

Strategic Marketing Management by the SPMB Committee to Enhance New Student Admissions at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang

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ABSTRACT

Competition among vocational education institutions demands adaptive and value-based marketing strategies to attract prospective students. This study examines the strategic marketing management of the New Student Admission (PMB) Committee at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang in the context of increasing the number of applicants, particularly in the Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering (TKRO) and Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) departments. The research aims to identify and analyze the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of the promotional strategies employed by the PMB committee. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis of the school's promotional activities. The findings indicate that the marketing strategy is implemented systematically through three managerial stages: planning, which involves mapping target schools and designing promotional content; implementation, through a combination of direct and digital promotion; and evaluation, conducted through regular meetings and monitoring of registration achievements. The effectiveness of the strategy is supported by the principal's leadership, alumni engagement as promotional agents, engaging social media content, and the school's differentiation as a value-based Islamic vocational institution. Challenges identified include limited human resources for promotion, technical issues in online promotion, and a lack of industrial partnerships. The study concludes that the success of the PMB promotion depends not only on the media and methods used but also on the synergy between strategic management, institutional values, and community relationships.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The New Student Admission System, commonly referred to as SPMB, is a crucial moment for educational institutions—especially private schools—in maintaining their existence and improving the quality of their educational services. As a vocational school consisting of the Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering (TKRO) and Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) departments with a pesantren-based model, SMK Hisba Buana Semarang faces challenges in attracting prospective students, particularly amid the increasingly competitive landscape in the digital era.

Initial observations indicate a declining trend in the number of applicants over the past three years. A PMB committee member noted, *"We are having difficulty reaching prospective students outside the school or foundation's internal network"* (Observation and interview, June 10, 2025). This situation highlights the need for a more structured and adaptive marketing strategy.

Marketing strategy is not merely about disseminating information; it is a managerial process that connects the school's strengths with the needs and expectations of the public. As Wibowo (2020) asserts, educational marketing strategies must be based on a deep understanding of the education market and carried out in an integrated and sustainable manner to build a positive institutional image. In this regard, the PMB committee plays a central role in designing, implementing, and evaluating the school's marketing programs.

The urgency of this study lies in the need for a contextual and professional strategic marketing management approach amidst the challenges of digital transformation and shifting public behavior in choosing schools. Islamic vocational schools like SMK Hisba Buana need to adapt their communication strategies to reach broader audiences and showcase the relevance of their flagship programs. An effective marketing strategy can serve as a vital tool to enhance competitiveness and ensure the sustainability of Islamic educational institutions (Suryadi, 2019).

Theoretically, strategic marketing management in the educational context involves a series of stages, including SWOT analysis, market segmentation, target audience determination, message formulation, and media selection (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2021). In practice, this strategy is implemented by the PMB committee through activities such as social media promotion, school visits to junior high schools, publication of flagship programs, and collaboration with community leaders. However, the effectiveness of this strategy largely depends on the quality of planning and the ability to adapt to the dynamics of the local market.

This research arises from the lack of studies that specifically examine the strategic marketing management implemented by the PMB committee as the direct actors in the field. Previous studies tend to focus more on policy aspects or general institutional promotion (Setiyawan, 2020). In fact, the dynamics, obstacles, and initiatives of the implementing committee have a direct impact on the success of the admission process. This study aims to analyze the strategic marketing management applied by the PMB committee at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang in increasing student enrollment. The research focuses on the strategic planning process, promotional activities implementation, use of communication media, internal coordination among committee members, and evaluation of promotional outcomes. In addition, the study also reveals supporting and inhibiting factors encountered during the execution of the marketing strategy.

Initial findings indicate that limited promotional human resources, insufficient marketing budget, and suboptimal use of digital platforms are the main obstacles hindering the effectiveness of the school's promotional efforts. Meanwhile, advantages such as industry-based vocational programs and an Islamic curriculum have not been optimally conveyed to prospective students and their parents. This reinforces the urgency for innovative, low-cost, yet high-impact marketing strategies. The novelty of this study lies in its micro-organizational approach, examining marketing strategies from the perspective of direct implementers—namely the PMB committee. This provides a scholarly contribution that distinguishes it from previous studies that were more focused on institutional policies.

