

Strategic Educational Marketing in Islamic Educational Institutions: Managing Institutional Growth and Sustainability

Yulianto*, St. Rodliyah, Gunawan

Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: yulianto05@gmail.com

Abstract

Islamic higher education institutions increasingly face pressure to compete, respond to shifting stakeholder expectations, and remain viable over the long term, yet educational marketing is still widely treated as promotion rather than a strategic management function. This study examines how strategic educational marketing is planned, implemented, and sustained to support institutional growth and sustainability. A qualitative case study guided the research. Data came from semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis involving university leaders and key administrative stakeholders, collected between May and July 2026, and were analyzed through the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, with credibility secured through triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that marketing planning integrates environmental analysis, stakeholder engagement, institutional branding, and segmentation, targeting, and positioning within the university governance system. Implementation combines digital platforms, school visits, partnerships, alumni engagement, and community outreach to strengthen visibility and stakeholder relationships, while sustainability rests on reputation, trust, continuous quality improvement, and internationalization. Rather than a promotional tool, strategic educational marketing operates as an integrated governance capability that carries the institution through transformation while preserving its Islamic identity. These results imply that university leaders should embed marketing within governance and quality assurance to achieve sustainable institutional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions now operate in a far more competitive environment than they did a decade ago, and the pressure arrives from several directions at once: globalization, demographic shifts, and a digital transformation that has changed how prospective students choose a campus. Universities are no longer judged on academic quality alone but also on their capacity to build institutional reputation and sustain organizational competitiveness. Strategic educational marketing has therefore moved beyond simple promotion and become a managerial approach that integrates institutional vision, value creation, branding, stakeholder relationships, and long-term organizational development (Basheer et al., 2025; Ul Hassan et al., 2025). This shift matters even more for Islamic higher education institutions, which must protect their Islamic identity while responding to market dynamics. In Indonesia, the rapid growth in the number of institutions has sharpened the competition for prospective students, qualified faculty, and research funding, turning strategic educational marketing into a matter of governance rather than a communication function (Khoir et al., 2025; Muthohirin, 2025).

Scholarly attention to educational marketing has grown rapidly over the past decade, and most of the evidence points toward the same conclusion. One line of work shows that strategic marketing strengthens institutional branding, student recruitment, stakeholder satisfaction, and organizational competitiveness (Albornoz-Toyohama et al., 2025; Tran et al., 2026). A second line highlights the role of relationship marketing, digital marketing, and institutional reputation in reinforcing the competitive position of universities within increasingly complex educational markets. Alongside these, the literature on institutional sustainability argues that universities must continually adapt their governance and innovation capacity to stay resilient amid social and technological change. Taken together, these findings move in a consistent direction: educational marketing has traveled well past promotion and now sits inside institutional management, supporting both performance and long-term development.

Real as this progress is, several theoretical and empirical gaps remain. Existing studies tend to examine educational marketing through the separate lenses of student recruitment, branding, marketing communication, or digital promotion (Kamyabi et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025). As a result, strategic educational marketing is rarely understood as an integrated managerial capability that supports institutional growth and long-term sustainability simultaneously, and marketing practice is often studied apart from broader organizational processes such as strategic planning and governance (Chin et al., 2025; Gordon-Isasi et al., 2025). Within Islamic higher education, empirical evidence on how strategic educational marketing becomes institutionalized as part of university management is especially thin. This is where the present study makes its contribution: it connects strategic educational marketing, growth, and sustainability within a single framework in an Indonesian State Islamic University, a context that has so far received little attention.

Responding to these gaps, this study examines the implementation of strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, one of Indonesia's State Islamic Universities that underwent a major institutional transformation after converting from an institute into a university. That transition brought heightened demands to raise academic quality, enhance public trust, and strengthen competitiveness at both national and international levels. Specifically, the study analyzes how strategic educational marketing is planned, examines its contribution to institutional growth, and explains its role in fostering institutional sustainability. In doing so, it extends the educational marketing literature from its recruitment-oriented focus toward a strategic management perspective, while offering a practical reference for university leaders who must design strategies that support performance and sustainability together.

