

Enhancing Competitiveness in Vocational Education: The Role of Strategic Marketing in Schools

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze marketing strategies to improve vocational high school competitiveness in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis is done through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The study results indicate that the school's competitive advantage lies in its special expertise in automotive technology, strong partnerships with leading companies, and modern facilities. The school's proactive approach to updating its curriculum to suit industry needs, effective branding and digital media strategies, and partnerships with industry have contributed to its success in producing employable graduates. The implications of this study suggest that vocational schools can improve their competitiveness by adopting a strategic marketing approach that focuses on building strong industry partnerships, developing relevant curricula, and utilizing digital media to promote their vocational programs.

Keywords: *Marketing Strategy, Competitiveness, Competitive Advantage, Industrial Partnership*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang strategi pemasaran dalam meningkatkan daya saing sekolah menengah kejuruan di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan datanya dilakukan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keunggulan kompetitif sekolah terletak pada keahlian khusus dalam teknologi otomotif, kemitraan yang kuat dengan perusahaan terkemuka, dan fasilitas modern. Pendekatan proaktif sekolah untuk memperbarui kurikulumnya agar sesuai dengan kebutuhan industri, strategi branding dan media digital yang efektif, dan kemitraan dengan industri telah berkontribusi pada keberhasilannya dalam menghasilkan lulusan yang dapat dipekerjakan. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sekolah kejuruan dapat meningkatkan daya saing mereka dengan mengadopsi pendekatan pemasaran strategis yang berfokus pada membangun kemitraan industri yang kuat, mengembangkan kurikulum yang relevan, dan memanfaatkan media digital untuk mempromosikan program vokasionalnya.

Kata Kunci: *Strategi Pemasaran, Daya Saing, Keunggulan Kompetitif, Kemitraan Industri*

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic marketing plays a vital role in increasing the competitiveness of schools by maximizing the potential of vocational education (Furdui et al., 2021; Rusdi et al., 2022; Diana, 2023). Vocational education has excellent potential to equip students with skills relevant to the job market, making it a valuable asset for schools (Wijaya & Khoir, 2022; Ochieng & Ngware, 2022; Maulidah et al., 2023). Vocational education is vital in equipping students with relevant skills for the job market, making it a valuable asset for schools (Calero et al., 2020; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023; Chuanchen, 2023). However, with the right marketing strategy, this potential is more utilized, which impacts the competitiveness of schools amid increasingly fierce global competition. Implementing strategic marketing successfully increases student enrollment and strengthens the institution's reputation (Lim et al., 2020; Ansori et al., 2023; Hamidah, 2023). Therefore, integrating strategic marketing in vocational education is a crucial step to maximize the competitiveness and sustainability of schools in the long term (Tasdemir & Gazo, 2020; Mian et al., 2020; Lv et al., 2022). According to Silliman & Virtanen (2022), concrete evidence shows that vocational education graduates tend to have a higher employment rate than general education graduates.

In addition, global industries increasingly need a workforce with specialized skills often acquired through vocational education (Beer & Mulder, 2020; Spöttl & Windelband, 2021; Li et al., 2023). The World Economic Forum (WEF) identifies that technology, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors rely heavily on technically trained vocational graduates (Li, 2020; Okolie et al., 2020; Haviland & Robbins, 2021). Vocational education is crucial in meeting the industry's workforce needs (Calero et al., 2020; Pambudi & Harjanto, 2020; Spöttl & Windelband, 2021).

Looking at some of these social facts, strategic marketing plays a vital role for schools, especially in vocational education, especially at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin. In an increasingly competitive educational environment, attracting the right students is a significant challenge for vocational schools. By implementing effective marketing strategies, schools can target prospective students with interests and talents in the vocational field, ensuring that the programs offered are relevant and appealing to them. This improves the quality of education and helps reduce the dropout rate.

