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Revisiting the Role of Marketing Mix in Shaping Brand Preference in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the role of the marketing mix in increasing brand preference in higher education institutions, with a specific focus on a private university context in Indonesia. The main objective of this research is to analyze how the implementation of an integrated marketing mix contributes to the formation of brand preference among prospective and current students. The study is grounded in the recognition of a research gap within existing literature, where most higher education marketing studies emphasize brand image, student satisfaction, or promotional effectiveness, while empirical investigations that link the holistic marketing mix directly to brand preference—particularly in faith-based private universities—remain limited and underexplored.

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto (UMP) and IAIN Syech Nurjati Cirebon (IAINSNC). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with university leaders, marketing managers, academic staff, and administrative personnel, complemented by document analysis and institutional marketing materials. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of recurring patterns across marketing mix elements, including educational offerings, pricing strategies, service processes, distribution channels, promotional activities, physical evidence, and human resources.

The findings indicate that the effective implementation of the marketing mix plays a significant role in strengthening brand preference by shaping positive perceptions, trust, and emotional attachment toward the institution. Brand preference is not driven solely by promotional efforts but emerges from the consistency between academic quality, service delivery, institutional values, and strategic communication. The study also reveals that internal marketing and value-based branding are critical factors in sustaining brand preference. This research contributes empirically to the higher education marketing literature and provides practical insights for universities seeking to enhance brand preference through integrated, ethical marketing strategies.

KEYWORDS: marketing mix, brand preference, higher education, educational service marketing,

A. INTRODUCTION

Marketing management of educational services plays an important role in the continuity of an educational institution. This requires educational institutions to compete in the educational marketing process, as competition for educational services is an inevitable reality. At this time, educational institutions are experiencing major changes in the global educational environment, so that effective educational marketing, supported by adequate facilities, can improve the quality of these institutions. However, if educational institutions are weak in marketing education, it is certain that fewer enthusiasts will emerge, and low-quality educational products will be marginalized (Rosa, 2012; Wahyudi, 2016).

Nowadays, educational marketing cannot be seen solely as a separate part of the organization; it is also less able to create effective marketing that meets customer satisfaction (Karnani, 2007; Mulyawan, 2013). According to Philip Kotler and Armstrong, marketing is a social and managerial processes that enable individuals and groups to obtain what they need and want through the creation and reciprocal exchange of products and value with other people (Kotler, 2004; Pearson & Gary, 2012; Priangani, 2013). Regarding educational services, both Kotler and other marketing experts agree that education is one of the non-profit institutions whose main activity is to serve consumers in the form of students and the general public, known as stakeholders (McKenzie, 2014)

Educational institutions essentially aim to provide services to other parties who wish to be served. On the other hand, they also want to get satisfaction from the service. Services are actions or deeds that one party can offer to another and are intangible, not resulting in ownership of any tangible asset. Kotler stated that the main characteristics of intangible services are: 1) Intangibility, 2) Inseparability, 3) Variability, 4) Perishability (Kotler, 2009). If the service demand is constant, the setup is simple. However, if there is a fluctuation in demand, various problems will arise

The elements of a marketing strategy consist of 7 Ps, namely the 4 traditional Ps of Product, Price, Place, Promotion, and the 3 Ps of services marketing: People, Physical Evidence, Process. This strategy was adopted from the business world, where marketing terms focus on consumer satisfaction through a logical rationale: if consumers are not satisfied, it means marketing has failed. (Eavani, 2012). If an institution wants to project a positive image to attract consumers, it must logically develop marketing strategies to encourage customers to use its services. (Rosenbaum, 2023).

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The relatively large number of universities has led to increasingly intense competition in the tertiary sector. In the midst of intense competition, most private universities in Indonesia face various challenges, including financial management, facilities and infrastructure, leadership, human resources, institutional image, and unhealthy organizational culture. Rapid and dramatic environmental developments and changes, including changes in consumer tastes, technological advances, and socio-economic changes, have influenced the higher education sector, resulting in intense business competition in the higher education industry (James, 1995). The competition between universities, both public and private, forces them to adopt effective marketing strategies to build long-term customer relationships and sustain their competitive advantage (Rodriguez, 2018).

