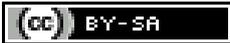


Educational Marketing Strategies in Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research aims to describe the marketing strategies used by the institution and the problems it faces. **Method:** The method used is qualitative descriptive. Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis is conducted qualitatively using an interactive analysis model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This method is expected to provide a clear picture of the current conditions as well as the potential for developing effective marketing strategies for kindergartens. **Results:** The research results show that the marketing strategy of the kindergarten institution in Sekardangan village uses a socio-communal approach and the use of simple digital media that aligns with the character of the semi-urban community. **Novelty:** The development of quality human resources in kindergartens is very important. An effective marketing strategy is needed to increase the number of students and create a positive reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is the main foundation for the formation of children's character, knowledge, and competencies for the future. Kindergartens, as early education institutions, play a strategic role in preparing a quality and morally upright younger generation. In the era of globalization and the development of information technology, kindergartens must be able to compete and attract the interest of parents and the community so that they choose these institutions as the place for their children's education. In Sekardangan Village, the presence of kindergartens faces increasingly intense competition dynamics. The numerous similar educational institutions in the area require the management to adopt appropriate and effective marketing strategies so that their institution remains relevant and gains the trust of the community. Marketing strategies that can enhance visibility, strengthen a positive image, and adapt to the socio-cultural characteristics of the village are highly needed [2]. The development of technology and social media opens up new opportunities in the marketing of educational services, including kindergartens. The use of digital media and social media as promotional tools has become one of the main strategies employed to enhance competitiveness and the number of students. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing has become an integral part of modern marketing strategies because it can effectively and efficiently increase visibility and engagement.

In addition, flagship programs such as tahfidz, student achievements, and religious activities also play an important role in enhancing the institution's appeal, designed according to the needs and culture of the village community [3]. An integrated strategy

must be able to combine traditional and digital methods to reach all layers of society comprehensively.

However, the implementation of marketing strategies is not without obstacles. Limited resources, limited access to technology, and a community culture that tends to follow a conventional lifestyle are the main obstacles that must be addressed [4]. Therefore, it is important to conduct an in-depth study of the strategies that have been implemented, their effectiveness, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors. Based on this background, the problem formulation in this research is: What Educational Marketing Strategies are implemented by Kindergartens in Sekardangan Village?

This research aims to describe and analyze the marketing strategies used by kindergartens in Sekardangan Village in an effort to increase the number of students and strengthen the institution's image. In addition, the research also aims to identify the obstacles and challenges faced and propose innovative steps for the development of more effective and sustainable marketing strategies. The results of this research are expected to provide practical insights for kindergarten managers regarding relevant and effective marketing strategies that align with the characteristics of the local community. This research can also serve as a reference in developing strategies based on digital technology and socio-cultural values that can increase the number of students and build a positive image of the institution in the village environment.

The definition of marketing strategy, according to several experts, is as follows: Marketing strategy is a company's plan designed to achieve competitive advantage and meet the needs of the target market effectively and efficiently (Kotler and Keller). It is a process of systematically arranging steps and tactics to promote products, services, or brands in order to increase consumer awareness, interest, and purchases (Armstrong and Kotler). That is the art and science of selecting target markets and creating the appropriate marketing mix to achieve organizational goals and meet customer needs. (Philip Kotler) Marketing strategy is an integrated plan and action designed to promote products or services so that they can be widely recognized by the target market, meet consumer needs, and achieve organizational or company goals. This strategy includes determining market segments, establishing product positioning, selecting promotional tools and media, as well as developing differentiation so that the products or services can compete effectively in the market. In general, marketing strategies aim to create value for customers while also generating profit for the organization through targeted and sustainable activities [4]. Kindergarten marketing strategies are steps designed to introduce, promote, and enhance appeal to parents and the community so that they are interested and choose the institution as the place for their children's education. This strategy includes the development of internal activities such as the implementation of special policies, promotion through family activities, as well as external activities such as collaboration with other institutions, distribution of brochures, banner placement, and the organization of events like open houses and educational exhibitions. In the end, all the marketing efforts undertaken by this institution culminate in one major goal: building parental trust, strengthening the institution's positive image, and in turn, increasing the

number of applicants year after year. Every step—whether simple or planned—is designed to make the institution more recognized, more trusted, and more favored by the surrounding community.

One of the main challenges in attracting students is the growing competition at the village level and its surroundings, where many other educational institutions, both general and religious-oriented, offer similar programs. This causes the market to become very competitive and makes it difficult for institutions to highlight their advantages and attract the interest of parents. In addition, the limited access and penetration of promotional media, such as the underutilization of social media and other digital technologies among rural communities, further exacerbate the marketing conditions.

