

Developing a Marketing Strategy for Private Colleges in 2026

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Abstract

Competition among private colleges in attracting new students has continued to intensify along with the increasing number of higher education institutions and changes in the behavior of younger generations in the digital era. These conditions require universities to develop marketing strategies that are more adaptive, innovative, and oriented toward the needs of prospective students. This article aims to analyze the marketing strategies of private higher education institutions in 2026 through approaches such as institutional positioning, the utilization of digital media, target audience identification, the development of relationships with the community, and the organization of campus events as promotional media. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using a library research approach through the analysis of various theories of higher education marketing, findings from previous studies, and the phenomena of higher education marketing in the digital era. The findings indicate that marketing strategies for private universities should not rely solely on digital promotion, but also need to be supported by institutional differentiation, experiential marketing, the strengthening of academic reputation, alumni engagement, high-quality services, and campus activities capable of creating positive experiences for prospective students. In addition, the utilization of digital technology and data analytics has become an important factor in understanding prospective students' behavior and improving the effectiveness of marketing communication. Through integrated and adaptive marketing strategies, private higher education institutions can enhance their competitiveness while strengthening their institutional image amid increasingly competitive higher education environments.

Keywords: marketing strategy; private higher education institutions; positioning; digital marketing; campus events

INTRODUCTION

The admission of new students is a very important moment for private colleges because it is directly related to the sustainability of the institution, both academically and financially. According to Kotler & Fox, (1995), in the context of higher education, students are the main customers who determine the sustainability of educational institutions. Therefore, higher education institutions need to implement well-planned marketing strategies that are oriented toward market needs.

The high dependence of private universities on the number of new students makes the student admission process one of the main focuses in institutional management. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology indicate that the number of private higher education institutions in Indonesia has reached more than 3,000 institutions, creating a very high level of competition in attracting prospective students each year. This competition has become increasingly complex because the public now has many choices of higher education institutions offering various study programs, facilities, and learning methods. Rabenu & Shkoler, (2022) emphasize that the growing marketization of higher education has compelled institutions to adopt more structured and consumer-oriented marketing frameworks

in order to attract and retain students effectively. In a similar vein, Cingillioglu, Gal, & Prokhorov, (2024) confirm that the escalating competition to recruit and retain students makes it incumbent for universities to craft more effective and data-driven marketing plans.

In the digital era, the behavior of prospective students has also changed significantly. Ivy, (2008) explains that students' decisions in choosing a university are influenced by the institution's image, academic quality, facilities, and the effectiveness of the university's marketing communication. Today's younger generation tends to seek educational information through digital media such as websites, social media, promotional videos, and online reviews before deciding on a university.

Therefore, private universities can no longer rely solely on conventional promotional methods. Instead, they need to develop marketing strategies that are more attractive, effective, and efficient in order to reach prospective students widely and accurately. According to Kotler, (2018), an effective marketing strategy must be able to create value and build strong relationships with consumers. In the context of higher education, this can be achieved through strengthening institutional branding, utilizing digital media, delivering relevant information, and creating interactive communication experiences with prospective students. Universities also need to understand the needs and preferences of the digital generation, who tend to prefer visual content, fast communication, and easy access to information. Therefore, higher education marketing strategies in the modern competitive era must be able to integrate digital technology, institutional differentiation, and adaptive communication approaches in order to increase attractiveness and win the competition for new student admissions.

The development of digital technology has brought major changes to various sectors of life, including higher education. Universities today are not only required to provide high-quality educational services, but they must also be able to build effective communication with the public through digital media. This transformation has caused significant changes in the marketing patterns of higher education institutions. In the past, promotional strategies were mostly carried out through conventional media such as brochures, billboards, or educational exhibitions. However, digital marketing has now become an increasingly dominant approach used to reach prospective students. Bonilla, & Olmo-Arriaga, (2022) demonstrate that social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become fundamental tools for information and interaction between universities and prospective students, with content-driven engagement strategies significantly influencing university brand perception among younger audiences.

The digital era is characterized by changes in the way people obtain information. Prospective students tend to use the internet and social media to search for references regarding study programs, university reputation, educational facilities, and career opportunities after graduation. This condition requires higher education institutions to provide information that is easily accessible, relevant, and engaging through various digital platforms. Thus, marketing strategies no longer function merely as promotional tools, but also as a means of building institutional image and strengthening relationships with the public. Del Río-Rama, Álvarez-García, Mun, & Durán-Sánchez, (2021) assert that perceived service quality plays a significant role in shaping student loyalty, meaning that universities must align their marketing communications with actual service delivery to build long-term credibility and trust. Furthermore, Borishade, & Dirisu, (2021) highlight that in higher education, the quality of

services directly influences student satisfaction and institutional reputation, making service-oriented marketing an indispensable component of broader institutional strategy.

