

IDENTIFYING MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES FOR INCREASING STUDENTS INTAKE IN CENTRAL JAVA - INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The competition of private higher education institution is getting much tougher and tighter. Each institution needs to give their best to attract students to enroll in their institution. To maintain their competitiveness among private universities, Public Relations Bureau will try their best effort to implement any strategies that they think as the most effective one in generating interest for new students. This study tries to investigate what Marketing Public Relations strategies implemented in private universities for increasing students intake. Besides, it also investigates what kind of communication programs carried out by Public Relations Bureau in attracting prospective students to enroll in their universities. This study employs interview to obtain the data and research any corresponding literature to analyze the collected data. There are 6 private universities involved in this study. The result of the study shows that most universities have implemented all the strategies in Marketing Public relations i.e. planning, implementing and evaluation. Apart from that they also carry out various Marketing Public Relations program ranging from having presentation at high school, participating in school exhibition to community service to support the society in building and developing their capacity and knowledge.

Keywords: Marketing Public Relations strategies, intake, Marketing Public Relations program, private university.

INTRODUCTION:

Nowadays, it cannot be denied that private higher education institutions face undeniable fact that they have to compete to get a desirable number of students every academic year. The competition itself is quite tough due to government policy regarding students' registration and acceptance in any state universities. It is common that each institution, especially in Central Java has to do their best to get students' interest to enroll in their universities. If those private universities do not maximize their effort in attracting students' interest to enroll in their universities then they will be in a disadvantageous situation for their sustainability as higher education institution.

In order to maintain the number of students enrolling in one's institution or known as students intake, any institution has to implement any strategies that they feel the most suitable one in addressing their need. This is usually carried out by the Public Relations Bureau of each institution. Normally, this Bureau is the one who is responsible for planning and executing any action in relation to their effort either image branding or attracting any prospective students. They usually conduct a routine activity ranging from doing presentation, roadshow, managing workshop, and training for high school teachers, to community service.

In promoting their institution, they need to implement a distinguished strategy that might not be taken by other institution. Integrating Public Relations with marketing reveals the milestone of this phenomenon. It means that in promoting their institution to the target market, they do not only doing any routine they used to do but also carrying out any relevant strategies in Public Relations domain.

The objective of this study is to investigate what kind of Marketing Public Relations strategies that universities have done so far to attract students' interest to enroll in their universities. Apart from that, it also tries to see what kind communication programs done by the Public Relations Bureau in order to attract the prospective students to enroll at their universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

PUBLIC RELATIONS CONCEPT:

Abdulrachman (1993) said the management strategy in doing the communication and building beneficially relationship between company and its public is done by the Public relations practitioner. The public in this case is the private university where Public relations practitioner works. The role of Public relations here is to create good will and get positive public opinions or establish a cooperation based on harmonious relationship with various public. Public Relations programs must be focused on internal Public relations and also external public relations.

MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS DEFINED:

Drawing upon the most frequently used definitions of Public Relations and marketing and personal experience, the definition of Marketing Public Relations is " Marketing Public Relations is the process of planning, executing, and evaluating programs that encourage purchase and customer satisfaction through credible communication of information and impressions that identify companies and their products with the needs, wants, concerns and interests of customers" (Harris, 1993)

Another experts Eduard Depari said that The term of Marketing Public Relations refers to a product or service marketing activities that are included in public relations activities. As the public relations activities, this should be designed to create, develop, and maintain the image of an organization or institution. It also reflects the self-selling, because between the good things about the institution and also the image of the product can not be separated, but on the other hand it should be interrelated and influenced one and another (Anggoro, 2005:255).

As Marketing Public Relations practitioners, they involve in may area of work such as : (a) Positioning the company as a leader or expert, (b) Building trust (confidence and trust) consumer, (c) Introducing new products, (d) Removing , re-launching products, (e) Communicating the benefits of the products, (f) Promoting the use of new methods for the product that is already known, (g) Involving the society to the product, (h) Reaching secondary markets, (i) Giving pressure to a weak market, (j) Expanding the use of advertising, (k) Spreading the news prior to advertising, (l) Creating a communicative advertising, (m) Describing the product in more detail, etc (Kasali, 2005: 13).

