

# Marketing Strategy of Islamic Higher Education Institutions: A structured-thematic analysis

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## Info Artikel

## Abstract

### Keywords:

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This study aims to explore marketing strategies implemented by Islamic higher education institutions through a structured literature review method. This method was chosen to assess the extent and depth of research related to this theme. A systematic search was conducted on journal articles published in the period 2014–2023 from the Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, and Springer Link databases. The selection focused on articles from journals indexed by Scopus or Sinta and those most relevant to the research objectives. The findings indicate that although interest in marketing strategies in Islamic higher education institutions is increasing, research in this area is still in its infancy and lacks strong theoretical integration. The main strategies identified include digital marketing, promotional mix, social marketing, Islamic branding, and experiential marketing. These approaches are considered effective in attracting prospective students and strengthening institutional visibility. However, most of the reviewed studies still lack empirical validation and contextual adaptation, especially within the cultural and religious framework of Islamic education. The findings of this study provide practical insights for institutional leaders and contribute to academic discourse by highlighting emerging themes and gaps in the literature. Limitations of this study include the limited scope of the database and the lack of representation of non-English language sources. Future research needs to build a robust theoretical model and explore the application of contextual strategies to improve marketing effectiveness.

### Kata kunci:

*Strategi pemasaran,  
Pendidikan tinggi islam,  
universitas islam*

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi strategi pemasaran yang diterapkan oleh perguruan tinggi Islam melalui metode tinjauan pustaka terstruktur. Metode ini dipilih untuk menilai sejauh mana dan sedalam apa penelitian terkait tema ini telah dilakukan. Pencarian sistematis dilakukan terhadap artikel jurnal yang terbit pada periode 2014-2023 dari basis data Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, dan Springer Link. Seleksi difokuskan pada artikel dari jurnal yang terindeks Scopus atau Sinta dan yang paling relevan dengan tujuan penelitian. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun minat terhadap strategi pemasaran di perguruan tinggi Islam mulai meningkat, penelitian di bidang ini masih berada pada tahap perkembangan dan belum memiliki integrasi teoritis yang kuat. Strategi utama yang teridentifikasi*

*meliputi pemasaran digital, bauran promosi, pemasaran sosial, Islamic branding, dan experiential marketing. Pendekatan-pendekatan ini dinilai efektif dalam menarik minat calon mahasiswa dan memperkuat visibilitas institusi. Namun demikian, sebagian besar studi yang ditinjau masih kurang dalam validasi empiris dan adaptasi kontekstual, terutama dalam kerangka budaya dan keagamaan pendidikan Islam. Temuan penelitian ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi pimpinan institusi dan berkontribusi terhadap diskursus akademik dengan menyoroti tema-tema yang sedang berkembang serta celah-celah dalam literatur. Keterbatasan penelitian ini mencakup cakupan basis data yang terbatas dan kurangnya representasi sumber berbahasa non-Inggris. Penelitian selanjutnya perlu membangun model teoretis yang kokoh dan mengeksplorasi penerapan strategi yang kontekstual untuk meningkatkan efektivitas pemasaran.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Marketing strategy in educational institutions is a crucial activity in the dynamics of competition among educational organizations. Therefore, the selection of the right strategy is essential to be considered by organization managers, especially in Islamic educational institutions. The implementation of effective marketing strategies can increase the interest of students in choosing educational institutions (Fadhli et al., 2023) and can increase the number of students as expected (Sufah & Subiyantoro, 2023). Conversely, the selection of ineffective and non-competitive strategies can impact a decrease in the number of applicants for admission to schools, falling short of expectations (Wahyudi & Sa'i, 2023; Zervina & Stukalina, 2019). Marketing strategy can be defined as the united decision outline of an institution, determining important selections regarding goods or services, markets, marketing actions, and marketing capitals in creating, communicating, and delivering goods or services that offer value to customers, in swap with the institution, enabling the organization to achieve specific goals (Li et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2019; Varadarajan, 2010). In summary, marketing strategy can be interpreted as the marketing logic used by a company to create value for customers to achieve business goals. This logic explains which customers to serve (segmentation and targeting) and how to serve them (positioning and differentiation) to generate and maintain competitive advantages (Varadarajan, 2010, 2020). Marketing strategy is implemented using the marketing mix (Sozuer et al., 2020).

