

## Higher Education Institution Marketing: Factors Influencing Students' Decision To Choose Politeknik Negeri Medan (POLMED)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing students' decisions to choose Politeknik Negeri Medan (POLMED) as their higher education institution. Higher education in Indonesia has experienced rapid development; however, competition among educational institutions has become increasingly intense. With a large number of both public and private higher education institutions, the challenge faced by each institution is how to compete and attract prospective students. POLMED, as one of the state universities in North Sumatra, must be able to implement effective marketing strategies to attract students. The research method used is a qualitative approach, with in-depth interviews conducted with students at POLMED. The findings indicate that the marketing strategies applied by POLMED, such as collaborations with schools, promotion through social media, and the organization of campus events, have proven to be effective in enhancing POLMED's visibility among prospective students. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in digital marketing. Students suggest that POLMED should improve its digital content to be more engaging and relevant to the interests of the younger generation, such as videos showcasing campus activities, alumni testimonials, and more detailed information about the advantages of vocational education.

**Keywords:** Higher education, marketing, POLMED.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with a population of approximately 282.5 million people, is a country rich in diversity and faces significant challenges in improving the quality of education. Since its independence, Indonesia has set the goal of advancing the intellectual life of the nation, as stated in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution. Achieving equitable education has been one of the primary focuses of the nation, from primary education to higher education (Brewis, 2019).

Over time, the Indonesian education system has undergone rapid development. Beginning with the "Sekolah Rakyat" during the colonial era, which later transformed into elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, and eventually higher

education institutions, these changes reflect Indonesia's commitment to enhancing human resource quality (Rosser et al., 2022). However, with the progress of time, new challenges have emerged, particularly in improving the quality of education that can compete at the international level. According to a global survey, 67% of Indonesians in 2023 have a strong aspiration to work abroad (Mediana, 2024), indicating that competition in the job market is increasingly intense, both domestically and internationally.

Currently, nearly every province in Indonesia has higher education institutions that young people can choose to gain the knowledge and skills needed in the workforce. Data from (Siahaan, 2025) indicates that there are 2,937 higher education institutions in Indonesia, distributed across various

provinces, including 235 public universities and 2,812 private universities. Access for the younger generation to obtain higher education is now easier. However, with the abundance of choices, the challenge faced by each higher education institution is how they can compete and attract prospective students (KUSUMAWATI, 2019).

In this regard, higher education institution marketing becomes extremely important. Every university must be able to market itself effectively to become known to prospective students (Ng et al., 2019). Effective marketing not only includes academic promotion but also the facilities, flagship programs, and institutional reputation that can serve as key attractions for prospective students. Politeknik Negeri Medan (POLMED), as one of the public higher education institutions in North Sumatra, is one such institution that must ensure that its marketing efforts reach and attract student interest.

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing students in choosing Politeknik Negeri Medan as a place to continue their higher education. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide deeper insights into effective marketing strategies for higher education institutions, as well as their contribution to the selection of educational institutions by prospective students.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Higher Education Institution Marketing

Marketing is a key element in ensuring the success and sustainability of a higher education institution. According to (Wu & Li, 2018), marketing can be defined as the process of creating value for customers and building long-term relationships with them, with the aim of receiving value from the customers. In the context of higher education institutions, marketing encompasses efforts to attract prospective students through the appropriate promotion of the values and facilities offered by the institution.

(Rohim, 2019) add that marketing is also a social process where individuals or groups fulfill their needs and wants by creating, offering, and freely trading valuable products or services. In this case, the "product" refers to the educational programs and services provided by the higher education institution. Marketing in higher education institutions does not solely focus on academic promotion, but also involves offering campus experiences, facilities, reputation, and industry relations, which are key factors in attracting the interest of prospective students (Elken, 2019).

According to (Stukalina, 2019) the marketing strategy for higher education institutions is a comprehensive, integrated plan to promote educational products and related services. In this context, the marketing strategy aims to create a positive image and differentiate the institution from its competitors. An effective marketing strategy is expected to increase the number of applicants, strengthen student loyalty, and generate a good public image, which in turn contributes to the success of the institution.