THE CONCEPT OF MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY:

In doing the job, Marketing Public Relations practitioner should know about the strategies that he/she should do in order to decide what communication tools used in implementing the program. The Marketing Public Relations strategies include : planning, implementing and evaluating the programs that can stimulate prospective students to choose study programs that are offered. It also can regain the satisfaction of prospective students through the

reliable information given and also give positive impression about the university / programs offered which are suitable with their needs, desires, concerns and interests (Ruslan, 2006).

Steps that must be done in the Marketing Public Relations (MPR) strategy are (Ruslan, 2006):

- a. Conducting market research, to obtain information according to the needs and desires of consumers in this case is the prospective students.
- b. Creating products. It means a study program in accordance with the results of the market research
- c. Determining the price of these products . it means the cost of the tuition fee charged by the university
- d. Determining the target consumer, target audience which is suitable with the programs offered.
- e. Planning and implementing promotional campaigns (pre-selling projects) which will be launched and be able to compete in the future and is quite attractive to prospective students in terms of output which would be obtained after finishing their study.
- f. Maintaining good relationships with its stakeholders especially the parents, High school teachers , etc.

MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS:

According to Kotler and Keller (2007). Marketing public relations tools covers many aspects as follows :

- a. Publications : companies entrust the expansions of the products based on the publication which will influence and attract the targeted buyers. These publications includes annual reports, brochures, articles, company newspapers, magazines and also audiovisual materials
- b. Identity media : the company needs to create an identity that can be easily recognized by the society. For example : company logo, stationery, brochures, signs, corporate forms, business cards, buildings, uniforms and also performance regulations for employees.
- c. Events : the company can draw attention to their new products or service by having special events, such as interviews, seminars, exhibitions, competitions, contests etc , in order to reach wider community.
- d. News : One of the main public relations work is to create or find events that fit with the company, its products, its people or its employees, and also make the media interested to make press releases and come to the press conferences managed by the company.
- e. Speeches: Company should be able to answer the questions asked by the community well
- f. Public service activities : company can build a positive image by getting involved in any public service activities
- g. Sponsorship: company can market their products by being a sponsor any sport events or cultural events that give the benefit for the company.

THE CONCEPT OF INTAKE:

As Hornby (1995) said in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, intake means a number of people entering an institution etc during a particular period (group of people who get into an institution within a certain time).

From this definition it can be concluded that the meaning of intake in this study is the number of new students who enroll at the college in a particular academic year. While to know the increase of the intake, will be seen from the large number of students who re-register at the college in a particular academic year.

RESEARCH METHOD:

This study involves 6 private universities in Central Java. The data collected for this study is obtained from interview and from previous study related to this topic. The universities involved are private universities in Central Java. The reason of choosing Central Java as the location of the study is that the hope that the study will be able to contribute to the Marketing Public Relations practitioners in this area. Besides, it is also the continuity of the previous study in the field of Public Relations. The study interviews people in charge of Public Relations in each university. The interview itself takes place for more or less 60 minutes. The questions given in the interview are open- ended ones with the hope that it will enable the interviewee to explore any relevant explanation that they think important. The interview is recorded and then transcribed before it is analyzed.

The data is collected and analyzed qualitatively to obtain the intended data to address the posed research questions. The questions used for the interview can be seen in the following list.

- Strategies done by the universities (planning, implementing and evaluation)
- Any market research carried out to identify the needs
- Marketing promotional strategies done by Public Relations Practitioner (advertisement, sponsorship, events, presentation, roadshow, etc)
- The influence of Marketing Public Relations Program towards the intake

- Any innovation made to increase the intake
- Public Relations program in relation to regain the image of the universities
- Any program to build the good relationship with stakeholders especially high schools and parents
- Form of community service in regaining the image of universities

The questions are derived and composed based on the literature that support this study. Sometimes there also questions that comes up spontaneously in the interview due to the situation and condition of each university. The list of the questions only serves as guidance for the interviewer, in this case is the researchers, it may be sometimes elaborated to get clearer explanation from the interviewee. It does not have to be in order as well, the interviewer let the interview flows smoothly like natural conversation so that the interviewee does not feel tense in answering the question.

After the interview in 6 universities is carried out then the data is transcribed and analyzed. The data will be interpreted and classified into several categories so that it will be easier to address the research questions. The categories will be data belongs to strategies in Marketing Public Relations and the ones belong to any activity carried out by the universities in relation to Public Relations.

