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Evaluation of IAIN Ternate's Interactive Marketing Communication Strategy in Increasing New Student Admissions

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Abstract

Competition among universities to attract prospective students in the digital era demands innovative and interactive marketing strategies. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of IAIN Ternate's interactive marketing communication strategy in increasing new student admissions. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study, involving secondary data analysis, interviews with the marketing team, and prospective students. The results indicate that IAIN Ternate has implemented various strategies, including digital marketing (website, social media, email marketing), direct outreach (roadshows to schools, campus festivals), and collaborations with alumni, religious institutions and local government. The institution's website serves as the main hub for official information, while social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are used to reach younger audiences. However, the main challenges include limited human resources, budget constraints, and difficulty in creating engaging content. New student admission data from 2021 to 2024 show an increase in conversion rates (from 47% to 66.9%), despite the fluctuating number of applicants. Strategic recommendations include training the digital marketing team, improving content quality, and integrating technologies such as webinars and social media analytics. This study concludes that an interactive, digital-based communication approach has the potential to increase IAIN Ternate's competitiveness, provided it is supported by adequate resources and content strategies relevant to prospective students' preferences.

Keywords

Strategy, Marketing Communication; Interactive

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1. INTRODUCTION

Competition to acquire new university students is becoming increasingly fierce, especially in the digital era, which allows for fast access to information. Universities are required to have effective marketing strategies to attract the interest of prospective students (Perguruan et al., 2018). One rapidly developing strategy is interactive marketing, a two-way communication effort that involves direct



interaction between educational institutions and prospective students through various digital platforms (Marsudi, 2018).

The development of information and communication technology has significantly transformed the paradigm of higher-education marketing (Ulfia et al., 2024). Higher education institutions, including the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Ternate, face the challenge of adopting effective interactive marketing communication strategies to attract prospective new students in the digital era. Competition among universities to attract prospective students has become increasingly fierce, requiring innovative marketing communication approaches that are relevant to the preferences of today's digital generation (Ziliwu, 2022).

The State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Ternate is one of the oldest State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Eastern Indonesia (Hilman Idrus, 2024b) and faces unique challenges in increasing student admissions. Some of the identified issues include the limited reach of traditional marketing communications, low awareness among prospective students of the academic programs offered, and a lack of optimal interaction between the institution and prospective students via digital media. Although various digital platforms have been utilized for marketing communications, the effectiveness of IAIN Ternate's interactive marketing communication strategies in increasing student admissions has yet to be comprehensively evaluated.

Research on evaluating interactive marketing communication strategies in higher education is urgently needed, considering students' ever-changing media preferences and information consumption behaviors. As stated by Novrianto and Ismail (Novrianto & Ismail, 2025), the use of Digital Analytics in Data-Driven Marketing Communication Strategies significantly increases university brand awareness in the digital era. Meanwhile, Dave Chaffey and Hemphill, (Dave Chaffey, Tanya Hemphill, 2019) emphasize that universities that can optimize interactive marketing communications have a competitive advantage in new student admissions.

The State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Ternate, an Islam-based higher education institution, faces challenges in increasing new student admissions each year. Based on internal data (IAIN Ternate, 2023), new student admissions have shown fluctuations, with a growth rate that tends to be stagnant at approximately 3% per year over the last three years. This figure is below the average growth rate of new student admissions at similar state universities in Eastern Indonesia, which is 5% per year (Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

Several main causes of this issue can be identified through synthesizing previous studies. First, the suboptimal use of digital media in marketing campaigns. According to an internal survey, only 35% of prospective students learned about flagship programs through social media, while the remaining 65% obtained information from less interactive sources. Second, there is a lack of diversification in interactive marketing programs capable of reaching prospective students from various socioeconomic and geographic segments. A study by Idrus (Hilman Idrus, 2024b) shows that marketing strategies that are not effectively segmented will find it difficult to compete in a dynamic market.