### Perception in University Selection

Perception is the process by which an individual organizes and interprets information to assign meaning to their environment. (Kumar et al., 2022) states that perception is the process in which a person organizes and interprets sensory impressions to understand objects or events happening around them. In the context of selecting a university, prospective students' perceptions of a higher education institution can be influenced by various factors, such as the institution's image, the facilities offered, the programs available, and the experiences of previous students.

(Wolff, 2019) defines perception as the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret incoming information to form meaningful representations. This perception is crucial in the context of university marketing because how prospective students perceive an

institution greatly influences their decision to choose it. A positive perception of the quality of education, facilities, and the institution's reputation can encourage prospective students to choose a particular university (Chandra et al., 2019).

Kervyn et al., 2022) also emphasizes that perception is influenced by various factors, including the perceiver, the perceived object, and the contextual situation in which the perception is formed. In this regard, students' perceptions of Politeknik Negeri Medan will be influenced by how they receive information about the institution, whether through media, personal experiences, or recommendations from others. This perception will influence their decision to apply and participate in the educational programs offered.

#### **Factors Influencing University Selection**

The selection of a university by prospective students is influenced by various factors, including economic, social, and academic factors, as well as the information received regarding the quality of education and available facilities (Delavande & Zafar, 2019). Furthermore, the growing access to information through the internet and social media plays a significant role in shaping prospective students' perceptions. Therefore, understanding these factors is crucial for higher education institutions in formulating effective marketing strategies to attract prospective students.

### **3. METHOD**

The method used in this study is qualitative with a descriptive approach. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained through in-depth interviews with active students from Politeknik Negeri Medan (POLMED), while secondary data is obtained from literature related to higher education institution marketing, Polmed's annual reports, and other published documents.

The instrument used in this research is semi-structured interviews, focusing on questions related to students' perceptions of POLMED's marketing strategies, including the media used, the quality of information received, and the influence of factors such as social media and word of mouth on their decision to choose Polmed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and with the consent of each respondent. In addition to the interviews, the author also collected secondary data from documents and reports related to marketing and promotional activities conducted by Polmed. The results of the interviews, which have been analyzed, are then combined with the secondary data to provide a more comprehensive picture of Polmed's marketing strategies.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Marketing for educational institutions, particularly higher education, is essential as it helps attract and retain students, improve the institution's image, and meet societal needs. The societal needs referred to here are the demands of an ever-changing era, where people need to develop their knowledge and skills to survive. Currently, the competition within educational institutions can be categorized as hyper-competition, where public universities are not only competing with other public universities but also with private universities.

The abundance of public universities and private universities in Indonesia allows the younger generation to choose which university suits their passions and aspirations. In North Sumatra alone, there are 5 public universities and 218 private universities that serve as choices for the people of the region. It is also important to note that people from around the world now have the freedom to pursue education in any country they desire, and vice versa.

Politeknik Negeri Medan, as one of the public universities in North Sumatra, continues to enhance its existence to remain the preferred choice for high-quality higher



education. Currently, Politeknik Negeri Medan educates over 5,500 students and has graduated more than 20,000 alumni who have worked in various industrial sectors. To remain the preferred choice for the younger generation, Politeknik Negeri Medan must continue to follow developments and implement optimal marketing to maintain its status as a top educational institution. The customers of higher education institutions are stakeholders that include society, industry, government, and the academic community within the institution (Falqueto et al., 2020).

In its efforts to attract customers, Politeknik Negeri Medan has employed several strategies to increase its visibility, such as collaborating with several high schools in North Sumatra, promoting through high school heads, and utilizing social media marketing.

To strengthen the analysis in this study, the author conducted interviews with students of Politeknik Negeri Medan. This approach was taken because the current generation of students, Gen Z, is the generation that has witnessed the rapid development of technology (YALÇIN İNCİK, 2022). This is useful to better understand the perceptions of the younger generation regarding the types of marketing strategies required in an era of technological advancement. A student named Ester shared her opinion:

*"In my opinion, Politeknik Negeri Medan has a strong marketing strategy. We can see the official website, where people can learn many things about the campus, such as information about campus activities, available programs, facilities, industry partnerships, and many other things that we can easily know. Politeknik Negeri Medan also frequently holds events that indirectly have the potential to make POLMED more popular. One of the most influential marketing strategies is word of mouth, meaning it spreads through personal stories from alumni, seniors, teachers, neighbors, or even parents."*

