MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) IN ATTRACTING PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN BANDUNG, WEST JAVA

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) SY's marketing communication strategy for attracting prospective students in the 2024/2025 academic year, highlighting key insights for marketing strategies in higher education. Amid intense competition among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in West Java, SY demonstrated resilience by increasing digital engagement by 20% post-pandemic. This Research employs a qualitative case study approach within a post-positivist paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, comprising data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that SY successfully implemented a concentrated STP (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) model by shifting the institutional positioning from a mere 'degree provider' to 'career certainty' through international work-study programs. The integration of social media (Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook) as a persuasion engine proved effective in reaching Generation Z. At the same time, a hybrid management system involving professional creative vendors enhanced the visual quality of content. The study concludes that while digital strategies are highly effective at building awareness, final enrollment decisions remain deeply influenced by social validation and tangible alumni success stories, offering valuable insights for higher education marketing strategies.

Keywords: Marketing Communication Strategy, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Social Media, STP, Student Interest.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, digital technology has fundamentally transformed the operational environment of higher education in Indonesia. The shift to digital platforms has not only altered how information is accessed but also transformed institutional communication strategies. Prospective students, particularly those from Generation Z, prioritize digital interaction, preferring genuine, visual, and interactive content to inform their academic choices. Moreover, social media has induced significant transformations in our lives and communication methods, establishing new roles for enterprises and users, who have emerged as content providers, thus diminishing certain traditional positions. The alterations may be challenging to perceive and articulate, since we, as social media users, are immersed in them and may overlook them due to the expectation of adapting concurrently (Bozkanat & Aslan, 2022). Social media platforms remain widely used due to their user-friendliness. The platforms include Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Given the unique needs of each user, it is essential to understand each platform's functions to meet those demands. However, returning to the topic, if the goal of product advertising is clearly stated, understanding the effective use of social media over time to engage clients or audiences is crucial. It is unsurprising that numerous companies in Indonesia, particularly educational institutions, maintain Instagram profiles for promotional and branding purposes, considering the substantial user base. Academic institutions, including universities, may utilize Instagram for promotional activities and information distribution. Instagram promotions, which emphasize visual elements, require a distinct strategy and approach compared to traditional advertising methods (Braniwati & Bangsawan, 2023).

Source: PDDikti (Processed), 2025
Figure 1. Comparison of Higher Education Institutions by Category in Indonesia

Educational institutions in Indonesia operate in a dynamic, high-growth environment. PDDIKTI data indicate that this sector encompasses a variety of institutions, including 2,069 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), 913 Universities, 561 Academies, and 435 Institutes. In this competitive environment, specialized education institutions must utilize distinct positioning to attract prospective students, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. SY is one of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Illustrated by sustaining a distinguished status among foreign language institutions in West Java. Figure 1 highlights SY's institutional resilience. Despite global shifts in this education market, the institution has demonstrated a strong capacity for recovery and growth after the outbreak of COVID-19, evidenced by a significant 20% increase in digital engagement and interest in the 2024/2025 academic year. This success is attributed to a sophisticated digital marketing ecosystem that aligns institutional strengths with the aspirations of modern students.

Table 1. Number of Students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in West Java
Source: PDDikti Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (Processed), 2025

Name of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	Study Programs	Level	Status	Rating	Number of Students 2025	Number of Students 2024	Number of Students 2024
SY	English	D3	Active	-	0	0	0
	Japanese	D3	Active	-	0	0	0
	English Literature	S1	Active	B	270	260	270
	Japanese Literature	S1	Active	B	235	225	234
	German Literature	S1	Active	Good	29	28	29
	French Literature	S1	Active	Good	23	18	22
Total Number of Students					**557**	**531**	**555**
SJ	English	D3	Active	Good	15	16	17
	Japanese	D3	Active	Good	31	31	31
	English Literature	S1	Active	B	220	217	229

	Japanese Literature	S1	Active	Good	480	397	436
Total Number of Students					**745**	**661**	**713**
	English	D3	Active	-	0	0	0
	Japanese	D3	Active	Good	82	96	104
SC	English Literature	S1	Active	Good	55	93	127
Total Number of Students					**137**	**189**	**231**
	Sastra Arab	S1	Close	-	0	0	0
SI	Japanese	D3	Active	Good	0	0	0
Total Number of Students					**0**	**0**	**0**
	English Literature	S1	Transform	-	0	0	0
SJU	Japanese	D3	Transform	No Rate	0	0	0
Total Number of Students					**0**	**0**	**0**
	German	D3	Active	-	0	0	0
	Sastra Arab	S1	Active	B	104	195	195
SB	English Literature	S1	Active	B	84	104	104
Total Number of Students					**188**	**299**	**299**
SE	English Literature	S1	Transform	-	0	0	0
Total Number of Students					**0**	**0**	**0**
	English Literature	S1	Transform	-	0	0	0
SCF	Japanese	D3	Transform	-	0	0	0
Total Number of Students					**0**	**0**	**0**
	English Literature	S1	Transform	B	0	0	0
SIC	Japanese Literature	S1	Transform	B	0	0	0
Total Number of Students					**0**	**0**	**0**

