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The Principal's Strategy in Marketing Educational Services at the Integrated Islamic Vocational High School (SMK IT) Abi Husni Meranti

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze and explain the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, which includes formulation, implementation, evaluation of strategies, as well as the obstacles faced and how to overcome them. The research took place from March to May 2024, with initial observations in December 2023. The method used was qualitative research with a case study approach with narrative characteristics. Researchers go directly into the field to obtain data through observation, interviews and recording. This approach allows researchers to investigate phenomena intensively and in depth. The research results show that strategy formulation is carried out through marketing planning, market identification, strategy creation, and strategy control. Strategy implementation involves market segmentation, marketing mix, school services, relationship marketing, and consistency in implementation. Strategy evaluation includes a review of internal and external factors, performance reviews, and continuous improvement and improvement. The obstacles faced include teacher discipline, the burden of activities on students, and the community's low mindset regarding education. To overcome these obstacles, the principal reprimands teachers personally, takes a personal approach to students, and consistently implements the planned program.

Keywords: Principal Strategy, Services Marketing, Education, Management

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is very necessary for schools to win competition among other educational institutions. Marketing educational services is very important to ensure the existence or existence of schools. One way to ensure that educational institutions are not abandoned by their customers is through managing the marketing of educational services to offer products that suit people's

needs.(Moh. Nur Fauzi & Muhtar, 2023)People now think more realistically and critically in determining education for their families.(Triani, 2022)Apart from that, many schools, both in the general and religious fields, grow and develop in the midst of society.(Malik, 2022)causing competition between schools, to be considered more famous and more prestigious than their competitors.(Nguyen et al., 2016)

Currently, every professional institution, including educational institutions, must carry out marketing activities. However, because schools are educational institutions and are non-profit institutions, the marketing activities implemented certainly have characteristics that are certainly different from profit-oriented businesses.(Nurbawani, 2021)If educational marketing continues to be carried out, the educational institution will be known and understood by the wider community, this is important to make it easier to obtain input from new students.(Moh. Nur Fauzi & Muhtar, 2023)This certainly emphasizes the importance of marketing educational services for a school, in acquiring and retaining consumers and becoming a better institution than its competitors.

Several studies were conducted related to the marketing of educational services. As Mahajan & Golahit(2020)conducting research in India reported that promoting marketing concepts has been proven to create a practical framework for marketing decision making related to the field of education over the years. Marketing educational services influences customer engagement, satisfaction and relationships. The majority of future student enrollment is generated on the recommendation of alumni or existing students. "Pointing-out," i.e. recommending a service to others plays a dominant role in attracting future sign-ups.The results of this research add to knowledge by showing that the marketing of educational services is also related to the experience and image perceived by students. This is also very important for schools which are educational institutions and products.

From several of these studies, it can be seen how important marketing is for an educational institution to support the achievement of success. Marketing educational services can provide benefits in many ways. These include getting and increasing the number of prospective students, becoming a superior school among other schools, and maintaining the school's reputation/image. Therefore, schools must make marketing a priority to get, maintain and increase their consumers. Marketing educational services is a step in reforming educational institutions. In this step, educational institutions market their goods and services to the public by creating and offering innovative goods and services that meet market expectations and demands. In today's competitive market, achieving balance in teaching operations is very important for schools. In this way, it is hoped that schools with a shortage of students will not happen again.(Fathurrochman et al., 2021)

In this context, the person who plays a big role in marketing educational services is the school principal who has more authority in building and improving the school. The urgency of this principal's strategy is also supported by previous research. Among them is Nurbawani(Nurbawani, 2021)revealed that the role of the principal is very important for the success and sustainability of educational institutions. To manage the school he leads, a school principal must function as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator and motivator (EMASLIM). One of the responsibilities of the school principal in carrying out this function is to organize educational marketing strategies for the educational institutions he leads. As for Muadin & Fannisa Nur Fatihah(2022)in his research revealed thatThe school principal takes a leadership role and sets policies regarding strategies implemented by all stakeholders involved in the process of achieving predetermined goals.

In another study, Gill and Arnold(2015)disclosethat being a school principal is a position that has great responsibility, because the principal exists as a complex combination of people and positions whose daily duties involve many people. Because one of the identities of an institution, especially an educational institution, is reflected in its leader(Nasution, 2022) Paputungan (2020) prove that School principals need strategies that can provide positive value to students' parents. including by presenting high quality programs, both academic and extracurricular, with the hope that schools can compete through school grant funds. Principals must have the courage to create change, ensuring they reach the finish line first.

In line with this, the research results obtained by Rezeky(2021)emphasizes that the principal's strategy plays an important role in the process of achieving educational goals, and the success or failure of school activities can be said to be greatly influenced by the principal's qualifications. In line with this, Mohammad(2023)found that one of the benefits of increasing education marketing efforts is that it can improve the image of the school. From the explanation regarding the marketing of educational services and school principal strategies above, it can be understood that school principals are stakeholders who play an important role in marketing educational services in order to increase the number of students, improve the image of the school, improve the quality of the school, and many other benefits.

