati, 2018). Through the 7P marketing mix approach—product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence—educational institutions can design effective communication strategies to build competitive advantages and enhance institutional reputation (Iryani, 2019). Several previous studies have also demonstrated that implementing digital-based marketing strategies can increase community engagement and broaden the reach of information about school programs.

Based on this background, the aim of this paper is to explore and analyze educational marketing strategies grounded in Kotler's theory within the context of Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School, as well as to examine how these strategies can improve the school's competitiveness in attracting prospective students. The central argument of this study is that well-structured, literature-based, and digitally adaptive marketing strategies are key for primary schools to survive and grow amidst the competitive dynamics of modern educational institutions.

2. METHODS

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the educational marketing strategies implemented by Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School to enhance competitiveness in school selection within the digital era (Hadi, Soetriono, Subekti, & Aji, 2025). The research site was chosen purposively due to the school's distinctive integrated learning approach and its initial efforts to implement digital-based promotional strategies.

Information sources included the principal, public relations or promotion team members, teachers involved in digital marketing activities, and parents as external informants. Data collection techniques involved in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, such as digital brochures, social media posts, and student enrollment data.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's framework, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Siti Sawerah, n.d.). Data triangulation was also conducted to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The research design was structured to illustrate real and contextual marketing practices, thus producing a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used, the challenges encountered, and their impact on the school's competitiveness in attracting prospective students (Gustiawan, 2024).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Educational marketing strategies are operationally defined as a series of planning, implementation, and evaluation activities carried out by Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School to introduce the institution's strengths to the community through Kotler's 7P marketing mix approach (product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence) (Agustina, Riyanto, & Roesminingsih, 2024). School selection competitiveness is understood as the school's ability to attract interest and shape positive perceptions among prospective students and their parents amidst competition with other primary schools in Besuki.

In this context, the digital era refers to the utilization of social media, online platforms, and digital communication strategies as the primary mediums for school marketing (Rizqiyah, Jauhari, Fawaied, & Maudy, 2025). Operational issues identified include suboptimal digital content management, limited human resources trained in marketing, and a lack of data-driven market segmentation analysis (Berlian & Zainuri, 2025). These three aspects serve as the main obstacles to achieving effective school marketing strategies.

Kotler's educational marketing theory highlights four key elements (4Ps) to be prioritized: (1) Curriculum and Facility Quality: Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School demonstrates a strong commitment to developing a relevant curriculum and implementing innovative teaching methods aligned with Islamic values and local wisdom. This serves as a strong value proposition in educational marketing. (2) Service Differentiation: The development of integrated learning programs, extracurricular activities, and character education differentiates the school and appeals to a specific market segment, particularly parents seeking character-oriented education for their children. (3) Transparent and Competitive Cost Policies: Parents appreciate the transparency and competitiveness of tuition fees. The school applies flexible payment systems and offers scholarships, enhancing its competitiveness in the education market. (4) Digital Technology Utilization: The use of websites, social media, and communication apps provides effective channels for information distribution. By offering real-time information, the school can reach prospective students from various areas, thereby improving accessibility and competitiveness. (5) Integrated Offline Activities: In addition to digital platforms, offline activities such as open houses, seminars, and educational roadshows are an important part of ensuring that marketing messages can be received directly by the public. (6) Strategic and Measured Marketing Communication.

3.1 The school has implemented various promotional methods, both through online and offline media.

Strategic and measurable marketing communication is implemented through social media campaigns with educational and interactive content, testimonials from alumni and parents to strengthen the school's reputation, community-based promotional activities, and consistent branding through logos, slogans, and messages delivered in every public interaction.

Digitalization in schools focuses not only on transforming learning systems but also on institutional communication (Westari & Sumarsono, 2025). In the marketing context, digitalization allows schools to leverage digital promotions to reach younger parents who increasingly rely on technology when making educational decisions (Paramansyah & SE, 2020). Digital promotions through Instagram, Facebook, websites, and WhatsApp serve as effective and interactive main channels. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing can broaden market reach, reduce promotional costs, and accelerate information dissemination (Awa, Judijanto, Ohlyver, Zahara, & Setiawati, 2024).

Competitiveness is the competitive position of an institution compared to other institutions in terms of service quality, public perception, and uniqueness of offerings. According to Porter (1998), competitive advantage can be achieved through differentiation of services offered and the ability to read market dynamics (Raharjo & Ir Herrukmi Septa Rinawati, 2019). In the context of elementary schools, competitiveness can be formed through the preparation of a narrative of excellence, excellent service, and effective communication with the community (Rosmayani, Julaihah, & Wijaya, 2025). Competitiveness in the context of education refers to the ability of a school to offer higher value than other institutions, both in terms of service quality, program excellence, and institutional image (Sudirjo et al., 2023). Competitiveness is not only about popularity, but also the public's perception of the reputation, credibility and sustainability of education quality. The right marketing strategy can strengthen competitive advantage through the establishment of a unique and relevant school positioning (Mustofa, 2024).

