

STP-Based Marketing and Public Perception Shift of Urban Islamic Primary Schools: Introducing the Demand Surplus Indicator

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to analyze urban community perceptions of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in the city of Surakarta, examine the Segmenting–Targeting–Positioning (STP)-based marketing strategies implemented, and identify the internal and external factors influencing their effectiveness within the context of educational competition in urban settings.

Design/methods/approach – This study adopts an integrative literature review design combined with limited field observation and documentation at several MIs in Surakarta. Secondary data were obtained from indexed articles, academic books, research reports, and policy documents, while primary data comprised the physical condition of the schools, facilities, promotional media, and student enrollment data. The analysis followed the stages outlined by Whittemore & Knafl (2005) using Kotler's STP framework.

Findings – The results indicate a significant shift in public perception: MIs are now viewed as modern Islamic schools on par with leading public schools, integrating religious values with mastery of science and technology. The application of STP—combining psychographic segmentation, targeting of flagship programs (foreign languages, robotics, life skills), and positioning based on achievements, facilities, and digital publications—has resulted in a demand surplus of applicants. Supporting factors include teacher quality, an integrative curriculum, and program innovations, while constraints involve limited physical capacity and competition from premium private schools.

Research implications – The findings provide strategic guidance for MI administrators to strengthen the “modern Islam” image through curriculum innovation, capacity expansion, and optimization of social media, with strategic adjustments tailored to the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the area.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 March 2024

Revised 28 November 2024

Accepted 31 December 2024

KEYWORDS:

madrasah Ibtidaiyah; educational marketing; STP; public perception; demand surplus.



Jurnal Pendidikan Islam

1. Introduction

Madrasahs, as one of the Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, hold significant historical and cultural roles in shaping human resources with religious character. However, in certain social contexts, madrasahs are often perceived negatively by segments of society. Such perceptions include the assumption that madrasahs are poorly maintained, dominated by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and focused solely on religious education without adequate attention to other fields of knowledge. This stigma is further reinforced by the assumption that madrasahs produce rigid and radical Muslim groups, making them less appealing to parents who wish their children to become professionals with broad academic competencies (Oji, 2015).



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How to Cite: Arief, M. M., Syukur, F., Fahrurrozi, Raharjo, & Ihsani, A. F. A. (2024) STP-Based Marketing and Public Perception Shift of Urban Islamic Primary Schools: Introducing the Demand Surplus Indicator, 13(2), 183-192.
<https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2024.132.183-192>

These views have positioned madrasahs as second-class educational institutions—last-resort options for students not admitted to preferred schools—and as outdated (Oji, 2015). Nevertheless, developments in national education policy through the Joint Decree (SKB) of three ministers—the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Minister of Education and Culture, and the Minister of Home Affairs—have strengthened the position of madrasahs as an integral part of the national education system. This decree equalized the status, diploma value, and curriculum of madrasahs with those of public schools, while simultaneously providing opportunities for quality enhancement in various aspects (Fadjar, 1998).

In recent years, preliminary observations have indicated a significant surge in public interest toward madrasahs in the city of Surakarta. Data from 2023 show that several madrasahs were compelled to reject hundreds of prospective new students because quotas had already been filled (Bram, 2023). This phenomenon can be understood in the context of urban social dynamics, aligning with Daldjoeni's view as cited in (Susetya, 2022), that high population density fosters competition for space, individuals selectively pursue their own advantages, and cities serve as meeting points for diverse ethnic and racial groups. This trend shift indicates a change in public perception, in which madrasahs are now regarded as educational institutions capable of integrating religious values with modern academic competencies, including mastery of science and technology (Bram, 2023).

Public interest in madrasahs in Magelang and Demak is influenced by the institution's positive image, academic and non-academic achievements, intensified publicity, flagship programs based on community needs, compliance with National Education Standards, and the physical appearance of the institution (Sofanudin, 2012). Madrasahs also hold equal status with public schools in the national curriculum, with a stronger emphasis on religious education, and the negative stigma toward madrasahs is dynamic and can change in line with social, cultural, and political developments (Suharyadi & Isbianti, 2022).

Research on educational marketing strategies has also begun to develop. Studies on the application of the marketing mix in madrasahs indicate that effective marketing strategies can enhance public interest through strengthened segmentation, precise target determination, and positioning (STP) aligned with the characteristics of the target market (Dayat, 2019; Machali, 2016). This is particularly relevant considering that urban madrasahs must compete with public schools offering various competitive advantages.