Based on several studies, it can be seen that the competitive advantage of a school shows whether a school principal is able to choose and implement strategies appropriately to achieve and maintain a competitive position through above average performance. Therefore, the school principal as a leader must have ways and strategies to persuade and invite other people and members to act in accordance with the goals that have been set so that the process of achieving these goals is well coordinated.(Mukhafadlo & Hariyati, 2022)

The existence of Islamic-based vocational high schools (SMK) is considered sufficient to answer the needs of society and the world of work. Integrated Islamic Vocational High Schools (SMK) are a combination of vocational schools and religion-based schools. So the Integrated Islamic Vocational School, SMK IT, seems to be the main choice for parents to continue their children's education apart from high school (SMA) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA).(Rosmaniar, 2019)



Figure 1.
Comparison Diagram of Number of Students

From the circular diagram of the comparison of the number of students presented, it can be seen that significant differences occur in two Islamic-based schools in one sub-district. Abi Husni IT Vocational School has a much larger number of students than other Islamic schools. This is because the Abi Husni Islamic Education Foundation (YPI) and the school principal have implemented special marketing strategies among the local community and outside the region, so that they are able to form an image and attract students. In short, this new Vocational High School (SMK) has had a positive impact from the strategy and image of the foundation that founded it.

The principal of the IT Vocational School, Abi Husni, continues to strive to market educational services at his school so that he can compete with other local private schools. Such as collaborating in internship programs (industrial work practices) with government agencies and companies locally and outside the region. Utilize and develop online media or websites to hold promotions on social media to the public. Apart from that, it provides superior programs that are different from most other school programs. Training programs are also often carried out by the Abi Husni IT Vocational School, especially for religious activities, so that students are able to compete in religious competitions. Apart from that, 90% of Abi Husni IT Middle School alumni continued their studies at Abi Husni IT Vocational School. This phenomenon shows that the Abi Husni Integrated Islamic Vocational High School (SMK IT) has a good marketing strategy, so that parents do not hesitate to send their children to the Abi Husni IT Vocational School.

Due to the urgency of the need for this research, the school principal is a leader who is expected to play a role in marketing educational services in the school he leads. As well as understanding that the benefits of marketing educational services will improve the school's image which is a reflection of the school's identity, and a positive image is very necessary for schools, especially private schools, to attract public sympathy. Even though there has been a lot of research conducted on school principals' strategies in marketing educational services, each school principal certainly has his own characteristics regarding the strategies he implements. Both the reasons for implementing the strategy, who is involved in implementing the strategy, the stages that are passed during the educational marketing mix, commitment, and obstacles that are overcome. Apart from that, the focus of the issue studied is regarding schools that have just started operating and do not yet have accreditation, because there are no alumni yet but have received a warm welcome from the community and attracted a lot of interest from students regardless of whether the school has accreditation or not. This issue has so far been underutilized by previous researchers, and is a novelty in this research. Most research raises issues regarding the marketing of educational services in schools/institutions that have been operating for a long time and have produced many alumni. This is a natural thing to do, because old schools will continue to make changes to maintain their reputation in order to attract new students every year.

To analyze and explain the formulation of the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, it is necessary to understand that an effective strategy must be prepared by considering various aspects such as the school's competitive advantage, market needs, and the latest educational trends. The school principal plays a key role in identifying opportunities and challenges, as well as formulating a marketing vision and mission that is aligned with the school's long-term goals. In this context, strategy formulation involves a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to determine the right direction and focus in efforts to market the educational services offered.

Furthermore, implementing the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School requires a systematic and measurable approach. Implementation of this strategy includes various activities such as promotions, improving the quality of educational services, as well as collaboration with various related parties. The school principal must ensure that all planned programs and activities run according to the schedule and targets that have been set. In this case, effective communication and good coordination between all team members are the keys to successful implementation of marketing strategies. Evaluation of the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School is also an important step to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategy that has been implemented. This evaluation is carried out through performance measurement and analysis of the results obtained, both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. School principals must be able to identify areas that require improvement and evaluate the impact of each marketing activity carried out. Thus, a comprehensive evaluation will provide a strong basis for making future strategy adjustments.

Finally, to find out the obstacles that occur in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School and outline how to overcome them, it is necessary to identify the problem in depth. Barriers can be internal factors such as limited resources or lack of innovation, as well as external factors such as intense competition and changes in regulations. School principals must be able to develop creative and effective solutions to overcome these obstacles, such as through increasing human resource capacity, applying technology in the marketing process, or establishing strategic partnerships with various stakeholders. With a proactive and adaptive approach, challenges in marketing educational services can be overcome well, so that Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School can continue to develop and compete competitively.

Previous research has mostly discussed school principals/university or institutional leaders and the factors that influence the marketing of educational services. There is still little research that explores school principals' strategies and the role of foundations in marketing educational services. In this research, researchers will explore the strategies used by school principals as leaders in improving the image of schools that are still newly operating, and how these strategies can be implemented effectively, as well as the role of foundations that participate in marketing educational services. So researchers are interested in conducting research on "School Principals' Strategies in Marketing Educational Services at the Integrated Islamic Vocational High School (SMK IT) Abi Husni Meranti"

METHOD

The location of this research is the Abi Husni Integrated Islamic Vocational High School (SMK IT) on Jl. General Sudirman No. 04 Hamlet II, Meranti District, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. The location survey was conducted in December 2023. Researchers chose Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School because of its appeal among the community, good quality of education, comfortable learning environment, and various student achievements, including superior activities such as the obligation to memorize the Al-Quran for students. The research is planned to last for three months, from March to May 2024, with initial observations in December 2023.