Sustainable competitive advantage is central to the field of marketing strategy. Marketing strategy is a construct at the heart of the strategic marketing concept and is a major focus of marketing practices. It is also an area where many challenges, identified by marketers and corporate leaders, often arise (Morgan et al., 2019). Some previous studies explain that marketing strategy influences financial and marketing performance (Varadarajan, 2020), thus achieving sustainable competitive advantages (Hidayat et al., 2022; Hunt, 2015). Research on marketing strategies is consistently driven by a fundamental desire to assist marketing managers in making informed decisions (Rutz & Watson, 2019; Varadarajan, 2020). The development and implementation of marketing strategies are at the core of what marketing managers do in practice. Therefore, research related to understanding these activities is key to establishing the relevance of the academic discipline of marketing (Morgan et al., 2019). Thus, an increased understanding of marketing strategy is important for developing theoretical understanding in marketing. For example, knowing which theories have been drawn from previous research and which aspects of marketing strategy have received less attention is a preliminary step in any effort to develop early marketing theories. A systematic analysis of the use of various approaches and research methods in a specific domain

and how this change over time can also reveal insights for the development of new approaches and methods (Morgan et al., 2019; Rutz & Watson, 2019; Sozuer et al., 2020).

Higher education is a pure service and possesses all the characteristics of service industries (Canterbury, 2000; Chanaka Ushantha & Samantha Kumara, 2016). It is marked by intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable, variable, perishable services, with customers (students) participating in the process. What sets it apart from most service businesses is the greater complexity, differentiation, and adaptation to the external environment (Chanaka Ushantha & Samantha Kumara, 2016). The conditions of higher education have changed due to market pressures on the global economy (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009), leading to the evolution of higher education management and pushing universities to adopt various commercial practices (Chapleo & O'Sullivan, 2017). Additionally, universities face increasing cost pressures across all areas, requiring significant investment for educational offerings comparable to more competitive universities (Chapleo & O'Sullivan, 2017). Research on marketing in higher education continues to grow, with discussions focusing on higher education marketing, marketing communication, branding, reputation and image, marketing strategies, consumer behavior in higher education, or perceptions and assumptions related to the marketization of higher education (Chapleo & O'Sullivan, 2017; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2021). Research on marketing in Islamic higher education has also increased, covering topics such as branding (Yaping et al., 2023), key themes in higher education marketing (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2021), service quality (Camilleri, 2021), and its impact on customer retention (Alshamsi et al., 2021).

However, there has yet to be a systematic literature review specifically addressing marketing strategies in Islamic higher education. Despite there being fewer studies on marketing in Islamic higher education compared to higher education in general, our review indicates a growing number of published articles in this area. Some researchers argued that Islamic higher education, particularly in Indonesia, has unique characteristics compared to higher education in general. Its existence is a result of a lengthy process of resisting Western ideologies that tend to be liberal and secular (A. Lukens-Bull, 2016; Rafik & Priyono, 2018). Debates related to the development of Islamic higher education in the Muslim world indicate researchers' interest in this complex phenomenon, where there has historically been a generative interaction between knowledge, politics, and social networks (Rafik & Priyono, 2018). Research on marketing related to the interaction between marketing principles and Islamic values has also gained attention, considering the application of religious principles in the daily lives of Muslims (Albin Shaikh et al., 2019; Floren et al., 2020; Mourad & Karanshaw, 2013; Sholikah et al., 2021).

Marketing in Islamic higher education must reflect and respect Islamic values, which influence aspects such as branding, student decision-making, and the implementation of marketing strategies (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; M et al., 2019; Maulana et al., 2025). In branding, institutions must highlight an Islamic identity that reflects integrity, honesty, and commitment to sharia principles, and avoid secular or materialistic elements (Ghafran & Yasmin, 2020). Students' decision-making is often driven by religious considerations, where they seek out institutions that not only offer quality education but also support their spiritual and ethical needs (Azkiyah et al., 2020; Kango et al., 2021). Therefore, marketing strategies should focus on teaching Islamic values applied in campus life, as well as showing how study programs and extracurricular activities can help students develop themselves in a balanced way between worldly knowledge and the afterlife. Aggressive or overly materialistic marketing should be avoided, and an approach that emphasizes

virtue, balance, and social contribution would be more in line with Islamic principles that prioritize ethics and social responsibility.

From the perspective of market segmentation theory, different consumers require different approaches (Fine et al., 1980; Visser, 2016), dividing the market into several consumer groups based on differences in needs, characteristics, or behaviours (Wang & Fan, 2020). Based on this, the Resource Advantage Theory argues that to occupy a market with a competitive advantage, organizations or companies need to provide more value or lower prices for products or services to consumers in a specific market (Hunt, 2015; Hunt & Arnett, 2004). However, some researchers argued that specific marketing understanding in a specific sector, struggles to keep pace with rapid changes (Chapleo & O'Sullivan, 2017).