Previous findings suggest that the success of madrasahs in attracting public interest is influenced by the quality of educational services, flagship programs, and effective communication strategies (Sofanudin, 2012; Suharyadi & Isbianti, 2022). However, limitations remain. First, most studies focus solely on image and service quality without exploring marketing strategies in an integrated manner, particularly those based on STP. Second, empirical studies linking madrasah marketing strategies with the urban community context are still limited. This constitutes both an empirical gap and a methodological gap that needs to be addressed through research integrating the analysis of public perceptions, marketing strategies, and the challenges and opportunities for their development in urban environments (D. A. Miles, 2017).

Based on these conceptual and empirical gaps, this study focuses on the following research questions (RQs):

- a. What are urban community perceptions of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Surakarta City?
- b. What marketing strategies are implemented by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah to attract urban community interest?
- c. What internal and external factors influence the effectiveness of these marketing strategies?
- d. What are the implications of these marketing strategies for the development opportunities and challenges faced by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in urban settings?

In line with the formulated RQs, the objectives of this study are to:

- a. Describe urban community perceptions of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Surakarta City.
- b. Analyze the marketing strategies employed by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in attracting urban community interest.
- c. Identify the internal and external factors influencing the success of these marketing strategies.
- d. Evaluate the implications of these marketing strategies for the development opportunities and challenges faced by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in urban settings.

This study carries both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on the dynamics of public perceptions and marketing strategies of Islamic educational institutions, particularly in the urban context. Practically, its findings are expected to serve as a reference for madrasah administrators, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders in formulating effective, adaptive, and distinctive marketing strategies to enhance the competitiveness of madrasahs amid increasingly intense educational competition.

As a step toward addressing the stated problems, this study adopts an integrative literature review design combined with limited field observation and documentation, thereby providing a comprehensive and contextual portrayal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah marketing strategies in urban areas.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

The research design employed in this study is an integrative literature review combined with limited field observation and documentation. The selection of this design is based on the research gap identified in the introduction, namely the scarcity of studies that integrate the analysis of urban community perceptions, STP-based marketing strategies, and the challenges and opportunities for developing Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This approach enables the researcher to combine findings from various sources, both empirical and non-empirical, with contextual field data, thereby producing a comprehensive synthesis. The method follows guidelines that emphasize a systematic process of data collection, evaluation, and integration (Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

2.2. Data Sources

- a. Secondary data were obtained from indexed journal articles, academic books, research reports, and policy documents related to madrasah education, educational marketing strategies, and the characteristics of urban communities.
- b. Primary data consisted of non-participatory observation results and documentation from several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Surakarta City, including physical conditions, facilities, promotional activities, publication media, student profiles, and applicant statistics.

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in three stages:

- a. Literature identification – searching sources through online databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and university repositories) using the keywords: “strategi pemasaran pendidikan” [educational marketing strategy], “Madrasah Ibtidaiyah,” and “masyarakat perkotaan” [urban community]. Inclusion criteria included: (a) direct relevance to the research topic, (b) publication within the last 10 years, and (c) availability in either Indonesian or English.
- b. Source selection – selecting literature that met the criteria and eliminating redundant or irrelevant sources.

- c. Field data collection – conducting observations at several MIs in Surakarta City and gathering official documents as well as promotional materials from the respective institutions.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the steps outlined in previous guidelines, adapted from the qualitative data analysis model (M. B. Miles et al., 2014; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005):

- a. Data reduction – selecting information relevant to the research focus (public perceptions, marketing strategies/STP, internal–external factors, challenges, and opportunities).
- b. Categorization – grouping data into main themes to facilitate synthesis.
- c. Synthesis – integrating literature findings with field observation results to build a comprehensive understanding.
- d. Conclusion drawing – formulating final findings that address the research questions.

2.5. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework employs Kotler's Segmenting, Targeting, Positioning (STP) concept as the primary lens for examining MI marketing strategies in urban areas, encompassing:

- a. Market segmentation of MI target audiences in urban settings.
- b. Determination of flagship educational programs and services.
- c. Positioning of MI's image within urban community perceptions.

The use of an integrative literature review supported by field data enables this study to provide both a holistic and contextual account, consistent with the research objectives previously outlined.

3. Results

3.1. RQ1 – Urban Community Perceptions of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Surakarta City

Observations and documentation at several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MIs) in Surakarta City reveal a significant shift in perceptions compared to the previous decade. MIs, which were once frequently regarded as second-tier educational options, are now increasingly accepted and, for many urban parents, have become a first-choice institution.