In the case study of Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Primary School, Kotler's marketing mix approach becomes an important analytical tool in measuring the extent to which the school's digital marketing strategy is able to shape competitiveness. Religious-based excellence, integrated facilities, and active learning approaches can be attractively packaged through digital media to improve public perception.

Table 1: implemented various promotional methods both through online and offline media

Source	Statement	Problem Focus
School principal	"We realize that promotion through conventional means such as banners and brochures is no longer enough. Therefore, since the last two years we have started to be active on social media to introduce the school's excellent programs. However, our obstacle is the lack of personnel who really understand digital marketing strategies."	Limited human resources in digital marketing
Public Relations/Digital Marketing Team	"We have been actively using Instagram and Facebook to post student activities and alumni testimonials. But we don't have a systematic strategy yet. It is still incidental and there is no market analysis. The content has not been scheduled neatly."	Lack of digital content strategy and planning
Parent of New Student	"I found out about this school from Instagram. The posts are interesting, especially the children's activities. But information about registration is sometimes not updated. If it could be more routine and clear information on social media or WhatsApp, parents would be more helpful."	Digital information is inconsistent and not real-time.

results of the interviews show that Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Primary School has realized the important role of digital marketing in increasing the competitiveness of school selection in the digital era. The three interviewees-the principal, public relations team, and parents-expressed complementary perspectives, and in general highlighted the awareness of the need for digital promotion, but accompanied by technical and strategic challenges in its implementation. From the managerial side, the school principal acknowledged the limited human resources who truly understand digital marketing strategies professionally. This is a major obstacle in designing consistent, engaging and targeted promotions. The public relations team confirmed this by stating that the use of social media has been incidental and not based on analysis or a planned content calendar.

Meanwhile, from the user's perspective (in this case, parents), social media has become a crucial initial information channel in the decision-making process of choosing a school. However, parents also complain about the lack of consistency and completeness of digital information, especially regarding the enrollment process and overall school profile. This finding suggests a gap between the school's strategic intentions and technical execution on the ground. Although digital media has been used, there is no systematic and integrated approach based on marketing theory, such as Kotler's 7P mix. Therefore, efforts are needed to strengthen internal capacity, digital marketing training for the public relations team, and the preparation of a structured promotional strategy so that school communication is more effective and able to increase the competitiveness of the institution.

The results of observations made at Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School show that this institution has started digital-based promotional steps through the use of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The school actively publishes student activities, registration information, and excellent programs. However, the effectiveness of the digital marketing strategy is still limited and faces a number of challenges.

First, in terms of digital content management, there is no systematic planning. Social media management is still carried out by teachers who have concurrent duties and do not have a special background in digital marketing. As a result, there is no content calendar based on a long-term communication strategy, and the uploaded content tends to be reactive and not integrated.

Second, promotional content does not provide complete and consistent information. Some posts did not include important details such as the registration flow, in-depth excellence programs, or the

uniqueness of the school. This inconsistency affects the perception of prospective students and parents who rely on social media as the main source of information.

Third, the school does not have a data-driven approach in identifying the target market. The absence of mapping the demographic characteristics of prospective learners or the digital media preferences used by parents is an obstacle in designing relevant and persuasive messages.

In response to these findings, schools are advised to take three main strategic steps. First, establish a dedicated promotion team that receives professional digital marketing training, including in content design, social media management, and the preparation of long-term promotion strategies. Second, develop an annual digital content calendar that covers various aspects of Kotler's marketing mix (7Ps), such as educational product excellence, service processes, and physical evidence (school facilities). Third, involving parents and alumni as a source of strategic feedback, both through online surveys and digital forums, so that promotional content is more based on community needs and expectations. From these observations, it can be interpreted that digital marketing at SD Terpadu Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki has not been running optimally because it has not been fully positioned as an integral part of the school's strategic management. Digital marketing practices tend to be carried out in response to momentary needs, such as ahead of PPDB, and have not become a sustainable and planned communication process.

This gap is rooted in the lack of integration between the potential of digital technology and the capacity of human resources in school management. Ideal digital marketing not only utilizes popular platforms, but also develops communication strategies that pay attention to market segmentation, needs analysis, and consistent school branding. In the context of Kotler's theory, the weakness of the school's marketing strategy shows that the promotion, people and process elements in the education marketing mix have not been optimized. By strengthening these aspects through a professional, participatory and data-driven approach, schools can improve their competitiveness in the face of increasingly rational and digital-savvy choices.

