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## EDUCATION MARKETING MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN INCREASING THE INTEREST OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS FROM A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan merumuskan strategi manajemen pemasaran pendidikan yang mampu meningkatkan minat calon santri dengan mengintegrasikan prinsip competitive advantage di lembaga pendidikan pesantren. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 15 informan kunci, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi selama periode Juli 2025. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi marketing mix 7P yang diadaptasi untuk konteks pesantren berbasis donatur telah menciptakan competitive advantage yang tercermin dari pertumbuhan santri melampaui target (50% tahun 2024), stabilitas pendanaan dengan rata-rata donasi bulanan Rp350.000.000, dan brand awareness 67% di wilayah Jabodetabek. Kualitas program pendidikan menjadi faktor dominan (37%) dalam menarik minat calon santri, didukung sistem pengelolaan donatur yang profesional dengan tingkat kepuasan 92%. Model pemasaran pendidikan yang dikembangkan pesantren menawarkan paradigma baru dalam demokratisasi pendidikan berkualitas bagi kalangan yatim dan dhuafa, sekaligus memberikan kerangka acuan bagi pengembangan pesantren berbasis donatur.*

**Kata kunci:** *Manajemen Pemasaran Pendidikan, Competitive Advantage, Pesantren Gratis, Pengelolaan Donatur.*

### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze and formulate an education marketing management strategy that is able to increase the interest of prospective students by integrating the principle of competitive advantage in Islamic boarding school educational institutions. This Islamic Boarding School implements a donor-based free education model. Using a qualitative approach with case study methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 key informants, participant observation, and documentation studies during July 2025. The research findings indicate that the implementation of the 7P marketing mix adapted for the donor-based Islamic Boarding School context has created a competitive advantage reflected in student growth exceeding targets (50% in 2024), funding stability with an average monthly donation of IDR 350,000,000, and 67% brand awareness in the Greater Jakarta area. Educational program quality emerged as the dominant factor (37%) in attracting prospective students, supported by a professional donor management system with a 92% satisfaction rate. The educational marketing model developed by the Islamic

Boarding School offers a new paradigm in democratizing quality education for orphans and underprivileged communities, while simultaneously providing a framework for developing donor-based Islamic Boarding Schools.

**Keywords:** Educational Marketing Management, Competitive Advantage, Free Islamic Boarding School, Donor Management.

## INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization has brought significant changes in the world of education, including in the Islamic Boarding Schools environment (Iskandar, 2023). Competition between Islamic educational institutions is getting tighter, requiring each institution to develop an effective marketing strategy (Safira, 2022). Digital transformation and changes in people's preferences in choosing educational institutions are challenges for Islamic Boarding Schools in attracting the interest of prospective students (Al Baqi & Firmansah, 2023). Proper education marketing management is the main key to building a competitive advantage and ensuring the sustainability of Islamic educational institutions (Sukatin & Fajri, 2021). So that public expectations for the quality of Islamic Boarding Schools education continue to increase along with the development of the times.

Educational marketing management strategies are a series of processes to create, build, and maintain profitable exchanges with the target market (Hendrayani & Siwyanti, 2021). The importance of a holistic approach in education marketing through the implementation of the 7P marketing mix (Sufisti, 2024). Competitive advantage is a competitive advantage obtained when an organization can provide more value to customers than its competitors (Gozali & Nugraha, 2022). The integration of these two concepts is an important foundation in the development of a sustainable education marketing strategy, especially for Islamic boarding schools that have specific market segments, such as orphans and poor people.

Research by Abidin & Hamzah, (2024) revealed that the implementation of the 7P marketing mix contributes significantly to the increase in the number of Islamic boarding schools. Hermanto, et al. (2024) in their research emphasized the importance of Islamic Boarding Schools branding through digital media to reach a wider target market. The Hikmah study, (2023) shows that the competitive advantage of modern Islamic boarding schools lies in the integration of the curriculum and the superior programs offered. These studies provide a solid empirical basis for the development of educational marketing strategies. However, there is still limited research that focuses on free Islamic Boarding Schools' marketing strategies.