This research is expected to serve as an alternative model for managing school promotions in Islamic private schools that is participatory, contextual, and adaptive to social changes. Furthermore, it

contributes to the development of Islamic educational management knowledge, particularly in integrating da'wah values, professionalism, and service within promotional strategies. As Rahmawati (2022) emphasizes, contemporary Islamic education must compete ethically in the face of globalization, upholding values of honesty and integrity in public communication. Therefore, this study not only addresses practical issues in promotion at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang but also provides theoretical contributions to the broader and contextual development of strategic marketing management in Islamic education.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at thoroughly describing and analyzing the management of marketing strategies implemented by the New Student Admission (Penerimaan Murid Baru or PMB) committee at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore social realities contextually through direct interaction with the subjects and research environment. Descriptive qualitative research is highly relevant for examining managerial processes and the dynamics of communication strategies in the context of Islamic education, where Islamic values are an integral part of promotional activities (Wibowo, 2020; Rahmawati, 2022).

The subjects of this study consist of the PMB committee members at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang, including the committee chairperson, committee members, the school principal, and other parties involved in the school's promotional activities. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and active participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of marketing strategies. These individuals are considered to possess deep and relevant insights into the research focus, particularly related to communication strategies and decision-making in educational promotion (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2021).

The research procedure involved several stages. First, the researcher conducted a preliminary observation within the school environment to gain a general overview of student enrollment trends and existing promotional practices. This was followed by primary data collection through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants selected based on their strategic roles. Observations were carried out during promotional activities such as visits to junior high schools (SMP/MTs), religious outreach events, and other social engagements that formed part of the PMB strategy. Documentation focused on promotional materials such as brochures, digital media, work program reports, meeting minutes, and student registration data over the past three years.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, acting as a human instrument. In qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role in the data collection and interpretation process. To support the validity of the data, the researcher employed interview guides, observation sheets, and document recording formats to ensure a systematic and structured data collection process (Sugiyono, 2021). Data were collected through three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to obtain informants' perspectives on the implemented promotional strategies, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their impact on enrollment numbers. Observations aimed to directly examine the committee's working methods, interactions with prospective students, and the effectiveness of promotional media. Documentation served to complement the interview and observation data and to confirm the accuracy of information provided by the informants.

Data analysis in this study utilized the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by filtering information relevant to the research focus. Data were presented in descriptive narrative form, and conclusions were drawn through repeated verification to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings. To ensure data validity, the researcher conducted source and technique triangulation and employed member checking with informants to confirm that data interpretations aligned with the realities intended by the participants (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Ethical

considerations were given serious attention, not only in administrative aspects but also in upholding moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for participants' dignity (Misbah et al., 2025).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the marketing strategies implemented by the New Student Admission (PMB) committee at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang, focusing on two flagship programs: Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering (TKRO) and Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ). The marketing strategy is examined based on the three main phases of management: planning, implementation (organizing and actuating), and evaluation (controlling). Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, the strategy has proven effective in building the school's image as both vocationally excellent and religious, accurately targeting its market, and increasing new student enrollment interest.

3.1 Strategy Planning Phase

Promotional planning at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang is designed systematically using an integrative approach that combines Islamic values with modern communication strategies. According to an interview with the PMB Committee Chair, "We plan our promotional programs based on regional potential analysis and community needs for vocational programs. TKRO and TKJ are attractive due to their high employment prospects and alignment with current developments" (Interview, May 4, 2025). The official PMB Work Program document for the 2024/2025 academic year shows that the promotional plan includes the development of visual materials such as brochures for the two flagship programs, featuring photos of students in practice, skill flowcharts, and graduate profiles. A school mapping document prioritizes promotional efforts toward SMP/MTs within a 20–25 km radius, taking into account graduate numbers, transportation access, and potential collaboration.

