

The Relationship Marketing Communication Strategy During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Islamic Schools in Yogyakarta

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Abstract— This paper investigates how educational institutions implement relationship marketing communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework used is a model that integrates the development of marketing relationships with marketing communication practices. The approach taken was a case study – qualitative research of 3 Islamic schools in Yogyakarta, namely SDIT Hidayatullah, SDIT Salsabila and SDIT Darussalam Selokerto. By reviewing school promotion tools, complemented by interviews of school management, the authors provide a case study of 3 Islamic Schools in Yogyakarta effectively employed the relational marketing communication strategy practices. The results showed several essential components in the relationship marketing communication strategy developed by Islamic schools. The schools build a deep interaction process relationship marketing and design the planned communication process in relationship marketing. In addition, Islamic Schools enhance the relationship marketing dialogue. Finally, they strengthen the relationship value process marketing. The findings indicate that school administrators can use relationship marketing communication to improve the school's image, leading to the increased public interest in choosing the school.

Keywords—*Relationship Marketing Communication, Islamic School*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on educational institutions. The pandemic has changed the learning process and changed the strategy of schools in conducting marketing communications.

Communication is a prerequisite for building trust among exchange partners. The quality and sharing of information influence the success of relationships and are a central part of the relationship atmosphere. In marketing relationships, communication plays a significant role in understanding the exchange partners' intentions and capabilities, thus forming the groundwork for relationship development. Moreover, communication informs the exchange actors when developing their conception of the prospective partner's exchange intentions. Hence, careful design of communication means and forms may play a decisive role in the relationship marketing process.

The process of interaction in communication becomes an essential component in marketing activities that can integrate

a communication plan that utilizes various promotional channels. A planned communication process is the marketing communications support through different communications media and a customer value process as the outcome of relationship marketing. If the interaction and designed communication processes are successfully integrated and geared towards customers' value processes, a relationship dialogue may merge [1]

Relationship Marketing is a process for creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong relationships with customers and other stakeholders [2] [3]. The relationship is a relationship between sellers and buyers and a long-term relationship that provides benefits to customers continuously, both current customers and new customers. A company needs to build a good relationship with its customers to maintain its existence. A good relationship will foster a good impression in the minds of customers.

Relationship marketing is a way for companies to get to know customers more closely by creating two-way communication to produce mutually beneficial relationships between customers and the company (Chan, 2003: 6).[4]

The three strategic issues in relationship marketing are: (1) defining the firm as a service business; (2) managing the firm from a process management perspective; (3) developing partnerships and networks. [5].

Relationship marketing has emerged as one of the dominant mantras in business strategy circles. The study shows that relationship marketing is more effective when relationships are more critical to customers (e.g., service offerings, channel exchanges, business markets) and when a company builds relationships with an individual rather than a selling firm. [6]

Developing long-term relationships with key stakeholders is an essential strategy in today's intensely competitive business environment. However, relationship marketing is a viable strategy in such contexts as high levels of social exchange, business-to-consumer marketing, and nonprofit marketing. The success of Relationship marketing in exchange relationships is related to 2 essential things, namely (1) involve individuals and (2) are based primarily on social exchange. The essence of these activities is to decrease exchange uncertainty and create customer collaboration and commitment through gradual development and ongoing

adjustment of mutual norms and shared routines. Several relationship marketing scholars agree that communication is a fundamental aspect of relationship development. [7]

The relationship marketing approach is widely used in educational institutions to develop their marketing communication strategies. J. Beneke and G. Human (2010) studied that changes in the competitive environment, primarily spurred by restrictions in government funding and an increase of educational service providers in the market, have forced higher education institutions to become more proactive terms of student recruitment. In response, many institutions have turned to corporate principles to run their operations and recruit their 'customers' (that is, the students themselves) [8]. Due to the changing competitive landscape in education, it becomes vital to understand how families select schools for their children. The management can apply several marketing principles in-school marketing, including elements of the marketing mix in a context unique to the competitive climate in which today's educators are operating. [9].