This research uses a qualitative research design with a narrative case study approach, in accordance with Creswell's (2015) view which emphasizes studying "cases" in real life contexts. This approach was chosen because researchers wanted to investigate phenomena in the field

intensively and in depth, observing, interviewing and recording data to understand and explain the phenomena accurately. The focus is to reveal the principal's strategy in marketing educational services, so that schools can develop and excel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the researcher describes the findings obtained from interviews, documentation and observations, both general and specific findings. Next, the researcher will discuss and develop the presentation made as a result of the research and adjust the implications. The discussion will be explained sequentially regarding the formulation of the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, then the implementation of the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, evaluation of the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni IT Vocational School. Meranti and the obstacles that occur in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School and how to overcome them.

Formulating the Principal's Strategy in Marketing Education Services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School

In connection with the strategy formulation carried out by the principal in marketing educational services at SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti, it will be explained in detail regarding the formulation steps carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing educational services. The formulation carried out includes several things including:

1 Marketing Planning and Goal Setting

Planning in good educational management requires planning before implementation. This can be achieved by creating a plan that is agreed upon by the team, including the principal, teachers, and employees.(Fatonah, 2022)This is the first step taken before operationalizing a marketing strategy. Planning is a design of activities that will be carried out before they are implemented to achieve certain goals. The function of planning is to help educational institutions find a way forward by setting clear goals. If there is no plan, the educational institution will not have clear results to achieve within a certain time period.(Zaman & Bakhri, 2023).

One of the important things that educational institutions must pay attention to is educational marketing planning. In making an educational plan, the purpose of the plan is also an important factor so that all related parties know what must be done, and realize the importance of the plan in a marketing strategy. This is not intended to abandon humanism in educational management or to commercialize educational services. If the education program itself does not meet society's expectations, establishing good education promotion, the right price for education, and easy access to the right location and conditions is meaningless.(Agustiarman et al., 2023).

Planning principles include the following: what will be done, how it can be achieved, who will do the educational marketing, location, time, and resources needed.(Agustiarman et al., 2023)Each school will design all the activities that will be carried out, the products that will be offered, form the committee structure, and what goals will actually be achieved. Of course, all these formulations must be completed before starting the next strategy formulation step. Marketing activity planning is a very important component for organizations/institutions to ensure long-term sustainability and success. After activities, products and marketing media have been determined, goal setting is usually based on the important components of success.

Goals do not need to be determined quantitatively, but they can serve as conditions to be achieved in the future. Goals provide direction for developing goals, policies, programs, and activities that will be used to achieve the mission. Therefore, objectives must have the ability to provide a solid basis for setting indicators. (Hafizin & Herman, 2022)

Based on the explanation above, the things that the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti did in marketing his educational services was to form an educational marketing team consisting of the principal, public relations representative, curriculum supervisor, foundation and teachers. The tasks of each team have been explained in detail so that the team understands better how to carry out their duties. In implementing educational marketing planning, schools develop strategic steps to achieve goals. One way to achieve this goal is to set school targets for obtaining information. This goal will be achieved through promotion and outreach to schools around the Meranti sub-district, both directly and through the media. Educational marketing activities at IT Vocational School involve all school components, including teachers, teaching staff, operators, TU, principal, head of public relations, head of curriculum and foundation. This is done to ensure that each section has loyalty and responsibility towards its educational institution. The marketing location is carried out within the school environment, namely at the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, and promotions are directly carried out to schools in the Meranti sub-district. Meanwhile, marketing time is carried out over a period of 6 months, starting from planning at the beginning of the even semester, then carrying out school promotions in January to March until the PPDB process at the end of the even semester. Resources in marketing educational services at Abi Husni IT Vocational School consist of the principal who is responsible, the deputy principal who is responsible for curriculum, the deputy principal who is responsible for public relations and human resources, the chairman of the foundation who functions as school treasurer, staff administration, and teachers who are assigned in stages.

Determining the marketing objectives described above, in an implementation process carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti, has fulfilled the criteria in marketing planning, namely to build the school's image, increase the number of students, and maintain the school's existence. The marketing objectives set also fulfill the organization's values and contribute to the mission, programs and subprograms offered. The objectives set describe the results of the program and explain the organization's future direction and are realistic to achieve.

From the explanation above, it can be understood that by carrying out marketing planning and setting goals, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti finds it easier to formulate strategies for marketing his educational services. This is because marketing planning and goal setting make it easier for institutions to determine marketing strategies that are suitable and appropriate to implement.

2 Market Identification

In order to attract the market's attention to see all the opportunities and challenges that might occur, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti identified the market in formulating its marketing strategy. This is done for the convenience and smooth implementation of the strategy that will be formulated. By identifying the market, it will be easier to see and know what educational products the public/customers actually want. Apart from that, the challenges that will occur are easier to overcome with control strategies. So that the marketing strategy carried out by the school will be maximized and possible failures can

be minimized. Market identification will also make it easier for schools to determine market segmentation and market targets.