The central argument of this article is that sustainable institutional growth in Islamic higher education cannot rest on effective promotion alone; it requires the integration of strategic educational marketing into governance, organizational strategy, stakeholder engagement, and continuous quality improvement. The study therefore treats marketing not as a promotional instrument but as an integrated strategic capability that spans planning, positioning, value proposition development, and sustainable organizational management. The exploration centers on how this capability actually works in the daily practice of the university and how it links governance to sustainability outcomes. To understand that process in depth, the following section sets out the methodological approach adopted in this study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine how strategic educational marketing is implemented to support institutional growth and sustainability in Islamic higher education. A qualitative approach suited the purpose because the questions concern managerial practices, strategic decision-making, and stakeholder engagement that make sense only within their real institutional setting, not through numerical measurement. A single-case design allowed these processes to be traced in depth, over time, and across organizational levels. The study was conducted at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia, chosen purposively for its ongoing institutional transformation and its strategic commitment to

strengthening competitiveness, academic quality, and sustainable organizational development. This setting offered an information-rich case in which marketing is actively woven into university governance rather than treated as a side function.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in institutional management and educational marketing, which ensured that informants could speak to the practices under study from firsthand experience. To give a clear picture of who took part and why, the informants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Informant	Role in Educational Marketing
R1	Rector	Overall strategic direction and marketing policy
VR1	Vice Rector	Governance, quality, and sustainability linkage
PR1	Head of Public Relations	Institutional branding and public communication
AR1	Head of Admission Office	Recruitment strategy and promotional activities
IT1	Head of ICT Center	Digital platforms and website management
QA1	Head of Quality Assurance	Quality standards and continuous improvement
L1	Lecturers	Academic engagement and program promotion
SA1	Students and alumni	Institutional experience and outreach support

The informants listed above represent leadership, administrative, academic, and stakeholder perspectives, ensuring that the account of educational marketing does not rest on a single vantage point. Data were collected from May to July 2026 through three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews explored planning, implementation, and sustainability practices; observation captured promotional and engagement activities as they happened; and document analysis drew on strategic plans, institutional policies, accreditation reports, annual reports, promotional materials, and other official records tied to the research objectives. Using three sources let the evidence be cross-checked and reduced reliance on any single account.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Kekez, 2019). Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were first coded inductively to surface recurring ideas, and these codes were then grouped into themes covering strategic educational marketing planning, institutional growth, and institutional sustainability. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, so early interpretations could be tested and refined against new evidence as fieldwork continued. Throughout the process, data from the three sources were continuously compared, which strengthened the consistency and credibility of the findings through methodological and source triangulation.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was pursued through triangulation and member checking, transferability through rich contextual description, and dependability and confirmability through systematic documentation of the research process and an auditable trail of decisions. Ethical principles were maintained by obtaining informed consent from all participants, protecting confidentiality and anonymity, and using the data solely for academic purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Strategic Educational Marketing Planning

The findings indicate that strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember is planned as an integral component of institutional strategic management rather than merely as a promotional activity. Marketing planning is systematically aligned with the university's vision, mission, strategic plan, and long-term development objectives to strengthen institutional competitiveness and sustainability. The planning process involves

market needs analysis, segmentation, targeting and positioning (STP), institutional branding, student admission target formulation, leadership commitment, and stakeholder participation. These interconnected components enable the university to develop adaptive marketing strategies that respond to changes in the higher education environment while maintaining its identity as a State Islamic University.

The planning process is initiated through an analysis of both internal and external environments. Internally, the university evaluates academic quality, human resources, institutional achievements, and organizational capacity. Externally, demographic trends, stakeholder expectations, educational competition, government policies, and labor market demands are considered in determining strategic priorities. Based on these analyzes, the university formulates market segmentation, identifies target groups, and strengthens its institutional positioning by emphasizing academic excellence, Islamic values, research productivity, international collaboration, and community engagement. Furthermore, student admission targets are established collaboratively by university leaders, faculties, quality assurance units, and admission committees, ensuring that enrollment objectives remain consistent with institutional capacity and quality standards. The planning process also actively involves internal and external stakeholders, including lecturers, administrative staff, students, alumni, partner schools, Islamic boarding schools, government agencies, and local communities.

