

Man 3 Cianjur Marketing Strategy in Increasing the Number of Students

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Abstract. *This thesis examines the performance paradox at MAN 3 Cianjur, the only State Islamic Senior High School in South Cianjur. Despite significant infrastructure improvements through the 2022 SBSN project, including six new classrooms, the school has experienced a consistent decline in student enrollment over the past five years, dropping drastically from 581 students in 2020 to 385 students in 2024. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented marketing strategy and formulate a new strategy to restore the institution's competitiveness. Using a qualitative research method with a case study approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with 12 key informants, observations, and documentation studies. Data analysis was conducted using the 7P Marketing Mix framework and a SWOT analysis. The results show that MAN 3 Cianjur's marketing strategy is not yet integrated and tends to be passive. Fundamental weaknesses were found in the Product aspect, where the school lost differentiation due to a monotonous curriculum and the loss of the flagship Tahfiz program. In the Price aspect, the existence of education fees (UDB) becomes a competitive barrier compared to other free schools. Place is the main obstacle because the location of the madrasah is far from the potential student base in the southern region without the support of boarding facilities. Promotion strategies are still conventional and minimal digitalization. In addition, internal problems in the form of a lack of management transparency trigger a decline in public trust. Based on the TOWS Matrix analysis, this study recommends a Turnaround strategy with a WO (Weakness-Opportunity) approach. Priority strategic steps include: (1) Product repositioning through the "MAN Plus Skills" branding that integrates vocational and religious; (2) Building a boarding school to overcome the obstacle of geographical distance; (3) Digitalization of promotions by involving students as ambassadors; and (4) Internal reform through enforcing teacher discipline to restore the institution's image.*

Keywords: *Islamic Education Management; Marketing Strategy; SWOT Analysis; Turnaround Strategy.*

1. Introduction

Education plays a central role in creating high-quality and competitive human resources (Syamsurijal, 2023). In the Indonesian context, education serves not only as a means of intellectual development but also as a medium for character and moral formation. One educational institution that integrates scientific and religious aspects is the madrasah (Taofik, 2020). As an Islamic-based educational institution, madrasahs hold a strategic position in developing a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses noble morals.

Madrasahs in Indonesia, including Madrasah Aliyah (MA), have long been an important alternative for people choosing an educational path (Huda, 2020). Madrasahs play a significant role in serving the educational needs of the community, particularly in rural and suburban areas. Furthermore, madrasahs are considered capable of responding to the challenges of globalization while maintaining their distinctive Islamic values (Selvia, 2024). However, amidst the dynamics of modern education, madrasahs face various challenges, such as competition with public schools, increasing societal expectations, and adapting to the needs of the times.

MAN 3 Cianjur as one of the State Islamic Senior High Schools in Cianjur Regency has a strategic role in providing quality religion-based education. As an educational institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MAN 3 Cianjur is expected to become the primary choice for the community, particularly in South Cianjur and the surrounding area. Furthermore, with government support in the form of the addition of six new classrooms through the Sukuk Project assistance program in 2022, the institution's capacity has significantly increased.

However, the reality shows a downward trend in the number of new students over the past five years. Based on internal data, the total number of students decreased from 581 in the 2020/2021 academic year to just 385 in 2024/2025. This decline has been consistent every year, for both boys and girls, as shown in the following table:

School year	Number of Students		Total
	Man	Woman	
2020/2021	205	376	581
2021/2022	186	325	511
2022/2023	174	291	465
2023/2024	163	251	414
2024/2025	153	232	385

Table Number of Students at MAN 3 Cianjur in the Last 5 Years

This decline indicates a gap between increased physical capacity and public interest in madrasahs. This raises critical questions: are the marketing strategies implemented effective, relevant, and integrated with community preferences?

In marketing management theory, an effective marketing strategy must include a thorough understanding of consumer needs, value creation, and the selection of the right marketing mix (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Furthermore, Kotler & Fox (1995) emphasize that in the context of educational institutions, marketing is not only about promotion, but also includes the process of positioning the institution, communicating service benefits, and building sustainable relationships with stakeholders such as parents, students, and the surrounding community.

