

Analyzing Unimar's Positioning Strategy for Strengthening Brand Image and Increasing Student Enrollment

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Keyword	Abstract
Positioning, Brand Image, SWOT, Purchase Decision, Student Enrollment	This study analyzes the positioning strategy of Universitas Muhammadiyah A.R. Fachruddin (Unimar) in building its brand image to increase new student enrollment. Using a mixed methods approach, combining interviews with institutional stakeholders, surveys of 150 respondents, and SWOT, IFAS–EFAS, and QSPM analyses, research found that Unimar's Islamic identity is its primary strength (recognized by 72% of respondents) but remains largely symbolic, with weak differentiation (40%), limited brand awareness (45%), and underdeveloped academic reputation. IFAS (2.60) and EFAS (2.90) place Unimar in Cell II (Grow and Build) of the IE Matrix, suggesting the need for aggressive growth strategies. QSPM results prioritize strengthening Islamic identity through integrated digital marketing, followed by the development of Islamic-modern flagship programs and enhancement of academic reputation. The study contributes theoretically to higher education marketing literature and provides practical recommendations for Unimar to enhance competitiveness and ensure sustainable student enrollment growth.

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I. Introduction

Competition in higher education in Indonesia has become increasingly intense, both at the national and regional levels. Every university is required to develop appropriate marketing strategies in order to attract prospective students and build a positive image in society. One of the most important strategies is positioning, namely how an institution places itself in the minds of consumers in a unique, relevant, and distinctive manner compared to its competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016). A well-executed positioning strategy will establish a strong brand image, which in turn influences the rate of new student enrollment.

Universitas Muhammadiyah A.R. Fachruddin (Unimar) is a relatively new private university with approximately 1,500 students. As part of the extensive Muhammadiyah higher education network, Unimar promotes itself as a “quality Islamic campus.” This identity constitutes a strategic asset, as Muhammadiyah has a long-standing reputation in education and an extensive network of schools. However, as a new institution, Unimar still faces challenges in introducing and

strengthening its image amid the highly competitive environment.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of brand awareness in shaping a strong brand image (Keller, 2013). Without public awareness, positioning cannot evolve into a lasting and meaningful image. Other studies have emphasized that brand image significantly influences students' decision-making in choosing a university (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) also found that a positive brand image increases student loyalty.

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What positioning strategies are implemented by Unimar?
2. To what extent do these strategies contribute to building a strong brand image?
3. What strategic steps can be taken to further strengthen Unimar's brand image?

The objectives of this study are to analyze Unimar's positioning strategy, assess its effectiveness in building a brand image, and provide relevant marketing strategy recommendations.

The significance of this research is twofold: theoretically, it enriches the study of educational service marketing grounded in Islamic values; practically, it serves as a reference for Unimar in formulating more effective marketing strategies to increase new student enrollment.

II. Literature Review

Positioning

Positioning is an institutional strategy to establish a brand image in the minds of consumers in a unique, relevant, and distinctive way compared to competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of higher education, positioning serves to differentiate a university from its competitors, thereby providing prospective students with a clear rationale for their choice. Ivy (2008) emphasizes that positioning in higher education must encompass product aspects (study programs), reputation, services, and integrated promotion. Pujiyanto and Santosa (2021) further assert that Islamic universities can utilize religious values as the basis of their positioning, but these must be combined with tangible evidence of academic quality in order to remain competitive.

Positioning of Islamic Higher Education: Pujiyanto and Santosa (2021) demonstrate that positioning based on Islamic values can serve as a key attraction if integrated with academic excellence. Meanwhile, Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) highlight that academic image continues to play a crucial role in fostering student loyalty. Therefore, Islamic universities must integrate religious values with demonstrable academic quality to establish a stronger brand image.

Brand Image

Brand image is a set of perceptions and associations attached to a brand in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). Within higher education, brand image includes academic reputation, service quality, and institutional credibility. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) assert that a positive university image is a determining factor in attracting new students. Similarly, Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) show that a strong brand image not only enhances student loyalty but also increases the likelihood that students will recommend the institution to others. Mulyana and Sugiharto (2020) found that a positive brand image significantly increases prospective students' interest in private universities. This finding reinforces the argument that brand image is not merely a perception but a key driver of

consumer decision-making when selecting a university.