Based on our review, the literature on marketing in Islamic higher education, although still limited, has increased. However, this increase is not clear-cut, and there is a lack of support from theoretical models that reflect the context of Islamic educational services, which may differ from higher education in general or even services in companies as a whole. Therefore, we conducted a systematic literature review by collecting, carefully examining, analyzing, and synthesizing the existing literature with the objectives of: 1) determining the scope of marketing strategy in Islamic higher education; 2) identifying gaps in the research literature and providing recommendations for future research. With this approach, we hope to answer several questions, What are the main themes studied related to marketing strategy in Islamic higher education?, What are the findings related to these main themes?, How does marketing strategy in Islamic higher education affect institutional competitive advantage and What are the main lessons from the implementation of marketing strategy in Islamic higher education, and what should be the directions for future research?

## **METHODS**

This research utilizes a structured literature review to analyse issues related to marketing strategies in Islamic higher education. This approach is employed to identify, evaluate, and interpret a significant number of scholarly journal articles with the aim of developing insights, critical reflections, future research paths, and research questions (Balaid et al., 2016; Massaro et al., 2016; Paul & Criado, 2020; Paul & Feliciano-Cestero, 2021; Paul & Singh, 2017; Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019; Yaping et al., 2023). The review is systematically and specifically organized based on methods, theories, and constructions commonly used in the form of tables and figures, providing readers with in-depth information from the reported data and content (Balaid et al., 2016; Kahiya, 2018; Paul & Criado, 2020; Paul & Feliciano-Cestero, 2021; Snijders et al., 2020).

This review is highly valuable as it helps provide up-to-date information and builds a more thorough and comprehensive systematic narrative on the topic of interest (Balaid et al., 2016; Paul & Criado, 2020; Turzo et al., 2022; Yaping et al., 2023). Specifically, the current research review process is conducted with the following steps:

### **Identification and Selection of Databases**

The articles used in this review are obtained from the "Google Scholar" database and additional sources from ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, and SpringerLink. The author conducted searches using the keywords "Marketing Strategy in Islamic Higher Education" in these databases, resulting in 17,200 hits from Google Scholar and 10 from Emerald Insight, totalling 17,210 hits.

The author then narrowed down the results by using quotation marks to focus on two phrases, namely "Marketing Strategy" and "Islamic Higher Education," resulting in 131 hits from Google Scholar and 10 from Emerald Insight, totalling 141 hits. In the next stage, the author focused only on journal articles (excluding books, theses, dissertations, repositories, and conference proceedings) that were more relevant to the research topic, resulting in 20 articles (Table 1). From these 20 articles, the author selected only those indexed in "Scopus" or "Sinta" and relevant to the context of marketing strategies in Islamic higher education (IHEIs), resulting in 11 articles. By selecting only journals indexed in Scopus and Sinta, the author ensures that the articles used have high credibility and have undergone stricter peer review. These studies are then comprehensively analysed.

**Table 1: Search and Selection Criteria**

Selection Stage	Selection Criteria
Selection of Journal Articles	Journal articles
Search Options	Databases: Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, Science Direct, and Springer Link
Keywords	"Marketing Strategy" and "Islamic Higher Education"
Period	2014-2023
Pre-Selection of Articles	Exclusion of books, theses, dissertations, repositories, and conference proceedings
Search for Relevance	1. Scan titles and abstracts. 2. Scan the content of articles if not clear from the title and abstract.
Final Selection	1. Only journal articles clearly focused on "Marketing Strategy" and "Islamic Higher Education." 2. Only journal articles indexed in "Scopus" and "SINTA."

## Descriptive Analysis

Figure 1 shows the number of reviewed articles from each journal. Among them, the Journal of Islamic Marketing, Asian Journal of Islamic Management, and Expert Journal of Marketing each published 2 articles, followed by other journals, each publishing 1 article. Among the journals publishing these articles, 2 journals are related to marketing (Journal of Islamic Marketing and Expert Journal of Marketing), 3 journals are related to Educational Management (Al-Tanzim: Journal of Islamic Educational Management, Improvement: Scientific Journal for Quality Improvement of Educational Management, and Mudir: Journal of Educational Management), and 5 journals are related to Management & Business (Management Research Review, Asian Journal of Islamic Management (AJIM), Cross-Border Journal of *Business Management*, *Saudi Journal of Business and Management Studies*, *Muslim Business and Economic Review*), where subjects related to management, marketing, and education are broadly discussed. Other journals publish more general subjects such as humanities, economics, religion, arts, communication, and others.