This is in accordance with what was conveyed by Kotler and Keller(2024)in his book entitled Marketing Management volume 1, translated by Sabran, that after the company knows its market opportunities, the company will decide how many and which segments to target. Of course, market opportunities are known from market identification. Apart from that, Khasanah(2015)in his research, he said that in determining strategic steps for marketing Islamic education services, market identification was carried out as the first step to determine market needs and conditions, including educational features that were important for educational customers. So Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, which is an educational institution that applies Islamic values in the learning process, has high potential in efforts to help educate the nation and make the national compulsory education program a success.

From the explanation above, what the researcher can conclude is that the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti carried out market identification to find out the opportunities and challenges that might occur when implementing his marketing strategy. So that you can find and determine strategic steps that will be taken in marketing educational services.

3 Creating a Strategy

One of the determining factors for an institution's success in marketing its services is a good strategy. Even though the product/service provided is of high quality, if the strategy used to recruit customers is not good, then they will not use the service or buy the product being sold. In essence, strategy is the way a company uses to offer services.(Kotler & Keller, 2024)Education marketing strategies are adopted from the business world. Marketing focuses on consumer satisfaction: if consumers are not satisfied, marketing has failed. In other words, educational institutions cannot maintain their existence if they cannot provide education to users in accordance with market demand.(MY et al., 2022).

A school as an educational institution can be defined as an organization that operates in the field of educational services whose activities serve consumers in the form of pupils, students and the general public known as stakeholders. In the field of education, marketing strategy is an effort to provide high intellectual services and character formation. Schools must have the ability to see and anticipate objectively internal and external conditions, which is the main goal of strategy setting. In a situation like this, the functions of management, distributors, consumers, and competitors can be clearly differentiated from each other. Strategic planning is important to gain advantage in the market and create products that meet customer desires with optimal support from existing resources.(Mundir, 2016).

Starting from the importance of strategies for the success of an institution explained above, Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School has formulated several strategies for marketing its educational services to the public. Among them are market segmentation, marketing mix, school services, relationship marketing, and istiqomah/consistent. Among the strategies implemented by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing educational services, there is a special strategy which is used as a differentiating strategy from the strategies implemented by most other schools, namely implementing all programs with istiqomah.

4 Creating a Control Strategy

Just as strategy is important to marketing success, control strategy also has the same role. In the world of small and large businesses, it is necessary to implement a management control system. In management, control strategies are very important to see organizational

actions. Control strategies can be used to view organizational activities and are used as settings, activity observations, execution estimates, and integrative components.(Wahyuningtiyas et al., 2021).

Implementation of control is the key to successful strategy implementation. Strategy failure is not only caused by the shortcomings of the strategy itself; Changing factors such as technology, politics, economics, and society can cause such failure. Additionally, company leaders are not smart enough to know what the company's best interests are. They usually do not understand what is expected because they lack information and do not have the ability to do what is expected because events occur that do not match expectations. In such situations, organizations must take control measures.(Djuwita, 2021).

Based on the explanation regarding the importance of control strategies above, Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School created a control strategy which aims to minimize the occurrence of initial strategy failures. So the researcher can conclude that in formulating a marketing strategy for educational services, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti took steps to control the strategy through creating standards, measuring performance and interpreting data in carrying out corrective actions. The control strategy is carried out as an effort to achieve marketing strategy success and increase the effectiveness of the institution.

Implementation of the Principal's Strategy in Marketing Education Services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School

In connection with the implementation of marketing of educational services carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti, we will explain in detail the types of marketing strategies implemented by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti. The strategy implemented by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti includes several things including:

1 Market segmentation

All organizations, whether producing products or services, must have the same question: "What kind of customers do we need?" Of course, these questions must be answered before the organization can begin operations. The segmentation process, which is the root of this question, is one of the successes of organizations. An organization's success clearly depends on its customers, including customer demographics, factors influencing the purchasing process, and customer purchasing power. All these factors are determined by the market segmentation process.

An important idea that supports marketing strategy and organizes the resources necessary to carry out marketing initiatives is market segmentation. Institutions/organizations should consider market segmentation as an overall process where they consider purchasing from each sector, at least businesses will be more cost effective if they divide purchasing units into various groups. This is because the most valuable aspect of this market segmentation is knowledge of the characteristics and how best to serve each category. Maximizing profits is what it's all about.(Habib Bayhaqi & Nuri Aslami, 2022).

Based on the market segmentation strategy explained above, the principal of SMK IT, Abi Husni Meranti, applies the procedures for students from the lower middle economic class. Geographically, Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School has students from various regions, including from outside the sub-district and even from outside the district. They also come from the lower middle social class psychographically. As for economics, the marketing target is the lower middle class, which means that people from the upper middle class are very likely to send their children to this school. Many high-quality institutions can only be reached by the

upper middle class, therefore Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School provides an opportunity for lower middle class people to afford institutional costs.

Based on the explanation above, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti finds it easier to market educational services because of market segmentation. Because market mapping and analysis allows institutions to identify which areas need direct promotion and which areas only need regular promotion, such as areas that already know about the existence of the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School directly or via social media.