The study by Asmito, (2024) identifies factors that affect the interest of prospective students, including the reputation of the Islamic Boarding Schools, the quality of education, facilities, and costs. Research by Adawiyah & Bahri, (2024) adds the spiritual leadership dimension as an important component in building a

competitive advantage in Islamic Boarding Schools. The study of Muzakky, Mahmuudy, and Faristiana (2023) highlights the importance of technology adoption and learning innovation in the marketing strategy of Islamic Boarding Schools' education. The results of this study show the complexity of factors that affect the success of Islamic Boarding Schools' education marketing. However, not many have studied it from the perspective of donor-based Islamic boarding schools.

The research only highlights the aspect of education promotion without comprehensively linking it to the concept of competitive advantage, so that the resulting strategies tend to be operational and have not been able to show the competitive advantages of institutions strategically (Hidayat & Sulis Rokhmawanto, 2021). In addition, Rahma et al., (2024) focuses more on increasing students' interest in public schools, not on the context of Islamic Boarding Schools that have different characteristics, values, and educational patterns. Previous research by Aripin, (2024) Has not placed the uniqueness of the program, as well as the differentiation of Islamic Boarding Schools' services, as the main factor in building the attractiveness of prospective students. This limitation is what gives birth to a research gap in the form of integrating educational marketing management analysis with a typical competitive advantage approach of Islamic Boarding Schools to produce a more relevant, superior, and oriented strategy to increase the interest of prospective students.

To analyze and formulate an education marketing management strategy that can increase the interest of prospective students by integrating the principle of competitive advantage in Islamic boarding school educational institutions. The significance of the research lies in its contribution to the development of a competitive advantage-based Islamic education marketing model for free Islamic boarding schools.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to understand in depth the marketing management strategy of education from the perspective of competitive advantage at the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School. The selection of a qualitative approach is based on the need to explore and understand phenomena holistically in their natural context. The case study method was chosen because of its ability to uncover the complexity of marketing strategies and the uniqueness of the donor-based Islamic Boarding Schools model. The research was carried out in October-December 2024 to ensure comprehensive and in-depth data collection.

Primary data sources were obtained through in-depth interviews with 15 key informants who were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on the criteria of involvement and understanding of Islamic Boarding Schools' marketing

strategies. The informants consisted of: Islamic Boarding Schools leaders (1 person), foundation administrators (2 people), marketing team (3 people), teaching staff (3 people), permanent donors (3 people), and guardians of students (3 people). Secondary data sources include marketing documents, financial statements, student data, activity documentation, and Islamic Boarding Schools promotional materials during the 2023-2024 period. The selection of this time range allows for an analysis of the development of marketing strategies before and after the implementation of new programs.

Data collection is carried out through three main techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines that had been validated by two Islamic education management experts. Each interview session lasts 60-90 minutes and is recorded using a digital recorder with the consent of the informant. Second, participatory observation was carried out by observing marketing activities, educational processes, and interaction with donors, using structured observation sheets. Third, the documentation study includes the analysis of physical and digital documents related to marketing strategies, donor management, and Islamic Boarding Schools' education programs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implemented Education Marketing Strategies

The results of the study show that the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School implements a 7P marketing mix strategy with adjustments to the context of donor-based Islamic Boarding Schools so that educational marketing practices not only aim to attract prospective students, but also ensure the sustainability of funding. Field observations show that the products offered by the Islamic Boarding Schools are oriented to the needs of orphans and poor students. Quran *tahfidz* programs, formal education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah levels, as well as skills training such as organic farming, graphic design, and gastronomy, are at the core of educational services. The director of education emphasized in an interview,

"We not only provide religious education, but also equip students to have life skills. That is the main selling point of this Islamic boarding school."

The program is designed based on an analysis of student needs conducted through *ustadz* deliberation forums, monthly evaluations, and input from foster student guardians. Researchers also found that some new skills programs, such as information technology training, emerged from the recommendations of large donors who hoped that students would have future competencies. The research found that even though Islamic Boarding Schools implement the concept of free education, the funding aspect remains an important component of the marketing mix. Based on observations of financial statements and interviews with the

fundraising, it was found that there is a stratified donor management system: monthly fixed donors (47%), donors of special programs such as facility construction (33%), and incidental donors (20%). The head of finance explained,

*"We do not collect fees from students, but we sell benefits to donors. We report every rupiah they give transparently."*