Several previous studies (Subagio, 2020; Harahap & Zainuddin, 2022) have examined the importance of marketing strategies in Islamic educational institutions, but few have specifically evaluated the implementation of the 7P Marketing Mix strategy in the context of a state madrasah in a remote area like MAN 3 Cianjur. Therefore, this study plays a crucial role in enriching the literature and addressing the institution's current challenges.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the marketing strategy implemented by MAN 3 Cianjur using the 7P Marketing Mix approach, evaluate its effectiveness, and identify the inhibiting and supporting factors of its implementation. Theoretically, this study is expected to broaden the scope of marketing-based educational management studies. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for MAN 3 Cianjur and similar educational institutions in formulating more adaptive, competitive, and sustainable marketing strategies.

2. Research Methods

A research method is a scientific approach used to systematically obtain, process, and analyze data to answer research questions. According to Husnita (2024), a scientific approach to research has three main characteristics: rational, empirical, and systematic. Rational means that research activities are based on coherent logic and scientific argumentation; empirical indicates that the data collected comes from real-world experiences through observation and interaction with research subjects; while systematic refers to a consistent and structured procedural sequence from problem formulation to conclusion.

These characteristics are essential to ensure the validity and objectivity of research findings, as well as ensuring that the data collection process is free from personal bias. In the context of this research, this scientific approach is highly relevant because the problem being studied—the decline in student numbers at MAN 3 Cianjur—is complex, involves many actors, and is closely related to social dynamics, educational market preferences, and institutional strategies.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Marketing Strategy Recommendations Based on 7P Analysis

Product

The product aspect is a critical point in building the attractiveness of an educational institution. Based on the results of interviews with informants, MAN 3 Cianjur does not yet have a clear flagship program that is well communicated to the community. N3 (PKM Kesiswaan) openly admitted that the current madrasah identity is "still general (the same as high school)" and does not yet have a "clear differentiation" as a main differentiator. This absence of competitive advantages was complained about by N12 (Alumni Chair), who assessed that the institution "lacks support for selling points/character" and "no new breakthroughs," which ultimately complicates the role of alumni in supporting the school's promotion.

The lack of differentiation causes madrasas to tend to get lost in the competition between schools in South Cianjur. In the context of educational consumer behavior, parents' and students' decisions are currently heavily influenced by the uniqueness of the services and program offerings. Therefore, strengthening the product element in the marketing mix is of utmost importance.

Programs such as certified Tahfiz (Quran Recitation), multimedia-based Digital Classes, and Bilingual Programs (Arabic/English) are highly relevant, given MAN's characteristics as a madrasah based on Islamic values, yet it must adapt to modern demands. Furthermore, today's society tends to seek schools that are not only religious but also competitive academically and provide 21st-century skills.

Price (Education Costs and Added Value)

In the context of marketing educational services, price is not simply the nominal fee paid by students, but part of the value perception that influences consumer decisions. The perception of cost disparity is under sharp scrutiny. This was emphasized by N4 (PKM Public Relations), who observed the reality on the ground that rural communities are more attracted to free schools. This statement was reinforced by N3 (PKM Student Affairs), who acknowledged the difficulty of competition because madrasas still charge fees (UDB/Infak), while other schools are free, which causes a shift in parental preference to competing schools. This shows that costs have not been packaged in a narrative of benefits (value-based pricing), but are still seen as a burden without clear compensation.

However, a sound pricing strategy in education doesn't always mean drastically cutting costs, but rather instilling awareness of the long-term benefits students and parents derive from every dollar paid. Therefore, transforming the approach from "cost" to "investment in the future" is urgent and needs to be translated into madrasa financing policies. Steps such as tuition waivers for high-achieving students, subsidies for school supplies, and scholarships

based on religious and academic achievement will increase the school's appeal and create a caring and visionary image.

Place (Registration Channel and Information Access)

The Place element in educational marketing encompasses how institutions distribute services and reach prospective students. The main challenge lies not in the absence of a system, but rather in a suboptimal digital marketing strategy. N10 (Parent) confirmed that online registration is running. However, digital promotional reach is still considered weak; N5 (PKM Sarpras) encourages Web/Ad optimization because facility publicity is not yet optimal, while N7 (BP/BK Coordinator) admits that the madrasah is losing branding on social media compared to competitors. In response, N1 (Kamad) is now shifting its strategy by reducing the use of less effective physical brochures in favor of digital content.