2 Marketing Mix

Marketing mix strategies in the education sector can foster satisfaction and prosperity for stakeholders in the long term. To achieve optimal results, educational institutions must create an effective marketing strategy and combine the elements in the marketing mix. (Sabila & Kholiq, 2023) The services marketing mix consists of 7Ps, namely Product, Price, place, Promotion, people, Physical Evidence, Process. (Fradito et al., 2020).

A product is anything that can be given to customers in order to meet customer needs and satisfaction. Prices can usually be adjusted. The quality of the product or service must determine the price carefully. People also known as "human resources" are the most important component in marketing activities, and require human resources who have sufficient capabilities. Implementing effective marketing will be easier if human resources can work professionally. Promotion aims to introduce the product widely so that it can penetrate quite large marketing numbers. Promotion must be carried out regularly and effectively in order to achieve satisfactory results to achieve previously set goals.

Place in marketing is a place. Determining the location of the place must be done strategically. A well-designed place can make it easier for customers to go and buy goods. Process is the entire series of tasks that must be carried out by the organization. Sales, payment and product distribution systems are part of the process. Processes also show how the company serves customers. Psychological evidence, also known as physical evidence, is a description of the sales environment that creates an atmosphere that attracts customers and captures their attention. In this case, the construction of a beautiful school building with beautiful interiors and other decorations can be used as physical evidence.

Based on the explanation of each element of the marketing mix above, Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School carries out a marketing mix as a form of strategy in marketing its educational services. The products offered by Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School are product differentiation so that they differ from school products in general, including:

- a. The major program is internship in village head offices spread across Meranti sub-district, sub-district office, KUA office, DISPENDA Asahan, and PT. Asahan Range Raharja Services.
- b. Religious programs, namely, the school taklim assembly every Friday, and PHBI.
- c. Character habituation programs such as Duha prayers and reading Ratib Al-Haddad before starting learning.
- d. The Islamic boarding school curriculum includes learning Fiqh, SKI, Al-Quran, Hadith and Arabic and ahfidzul Qur'an.
- e. Extracurricular hadroh/Qasidah sholawat, futsal.
- f. The life skills program is sewing and automotive.

Meanwhile, in terms of determining costs, Abi Husni IT Vocational School applies relatively affordable financing compared to the services and facilities and quality of education provided, namely Rp. 50,000,- per month and frees up fees for orphans. Turning to Place, Abi

Husni IT Vocational School is in a strategic location and easy to reach, but there is a slight obstacle, namely the roads are still inadequate. In terms of promotion, promotional activities for the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School are carried out in two forms. Direct promotion and promotion via social media. Promotional activities at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School include; visits to SMP/MTs located around the Meranti sub-district, by distributing brochures to prospective new students, and social media promotions on Facebook. As for the people/resources element, the implementation of the marketing strategy at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School involves all stakeholders, such as Administrative staff, all teachers as PPDB committee members, and is directly supervised by the Abi Husni Education Foundation.

Referring to physical evidence, Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School has physical evidence which includes infrastructure that helps the learning process. Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School has sufficient facilities and infrastructure to facilitate its students. Such as a pleasant learning environment, beautiful gardens, clean classrooms, canteen, prayer room, computer lab, library, sports equipment, sewing equipment, motorbike automotive equipment, hadroh equipment and so on. Apart from that, the services provided by Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School are known to be good, friendly, polite and courteous. Meanwhile, in terms of promotion, the marketing process for educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School is quite easy and good. Even though it has only been operational for about 2 years, the community already knows the positive image of the Abi Husni foundation.

Therefore, the process that Abi Husni IT Vocational School goes through in carrying out marketing is quite easy because the foundation's image is well known and positive by the public. Apart from that, in a series of marketing processes, strategies are formulated along with the programs to be implemented, then implementation of all strategies with supporting activities is carried out and at the end an evaluation of the performance that has taken place is carried out. The marketing process for educational services carried out by SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti is conceptual, starting from forming a committee, scheduling the distribution of brochures, scheduling uploads to social media and registration times. Based on all of this, it can be understood that in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, the school principal uses the theories explained above.

3 School Services

The quality of a product or service is very important for the success of a company or institution because it is a guarantee of customer loyalty (customer loyalty), making it the strongest defense against competition. Furthermore, to evaluate quality education services, it is necessary to have elements that are fulfilled as a basis. The SERVQUAL model, developed by Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman, is a service quality approach that is often used as a reference for marketing research. This model is used to compare two main factors that influence service quality: customer perceptions of the actual services received (Perceive Service) and customer perceptions of the services actually expected (Expected Service).(Atiyah et al., 2022)

In the world of education, the five dimensions of SERVQUAL, also called RATER, consist of the following elements: 1) Reliability, namely the school's ability to provide educational services accurately and reliably in accordance with its promises; 2) Assurance in the form of knowledge, politeness and ability of school employees to increase students' level of trust. 3) Tangible (tangible), namely the school's ability to show itself to others. This includes the use of educational equipment and supplies, physical facilities such as warehouses

and buildings, and the appearance of school employees. 4) Empathy (empathy) in the sense that schools can provide sincere and personal attention to users of educational services by understanding the desires of users of educational services. 5) Responsiveness (responsiveness) which is a policy to assist and provide educational services quickly and accurately.(Atiyah et al., 2022).