The main problem many vocational schools face today is the need for a well-planned and integrated marketing strategy. Most vocational schools still rely on traditional promotion methods that are less effective in attracting potential students and building strong relationships with industry. This results in low student enrollment rates and a lack of industry involvement in the education process, ultimately impacting graduates' quality and the school's competitiveness in the job market. At SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, although several marketing strategies have been implemented, there has yet to be an in-depth study of the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing school competitiveness. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the role of strategic marketing in improving the competitiveness of SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, focusing on how the school can leverage strategic marketing to attract more students, build a positive image, and strengthen relationships with the industry.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between strategic marketing and the competitiveness of vocational education. For example, Furdui et al. (2021) found that implementing the right marketing strategy can increase the number of student enrolments in vocational schools while strengthening the institution's image in the public's eyes. This study emphasizes the importance of effective branding and promotion in attracting potential students and improving the school's reputation. In addition, research by Tasdemir and Gazo (2020) shows that cooperation with industry through internship and training programs can increase the relevance of the curriculum and strengthen the competitiveness of graduates in the job market. This research underscores the critical role of industry partnerships in supporting strategic marketing in vocational schools. Another study by Silliman and Virtanen (2022) identified that vocational schools that integrate strategic marketing with curriculum development have higher graduation rates and more work-ready students than schools that do not implement similar strategies.

Although several studies have highlighted the importance of strategic marketing in vocational education, there needs to be more literature regarding how this strategy is explicitly implemented in vocational schools in Indonesia, especially in the context of industrial cooperation and curriculum adjustment. Many previous studies have focused more on branding and promotion, while other aspects, such as program development and integration with industry, have yet to be widely explored. This research seeks to fill this gap by examining in depth the implementation of strategic marketing at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin and how this strategy can increase school competitiveness through close cooperation with industry and curriculum adjustments relevant to market needs.

This research offers novelty by developing a holistic strategic marketing model in the context of vocational education in Indonesia, which focuses on promotion and branding and includes program development and industry partnerships. The uniqueness of this research lies in its comprehensive approach, which integrates various strategic marketing elements to create a sustainable competitive advantage for vocational schools. This research is also interesting because it uses a case study at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, a leading vocational school in Banjarmasin that has implemented various marketing strategies to maintain its competitiveness. Thus, this research is expected to significantly contribute to developing education management literature, especially in the context of vocational education in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how strategic marketing plays a vital role in increasing school competitiveness by maximizing the potential of vocational education at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin. This research is based on the premise that the competitiveness of vocational schools is determined not only by the quality of the curriculum and teaching but also by the ability of schools to position themselves strategically in the education market. In this context, strategic marketing is an essential tool to achieve this. With increasing competition in the education sector, particularly between vocational and public schools, strategic marketing can help vocational schools highlight their strengths, such as practical training and direct engagement with industry.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to explore in depth the role of strategic marketing in improving the competitiveness of vocational schools in SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, Banjarmasin City, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. The selection of qualitative approaches is based on the need to understand strategic marketing phenomena in real and complex contexts, which quantitative approaches cannot fully reveal (Nassaji, 2020; Gilad, 2021; Mulisa, 2022). The case study was chosen because this method allows for an in-depth exploration of the strategic marketing phenomenon applied at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, considering various contextual factors that affect the strategy's effectiveness. Compared to other research methods, such as surveys or experiments, case studies offer flexibility in uncovering the internal dynamics of the school, interactions between stakeholders, and the impact of the marketing strategies implemented. This approach also provides an opportunity to capture nuances that may have been missed in research with other methods, such as informal behavior or non-verbal interactions relevant to the research topic.

The data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with 13 informants selected purposively: the principal, vice principal, marketing department, several teachers, and students directly involved in the school's strategic marketing process. The location of this research is SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, located at Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. The selection of this location is based on the school's reputation as one of the leading vocational schools in Banjarmasin, which has implemented various marketing strategies to maintain its competitiveness. Direct observation is carried out by monitoring marketing and relevant school activities, such as promotional campaigns, educational exhibitions, and school interactions with industry. Documentation includes analysis of the school's annual report, promotional materials, and statistical data on student enrollment over the past few years. The purposive sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the interviewed informants have in-depth knowledge and experience in marketing strategies implemented in schools so that the data obtained can provide rich and relevant insights (Lokot, 2021; Alam, 2021; Mwita, 2022).