CONCLUSION

Educational marketing strategies in the digital era are essential for educational institutions to build competitiveness and strengthen their institutional image amidst growing competition among schools. The application of Philip Kotler's marketing theory, particularly the 7P marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence), provides a solid conceptual foundation for designing holistic and measurable marketing strategies.

In the context of school digitalization, the utilization of social media, websites, and online communication platforms serves as a primary instrument in delivering effective educational messages to the community. When strategically and consistently designed, digital promotions can increase school visibility, strengthen emotional connections with prospective parents, and create distinctive positioning in a competitive environment.

The case study at Muhammadiyah 1 Besuki Integrated Elementary School shows that the success of digital marketing strategies is largely determined by human resource readiness, content consistency, and the ability to understand the needs and characteristics of the target market. Thus, alignment between Kotler's marketing theory, digital technology utilization, and competitiveness-oriented approaches is key to developing relevant and sustainable educational marketing strategies. Schools capable of adaptively integrating these aspects will be better prepared to navigate the evolving dynamics of school selection in the digital age.

REFERENCES

- Agustina, M. F., Riyanto, Y., & Roesminingsih, E. (2024). Strategi Bauran Pemasaran 7P sebagai Upaya Meningkatkan Animo Masyarakat dalam Memilih Sekolah. *JlIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 7(12), 13591–13598.
- Awa, A., Judijanto, L., Ohlyver, D. A., Zahara, A. E., & Setiawati, T. (2024). *Digital Marketing Strategy*:

- Membangun Bisnis Online melalui Strategi Pemasaran Digital yang Efektif*. PT. Green Pustaka Indonesia.
- Berlian, Z., & Zainuri, A. (2025). Controlling Islamic Education Marketing Services at MTs Negeri 4 Musi Banyuasin. *TOFEDU: The Future of Education Journal*, 4(1), 275–284.
- Gustiawan, D. (2024). *Manajemen Strategis*. PT Indonesia Delapan Kreasi Nusa.
- Hadi, S., Soetrisno, S., Subekti, S., & Aji, J. M. M. (2025). *Pendekatan Kolaborasi Model Hexahelix Dalam Optimalisasi Peran BUMDes Pada Pengembangan Kawasan Ekonomi Masyarakat Wilayah Pesisir*. Star Digital Publishing, Yogyakarta-Indonesia.
- Iryani, S. I. (2019). *Pengaruh Bauran Pemasaran 7P (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence) Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Konsumen di Balkondes Café Borobudur*. STP AMPTA Yogyakarta.
- Kusumawati, A. (2018). *Perilaku Konsumen dan Pemasaran Pendidikan Tinggi*. Universitas Brawijaya Press.
- Mustofa, M. (2024). *Strategi Bersaing Dalam Pendidikan: Porter's Five Forces And SWOT Analysis di MIN 2 Bogor dan MI Pembangunan Jakarta*. Jakarta: FITK UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.
- Paramansyah, H. A., & SE, M. M. (2020). *Manajemen pendidikan dalam menghadapi era digital*. Arman Paramansyah.
- Raharjo, T. W., & Ir Herrukmi Septa Rinawati, M. M. (2019). *Penguatan strategi pemasaran dan daya saing UMKM berbasis kemitraan desa wisata*. Jakad Media Publishing.
- Rizqiyah, N., Jauhari, A. H., Fawaied, M., & Maudy, M. (2025). *Revolusi Digital Dalam Pendidikan: Peran Teknologi Dan Media Sosial Dalam Pembelajaran*. PENERBIT KBM INDONESIA.
- Rosmayani, M., Julaihah, S., & Wijaya, I. S. (2025). Strategi Humas dalam Membangun Citra, Kepercayaan, dan Reputasi Sekolah Islam: Studi di SD Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda. *ITQAN: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Kependidikan*, 16(1), 25–36.
- Siti Sawerah, S. P. (n.d.). Bab 4 Rekrutmen Dan Seleksi. *Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia*, 37.
- Sudirjo, F., Jauhar, N., Nurchayati, N., Ashari, A., Sari, H., Siagawati, M., ... Idrus, I. (2023). *Manajemen Pemasaran Jasa Pendidikan: Konsep, Model, dan Implementasi*.
- Susanti, F., Mustar, S., & Sumarto, S. (2024). *Brand Image dan Strategi Promosi Sekolah dalam Menarik Minat Peserta Didik Baru Pada Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Kepahiang*. Pascasarjana IAIN Curup.
- Westari, N., & Sumarsono, R. B. (2025). Tantangan dan Peluang Transformasi Manajemen Pendidikan di Era Digital (Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis). *Proceedings Series of Educational Studies*.