

***FORMULATING AN INTEGRATED MARKETING PLAN:
LEVERAGING STP-BASED DIGITAL BRANDING TO ENHANCE
THE ATTRACTIVENESS AND INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE OF
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS***

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Keywords: <i>Marketing Plan; Digital Branding, STP; Institutional Image; Early Childhood Education.</i>	<i>This study aims to analyze the formulation of an integrated marketing plan and the implementation of Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) marketing strategies combined with digital media utilization to enhance the institutional image and attraction of PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran (PAUD Saung). A descriptive qualitative research approach was employed, gathering data through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that PAUD Saung has naturally implemented STP elements, establishing a strong positioning as a nature-based early childhood education center focusing on outdoor learning. Although the institution benefits from robust social capital through parental collaboration and conventional word-of-mouth promotion, it faces significant challenges in digital marketing management. The official social media account dedicated to the PAUD unit has experienced a two-year content stagnation due to marketing being centralized at the foundation level and operational documentation being restricted to internal communication groups. While periodic evaluations show that student enrollment numbers remain stable, shifting toward a more structured strategy with active, consistent, independent, and integrated social media management at the institutional level is highly recommended to strengthen its public image sustainably.</i>

A. Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) represents a level of education that plays a strategic, fundamental, and irreplaceable role in establishing the foundation of children's education during the golden age of development (Indrawati, 2017). This developmental stage is a critical period in which neurological, cognitive, linguistic, psychomotor, personality, social-emotional, religious, and moral development progresses at an exceptionally rapid pace and cannot be replicated later in adulthood (Supriyanto, 2015). Therefore, educational stimulation provided during this stage should be designed comprehensively, appropriately, and with genuine care to prepare children for the next level of education. Early Childhood Education institutions serve not merely as childcare facilities but as formal educational environments where children's spiritual values, character, intellectual abilities, and innate talents are identified, nurtured, and optimally developed (Suyadi, 2021).

As public awareness of the importance of providing educational opportunities from an early age continues to increase, appreciation for Early Childhood Education institutions has grown significantly. This positive trend is reflected in the rapid establishment of ECE institutions across various regions, ranging from rural villages to urban areas, managed by private organizations, religious foundations, and government agencies (Erni Triana Agustin; Nurina Fadilatu Shaumi; Uminah Shaumi, 2024). However, this substantial quantitative growth has also intensified competition among educational institutions in attracting public trust and maintaining their sustainability (Suyadi, 2021). Consequently, schools are increasingly competing by offering various advantages, including modern facilities, diverse curricula, and innovative educational programs designed to attract prospective parents (Sudarso, S., 2024).

In response to this increasingly dynamic and competitive educational environment, Early Childhood Education institutions can no longer rely solely on their geographical location or conventional management practices (Lubis, 2026). The growing number of competing institutions requires school management to develop appropriate strategies that ensure institutional sustainability while enhancing competitiveness. One of the most essential strategies is building a strong and positive institutional image (branding) within the community (Wahyu Zakaria; Ulfa Yuniati; Enis Evi Puspitasari, 2023). Institutional image reflects the public's perceptions, evaluations, and trust regarding the quality of educational services provided by an institution. A positive institutional image enhances public confidence and creates a sense of security among prospective parents, ultimately influencing their decision to enroll their children in the institution (Fattah, 2019).

Within the context of educational management, institutional image is developed not only through improvements in internal quality—such as teacher competence and educational facilities—but also through well-planned educational marketing strategies (Wijaya, 2020). Educational marketing encompasses a series of systematic activities aimed at introducing educational institutions, communicating their comparative advantages, and establishing long-term relationships with the community as users of educational services (Aditia Fradito; Suti'ah; Muhyadi, 2020). A crucial component of educational marketing is the development of a marketing plan, which outlines institutional objectives, marketing strategies, promotional programs, target audiences, communication media, and evaluation procedures (Kotler & Keller, 2016). For Early Childhood Education institutions, developing a comprehensive marketing plan is particularly important because parents consider numerous factors when selecting a school, including location, tuition fees, educational quality, learning programs, safety, and

institutional reputation (N. Harahap, 2024). A well-designed marketing plan enables institutions to communicate their unique selling proposition consistently and effectively. To maximize its effectiveness, educational marketing should adopt a systematic strategic framework, one of the most widely recognized being the Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) model, which ensures that marketing messages reach the appropriate audience.