Today, there are differences between the three marketing communications concepts. Chan divides the concept of marketing communications into three (Chan, 2003). First, mass marketing is a marketing communications concept that flows in one direction and is aimed at everyone. Mass marketing through advertising activities, for example, conveying a single message to everyone without knowing exactly who is receiving it. Second, the direct market concept, which bases marketing communication activities on the customer database they already have, is more unidirectional. (Riedel, 2022). Third, relationship marketing bases its marketing communication concept on databases but places more emphasis on interaction, namely two-way one-to-one communication, which is based on conventional marketing thinking, meaning that marketing relationships start from human needs and desires. Human needs are the basic satisfactions of food, clothing, shelter, security, property rights, and self-esteem. These needs are not created.

B. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Higher education is education in the school education pathway at a level above secondary education (Indrajit, 2003; Tjiptono & Gregorius, 2012). Meanwhile, universities are educational units that provide higher education. Higher education comprises academic and professional education (Scorita, 2022). Academic education is education primarily focused on mastering knowledge, while professional education is primarily focused on readiness to apply skills. Academic education includes Undergraduate Programs (S-1) and Postgraduate Programs consisting of Master's Programs (S-2) and Doctoral Programs (S-3), while professional education includes Diploma-1, Diploma-2, Diploma-3, and Diploma-4. The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education has the authority to administer higher education, including various higher education institutions in Indonesia (PP, 2021).

Therefore, this ministry can set standards for the quality of domestic higher education. Currently, there are five components of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education's higher education assessment.

a. Quality of Human Resources, which includes the ratio of students to lecturers, the percentage of associate professors and professors, as well as the number of lecturers with doctoral degrees.
b. Institutional quality, which is the determining factor, consists of the accreditation of departments/study programs and institutions, the number of departments/study programs that are internationally accredited, the number of university collaborations, and the number of foreign students.
c. The *Kemenristekdikti* assessment focuses on student activities, more precisely, how well the student activity units are performing.
d. The quality of research and community service, which has a broader scope, namely the number of Scopus-indexed scientific articles per number of lecturers, community service performance, and research performance.
e. Quality of innovation, which refers to the innovation performance of the university concerned. Higher education institutions are ranked where the 2019 higher education ranking assessment indicators focus on indicators or assessments based on Output - Outcome Base, with the aim of later being able to create existing policies in each tertiary institution to create quality tertiary institutions (https://pddikti .kemdikbud.go.id/).

1. Education Marketing Strategy

In the field of education, two marketing strategy concepts are needed that can be considered, namely: a) Distinctive competence, namely actions taken by educational institutions so that they can carry out activities better than competitors; and b) Competitive advantage, namely specific activities developed by institutions education so that it is superior to its competitors, through a differentiation strategy (competitive advantage is caused by the strategic choices made by educational institutions to seize market opportunities) (James C. A., 1995). Irianto's (2014) differentiation strategy is one of the marketing strategies as a competitive strategy, consisting of the following.

a. Differentiation is a strategy of providing offers that are different from those offered by competitors. A differentiation strategy implies that educational institutions have services or facilities that have qualities or functions that can differentiate themselves from competitors. The differentiation strategy is achieved by creating a perception of value for consumers (Varadarajan, 2015). For example: perceptions of program superiority, educational innovation, better service, and superior brand image (Das, 2019; Ningsih, 2023).
b. Low cost is a strategy to streamline all education costs so that it is more attractive to customers compared to competitors who offer high costs. The strategy to streamline all education costs focuses on using existing facilities to avoid imposing high costs on customers (Javed, 2020).
c. Focus is a strategy for working on a specific target. Focus strategies are usually implemented for facilities or services with special characteristics and interests. Some facilities, for example, focus solely on the upper class, so that all facilities provide benefits and functions that comply with existing regulations (Pimentel, 2023). Facilities that focus on the target market require three elements needed in a marketing strategy.
    1). Target market strategy, which decides which market segments will be the target market. These market segments may focus on segments where demand exceeds supply. In this case, schools need to segment the education market based on students' demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics. In this way, schools can more easily determine marketing strategies for educational services according to market characteristics and needs.

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2). Competitive positioning strategy, which bases provision on the relative privileges and strengths possessed by institutions, which can ensure a competitive level (Khamitov, 2019).

Mixed strategy, which identifies specific elements that the organization can promote. This mixed strategy consists of four basic components, called the 4Ps: product, location, price, and promotion. However, in the service sector, these components are added to the 3P framework: people, process, and Product (Alma, 2021). Services at educational institutions must be considered. A service in education includes physical buildings, student services, and lecture support facilities. All consumers will expect a satisfactory service

2. Brand Preference

Brand preference is when customers consistently choose one brand over another. In other words, they have gotten to know the competitors, perhaps even tried several products from different brands, and made a choice about which one they like best from this brand (Ebrahim R. G., 2016). Brand preference goes hand in hand with brand loyalty. When faced with a decision, customers with brand preferences will choose your brand every time. This kind of repeat business leads to customer loyalty and brand advocates, which, in turn, help you build a successful, sustainable business. Brand preferences, like brand loyalty, are not formed overnight. It is developed over time and with product and brand consistency (Morgan-Thomas, 2013).