If this situation continues, IAIN Ternate risks losing its competitiveness both regionally and nationally. This impact would be a decline in the number of new students, which could affect the institution's operational sustainability, including funding for the development of academic and non-academic programs. This could also diminish IAIN Ternate's reputation in the public eye.

The proposed solution is to evaluate IAIN Ternate's interactive marketing strategies, including analyzing the effectiveness of digital media, optimizing engagement through digital platforms such as social media, and developing new strategies oriented toward the needs of prospective students. This research uses a qualitative approach with data collected through in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis from IAIN Ternate's marketing reports.

Interactive marketing communication involves not only one-way information delivery but also active audience participation through social media, websites, webinars, and other digital channels. It is hoped that this strategy can increase brand awareness, trust, and prospective students' interest in choosing IAIN Ternate as their higher-education destination. However, the effectiveness of this strategy in achieving these goals still needs to be examined more thoroughly.

This study aims to evaluate the interactive marketing communication strategies of IAIN Ternate to increase new student enrollment. Through an analysis of the methods, channels, and impacts produced, this research is expected to provide recommendations for improvement so that IAIN Ternate's marketing communication strategies can be more optimal in the future.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach (Moleong, 2019) with a descriptive-evaluative research design (Patton, 2002) This approach was used to provide an in-depth description and evaluation of the

interactive marketing communication strategies implemented by IAIN Ternate in the context of new student admissions.

The data sources for this study included both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with IAIN Ternate's Public Relations/Marketing staff, lecturers involved in promotions and prospective/new students. Secondary data were obtained from promotional documents, official social media, brochures, student admission reports, and institutional statistical data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of IAIN Ternate's Marketing Communication Strategies

IAIN Ternate has implemented various interactive marketing communication strategies to increase new student enrollment. Based on the data collected, these strategies can be categorized as follows:

a. Digital Marketing Communication

IAIN Ternate has developed a digital presence through several platforms:

1) Institutional Website

The IAIN Ternate website (www.iain-ternate.ac.id) serves as the main information gateway, providing comprehensive information about the institution's profile, study programs, facilities, achievements, and new-student registration procedures. The website is also equipped with an interactive chat feature that allows prospective students to ask questions directly to the administrator.



Figure 1.1. IAIN Ternate Website

An overview of IAIN Ternate's marketing communication strategy, as seen on the website's homepage, demonstrates a structured approach, focused on strong branding,

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clear messaging (generation of character), and the provision of easily accessible calls to action for further information and registration. The website functions as the main hub for official information (Dave Chaffey, Tanya Hemphill, 2019) and becomes the starting point for prospective students to engage further with IAIN Ternate through various connected online channels.

2) Social Media

a) Facebook

This Facebook page has the potential to become an important part of IAIN Ternate's interactive marketing communication strategy (Athallah & Maksum, n.d.).

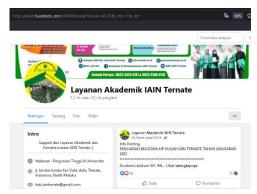


Figure 1.2. IAIN Ternate Facebook

Source: https://www.facebook.com/share/1GbYq51VmH/?mibextid=wwXIfr

The "Layanan Akademik IAIN Ternate" Facebook page is a valuable asset in IAIN Ternate's communication and marketing strategy, especially with its direct links to registration information and positive feedback. However, to optimize its effectiveness in attracting prospective new students, it is necessary to increase the focus on content that is engaging and relevant to them, as well as utilize Facebook's interactive features to build engagement and community (Sevima, 2025). Ensuring that new student admission information is easy to find and actively promoted on this page is crucial.

b) Instagram

The IAIN Ternate Instagram account, with 3,477 followers, has a fairly good reach, demonstrating interest from the audience, including potential new students,

current students, alumni, and other related parties. The relatively small number of "following" accounts (42) indicates a focus on their own content and more selective interactions.