The institutions listed above are all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in West Java specializing in language studies. It stated that institutions are closing permanently or transforming to survive, while SY continues to maintain its student base. That's why it justifies why SY is one of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in West Java that has maintained best practices for years, even though they faced difficulties after the outbreak of COVID-19. SY's ability to sustain its numbers justifies its selection as a 'best practice' model. This resilience is not accidental but the outcome of a planned shift in communication tactics that matches Generation Z's digital inclinations, creating a baseline for other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the region. Digital marketing strategies are essential for tackling global and local educational challenges, as academic institutions face increased competition to attract and retain students amidst globalization and technological advancements (Pamungkas et al., 2023). These digital methodologies align with contemporary marketing management, which integrates traditional and digital components to engage consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The campus's reputation and brand awareness significantly affect the relationship between this marketing strategy and students' enrolment interest, as a positive image enhances trust and perception of the institution. Prospective students evaluate an institution's brand by examining its rankings, offered programs, facilities, and employment opportunities (Artiyanti & Munawar, 2025). A coordinated communications approach using traditional and digital media drove this growth. Pamphlets and posters are strategically placed, while Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are used to share promotional visuals. The university engages directly via school visits, webinars, and personal communications, utilizing a multi-touchpoint strategy (Laini, Narti, Dianthi, 2025). The marketing strategy perspective is classified into five primary study streams. Firstly, social media as a medium

for consumer engagement; secondly, social media as a branding tool; thirdly, the use of social media to Influence adoption decisions; fourthly, social media as a customer relationship management (CRM) instrument; and lastly, social media as a holistic marketing and strategic instrument (Pawar, 2024). In the education sector, an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy is essential for increasing student enrolment, particularly in private universities (PTS). Globalization and digitalization require these universities to remain aware of developments to enhance management practices and marketing strategies that highlight their unique strengths. Amid increasing competition among educational institutions, private colleges must emphasize effective governance in their marketing strategies to recruit new students annually (Mujahid, Sukmarini & Samad, 2025). Contemporary new technology, like the internet, has integrated into the daily lives of school-aged children. Consequently, it is no longer an unfamiliar concept to society, particularly among adolescents and adults (Shofwan et al., 2021) SY, provide a concentrated Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) model, which serves as the core of strategic marketing by identifying specific market niches and developing a distinct value proposition (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Shifting its positioning from offering a "degree" to offering a "career" certainty through international work-study programs, the institutions successfully utilized digital platforms to validate its academic quality and professional outcomes. This study aims to highlight the best practices of SY's digital marketing communication strategy. Analysing the synergy between professional creative vendors, active social media validation, and the institution's evolving "career-ready" brand, this research provides a roadmap for how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can achieve excellence and high enrolment rates in a digitally dominated era.

METHOD

Research design. This research employs a qualitative case study approach. The paradigm used is post-positivism with a constructivist approach, viewing social reality as contextual and constructed through interaction between the institution and its audiences. Data collection. Data was collected through three primary techniques. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants selected through purposive sampling. Preserve anonymity, the informants are referred to by their functional titles (see Tabel 2). Observation, direct observation of the institution's social media activities and internal marketing planning processes. Documentation, review of internal planning documents, digital content archives, and enrolment data.

Table 2. List of Research Informants SY (Anonymized)

No	Criteria Informan	Informant Position	Informant Code
1	Marketing Team	Vice Chairman III for Student Affairs	N1
		Head of the Japanese Language Study Program	N2
		Head of English Study Program	N3
		Head of the French Study Program	N4
		Head of German Study Program	N5
2	New Student Admissions Task Force Team	Head of the Center for Information and Communication Technology	N6
3	Other Related Staff	Chairman	N8
		Students	N9 – N13
		Student's Parents	N14

Data analysis. The data analysis adhered to the Miles and Huberman framework, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation. Triangulation of sources, by comparing interview data with digital observation, was employed to assure data veracity. This research was conducted over a period of 24 months, from October 2023 to October 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as SY have redefined their strategic approach to align with modern market demands. Strategic frameworks in digital communication are essential for enhancing the visibility and reputation of educational institutions, especially when targeting Generation Z, who are significantly dependent on smartphones and digital innovation (Saputra & Aras, 2023; Wijaya, 2023). The institution applies concentrated Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) strategies in the first place. This method guarantees that marketing efforts are concentrated on high-conversion segments rather than dispersed over a wide audience. Constricting this operational scope, the organization can allocate its financial and creative resources more precisely, ensuring that each campaign achieves optimal impact for prospective students.