Table 2. Main Findings of Strategic Educational Marketing Planning

Strategic Planning Components	Empirical Findings
Strategic marketing formulation	Integrated into the university's strategic plan and long-term institutional development.
Market needs analysis	Based on institutional evaluation, demographic trends, stakeholder expectations, and higher education competition.
Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP)	Market segmentation considers geographical, academic, and socio-economic characteristics, while positioning emphasizes academic excellence and Islamic values.
Institutional branding	Developed through institutional reputation, accreditation, academic achievements, research productivity, international cooperation, and digital communication.
Student admission targets	Determined collaboratively based on institutional capacity, quality assurance standards, and projected market demand.
Leadership role	University leaders coordinate policy formulation, strategic planning, and implementation of educational marketing initiatives.
Stakeholder involvement	Internal and external stakeholders participate in planning, evaluation, partnership development, and continuous institutional improvement.

The interview findings further confirmed that educational marketing planning is positioned as a strategic instrument for institutional development rather than simply an effort to increase student enrollment. According to the Rector, the planning process is integrated into the university's governance system to ensure that marketing initiatives consistently support institutional quality, public trust, and long-term competitiveness.

"Strategic educational marketing is not only about attracting prospective students. It is part of our institutional strategy to strengthen academic excellence, expand public trust, and ensure the university's sustainable development through collaborative governance and continuous innovation." (R1)

A similar perspective was expressed by the Head of the Public Relations Office, who emphasized that effective institutional branding requires consistency between the university's identity, academic achievements, and stakeholder experiences. Promotional activities are therefore designed based on institutional performance and the expectations of prospective students, parents, alumni, and partner institutions.

"Our branding strategy is built upon the university's actual strengths. Public communication must accurately reflect academic quality, institutional achievements, and Islamic values so that stakeholders

develop lasting trust in the university." (PR1)

Overall, the findings demonstrate that strategic educational marketing planning at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember is implemented through a comprehensive and collaborative planning process. By integrating market analysis, strategic positioning, institutional branding, enrollment planning, leadership commitment, and stakeholder engagement, the university has established a strategic marketing framework that supports institutional growth while reinforcing long-term organizational sustainability.

Implementation of Strategic Educational Marketing for Institutional Growth

The findings indicate that the implementation of strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember is carried out through integrated promotional and engagement strategies designed to strengthen institutional growth. The implementation is not limited to attracting prospective students but also aims to enhance institutional visibility, expand stakeholder networks, reinforce public trust, and increase the university's competitiveness. To achieve these objectives, the university integrates digital marketing, social media, the official website, school visits, institutional partnerships, community engagement, alumni involvement, open house activities, educational expos, public relations, and collaborative programs into a unified marketing strategy.

The implementation process is coordinated by the university's admission office, public relations unit, faculties, and supporting administrative divisions. Digital marketing serves as the primary communication channel through the university's official website and various social media platforms, providing information on academic programs, admission procedures, scholarships, research achievements, and campus activities. These online initiatives are complemented by direct promotional activities, including school visits to senior high schools, vocational schools, and Islamic boarding schools, participation in regional and national educational expos, open house programs, and collaborative partnerships with educational institutions, government agencies, industries, and alumni networks. Community engagement activities and public relations programs further strengthen institutional relationships by fostering continuous interaction with prospective students, parents, alumni, and the wider community.