Figure 1. Number of Articles Published in Scientific Journals

A comprehensive search for literature related to marketing strategies in Islamic higher education from 2014 to 2023 was conducted to investigate the research developments on this theme over the last 10 years. As shown in Figure 2, 2015 marks the earliest year when an article related to Marketing Strategy in Islamic Higher Education, included in the review, was published. There were no articles in our database for the years 2016, 2017, and 2019. Starting in 2021, the number of articles began to show an increase. This pattern indicates that topics related to marketing strategies in Islamic higher education are gaining the attention of researchers. However, in terms of the overall total number of articles, research on this theme is still relatively limited.

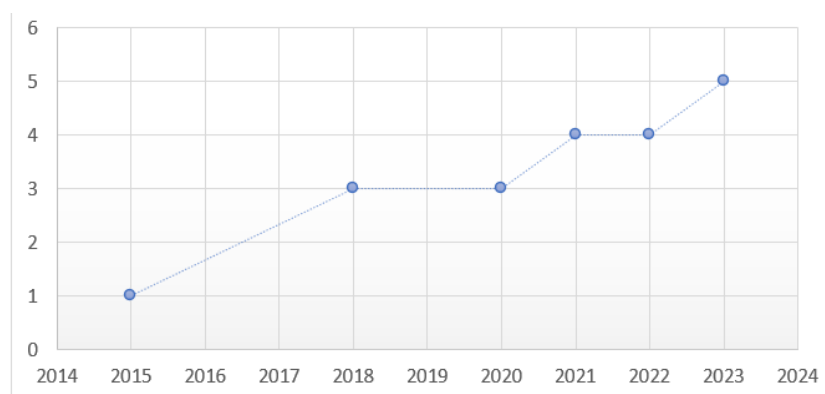


Figure 2. Development of Journal Articles Related to Marketing Strategies in Islamic Higher Education Over the Last 10 Years

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

In this research, a total of 11 empirical research studies from journal articles were thoroughly reviewed, comprising 5 qualitative studies, 5 quantitative studies, and 1 mixed-method study (see Table 2). Data from these studies were collected from five different categories: three studies obtained information from the consumer level, specifically students (Ambarwati & Sari, 2023; Auliarahman, 2020; Fadhlil et al., 2023), three studies at the organizational level, including foundation leaders, higher education institutions, or lecturers (Kristanto et al., 2021; Riofita et al., 2022; Susanto, 2022), three others from alumni (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023; Muharom et al., 2023; Rafik & Priyono, 2018), one from professional employees (employees with more than 35 years of experience in Islamic studies) (Mourad & Karanshaw, 2013), and one from documents, social media, or university websites (Sri Haryanti et al., 2023).

**Table 2: Methods & Key Findings from the Reviewed Literature**

No.	Authors	Method	Key Finding
1	Ambarwati, R., & Sari, D. K. (2023)	Quantitative	<p><i>Experiential Marketing, Islamic Branding, and Word of Mouth in College Decisions:</i></p> <p><i>Direct and Indirect Effects:</i> Experiential marketing, Islamic branding, and word of mouth directly influence college decisions. There is also an indirect influence between experiential marketing and Islamic branding on college decisions through word of mouth. <i>Mediation Role of Word of Mouth:</i> Although word of mouth partially mediates the relationship between experiential marketing and Islamic branding on college decisions, the influence of word of mouth does not function as a perfect mediator.</p>
2	Riofita, H., & Dimasadra, W. (2022)	Quantitative	<p><i>Digital Public Relations and Network Empowerment in Islamic Higher Education Marketing:</i></p> <p><i>Enhancing Social Media Capabilities:</i> Digital public relations and digital network empowerment play a crucial role in strengthening social media capabilities, contributing to improved marketing performance and increased prospective students.</p> <p><i>Important Role:</i> Both digital public relations and digital network empowerment are identified to have a highly significant role in the context of marketing private Islamic higher education institutions.</p>
3	Auliarahman, L., & Sumadi, S. (2020)	Quantitative	<p><i>Social Media Marketing, Religiosity, and Perceived Value in Student Decision-Making:</i></p> <p><i>Positive Impact of Social Media Marketing and Religiosity:</i> Social Media Marketing and religiosity have a positive and significant impact on Perceived Value in education.</p> <p><i>Other Impacts of Social Media Marketing and Religiosity on Student Decisions:</i> Although Social Media Marketing has a positive but not significant impact on student decisions, religiosity has a negative but not significant impact. Significance of Perceived Value: Perceived Value is identified as a key factor with a positive and significant impact on student decisions.</p>
4	Rafik, A., & Priyono, A. (2018)	Quantitative	<p><i>Alumni Satisfaction and Loyalty Determinants in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEI):</i></p> <p><i>Career Capability Development:</i> The IHEI's ability to develop career capabilities through knowledge enrichment is identified as the most important determinant of alumni satisfaction and loyalty.</p> <p><i>Importance of Environment and Islamic Values:</i> A positive environment and the embodiment of Islamic values supporting learning programs on campus are highlighted as significant triggers for knowledge development.</p>