This approach aligns with Nugroho & Prasetyo (2021), who state that educational marketing strategies must include market segmentation, mapping of prospective students' needs, and the selection of promotional media tailored to audience characteristics. At SMK Hisba Buana Semarang, strategic planning focuses not only on external promotion but also internal consolidation. Observations during the committee's initial meetings revealed that the team first identified the strengths of each program through discussions with TKRO and TKJ vocational teachers. These discussions informed the promotional narratives, addressing market needs such as the growing demand for electric vehicle technicians and home internet network specialists. This illustrates that promotion planning is grounded in both internal and external micro- and macro-level data.

Students were also involved in the design of promotional materials. For example, a 12th-grade TKJ student contributed to the brochure's digital design and helped manage the school's promotional Instagram account. This involvement not only supports human resource efficiency but also ensures the content reflects youth communication styles. "I helped design and create videos because I understand trends that junior high students like," said the student in an informal interview (Interview, May 5, 2025). This strategy reflects the concept of student-based marketing, where students serve as both agents and objects of educational marketing communication.

3.2 Strategy Implementation Phase (Organizing & Actuating)

During the implementation phase, the committee adopted a blended marketing model, combining offline (direct) and online (digital) promotion. During a visit to SMPN 3 Genuk, the PMB team demonstrated hands-on activities, including computer assembly simulations by TKJ students and vehicle brake and injection system checks by TKRO students. These sessions were led by 12th-grade students serving as program ambassadors, accompanied by vocational teachers and promotional staff. One committee member stated, "We don't just hand out flyers; we provide them with a direct experience of vocational practices. That leaves a stronger impression" (Interview, May 8, 2025). Digitally, the team utilized Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to present promotional content, such as vlogs titled "A Day with a TKJ Student" and a TKRO program profile video showing students conducting vehicle tune-ups in the school workshop. As of May 12, 2025, the TKRO video had

received over 4,200 views on YouTube, and the school's Instagram page saw a 60% increase in visits during the promotional period.

Islamic values were explicitly presented throughout the promotional activities. Observations showed that during visits to SMP/MTs, teachers and students wore Islamic attire, greeted with Islamic salutations, and integrated moral messages into their presentations. A teacher commented, "We want to show that SMKs not only teach technical skills but also instill strong Islamic character and ethics" (Interview, May 10, 2025). This aligns with Rahmawati (2022), who emphasizes that modern Islamic education should integrate professionalism with da'wah values in its communication strategies.

Field promotions were carried out using flexible and adaptive approaches. For instance, during a visit to MTs Hidayatus Subban Karangroto, the team delivered materials in polite Javanese to connect emotionally with local students and teachers, and adjusted presentation duration to avoid disrupting formal learning. This adaptability demonstrates the committee's sensitivity to local cultural contexts—an essential principle in community-based educational promotion (Suryadi, 2019). In addition to formal strategies, the promotion also involved informal methods, such as community figure visits. A local religious leader was invited to observe the TKRO and TKJ practice sessions, and documentation notes that "the invited community figure helped promote the school via WhatsApp groups and women's religious gatherings" (Activity Report, May 6, 2025). This highlights how promotion extended beyond media channels to include community-based outreach through social relationships and da'wah.

3.3 Strategy Evaluation Phase (Controlling)

The evaluation of the marketing strategy is conducted regularly through biweekly meetings of the PMB (Student Admission Committee). According to the minutes of the evaluation meeting held on May 15, 2025, the committee monitors the increase in applicants by department. The data revealed that the number of applicants for the TKJ program rose by 42%, while the TKRO program experienced a 28% increase compared to the previous year. The evaluation also addressed the effectiveness of promotional media. From an interview with the Media Promotion Division, it was stated that, "video content is far more effective in reaching prospective students than static images because today's youth prefer watching to reading" (Interview, May 12, 2025). This finding reinforces the adoption of interactive visual-based promotional strategies that align with the characteristics of Generation Z.