The implementation of educational marketing strategies is also evident at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, commonly known as PAUD Saung. Preliminary observations indicate that the institution possesses substantial social capital through strong collaboration and mutual cooperation with parents. Moreover, the institution has naturally incorporated the principles of the Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) framework into its educational practices. In terms of segmenting, the school identifies its target market geographically while conducting assessments of children's developmental characteristics. Regarding targeting, the institution focuses primarily on parents seeking nature-based education that emphasizes religious values, moral character, and children's independence. Meanwhile, in terms of positioning, PAUD Saung has successfully established a distinctive institutional identity through its strengths in outdoor learning, environmental exploration, and character education supported by community-based initiatives such as the Forum Ibu Saung.

Despite these strengths, institutional image development cannot achieve its full potential without a systematic long-term marketing strategy. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of marketing plan formulation and the integration of the STP marketing strategy with consistent digital branding initiatives is essential (Desri Amanda Firdayani Nasution; Aulia Habibi Saputri; Rizki Hambali; Suhairi, 2023). Such an analysis is expected to identify the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, thereby enabling the development of an independent and sustainable marketing strategy capable of expanding public outreach while strengthening the institutional image of Sekolah Alam Ungaran (PAUD Saung) within the broader community.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the formulation of an integrated marketing plan through the utilization of STP-based digital branding at PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran (SAUNG). A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore social phenomena in depth by examining participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural context. Through this approach, the study sought to provide a detailed description of the institution's marketing planning process, branding strategies, and their implementation in educational practice.

The research was conducted at PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran (SAUNG), an early childhood education institution that implements a nature-based learning approach while actively developing its institutional image through educational marketing strategies. The selection of this research site was based on the institution's unique characteristics in integrating educational quality with branding and marketing activities, making it an appropriate setting for investigating the formulation of an integrated marketing plan.

Research participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Informants were chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in institutional management and educational marketing activities. The participants included the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and several parents. The principal provided information regarding institutional policies and marketing strategies, teachers described the implementation of branding activities within the learning process, administrative staff explained promotional and communication

activities, while parents shared their perceptions regarding the institution's image and the factors influencing their decision to enroll their children at PAUD SAUNG.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using interview guidelines developed according to the research objectives. Observations focused on learning activities, interactions between teachers and parents, promotional activities, and the implementation of digital branding through various communication media. Documentation included institutional profiles, promotional materials, social media content, school activity reports, photographs, and other administrative documents related to educational marketing and institutional branding.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study employed source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and parents. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was carried out by presenting the interview findings to participants to verify that the interpretations accurately represented their perspectives and experiences.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data condensation stage, relevant information was selected, categorized, and organized according to the research focus. The data were subsequently presented in narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure the consistency and trustworthiness of the findings. The results were then interpreted in relation to theories of educational marketing, institutional branding, digital branding, and the Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) marketing framework.

C. Results and Discussion

Based on the findings obtained from observations and interviews, the current marketing management practices at PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran (PAUD Saung) continue to demonstrate a high level of dependence on the foundation's macro-level policies. Although the institution has developed a marketing plan and displays its vision and mission statements prominently at the school entrance and in every classroom, these strategic documents have not been independently formulated at the institutional level. Furthermore, the implementation of marketing activities has not yet been formalized into a documented Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) strategy. Instead, marketing practices have evolved organically through the institution's accumulated experience, guidance from the foundation, and the active participation of parents.

Despite the absence of a formal STP document, the essential components of the STP framework are already reflected in the school's day-to-day operations. In terms of segmenting, the institution identifies its target market geographically within the Ungaran area while simultaneously segmenting prospective students according to their developmental characteristics during the student admission process. This process includes initial developmental assessments, observations of children's fundamental competencies, and interviews with parents regarding their children's developmental histories. Regarding targeting, the institution primarily focuses on parents seeking a nature-based early childhood education that emphasizes religious values, moral character, and children's independence. These strategies collectively contribute to a strong positioning, enabling the school to establish a distinctive unique selling proposition (USP) as an educational institution specializing in outdoor learning and

environmental exploration. This positioning differentiates PAUD Saung from other early childhood education institutions, despite having physical facilities that are relatively comparable to those of its competitors.

In implementing its marketing plan, strong collaboration and mutual cooperation with parents serve as both the institution's primary pillar and its most valuable social capital, enabling the school to remain competitive within an increasingly dynamic educational environment. Since modern communication channels have not yet been fully optimized, the institution continues to rely heavily on word-of-mouth marketing, with parents acting as the school's primary ambassadors by naturally sharing positive experiences and information within their personal and community networks.