The lack of digital systems limits access to prospective students from remote areas and fails to meet the expectations of digital natives and young parents accustomed to online services. Therefore, marketing strategies need to integrate digital-based distribution channels, strengthen relationships with feeder schools, and provide direct student admissions services in communities as a proactive way to welcome prospective students and foster social cohesion.

Promotion (Madrasah Promotion and Publication)

Promotional strategy is the heart of educational institution marketing because it serves as a bridge between the services offered and public perception. Interview results indicate that MAN 3 Cianjur's promotion remains very passive, limited to brochures and sporadic face-to-face activities. Promotion evaluations indicate a suboptimal strategy transition. N1 (Madrasah Principal) decided to reduce the use of physical brochures because they were deemed ineffective. However, digitalization efforts remain hampered; N5 (PKM Sarpras) acknowledged that publicity regarding new building facilities has not been optimal, while N7 (BP/BK Coordinator) assessed that the madrasah is less competitive in social media branding strategies compared to competitors.

The absence of a strong and modern communication strategy results in strategic information, such as flagship programs, student achievements, and facilities, being under-disseminated. As a result, the surrounding community is more familiar with competing institutions that aggressively build their own narratives of superiority. From the perspective of integrated marketing communication theory, effective promotion must be creative, consistent, and relevant to the target audience, especially Generation Z and millennials, who are highly visual and digitally oriented.

Therefore, transitioning from conventional promotions to digital campaign strategies is urgently needed. Creative content such as virtual tour videos, alumni testimonials, and documentation of student activities will create emotional engagement and strengthen

public trust. The involvement of alumni and community leaders is also crucial as promotional ambassadors with social authority to influence public decisions.

SWOT Analysis of Marketing Mix MAN 3 Cianjur

The following is a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis that summarizes the results of the evaluation of MAN 3 Cianjur's marketing strategy based on the 7P marketing mix approach and interview findings:

Based on the SWOT analysis of each aspect of the marketing mix above, the next step is to formulate a strategy using the TOWS Matrix. According to Weihrich (1982), the TOWS Matrix functions as a matching tool that produces four alternative strategic strategies. As explained by Rangkuti (2017), these strategies include SO Strategy (using strengths to seize opportunities), WO Strategy (minimizing weaknesses to seize opportunities), ST Strategy (using strengths to overcome threats), and WT Strategy (minimizing weaknesses and avoiding threats).

The following is the TOWS (Threats-Opportunities-Weaknesses-Strengths) Matrix compiled based on field data analysis of MAN 3 Cianjur, along with recommendations for the most relevant priority strategies to be implemented.

Based on the matrix above, the most relevant strategy for MAN 3 Cianjur is the Weakness-Opportunity (WO) Strategy, which focuses on remediating internal weaknesses to capitalize on external market opportunities. This strategy was chosen because the decline in madrasah performance is more due to accessibility deficiencies and product stagnation, rather than solely due to external threats.

The decline in student numbers stems from geographic constraints (lack of dormitories/W3) and the loss of curriculum appeal (W1, W2). However, there is significant market demand from the southern region (Cidaun/Naringgul) for residential services (O3) and vocational competencies (O1).

Tactical implementations that can be carried out include:

1. The construction of dormitories or residential partnerships is an absolute priority to eliminate the barriers of geographical distance (W3) and accommodate potential students from outside the sub-district (O3).
2. *Re-branding* The identity of the madrasah became "MAN Vokasi" to answer the needs of the labor market (O1) and revitalize the monotonous curriculum (W1), while maintaining the Tahfiz program as a spiritual anchor.
3. Enforcing discipline among teaching staff and improving teaching and learning services (W4) are carried out as fundamental prerequisites before carrying out massive promotional expansion, in order to prevent the institution's image from boomeranging.