This study aims to analyze the importance of marketing strategies for private universities in facing competition for new student admissions in the digital era, explain the role of institutional positioning in building the image and differentiation of private universities, identify strategies for understanding the target audience of prospective students through digital approaches and interactive communication, analyze the utilization of digital media, social media, websites, and data analytics in improving the effectiveness of university marketing, explain the importance of building relationships, trust, and positive experiences through experiential marketing strategies and campus events, and examine integrated marketing strategies that can enhance the competitiveness of private universities in attracting new students. Maulana, Patterson, Satria, & Pradipta, (2024) underscore that alumni connectedness built through sustained institutional engagement is a significant predictor of alumni contribution intentions, reinforcing the importance of long-term relationship marketing in higher education. Additionally, Aktan, & Akram, (2025) demonstrate that online experiential marketing plays a pivotal role in fostering university brand evangelism, indicating that institutions must invest in digital experiences that generate authentic emotional connections with prospective and current students.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach. The descriptive method is used to systematically and comprehensively describe the phenomenon of marketing strategies for private universities in the digital era. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on analyzing concepts, strategies, and phenomena of higher education marketing based on theories and findings from previous studies. The data in this study were obtained through secondary sources in the form of books, scientific journals, research articles, official government reports, and references related to higher education marketing, digital marketing, institutional branding, and prospective student behavior.

Several theories used in this study are derived from the ideas of Keller, (2013), as well as various studies on higher education marketing. Data collection was conducted through documentation studies by reviewing various literature relevant to the research topic. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was conducted by linking higher education marketing theories with the phenomenon of competition among private universities in attracting new students in the digital era. The results of this study are expected to provide an overview of effective and relevant marketing strategies for private universities in enhancing institutional attractiveness and winning the competition for new student admissions in 2026.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Importance Determining the Positioning of Higher Education

In developing marketing strategies in the digital era, the first step that universities need to take is to establish a clear institutional positioning. According to Keller, (2013), positioning is the act of designing an organization's image and offerings in order to secure a distinct and

valuable place in the minds of the target market. In the context of higher education, strong positioning will influence prospective students' perceptions of the quality and reputation of an institution. Therefore, universities need to conduct an objective internal evaluation in order to determine an identity that aligns with their characteristics and potential.

Positioning is an effort to build an identity and character that differentiate a university from other institutions. Determining positioning must begin with a comprehensive understanding of the institution's internal conditions. Universities need to identify their main strengths, both in academic and non-academic aspects. These strengths may include the quality of lecturers, research capabilities, modern facilities, international networks, entrepreneurship programs, graduate employability rates, as well as technology-based learning innovations. This identification process is important because effective positioning must be built on the institution's actual strengths rather than merely promotional slogans.

In addition to understanding internal strengths, universities also need to analyze the external environment, particularly the needs and preferences of prospective students. Today's younger generation tends to choose institutions that not only have a strong academic reputation but are also capable of providing learning experiences that are relevant to developments in the workforce and technology. Therefore, positioning must be aligned with societal needs and current educational trends. For example, the increasing demand for workers in the digital sector may encourage universities to position themselves as technology- and innovation-based institutions.

This view is consistent with the customer-oriented marketing theory proposed by Kotler, (2018), which emphasizes that marketing strategies should focus on consumers' needs and desires. In the context of higher education, prospective students are positioned as consumers of educational services who have expectations regarding the quality of learning, facilities, and career prospects after graduation. Universities that are able to understand these changing needs will find it easier to build relevant and competitive positioning.

A case study can be seen at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), which has consistently positioned itself as a leading university in the fields of science, technology, and innovation. This positioning is strengthened through various research achievements, international collaborations, and the development of technology-based startups within the campus environment. This consistency has made ITB widely recognized as a higher education institution that produces outstanding graduates in technology and engineering.