To address the limited capacity of the management team in operating interactive digital platforms, the school periodically produces printed promotional materials, including brochures and flyers. A distinctive feature of these promotional materials is their personalized design, incorporating photographs of each individual child. This emotionally engaging approach has proven effective in fostering parental pride, encouraging parents to voluntarily display the flyers in public places, distribute them among relatives and acquaintances, and share them through personal digital platforms such as WhatsApp Status.

Beyond printed promotional materials and interpersonal marketing, the institution further strengthens its positive public image through community-based social initiatives involving local residents. Through the parent organization Forum Ibu Saung, the school regularly organizes social programs, including community service activities, subsidized food voucher programs, health screening services, and the distribution of essential food packages to surrounding communities. These initiatives not only strengthen relationships between the institution and the local community but also cultivate a positive public perception of PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran as an educational institution that demonstrates genuine concern for social welfare. Furthermore, the school expands its marketing network by participating in meetings organized by the Indonesian Kindergarten Teachers Association (IGTKI) and by distributing student admission forms through several playgroups (Kelompok Bermain/KB) within the Ungaran District.

Despite the success of these conventional marketing strategies, the institution continues to face significant challenges in the management and optimization of digital marketing. Information regarding flagship educational programs and new student admissions is currently administered through the foundation's Instagram account rather than through an independent account managed by the PAUD unit. Consequently, the institutional identity of PAUD Saung has not yet been fully established within the broader public. Moreover, the institution's official Instagram account has remained inactive for the past two years due to the limited capacity of the management team, resulting in a prolonged absence of content updates.

These publication constraints have been further exacerbated by the fact that, throughout the 2025/2026 academic year, documentation of classroom learning activities and children's daily creative experiences was shared exclusively within internal WhatsApp groups for parents. Although these activities represent highly valuable promotional content capable of enhancing the institution's public image, they have not been consistently disseminated through publicly accessible social media platforms. Likewise, the personal social media accounts of teachers have not yet been strategically utilized to support promotional activities and expand the institution's digital presence.

The effectiveness of all marketing activities is periodically evaluated through strategic meetings conducted jointly with the foundation to formulate work programs for the following academic year. The evaluation findings indicate that although the annual number of newly enrolled students has not increased substantially, overall student enrollment has remained relatively stable. The presence of new students originating from areas outside the Ungaran District, together with the enthusiastic support of local residents in granting permission to install admission banners, billboards, and promotional signage, provides tangible evidence that the positive image of PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran has been widely recognized by the community. Nevertheless, to achieve greater institutional growth in the future, the findings emphasize the necessity of transitioning toward a more structured marketing strategy through the active, consistent, independent, and integrated management of social media platforms at the PAUD institutional level.

D. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran (PAUD Saung) has successfully incorporated the principles of Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) into its daily operational practices, although these strategies have not yet been formally documented as an independent marketing strategy at the institutional level. The institution has established a strong unique selling proposition (USP) through its distinctive nature-based and outdoor learning approach, which differentiates it from other early childhood education institutions.

The institution's sustainability and relatively stable student enrollment are strongly supported by its robust social capital, characterized by close collaboration and mutual cooperation with parents. This has been achieved through conventional word-of-mouth marketing, personalized printed promotional materials, and community-based social initiatives such as Forum Ibu Saung. These strategies have played a significant role in strengthening public trust and maintaining the institution's positive reputation within the local community.

Nevertheless, the study also reveals that the institution faces several important challenges. The most significant limitations include its continued dependence on the foundation's macro-level policies and the underutilization of digital marketing. The official social media account dedicated to the PAUD unit has remained inactive for the past two years because the promotion of flagship programs continues to be centralized through the foundation's digital platforms. In addition, documentation of children's daily learning activities and creative experiences has been shared only within internal WhatsApp groups for parents, limiting the institution's ability to reach broader audiences through public digital channels.

Therefore, although PAUD Saung has successfully established a positive institutional image and maintained relatively stable student enrollment, the institution should transition toward a more structured and sustainable marketing strategy. This can be achieved through the active, consistent, independent, and integrated management of social media platforms at the institutional level. Strengthening its digital branding strategy is expected to expand the dissemination of information, enhance public engagement, and further reinforce the institution's image and reputation within the wider community.

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