In the context of higher education, to anticipate rapid environmental changes, education practitioners are recommended to adopt a relationship marketing approach to the management of higher education services. Increasingly organizations are recognizing the value of establishing close relationships with their customers. Notably, while relationship strength determines loyalty in other service contexts, the loyalty drivers remain the same despite the power of the relationship students perceived with their institution. The study suggests the need for a more comprehensive, involved, and proactive strategy to developing, managing, and maintaining the student–university relationship. [10]

Many elements affect the sustainability of an educational institution. Therefore we need the right marketing strategy. There are three models of service marketing, namely external marketing, internal marketing, and interactive marketing. Educational institutions as organizations that offer services can use this marketing approach. [11]

External marketing is a typical service marketing activity carried out by educational institutions to promote their products, create strong bonds with customers, and build long-term relationships. Educational institutions need to prepare the 7Ps of the marketing mix according to the concept of Booms and Bitner, which include product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, process. [2]. Internal marketing is related to the concept of excellent service, which allows educational institutions to generate motivation, work morale, pride, loyalty, and a sense of belonging to everyone in the organization to contribute to service marketing. Meanwhile, interactive marketing is a marketing model that builds interaction between customers and all human resources in the organization. It is related to the concept of Total Quality Service, which provides satisfaction to customers so that it will maintain a long-term relationship with the organization.

Research on Islamic school marketing concludes that promotions carried out by Islamic schools prioritize promotions that utilize kinship, networking, and highlight outstanding students in promotional materials. (Supar, 2014: 169). [12]

Other research shows that Islamic educational institutions are constantly trying to improve the quality of their education to build public trust. In addition, Islamic educational institutions are also trying to develop harmonious cooperation with the public through public relations activities. Public relations in education management are part of management activities related to building pleasant collaboration between schools and their public, both internal and external. [13]

Rahmawaty (2015), in her research on the Sharia Relationship Marketing Model, explains the dimensions in relationship marketing: bonding, empathy, reciprocity, trust, commitment, shared values, communication, conflict handling, and compliance with sharia or Islamic law as distinctive elements in sharia relationship marketing. Shariah relationship marketing built through bonding, communication, commitment, complaint handling, trust, and sharia compliance has a significant relationship to customer satisfaction and loyalty. [14]

It is interesting to examine how the schools develop the relationship marketing communication during the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper aims to investigate how educational institutions implement relationship marketing communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. METHOD

The study uses a qualitative research method. Data collection techniques used in the study were in-depth interviews and literature studies. The following are the informants interviewed in this study: Muhammad Rifki Saputra, S.Pd.I (Principal of SDIT Hidayatullah, Tuswan (administrative staff of SDIT Hidayatullah), Saryo, S.Pd, M.Pd (Principal of SDIT Salsabila), Mohammad Hasan SHI (Principal of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto), Muhatrom Ma'arif Suaz, S.Sos (Teacher of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto), Martina Winahju, A. Md (administrative staff of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto). Subsequently, the data acquired from the field were processed and simplified, then systematically compiled to conclude.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Schools Profile

SDIT Hidayatullah Yogyakarta is an Islamic school owned by the Yogyakarta Assakinah Foundation. This school is one of the activities of Hidayatullah, a national organization engaged in da'wah, social, and education in Indonesia. Hidayatullah has many educational institutions in schools (kindergarten, elementary, junior high, high school), Islamic boarding schools, and universities spread across various regions in Indonesia.

SDIT Hidayatullah Yogyakarta was established in July 1998. In 2006 this school achieved Accredited A status based on the School Accreditation Board of Sleman Regency assessment. In 2021, SDIT Hidayatullah has a total of 621 students, 79 teachers, and nine employees. The maximum capacity for new students each year is 112 students (divided into four classes, each class consists of 28 students)—the location of this school at Jl. Student Army Palace Km 14.5 Balong, Donoharjo, Ngaglik, Sleman, Special Region of Yogyakarta. The market segment of this school is students

with parents from the upper-middle class while still providing opportunities for students from the poor.

This school has a vision of becoming an educational institution of high quality and excellence. Its institutional mission is to become a quality school that cares for the poor. At the same time, the academic mission is to organize education integrally in soul, mind, and body. It can educate generations of Muslims who have the characteristics: devout, intellectual, and excellent physique. It can give birth to humans who are ready to carry out the mandate of Allah as His servant and caliph.

Meanwhile, SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo is an Islamic school owned by the Indonesian Child Lovers Silaturrahim Foundation (SPA). The SPA Indonesia Foundation has a school network consisting of 16 pre-school, kindergarten, elementary to junior high schools in several cities, such as Yogyakarta, Purworejo, Magetan, and West Kutai. The Foundation also has a university, namely: the Yogyakarta "Bina Insan Mulia" Education College.

This school was founded in 2015 and is a branch of SDIT Salsabila Klaseman which was established in 2001. It is located in Brayut, Pandowoharjo, Sleman, Yogyakarta. In 2021 this school has 143 students, 19 teachers and 2 employees. Setiap tahun sekolah ini menargetkan menerima 28 murid (1 kelas).