This system shows that the practice of the value proposition of the Islamic Boarding Schools is not given to students, but to donors. These findings are in line with several previous studies on Islamic Boarding Schools' economics. However, this study provides more in-depth details about the mechanism of donor stratification and its level of stability from year to year. The Place aspect is also a fairly important finding. The Islamic boarding school is located in the Cimanuk area, which is quite strategic, located on the connecting route between the village and the regency city, so that transportation access is relatively adequate. Observations show that the location of the Islamic Boarding Schools is in a quiet and spacious area, supporting a conducive learning atmosphere. In an interview, one of the guardians of foster students stated,

*"We chose these Islamic Boarding Schools because the environment is quiet and not far from settlements. Kids can focus on learning, but it is still easy to reach."*

Meanwhile, the promotion strategy is carried out through multi-channel marketing, ranging from social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, to the official website of the Islamic boarding school. The results of observations on digital content show that Islamic Boarding Schools prioritize impact stories, namely the story of the educational journey of orphans and poor students, which is conveyed through short videos, documentation photos, and inspirational narratives. The head of public relations conveyed,

*"Every content must touch the heart. We do not just show activities, but we want the public to understand the changes experienced by students."*

This technique has proven to be effective, as seen by the 38% increase in the number of followers in the past year and hundreds of positive interactions on each upload. Research has found that the success of education marketing strategies is greatly influenced by the quality and competence of teachers. Based on the data obtained, the teacher-student ratio is 1:12, with a composition of 85% of S1 graduates and 15% of S2 graduates. The Islamic Boarding Schools implement selective recruitment and periodic training, including classroom management workshops, digital competency improvement, and active learning methodology training. A senior teacher explained,

"We not only teach, but also become role models. So improving competence is mandatory."

The educational process implemented integrates the Islamic Boarding Schools curriculum with the national curriculum, plus a character development program that emphasizes discipline, cleanliness, and social responsibility. Daily observation shows a structured routine ranging from dawn activities, *halaqah tafhidz*, academic classes, to extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, Physical Evidence in the form of learning facilities, air-conditioned classrooms, computer laboratories, *tahfidz* rooms, and clean and comfortable dormitories is an added value that strengthens the image of the Islamic boarding school. One of the students revealed in an interview,

"Even though it is free, the facilities here are not inferior to paid schools. It makes us excited," he said.

The most prominent finding in this study is the innovation of fundraising strategies that are integrated with educational marketing. The "Foster Parent Movement" program is proof of this innovation. This program invites the community to finance the education of one orphan or poor student through regular monthly contributions. Based on interview data with fundraising coordinators, the program has reached 234 permanent donors with a retention rate of 87% over the past two years. He explained,

"We do not just ask for help. We invite people to be part of the life journey of a student."

Observations of monthly reports show that the sustainability of this program is strengthened by digital reporting systems, such as sending updates on student progress via WhatsApp and email, which makes donors feel emotionally involved. This innovation not only strengthens Islamic Boarding Schools funding, but also becomes an effective marketing strategy because it increases public trust while attracting the interest of prospective students and new donors.

### **Analysis Competitive Advantage**

The results of the study show that the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School has three main sources of competitive advantage that clarify its differentiation position compared to other Islamic boarding schools in the West Java region. Based on the value chain analysis conducted by the researcher through observation of the daily activities of the Islamic boarding school, the review of academic documents, and interviews with the leaders of the institution, it was found that the first advantage lies in the quality education program with the concept of zero cost. The researchers' observations for two weeks showed

that the integration of the national curriculum and the Islamic Boarding Schools curriculum was running optimally. The daily schedule of the students is very structured, starting from *halaqah tahfidz* before dawn, formal academic lessons, and character development programs in the afternoon.

Documentation of academic achievement and *tahfidz* shows that the average memorization of students reaches 15 juz, exceeding the internal target of 10 juz. In an interview, the Head of the *Tahfidz* Program stated,

"Our target is actually 10 juz, but the enthusiasm of the children is extraordinary. Many reach 15 juz even before the 3rd grade of Madrasah Aliyah."