While there's no silver bullet to building brand preference quickly, there are some things you can do to help develop it. Brand preference measures aim to gauge the impact of marketing activities on customers' and potential customers' hearts and minds. Higher brand preference usually indicates greater revenue, sales, and profits, and thus serves as an indicator of a company's financial performance (Kim, 2011). Brand preferences are used in many marketing applications, including copy testing, brand enhancement, and brand scoring. Brand preference is very important for businesses looking to build repeat customers among their target audience, as it raises awareness and helps them develop a strong reputation. Referring to Aakar's research, brand preference is part of the brand's assets and liabilities, which are integrated into the brand and into customers' subjective, intangible assessments of the brand (Aaker, 2001). Brand preference is essential for understanding consumer brand selection; therefore, it has received considerable attention from marketers (Alamro, 2011).

Brand preference refers to consumers' tendency to prefer a particular brand (Goode, 2010). This refers to behavioral tendencies that show the extent to which consumers prefer one brand over another (Clatworthy, 2012). Brand reference is very close to practice in by society or marketers, but rather by the nature of biology and the human condition. While desire is a desire to satisfy specific needs (Caruana, 2016).

Meanwhile, the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto (UMP) has 11 faculties with 36 D3, D4, and S1 study programs, 7 postgraduate study programs, and 5 professional programs. UMP has now developed into one of the private universities to be reckoned with; this is evident in the continued increase in the number of students accepted. In 2023, UMP will have 15,695 active students (UMP academics, 2023). Supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure, UMP equips its graduates with good knowledge wrapped in the spirit of Islam, so it is hoped that UMP graduates can be at the forefront If it is looked at the number of universities in Purwokerto, UMP is a private university that is able to compete with two state universities, namely UNSOED, UIN Saizu, and other private universities totaling 26 units (Pd Dikti, 2023). This fact shows that UMP has a superior and competitive marketing strategy. For this reason, this campus is suitable as a research location.

The terms of reflecting consumers' evaluation of the brand. In the market, consumers often face the situation of choosing from several options (Rimawan, 2017). Brand perception comprises three responses: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive component includes the utilitarian beliefs of brand elements. Affective response refers to the level of desire or desire that reflects a consumer's feelings towards a brand. Conative or behavioral tendencies are symbolized by the consumer's predicted or approaching actions towards an object. These are revealed preferences exhibited in consumer choices (Adriatico, 2022). Chernev assumes that the association results from behavior, such as willingness to pay and brand preference. This is assumed to be related to behavioral tendencies (Chernev, 2011). Purchasing decisions result from behavior driven by differentiation between alternatives, namely, consumer preferences (Mittal, 2016).

Preferences facilitate consumer choices by increasing their intention to purchase a preferred brand. Actual purchasing behavior aligns with intent; the mechanism that forms intent is evidence of sustainable consumer preferences (Ardiani, 2020; Dewi, 2020). Consistency between consumer choices and given preferences adds to the predictive validity of attitude preference statements (Ebrahim R. G., 2016). A consumer's biased position towards a particular brand is formed through consideration of choices between alternatives and reflects the strength of the brand. In this way, changes in consumer brand preferences are reflected in brand performance and market share (Decker, 2010).

In addition, brand preference combines desirable consumer attributes and perceptions: as such, it offers an indirect and unobtrusive way to assess important attributes (Pakurár, 2019). Therefore, uncovering consumer brand preferences is considered an important input for designing successful brand strategies and brand positioning, as well as for informing product development (Murti, 2019). Therefore, understanding brand preferences helps build a strong brand that can sustain long-term relationships with consumers. The factors that determine brand preference are divided into two, namely economic and non-economic factors (Chen, 2016).

Economic factors include the value of sacrifice and the benefits obtained, while non-economic factors include the need for actualization and appreciation from the environment. Brand preference is one of the factors that causes brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is a consumer's consistent preference to purchase from the same brand for specific products or service categories.