Besides competition, another challenge is the lack of knowledge or understanding among the community regarding the importance of religious-based education from an early stage. Many parents tend to choose established institutions or those with a certain good reputation, while newly established institutions or those building their reputation must work hard to convince parents that the Islamic-based education in these institutions can meet their children's educational needs and character development.

Beyond the various external challenges faced, the institution must also confront internal obstacles. The limitations of resources, whether in terms of manpower, time, or technical skills, often result in promotional activities being less than optimal. Teachers and administrators actually understand the strengths and uniqueness of their institution, but they do not always have enough space to package that message into communication that is appealing to the public. As a result, information about the quality of services that should be the main attraction is not conveyed optimally. The impact is quite noticeable: the expected number of new students is not always achieved. Every year, the institution must strive to ensure that the number of registrants does not decline and remains on target. When the target is not met, not only the learning activities are affected, but also the long-term sustainability of the institution. This situation makes the marketing process not something that can be considered a side issue, but rather an important part that determines the future of the educational institution itself.

Research on educational marketing strategies has been extensively conducted, both in the context of formal institutions and early childhood education. However, this research has several novel aspects that distinguish it from previous studies and provide significant new scientific contributions. The originality of this research presents a study of educational marketing at the micro level, specifically in the context of the Sekardangan Village area in Sidoarjo. Most previous research was conducted within the scope of cities or specific institutions individually, thus failing to reveal the dynamics of educational marketing at the village level, which has distinct social, cultural, and economic characteristics. Focusing on this micro-region provides a more contextual understanding of how kindergartens compete and maintain their existence amidst a heterogeneous community environment [25].

Furthermore, this research is expected to enrich the study of early childhood education marketing strategies in a broader and more comprehensive manner,

particularly in the Sekardangan village area. The results are anticipated to provide insights into the application of marketing strategies that align with the characteristics of the village community, as well as to contribute to the literature on marketing educational institutions in rural environments. By understanding effective marketing strategies, kindergarten managers can design targeted promotional steps, increase the number of students, and enhance the existence and positive image of the kindergarten in the local community [5].

This research can help raise awareness among the Sekardangan village community about the importance of early childhood education, as well as encourage active participation from parents and the community in supporting the success of early education in the village environment. An appropriate marketing strategy can strengthen the sustainability of kindergarten operations in Sekardangan village, provide opportunities for increased income, and improve the quality of educational services, which indirectly impacts the development and welfare of the village community [6]. Therefore, thru this research, it is expected to conduct an in-depth analysis of the marketing strategies implemented and the obstacles faced in the process of student recruitment, so that effective strategic steps can be formulated to increase the number of students while strengthening the presence of this educational institution in the community.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted thoroughly, resulting in valid and applicable conclusions. The method used is descriptive qualitative with data presentation in the form of sentences through natural phenomena (phenomenological) related to the concept of marketing strategy, particularly in the context of early childhood education. The sources used include academic journals, books, articles, and publications in the field of educational marketing. This study aims to understand the basic theories and best practices in effective marketing strategies [8]. Qualitative methods focus on the interpretation of social phenomena within the specific context provided by each individual [31]. This research was conducted over the last 5 months, from June 2025 to October 2025. The research was conducted in several kindergartens in the village of Sekardangan, Sidoarjo. The data collection techniques used in this research include observation, interviews, and activity documentation. In this case, field observations were conducted thru direct observation of the kindergartens in Sekardangan Village. There are 7 institutions, namely: TK Islam Setya Darma, TK The Fun, TK Islam Al Ikhlas, TK Islam Sari Bumi, TK Tunas Islam, TK ABA 5, TK Dharma Wanita Persatuan Sekardangan. This observation includes an analysis of the physical environment, available facilities and infrastructure, as well as the activities conducted by the kindergarten administrators. The observation also covers the interaction between educators and children, as well as parental involvement in kindergarten activities [9]. In the second stage, interviews were conducted with the principal and the kindergarten manager to gather more information about the marketing strategies that have been implemented. This technique is intended

to gain an in-depth perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by kindergartens in Sekardangan Village. Documentation is supporting data used by researchers as evidence of the study in the form of learning photos.