Purchase Decision

A purchase decision refers to the process undertaken by consumers, beginning with need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, choice, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In higher education, purchase decision-making is reflected in prospective students' decisions to enroll at a particular university.

The indicators of purchase decision-making include:

1. Need recognition: prospective students acknowledge the importance of pursuing higher education.
2. Information search: prospective students seek information on relevant universities.
3. Evaluation of alternatives: comparing different universities.
4. Decision to choose: enrolling in a selected university.
5. Post-purchase behavior: satisfaction after joining, including the willingness to recommend the university.

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010), purchase decisions are influenced by psychological factors (motivation, perception), social factors (family, reference groups), and marketing factors (promotion, brand image, positioning). Ivy and Naude (2004) add that prospective students consider a combination of academic factors (program quality, reputation) and non-academic factors (cost, location, campus environment) when making their choices. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) also emphasize that university choice is a complex process involving individual factors, family influence, and institutional marketing strategies.

Research Variables

Independent Variable : Positioning

Positioning is a university's strategy to place itself in the minds of prospective students in a unique, relevant, and distinctive way compared to competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Indicators of Positioning:

1. Differentiation: the uniqueness of Unimar compared to other universities.
2. Relevance: the extent to which Unimar's positioning aligns with the needs of prospective students.
3. Message consistency: the coherence between promotional messages and actual student experiences.

4. Islamic identity: the incorporation of religious values as the basis of the university's image.

Mediating Variable : Brand Image

Brand image refers to the perceptions or associations attached to Unimar in the minds of society (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013).

Indicators of Brand Image:

1. Brand awareness: the degree to which the public is aware of Unimar.
2. Perceived quality: assessments of faculty, facilities, and academic services.
3. Reputation and credibility: the level of public trust toward the institution.
4. Loyalty or recommendation: the willingness of students and stakeholders to recommend Unimar.

Dependent Variable : Purchase Decision

In the context of higher education, a purchase decision is defined as the decision of prospective students to choose Unimar as their place of study (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Indicators of Purchase Decision:

1. Need recognition: awareness among prospective students of the importance of pursuing higher education.
2. Information search: the extent to which prospective students seek information about Unimar.
3. Evaluation of alternatives: comparisons between Unimar and other universities in Tangerang and surrounding areas.
4. Decision to choose: the final decision to enroll at Unimar.

III. Metode

This study employs a mixed methods approach, which combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach was chosen because the research problem relates to positioning strategies, brand image, and students' decisions in choosing a university—issues that require in-depth understanding (qualitative insights) as well as measurable analysis (quantitative assessment).

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-explanatory design. Descriptively, it aims to portray the actual condition of Unimar's positioning, while explanatorily, it seeks to analyze the relationship between the variables of positioning, brand image, and prospective students' purchase decisions.

Research Subject and Object

The object of this research is Universitas Muhammadiyah A.R. Fachruddin (Unimar) as a

higher education institution. The research subjects consist of three groups of respondents:

1. Internal stakeholders: university leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff.
2. External stakeholders: new students enrolled at Unimar in 2025.
3. General public: particularly parents of new students in 2025.

Population and Sample

The population of this study includes all active students and prospective students of Unimar. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, with criteria focusing on respondents relevant to the university selection process. A total of 150 respondents were selected for the survey, consisting of 100 active students and 50 prospective students. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 10 key informants, including university leaders, lecturers, and student representatives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three main methods:

1. In-depth Interviews: conducted with university leaders, lecturers, and students to gather qualitative insights into positioning and marketing strategies that have been implemented.
2. Questionnaires (Survey): distributed to students and prospective students to measure perceptions of positioning, brand image, and the decision to choose Unimar. The questionnaire was developed based on research variable indicators and employed a Likert scale (1–5).
3. Documentation and Media Analysis: consisting of secondary data from official university documents, brochures, the university website, social media, and reports on student admissions.