There are three indicators of brand preference. First, the product brand has a name that consumers consider attractive. When the company chooses a brand name, it must be easy to remember, attractive, and convey an exclusive impression. Second, consumers' perceptions of choosing one product over another product. This means consumers have a more positive perception of the brand than others. Third, consumers remain loyal to the product or brand they choose (Miao Li, 2021). This happens when consumers feel the brand they choose can meet their needs. In this way, consumers will be loyal to the brand. This means consumers have a more positive perception of the brand than others. Consumers remain loyal to the products or brands they choose. This happens when consumers feel the brand they choose can meet their needs. In this way, consumers will be loyal to the brand (Veloutsou & Black, 2020; Page, 2021).

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3. Previous research

A research written by Handayani related to Marketing Mix strategies in managing educational institutions (Handayani, 2017; Rochmah & Diah Yuliana, 2017). The research results show that the marketing mix, consisting of product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process, has a significant influence on students' decisions to choose the Development Economics Study Program at the Faculty of Economics, Bojonegoro University. Another study that discusses school marketing strategies is Sutama and Sri Walji Hastanti's (2019) entitled "Marketing Mix of Muhammadiyah Primary School Education Services". This research aims to describe the marketing mix of educational services at the Muhammadiyah Plus Elementary School in Salatiga City, comprising product, price, location, promotion, human resources, physical evidence, and the learning process. This research used qualitative methods. Data was obtained from direct interviews with speakers, environmental observations that support research, and documentation studies. This research uses a flow analysis model. Marketing education services are promotional activities regarding products, prices, locations, physical evidence/school infrastructure, and school activity processes carried out by people/human resources (Sutama & Hasthanti, 2019).

The next research that is also relevant is by Katya Labaso with the title "Application of Marketing Mix as a Marketing Strategy for Educational Services at MAN 1 Yogyakarta" (Labaso, 2018)). Based on research conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Yogyakarta, it was found that Islamic educational institutions also implement various strategies to market their educational services. The marketing strategy at MAN 1 Yogyakarta is carried out through the application of marketing mix theory (product, price, place, promotion, human resources, physical evidence, and process) by utilizing its superior competence as an Islamic educational institution which tends to have a moderate level of ideology, so that it can target the community Muslims from both traditional and modern backgrounds as a segment marketing their educational services. According to other research by Slambolchi (2015), the study found a positive and significant influence of all Marketing Mix variables on Brand Equity in the research object.

Other research was conducted by Ridiyanto and Rahman as a benchmark for the existence of private higher education institutions in facing competition between educational institutions, as well as a preference for the results of marketing strategies for educational institutions that prioritize services to be reached by all groups (Risdwiyanto & Kurniyati, 2015; Rahman, 2021). This research concludes that the replication model implemented demonstrates very significant implications for private campuses and the voting power of new students in Yogyakarta. This research makes a positive contribution to the development of marketing models in private universities.

The research to be carried out has several similarities and differences with previous research. The similarity lies in the big theme, which includes the marketing mix. However, the study conducted by the researchers focused on two universities with different statuses: IAIN Syech Nurjati, a state university, and UMP Purwokerto, a private university. The next difference is that this research is linked to students' brand preferences, even though the relevant data is still limited to documentary or new student acquisition data maintained by the academic department. The study's findings show significant implications for private campuses and the voting power of new students in Yogyakarta. This research makes a positive contribution to the development of marketing models in private universities.

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C. METHOD OF RESEARCH

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews (Denzin, 1994) with relevant parties, continuous observation, and the use of supporting documents available at the research location (Cresswell, 2018). Data analysis is the most important part of the scientific method because it helps solve research problems. The raw data collected needs to be grouped and selected to answer the problem posed (Strauss, 1988). The analysis technique used is the one proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984). He stated that qualitative data analysis was carried out intensively and continued until saturation, ensuring that the data were saturated.

The intensive analysis model put forward is as follows (Patton, 2014)

a. Data reduction

It is the process of selecting, loading attention, abstracting, and transforming rough data from the field. This process takes place during the research time. In this reduction process, the researcher really provides valid data. When researchers see the truth in the data they have obtained, they will double-check it with other informants they feel know more.