Academic achievement also shows very competitive results, with 85% of graduates being accepted into state universities, and some even successfully passing the selection of foreign campuses in the Middle East region. These findings reinforce Porter's concept of value differentiation, in which Islamic Boarding Schools provide a unique value proposition: superior education at no cost. The second competitive advantage lies in a professional and transparent donor management system. The researcher's observation in the administration room showed the use of a real-time donation monitoring digital platform that allows donors to monitor the use of daily and monthly funds. The digital financial statement documentation shows that data updates are carried out every 8 hours. In an interview, the Islamic Boarding Schools treasurer explained,

"Donors can see the fund report directly on the dashboard. We want all processes to be open and accessible at any time," he said.

In addition, donor engagement activities are carried out regularly through monthly studies, gathering programs, and special events such as *tahfidz* graduations. The researcher also found that each donor received a progress report containing the development of foster students, complete with photos, academic grades, and notes on character development. The third competitive advantage comes from systematic and measurable impact story documentation. Islamic Boarding Schools routinely collect data on the development of students from the beginning of entry to graduation, then package it in the form of video testimonials, inspirational articles, and narrative reports. Field documentation shows the use of mini studios for digital content production. In the interview, the media staff mentioned,

"We believe that the story of changing the lives of students is our greatest strength. That is what makes people believe,"

Based on alumni tracking data, it was found that 78% of graduates managed to enter university, either through merit pathways or scholarships. This shows a significant educational impact and is a strong branding element for Islamic boarding schools.

The results of the study identified five main factors that affect the interest of prospective students, strengthening the findings about the determinants of the selection of Islamic educational institutions. The quality of educational programs is the dominant factor, with a contribution of 37%, shown through various academic and non-academic achievements at the regional and national levels, as well as intensive character development programs. Modern learning facilities contribute 24% to the interest of prospective students, including the availability of a learning environment with natural scenery, vegetable plantation fields, livestock, a complete computer laboratory, and a dormitory that is comfortable and meets health standards.

The reputation of the Islamic Boarding Schools affects the interest of prospective students by 18%, reflected in the track record of graduates who have successfully continued to their favorite universities, including abroad, positive testimonials from various stakeholders, and media coverage that consistently displays the achievements and superior programs of the Islamic Boarding Schools. Quality free programs account for 15% of the decision to choose an Islamic Boarding School, with a zero-cost education offer that includes not only education costs but also student supplies assistance and health insurance. Strategic location is the last factor with a contribution of 6%, supported by good transportation accessibility, a conducive environment for learning, and a 24-hour security system that ensures the safety of students.

These findings indicate that although free programs are an attraction, the quality of education remains the main consideration for prospective students and guardians. This emphasizes that the branding of free Islamic Boarding Schools must be balanced with ensuring the quality of educational programs and adequate facilities. The donor-based education model implemented by Islamic boarding schools has proven to be able to answer the community's need for affordable, quality education, while maintaining high-quality standards through professional and accountable fund management.

The following is the data on the last three years of growth in the number of students that show a positive trend described in Table 1.

Table 1. Growth of Students in the Last 3 Years

Year	Number of Students	Growth	Target	Status
2022	120	-	25%	-
2023	160	33%	25%	Exceeding targets
2024	180	50%	25%	Exceeding targets

The Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School has shown very encouraging growth in the last three years. Statistical data shows a consistent increase in the number of students and exceeds the set annual target of 25%. Starting from 2022 with 120 students, Islamic boarding schools experienced a significant surge of 33% in 2023 with a total of 160 students. This positive momentum will continue in 2024 with higher growth reaching 50%, bringing the number of students to 180. This achievement is inseparable from the implementation of an effective marketing strategy, including the implementation of the 7P marketing mix that is adjusted to the context of donor-based Islamic boarding schools. Quality education programs with the concept of zero cost are the main attraction, supported by a professional and transparent donor management system. The success of Islamic boarding schools in integrating fundraising strategies with educational marketing, such as the "Foster Parent Movement" program, has contributed significantly to this growth.