Alumni engagement in promotional activities is also considered an evaluative strategy. One TKRO alumnus, now employed at an official Mitsubishi workshop, shared a one-minute testimonial video on TikTok, which received a positive response from viewers. In the video, he stated, "I'm proud to be a graduate of TKRO Hisba because I was trained to be a technician with both religious values and professional work ethics" (Alumni Testimonial Video, TikTok, May 2025). The video was later reposted by a student automotive community account and became one of the most viewed contents during the promotional period.

The evaluation encompassed not only quantitative assessments, such as the number of applicants, but also qualitative reflections on the committee's experiences during the promotional campaign. In a reflective interview, one committee member stated, "We also evaluated how exhausted we were, so next year we plan to involve more student council members and alumni" (Interview, May 16, 2025). This highlights the importance of psychological factors and workload in developing a sustainable promotional management system. Additionally, the committee evaluated the timing effectiveness of the campaign. It was found that promotions conducted during the Islamic months of Rabiul Akhir and Jumadil Awal garnered more attention, coinciding with the period when ninth-grade students typically make school decisions. This is supported by monthly registration data, which shows a spike in interest following the release of digital promotional content. Thus, the evaluation also addresses the timing strategy in promotional management.

Finally, the evaluation results were used to develop long-term strategic recommendations, one of which is to establish a permanent promotional division under the student affairs and public relations

structure of the school. The committee agreed that promotion should not merely be a seasonal activity preceding PMB but rather a regular and ongoing effort. This marks a shift from reactive to proactive promotion, which is a hallmark of professional educational marketing management (Wibowo, 2020).

3.4 Supporting Factors

3.4.1 Support from School Leadership and Foundation

The support of the school principal and the foundation is a key factor in implementing educational promotion strategies. Based on an interview with the Principal of SMK Hisba Buana, he stated, *"We recognize the importance of marketing strategies in the current era of private school competition, so we have no hesitation in allocating budgets for promoting the TKJ and TKRO programs, including video production and school visits"* (Interview, May 14, 2025). This is reinforced by documentation of the 2025 student admission promotion budget, which recorded a total expenditure of IDR 8,500,000 for promotional purposes. This phenomenon reflects the application of the Total Quality Management (TQM) principle in school management, where leadership supports continuous improvement through structured planning and resource allocation (Suryosubroto, 2017, p. 98).

3.4.2 The Strength of Alumni as Branding Ambassadors

Alumni who have succeeded in the automotive and information technology sectors serve as powerful promotional agents. In an observation of TikTok promotional videos, testimonials from TKRO and TKJ alumni were featured. One TKJ alumnus stated, *"I was accepted for an internship at an IT company even before graduation, thanks to the portfolio I built during school practice"* (TKJ Alumni Video, May 2025). An interview with the PMB committee revealed, *"Successful alumni are promotion magnets. We deliberately invite them to speak in front of prospective students and help share videos on social media"* (Interview, May 13, 2025). This aligns with the concept of Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM), which suggests that third-party testimonials possess high credibility and significantly influence public decisions in choosing educational services (Wulandari & Munir, 2018, p. 142).

3.4.3 Relevant and Interactive Digital Content

A social media-based promotional strategy serves as a distinct strength. Based on observations of an Instagram Live promotion session on May 9, 2025, the researcher noted highly active interactions, with over 100 comments from junior high school students and a surge in followers from 2,100 to 3,600 within two weeks. An interview with the media team stated, *"We focus on content that resonates with teenagers, such as 'Tips on Assembling a Computer' or 'Motor Engine Diagnostic Challenges.' That's the kind of content junior high students relate to these days"* (Interview, May 11, 2025). This phenomenon reflects the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach in education, which integrates digital platforms with personal and visual narratives to reach younger generations (Pratiwi, 2019, p. 67).

3.4.4 Islamic School Identity as a Differentiating Factor

SMK Hisba Buana stands out as an Islamic-based vocational school. In an interview with a prospective student's parent, it was stated, *"I chose SMK Hisba because besides learning about automotive, my child also studies the Qur'an and joins tahfidz. There's a balance between worldly and spiritual values, God willing"* (Interview, May 6, 2025). This Islamic identity forms a unique positioning strategy that strengthens the school's image. A religious-based school with vocational programs can attract a market segment seeking the integration of professionalism and spiritual values (Hidayatullah, 2020, p. 45).