4. Through this strategy, MAN 3 Cianjur can avoid price competition (red ocean) against free schools, and switch to creating a new market niche based on the superiority of dormitory facilities and specific skill competencies.

MAN 3 Cianjur Marketing Strategy Operational Plan

This marketing strategy operational plan is based on the results of a SWOT analysis, TOWS analysis, and field findings. The plan is divided into short-, medium-, and long-term plans, complete with key activities, responsible parties, implementation timelines, and performance indicators (KPIs).

3.2. Integrated Marketing Strategy Based on Marketing Mix: Transformation of Identity and Competitiveness of MAN 3 Cianjur

The 7P Marketing Mix approach (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence) provides a relevant strategic framework to address the challenges of declining student numbers at MAN 3 Cianjur. This framework not only offers a technical marketing dimension but also opens up space for strategic reflection to reshape the madrasah's identity and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive education ecosystem. Each element of the marketing mix must be designed in an integrated manner and responsive to the dynamics of community preferences and external needs. Based on the synthesis of field findings and a SWOT analysis, the following is a comprehensive strategy formulation designed to address the four main research questions.

Product Repositioning and Differentiation Strategy (Product Strategy)

Field findings indicate the urgent need for product differentiation. As highlighted by informants N3, N5, and N12, madrasahs currently lack distinctive flagship programs capable of differentiating themselves from competitors. This situation demands that the product aspect become the primary entry point for strategic transformation through the implementation of a hybrid curriculum.

To overcome this stagnation, MAN 3 Cianjur needs to reposition itself by launching the "MAN Plus Skills" identity. This strategy does not simply offer a regular curriculum, but rather integrates a religious curriculum (Tahfiz and Quranic studies) with vocational education relevant to the local and global job market, such as Agribusiness (Palm Sugar), Computer Network Engineering (TKJ), Automotive, and Fashion Design. This approach aims to create a dual value proposition: producing graduates who are both religious and work-ready. In addition, the revitalization of the flagship Tahfiz Al-Qur'an program, which had been dormant, must be carried out as a flagship product for the religious market segment, coupled with a strategic alliance for job placement abroad (Japan/Korea) as concrete evidence (tangible proof) of graduate competitiveness.

Accessibility and Physical Visibility Strategy (Place & Physical Evidence Strategy)

Analysis of the physical and distribution aspects revealed a gap between existing assets and public perception. Informant N6 criticized that the new building facilities (funded by the SBSN) had not been optimally capitalized in promotional strategies and were not widely known by the public. Furthermore, geographical barriers were a major obstacle for prospective students from the southern region (Cidaun, Naringgul).

The required intervention strategy encompasses two dimensions. First, the development of boarding schools (dormitories) is an absolute necessity to improve accessibility for students who are hampered by distance. As a short-term solution, madrasas can adopt a "satellite dormitory" model through collaboration with the community or surrounding Islamic boarding schools. Second, revitalizing the visual landscape is necessary to synergize physical evidence with promotional activities. Repairs to the facade, main gate, and school garden should be undertaken to enhance the institution's image of integrity, which should then be visually documented as regular digital promotional content.

Participatory and Relationship-Based Promotion Strategy

The drastic drop in enrollment, from around 200 students to 118 (N9), demonstrates the failure of previous marketing strategies to maintain market loyalty. Informant N7 also emphasized that the madrasah's branding remains weak, while N12 expressed alumni's confusion in promoting the school due to the lack of a specific narrative of excellence.

To address this, promotional strategies must transform from an administrative approach to participatory and experiential promotion. Promotional activities are no longer passive, but rather engage the target market through optimized marketing events such as the large-scale "Mantastic Fest" to provide direct experiences to prospective students. Furthermore, madrasas need to implement a trust-based marketing approach by empowering students as digital ambassadors to create peer-to-peer marketing content on social media, and leveraging social proof through testimonials from successful alumni to rebuild market trust.

Value-Based Pricing Strategy

Amid competition from "free schools" and the public's economic sensitivities, pricing strategies must focus on educational value for money. Management needs to communicate that the tuition fees are commensurate with the modern infrastructure and vocational skills competencies not available at competing schools. Furthermore, implementing transparent fund management and cross-subsidy schemes for high-achieving and underprivileged students is necessary to mitigate financial barriers and parental resistance.