Table 3. Main Findings of Strategic Educational Marketing Implementation for Institutional Growth

Implementation Strategies	Empirical Findings
Digital marketing	Digital campaigns through online platforms to increase institutional visibility and disseminate academic information.
Social media	Active use of Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and other platforms to engage prospective students and stakeholders.
Official website	Provides comprehensive information regarding academic programs, admissions, scholarships, research, and university services.
School visits	Promotional visits to senior high schools, vocational schools, and Islamic boarding schools to introduce study programs and admission opportunities.
Partnership	Collaboration with schools, government institutions, industries, and community organizations strengthens institutional networks.
Community engagement	Public lectures, community service, and educational outreach programs that enhance public trust and institutional recognition.
Alumni engagement	Alumni participate in promotional activities, career sharing, mentoring, and institutional networking.
Open house	Campus visitation programs allow prospective students and parents to experience the academic environment directly.
Educational expo	Participation in educational exhibitions to broaden market reach and strengthen institutional branding.
Public relations	Strategic communication maintains institutional reputation and strengthens stakeholder relationships.
Collaboration	Cross-sector cooperation supports academic development, research collaboration, and

institutional competitiveness.

The Head of the Admission Office explained that the implementation of educational marketing emphasizes a combination of digital promotion and direct interaction with prospective students. According to the informant, school visits, educational expos, and digital campaigns are designed to provide accurate information regarding academic opportunities while simultaneously strengthening the university's visibility among prospective applicants.

"We combine digital campaigns with direct promotional activities such as school visits and educational expos because prospective students need both accessible information and personal interaction. This integrated approach has significantly expanded our outreach and strengthened public interest in studying at the university." (AR1)

The Head of the Information and Communication Technology Center further emphasized that digital platforms have become the backbone of the university's marketing implementation. The integration of the official website, social media, and digital information systems enables the university to communicate consistently with prospective students and stakeholders while improving the accessibility of institutional services.

"Digital platforms allow us to communicate institutional information quickly, transparently, and consistently. The integration of the university website and social media has improved stakeholder engagement and has become an effective instrument for strengthening the university's public presence." (IT1)

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the implementation of strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember adopts a multi-channel and collaborative approach. The integration of digital marketing, direct promotional activities, stakeholder engagement, institutional partnerships, alumni involvement, and public relations has strengthened institutional visibility, expanded stakeholder networks, increased student recruitment opportunities, and contributed to the university's institutional growth.

Strategic Educational Marketing for Institutional Sustainability

The findings demonstrate that strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember extends beyond institutional growth and functions as a long-term strategy for institutional sustainability. The university positions educational marketing as an integral part of sustainable governance by continuously strengthening institutional reputation, maintaining stakeholder trust, improving academic quality, expanding international collaboration, and fostering an organizational culture of innovation. Rather than emphasizing short-term promotional outcomes, the university focuses on building long-lasting relationships with stakeholders that support organizational resilience and sustainable development.

The implementation of sustainability-oriented marketing is reflected in continuous efforts to enhance academic services, maintain accreditation standards, strengthen research and community engagement, and improve institutional governance. These initiatives are complemented by internationalization programs through academic collaborations, student and lecturer exchanges, joint research, and international partnerships that increase the university's global visibility. At the same time, stakeholder trust is reinforced through transparent governance, quality assurance mechanisms, responsive public services, and continuous communication with students, alumni, government agencies, educational partners, and the wider community. The university also promotes an innovation culture by encouraging digital transformation, curriculum improvement, research productivity, and collaborative problem-solving across academic and administrative units.

Table 4. Main Findings of Strategic Educational Marketing for Institutional Sustainability

Sustainability Components	Empirical Findings
Institutional reputation	Strengthened through academic excellence, accreditation, research productivity, public service, and institutional achievements.
Stakeholder trust	Built through transparent governance, responsive services, quality assurance, and continuous stakeholder communication.
Continuous improvement	Institutional evaluation, quality assurance, curriculum development, and service enhancement are conducted regularly.
Internationalization	Expansion of international partnerships, academic exchanges, collaborative research, and global academic networking.
Academic quality	The institution ensures continuous improvement in teaching, research, community service, and accreditation performance.
Long-term competitiveness	Achieved through strategic planning, innovation, institutional differentiation, and adaptive organizational management.
Sustainability governance	Integration of educational marketing into strategic planning, quality assurance, and institutional decision-making.
Innovation culture	Promotion of digital transformation, research innovation, collaborative learning, and continuous organizational improvement.