The data analysis in this study was carried out using the Miles and Huberman model, which consisted of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification. In the data reduction stage, the information collected through interviews, observations, and documentation is filtered and coded to identify key themes relevant to the research. The data that has been reduced is then presented in a systematic form, such as tables or diagrams, which allows researchers to see patterns, relationships between variables, and dynamics that occur in the field. The last stage is drawing conclusions, where the initial findings are interpreted and verified through data triangulation and member checking. Triangulation is carried out by comparing data from various sources (interviews, observations, and documentation) to ensure consistency of findings, while member checking involves confirming findings by informants to increase the validity and credibility of the conclusions

drawn (Priya, 2021; Adane et al., 2021; Rainer & Wohlin, 2022). This analysis technique was chosen to provide a deep and holistic interpretation of the data so that the conclusions produced can significantly contribute to the educational management literature, especially in the context of vocational education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study present an in-depth analysis that uncovers various critical aspects of the topic studied to significantly contribute to a broader understanding of this field of study. These findings are expected to answer the research questions, test the hypotheses presented, and provide new insights that can be the basis for further research. Each finding is systematically compiled based on the data collected and interpreted in the context of relevant theories and literature to ensure the validity and reliability of the results obtained.

Identify the Value of A School's Competitive Advantage

This study identifies schools' competitive advantage as the first step in a marketing strategy aimed at improving vocational education. This competitive advantage is found in the specialized skills programs offered by the school, strong relationships with industry, and modern facilities owned. This advantage allows schools to excel in the increasingly competitive education market. According to strategic management theory, competitive advantage can be created when an organization can offer unique value that is difficult for its competitors to imitate.

Based on the results of interviews with several informants, specialized skills programs are one of the main advantages possessed by schools. One informant stated, "Our school offers specialized expertise in automotive technology, which is in great demand by the local industry" (I_AL_24). This shows that focusing on skills that are to the needs of the local labor market provides added value to the school while strengthening its position among other educational institutions. Observations of this educational program show that a curriculum designed according to industry needs increases students' interest in choosing the school.

In addition, partnerships with industry are also key factors in schools' competitive advantage. Another informant emphasized the importance of relationships with large companies: "We have established strong partnerships with several leading companies, which provide our students with hands-on experience and better job opportunities after graduation" (I_FI_24). Observations also showed that having industrial work experience at partner companies makes school graduates better prepared to enter the workforce. This improves the school's reputation in the eyes of the community and strengthens stakeholders' trust in the quality of education provided.

Modern facilities also play an important role in differentiating the school from other educational institutions. Another informant highlighted the school's infrastructure: "The high-tech laboratories and workshops we have here set us apart from other schools in the area" (I_AK_24). Observations of these facilities showed that students have access to cutting-edge technology relevant to the industry. These sophisticated facilities enhance the learning process and strengthen the school's image as an institution that excels in providing facilities and infrastructure that support vocational education based on industrial skills.

Program Development by Market Needs

The study results indicate the importance of developing vocational education programs to meet the labor market's needs. The development of this program is closely related to education and training, which focuses on investment in human capital, which will ultimately increase individual productivity in the world of work. In the context of SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, curriculum development is carried out by adjusting to market and industry needs, increasing the value of the quality of education students receive. The concept of human capital management places teachers and students as important assets for institutions, including knowledge, skills, and intelligence.

Alignment between educational programs and the needs of the ever-evolving industry is an important factor in maintaining the relevance and competitiveness of vocational schools. The results of observations and interviews show that SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin proactively updates its curriculum to suit industry needs. A teacher emphasized, "We regularly update the curriculum based on input from industry partners to ensure our students get the skills they need" (I_AL_24). This indicates that collaboration between schools and industry is very important in maintaining the relevance of the education provided.

In addition, students feel the direct benefits of a curriculum tailored to industry needs. One student shared his experience, "The skills I learned here are what employers are looking for during my internship, making it easier for me to get a job" (I_SU_24). This statement reflects how the right program development can facilitate students' transition from education to work, strengthen their work readiness, and increase their job opportunities after graduation. Observations show that students in the internship program are more confident and have practical skills relevant to the job market.

From the industry side, work partners also recognize the readiness of SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin graduates. One industry partner stated, "Graduates from this school are very well prepared and have the technical skills needed today in our sector" (I_OP_24). This statement confirms that a curriculum tailored to industry needs is beneficial for students and the needs of the industry workforce. This strengthens the school's position as an institution that can produce graduates who can directly contribute to the world of work.

It can be concluded that SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin has successfully developed an education strategy relevant to market needs through curriculum updates and collaboration with the industry. By adjusting the educational program according to the needs of the industry, the school not only improves students' work readiness but also strengthens its reputation as an educational institution that can produce graduates who are ready to compete in the world of work. This strategy provides dual benefits for students in terms of increasing job opportunities and industries that get workers who match their needs.