This positive trend reflects the success of Islamic boarding schools in building competitive advantage through three main pillars: quality education programs at no cost, a professional donor management system, and a measurable impact story. With this strong foundation, the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School has great potential to continue to grow and provide access to quality education for more students from orphans and poor people in the future. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the funding of the Madinah AL Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Funding Stability

Indicator	Value	Description
Steady Donor Growth	47%	Year
Monthly Donation	Rp. 350.000.000	Average each Month
Cost Each Student	Rp1.500.000	Each Student/Month
Emergency Fund	6 Months	Operational Coverage

The Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School shows a healthy and sustainable financial condition, reflected in several key indicators of fund management. The growth of permanent donors, which reaches 47% per year, indicates high public trust in Islamic Boarding Schools. The average monthly donation of IDR 350,000,000 provides a solid foundation to finance quality education operations, with an allocation of IDR 1,500,000 per student every month, which covers all education, dormitory, and skill development needs. An aspect that should be appreciated is the commitment of the Islamic Boarding Schools in maintaining financial sustainability through an emergency fund that is able to cover operational costs for 6 months. This policy reflects the principle of prudence in financial management and ensures the sustainability of students' education despite fluctuations in donations. This funding stability is one of the

competitive advantages of Islamic Boarding Schools in providing a guarantee of the sustainability of quality free education programs for orphans and poor students.

Finally, regarding the analysis of Brand Awareness and Reputation of the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School. The results of the study show that the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in building brand awareness and a strong reputation in the community, especially in the West Java region. The level of brand awareness that reached 67% in West Java shows the effectiveness of the communication and marketing strategies implemented by Islamic boarding schools. This achievement is supported by impressive social media performance with 1,909 followers on Instagram and 1,521 followers on Facebook, reflecting the success of the Islamic Boarding Schools in building engagement with the digital community. The social media image of the Al-Hijrah Islamic Boarding School is explained in Figure 1.

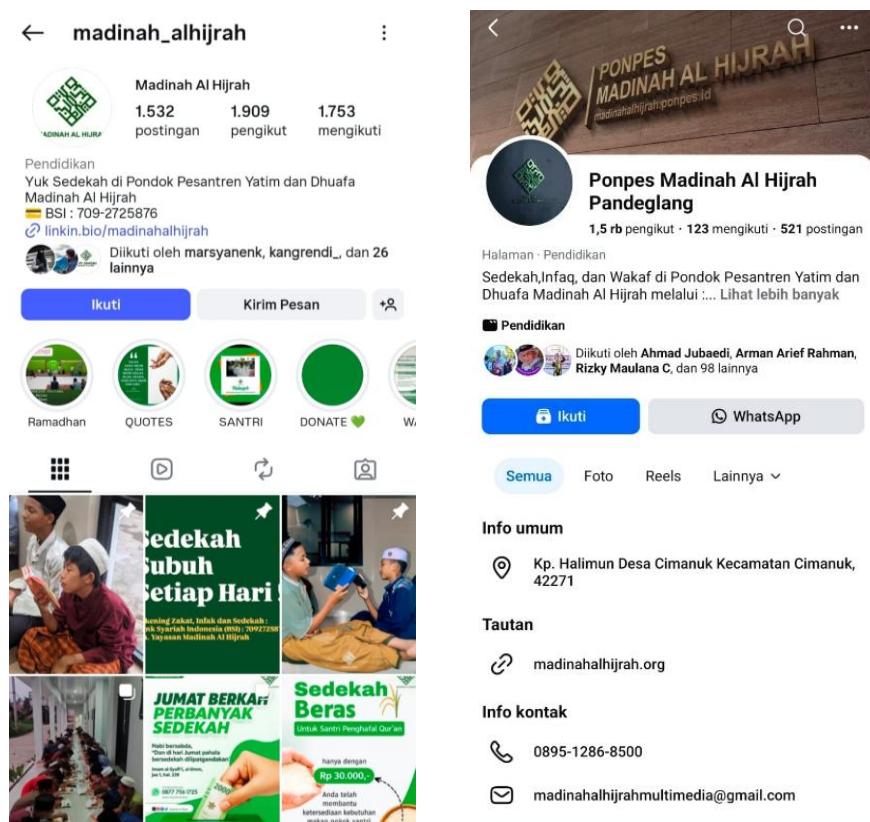


Figure 1. Brand Awareness and Reputation of the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School on Social Media

The very high level of donor satisfaction, reaching 92%, is a strong testimony to the professionalism of fund management and the quality of the educational programs carried out. This is strengthened by activity programs on social media, especially programs for donors throughout 2024, which illustrate public appreciation for the contribution of Islamic boarding schools in the development of empowerment-based Islamic education. The combination of

stakeholder satisfaction, positive media coverage, and a strong presence on digital platforms is an important asset for Islamic Boarding Schools in maintaining the sustainability of the program and expanding the reach of its social impact.