All the participants involved in this study are ensured that their response would be anonymous for their confidentiality. In line with that, they have sign a consent form that there is no objection for them to be involved in this study. In the data interpretation or discussion, there would not be any name mentioned. It is strictly assured that there would be any name mentioned in the data analysis and discussion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The result and discussion of the study conducted in this context is presented in this section. After all the data needed are collected and transcribed, it comes to the part in which the data have to be analyzed and interpreted. The discussion and interpretation will give all the data needed to address the research questions preciously written in introduction section

MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES:

Most of the universities involved in this study mention that they always do all steps in Marketing Public Relations strategies which cover planning, implementing and evaluation. In carrying out those steps, they tend do it in a various way. Let's take an example, the first step done by the universities in planning the program, they normally involve all the faculties in their universities for brainstorming the ideas. However, they might also make a promotion team just for handling the students' enrollment for that particular occasion. In other words, it means the team serves as ad hoc or situational. This condition reflects that most of the private universities do not have specific-patterned strategies regarding the students' enrollment in one academic year.

During the planning stage, they normally coordinate with the internal public to decide what they have to do or execute their program. One of the universities Public Relations Practitioners mentions that "Involving promotion coordinator at faculty level is very important because we can know exactly what main points should be covered in promoting their faculty along with all the majors". (Public Relations Practitioner 1 / PR1, translated by the researcher).

Another Public Relations Practitioner states that " We decide to make the ad hoc promotional team due to the lack of personnel in Public Relations Bureau. By doing so, it can be a great help for the Public Relations Practitioner to carry out the planned program" (PR2, translated by the researcher.) based on the explanation and statement given by the Public Relations Practitioners, it can be deducted that most of the universities have done the first step, in this case is planning, before they implement the program. In some cases, it is possible that during the planning stage, they will come up with a new idea or program to increase the intake so that they do not only stick to the routine program. In the same way, they invent an innovation that has not been done before.

At the implementation stage, the universities carry out what they have already planned at the previous stage. In executing their planned program, they work in the time frame they have agreed on so that they will work effectively and efficiently. According to those Public Relations Practitioners, what they have planned and done so far have a positive impact for the intake especially the innovation that comes up at the planning stage. One of the Public Relations Practitioners says, " Our new program is students gathering that involves high schools students around the university area. In this gathering, students will visit the faculty in which the students are interested in. In this case, faculty will have to hold a small exhibition or open house in there faculty where the students can ask questions and see the outstanding work produced by students at that particular faculty along all the achievement and awards they have obtained. At the same time, this program will be broadcasted by local television. This is the most interesting part that the prospective students are waiting for because they think that they can promote their

school as well “.(PR 4, translated by the researcher). As what Dennis L Wilcox said that the impact of television on the field of personality promotion is immense. An unknown person who appears on a nationally or locally distributed television show may become an almost instant celebrity (Wilcox. Dennis L, 1995)

Still in the same path, one Public Relations Practitioner says that to help them in carrying out their marketing program, they involve all high schools guidance and counseling teachers that have a good relationship with the university. They involve all those teachers in their promotional team. Another university gives an incentive to those guidance and counseling teachers in a form of training, out bond training, workshop and seminars that will help them in developing their professionalism in carrying out their duty either for their daily duty at their school or in helping the university’s promotional program. By doing so, they will feel attached and bear the responsibility to promote the university to high school students.

In short, the implementation stage shows that all their programs along with the innovation have a great deal of impact for the intake. In average, they are able to increase the students’ intake up to 15% yearly. It is a big achievement for each of the Public Relations Bureau.

The last stage in Marketing Public Relations strategies is evaluation. This stage is normally done informally while they are carrying out the program. In some cases, it may happen directly after they program is finished. From the evaluation that they do whether it is formal or informal, they will take important points that they have to improve in the next program. Based on what most Public Relations Practitioners have said, this stage is usually not well coordinated.

MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM:

In Marketing public relations, the universities do not only plan, implement and evaluate the marketing public relations strategies but also have some marketing public relations programs that they have to carry out for the sake of their promotional program. Most universities involve media in helping their promotional program. Besides, they also have actions program that directly link with the stakeholders.