The Vice Rector stated that educational marketing contributes to institutional sustainability by ensuring that every strategic initiative reflects the university's long-term vision and commitment to academic excellence. According to the informant, marketing is closely connected with institutional governance, quality enhancement, and stakeholder engagement rather than functioning solely as a promotional activity.

"Strategic educational marketing supports institutional sustainability because it communicates not only who we are, but also how we continuously improve our academic quality, governance, and services. Public trust grows when institutional performance consistently reflects the values we promote." (VR1)

The Head of the Quality Assurance Unit further explained that sustainable institutional development depends on continuous evaluation and improvement across all university functions. Educational marketing becomes effective when it accurately represents institutional quality and is supported by measurable improvements in academic performance, governance, and stakeholder satisfaction.

"Institutional sustainability cannot rely on promotion alone. It requires continuous quality improvement, effective governance, innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction. Educational marketing becomes sustainable when it is supported by real institutional performance and a strong quality assurance system." (QA1)

Overall, the findings indicate that strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember has evolved into a strategic instrument for institutional sustainability. By integrating institutional reputation, stakeholder trust, continuous improvement, internationalization, academic quality, sustainability governance, and an innovation culture, the university has established a comprehensive marketing framework that strengthens long-term competitiveness while ensuring sustainable institutional development.

Discussion

The findings show that strategic educational marketing at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember works as a managerial process that supports institutional development rather than a set of promotional tasks. Market needs analysis, segmentation, targeting, positioning (STP), institutional branding, stakeholder engagement, and admission planning are integrated into one planning cycle, which signals that marketing has become part of university governance (Mogaji, 2025; Pasi & Dhamak, 2026). This integration allows the university anticipate shifts in the higher education environment, respond to stakeholder expectations, and align its resources with long-term goals. The pattern fits Strategic Management Theory, which frames strategic planning as a systematic way for organizations to set long-term objectives, read their internal and external

environments, and build advantage over time (Paweehirunkrai & Pankham, 2025; Pu et al., 2025). Educational Marketing Theory adds the complementary point that marketing is about identifying stakeholder needs and creating educational value, not merely communicating it (Moshood et al., 2025; Osei et al., 2026). Taken together, planning here operates as a strategic capability rather than a promotional afterthought.

This reading refines earlier work in an important way. Previous studies have shown that strategic educational marketing improves institutional reputation, competitiveness, stakeholder engagement, and recruitment, but they have often examined branding, communication, or digital promotion as separate operational activities (Bermúdez-Hernández et al., 2026; Harb et al., 2026). The present case instead shows those elements working as one institutional process, where market analysis, positioning, branding, leadership commitment, and stakeholder participation feed a shared long-term agenda. That distinction matters for Islamic higher education, where planning has to hold academic quality and Islamic identity together with market responsiveness. The contribution at this stage is conceptual: strategic educational marketing planning is best understood as a core element of institutional governance, and sustainable growth starts with that comprehensive planning rather than with isolated campaigns.

Regarding implementation, institutional growth is driven by the university's ability to keep communicating and engaging with its stakeholders through many channels at once. The official website, social media, school visits, educational expos, public relations, alumni involvement, partnerships, and community outreach are not standalone tactics; they create multiple points of contact that build visibility, trust, and reach (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Xiao et al., 2026). This is consistent with Stakeholder Theory and Relationship Marketing Theory, which hold that organizational success rests on trust, commitment, and continuing interaction rather than one-off transactions, and with the view that universities should deliver educational value through integrated communication rather than promotion alone (W. H. Liu et al., 2026; Muyaka, 2025). What the case adds is evidence that these channels matter because they reinforce one another inside a coordinated framework, not because any single one is decisive (Gévry et al., 2026; Liang, 2025). Growth, in other words, is a product of integration.