The vision of this school is: "Creating a Golden Indonesian Generation with the spirit of the Qur'an in 2045 who is capable, intellectual, and has a noble character." While the missions are: (1) Carrying out learning based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet with an active, creative, practical, innovative, and fun learning approach, (2) Implementing noble character habituation, (3) Implementing training to grow the basics of life skills, (4) Implement personal mentoring programs according to children's talents, interests, and potentials, and (5) Build a culture of independent learning in reading, writing, counting, and working.

The market segment of this school is students whose parents are of upper-middle socioeconomic status and have a good understanding of Islam. The advantages of the school offered are: Tahfidzul Qur'an and instilling a leadership spirit in students. The tagline of this school is: capable, scholarly, noble

The next school is SDIT Darussalam Selokerto. The Darussalam Selokerto Foundation, as the owner, found this school in 2011. By 2021 the school has 91 students, 12 teachers, and two employees. The tagline of this school is: educating a generation that prospers mosques that are smart and have noble character. The school's vision is: To be a monotheistic-based school that enlivens the sunnah, to educate students to be righteous, noble, and achievers. Meanwhile, the missions are (1) Developing curriculum and learning methods based on monotheism, reviving the sunnah, educating the brain, as well as awakening the soul, (2) Building a culture of noble character and a culture of achievement in schools, (3) Caring and committed to helping orphans and the poor, and (4) Developing an excellent and quality-oriented school management system.

The target market of this school is people who want to send their children to Islamic schools with affordable costs

and good quality. This school offers an Islamic curriculum combined with the Ministry of Education and Culture curriculum. The advantages offered are the Tahfidzul Qur'an Program, Arabic, and character education. The tagline of this school is: Smart and noble.

TABLE I. THE PROFILES OF 3 ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

No	Element	SDIT Hidayatullah	SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo	SDIT Darussalam Selokerto
1.	Founded in	1998	2015	2011
2.	Founder/owner	"Assakinah Yogyakarta" Foundation	"Silaturrahmi Pecinta Anak Indonesia" Foundation	"Darussalam Selokerto" Foundation
3.	Segmentation	Middle up	Middle up	Lower middle
5.	Distinguishing advantage	-Tahfidzul Qur'an -UMMI Method of Al-Qur'an Learning -Character Class	-Tahfidzul Qur'an -Pendidikan Leadership	-Tahfidzul Qur'an -Adab Learning -Science & Technology
6.	Tagline	Tawheed, Superior, Character	Proficient, scholarly, noble	Smart, noble
7.	School fee	Admission fee for new students: Rp 9.725.000 – Rp. 11.885.000 -monthly school fees: Rp. 508.500	Admission fee for new students: Rp 6.690.000 – Rp. 7.940.000 -monthly school fees: Rp.425.000	Admission fee for new students: Rp. 3.450.000 -monthly school fees: Rp.200.000

B. The School Marketing Communication Strategy before the Covid-19 Pandemic

Marketing communication is one of the essential elements in Islamic school management. Based on interviews with sources at 3 Islamic schools, in typical situations, before the Covid-19 pandemic, schools used various types of marketing communication tools (promotion mix). The school plans and implements integrated marketing communication, using several tools, namely: (1) Publicity and Public Relations, (2) Advertising, (3) Direct Marketing, (4) Personal Selling, (5) Organizing Events and (6) Utilizing the Website and Social Media.

At SDIT Hidayatullah, according to the school principal, Muhammad Rifki Saputra, S.Pd.I before the Covid-19 pandemic, the school, held various forms of promotion to get new students. Upgrades are carried out continuously throughout the year. The largest source of new students at his school came from Yaa Bunayya Kindergarten, a kindergarten that the Yogyakarta Assakinah Foundation also owns. Although it already has a stable fixed market share, SDIT Hidayatullah continues to carry out promotional activities in various ways, from establishing relationships with the media, advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, organizing events, and utilizing websites and media.

According to Saryo, S.Pd, M.Pd, his school is actively carrying out public relations activities, including media

relations, community relations, and government relations. Activities for the community include slaughtering sacrificial animals on Eid al-Adha, Ramadan social services, and providing scholarships for students. For advertising, schools use radio media for promotion and various forms of promotional media such as calendars, brochures, and pamphlets. Promotional activities at SDIT Salsabila Pandowo Harjo also utilize different promotional channels. In addition, before the Covid-19 pandemic, this school held many events that invited prospective students from various kindergartens through various competitions. In addition, the school organizes parenting seminars, kindergarten teachers for parents and teachers. The school optimizes websites and social media to promote by sharing the latest information about schools.