In qualitative research, data analysis activities are conducted continuously and interactively until data saturation is reached [32]. Data analysis is conducted qualitatively using an interactive analysis model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This method is expected to provide a clear picture of the current conditions as well as the potential for developing effective marketing strategies for kindergartens in Sekardangan Village, Sidoarjo. With this comprehensive approach, this article is intended to serve as a reference for kindergarten managers in implementing more competitive and relevant marketing strategies [11].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at kindergarten institutions located in Sekardangan Village, namely TK Islam Setya Darma, TK The Fun School, TK Islam Al Ikhlas, TK Islam Sari Bumi, TK ABA 5, TK DWP Sekardangan, and TKM NU 169 Tunas Islam. The seven institutions have diverse characteristics, both in terms of flagship programs, foundation backgrounds, student segmentation, and management patterns. Nevertheless, all of these kindergartens operate within the same social context, namely a semi-urban community with a high level of social closeness, where relationships among residents, informal recommendations, and the involvement of RT/RW communities, PKK, and local social networks significantly influence the formation of the institution's image and parents' decision-making in choosing early childhood education.

Field findings show that in a social context like Sekardangan Village, the marketing strategy of kindergarten institutions cannot be separated from the strength of social relationships and community trust. Word-of-mouth promotion, testimonials from parents, and teachers' involvement in community social activities become dominant factors that strengthen the institution's reputation. This condition is reinforced by the use of micro-scale digital marketing, such as the use of community WhatsApp groups, teachers' social media statuses, and school activity posts on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, which have proven effective in quickly and personally reaching the parents of prospective students.

The synchronization between field findings and educational marketing strategy theory shows that the success of kindergarten marketing in Sekardangan Village is not only determined by the normative application of marketing concepts but also by the institution's ability to adapt these strategies to the socio-cultural characteristics of the local community. Therefore, this research formulates a contextual and applicative early childhood education marketing model, which is a combination of a community-based marketing approach and the utilization of simple yet relevant micro digital marketing to the conditions and needs of the semi-urban community. This model is expected to serve as a practical reference for early childhood education institutions in enhancing

competitiveness, building public trust, and maintaining the sustainability of early childhood education institutions in village environments.

The marketing strategies of seven kindergartens in Sekardangan Village in this study are analyzed using the main conceptual framework approach. The selection of this framework is based on the characteristics of early childhood education institutions that fall into the service category, thus requiring an analysis that not only focuses on product and promotion aspects but also on service quality, processes, human resources, and physical evidence that shape the experiences of parents and students. Through this research approach, an effort is made to systematically explain how each marketing element is applied by each institution and how these elements interact with each other in building attraction, trust, and a positive image of the institution within the community.

Furthermore, in the context of Sekardangan Village, it cannot be separated from the social characteristics of the community, which has a high level of closeness and a communal communication pattern. Therefore, the analysis of marketing strategies not only looks at them normatively but also relates them to the social, cultural, and economic realities of the local community. This approach allows the research to assess the extent to which the implemented marketing strategies can adapt to the needs of parents, leverage the strengths of the local community, and respond to the dynamics of competition among early childhood education institutions sustainably. This harmonious social relationship creates high trust and becomes the main foundation for the institution's marketing success. The flagship programs, both religious and creative in nature, such as tahfidz, character education, arts activities, and language development, have proven to be relevant to the needs and values upheld by the local community. This strength is reinforced by the effectiveness of word-of-mouth promotion, which occurs naturally and is trusted, supported by relatively affordable educational pricing policies and the reputation of teachers who are communicative and regarded as role models by the community.

However, behind these strengths, the kindergarten institutions in Sekardangan Village also face several weaknesses that could potentially hinder the optimization of marketing strategies. Most institutions do not yet have a written and structured marketing plan, resulting in promotional activities that tend to be incidental and reliant on individual initiative. Social media management is still done in a simple and unprofessional manner, characterized by inconsistent postings and limited production of engaging digital content. In addition, the physical facilities in several institutions are still relatively simple, which can affect parents' perceptions, especially those who are starting to compare services between institutions. Inconsistent promotional activities each year also make the institution's image less sustainably managed.

From the perspective of opportunities, external conditions show significant potential for the development of early childhood education marketing strategies in Sekardangan. The increasing awareness among parents about the importance of early childhood education opens up opportunities for institutions to expand their reach to more students. Support from local communities, such as neighborhood associations

(RT/RW), integrated health posts (posyandu), and family welfare programs (PKK), becomes a strategic channel that can be utilized for community-based promotion. In addition, access to social media, which is becoming increasingly easy and affordable, provides opportunities for institutions to enhance visibility without incurring high costs. The religious image of the village community can also be capitalized on as a selling point that strengthens the positioning of character and morally based educational institutions.