From Ester's statement, it is clear that word of mouth has a significant impact on the

success of campus marketing. Another student, Nazwa Fachira, added:

*"From what I've observed, POLMED is quite active in promoting the campus through activities such as the annual job fair and anniversary celebrations. Recently, POLMED also participated in the Bandung Campus Update 2025 event held in Bandung. This event, attended by various public and private universities, provided an opportunity for POLMED to attract prospective students from outside Sumatra. However, in terms of digital promotion, improvements are still needed. For example, the content should be more engaging and informative, which helps enhance the campus's image in the public eye. Positive activities from students should be posted more frequently, along with alumni testimonials. Alumni promoting the campus is a powerful attraction and gives confidence to prospective students in choosing POLMED."*

Based on the statement, it is evident that POLMED holds an annual job fair during its anniversary celebrations, which is a good marketing strategy for the campus. If the job fair is held within the POLMED environment, the public who attend will indirectly see the campus facilities and observe how students engage in campus activities. Additionally, POLMED's participation in national promotional events opens up opportunities to attract prospective students from outside Sumatra.

However, despite the marketing efforts undertaken by Politeknik Negeri Medan, there is still room for improvement in digital promotion. Kayla Sabina also commented:

*"In today's digital era, campus promotion cannot rely solely on brochures or educational fairs; it must also be active on social media, such as Instagram, because young people today are more likely to search for information about campuses on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Currently, Politeknik Negeri*

*Medan has implemented digital marketing strategies by involving local influencers to promote the Tenank café managed by POLMED, which shows that the campus is quite adaptive in using social media for marketing. However, the marketing strategy and digital content must be updated to be more relevant to the needs of the education market today."*

Finally, a student named Joel shared his opinion:

*"Marketing can be enhanced by increasing promotion through social media, the campus website, and other digital platforms by featuring alumni success stories to attract prospective students and build POLMED's image as a superior vocational campus that prepares students for the workforce."*

Based on the interviews conducted by the author with several students, it is clear that Politeknik Negeri Medan has carried out marketing efforts to promote the campus to the public and attract interest in studying at the institution. Politeknik Negeri Medan has also displayed information about new student admissions on its official website.



**Figure 1.** POLMED 2025 New Student Admissions Brochure

The information displayed on the POLMED website and Instagram is considered insufficient by the younger generation, particularly students, who are seeking clearer digital content. This generation desires more engaging content, such as videos showcasing student activities on campus, testimonials from alumni, and detailed explanations of vocational

advantages. Students agree that attractive content can capture the interest of a greater number of prospective students. By showcasing testimonials or videos from successful alumni working in various sectors, the public and young people will be more convinced that Politeknik Negeri Medan is an institution that excels in educating the next generation, producing outstanding alumni who are accepted across various industries.

A study conducted by Adiyono et al. (2021) shows that online marketing strategies through social media have proven effective in increasing sales and business popularity. The research indicates that using social media as a promotional platform allows businesses to reach their target market more efficiently and effectively. Through creative, informative, and engaging content, businesses can capture the attention of potential customers and influence their purchasing decisions. This finding aligns with higher education institution marketing, where creative, informative, and engaging content can attract the attention of the public and the younger generation, influencing their decisions on choosing an educational institution to pursue their studies and achieve their dreams.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that marketing in higher education institutions, particularly Politeknik Negeri Medan, plays a crucial role in influencing students' decisions in choosing a higher education institution. Various marketing strategies implemented by Polmed, such as partnerships with schools, social media promotion, and campus events, have proven effective in increasing the campus's visibility in the eyes of prospective students. However, despite the positive outcomes from the marketing efforts already in place, there is still room for improvement, especially in digital marketing. More engaging and relevant digital content tailored to the interests of the younger generation, such as videos showcasing campus activities, alumni testimonials, and in-depth information about



the advantages of vocational education, is essential to enhance Polmed's appeal. This is crucial for Polmed to maintain its competitiveness in the face of intense competition among higher education institutions. Overall, the findings indicate that although Polmed has carried out marketing strategies effectively, enhancing digital marketing strategies and utilizing social media platforms more creatively and informatively will further strengthen Polmed's position as the top choice for prospective students.

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