At SDIT Darussalam Selokerto, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the school held various forms of promotion, such as activating school public relations activities, making banners, brochures, pamphlets, direct selling, personal selling, holding events, and utilizing school website and social media. As described in detail below:

"Before the Covid-19 pandemic, our school was actively carrying out public relations activities by establishing good relations with the media, community, and government. For advertising, we do not place paid advertising in the mass media but make banners and brochures. For Personal Selling, we involve teachers to participate in promoting the school directly. Direct Marketing uses direct mail and WhatsApp Groups. On the other hand, we also use the website and social media to promote the school. (Interview, Mohammad Hasan, SHI, Head of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto).

The following is an overview of the marketing communication strategies of 3 Islamic schools before the Covid-19 pandemic:

TABLE II. MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF 3 ISLAMIC SCHOOLS BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

No	Marketing Communication Tools	SDIT Hidayatullah	SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo	SDIT Darussalam Selokerto
1.	Publicity and Public Relations	-Media relations -Community relations -Government relations.	-Media relations -Community relations -Government relations.	-Media relations -Community relations -Government relations.
2.	Advertising	Print media advertisements, Radio advertisements, Calendars, Brochures, Flyers, and Pamphlets.	Radio ads, Calendars, Banners, Brochures, and pamphlets.	Calendars, Banners, Brochures, and Pamphlets.
3.	Direct Marketing	Direct Mail, Whatsapp Group	Direct Mail, Whatsapp Group	Direct Mail, Whatsapp Group
5.	Personal Selling	-	-	Teachers promote the school directly to prospective students and their parents

6.	Event Organizing	Seminars, general recitations, fairy tales for children, various competitions for kindergarten	Parenting class, general recitations, various competitions for kindergarten	Recitations, various competitions for kindergarten
7.	Utilization of the Website and Social Media	Website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, telegram, Whatsapp group	Website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, telegram, Whatsapp group	Website, Facebook, Instagram, youtube, Whatsapp group

Based on the table above, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the 3 Islamic schools were actively carrying out various promotional activities by combining activities that utilize communication media and direct activities by holding multiple promotional events in the form of face-to-face meetings with parents and candidates. New students include general recitation, parenting seminars, fairy tales for children, competitions for children, kindergarten teacher workshops, and various other activities.

C. The School Relationship Marketing Communication Strategy during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted all school activities, including learning activities, new student admissions, and marketing communication activities. School management tries to implement various strategies to manage the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including managing school marketing communication activities.

At SDIT, Hidayatullah Yogyakarta, according to the school principal, Muhammad Rifki Saputra, S.Pd.I., Covid-19, affects the acquisition of new students. Here is the explanation:

"Usually, in February, the quota for new students is usually 80-90% filled. But during the pandemic, there was a significant decline. The declining economy of the community has an impact on the decline in the number of registrants. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, our Foundation has taken a policy not to increase school fees for new students" (Interview, Muhammad Rifki Saputra, S.Pd.I., Principal of SDIT Hidayatullah Yogyakarta).

The Covid-19 pandemic has also affected the acceptance of new students at SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo. According to Saryo, S.Pd., M.Pd (Principal of SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo), in 2020, when the pandemic began, around 15% of prospective new students who had registered stated that they had resigned and moved to public schools due to financial issues.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also affected the decline in the number of registrants at SDIT Darussalam. "Many people have been affected economically, so it has reduced interest in sending their children to private schools," said Mohammad Hasan, the school principal. "The policy is to reduce the education costs charged to students," said Tina Winahyu, the school treasurer.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 3 Islamic schools develop marketing communication based on the relationship marketing perspective. According to the Head of SDIT Hidayatullah, Muhammad Rifki Saputra, S.Pd.I and the administrative staff, Tuswan, this school develop suitable marketing relationships programs with students and parents, alumni, and the community, namely: (1) Improving the quality of educational services and facilities, (2) Establishing a Parents Forum, (3) Inviting parents to be involved in the learning process with the Learning from Experts program, (4) Inviting parents to make testimonials of school excellence and disseminated through social media. (5) creating the alumni database and the Alumni Forum, (6) inviting alumni to make testimonials about the school's excellence, (6) Organizing social service activities (social service, Qurban Eid al-Adha), (7) organizing Al-Qur'an education for children and recitation for parents.

The values that form the basis for building these relationships are excellent service, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Some of the programs implemented include: (1) improving the quality of online learning during the pandemic (2) Special services for tutoring, worship, and guidance on reading the Qur'an, (3) tutoring services for children with low cognitive and affective abilities, (5) implementation of home curriculum and independent learning.

SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo applies the principles of relationship marketing too. According to Saryo MPd (Principal of SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo), excellent service aims to gain student and parent satisfaction. For example, collecting school fees is attempted with the best possible communication. In addition, the school also seeks to provide a quick response to information needs and handle complaints from students and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. Relationships with alumni are also fostered and possible through social media and online events, such as online Ramadan Islamic boarding.

SDIT Darussalam Selokerto applies the principle of Relationship Marketing too. Mohammad Hasan SHI (Head of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto), Muhatrom Ma'arif Suaz, S.Sos (Teacher of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto), Martina Winahju, A.Md (administrative staff of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto), explained the school's strategy in establishing relationships with students and parents, alumni and the community. The school develops good relations with them through some principal and programs: (1) good communication and cooperation through school committee forums, (2) activating dialogue with parents through regular meetings, (3) involving parents actively promoting the school, (4) Involving alumni to become school representatives in school promoting, (5) establishing communication with community leaders, and (6) Providing scholarships or school fee reductions for residents around the school.

Regarding excellent service, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, school management developed several strategies, such as: (1) Responding quickly to complaints from parents regarding teaching and learning activities, (2) Providing services to student learning barriers during the Covid-19 pandemic, (3) Develop dialogue to find solutions together, and provide counseling assistance for students, (4)

Provide the best services to meet student needs, such as exemption or reduction of tuition fees, (5) Involve parents in developing school programs.

The principles of relationship marketing applied to the 3 Islamic schools above are the basis for developing marketing communication strategies during the pandemic.

SDIT Hidayatullah Yogyakarta, trying to develop a marketing communication strategy with a relationship marketing approach. The school sets promotions through its previously owned network, such as the Islamic Kindergarten Teacher Association network. Parents are also involved in promotional activities, for example, by making twibbons (photo frames designed in such a way to create specific support) for parents. In addition, the school is also trying to take advantage of the alumni network.

SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo also developed a marketing communication strategy with a relationship marketing approach. The following is the statement of Saryo S.Pd, M.Pd, the principal of the school:

"We are trying to highlight the school's excellence as promotional material. One of the advantages of our school is educating leadership. We convey this advantage to the public through various media. In addition, we continue to run promotional events, but in online media, for example, by holding competitions for kindergarten students. In addition, we are also intensifying promotions through the website and social media" (Interview, Saryo S.Pd, M.Pd, Head of SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo).

SDIT Darussalam Selokerto, as explained by Mohammad Hasan, Muhtarom Ma'arif Suaz, and Tina Winahyu, chose a marketing communication strategy that optimizes school promotion through social media. Registration forms for new students are provided online via Google Forms. In addition, the teachers actively promote the school through their social media accounts and personal selling strategy.

TABLE III. MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF 3 ISLAMIC SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

No	Marketing Communication Tools	SDIT Hidayatullah	SDIT Salsabila Pandowoharjo	SDIT Darussalam Selokerto
1.	Publicity and Public Relations	Community relations	Community relations	Community relations
2.	Advertising	Online, Brochures, Flyers, and Pamphlets.	Online brochures, flyers, and pamphlets.	Banners, Online Brochures, flyers, pamphlets.
3.	Direct Marketing	Direct Mail, Whatsapp Group	Direct Mail, Whatsapp Group	Direct Mail, Whatsapp Group
5.	Personal Selling	-	-	Line & offline, personal selling by the teachers
6.	Event Organizing	On line Seminars and recitations	Online parenting classes and competitions	Online recitations
7.	Utilization of the	Website, Facebook,	Website, Facebook,	Website, Facebook,

Website and Social Media	Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, telegram, WhatsApp group	Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, telegram, WhatsApp group	Instagram, youtube, Whatsapp group
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Based on the presentation of the data above, we can analyze that the advantages of the marketing communication strategy of 3 Islamic schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, which intensified the relationship marketing approach. The schools develop good relations with students and parents, prospective students and parents, kindergarten teachers, alumni, and the surrounding community with important values: Islamic values, excellent service, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Schools build an in-depth relationship marketing interaction process through good marketing communication planning to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic situation. Dialogue with all stakeholders and involving them in school promotion activities is advantageous in the relational marketing communication strategy.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the Integrated Marketing Communication discipline by proposing a unique "Relationship Marketing Communication." The results showed several essential components in the relationship marketing communication strategy developed by Islamic schools. The schools build a deep interaction process relationship marketing and design the planned communication process in relationship marketing. In addition, Islamic Schools enhance the relationship marketing dialogue. Finally, they strengthen the relationship value process marketing.

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