On the other hand, kindergartens in Sekardangan also face various threats that need to be anticipated strategically. Competition among early childhood education institutions is becoming increasingly fierce with the growing number of new kindergartens in the surrounding area, both public and religious-based. The changing preferences of parents, who are starting to demand more modern and representative learning facilities, pose a unique challenge for institutions with limited resources. In addition, the presence of larger educational institutions that have implemented digital marketing professionally has the potential to shift public attention if local institutions are unable to adapt to these developments. Therefore, a more planned and innovative marketing strategy is needed so that kindergartens in Sekardangan remain competitive and sustainable.

The research results show that the marketing strategy of the Kindergarten in Sekardangan Village does not operate through a single approach, but rather through the integration of three main approaches, namely the Marketing Mix (7P), community-based marketing, and micro digital marketing. These three approaches complement each other and form a marketing system that is contextual according to the characteristics of the local community. The Marketing Mix (7P) serves as the foundational framework that governs the comprehensive management of the institution's marketing, encompassing aspects of educational products, pricing, location, promotion, human resources, service processes, and physical evidence, which collectively shape the institution's image and appeal in the eyes of parents.

In the social context of Sekardangan Village, which has a high level of community closeness, community-based marketing plays a strategic role in building and maintaining public trust. The close relationship between teachers, parents, and village residents creates informal promotion channels that naturally occur through word-of-mouth recommendations. These findings reinforce previous analyses that social trust and emotional closeness are dominant factors in parents' decision-making when choosing early childhood education institutions, even more influential than formal promotions.

Along with the strengthening of community-based marketing, the utilization of micro digital marketing has become an effective strategy enhancer in expanding the reach of information. Unlike the trend in digital marketing theory that emphasizes the use of websites or Instagram as the main channels, this research found that WhatsApp has become the most dominant and effective marketing medium in semi-urban areas like Sekardangan. The dissemination of information through teacher status updates, RT/RW groups, and parent groups has proven to reach prospective parents quickly, personally, and reliably. These findings emphasize that the success of digital marketing heavily relies on the alignment of media with the communication habits of the target community.

In addition to the media aspect, this research also emphasizes that the flagship religious programs are the main distinguishing factor among kindergarten institutions in Sekardangan. Tahfidz programs, habituation of manners, and other religious activities are not only positioned as educational services but also as the institution's identity that aligns with the values and culture of the village community. The strength of a solid community has proven capable of compensating for the limitations of physical facilities and operational costs, so the perception of the institution's quality is more built through experience, testimonials, and social closeness rather than purely material aspects.

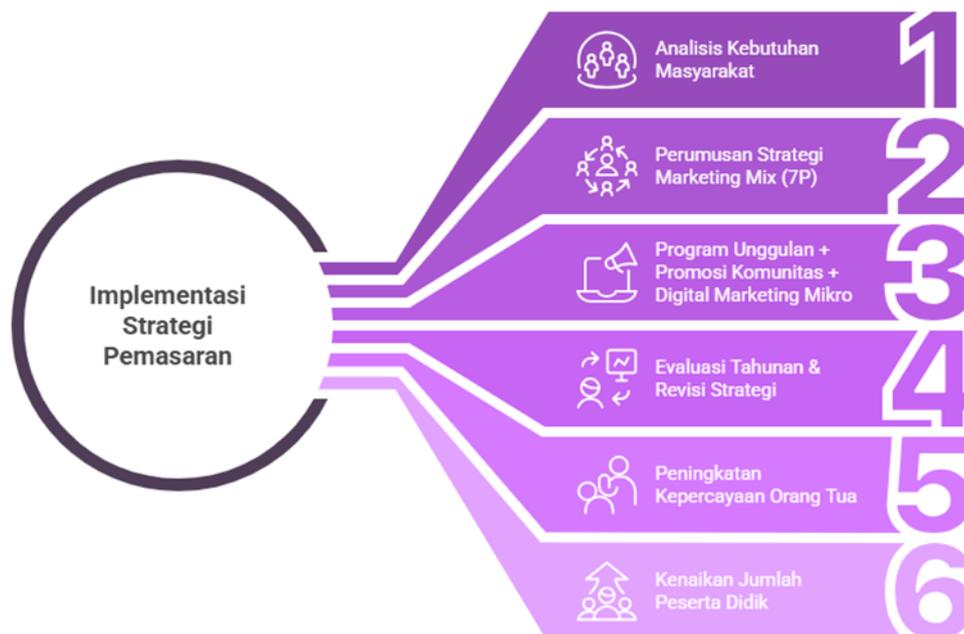


Figure 1. Implementation of Marketing Strategy.