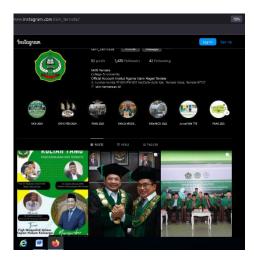


Figure 1.3. IAIN Ternate Instagram Source: https://www.instagram.com/iain_ternate/

92 posts indicate that this account is quite active in sharing content, which is important to keep the audience engaged and informed. The highlight feature is used effectively to categorize important information. Titles such as "KKN 2024", "EXPO FEBI", "PBAK 2023", "KKN 23 Moderasi" and others show a focus on academic activities, campus introduction, and other important moments. This makes it easier for prospective students to find specific information without scrolling through the entire feed.

Overall, IAIN Ternate's Instagram account demonstrates a strong effort to utilize digital media for marketing purposes. With a clear username, informative bio, engaging visual content, and organized use of the highlight feature, this account has great potential to effectively reach, build a positive image, and interact with prospective students. The use of Instagram social media plays an important role as a fast and accurate promotional tool that can also communicate directly with its target audience. Instagram is not only an informative social media platform but also persuasive and symbolic (Braniwati & Bangsawan, 2023).

c) TikTok

TikTok allows users to create, edit, and share short videos with a duration of 15 to 30 seconds, equipped with various supporting features such as music, live broadcasts, stickers,

video effects, voice changers, beauty filters, and automatic captions (Felix et al., 2023). This can enhance IAIN Ternate's appeal to prospective students.

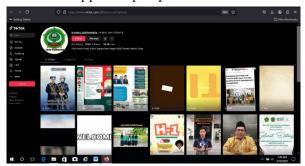


Figure 1.4. TikTok IAIN Ternate Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@humas_iainternate

IAIN Ternate's presence on TikTok through the HUMAS account demonstrates an understanding of the importance of reaching a young audience on a popular platform. Although the number of followers is still relatively small compared to other platforms, the high number of likes indicates the potential for strong engagement. To optimize TikTok's effectiveness in increasing new student enrollment, a content strategy that is more focused on prospective students, maximal utilization of TikTok's interactive features, and consistent efforts in building an appealing and relevant presence/connect must be established (Sangadji et al., 2024).

3) Email Marketing

Email marketing has become a strategic component of IAIN Ternate's interactive marketing communications, making a significant contribution to the increase in the number of applicants. Although it still faces several challenges, this strategy shows great potential for further development through increased personalization, mobile optimization, integration with social media, and the development of interactive content. With continuous improvement, email marketing can become an increasingly effective communication channel for reaching potential students and increasing student enrollment at IAIN Ternate (Agustine, 2023).

b. Socialization and Direct Activities

1) School Roadshow

The IAIN Ternate team routinely conducts a roadshow program for senior high schools in North Maluku and its surroundings as part of its interactive marketing

strategy. During the 2024–2025 period, the IAIN Ternate socialization team visited approximately 45 schools across various regencies/cities, such as Ternate City, Tidore Islands City, West Halmahera, North Halmahera, Central Halmahera, East Halmahera, and Morotai. The Public Relations and Publications Team coordinates this roadshow program in collaboration with the New Student Admissions Committee.

In its implementation, the roadshow is divided into three tracks: the SPAN track, the UM-PTKIN track, and the Independent track, following the academic calendar of the target schools. The roadshow team usually consists of 1–2 people, including representatives of lecturers and administrative staff members. Roadshow activities included an institutional profile presentation, introduction to flagship study programs, explanation of admissions pathways and scholarships, and an interactive Q&A session with students. The team also distributes brochures, study program catalogs, and institutional merchandise.

2) Festival

Campus festivals organized by the faculties at IAIN Ternate are a strategic initiative to introduce the institution to the public and prospective students. The Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business (FEBI) organizes the "Islamic Banking Festival 3.0 2024," which features a student entrepreneurship expo, a business plan competition, and a Sharia economic seminar featuring national practitioners and academics. This event serves as a platform for FEBI students to showcase the practical application of their knowledge while introducing their study programs.