The sustainability findings extend the argument further. Institutional sustainability here appears as the university's capacity to protect its reputation, hold stakeholder trust, improve academic services, and widen international collaboration over time, which places marketing well beyond recruitment (Alhazmi & Almashhour, 2026; T. Liu & Yao, 2026). This aligns with the Resource-Based View, which treats reputation, academic excellence, stakeholder trust, and organizational knowledge as valuable and hard-to-imitate assets, and with the broader idea that sustainability depends on balancing quality, governance, innovation, and social responsibility (Efranto et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2026). Earlier research has tended to study reputation management, quality assurance, and internationalization as separate initiatives (Kunta et al., 2024; Walid & Malik, 2023). The case shows them instead as interconnected outcomes of one strategic marketing process, developed together rather than in isolation. Sustainability, then, is not an add-on to marketing but something marketing helps produce when it is tied to real institutional performance.

Taken as a whole, the study makes a specific contribution to how strategic educational marketing is understood in the context of institutional transformation. For a State Islamic University moving from an institute into a university, marketing is not a communication department's job but an integrated governance capability that links planning, growth, and sustainability into a single trajectory of change. This reframing is the novelty: rather than treating branding, engagement, and quality as parallel efforts, the study shows how they combine to carry an institution through a genuine transformation while keeping its Islamic identity intact. The synthesis of the three findings is presented in Figure 1, which shows how strategic planning, institutional growth, and sustainability feed one integrated governance capability that drives sustainable institutional transformation while preserving the university's Islamic identity.

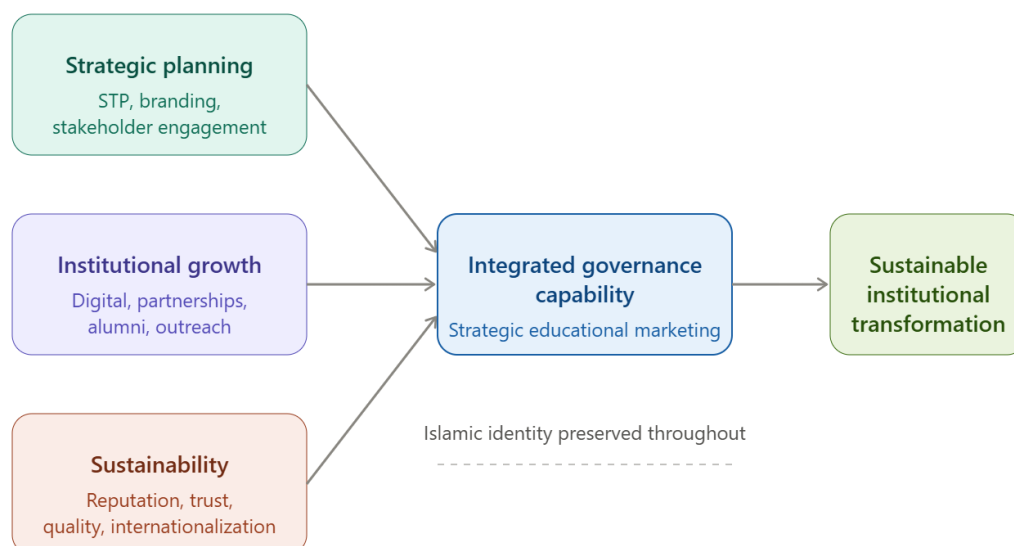


Figure 1. Strategic Educational Marketing as an Integrated Governance Capability for Sustainable Institutional Transformation

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how strategic educational marketing is planned, implemented, and sustained at Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, and the findings show that it functions as an integrated governance capability linking planning, institutional growth, and long-term sustainability rather than a stand-alone promotional activity. That said, the study has clear limits. It rests on a single case at one State Islamic University, so its findings describe this setting well but cannot be generalized to other institutions with different histories, resources, or governance cultures. The evidence also draws mainly on the accounts of leaders and administrative stakeholders gathered over a three-month period, which captures managerial intent more fully than it captures long-term outcomes or the perspectives of prospective students and the wider public. Future research could address these gaps by comparing several institutions, including private and non-Islamic universities, and by using longitudinal or mixed-method designs that track marketing outcomes over time. Studies that measure stakeholder response directly would further test and extend the framework proposed here.

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