Competitor analysis is also an important part of determining positioning. Universities need to understand how other institutions build their image in society. By understanding competitors' positions, institutions can identify differentiation opportunities that make them unique and provide added value. Such differentiation may include more flexible learning approaches, a focus on industry-based education, strengthening student character development, or an international orientation. Successful positioning is positioning that can clearly demonstrate why prospective students should choose the institution over other universities. Le, Fuller, Hoang, & Nguyen, (2025) confirm through a bibliometric study that branding in higher education has emerged as a key strategy for institutions to gain competitive advantage and increase market share, with communication strategies and brand value co-creation being among the most critical areas for institutional differentiation.

According to David Aaker (2014), differentiation is a key element in building a strong brand identity. In the increasingly competitive higher education environment, differentiation is essential so that institutions do not lose their identity among the many available university choices. Universities with unique characteristics tend to be more easily remembered by the public and have greater appeal to prospective students.

Another case study can be seen at BINUS University, which has successfully built its positioning as a university focused on digital technology and entrepreneurship. Through a curriculum that aligns with the needs of the digital industry, collaborations with technology companies, and the development of student startup programs, BINUS has been able to attract the interest of young people who want to develop competencies in technology and digital business. This strategy demonstrates the importance of differentiation in building an institutional image in the digital era.

In the digital era, the relevance of positioning is also strongly influenced by the consistency of institutional communication across various media platforms. The identity that has been established must be reflected in all marketing activities, whether through the official website, social media, digital advertising, or other promotional activities. If a university positions itself as an innovative technology-based campus, then the communication content presented must also reflect innovation, creativity, and the use of digital technology in both the learning process and academic services. This consistency is important for building a strong perception in the minds of the public.

According to Keller, (2013), consistency in brand communication strengthens brand awareness and brand image in the long term. In the context of higher education, inconsistent communication can cause public confusion regarding the institution's identity. Therefore, all elements of marketing communication must be designed in an integrated manner to support the predetermined positioning.

Relevant positioning is also a must nature realistic and sustainable. College tall need ensure that constructed image can proven through quality service and experience real that is felt students. Mismatch between promotion and reality precisely can lower trust public to institution. Therefore that, positioning is not only become part from the communication strategy, but it must also be supported by development quality institutions in a way comprehensive.

Relevant positioning must also be realistic and sustainable. Universities need to ensure that the image they build can be proven through the quality of services and the real experiences felt by students. Any mismatch between promotion and reality can reduce public trust in the institution. Therefore, positioning should not only be part of a communication strategy, but must also be supported by the overall development of institutional quality.

For example, Gadjah Mada University (UGM) is widely recognized as a people-oriented university and a center for community service. This positioning is not only communicated through promotional activities, but is also reflected in various community service programs, social research initiatives, and tangible contributions to national development. This consistency between image and implementation is what has kept UGM's positioning strong and trusted by the public to this day.

Therefore, establishing a clear and relevant positioning in higher education marketing strategies requires a combination of understanding internal strengths, market needs, competitor

analysis, and consistency in institutional communication. Appropriate positioning will help universities build a strong identity, enhance competitiveness, and create better relationships with the public amid the dynamics of higher education in the digital era.

Determining the Target Audience of Students

In addition to determining positioning, understanding the target audience is also a very important aspect of digital marketing strategies. Universities must understand the characteristics of today's younger generation, which is predominantly Generation Z. This generation tends to consume information quickly and prefers visual and interactive content. They are more interested in digital content that is communicative and easy to understand rather than long and rigid formal information. Therefore, higher education institutions need to adapt their communication styles and content formats to make them more relevant to the needs of the audience. Personal and interactive approaches are considered more effective in attracting the attention of prospective students.

Today, much of young people's activities take place on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X. Universities can utilize social media analytics to identify the types of content that attract the most interest, the times with the highest interaction rates, and the topics most frequently discussed by prospective students. This data can serve as the basis for determining more relevant communication strategies. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), the use of digital analytics enables organizations to understand consumer behavior more accurately, allowing marketing strategies to be developed more effectively and based on data.

In addition to understanding digital behavior, universities also need to build direct communication with prospective students. This strategy can be implemented through activities such as open houses, webinars, school visits, educational exhibitions, and online educational consultations. Direct interaction allows institutions to gain a clearer understanding of the needs and expectations of prospective students. A personal communication approach can also increase trust and emotional connection between prospective students and the institution.

A case study can be seen in several private universities in Indonesia that actively utilize interactive social media to reach younger generations. BINUS University, for example, applies digital marketing approaches through creative content, technology webinars, and career-oriented digital promotions to attract prospective students. This strategy has successfully built the image of a modern university that is relevant to the needs of the digital industry. This demonstrates that understanding the target audience can help universities develop more targeted marketing strategies.