The Faculty of Education and Teacher Training (FTIK) holds the "Gebyar FTIK," which includes speech competitions, English debates, scientific writing, dancing, and solo pop singing (Hilman Idrus, 2024a). This activity is designed to demonstrate FTIK's excellence in producing quality and adaptive future educators. Both faculty festivals are integrated into IAIN Ternate's annual agenda to maximize publication impact and effectiveness in attracting prospective students.

c. Collaboration and Partnerships

1) Collaboration with Alumni

This collaborative program is implemented through the formation of the "IAIN Ternate Alumni Network," which is connected through a dedicated digital platform, such as a WhatsApp group. Alumni are provided with the latest information about study programs, campus excellence, and student admission procedures. They actively conduct outreach in the schools where they work or within their local communities and share this information through WhatsApp groups.

In addition, alumni who have achieved professional success are invited to provide testimonials and share their experiences during campus events, such as career seminars and motivational workshops. These testimonials were documented in video format and distributed through IAIN Ternate's digital platforms. Alumni are also involved in mentoring programs for new students and internship programs for the final-year students.

a) Collaboration with Religious Institutions

IAIN Ternate has established strategic collaborations with various religious institutions in North Maluku and surrounding areas as part of its interactive marketing communication strategy. These collaborations include formal relationships with pesantrens, Islamic senior high schools (madrasah aliyah), and Islamic community organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah at the regional level. Forms of collaboration include special outreach programs within religious institutions, organizing joint events such as Islamic seminars and young preacher training, and developing special recommendation pathways for outstanding graduates of religious educational institutions. IAIN Ternate also offers special scholarships for outstanding santri (Islamic boarding school students) and facilitates regular visits from pesantren and madrasah representatives to the campus to introduce the facilities and study programs available.

b) Collaboration with Regional Governments

IAIN Ternate has developed strategic collaborations with various regional governments in North Maluku as an integral part of its marketing strategy. This partnership is realized through formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreements with the North Maluku Provincial Government and seven district/city governments in the region. The main program of this collaboration is a regional scholarship scheme funded by the local government budget (APBD) for outstanding and underprivileged students from each district and city. Other forms of collaboration include local human resource development programs through further education for regional civil servants (ASN) at IAIN Ternate, joint research for the development of religion-based policies, and the organization of collaborative community service activities, among others. IAIN Ternate is routinely involved in local government activities related to religious guidance and community empowerment. In return, regional governments facilitate the promotion of IAIN Ternate in schools and at official government events.

Evaluation of Marketing Communication Strategy Effectiveness

The effectiveness of IAIN Ternate's marketing communication strategy was evaluated to measure how far promotional efforts and engagement initiatives succeeded in increasing new student enrollment. Below are the New Student Admissions Data for the Past 4 Years:

Table 1. 1. New Student Admissions for 2021 - 2024

No	Academic	Number of	Number	Number of	Increase
	Year	Applicants	Accepted	Applicants with NIM	Ratio
1	2021/2022	2273	1087	704	47%
2	2022/2023	1590	805	549	50,6%
3	2023/2024	1181	810	651	68,6%
4	2024/2025	1252	837	718	66.9%

Source: BAAK IAIN Ternate, 2024

The data on new student admissions at IAIN Ternate over the past four years show fluctuating trends. In the 2021/2022 academic year, the number of applicants reached 2,273, with 1,087 accepted and 704 holding student ID numbers. The following year, the number of applicants dropped sharply to 1,590, but the acceptance conversion ratio rose to 50.6%. In 2023/2024, even though the number of applicants decreased again to 1,181, the conversion ratio jumped significantly to 68.6%, reflecting more effective selection. In 2024/2025, the number of applicants

increased slightly to 1,252, with the conversion ratio remaining high at 66.9%. This data indicates that the IAIN Ternate's marketing communication strategy has succeeded in improving the quality of prospective students, although the main challenge still lies in the overall decline in the number of applicants. Efforts in branding and expanding promotional outreach must be strengthened to attract greater interest. Furthermore, the gap between the number of accepted students and those who hold student ID numbers signals the importance of more intensive follow-up to ensure that prospective students re-register. By improving these aspects, IAIN Ternate can attract more applicants while maintaining the effectiveness of its conversion process.