> "Every year, we survey our new students to see where they learned about SY. From there, we try to prioritize. Incidentally, they first learned about it through social media, including things related to the virtual world."
> — **(N1, Vice Chairman III for Student Affairs)**

SY uses traditional demographic segmentation and psychographic segmentation, as well as the focus. It indicates that the institution identifies its primary segment not just by age, but by the "Digital Lifestyle" of Generation Z. Furthermore, segmentation focuses primarily on the Greater Bandung area and surrounding regencies. Internal data reveals that the bulk of the student population hails from these regions, motivated by the cost-effectiveness of residing close to home as opposed to relocating for school. Ensuing segmentation psychographic, the prospective students pursue self-actualization and communities that foster their interests. As a result, marketing content prominently incorporates Student Activity Units (UKM in Indonesia) to resonate with their preferred lifestyles. Whereas the segmentation demographic is too stratified, distinguishing between students (users) and parents (decision-makers). Promotional periods are delineated content targeting students is disseminated during examination intervals, whilst content aimed at parents (emphasizing costs and legality) is promoted during enrolment periods.

> "Another thing that we also highlight is student activities, that SY provides active student activity units, there are around 16 of them, from there there is a promotional element, so that when prospective students have certain interests and talents and SY has a forum for them, they are interested.." — **(N1, Vice Chairman III for Student Affairs)**

The institution employs "continuous targeting" to engage Grade 11 students, promoting early brand familiarity rather than focusing just on graduating seniors. Furthermore, "relational marketing" is employed through alumni networks to draw prospective students from beyond the primary geographic area, utilizing alumni success narratives to build trust with the intended audiences. SY has carefully redefined the positioning its identity to dispel the perception of being merely a "course provider". Transitioning from competency to utility. The organization positions itself as a provider of industry skills rather than solely linguistic theory. SY also made curriculum adjustments, including the integration of digital media skills (e.g., copywriting and podcasting), to support this transformation. Outcome-focused positioning, the primary differentiation is the "international work study" program. This curriculum guarantees employment prospects in certain countries (e.g., Japan for Japanese programme students') rather than merely offering an academic degree, shifting the emphasis from "what you learn" to "what you become." This is validated by Informant N2 (Head of Japanese Language Study Program), who noted that digital platforms are successfully used to validate professional outcomes and career certainty.

> Implementation of the Marketing Communication Mix employs an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy, prioritizing digital platforms while maintaining traditional channels as necessary (Dagumboy, 2022; Octora & Alvin, 2022; Ramadhan et al., 2024). Modern institutions skilfully combine traditional media with digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, often utilizing material and promotional videos to augment campus attractiveness (Laini, Narti, Dianthi, 2025). Annual internal polls indicate that social media serves as the principal source of information for prospective students. Consequently, SY prioritizes Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The institutional website functions as a "credibility anchor" by providing formal, static information, but social media serves as a "persuasion engine" by cultivating emotional connections.

> "The digital platforms we currently use include the official SY website, as well as social media accounts like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. We see each platform playing a unique role in reaching different audiences, particularly in building faster engagement with prospective students.." — **(N6, Head of the Center for Information and Communication Technology)**

Content strategy and implementation used hybrid management and study program differentiation. SY employs a hybrid implementation strategy. The internal public relations team maintains strategic oversight to safeguard institutional identity, while technical implementation and visual design are assigned to expert vendors during peak admission times. This ensures that the material conforms to the high visual standards expected by digital natives. While for differentiation of study programs, the marketing strategy significantly varies across different study

programs to address specific market challenges. Evaluation and interest conversation made an impact on student interests. The study found that while social media is effective for building situational interest (awareness), the conversion to personal interest (enrolment) is heavily influenced by social validation. Active digital engagement shows a strong positive correlation with enrolment intent, yet final decisions are significantly driven by brand image and Word of Mouth (WOM) (Saksono & Sugiono, 2025). Furthermore, interest is sustained by the perception of career relevance, scholarship availability, and digital accessibility (Wijaya, 2023). Testimonials from successful alumni and recommendations from family members are crucial motivators give social proof. The "relatedness" pillar of self-determination theory is evident. Many students choose institutions based on trusted recommendations. Furthermore, career relevance views an interest as sustained by the perception that the curriculum connects directly to employment (expectancy value theory). Students view the international work programs as high-value investment.

CONCLUSION

The private foreign language college in this study has successfully navigated a paradigm shift in marketing communication, moving from conventional methods to a digital approach. This shift is effective in increasing enrolment, particularly when video content is used to influence student choices. This achievement is rooted in a strategic realignment that emphasizes "selling the future" (career prospects) rather than solely academic offers. Integrating work-study programs into marketing narratives presents a unique selling proposition that appeals and aligns with the practical needs of Generation Z. However, conversion transformation remains. While digital strategies like SEO and marketing increase brand visibility, the interactive communication aspect of content needs to be enhanced to succeed in the competitive higher education landscape (Setiawati & Ismail, 2025). Social media effectively generates awareness final enrolment decisions are deeply rooted in social validation and word of mouth (WOM). The implementation of a hybrid management system (internal strategy/external execution) has improved content quality, but the technical infrastructure requires optimization to support the digital ecosystem fully.

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