Starting from the service quality dimensions explained above, Abi Husni IT Vocational School has fulfilled each SERVQUAL dimension. The explanation is as follows, 1) Reliability, in terms of reliability, Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School always tries to provide the best service according to what has been offered. Quality services will continue to be pursued despite obstacles. 2) Assurance, to increase customer confidence in the educational services offered by SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti, including communication between teachers and staff with students, parents and outside parties, security of the school environment, parents' confidence in "entrusting" their children they study at the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, and have good manners. 3) Tangibel, in this case the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School shows its existence in the Meranti District environment by regularly participating in and winning MTQ competitions at the sub-district level, taking part in every important activity held in the sub-district, often presenting hadroh at various community events. 4) Emphaty, regarding this matter, all educators and education staff at the Abi Husni IT Vocational School supervise students while at school. The school also accommodates input from students' parents. 5) Responsiveness, in this regard, all members of the foundation and educators as well as educational staff at SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti are responsive in serving all student needs, student administration, parental input and suggestions. The conclusion obtained from the explanation above, namely the school service strategy used by the principal in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, has been carried out well and with quality and in accordance with the theories that have been explained.

4 *Relationship Marketing*

*Relationship Marketing*In the world of marketing, it is an important concept to be able to manage relationships between people and institutions that have similar functions and goals. The reason why collaboration between institutions is important is because it produces many benefits for both parties, one of which is improving the quality of graduates. The second reason is to understand and explain how cooperation in inter-organizational relationships is carried out, so that people who work together can trust each other and commit to maintaining these relationships for mutual benefit.(Sarwono & Ihalaauw, 2021).

Almost all types of organizations or institutions require a public relations role. This includes commercial and non-commercial organizations, such as companies, professional associations, educational institutions, socio-cultural institutions, and government. In general, relationship marketing is one of the spearheads of an organization to establish communication with stakeholders and to inform the public about the organization's vision, mission, goals and programs.(Hidayat & Wijaya, 2017)One way to look at inter-organizational relationships is to see how two organizations can work together in a mutually beneficial relationship, but this does not mean that the two organizations have to merge into one unit. What is interesting here is that the trust factor does not have a significant influence on the success of the relationship between the two international travel companies, where marketing support and business success are the main objectives.(Sarwono & Ihalaauw, 2021)

Hidayat and Wijaya(2017)reveals in his book that there are three types of relationship marketing in educational institutions, including:

a. Educational Relationships

The cooperative relationship between teachers at school and parents in the family in educating children. This relationship is created to avoid differences in principles or even conflicts that could cause children to doubt their stance and attitudes.

b. Cultural Relations

Cultural relations are a collaborative effort between the school and the community. Therefore, there is a relationship between life at school and life in society. The school curriculum is adapted to societal developments. Likewise for the choice of teaching materials and teaching techniques.

c. Institutional Relations

Relationships between schools and other official institutions or agencies, both private and government. Examples of these relationships include collaboration between schools and other schools, local government heads, and state companies. These relationships contribute to overall educational improvement and development.

In its implementation, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti entered into collaborative relationships with several other institutions as a form of marketing educational services. With the aim, Abi Husni IT Vocational School students can build and improve life skills which will support their educational process and life in the future. Apart from that, the collaboration aims to be a way to promote/show to the public that Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School has a quality program. Of course, this is a good form of marketing to increase customer attraction. The form of collaboration carried out by SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti is internship (industrial work practice), in this case students do internships in village head offices spread throughout Meranti sub-district, and the Meranti sub-district office. Apart from that, internships are also carried out at the Asahan Regional Revenue Service (DISPENDA) office, and PT Jasa Raharja Kisaran Asahan. Meanwhile, to hone students' life skills, collaboration is carried out with workshops and taylors spread across Meranti sub-district.

From the explanation above, researchers can conclude that the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti carries out relationship marketing as one of the marketing strategies for his educational services with the aim of developing students' life skills and as a way to develop community attractiveness. The forms of collaboration carried out are in the form of internships (industrial work practices) and automotive and sewing training. Thus, the type of collaboration carried out by SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti is a cultural relationship which is collaboration with the local community, namely sewing and automotive, and institutional relationships with local government institutions, namely industrial work in the village head's offices, sub-district office, Dispenda and PT Jasa Raharja.

5 Istiqomah/Consistent

According to Yamani(2022)Istiqamah in excellence shows perseverance and patience to achieve maximum results in work. Istiqamah is the result of a continuous process. This process can result in a good, honest, and open system, and dishonesty will be greatly reduced as a result. People or organizations that continue to do good can achieve peace and, at the same time, find solutions to all existing problems. This shows Allah's promise to His servants that they will remain consistent and remain steadfast. Istiqomah is seen as a feature of the Islamic work ethic.

Various management experts recommend istiqamah, as excellent self-management. Because istiqamah means controlling emotions. Apart from that, the current paradigm is that istiqamah is the most important key to success. Someone who can continue to do good will have a higher level of success than even a very intelligent person. One of the scopes of istiqamah is istiqamah action which is the determination to do work, deeds, or whatever is done to achieve success that is approved by Allah. In other words, it is an attitude of dedication in carrying out work, business, or struggle to uphold the truth without being disappointed, weak, or hopeless. (Rahman, 2018) One of the benefits of istiqamah is to achieve the goals of a person or institution well and regularly.