5	Muharom, F., Izzati, L. R., Purbowati, D., & Dewi, E. R. (2023)	Quantitative	<p><i>Factors Influencing Alumni Satisfaction at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta:</i></p> <p><i>Comprehensive Correlation:</i> Factors such as faculty and program leadership, learning processes, administrative services, facilities, and alumni organizations are found to have a strong positive correlation with alumni satisfaction, contributing to 57.7% variance. <i>The Importance of Other Factors:</i> 57.7% is explained by the mentioned factors, while 42.3% is determined by other factors not explicitly mentioned.</p>
6	Haryanti, S., Rohmadi, Y., & Dhofir, M. A. H. (2023)	Qualitative	<p><i>Marketing Strategies at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta:</i></p> <p><i>Comprehensive Marketing Management:</i> UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta has implemented comprehensive marketing management strategies, utilizing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and alumni networks for effective marketing. <i>Adaptation to Society 5.0 Demands:</i> The institution is considered capable of adapting to the demands of Society 5.0 by prioritizing innovation and utilizing various social media platforms.</p>
7	Irham, I., & Wahyudi, R. (2023)	Qualitative	<p><i>Internationalization and Brand Perception in Higher Education:</i></p> <p><i>Strategic Use of EMI (English as Medium Instruction) and AMI (Arabic-Medium Instruction):</i> The strategic use of English and Arabic as mediums of instruction is considered to symbolically legitimize the "international" profile of Universitas IIU.</p> <p><i>Concerns Regarding Quality:</i> Despite symbolic legitimacy, there are concerns about below-average educational quality due to the practices of EMI and AMI.</p>
8	Susanto, E., Muntholib, M., & Hidayat, H. (2022)	Qualitative	<p><i>Competitiveness Strategy and Factors Influencing Competitiveness in PTKIS:</i></p> <p><i>Factors Influencing Competitiveness:</i> Competitiveness strategies of higher education are influenced by factors such as the emergence of new competitors, decreased public interest, improved quality of old competitors, unattractive graduate absorption, and competition among Islamic higher education institutions.</p> <p><i>Strategies for Improving Competitiveness:</i> Strategies for improving competitiveness include innovation, program differentiation, quality improvement, cost management, reputation enhancement, and human resource management.</p>
9	Kristanto, J., Soleh, A. K., Al Idrus, S., & Raya, M. K. F. (2021)	Qualitative	<p><i>Promotion Mix and Branding Impact on Student Enrollment at UNUSA:</i></p> <p><i>Diverse Promotion Mix:</i> UNUSA utilizes a diverse promotion mix, including national television, personal selling, publications, and direct marketing, contributing to a 21% increase in new student enrollments over the last five years.</p>



10	Mourad, M., & El Karanshawy, H. (2013)	Qualitative	<p><i>Branding as PTNU</i>: Branding UNUSA as PTNU (Nahdlatul Ulama Higher Education) through the promotion mix significantly impacts the number of new students from the Nahdliyin community.</p> <p><i>Determinants of Brand Perception in Islamic Higher Education Market</i>:</p> <p><i>Significance of Functional Dimensions</i>: The functional dimension of branding is identified as more significant than the social, mental, and spiritual dimensions in the Islamic higher education market.</p> <p><i>Role of Internationalization</i>: Internationalization is recognized as a key element influencing brand perception in the evolving competitive environment.</p> <p><i>Product Impact on Student Interest in Higher Education (PTKIN)</i>:</p> <p><i>The Significant Role of Products (Programs and Accreditation)</i>: Products, including programs and accreditation, significantly influence students' interest in higher education.</p> <p><i>Recommendations for PTKIN</i>: The research suggests that PTKIN should add more programs to provide diverse choices for prospective students.</p>
11	Fadhli, M., Salabi, A. S., Siregar, F. A., Lubis, H., & Sahudra, T. M. (2023)	Mixed method	

Please note: "PTKIN" refers to Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (State Islamic Religious Higher Education).

### Major Theme in the Areas of the Current Research on IHEIs Marketing Strategy.

Several themes have been explored in articles related to marketing strategy in Islamic higher education. This paper discusses these themes by integrating them into three main themes, which will be comprehensively and critically discussed from the perspective of marketing strategy.