Research Instruments

The research instruments consist of interview guidelines for collecting qualitative data and questionnaires for collecting quantitative data. The questionnaire covers three research variables:

1. Positioning (X1): differentiation, relevance, message consistency, and Islamic identity.
2. Brand Image (X2): brand awareness, perceived quality, reputation, and loyalty/recommendation.
3. Purchase Decision (Y): need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, decision to choose, and post-purchase behavior.

The instruments were tested for validity and reliability using statistical methods (item validity with Pearson Product Moment correlation and reliability with Cronbach's Alpha).

Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative Analysis: employed content analysis of interview and documentation data. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and insights relevant to Unimar's positioning.

Quantitative Analysis: used descriptive statistical analysis to illustrate respondent profiles and perceptions of the research variables. Multiple linear regression analysis was then applied to examine the effect of positioning (X1) on purchase decision (Y), with brand image (X2) as a mediating variable.

SWOT Analysis: applied as a supporting tool to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by Unimar in building its brand image.

Research Procedures

The research was carried out in the following stages:

1. Preliminary study: collecting initial data through observation and literature review.
2. Instrument development: designing interview guidelines and questionnaires.
3. Data collection: conducting interviews, surveys, and documentation.
4. Data analysis: processing qualitative and quantitative data using the designated analysis techniques.
5. Conclusion drawing: formulating research findings, discussion, and strategic recommendations.

IV. Results And Discussion

Research Findings

In-depth Interview Results

Interviews with university leaders, lecturers, and students revealed that Unimar has established a relatively clear positioning foundation, namely as a university with an Islamic identity. This identity is regarded as a symbolic strength that differentiates Unimar from other universities in Tangerang. The support of Muhammadiyah further strengthens the legitimacy of this institution, given the organization's long-standing reputation in education and its extensive school network.

Nevertheless, informants also highlighted several challenges. Students acknowledged that the Islamic atmosphere on campus is tangible, but

academic quality and facilities have not yet fully served as major attractions. Furthermore, university leaders admitted that promotional activities are still carried out sporadically and inconsistently, preventing the positioning message from being effectively communicated to the wider public.

Survey Results

To obtain a quantitative perspective, a survey was conducted with 150 respondents. The findings indicate that although Unimar's image is relatively recognized, there remain significant gaps in terms of differentiation and brand awareness.

Table 1. Unimar positioning perception

Brand Image Indicator	Agree	Description
Unimar is known as an Islamic campus	72%	Strong religious identity
Lecturer quality is considered good	68%	Positive, but not a differentiating factor
Campus promotion is easy to find	45%	Brand visibility remains low
Unimar is different from other campuses	40%	Weak differentiation in positioning
Willingness to recommend Unimar	62%	Moderate public trust

Source: Research Results, 2025 (Data Processed)

These results suggest that while Islamic identity is prominent (72%), only 40% of respondents perceive Unimar as having clear differentiation. Thus, although Islamic-based positioning has been fairly successful, it has not yet resulted in a strong brand image as a leading university.

SWOT Analysis

Based on interview and survey findings, the SWOT profile of Unimar is as follows:

1. Strengths (S): Islamic identity, Muhammadiyah support, religious academic culture, developing faculty resources.
2. Weaknesses (W): Low brand awareness, inconsistent promotion, weak academic reputation, limited facilities.
3. Opportunities (O): Growing demand for Islamic education, Muhammadiyah network, digital marketing trends, potential external partnerships.
4. Threats (T): Intense competition, dominance of established university brands, high societal expectations, trends in online education.