These positive perceptions generally encompass three dimensions:

- a. Integration of religious values and the national curriculum – Parents appreciate MIs for their ability to combine strong religious instruction with general subjects relevant to the demands of the 21st century. Programs such as Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), moral education, and regular worship practices are implemented alongside science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction. "We want our children to have good morals, but also excel in science and languages. Here we see both running in balance" (W2).
- b. Early mastery of science and technology – Some MIs have computer laboratories, multimedia equipment in classrooms, and extracurricular programs in robotics and coding. These facilities increase parents' confidence that MIs excel not only in religious education but also in preparing children for technological advancements.
- c. A safe and conducive learning environment – Schools generally offer tidy classrooms, spacious courtyards, safe play areas, and adequate security systems. Parents view these conditions as important factors in character formation.

New student enrollment data for the 2023/2024 academic year show a consistent upward trend. At one leading MI, the number of applicants reached 220 students, while capacity was limited

to only 120 seats. This indicates a *demand surplus*, serving as strong evidence of the shifting image of MIs in public perception.

3.2. RQ2 – Marketing Strategies Implemented by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Based on observations, documentation, and literature review, MI marketing strategies in Surakarta City were analyzed using the Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) framework.

a. Segmenting

MIs target families in urban areas with high population density and socio-economic diversity. This segmentation is reinforced with a psychographic approach, focusing on parents who seek religiously grounded education delivered through modern methods. “Open school” and “trial class” activities are used to build connections with prospective parents.

“We aim for families who want their children to be strong in faith but also ready to compete in the technological era” (W1).

b. Targeting

The primary target is children aged 6–13 entering primary education. MIs offer flagship programs such as:

- Foreign language classes (English and Arabic)
- Science and technology enhancement (science clubs, robotics, coding)
- Arts and culture (Islamic musical ensembles, theatre, regional dance)
- Life skills (e.g., gardening, cooking)
- Moral development and personal mentoring

Promotional materials, both print and digital, emphasize the message of “holistic education” to appeal to middle-class parents concerned with balancing academic and moral development.

c. Positioning

MIs position themselves as “modern Islamic schools on par with leading public schools,” with an image built through:

- Academic and non-academic achievements at city and provincial levels
- Comprehensive and well-maintained learning facilities
- Regular publications on social media
- Parent testimonials shared via the school’s official channels

Table 1. Summary of STP Implementation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Surakarta City

STP Component	Field Findings (Observation & Documentation)	Literature Support
Segmenting	Focus on high-density urban areas; dominant geographic segmentation complemented by psychographic segmentation (parents seeking religious and modern education).	Effective segmentation facilitates resource allocation and creates competitive advantage (Machali, 2016).
Targeting	Main target: students aged 6–13. Flagship programs: foreign languages, science & technology, arts and culture, life skills, moral development.	A clearly defined target market enhances promotional effectiveness and program relevance (Dayat, 2019).
Positioning	MIs positioned as modern Islamic schools equivalent to leading public schools; positive image built through	Strong positioning increases perceived value and differentiates from competitors (Dayat, 2019).

achievements, facilities, digital publications, and parent testimonials.

3.3. RQ3 – Internal and External Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies

From the perspective of internal factors, the effectiveness of marketing strategies is supported by the quality of teachers and staff, most of whom hold bachelor's or master's degrees in education or Islamic studies. Their competencies are continually enhanced through various training programs, as expressed by one teacher:

"We regularly join creative teaching workshops so the material doesn't become boring" (W7).

The implementation of an integrative curriculum that combines the national curriculum with a distinctive madrasah curriculum focused on character development is also a strength. Flagship programs that adapt to student interests and current trends—such as *tahfidz* programs, Islamic arts, and digital literacy—add value in attracting public interest.

However, certain internal factors hinder progress, including limited infrastructure, particularly in the availability of adequate laboratory facilities, and classroom capacity that does not match the high number of applicants.

In terms of external factors, national policy through the Joint Decree of three ministers affirming the equal status of MIs with public schools provides legitimacy and unique appeal to the public. The change in public perception also serves as a significant driver, marked by increasing parental awareness of the importance of value-based education.

Conversely, notable external constraints include intense competition from private general schools offering premium facilities, making them primary competitors. In addition, differences in regional preferences affect the effectiveness of strategies; approaches successful in urban centers may not be directly applicable to suburban areas.

3.4. RQ4 – Implications of Marketing Strategies for Opportunities and Challenges in Developing MIs in Urban Areas

Field data show that the implementation of Segmenting–Targeting–Positioning (STP)-based marketing strategies has had a tangible impact on enhancing the competitiveness and positioning of MIs in urban settings. One of the most prominent indicators of success is the increase in applicants over the past two years, accompanied by greater parental involvement in various school activities. Schools view this increase as evidence of public trust built through well-targeted promotion.