### Competitiveness, Marketing Strategy, and Institutional Strategies in Islamic Higher Education.

Among the marketing strategies in Islamic higher education discussed in several reviewed articles are social media marketing strategy (Auliarahman, 2020), Digital Public Relations and Network Empowerment (Riofita et al., 2022), comprehensive marketing management (Sri Haryanti et al., 2023) and experiential marketing strategy (Ambarwati & Sari, 2023).

Digital marketing and social marketing strategy, the first theme includes social media marketing strategy conducted by three universities, namely Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII), Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY), and Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga. This strategy was found to have a significant influence on Perceived Value, a key factor in positively impacting students' decisions to choose non-religious study programs in Islamic higher education (Auliarahman, 2020). This finding encourages universities to consider social media as one of the marketing channels in their institutions, both to promote study programs and the institution as a whole.

This theme extends to the realm of digital marketing, with a focus on the role of digital public relations, digital empowerment, and social media marketing in enhancing the marketing performance of private Islamic higher education institutions (Riofita et al., 2022). The discussion emphasizes the strategic use of digital channels and networks to improve visibility, engagement, and attract prospective students.

Social media marketing strategies are also implemented by other Islamic higher education institutions. UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta has leveraged social media marketing using various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter within the framework of comprehensive marketing management. Additionally, the institution has implemented other strategies such as branding, positioning, and alumni network utilization (Sri Haryanti et al., 2023). Influence of experiential marketing, islamic branding, and wom on college selection. The impact of experiential marketing, implemented by Muhammadiyah-Aisyiyah Universities along with other factors such as Islamic branding and Word of Mouth (WOM), on college selection decisions is discussed. This emphasizes the importance of creating positive and culturally relevant experiences for prospective students, utilizing Islamic branding to add value, and recognizing the role of Word-of-Mouth promotion in shaping decisions (Ambarwati & Sari, 2023).

Promotion Mix and Competitiveness, under this theme, discussions revolve around the diverse use of promotion mix and branding by UNUSA as a private Islamic university. Promotion strategies are designed to attract attention, generate interest, create desire, and prompt action, ultimately influencing student enrolments and enhancing brand visibility (Kristanto et al., 2021). Competitiveness can be achieved through innovative strategies, product/service differentiation, quality of learning, competitive pricing, institutional reputation, and superior human resource management (Keaveney, 2006). The theme of Competitiveness and Institutional Management includes factors influencing competitiveness, such as internationalization, innovation, program differentiation, and quality improvement. It also involves discussions related to the strategic management of institutional challenges and opportunities in the evolving education landscape.

### **Brand and Image in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs).**

Another major theme frequently discussed in the reviewed literature is brand and image. Topics such as brand dimensions, Islamic branding, and the “international” profile have been explored.

Perceptions of the “Islamic study institution” brand dimensions are thoroughly examined in one article, revealing four dimensions: functional, social, mental, and spiritual. The functional dimension was found to be the most significant, reflecting perceptions of product or service benefits associated with the brand. In the context of Islamic higher education institutions, the functional dimension of the brand is reflected in perceptions related to education quality, faculty quality, staff relationships, campus size, positive Word of Mouth information, tuition fees, international relations, historical background, promotional activities, alumni relationships, and location (Mourad & Karanshawy, 2013).

Identity and Institutional Legitimacy, One article discusses the use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Arabic as a Medium of Instruction (AMI) at Universitas Islam Indonesia, serving as tools to legitimize the “international” profile. This emphasizes how institutions adopt specific practices to gain legitimacy and acceptance in their environment (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023). This aligns with Mourad & Karanshawy's research, emphasizing the consistent use of the “international exposure” image while considering the preservation of Islamic culture as a unique identity communicated within the labour market. This exposure underscores the importance of the image of Islamic educational institutions in competing for sustainable competitive advantages.

Islamic Branding While still in the conceptual development stage, Islamic branding has gained acceptance and research attention from marketing scholars, both in predominantly Muslim

countries and those with Muslim minority populations (Bukhari & Isa, 2020; Rashed et al., 2018; Tabatabai Nasab & Banejad, 2016). In the reviewed literature, Islamic branding plays a significant role and has a considerable influence on students' decisions to choose Islamic higher education institutions. This is reinforced by findings that Muslim consumers are interested in brands that portray alignment with their religious values (Bukhari & Isa, 2020).