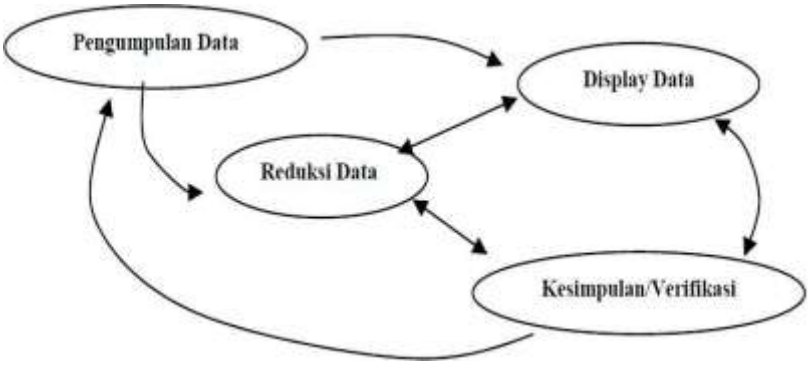
b. Data Presentation

It is a collection of structured information that enables drawing conclusions and taking action. The forms of presentation include narrative text, matrices, graphs, networks, and charts. The goal is to make it easier to read and draw conclusions

c. Draw conclusions (verification)

Conclusions were also verified during the research. The meanings that emerge from data must always be tested for truth and suitability so that their validity is guaranteed. (Singarimbun & Effendi, 1989; Watkins, 2017)

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D. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Higher education service products include the higher education curriculum. A good higher education institution has an appropriate, specific, broad, and innovative curriculum in accordance with the Indonesian National Graduation Competency (KKNI), aligned with scientific developments and the needs of the labor market. Other Higher Education Service Products include a credible research institution that has produced extensive research, as well as consulting and training services. Higher education service products must be aligned with the needs of society, especially the industrial world and government (bureaucracy), so that there is a mutual need. (Sihite, 2016).

Furthermore, the Dean of FKIP explained that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at the Faculty and Study Program levels is a breakdown and follow-up to university policies after the Faculty receives instructions and information from the university. The form of support and adjustments made by this University refers to the rules regarding the implementation of the Independent Learning and Independent Campus (MBKM) policy in higher education. For example, the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, in several Study Programs, has implemented the Merdeka curriculum and the policy reference to students, giving them permission to take programs provided by the Ministry outside the campus.

In addition to the policy on students who can take courses from other study programs, UMP implements the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy, which allows students to take nine programs outside their study program. These programs are as follows.

MBKM Program Conducted in UMP

No	Program	Status
1	Candidate	done
2	KAMMI	done
3	Village Project	Done
4	Teaching Campus	Done
5	Students Exchange	Done
6	Research	Done
7	Entrepreneur	Done
8	Independent Studi	Not yet
9	Humanity Project	done

In addition, UMP implements the Indonesian Student Micro Credential Program (KMMI). This credential program aims to enable students who actively participate to take courses outside the campus. In addition, this program aims to provide experience, skills, and knowledge, as well as soft skills, needed in the business world and industry. Another benefit of this program is recognition by the university, which is converted into a certificate that can be submitted to universities for credit conversion.

With the program now in place, UMP strives to optimize student involvement in the new curriculum. As conveyed by the Dean of the Faculty of Education, the implementation of the MBKM curriculum is able to create a new academic culture and habits, including;

a. increasing student motivation to seek new experiences outside campus,
b. habits of operating digital devices and technology,
c. the emergence of a culture of sharing information,
d. increasing student willingness to develop themselves,
e. the ability of students and campuses to adapt to new things,
f. And more integration of each level in developing the curriculum (Dean of FKIP).

To ensure the curriculum always aligns with the development of the business and industrial worlds, UMP has implemented a curriculum implementation policy based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE). UMP implements the curriculum using the OBE approach to support MBKM, in accordance with Rector Regulation No. 1 of 2020 on academic regulations regarding the Education Standards of Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto. (Academic Document, 2024). This MKBKM policy is supported by the diversity of forms of learning and the availability of facilities for students to study for three years outside their study program

1. Price

This decrease in education costs is very helpful for students financially. This is intended to allow students to use their funds to participate in off-

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campus activities that remain relevant to their study programs. In addition, the decreasing contribution table for each semester can create a psychological effect: the higher the semester, the lower the contribution. Thus, the community will respond positively and consider the UMP's educational contribution to be no big deal. In addition to the decreasing table, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto (UMP) launched the Ramadan Blessing Promo program, namely by exempting 50% of the education contribution fee for Semester 1 students, development and development contributions, and registration fees for postgraduate programs. In this book, the Head of the UMP Publication and Admissions Bureau (BPA), Dr. Yudha Febrianta, M.Or., said that for this Ramadhan 1443 Hijriah, UMP has taken a payment policy for prospective new students for the 2024-2025 academic year for 18 study programs during the period of March 18 - April 8, 2024.