"With the right promotion, parents feel more confident. This is proven by the surge in applicants over the last two years" (W9).

Beyond the rise in applicant numbers, alumni engagement has emerged as another marker of marketing success. Alumni not only serve as informal promotional agents through personal recommendations but also contribute to school activities both financially and non-financially. This support strengthens the madrasah's social network within the wider community while reinforcing institutional reputation.

Observations at several school events revealed active participation from parents and the community in activities such as mass religious gatherings (*pengajian akbar*), student exhibitions, and Islamic-themed competitions. Their presence not only enhances the public image of MIs but also generates a positive word-of-mouth effect, increasing attractiveness for prospective students.

Nevertheless, the implementation of these strategies faces challenges. Competition with public and private schools offering similar or even more advanced facilities remains a major obstacle to sustaining a competitive edge. Several competing schools in the same areas highlight

the superiority of their learning technology and modern laboratory facilities, appealing to certain parent segments.

Infrastructure limitations also present an internal challenge requiring strategic anticipation. In some locations, the number of classrooms available is insufficient for the volume of applicants, potentially hindering continued growth. Direct observation at one MI showed that some lessons had to be conducted in multipurpose rooms due to limited classroom capacity. This situation demands careful planning for physical infrastructure development and human resource enhancement to ensure the long-term sustainability of marketing success.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to describe urban community perceptions of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Surakarta City, analyze the marketing strategies employed, identify the factors influencing the success of these strategies, and evaluate their implications for the opportunities and challenges in developing MIs. The findings demonstrate a significant paradigm shift in public attitudes. Once often portrayed as second-tier educational institutions, MIs are now beginning to occupy a strategic position within the competitive landscape of urban education. This transformation is reflected in the consistently increasing number of applicants that surpass enrollment capacity. This condition aligns with the importance of a positive image and the existence of flagship programs in attracting public interest (Sofanudin, 2012). However, this study extends those findings by demonstrating that the integration of religious and national curricula, mastery of science and technology, and the creation of a safe and conducive learning environment are decisive factors shaping positive urban public perceptions of MIs.

The implementation of marketing strategies grounded in the Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) concept has proven to be a primary driver of MI success in Surakarta. This strategy illustrates that segmentation which considers not only geographic areas but also psychographic dimensions, such as parental values and aspirations, can enhance marketing effectiveness. This aligns with the view that precise segmentation and clear positioning can create competitive advantage (Dayat, 2019; Machali, 2016). In this context, MIs do not merely highlight their religiosity but build an image as “modern Islamic schools on par with leading public schools,” aligning with the needs of the urban middle class that seeks a balance between academic achievement and moral development.

The results also reinforce the view that curriculum equivalence between madrasahs and public schools opens opportunities to enhance institutional image (Suharyadi & Isbianti, 2022). The novel contribution of this study lies in revealing that the success of marketing strategies can be measured more objectively through the demand surplus indicator, an aspect rarely discussed in previous literature. While earlier studies have underscored the role of publicity and flagship programs (Sofanudin, 2012), the field findings here indicate that MI success in Surakarta is not solely reliant on promotion but is also influenced by internal factors such as teacher quality, integrative curricula, and program adaptability to educational trends. This finding resonates with the observation that integrated Islamic schools with modern science curricula and comprehensive religious education tend to exhibit strong customer orientation, effective inter-functional coordination, and the use of technology as a medium for community engagement (Shaikh & Kazmi, 2022). Nonetheless, gaps remain in competitor orientation, curriculum development, and teacher recruitment based on specific criteria. Integrating these insights suggests that MIs capable of combining strong market orientation, optimal internal resource management, and curriculum differentiation will achieve a more robust competitive position amid the intensifying educational competition in urban settings.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the relevance of the STP model in marketing Islamic education in urban areas. A key finding is the effectiveness of psychographic segmentation compared to purely demographic segmentation, and the importance of integrative value-

based positioning that blends spiritual strengths with mastery of science and technology. This approach extends the theoretical framework of educational marketing by incorporating a spiritual–moral dimension as a core value proposition, a dimension that has received limited attention in conventional marketing literature.