### **Customer Relationship Management: Student Decision, Alumni Satisfaction, and Loyalty in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs).**

The next theme relates to consumer behaviour (students and alumni) in Islamic higher education institutions. Themes include decisions to choose Islamic high schools or universities, student interest in colleges, and satisfaction and loyalty of students or alumni. Based on the reviewed literature, variables such as student interest and decisions in choosing higher education are influenced by factors such as experiential marketing, Islamic branding, word of mouth, social media marketing, religiosity, and products (departments and accreditation) (Ambarwati & Sari, 2023; Auliarahman, 2020; Fadhli et al., 2023).

These three studies emphasize the importance of adding majors or study programs to increase student interest in choosing Islamic higher education and the use of marketing strategies such as experiential marketing, Islamic branding, and word of mouth to boost new student registrations. Specifically, Ambarwati & Sari (2023) mention that Islamic branding is a significant strategy among these three. Social media marketing and religiosity were found to influence the decision to choose Islamic higher education through perceived value (Auliarahman, 2020). Additionally, the implementation of a promotion mix strategy is considered to enhance student interest in Islamic higher education (Kristanto et al., 2021).

**Alumni Satisfaction and Loyalty.** Alumni satisfaction and loyalty are crucial factors for universities because satisfied alumni are more likely to contribute to the university and recruit new students. One study found that the most important determinants of satisfaction and loyalty among alumni in Islamic higher education are the ability to develop career capabilities through knowledge enrichment (Rafik & Priyono, 2018). Moreover, other factors such as faculty and program leadership, learning processes, administrative services, facilities, and alumni organizations simultaneously influence the level of alumni satisfaction (Muharom et al., 2023).

This research indicates that universities need to focus on equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workplace. For instance, Islamic higher education institutions can offer career counselling services, internship opportunities, and job placement assistance. They can also collaborate with companies to create cooperative programs and other opportunities for students to gain real-world experience.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Marketing Strategy Practices and Key Factors in Marketing Islamic Higher Education**

The discussion on marketing strategies in Islamic higher education (IHEIs) can be considered to be in its early stages, unlike the discussion on marketing in higher education (HE) in general. Nevertheless, research on this theme is beginning to gain widespread attention. Overall, the thematic analysis of marketing strategies in Islamic higher education indicates that universities can employ various strategies to attract student enrolment. These strategies include experiential marketing, Islamic branding, word-of-mouth marketing, digital marketing, social media marketing, promotion mix, as well as a focus on alumni satisfaction and loyalty. However, core marketing

theories are not prominently visible in the reviewed articles. Therefore, we will discuss, accompanied by reinforcement with relevant theories or previous findings.

The implementation of marketing by comprehensively utilizing social media in the strategy of Islamic higher education institutions aligns with contemporary marketing practices. This finding emphasizes the significant impact of social media on perceived value, which, in turn, influences students' decisions regarding Islamic higher education, both at the institutional and department levels, including non-Islamic study programs. This aligns with the concept of perceived value in service industry marketing theory, where the perceived benefits of a product or service influence consumer decisions and satisfaction (Ashraf et al., 2018; Boksberger & Melsen, 2011; Hu et al., 2009; Tam, 2004; Zeithaml, 1988).

The discussion on brand dimensions and Islamic branding highlights the importance of an international profile image while preserving Islamic identity. This study emphasizes the importance of consistent branding and the implementation of other practices such as EMI or AMI programs to gain international legitimacy. This is consistent with university brand concepts (Haza et al., 2022; Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al., 2018; Panda et al., 2019), brand identity (Balaji et al., 2016; Krishna & Kim, 2021; Yaping et al., 2023) and brand legitimacy (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Kaltenecker & Okoye, 2022; Miotto et al., 2020; Pluntz & Pras, 2020) in marketing theory. The use of language (EMI and AMI) to shape institutional identity aligns with the branding theory framework (Christensen et al., 2019; Hunt, 2015; Yaping et al., 2023).

The focus on student decision-making, alumni satisfaction, and loyalty underscores the importance of understanding consumer behavior in the context of Islamic Higher Education. The integration of experiential marketing, Islamic branding, and word-of-mouth promotion in marketing strategies reflects a holistic approach to attracting and retaining students. The emphasis on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) theory is evident, particularly in understanding factors influencing student decisions as well as alumni satisfaction and loyalty (Deszczyński & Beręsewicz, 2021; Hunt, 2015). Concepts such as experiential marketing and word of mouth (Ambarwati & Sari, 2023) align with this discussion.