Table 2. Internal Factor Analysis Summary (IFAS)

Internal Factor	Weight	Rating	Score
Strong Islamic identity	0.15	4	0.6
Muhammadiyah support	0.15	4	0.6
Religious academic culture	0.1	3	0.3
Developing faculty resources	0.1	3	0.3
Low brand awareness	0.15	2	0.3
Inconsistent promotion	0.1	2	0.2
Weak academic reputation	0.1	2	0.2
Limited facilities	0.05	2	0.1
Total	1		2.6

Source: Research Results, 2025 (Data Processed)

A score of 2.60 indicates that Unimar's internal condition is moderately strong. Its Islamic identity and Muhammadiyah support are major assets, but weaknesses in promotion and academic reputation require significant improvement.

Table 3. External Factor Analysis Summary (EFAS)

External Factor	Weight	Rating	Score
Rising demand for Islamic education	0.15	4	0.6
Muhammadiyah network	0.15	4	0.6
Digital marketing trends	0.1	3	0.3
External collaboration opportunities	0.1	3	0.3
Competition with established universities	0.2	2	0.4
Dominance of major university brands	0.1	2	0.2
High societal expectations	0.1	3	0.3
Shifts in online education trends	0.1	2	0.2
Total	1		2.9

Source: Research Results, 2025 (Data Processed)

A score of 2.90 reflects favorable external conditions, with strong growth opportunities : particularly in Islamic education trends and the Muhammadiyah network.

Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM), Strategic Alternatives Derived from SWOT:

- SO1: Strengthen Islamic identity through digital marketing.
- SO2: Leverage the Muhammadiyah network for recruitment.
- WO1: Optimize digital promotion to improve brand awareness.
- WO2: Enhance academic reputation through accreditation, publications, and

achievements.

- STI: Develop Islamic-modern flagship programs.
- WTI: Establish consistent communication strategies.

Table 4. QSPM Results

Strategy	TAS Score	Rank
SO1 – Islamic Digital Marketing	3.35	1
STI – Islamic-modern Flagship Programs	3.25	2
WO1 – Digital Promotion & Brand Awareness	3.1	3
WO2 – Academic Reputation Building	3	4
SO2 – Muhammadiyah Network	2.9	5
WTI – Consistent Communication	2.65	6

Source: Research Results, 2025 (Data Processed)

The top strategic priority is SO1 (strengthening Islamic identity through digital marketing), followed by STI (developing Islamic-modern flagship programs) as a differentiation strategy.

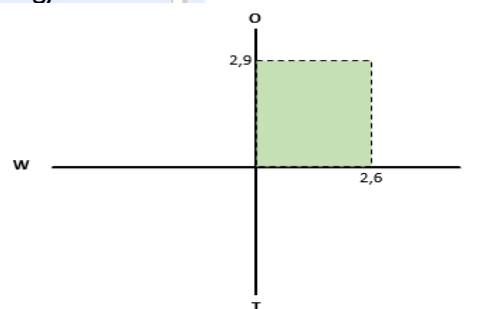


Figure 1. IE Matrix

Source: Research Results, 2025 (Data Processed)

Based on the IFAS score of 2.60 and the EFAS score of 2.90, Unimar is positioned in Cell II (Grow and Build) within the IE Matrix. This position indicates that the university possesses moderately strong internal resources and faces a highly favorable external environment. In practical terms, this means that Unimar is in a strategic condition that allows it to pursue aggressive growth initiatives. The institution has sufficient internal capabilities—particularly its Islamic identity and the support of Muhammadiyah—to leverage external opportunities such as the increasing demand for Islamic higher education and the rise of digital marketing platforms.

Being situated in Cell II suggests that Unimar should prioritize strategies such as market penetration, market development, and product

development. Market penetration can be achieved through more intensive and consistent digital marketing campaigns that strengthen brand visibility. Market development may involve optimizing the Muhammadiyah network as a recruitment channel for prospective students. Product development requires designing academic programs that integrate Islamic values with contemporary competencies, thereby providing clear differentiation from competing universities.

Thus, Unimar's placement in the Grow and Build quadrant highlights the necessity for an assertive and proactive approach in its strategic management. Rather than maintaining its current symbolic positioning, the university must actively expand its market reach, enhance its academic reputation, and consolidate its Islamic identity into a unique competitive advantage. If effectively implemented, these strategies will enable Unimar not only to strengthen its brand image but also to ensure sustainable growth in student enrollment.