Therefore, understanding the target audience of prospective students at private universities requires an integrated approach through market segmentation, research on prospective students' needs, the utilization of digital data, and active as well as interactive communication. These strategies are important to ensure that universities can develop marketing programs that align with the characteristics of the younger generation and enhance institutional competitiveness amid increasingly competitive higher education environments.

Maximizing Online Media and Data Analysis

Optimizing the institution's official website also plays an important role in digital marketing strategies. A website functions as the main information center that reflects the quality and professionalism of a university. In this context, a modern website design, easy navigation, and the provision of comprehensive information are important factors that must be considered. Information regarding study programs, tuition fees, campus facilities, student activities, and admission procedures should be presented clearly and systematically. In addition, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is also necessary so that the website can be easily found by the public through internet searches.

Social media has become a marketing instrument that cannot be separated from the lives of digital communities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn have become major communication spaces for younger generations. Universities can utilize social media to build closer interactions with prospective students through various types of content, such as videos of campus activities, student achievements, online seminars, virtual campus tours, and alumni testimonials. Creative and consistent use of social media can increase engagement while strengthening institutional branding in the digital space. Cingillioglu et al., (2024) demonstrate through a systematic literature review that social media marketing for student recruitment in higher education encompasses five key dimensions: student engagement, university branding, enrolment decision-making, and communication strategy, all of which must be managed in an integrated manner to achieve optimal marketing outcomes.

In addition, content marketing has become an effective strategy for building the reputation of higher education institutions. Through educational articles, podcasts, webinars, and learning videos, universities can demonstrate their academic capabilities to the public. Informative and useful content not only increases public trust but also strengthens the institution's position as a center for the development of knowledge. In this context, marketing is no longer solely oriented toward promotion, but also toward creating value for society.

Using digital technology in marketing is also increasingly developing through the application of data analytics and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems. Digital data enables universities to understand prospective students' behavior, evaluate the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, and determine more targeted communication strategies. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technology has even begun to be implemented to improve information services through chatbots and automated recommendation systems. This shows that higher education marketing in the digital era is increasingly moving toward data-driven and technology-based approaches.

Nevertheless, challenges in digital marketing remain an issue that must be addressed seriously. The high level of competition among universities encourages each institution to continuously innovate in strengthening its branding and improving the quality of the services it provides. In addition, the image of higher education institutions in the digital era is highly vulnerable to public opinion and the spread of information through social media. Therefore, digital communication management must be carried out professionally, promptly, and accurately in order to maintain the institution's reputation effectively.

Overall, marketing strategies for higher education institutions in the digital era require an integrated approach that combines technology, communication, and the strengthening of institutional identity. Universities are not only expected to utilize digital media as promotional

tools, but they must also be capable of creating positive digital experiences for prospective students and the public. Through adaptive and innovative marketing strategies, higher education institutions can enhance their competitiveness while strengthening their existence amid the dynamic development of information technology.

It's Importance of Private University in Building Relationships, Trust, and Positive Experiences for Public.

In facing increasingly competitive higher education competition, private universities cannot rely solely on positioning strategies and marketing through social media or digital platforms. Although digital strategies play a very important role in the modern era, the success of higher education marketing is also influenced by the institution's ability to build relationships, trust, and positive experiences for the public. Therefore, more comprehensive and integrated marketing strategies are required so that institutions can enhance their attractiveness and maintain their existence amid increasingly intense competition.

One important strategy that needs to be implemented is building partnerships with senior high schools and vocational schools (SMA/SMK). Schools are the primary source of prospective students; therefore, maintaining good relationships with schools can help universities gain direct access to students. Forms of collaboration may include campus outreach programs, educational seminars, teacher training, academic competitions, and scholarship programs for outstanding students. According to Kotler & Fox, (1995), effective educational marketing requires a relationship marketing approach, namely building long-term relationships with parties that influence consumer decisions. In the context of higher education, teachers and schools often play a significant role in influencing prospective students' choices of universities.

In addition, experiential marketing strategies are also important for private universities to implement. Experiential marketing is a strategy that provides prospective students with direct experiences so that they can experience the atmosphere and academic culture of the institution firsthand. This strategy can be implemented through activities such as open houses, campus tours, trial classes, workshops, and student activities involving school students. According to Bernd Schmitt, (1999), experiential marketing is capable of creating emotional relationships between consumers and institutions through memorable experiences. In higher education, positive experiences gained by prospective students when visiting a campus can increase their interest in and trust toward the institution.