The University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto is always committed to providing broad access to education for all prospective students through various scholarship programs. This scholarship is intended to ease financial burdens and provide equal opportunities for all. Therefore, UMP invites all prospective students to make the most of this scholarship as a first step towards a brighter future. In other words, this scholarship program can also serve as a promotional tool to attract talented students, retain students with high academic potential, and enhance the educational institution's reputation (Rahman, 2023; Phana, 2022).

2. Promotion

In the world of marketing, promotion can be interpreted as an activity carried out in order to increase the development of something. Marketing development differs from work; it emphasizes developing the brand, product, or company itself. In other words, promotion is a communication activity carried out by a person or company to the wider community. Promotion aims to introduce brands, products, or companies to the public while at the same time influencing them to use or buy the product or service

In his speech on the ump.ac.id site, the Chancellor of the Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto (UMP), Jebul Suroso, encouraged Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (UMKM) to maximize social media (medsos) as a means of promoting their stalls on UMP's official Instagram story every Saturday and Sunday. He also explained that UMP has long declared itself to be a university and MSME House. The benefits obtained by business actors include sales support and mentoring.

"UMP has indeed declared itself to be a university and UMKM House. Then we facilitate it at UMP through Sunmor activities, the Ramadan market, product companions, and the halal products that are available there. Then UMP also becomes a showcase for selling UMKM products in addition to sales using digital media in the future," (downloaded from, ump.ac.id., 2024)

In line with the Chancellor, Head of Public Relations and Promotion Bureau Irfan Fatkhurohman also invited students and UMKM activists to promote their products by making flyers as attractive as possible, while the template can be downloaded from the UMP UMKM stall flyer template provided by the UMP Public Relations team at twb.nz/lapakumkmump. He further explained that the UMP UMKM stall provisions are free of charge. Trader products must use the UMP UMKM Lapak Twibbon template. The content that must be included in the Trader's flyer includes: product name, WhatsApp contact number, Instagram, and YouTube (if any). For the amount of content, the campus will not limit it

3. **Place**

In accordance with the research results presented by Sihite, that the location of a strategic university service that is easily accessible by public transportation will be an attraction for prospective students. The university's location is intended to be an attraction for prospective students, including the layout of the physical campus (its architecture). The university's location must also be accessible virtually, namely via the internet. According to the website, information can be accessed by all parties without visiting the location. (Sihite, 2016) The location of a representative private university, both the building's location and its layout, is certainly one of the factors that attract prospective students.

The UMP campus is located in a strategic area in Purwokerto, Central Java. Spanning tens of hectares, this campus offers a comfortable, conducive learning environment for students. In addition to the beautiful environment, UMP is surrounded by two large state universities that also received Ugnggu accreditation, namely UIN KH Saefuddin Zuhri and Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, and to the south is the Putra Bangsa campus, which is also a famous university. A situation like this can increase the atmosphere of academic competition.

This private university that promotes Islam provides various support services to ensure the entire academic community can benefit. Universities will be increasingly known if they have complete lecture facilities. The following is a list of supporting facilities provided by the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto: Library, A.K. Ansori Auditorium, Internet Access and Broadband, Sports Facilities, and Mosque.

Since 2020, UMP has had a Digital Forensics Center (DFC). The existence of a digital forensics laboratory is considered important for a center of knowledge, research, and analysis of cybercrime cases. And UMP is the first campus in Indonesia to have a digital forensics laboratory. In his remarks, the Chancellor said, "As a campus, we have a responsibility to help the government, society, and the police in solving problems through the digital forensics system. So our existence is in order to help the police, or other institutions that require digital forensics, we are ready to help," (Source, Suara Muhammadiyah, 2020)

In management, the DFC Laboratory comprises 10 experienced information technology lecturers. According to the head of management, the laboratory plays a very strategic role because the rapid, uncontrolled development of digital technology has led to an increasing number of cyber incidents. So efforts need to be made to improve capabilities in cybersecurity and digital forensics. For this reason, we prepare human resources with the ability in this field so they can meet the industry's needs.

4. Personal Traits

Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto, until 2024, has 10 Professors. This shows that human resources, especially lecturers, have superior competence to provide services to students. The number of professors will increase each year, as the university has provided facilities and incentives for lecturers who publish articles in Scopus-indexed journals.

In a professor's inauguration event, the Chancellor stated that by 2027, UMP would increase the number of professors threefold. He said, "We have the capital to later take care of around 38 more professors." (Rector's Speech at the Inauguration of Professor Pujiharto. 2024) In line with this statement, the Human Resources Bureau said that the quality of human resources, especially lecturers, continues to be improved. One of the efforts is the development and further study of lecturers, carried out in a programmed manner (UMP Public Relations News, 2023).