### **Managerial Implications**

In the context of increasingly fierce global competition, Islamic higher education institutions need to implement an integrated marketing approach that combines various strategic elements, especially marketing through social media, institutional branding, and customer relationship management (CRM). This approach not only increases the institution's visibility online, but also strengthens the institution's image as a whole. Social media allows institutions to reach the younger generation directly in an interactive and real-time manner. Meanwhile, a strong branding strategy can build a consistent institutional identity and differentiate it from competitors. CRM helps create and maintain long-term relationships with students, prospective students, parents, and alumni. When these three elements are synergized, institutions are not only able to attract more interest but also increase stakeholder loyalty in the long term.

Internationalization is a strategic need for Islamic higher education institutions that want to increase global competitiveness, attract foreign students, and establish international collaborations. However, this process must be carried out carefully so as not to erode the institution's Islamic identity. Educational managers need to ensure that the language of communication used in promotion, teaching, and branding is in line with the Islamic values that underlie the institution's existence. Branding must convey a consistent and attractive message, but still reflect Islamic principles such as integrity, justice, and blessings. This strategy includes the use

of symbols, slogans, and narratives that highlight the intellectual and spiritual excellence of Islamic higher education institutions. This balance is important for institutions to remain relevant at the global level without losing their roots in identity.

Alumni are strategic assets in the development of higher education institutions. The level of alumni satisfaction with their experience at university has a major impact on the institution's reputation, word-of-mouth marketing, and even new student recruitment. Therefore, institutional managers need to invest in programs that continuously increase alumni satisfaction and engagement. This can be in the form of career development initiatives, such as job guidance, soft skills training, professional networking, and opportunities to get involved in campus activities or mentoring programs. In addition, building a good communication system and providing a digital platform for alumni interaction can also strengthen their emotional ties to their alma mater. This investment not only has an impact on increasing alumni loyalty, but also contributes to the growth of the institution through donations, research collaborations, and expanding global networks.

### **Limitation and Future Research Directions**

This research has several limitations. Firstly, in terms of search keywords, the search was restricted to “marketing strategy” and “Islamic Higher Education”, possibly excluding other marketing themes such as strategic marketing, internal marketing, marketing techniques, or others. Secondly, in terms of journals, only Scopus or SINTA-indexed journals were reviewed. Thirdly, the reviewed journal articles were only in English and Indonesian, based on keyword search criteria. Therefore, future research could broaden or deepen the study by removing these criteria from the search.

Despite the study's limitations, the research results indicate that there is much to be explored and exploited in the field of marketing strategy in Islamic higher education. For instance, in-depth analysis of social media could be further explored. Future research may explore specific elements of social media content that contribute most to perceived value and decision-making. Comparative studies on the effectiveness of various social media platforms can provide valuable insights. Long-term impacts of internationalization need to be investigated further. Subsequent research should explore the long-term effects of internationalization on the perceptions of Islamic institutions and the dynamics of managing dual identities, such as the image of being “internationally standardized” with “Islamic branding.” Further research on religiosity and consumer behavior is needed. Researchers should delve into the role of religiosity in shaping consumer behavior in the context of Islamic higher education, providing a deeper understanding of factors influencing student decisions.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study systematically reviewed journal articles from Google Scholar and ScienceDirect published between 2014 and 2023, with the aim of identifying, evaluating, and analyzing key research themes related to marketing strategies in Islamic higher education. The findings suggest that this field is still in its formative stage, with fragmented and incomplete scholarship. Nonetheless, the thematic analysis highlights that Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) are employing various strategies such as experiential marketing, Islamic branding, word-of-mouth marketing, digital and social media marketing, promotion mix, and alumni satisfaction initiatives to attract student interest and build institutional loyalty. When effectively implemented, these strategies can strengthen an institution's competitive advantage. Importantly, a critical review

reveals that a multifaceted marketing approach integrating social media, brand identity, and relationship management is essential for success in Islamic higher education. However, the conclusion would be stronger with a more explicit articulation of how these findings contribute to academic theory-building and practical applications. Specifically, Islamic higher education institutions can learn to align their marketing strategies with Islamic values while leveraging modern marketing tools to meet institutional goals.

While this study outlines several limitations such as the limited scope of available literature, the emerging nature of the research domain, and the lack of cohesive theoretical frameworks it does not offer concrete solutions or strategies for addressing them. Future research should provide more targeted directions, particularly tailored to the unique religious, cultural, and institutional characteristics of Islamic higher education. Scholars are encouraged to develop comprehensive models or frameworks that align marketing strategies with Islamic ethical principles and institutional missions. Additionally, empirical studies involving diverse geographic and institutional contexts within the Islamic world would help validate and expand the findings. Offering specific methodologies to bridge current research gaps will enhance both the academic rigor and the practical relevance of future studies in this field.

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