In its implementation, the istiqamah carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing his education seeks to be consistent in carrying out all the strategies, programs and activities that have been formulated. Do not make programs or activities just a formality to seek public attention. All programmed activities will be controlled by each supervisor. Even though there are obstacles in implementation, the school principal and all stakeholders continue to carry out what has been planned. Istiqamah is used as a special strategy in marketing carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti, and of course it is different from the strategies carried out by other schools in general. The benefits obtained from implementing istiqamah can be felt by schools and foundations. Istiqamah forms a positive image of the school and the foundation. This is of course an important factor that encourages local people to register their children or family members at the Abi Husni IT Vocational School.

From the presentation given, the researcher concluded that the special strategy carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing his educational services was implementing the program with istiqamah. Don't make the program just a formality or image. Even though there are obstacles in implementing it, it still does not change the commitment, persistence and consistency. From the implementation of istiqamah, of course the institution has had a positive impact, namely the formation of a positive image of the school among the community.

Evaluation of the Principal's Strategy in Marketing Education Services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School

1 Reviewing Internal and External Factors

The end of the strategic management process is evaluation. Every program that has been implemented must be evaluated, both the process and the results, such as marketing programs to determine the benchmarks for marketing success. The results of the evaluation will be a solution to correct deficiencies and increase success in the future. According to Nuroni (2017) Strategy evaluation is a stage of the strategic management process where top management tries to ensure that the strategy they choose is consistent, appropriate and can be implemented as well as a means of utilizing feedback as input for planning new strategies.

Apart from that, in Risa Kharisma's research (2020) revealed that the urgency of strategy evaluation was formulated in three stages. One way to do this is to look at internal factors by considering the strengths and weaknesses of the institution that will make the educational institution survive, as well as the weaknesses that will make the educational institution fail. Apart from that, educational institutions can also look at external factors to measure performance and consider what opportunities there will be. Examining internal factors by considering the strengths and weaknesses that will keep the educational institution

standing and external factors by considering what opportunities educational institutions must take to become independent and anticipating what threats might allow educational institutions to experience setbacks.

Based on the urgency of the strategy in educational institutions above, in its implementation, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti evaluated strategies in marketing educational services with the first step, namely reviewing internal and external factors. This is done as a basis for identifying the origin of problems that arise, so that it is easier to determine ways to solve them and improve future plans more efficiently. In this evaluation phase you can see whether everything is going well or not.

From the presentation given, the researcher concluded that the first stage carried out by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing his educational services was to review internal and external factors regarding the causes of existing obstacles. So you can find and determine solutions or improvements that are relevant to the problems that occur.

2 Reviewing the Performance that Has Been Implemented

Era(2023)revealed that there are three objectives of strategy evaluation, namely as follows: 1) As a tool to improve future plans; 2) Improve the allocation of financial resources and management capabilities now and in the future; and 3) Improving factors inhibiting implementation by re-checking the relevance of continuous small change programs and measuring progress towards planned targets. Fred R. David (2107) in his book states "the Balanced Scorecard is a strategy evaluation and control technique. Balanced Scorecard derives its name from the perceived need of firms to balance financial measures that are often used exclusively in strategy evaluation and control : Review Article 207 with nonfinancial measures such as product quality and customer service."

According to David, Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is an evaluation and control method. The BSC stems from a company's need to balance financial measures often used for strategy evaluation and control along with nonfinancial measures such as product quality and customer service. Therefore, as David said, the Balance Scorecard (BSC) is a management tool that can be used by educational institutions. BSC is used to evaluate how effective and efficient a school's performance is from a financial and non-financial performance perspective. In the BSC method there is a DRIVE element, where D shows the direction or goal that the educational institution wants to achieve, R shows the resources or resources, especially the financial resources needed to run the educational institution, I shows the impression on students, good in the past, present, or future, and V denotes the means and processes used to achieve those goals and objectives. (Kharisma, 2020).

Based on the objectives of the evaluation and Fred David's expression regarding the evaluation method described above, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in its implementation reviews the performance that has been carried out as the second evaluation step. After reviewing internal and external factors. In this case, all school parties will review the results of their work within a predetermined time period. with the aim of improving the allocation of funding resources and management capabilities now and in the future. Based on the explanation above, the researcher concludes that in reviewing the performance that has been implemented,principals, foundations and staff members perform a variety of tasks in these activities, such as explaining and communicating the strategy to the entire organization, aligning the goals of each program with the organization's goals, linking strategic goals to long-term goals and annual budgets, finding and aligning initiatives to the strategy, and conduct regular strategy reviews to obtain needed feedback.

3 Making Repairs and Improvements

The strategic evaluation of an educational perspective has many goals, principles, scope, urgency, and the steps needed to carry it out to evaluate whether the strategies that have been created and implemented in educational institutions have achieved the expected results or not. One of the objectives of educational evaluation is the general and specific goals that must be achieved by the school. Evaluation principles include continuity, overallity, purpose, criteria, and usefulness. Strategic evaluation includes evaluation of educational programs and educational implementation processes.