## Discussion

The findings of this study corroborate the results of the study that the integration of the national curriculum and Islamic Boarding Schools can encourage academic and spiritual quality simultaneously (Rizan et al., 2023). A professionally managed donor-based education model has been proven to strengthen the sustainability of institutions, which places scarce and elusive resources at the core of the Institute's excellence (Putra, 2023). The high achievement of student memorization and the percentage of graduation to state universities support research that shows that the quality of outcomes is the strongest indicator in building the reputation of Islamic education (Mahsyar & Oktaviani, 2024). This integrated learning approach of modern Islamic boarding schools is also consistent with the findings that institutions that combine academics, *tahfidz*, and practical skills have higher competitiveness in the eyes of the community (Patricia & Andono, 2022).

A donor management system based on digital transparency is an important finding that strengthens the position of Islamic Boarding Schools in creating a sustainable competitive advantage (Asyiah, Zohriah & Fauzi, 2024). Fund transparency through digital dashboards is in line with the concept of public accountability put forward by Sholeh, (2023), which emphasizes that information disclosure increases stakeholder trust. These findings also corroborate the study that waqf-based or donor-based educational institutions require professional governance in order to be able to maintain long-term funding stability (Kurniawan et al., 2023). The donor engagement model through routine reports and participatory activities also supports the theory of stakeholder engagement, which states that emotional relationships increase loyalty and contribution (Pramesti, 2024). In addition, the practice of documenting impact stories carried out by Islamic Boarding Schools is in line with the findings that social change narratives are an effective branding strategy for non-profit institutions (Yusuf, 2023). This is reinforced by research that states that institutions with transparent reporting practices have 2-3 times greater potential in retaining donors (Ulum, 2025).

Factors that affect the interest of prospective students include the quality of education, modern facilities, the reputation of the institution, free programs, and strategic locations that show consistency with the theory of educational consumer behavior, which emphasizes that the perception of quality is the main determinant in decision-making (Indah, 2025). The large contribution of quality of education (37%) strengthens the research that academic excellence is a determining factor in choosing quality Islamic boarding schools (Hermanto, 2024). Modern learning facilities, which contribute 24%, are also in accordance with the findings that the

physical environment of schools has a significant influence on the perception of institutional quality (Wahyunto, 2024). The reputation of Islamic Boarding Schools that has an impact of 18% is in line with the institutional image theory, which states that the image of the institution is a strong predictor of interest in entering (Faradila, 2024). In addition, the concept of free education that attracts 15% of prospective students is consistent with the literature on access to education that emphasizes the importance of inclusive financing in increasing community participation (Deden, 2023). The strategic location factor (6%) also corroborates the finding that accessibility is a factor supporting interest, even though it is not dominant (Yaqin, 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of the education marketing management strategy at the Madinah Al Hijrah Cimanuk Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in creating a competitive advantage through the integration of quality education programs with a professional donor management system. This success is reflected in the consistent growth in the number of students exceeding targets, maintained funding stability, and high levels of public trust. The donor-based education model developed by the Islamic Boarding Schools has proven to be sustainable, supported by the implementation of an adaptive 7P marketing mix and a transparent management system. The quality of the educational program is the dominant factor in attracting the interest of prospective students, followed by the excellence of the facilities and the reputation of the Islamic Boarding Schools. Measurable impact stories and effective digital communication have built strong brand awareness in the community, especially in the West Java region. The educational marketing model developed by the Islamic Boarding Schools offers a new paradigm in the democratization of quality education for orphans and the poor.

Based on these findings, future scientific development needs to be directed at the formulation of a theoretical model that integrates the concept of competitive advantage with the context of donor-based Islamic boarding schools. Further comparative and longitudinal research is needed to measure the long-term impact and identify best practices for the management of free Islamic boarding schools. Standardization and regulations specific to donor-based Islamic Boarding Schools need to be developed to ensure the sustainability and replicability of the model. The establishment of networks between similar Islamic boarding schools can facilitate knowledge sharing and the development of more comprehensive metrics in measuring the social impact of free education programs.

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