Obstacles in Implementing Interactive Marketing Communication Strategies

One of the main challenges is the availability of human resources with appropriate expertise. Interactive marketing often involves the use of various technologies and digital platforms (*Laporan Evaluasi Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru*, 2023), he creation of content that is not only informative but also engaging for interaction (such as quizzes, polls, or even augmented reality experiences), and the ability to analyze data generated from such interactions. If the marketing team does not have an adequate background or training in these areas, the implementation process can become difficult and less effective.

In addition, the budget is an important consideration. Developing high-quality interactive content, utilizing specialized software and platforms to run interactive campaigns, and promotions to encourage audience participation often require significant investment. Limited funding can hinder organizations from fully adopting interactive marketing strategies or restrict the quality and reach of campaigns that can be conducted (PuskoMedia Indonesia, 2020).

From a technical perspective, implementing interactive marketing may require adequate technological infrastructure. For example, if it intends to develop an interactive application or leverage virtual reality technology, IAIN Ternate needs to have suitable hardware and software and ensure a stable Internet connection for the audience. Infrastructure limitations can become a barrier, especially for IAIN Ternate, with its limited technological resources.

Another challenge lies in the ability to create content that is truly engaging and relevant to the target audience. Interactive content must spark curiosity, provide added value, or offer a unique experience that motivates the audience to participate (Hilman Idrus, 2024b). Consistently

producing content that captivates and suits the interests of the audience requires an in-depth understanding of their preferences, creativity, and ability to follow current trends. If the presented content is not appealing, interactive marketing efforts may be in vain due to a lack of participation.

The marketing team identified the main obstacle as the lack of skilled human resources to manage digital media interactively. Limited marketing budgets also hinder the diversification of marketing platforms. Difficulties in creating engaging and relevant content

Discussion

Based on the findings above, IAIN Ternate's marketing strategy needs to be improved with a more interactive approach. The importance of two-way communication in building an emotional connection with prospective students (Hilman Idrus, 2024b). This aligns with the findings that prospective students desire more personal communication with universities.

In addition, it is important to strengthen the capacity of the marketing team through training and allocate a more adequate budget. By utilizing technology, such as interactive webinars and online consultation sessions, institutions can provide a better experience for prospective students. By adopting new technologies, such as webinar platforms and mobile applications, to directly engage with prospective students. Adding competent human resources in the area of digital marketing. Developing more engaging marketing content, such as alumni testimonial videos, interactive Q&A sessions and virtual campus tours. Social media analytics can be used to monitor campaign effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that IAIN Ternate's interactive marketing communication strategy has had a positive impact on increasing new student admissions, although there are still several challenges that need to be addressed. The implementation of various approaches, such as digital marketing (website, social media, email marketing), direct activities (roadshow, campus festivals), and collaboration with alumni and religious institutions, successfully increased the conversion ratio of applicants to students from 47% (2021/2022) to 66.9% (2024/2025). However, fluctuations in the number of applicants indicate a need for further optimization.

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The main challenges include a lack of skilled human resources in digital marketing, limited budgets, and difficulties in creating content that is attractive and relevant to prospective student audiences. To improve the effectiveness of its strategy, IAIN Ternate needs to strengthen the team's capacity through training, allocate a more adequate budget, and develop technology-based interactive content, such as webinars, virtual tours, and social media analytics.

By refining the interactive marketing communication strategy and overcoming existing obstacles, IAIN Ternate can be more competitive in attracting new prospective students while also strengthening its image as an adaptive higher education institution in the digital era. This step will not only increase the number of applicants but also ensure the sustainability and quality of education at IAIN Ternate in the future.

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