THE USE OF MEDIA IN PROMOTIONAL PROGRAM:

Most of the universities use media in supporting their promotional program even though some of them think that this is the main means for promotion. The use of media is ranging from advertisement, advertorial, to news release. They do not only use printed media such newspaper but also involve electronic media like local television and radios. They normally use television and radios for talks shows or exposing university’s profile. The new form media that are often used by those universities are websites and social media. They think that it is the most suitable and practical media that people access nowadays to get information about the university. Most of them use Facebook, Twitter, blog and Google plus.

The example of using printed media is for advertorial, advertisement and news release. One Public Relations Practitioner explains that “ The use of advertisement and advertorial is a must. People will tend to read and notice the positive side of the university as well as what the university has done that is reflected in news release. Besides, it shows the existence of the university “. (PR 3, translated by the researcher).

In relation to the use of electronic media, it depends on the financial condition of the university. For those university who have a big budget for electronic media they will maximize the chance for promoting the university either for advertorial or having talk show in both radio and local television.

In line with the above fact, one Public Relations Practitioner maintains that” Using television and local radio will create a two-way or interactive communication between the prospective students and the university. It gives a good impact that students will know more about the university through all the programs in radio and television”. (PR 5, translated by the researcher).

Nowadays, promoting through social media seems to be the most effective and practical way in reaching the target audience especially the young prospective students for university. This is due to the fact that most of high school students spend most of their time accessing social media either for socializing or for finding any information that they want including their further education.

The use of social media is considered to be the most effective and practical if it is well managed. It is proven by one university that states “ We employ one person to be in charge for handling those social media that publish information about the university as well as answering questions posted by social media users. We focus on using Facebook page and twitter specialized for anything related to the university starts from students activities to the news update of the university” (PR6, translated by the researcher).

The use of media either printed or electronic ones are proven to be helpful in building the image of the university in

the society. Most of the universities involved in this study use the media in accordance with their situation to achieve their set goals for their promotional program. They maintain that media is quite important in this case, though it does not directly contribute much for their promotional program in sense of increasing students' intake, they believe that it helps them a lot in image building and branding awareness of their universities.

It shows that there is a good relationship between the universities and the media. As what Broom, Center and Cutlip (1994) said that there is beneficially mutual understanding between PR and Media. For example the need of a university to promote its university by putting an advertisement in the media, having a talk show etc and on the other hand, there is also a need for a media to get some incentive from the advertisement or talk show which are paid by the university. This respective cooperation is done for the sake of both parties.

ACTION PROGRAM AS PART OF PROMOTIONAL PROGRAM:

Apart from media, most universities also do some action programs in their promotional actions. They normally do things from presentation for high school students, roadshow to high school in the surrounding area to participating in school exhibition. Universities are also active in giving any kind of sponsorship for high school event with the hope it will help in building good relationship with the schools. In addition, universities provide various competitions to accommodate high schools students' interest and talent. The one responsible for conducting such event is the corresponding faculty. In line with that, universities do community service as part of their promotional program. At least twice a year, they will have such a program to help the community in the surrounding area to improve the capacity and knowledge in the society.

Among 6 universities, 5 of them still consider that having presentation and roadshow at high schools is still needed. As one Public Relations Practitioner mention that " presentation at high school is still effective because at the same time it gives a chance for the prospective students to interact directly with the university representative" (PR1, translated by the researcher)

However, one university thinks that having presentation is not effective anymore. They to have one day admission test for their prospective students, this is expressed by a well-established private university. Their Public Relations Practitioner mentions "We never give presentation to high schools anymore, because most of them have already known about our university. They normally find the information about the university on their own" (PR 2, translated by the researcher)

The universities involved in this study mostly participate in any school exhibition to show their existences among other higher education institutions. As what David W.Wragg said that exhibitions are just one of the ways in which the interests of your organization in this case is the university itself, that joined the exhibition, can be promoted (Wragg, David W, 1992). Besides, they give any kind of sponsorship to high schools' event. This is intended for maintaining the relationship between universities and high schools. It is a kind of mutual appreciation that benefits both parties.

CONCLUSION:

To sum up with, this study has been able to answer the posed research questions. All the private universities involved in this study have implemented all the stages in Marketing Public Relations strategies comprising of planning, implementing and evaluation. One big change that they usually do in planning is having innovation. For the Marketing Public Relations program, those universities have planned and implemented several actions. Their actions ranging from having presentation at high schools, road show, participating in schools' exhibition, giving sponsorship to events conducted by high schools to providing community service to support the society in building their capacity and knowledge.

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