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In fact, the Vice Rector 1 for Academic and Cooperation Affairs stated that UMP remains enthusiastic about improving lecturers' qualifications and competencies. He stated that in the last five years, UMP has sent lecturers, both incumbent and non-incumbent, to doctoral studies. With this policy, it is hoped that UMP will soon harvest doctors. In the past four years, UMP has been harvesting doctors. One month can produce 4 to 5 doctors.

However, the number of lecturers who already hold the positions of lector and head lector is above 50 percent, or 255. This comparison is quite good because lecturers in the *lektor* position already have the authority to conduct independent research. So, they can invite and train students to conduct research. To accelerate lecturers' rank advancement, UMP has provided various services and support.

5. Process

In higher education, a process involves lecture services such as the process for prospective new students, the process during lectures for all students, and the post-lecture process for alumni or students who have graduated. This is certainly a process that must be considered by all higher education institutions because it is closely related to student activities. According to the Head of the Academic Bureau, the implementation of lectures at UMP adheres to the Semester Credit System, which includes student study load, lecturer workload, learning experience, and program implementation load.

In one year, lectures are divided into semesters with an effective learning activity time of 16 (sixteen) weeks. Semester Credit Unit Semester credit unit, hereinafter abbreviated as Study Plan Card (SKS), is the measurement of learning activity time charged to students per week per semester in the learning process through various forms of learning or the amount of recognition for the success of student efforts in participating in curricular activities in a study program (Interview; Academic Bureau. 2024.

To support student competence and competitiveness, UMP holds an English Enrichment Program (Equivalent to Diploma One) and a TOEFL-like Test Program. All Bachelor's and Diploma students are required to take the English Enrichment Program (PPBI) with a load of 16 credits, except for students in the English Education S-1 and English Literature S-1 study programs. This provision applies to students starting from the 2000-2001 academic year. Meanwhile, for transfer students, the provision is to take the Official TOEFL ITP Certificate with a minimum score of 450, IELTS with a minimum score of 4.5, iBT with a minimum score of 41, or TOEIC with a minimum score of 550 as a substitute for the English Enrichment Program certificate. (UMP Academic Guide Document, 2023)

6. Physical Evidence

On one occasion, the Rector of UMP, Jebul Suroso, said that UMP had prepared various devices and media for face-to-face learning, including the 'hybrid learning' model. In this face-to-face learning, the lecture room capacity, which can actually accommodate 60 students, will be reduced by a third, so that each room is filled with only 20 students. Meanwhile, other students will attend lectures outside the campus, either outside the room or at their respective homes, using their smartphones or computers. Furthermore, he said that the hybrid lectures will be implemented in all faculties and study programs at UMP. This is a form of the University's commitment to providing face-to-face learning services that meet needs. The following is a circular from the Chancellor to implement hybrid lectures, and this policy cannot be denied in the COVID-19 era. Below is the circular from the Rector to be carried out by the investigators.

It should be noted that UMP has achieved a ranking of 39 as the Top Islamic University in the world, a ranking of 59 among the best universities in Indonesia according to Unirank (4icu), and recognition as one of the 50 best private universities according to the Webometrics release (ump.ac.id). In addition, the PPG UMP also achieved the highest ranking in the percentage of passing the 2020 PPG Student Competency Test (UKMPPG) for Muhammadiyah Higher Education (PTM) Level, ranking 4th at the national level. Other recognitions obtained by UMP include obtaining a Superior certificate in Six International Classes and ISO 9001:2015 certification from two Quality Assurance and Instructional Activity Development Institutions (LPMPAI) and the Language Development Center (LDC).

7. Brand Preference of UMP

Students certainly have different considerations and reasons for choosing a university to continue their education. The various aspects that are considered include tightness, education costs, socio-economic status, educational facilities, college reputation, study program image, study program prospects, environment, interests, motivation, and alumni success. In addition, Mehboob et al. (2012) explained that 11 factors influence college choice, namely aspiration factors, attitudes, career guidance, academic programs, education costs, college reputation, promotions, facilities, availability of financial assistance, and parental factors.

Purchasing decisions are a stage in the decision-making process in which consumers actually buy. The purchasing decision process is a consumer behavior to determine a decision development process in purchasing a product. The purchasing decision-making process consists of various stages and factors that influence it. As the research objective in Chapter I, the researcher intends to analyze whether the marketing mix can increase students' brand preference in college.