Strengthening Branding and Utilization of Digital Media

Strengthening branding and using digital media as a strategy for building and maintaining the image of educational institutions in the digital era is a major concern for schools. In the SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin context, solid and consistent branding is a significant differentiating factor from its competitors. Strong

branding reflects the school's vision, mission, and competitive advantages, which are communicated effectively to the target audience through various digital platforms. Important components of strong branding include brand awareness, loyalty, association, and quality perception (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022). This branding plays an important role in building trust and attracting the attention of prospective students and parents. One of the main aspects of branding at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin is increasing brand awareness through digital media such as websites, social media, and email campaigns. The school's active presence on these platforms helps build closer relationships with prospective students, parents, and the general public. Observations of the school's social media activities show that they consistently communicate their superior skills programs and student achievements. One of the school staff stated, "Our branding reflects our commitment to quality education and the relevance of the institution, which we communicate through our Website and social media channels" (I_AL_24). This shows that school branding is not only related to the visual aspect but also reflects the quality of education offered.

Based on the results of an interview with one of the students, digital media proved to be one of the factors that attracted their interest in choosing an educational institution. A prospective student shared his experience, "I was attracted to this school after seeing their online presence. The way they present their programs and achievements online really caught my attention" (I_UB_24). This indicates that effective branding through digital media can be a powerful tool in attracting prospective students and promoting school programs. Observations of responses on social media also showed positive enthusiasm from users, especially regarding the skills programs provided by the school.

Not only prospective students but parents also felt the positive impact of the school's digital presence. A parent noted, "The school's active involvement on social media platforms gives me confidence that they are following the latest trends and are serious about their students' success" (I_SU_24). Further observation of the school's digital media shows that they also provide up-to-date information on school activities, student achievements, and other relevant updates, further strengthening its image as a modern and responsive institution. This creates a sense of trust from parents in the quality of education offered.

By optimally utilizing digital platforms, SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin has reached a wider audience and effectively communicated its advantages. The observations show that interactions on the school's social media, such as discussions about skills programs and events, play an important role in shaping positive public perceptions. As followers on social media increase, the school's brand awareness increases, making the school better known as a competitive educational institution at the regional level. Interviews with social media users indicate the school's image as a forward-thinking and future-oriented institution is strengthening.

Strengthening branding through digital media has had a significant positive impact on SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin. Strong branding and a consistent digital presence allow the school to attract prospective students and build a reputation as an educational institution responsive to technological developments

and industry needs. This strategy provides long-term benefits for students who receive education relevant to the world of work and for schools that become increasingly known and trusted by the wider community.

Partnerships with Industry

Partnerships at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin are realized through various forms of collaboration, such as internship programs, joint training, and student work placement. These partnerships benefit students through work experience and strengthen the school's position in the eyes of the industry and the wider community. Through close collaboration, schools can present educational programs that are more relevant to the needs of the ever-changing job market.

Effective partnerships between educational institutions and industry can create mutually beneficial synergies. This study shows that strong collaboration can help organizations achieve goals that cannot be achieved independently. In this context, partnerships with local industries allow schools to offer educational programs that are more relevant to the job market's needs while providing students with direct experience in the industrial world. Observation results show that students in this internship program feel more prepared and confident when entering the workforce.

Building and maintaining partnerships with industry is essential for vocational schools to increase their attractiveness and relevance. The findings of this study indicate that success in establishing solid relationships with local industries is very beneficial for schools and students. One industry representative stated, "Our partnership with this school is very beneficial; we get well-trained interns, while students get real-world experience" (I_AK_24). This reflects the importance of reciprocal relationships between schools and industries in creating mutually beneficial outcomes.

From the perspective of educators, the partnership is also seen as an important factor in students' professional development. A teacher said, "This partnership allows us to offer internships and work placements to students, which is invaluable in their professional development" (I_IF_24). Further observations showed that teachers actively collaborate with industry partners to align the curriculum with the job market's needs so that students gain skills that align with industry demands.

For students, the partnership provides immediate benefits. One student shared her experience, "The internship I did through this school partnership was very impactful for me; it opened the door to full-time employment as soon as I graduated" (I_BU_24). Interviews with other students also revealed that the internship experience helped them build professional networks and broaden their horizons about the real working environment. Observations show that graduates who participate in internship programs are more likely to get jobs faster than those who do not.