The final step in evaluating strategies in education is taking and carrying out corrective action. In this case, repairs are carried out if discrepancies occur. (Kharisma, 2020) By continuously checking the relevance of the program and measuring progress towards the planned target. If something undesirable happens, improvements are made, if the strategy goes well according to plan then improvements are made. Improvements are made if necessary, and improvements are made to get better results and improve performance than before.

Starting from the explanation regarding improvements and improvements in the evaluation described above, in its implementation the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti has made efforts to improve the hampered strategies and make improvements for better performance. Every six months, an evaluation is carried out to ensure that the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School work program does not deviate from the plan. If the overall program has gone well according to plan, efforts will be made to improve it in a better direction. However, if obstacles occur and need improvement, the school principal takes corrective action through deliberation.

So the conclusion obtained from the explanation above, namely the strategic evaluation carried out by the principal in marketing educational services at the Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School, has been carried out well and is in accordance with the expert theories explained above. In implementing its performance, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti has made efforts to improve the obstacles that occurred by involving all members of the school and the foundation.

Obstacles that Occur in Marketing Education Services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School and How to Overcome Them

The principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti faces challenges in marketing his educational services, both internally and externally. Overall, the challenges he faces include educators who have not carried out their duties and obligations well, students who view quality education as a burden, and the low level of society's mindset about education. In this case, the researcher will describe the obstacles experienced by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing his educational services.

According to marketing environmental theory, there are two factors that influence marketing: macro and micro factors. Macro factors originate from the institutional environment and influence its performance. Micro factors include institutions, suppliers, marketing intermediaries, customer markets, competitors, and society, which are actors close to institutions and influence how a business can serve its customers. community, local community, general community, and internal community. Meanwhile, macro environmental factors in marketing are larger social factors that influence micro marketing, which include things such as demographics, economics, nature, technology, politics and culture.(Hasibuan & Napitupulu, 2021).

Based on a number of factors that influence marketing mentioned above, the inhibiting factors faced by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti when implementing marketing strategies for educational services include marketing intermediaries within the institution, namely teaching staff, customers, namely students and the community. Marketing intermediaries are parties who connect producers and consumers or wholesalers and consumers. In education, teachers can be understood as intermediaries in the delivery of services from institutions/schools to students. In its implementation, the obstacles posed by teachers in delivering services to students stem from teachers' lack of discipline in carrying out their duties. There are teachers who are still lazy to carry out the teaching and learning process because they do not come to class on time.

Apart from marketing intermediaries, what the principal faces in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School comes from his own customers, namely students who still feel burdened by the many activities, assignments and memorization given by the teacher. Apart from that, other obstacles are encountered from the community environment. In carrying out marketing activities, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni still encounters people who think all schools are the same, without identifying the facilities and quality provided. The public's mindset still underestimates education today. So for society it is not important to send their children or families to school, the most important thing is a diploma.

In overcoming the obstacles that occurred, there were several things that the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti did. In terms of disciplinary issues for teaching staff, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti overcome this by reprimanding the teachers personally. Apart from that, to overcome students who are lazy and feel burdened by the programs and assignments given, the principal urges and directs all teachers to embrace and take a personal approach to students, making students become friends and companions during learning, so that teachers are more easily instills a sense of enthusiasm, brings full awareness to students to carry out activities, programs or carry out assigned tasks. Apart from that, to overcome the low mindset of the community regarding quality education, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti addresses this by remaining istiqomah/consistent in carrying out all programs, activities and strategies that have been formulated to change the low mindset of the community towards education.

From the presentation of the data above, the researcher concluded that the low level of public thinking was the biggest factor experienced by the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing his education. For every obstacle experienced, the principal of SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti made efforts to overcome it. These include dealing with undisciplined teachers by giving them personal reprimands, overcoming lazy students by approaching them and treating them as friends, and changing people's mindset towards education by being consistent/istiqomah in carrying out all the activities that have been programmed.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description of the results of the research and analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the principal's strategy in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School involves several important stages. First, strategy formulation is carried out through marketing planning and goal setting, market identification, creating market segmentation strategies, marketing mix, school services, relationship marketing, and strategy control. The school principal forms a marketing team, conducts research to understand community needs, and develops realistic and measurable strategic steps.

Implementation of this strategy involves five main approaches: market segmentation for mapping promotional areas, marketing mix for determining products, prices, promotions and locations, optimal school services to increase customer trust, relationship marketing through collaboration with other institutions, and consistency in implementing all planned program.

Strategy evaluation is carried out by reviewing internal and external factors, reviewing the performance that has been implemented, and making continuous improvements and improvements. This evaluation aims to improve resource allocation and management capabilities, as well as ensure the relevance of the program to planned targets. Obstacles faced in marketing educational services at Abi Husni Meranti IT Vocational School include teacher discipline, the burden of school activities on students, and the low level of public thinking about education. To overcome these obstacles, the principal reprimands teachers personally, takes a personal approach to students, and consistently implements all activities and programs that have been formulated. Overall, the principal's strategy at SMK IT Abi Husni Meranti in marketing educational services focuses on careful planning, structured implementation, comprehensive evaluation, and effective handling of obstacles, so that the school can continue to develop and excel.

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