3.5 Inhibiting Factors

3.5.1 Limited Human Resources in Digital Content Management

The PMB (student admission) committee is largely composed of active teachers who also carry teaching responsibilities. One teacher stated, *"We often run out of time to edit videos or write captions because we also have to teach. Meanwhile, social media trends require consistency"* (Interview, May 7, 2025). Observations of the school's Instagram account show posting gaps of up to one week. This issue highlights the suboptimal division of labor and the absence of a dedicated digital promotion unit.

This aligns with findings that small to medium educational institutions often lack resources for public communication divisions (Sutrisno & Dewi, 2021, p. 112).

3.5.2 Technical Barriers in Online Promotion

During the observation of a live promotional session at SMPN 48 Karangroto Genuk, Semarang (May 5, 2025), the video feed was interrupted and the audio was unstable for five minutes. One student commented, *"The video is lagging, I couldn't understand the explanation during the TKRO practice part."* Evaluation meeting documentation noted the need to improve Wi-Fi connectivity and supporting devices. This obstacle illustrates weaknesses in the *tangibles* and *reliability* dimensions of the SERVQUAL service quality model, which relate to an institution's ability to provide reliable promotional facilities (Rahmah & Fadhilah, 2017, p. 88).

3.5.3 Public Stigma Toward Islamic Vocational Schools

There remains a perception that graduates from Islamic vocational schools lack technical competitiveness. An interview with the public relations committee stated, *"There are still parents who ask, 'Will my child be able to work in a large workshop if they study at an Islamic SMK?'"* (Interview, May 10, 2025). To address this, the committee utilizes alumni testimonials and documentation of industry practices. This negative perception highlights the importance of market perception in promoting educational institutions. Public perception is shaped by media exposure and indirect experiences, requiring a continuous communication strategy (Aziz & Ramdani, 2020, p. 103).

3.5.3 Limited Collaboration with Industry

Cooperation documents show only three active MoUs, with activities mostly limited to student internships (Prakerin). A committee member noted, *"We still struggle to build partnerships with industry because not all businesses understand the potential of graduates from Islamic schools"* (Interview, May 15, 2025). This lack of synergy indicates that the Triple Helix model has not yet been optimally implemented in vocational education. To enhance competitiveness, vocational schools need to systematically build networks with the business and industrial sectors (Syafudin, 2019, p. 130).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the marketing strategy management implemented by the New Student Admission (PMB) committee at SMK Hisba Buana Semarang is carried out in a structured manner through three main stages: planning, organizing & actuating, and controlling. This strategy has proven effective in enhancing promotional efforts and increasing the attractiveness of the school, particularly for its two flagship programs: Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering (TKRO) and Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ). Moreover, it has contributed to building the institution's image as a professional and religious-based Islamic vocational school.

In the planning stage, the committee successfully integrated Islamic values with modern communication strategies through regional potential analysis, target school mapping, and the development of visually based promotional materials. The implementation stage adopted a blended marketing approach, combining direct (offline) and digital (online) promotion while emphasizing educational, humanistic, and spiritual interactions. Evaluation was conducted regularly and comprehensively through routine meetings and applicant data monitoring, which resulted in a significant increase in new student enrollment, especially in the TKJ and TKRO programs.

The success of this marketing strategy was supported by several key factors, including the commitment of school and foundation leadership, the role of alumni as brand ambassadors, engaging digital content, and the school's Islamic identity, which serves as a unique attraction to the community. However, several challenges remain, such as limited human resources for social media management, technical issues in online promotion, stigma toward the technical competence of Islamic vocational school graduates, and suboptimal collaboration with the industrial sector.

Overall, this research affirms that the success of marketing strategies does not solely rely on the sophistication of media and promotional techniques, but also on the integration of Islamic values, community engagement, and adaptive management. These findings offer practical contributions for the development of promotional models for Islamic-based vocational schools and enrich the

theoretical discourse in contemporary Islamic education management, which emphasizes participatory, contextual, and value-oriented approaches.

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