Partnerships with local industries have had a significant positive impact on SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin. This strategy benefits students through increased work readiness and strengthens the school's image as an institution capable of producing graduates who are ready to work. By leveraging close collaboration

with industry, the school can offer relevant education relevant and relevant education in line with the job market's needs while strengthening its position as a competitive educational institution responsive to industry developments.

This partnership is essential to ensure that the education provided at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin is aligned with the needs of the industry. This collaboration provides students with practical experience and helps schools stay updated with the latest industry trends and requirements. This symbiotic relationship increases the school's attractiveness to students and industry partners, further strengthening its position in the market. The partnership was carried out at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, which includes Accounting and Institutional Finance, Visual Communication Design, Office and Business Institution Management, Computer and Telecommunication Network Engineering, and Marketing. It can be displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Partnership at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin

No	Types of Partnerships	Programmes Involved	Benefits for Students
1	Internship Program	Accounting and Finance Institutions	Hands-on work experience in the industry
2	Joint Training	Visual Communication Design	Improvement of technical skills and soft skills
3	Work Placement	Office and Business Institution Management	Work placement after graduation
4	Curriculum Development Collaboration	Computer and Telecommunications Network Engineering	Curriculum relevant to industry needs
5	Educational Equipment Sponsorship	Marketing	Modern facilities for student practice

Table 1 shows that SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin's partnerships with the industry include internships, joint training, job placements, curriculum development, and sponsorship of educational equipment. The internship program in an accounting and finance institution provides students with hands-on work experience while training in visual communication design enhances their technical and soft skills. Work placements in office management and business institutions facilitate students' transition into the workforce. Curriculum development collaboration in computer and telecommunications network engineering ensures the relevance of learning to industry needs. Sponsorship equipment in the Marketing program provides modern facilities for student practice. This partnership strengthens the quality of education and student job readiness.

Based on the findings above, this study shows an effective strategy for improving vocational programs at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin. Strong partnerships between schools and local industries significantly improve students' work readiness and make education more relevant to the workforce's needs. These strategies connect education with industry and strengthen students' abilities to face challenges in the ever-evolving workforce. These findings are supported by a study by Furdui et al. (2021), which found that industry partnerships improve the quality of graduates through access to technology and current practices. Tasdemir

and Gazo (2020) also emphasized that the collaboration of vocational education with industry produces graduates who are better prepared to face the demands of work. In addition, Silliman and Virtanen (2022) emphasized that aligning the curriculum with industry needs increases the competitiveness of graduates in the job market. Overall, the results of this study reinforce the evidence that strategic partnerships are vital in preparing students for success in a dynamic workforce.

This research contributes to developing partnership strategies between vocational education institutions and industry, which can be applied in the context of Islamic education to improve the relevance and quality of graduates. By identifying the value of a school's competitive advantage, developing programs that suit market needs, strengthening branding, and using digital media, this research offers a model that Islamic educational institutions can adopt to increase their competitiveness. The partnership strategy with industry, as implemented by SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, can be adopted by madrasah or vocational boarding schools to ensure that their curriculum remains relevant to market needs and can produce graduates who are ready to work by sharia demands. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to enriching Islamic education management literature with a more holistic and industry collaboration-based approach, which can strengthen the role of Islamic educational institutions in producing a generation that is not only spiritually competent but also has the practical skills needed in the modern world of work.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the importance of strategic marketing in enhancing the competitiveness of vocational schools. The research reveals that SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin's competitive advantage lies in its specialized expertise in automotive technology, strong partnerships with leading companies, and modern facilities. The school's proactive approach to updating its curriculum to suit industry needs, effective branding and digital media strategy, and partnerships with industry have contributed to its success in producing employable graduates. These findings underscore the need for vocational schools to adopt a strategic marketing approach to remain competitive in the education market.

This study contributes to the literature on vocational education by highlighting the significance of strategic marketing in enhancing school competitiveness. The research provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of strategic marketing in vocational education, which can inform policy decisions and practice. However, this study is limited to a single case study of SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, and future research could explore the implementation of strategic marketing in other vocational schools in Indonesia to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Additionally, future studies could consider incorporating a survey method to capture a broader range of perspectives and experiences, including those of students, teachers, and industry partners.

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