The results of a study conducted by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) indicate that students' decisions in choosing a university are influenced not only by formal promotions, but also by personal experiences, social interactions, and perceptions of the campus environment. Therefore, universities need to create experiences that can build positive impressions and strengthen the institution's image in the eyes of prospective students.

Another important strategy is strengthening academic reputation and the quality of graduates. Institutional reputation is a significant factor influencing public trust in universities. Private universities need to demonstrate academic quality through accreditation, the achievements of lecturers and students, scientific publications, international collaborations, and the success rates of alumni in the workforce. According to Ivy, (2008), academic reputation is one of the main factors affecting students' decisions in choosing higher education institutions.

The better the reputation of a university, the greater its opportunity to attract prospective students.

In this context, alumni also play a strategic role as part of institutional marketing. Alumni who succeed in their careers can serve as tangible evidence of the quality of education provided by the university. Alumni-based marketing strategies may include publishing alumni success stories, organizing career seminars, providing student mentoring, and involving alumni in campus promotional activities. Research by Stephenson, Nonprofit, (2014) explains that alumni play an important role in building institutional credibility because their experiences are considered more authentic and trustworthy by prospective students. More recently, Maulana et al., (2024) propose that alumni connectedness encompassing relatability, dependency, and sense of community is the most significant predictor of alumni's intention to contribute to their alma mater, underscoring the strategic value of cultivating deep and sustained alumni relationships as part of broader institutional marketing.

Private universities also need to develop service marketing strategies. In higher education, service quality is an important factor influencing student satisfaction and institutional image. Fast, friendly, transparent, and responsive services can increase public trust in the university. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & L Berry, (1988), service quality has a major influence on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. In the context of higher education, administrative services, new student admission processes, and access to academic information are all parts of the experience that are directly evaluated by prospective students and parents. Borishade et al., (2021) further validate this finding, demonstrating in a higher education context that the quality of services delivered by institutions directly and significantly determines student satisfaction and loyalty, underscoring the need for private universities to continuously improve administrative and academic service standards as an integral component of their marketing strategy.

In addition, scholarship and educational assistance programs can also serve as effective marketing attractions. Many prospective students consider financial factors when choosing a university. Therefore, providing academic scholarships, achievement-based scholarships, and financial aid programs can help increase public interest in the institution. This strategy functions not only as a promotional tool but also as an indication of the university's social commitment to supporting broader access to education.

Case studies can be observed in several major private universities in Indonesia, such as Telkom University and Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY). Telkom University has successfully built its image as a technology and digital industry-oriented university through collaborations with technology companies, startup incubator programs, and strengthened industry connections. Meanwhile, UMY is recognized for strengthening internationalization values, student exchange programs, and providing scholarships for outstanding students. Both institutions rely not only on social media but also on the development of academic reputation, student experiences, and partnership networks as part of their institutional marketing strategies.

Therefore, marketing strategies for private universities should not only rely on digital media or social media approaches, but also need to be implemented in an integrated manner through the development of school partnerships, experiential marketing, strengthening academic reputation, utilizing alumni networks, improving service quality, and providing

scholarship programs. These strategies will help institutions build public trust and enhance their competitiveness amid the increasingly complex competition in higher education.

Marketing Through Campus Events (Campus Brand Activation)

Marketing private universities through the organization of campus events is one of the most effective strategies for increasing institutional attractiveness amid increasingly competitive higher education competition. This strategy functions not only as a promotional medium, but also as a means of creating direct experiences for prospective students and the public regarding the campus academic environment. Through campus events, universities can demonstrate the quality of education, facilities, organizational culture, student creativity, and institutional reputation more concretely than through conventional promotional methods. In today's digital era, direct experience remains highly influential because prospective students not only seek information, but also want to experience the atmosphere and identity of a university before making their choice.

According to Schmitt, (1999), experiential marketing is a marketing approach that focuses on creating emotional and interactive experiences between consumers and an institution or brand. In the context of higher education, the experiences gained by prospective students through campus activities can shape positive perceptions and increase interest in the institution. Therefore, many private universities have begun to make campus events an important component of their institutional marketing strategies.