Discussion

The study confirms that Unimar's positioning as an Islamic university has been widely recognized by respondents, with 72% associating the institution with Islamic identity. This indicates that religious-value-based positioning has successfully established strong associations in public perception. However, there remains a notable gap between symbolic positioning and academic realization. Only 40% of respondents viewed Unimar as differentiated from other universities, meaning the Islamic image alone has not yet created substantial academic distinctiveness. This aligns with Kotler & Keller's (2016) argument that effective positioning must be supported by demonstrable quality and consumer experience rather than symbolic claims alone.

In terms of brand image, Unimar possesses an initial strength in religious identity but remains weak in brand awareness and academic reputation. Only 45% of respondents reported that promotional information was easily accessible, signifying limited visibility. In today's digital era, visibility across public spaces—particularly through social media and websites—is critical in shaping brand image. Ivy (2008) emphasizes that promotion is a vital element of the higher education marketing mix, and low visibility hinders the formation of a consistent and strong brand image.

The SWOT analysis further demonstrates that Unimar holds significant internal strengths,

namely its Islamic identity and Muhammadiyah affiliation, both of which serve as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Muhammadiyah's backing offers legitimacy and access to an extensive school network. Nonetheless, weaknesses such as inconsistent promotion and limited academic reputation undermine the effectiveness of these strengths.

Externally, Unimar faces promising opportunities. The growing societal demand for Islamic-based education and the rise of digital marketing create avenues for expanding its influence. With an EFAS score of 2.90, opportunities outweigh threats. However, threats from intense competition with established universities and rising public expectations cannot be ignored. Strategies must therefore combine internal strengths with external opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and threats.

QSPM results underscore that the most critical strategy is strengthening Islamic identity through integrated digital marketing, followed by the development of Islamic-modern flagship programs to foster academic differentiation. The IE Matrix also places Unimar in the Grow and Build quadrant, meaning it must pursue aggressive growth strategies. The university should not rely solely on symbolic identity but must actively expand market reach, enhance visibility, improve academic quality, and establish clear differentiation.

In conclusion, Unimar's future success hinges on the integration of Islamic positioning, academic reputation strengthening, and consistent digital promotion strategies. Implementing these measures will enhance Unimar's brand image, increase prospective students' decision-making confidence, and ultimately achieve sustainable growth in student enrollment.

V. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Unimar's positioning in building brand image to increase new student enrollment, the main conclusions are as follows:

1. Unimar's Islamic positioning has successfully shaped its identity in public perception (72%), but remains symbolic, with only 40% of respondents perceiving clear differentiation.
2. The university faces weaknesses in brand awareness and academic reputation, with only 45% of respondents finding promotional information easily accessible.
3. SWOT analysis shows strengths in Islamic identity and Muhammadiyah support,

weaknesses in promotion and brand awareness, opportunities in Islamic education demand and digital marketing, and threats from competition and public expectations.

4. IFAS (2.60) and EFAS (2.90) place Unimar in Cell II (Grow and Build) of the IE Matrix, requiring aggressive growth strategies.
5. QSPM results identify the top priority as strengthening Islamic identity through integrated digital marketing, followed by developing Islamic-modern flagship programs and enhancing academic reputation.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Digital Promotion: Unimar should optimize consistent and integrated digital marketing strategies to increase brand awareness and ensure that its Islamic positioning reaches a broader audience.
2. Develop Academic Differentiation: The university should create flagship programs that integrate Islamic values with modern labor market needs, thereby establishing clear differentiation.
3. Enhance Academic Reputation: Systematic efforts are required to strengthen academic quality through accreditation, research publications, faculty and student achievements, and collaborations with industry and external institutions.
4. Leverage Muhammadiyah Networks: Muhammadiyah should be maximized as recruitment bases through targeted promotion and collaborative academic and non-academic activities.
5. Ensure Communication Consistency: Unimar must adopt a consistent institutional communication strategy across all channels to prevent distortion of its positioning and brand image.

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