Students choose UMP as a place to study for various reasons, such as the quality of the institution, a good academic atmosphere, favorite study programs, affordable boarding house living, and easily accessible transportation. Conditions like these can increase brand preference.

However, only a few aspects are likely to influence student decision-making, such as tuition fees, the study program's image, educational facilities, and prospects for the study program. Tuition fees are among the factors prospective students consider when choosing an education, taking into account their own ability and their parents' ability to pay and finance their needs. Tuition fees are a very important component of educational planning; without financial support, the educational process will not run smoothly.

With a decreasing tuition fee model, students do not feel burdened and perceive it as cheaper than the Single Tuition Fee at State Universities, which use a flat model. This tuition fee model is also used in the trade world. This psychological impression influences a person's brand choice.

In addition to tuition fees, image is the impression a university leaves in students' minds. The image of a university is the public's perception or impression of it. A superior university certainly has a good image too. If a university has a positive image in the public eye, prospective students will form the impression that it has high quality.

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As part of the University's marketing strategy to increase enthusiasm and choice among prospective students, UMP has boosted brand preference in the community. Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that location, price, and promotion factors significantly affect consumer perception. Meanwhile, product, facility, and university image factors can enhance the community's brand preference. If the product, facility, and developer image factors increase, consumer perceptions of the decision to choose a study program at the university tend to increase. Rustandi (2012) stated that products influence perception; in addition, Tjiptono (2008) stated that the basis for making purchasing decisions can be seen through product attributes. As evidence, the following graph shows the number of students over the last five years.



The Sum of New Students of UMP for Five Years in Percentage

No	Faculty	%	No	Faculty	%
1	Healthy Science	18.5	7	KIP	13.4
2	Culture and Communication	2.1	8	Magister	13.2
3	Law	4.2	9	Islamic Religion	2,2
4	Farming and Fishing	4.8	10	Technic dan science	4.1
5	Medical	3.3	11	Farmasi	7.7
6	Psychology	8.3	12	Economic Business	18,3
	Total				100

From the figure above, it can be seen that the most enthusiasm or choice is among the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Economics and Business. This choice is not wrong because both faculties have a theoretically wide job market. Furthermore, at the undergraduate level, the Faculty of Culture and Communication and the Faculty of Islamic Religion rank lowest, at 2.1% and 2.2%, respectively. This does not apply to the Faculty of Medicine, which only gets 3.3%. This faculty can be said to have little enthusiasm, not because prospective students are not interested in the faculty, but because the cost of education each semester reaches IDR 20,000,000. Meanwhile, according to the Academic Bureau, student numbers decreased in 2020, and student enthusiasm decreased as well, attributed to the Covid-19 outbreak, to 4023 students. As the Covid-19 outbreak subsided, the number of students accepted jumped to 6,716. The increase in the number of students, according to Eli Hasan, Dean of FIP, is due to virtual-based marketing strategies such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Interview, 2024).

By switching from conventional to virtual strategies, the reach of the target market is also increasingly unlimited by space. Therefore, information about UMP can be accessed by everyone, anywhere, and at any time. Why can this happen? Because the UMP website, which contains university information, offers a choice of languages, it is very easy for people with different languages to access. Meanwhile, in the 2023-2024 academic year, there was a decrease of 469. The University has not evaluated the decrease in brand choices to identify the cause. However, the number of active UMP students is, to date, 13811. This condition makes UMP rank 10th in the most favorite universities in Central Java (Detikedu, Accessed, 2024).

E. CONCLUSION

Of the 7 P's, as an indicator of the marketing mix, product is UMP's flagship program and has been successfully implemented. The programs include obtaining the excellent (*Unggul*) accreditation status and marketing cooperation with Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (UMKM). This UMKM cooperation is in direct contact with the community, making it easier for the institution's image to be enhanced. Because the community can directly feel the benefits of UMP's activities, including mentoring and consulting. In addition to the accreditation of the institution and the study program, providing scholarships to students will also be a priority.

The marketing mix implemented by UMP has a real impact on the community's brand preference as a place to study. This brand preference is

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evidenced by the number of new students each year. Student data over the last three years shows a significant upward trend, though 2020 saw a decline due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Promotional activities are conducted through billboards in strategic locations, campus banners, websites, brochures, and online media promotions. This model is an effective way to disseminate information to the public. The success of an educational institution's marketing strategy is inextricably linked to its ability to create and maintain a positive image. Marketing strategies can significantly shape an educational institution's perception. The implementation of marketing strategies at UMP has resulted in a notable increase in public trust.

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