One common form of activity is a campus open house. This activity provides opportunities for high school and vocational school students, as well as their parents, to visit the campus directly, learn about study programs, observe learning facilities, interact with lecturers and students, and obtain information regarding scholarships and new student admissions. Through open houses, prospective students can gain a real picture of academic life on campus, thereby increasing their level of trust in the institution. Kotler & Fox, (1995) explain that direct interaction with prospective consumers in educational marketing has a major influence on the formation of institutional image and trust.

In addition to open houses, universities can also organize seminars and workshops for high school and vocational school students. Activities such as digital training, motivational seminars, business workshops, graphic design workshops, public speaking sessions, and coding workshops can serve as platforms for demonstrating the institution's academic competence. This strategy not only introduces the campus to prospective students, but also builds the image of the university as an innovative institution that is relevant to contemporary developments. Several private universities in Indonesia, such as BINUS University and Telkom University, actively utilize technology seminars and digital training programs as a means of strengthening their branding as technology- and creative industry-oriented campuses.

Organizing interschool competitions is also a highly effective marketing strategy. Academic and non-academic competitions, such as science Olympiads, debate competitions, sports tournaments, e-sports competitions, and art festivals, can increase interaction between universities and school students. Through such activities, universities can build emotional connections with prospective students while introducing the campus environment more broadly. Research by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) shows that experiences and social

interactions significantly influence students' decisions in choosing higher education institutions.

In addition to academic activities, entertainment events such as campus festivals, art performances, and student expos can also be utilized as institutional promotional strategies. Today's younger generation tends to be attracted to activities that are interactive, creative, and entertaining. Therefore, such events can serve as a means of building the image of a dynamic, active, and student-oriented campus. During these activities, universities can showcase student projects, student organization activities, and information services related to new student admissions. Aktan et al., (2025) demonstrate that online experiential marketing strengthens university brand evangelism among students, suggesting that blending physical campus events with digital amplification through social media significantly enhances the reach and emotional impact of institutional marketing activities. Furthermore, Bonilla Quijada et al., (2022) confirm that consistent and strategic use of social media platforms to document and promote campus events generates higher levels of audience engagement, reinforcing the institution's brand identity among prospective students.

Marketing strategies through campus events can also be strengthened through activities involving industry sectors, such as job fairs, career expos, professional seminars, and public lectures featuring practitioners. These activities are important because many prospective students consider career prospects after graduation as a primary factor in choosing a university. According to Ivy (2008), institutional relationships with the professional world and graduate career opportunities are among the aspects that strongly influence prospective students' decisions.

In addition, community service activities such as social service programs, training for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), free health check-ups, and community development programs can also become part of institutional marketing strategies. These social activities demonstrate the university's tangible contributions to society while strengthening the institution's image as one that is socially responsible and concerned with community welfare.

Therefore, marketing private universities through campus events is a strategy capable of creating direct experiences, building emotional connections, and strengthening the institution's image in the eyes of the public. Campus events function not only as promotional tools, but also as platforms for demonstrating academic quality, organizational culture, student creativity, and the institution's social contributions in a tangible manner. Consequently, universities need to design innovative and relevant activities that align with the characteristics of younger generations in order to enhance competitiveness in the increasingly competitive new student admission process. Le, Fuller, Hoang, and Nguyen (2023) reinforce this point by establishing that HE communication strategies and brand value co-creation are among the most critical emerging themes in higher education branding research, suggesting that universities that actively involve students and stakeholders in campus-based experiences are better positioned to build strong, differentiated, and enduring institutional brands in the long term..

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion presented in this study, it can be concluded that marketing strategies for private higher education institutions in the digital era of 2026 must be implemented in an integrated, adaptive, and needs-based manner that aligns with the

expectations of prospective students. Universities can no longer rely solely on conventional promotional methods or social media marketing; Instead, they need to build clear institutional positioning, strong differentiation, and an academic image that is relevant to technological developments and labor market demands.

The success of higher education marketing is also influenced by the institution's ability to build relationships, trust, and positive experiences for the public through experiential marketing, partnerships with schools, alumni engagement, improvements in service quality, and the provision of scholarship programs. Furthermore, organizing campus events such as open houses, seminars, workshops, competitions, and campus festivals has proven effective in building emotional connections among students and strengthening the institution's image in the eyes of prospective students. Through integrated marketing strategies that combine digital technology, the strengthening of academic reputation, service quality, and direct community engagement, private universities can enhance their competitiveness while strengthening their existence amid increasingly intense competition in higher education.

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