Human Resources Reform and Service Quality (People & Process Strategy)

External marketing strategies will be ineffective without being supported by internal reform. The lack of flagship programs and declining public trust are also driven by internal factors.

Therefore, madrasahs need to reform their work culture by enforcing strict discipline (zero tolerance) for educators, considering that teacher attendance is a key indicator of service quality. Furthermore, eliminating sectoral egos and strengthening internal branding, where teachers make the madrasah the primary choice for their own children, is crucial for restoring public trust.

Overall, the integration of these seven marketing mix elements enables MAN 3 Cianjur to undergo a total transformation: from a passive madrasah to a competitive educational institution, adaptive to the aspirations of modern society, but still firmly rooted in Islamic identity.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of qualitative research conducted through observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews with 12 key informants, it was concluded that MAN 3 Cianjur's current marketing strategy is unable to comprehensively and adaptively respond to the dynamics of the education market's needs. This is evident in the following four main conclusions: 1. Marketing Strategy is Not Optimal and Not Integrated. Although various promotional activities have been carried out, such as inter-school competitions, social media publications, and outreach to the original schools (N1, N5, N6, N8, N9), these efforts remain sporadic, not systematically planned, and do not consistently target strategic communities. The decline in the number of new students from six classes to four (with only 118 students in 2024/2025) is a concrete indicator that the current strategy has not touched the root of the problem. Furthermore, the absence of active involvement of teachers, alumni, or community leaders as promotional agents indicates the weakness of strengthening People and Promotion in the 7Ps. 2. Internal and External Factors Contribute to the Decline in Enrollment. The decline in student numbers at MAN 3 Cianjur is caused by a combination of internal and external issues. Internally, the main weaknesses lie in the product identity crisis and the disintegration of human resources; N3 (Student Affairs) and N9 (PPDB Members) highlight the lack of differentiation of flagship programs and the loss of old programs. This crisis is exacerbated by low teacher discipline (N1, N3) and N6's admission that teachers "don't send their own children to MAN," reflecting an internal crisis of trust. Digital promotion aspects are also not optimal, as evidenced by N7 (BP/BK) admitting defeat in branding strategies on social media. Externally, the madrasah is losing out to free schools and is facing shifting public preferences that demand clarity in vocational skills (as proposed by N1) and madrasah modernization. The absence of an active response to this competition has left the madrasah behind in creating the value differentiation expected by the public. 3. Changes in Community Preferences Not Followed by Adaptation of Strategy. Interview results indicate a shift in societal orientation from solely pursuing religious-based institutions to institutions that are more adaptive, flexible, and relevant in terms of life skills. The gap between discipline and excellence is a major problem; N10 (Parent of a Student) complained about a decline in service quality that makes the cost of the madrasah difficult to justify, even though he considered the school "inexpensive but not

cheap." This condition is exacerbated by the lack of clarity of the service product, making it difficult for N12 (Alumni Chair) to help promote the madrasa because it is considered to lack support for selling points/character and does not have new breakthroughs that can be sold as advantages. This indicates that Product, Promotion, and Process in the marketing mix have not been optimized as tools to respond to changing market needs. 4. Weak Image, Position, and Competitiveness of Madrasahs. The absence of a strong visual identity, differentiation program, and integration between religious values and 21st-century competencies makes it difficult for MAN 3 Cianjur to compete in the local education landscape. The madrasah's branding is not widely recognized by the public, and even internal teachers do not choose the madrasah as a place for their children to study (N1). This indicates that the institution's positioning is still unclear and has not been able to create an emotional attachment with the public. The weakness of physical evidence in the form of evidence of graduate success, alumni testimonials, and facility branding makes public perception tend to be negative or neutral. Overall, the 7P Marketing Mix approach has not been implemented holistically and strategically. This research emphasizes the need for a complete rebranding of the madrasah, strengthening of flagship programs, involving internal and external communities in promotions, and adapting strategies to the characteristics of community preferences. This way, MAN 3 Cianjur's competitiveness can be restored and sustainably enhanced.

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