Nevertheless, the research results also indicate limitations in the institution's marketing management. Most kindergartens still implement marketing strategies spontaneously and have not yet structured them into a systematic annual plan. Promotional activities heavily rely on specific moments, such as new student admissions, as well as the individual initiatives of teachers or administrators. This condition has the potential to hinder the long-term sustainability of the institution's image if not balanced with more directed and consistent planning.

From the perspective of urgency and novelty, this research makes an important contribution to the study of early childhood education marketing. Unlike previous research, which generally focused on educational institutions in urban areas or large-scale settings, this study places the village context as the main locus of the investigation. The integration of the Marketing Mix (7P), community-based marketing, and micro digital marketing is a conceptual finding that has not been extensively discussed simultaneously in previous research. Additionally, this research reveals the behavior of parents in semi-urban areas that is heavily influenced by factors such as religiosity, emotional closeness, and trust, and introduces the concept of micro digital marketing as

a realistic, applicable, and low-cost strategy for early childhood education institutions with limited resources.

The marketing strategy model produced from this research is contextual and adaptive to the real conditions of educational institutions at the village level. This model is not only relevant for kindergartens in Sekardangan Village but also has the potential to be applied to other early childhood education institutions with similar social characteristics. Thus, this research not only enriches the treasury of educational marketing theory but also provides practical contributions for institution managers in designing sustainable, trust-based marketing strategies that meet the needs of the local community.

Based on the overall research results, it can be concluded that the marketing strategy of kindergarten educational institutions in Sekardangan Village is formed through a combination of a formal approach leveraging local community strength and the utilization of micro digital marketing, which is very suitable for the character of the semi-urban community. Each institution develops relatively similar strategies but places different emphasis on flagship programs, social closeness, and the use of simple social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This indicates that these institutions have significant strengths in aspects of religiosity, interpersonal relationships, affordability, and community support, but at the same time still face limitations in digital media management, unstructured strategic planning, and increasingly complex competition. Research findings reveal that effective marketing in the early childhood education environment does not solely depend on promotion, but also on the emotional experiences felt by parents, the quality of teacher relationships, and the social trust built consistently.

Through the synchronization of field findings, this research shows that the implementation of appropriate marketing strategies must be carried out through a systematic process—starting from the analysis of community needs. This finding also emphasizes that the success of early childhood education marketing in Sekardangan does not stem solely from theoretical strategies, but rather from the institution's ability to adapt to the local social context. Thus, this research not only enriches the literature on educational marketing but also provides a practical and applicable strategic model, especially for early childhood education institutions with limited resources that wish to enhance their image and competitiveness through contextual, inexpensive, and effective marketing approaches.

This research concludes that the success of the kindergarten marketing strategy in Sekardangan Village is built through a combination of community support and micro digital marketing that is very much in line with the character of the semi-urban community. The flagship religious and creative programs, affordable costs, strategic location, close communication between teachers and parents, as well as promotion through WhatsApp, social media, and word-of-mouth, are the main factors that shape the institution's trust and image. Strength in social closeness and religious image can drive public interest, although there are still weaknesses in digital management and

unstructured strategic planning. This research presents novelty through a contextual, inexpensive, and applicable marketing strategy model—community-based marketing and micro-digital marketing—that can significantly enhance competitiveness, trust, and the number of students in early childhood education institutions with limited resources.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This research concludes that the success of the kindergarten marketing strategy in Sekardangan Village is built through a combination of community support and micro digital marketing, which is very suitable for the character of the semi-urban community. The flagship programs of religious and creative nature, affordable costs, strategic location, close communication between teachers and parents, as well as promotion through WhatsApp, social media, and word-of-mouth are the main factors that shape the trust and image of the institution. **Implication :** The findings indicate that early childhood education institutions, particularly those located in semi-urban areas, can strengthen their competitiveness by adopting marketing strategies that integrate community engagement and low-cost digital platforms. The combination of socio-communal relationships and simple digital promotion demonstrates that effective educational marketing does not necessarily require high financial investment, but rather contextual adaptation and trust-building approaches. **Limitation :** This research focuses specifically on one kindergarten institution in Sekardangan Village, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographical or socio-economic contexts. The characteristics of the semi-urban community play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of the strategy; different community structures may produce different outcomes. **Future Research :** Future research can examine the applicability of this contextual, inexpensive, and community-based digital micro marketing strategy model in other regions with different demographic and socio-cultural characteristics. Further studies may also explore quantitative measurements of the long-term impact of micro digital marketing on institutional sustainability, enrollment growth, and stakeholder loyalty in early childhood education institutions.

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