Practically, the results provide implications for MI administrators to maintain and enhance their image as modern Islamic schools through curriculum innovation responsive to contemporary developments, including the strengthening of digital literacy and 21st-century skills. Expanding physical capacity and human resources is essential to anticipate the impact of sustained demand surplus. In addition, more strategic use of social media—through the publication of achievements, school activities, and testimonials from parents and alumni—can further consolidate the positive image of MIs. Marketing strategies should also be tailored to different regions, given that the preferences of urban center communities and suburban areas are not always homogeneous.

Despite the significant contributions of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. The geographic scope focusing solely on Surakarta City restricts the generalizability of findings to other regions with different characteristics. Furthermore, field data obtained primarily through observation and documentation, without in-depth interviews, capture public perspectives only indirectly. While the integrative literature review approach allows for a comprehensive synthesis, it still carries potential selection bias. These limitations indicate the need for follow-up studies employing mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews to strengthen the validity of findings.

Future research directions could include comparative studies across cities to identify differences in MI marketing strategies in various urban contexts, as well as quantitative analyses measuring the specific effects of marketing variables on student enrollment rates. Longitudinal research could also be conducted to monitor the consistency of changes in public perceptions toward MIs over time. Additionally, exploring collaborations between MIs and external stakeholders—both private and governmental—may provide avenues for strengthening facilities and learning technologies that support the image of modern Islamic schools.

Overall, this study affirms that the success of MIs in Surakarta City in attracting urban public interest results from the synergy between shifts in public perception, the implementation of STP-based marketing strategies, and improvements in educational service quality. The novelty of this research lies in integrating these three elements within a single comprehensive analytical framework, while introducing *demand surplus* as a measurable indicator of educational marketing success. Accordingly, this study not only enriches the literature on Islamic educational marketing with a contextual, urban-based approach but also offers practical guidance that can be adopted by similar institutions to enhance competitiveness amid the dynamics of modern educational competition.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that the success of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Surakarta City in attracting urban public interest is the result of the synergy of three main factors: the increasingly positive shift in public perceptions, the targeted implementation of Segmenting–Targeting–Positioning (STP)-based marketing strategies, and the improvement in the quality of educational services that integrate religious values with modern academic competencies. MIs are no longer perceived as second-tier options but as modern Islamic schools on par with leading public schools—capable of fulfilling the aspirations of the urban middle class for holistic education that balances moral development with academic achievement, including digital literacy and 21st-century skills.

The application of STP has proven effective through psychographic segmentation that takes into account parents' values, aspirations, and lifestyles; the selection of flagship programs relevant to market

needs; and consistent positioning built through achievements, facilities, and digital publications. This strategy has generated a *demand surplus*, serving as an objective indicator of educational marketing success—a conceptual contribution rarely highlighted in previous literature. Key supporting factors include teacher quality, integrative curricula, and the adaptation of programs to educational trends, while the main obstacles involve limitations in physical capacity, infrastructure, and intense competition from premium public and private schools.

Practically, these findings provide guidance for MI administrators to maintain the “modern Islam” image through curriculum innovations responsive to advances in science and technology; to expand physical capacity and human resources in anticipation of growing demand; and to optimize social media as a strategic communication channel to strengthen institutional image and build emotional connections with the community. Furthermore, marketing strategies should be adjusted to the demographic and psychographic characteristics of different areas, given that the preferences of urban center communities may differ from those in suburban regions.

The limitations of this study lie in its geographical focus solely on Surakarta City and the restricted scope of field data collection, which did not include in-depth interviews; thus, the generalization of findings should be approached with caution. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-methods approaches, conduct comparative studies across cities, and develop quantitative analyses to measure the direct effects of marketing variables on enrollment rates. Longitudinal studies are also needed to monitor the sustainability of changes in public perceptions.

For education practitioners, the main implication of this study is that the successful marketing of Islamic educational institutions in urban areas depends not only on promotion but also on the quality of services and the relevance of programs aligned with community aspirations. For the academic community, this research enriches the literature by introducing an integrated analytical framework that combines STP marketing strategies, service quality, and the *demand surplus* indicator, while also opening pathways for the development of educational marketing theory based on spiritual–moral values within the urban context.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Moh. Miftahul Arief contributed to the formulation of the research problem, conducted field data collection, and drafted the initial report. Fatah Syukur provided conceptual supervision, guided the methodological framework, and validated the final findings and conclusions. Fahrurrozi was involved in data analysis, interpretation of results, and editing the structure and coherence of the research report. Raharjo contributed to the literature review, theoretical synthesis, and development of the research’s conceptual framework. A. Fikri Amiruddin Ihsani was responsible for writing the global context, mapping contemporary issues, and contributing to the comparative cross-national analysis.

Funding statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest’s statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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