

Students Perceptions and IIB Darmajaya's Marketing Marketing Strategy during Covid-19 Pandemic

Novita Sari¹, Firmansyah YA², Aswin³, Winni Sari⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty of Economics and Business, Department of Management, Institute of Informatics and Business Darmajaya.

Z.A PagarAlamSt., No. 93, LabuhanRatu, Bandar Lampung 35142

Telp. (0721) 700261, 781310

winnisfz@gmail.com, noviadinda@gmail.com

Abstract: Covid-19 has brought some negative impact globally, including the declining interest to register in universities due to economic unaffordability. This study will obtain information about how students perceive Darmajaya in the middle of this Covid-19 spread. For the marketing area, this information might give an additional strategy on how to attract new students in a new different way in increasing the number of total new admissions. This study used the approach of qualitative phenomenological study. To acquire the data, the researcher used the deep-interview method. A sample of 14 students of Darmajaya's first year-students and a number of selection criteria were identified. From the informants, it was obtained that Darmajaya had built a good perception among the students regarding the service quality, accreditation, lecturers' quality, achievements, web, and social media accessibilities as well as popular events and competitions but it needed an improvement in scholarship socialization, needed to expose more of the students' organizations (UKM) in social media and needed to enrich the major/courses in order to attract the new enrollers to register.

Keyword: Students, Perception, Pandemic Covid 19, Marketing strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a matter of things that has broad impacts on self-development which may lead to global advancement. New skills rejuvenation such as cross-country studies, technology, and a diversity of so called 21st-century skills has developed new regenerated updated skills including collaboration, oral and written communication skills, agility, critical thinking, initiative, imagination, and ability to analyze information. In Darmajaya itself as per 2018, reported from the archives of The Office of New Admissions Center, the total numbers of new enrollees in Informatics and Business Institute (IIB) of Darmajaya has significantly dropped from what the year of 2017 could yield. It may be worsened by the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). IIB Darmajaya needs to develop strategic options that will be responsive to the changes facing this sector. One of the steps in generating strategic options is customer analysis. This research is undertaken in the context of students' perceptions of the marketing communication approach IIB Darmajaya had done in order to attract their interest to enroll, therefore, it makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in this important area of research.

2. METHOD

As this research needs real-time and direct answers from the informants, the researcher employed the interview data collection method, recorder, as well as field notes. For this study, the data collection method will be conducted through interviews. The interview, as the researcher obeys the government's regulations to do the physical distancing, the interview will be conducted through phone calls. Interviews through the phone are conducted because there might be busy

students or the ones who had hectic schedules. Plus, a phone call was an effective way to connect with participants who lived far away. For this stage, the semi-structured deep interview will be applied and assisted with audio recording and verbatim archives to obtain the understanding and insights of students' perceptions. The researcher was able to take the sample from each course that Darmajaya accommodates. There are 7 courses divided into 2 departments. From each course, the researcher will ask at least 2 participants who are willing to join. In total, there will be 14 informants for the interview session.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Brand Image

More than half of the informants interviewed stated that Darmajaya had an equal strength of brand image to some other private universities such as University of Bandar Lampung (UBL) and University of Teknokrat. These two universities are the most mentioned private higher educational institutions as IIB Darmajaya's competitor even thought that the brand image that Darmajaya was less popular than the two universities mentioned above. The reasons, they said that the two main things that Darmajaya can did not provide so far. The first most mentioned reason was that University of Bandar Lampung and University of Teknokrat had more majors/courses to choose from, in which a lot of students have an interest. Since there were so many choices to choose from the courses available in University of Bandar Lampung as well as University of Teknokrat, a large number of students tend to make their mind to select those two as their "Plan B" if they don't make it to the state university. When they get into the universities, they tend to recommend it to their friends, family, relatives, and other people so that they made a strong brand image to people in a wider range of community.

On the other hand, Darmajaya had more specific courses to choose. As Darmajaya focused on economic as well as computer science, it provided less choice to the students. But the advantage was, the students said, that it made Darmajaya more concentrated on what they are focusing on, it made the human resources (in this case are the lecturers) were more qualified in the field and it makes the accreditation of IIB Darmajaya stable over the years in the level of A and B. They stated also, that this advantage made IIB Darmajaya not lose in competing with other private universities since there were also a large number of students whose interest was either in economic science or computer science recommend Darmajaya to other people. In this case, Darmajaya had an equally strong brand image but needs to be careful with other competitors too.

b. Exposure

One of the most frequent factors that students revealed how they got exposed to IIB Darmajaya is the events. Events they said, are the number one medium for high school students to get to know about a college or universities. From the events that are held, students are starting to have a curiosity about the campus, about the courses they provide, what are the students' activities or organizations they have, what are the achievements that they've got, etc. Events are the best medium for students to get recognized on a certain campus and then have an interest in, and in the end, it can lead their mind to register in. Some informants said that Darmajaya is already rich in events or competitions that are held in high schools. Some informants even revealed that they made their mind to register in Darmajaya because they got exposed from the events and competition such as programming competition, futsal competition, music events, accounting events, and many more. In this case, most of them stated that Darmajaya has accommodated their events so well in order to introduce the high school students more about IIB Darmajaya. But again, Darmajaya always has competitors, Three of the informants stated that the closest candidate of Darmajaya's competitor is Teknokrat with its robotics events that have

entered the international competition. They suggest that Darmajaya needs to make more interesting events in the future.

c. Pricing Strategy

As many as nine students stated that the pricing strategy that Institute of Informatics and Business of Darmajaya applied in the middle of the Coronavirus spread is considered expensive. they think that with so many competitors compete with Darmajaya such as Teknokrat and University of Bandar Lampung, Darmajaya is the highest in giving the price to the students. They argue that there are other choices in selecting private universities as their plan B, considering the prices that they can afford and highlighting that Covid-19 gives a negative impact on their economic affordability. Overall, they argue that IIB Darmajaya is way too high in giving price to the students.

But the good news is, the students told the researcher that they paid the high money for a lot of very good returns. They can enjoy the accredited accreditation that not all private universities have, they got qualified lecturers to teach them something new, they have rich facilities and infrastructures, they got adequate online/e-learning medium to support their study, they received exceptional service from enrolling in until today, they have satisfying students organizations, they enjoy the achievements that Darmajaya obtained before, and most of all, they have participated in so many events that IIB Darmajaya held up until now, such as webinars.

The conclusion is, despite its high pricing consideration, there are so many good things provided in return. And this is good considering the approach that Darmajaya take is suitable in the middle of Covid-19 spread.

d. Product Socialization

IIB Darmajaya offers quite many variants and quota for scholarship, either academic or non-academic. IIB Darmajaya offers Bidikmisi Scholarship, Hafiz Qur'an scholarship, orphan scholarship, underprivileged scholarship, and academic achievement improvement scholarship. Other than that, IIB Darmajaya also offers quite many international program that students can join with extra scholarships such as Student Mobility, Joint Research, Joint Degree, Distant Learning, and Academic Visit. With so many scholarship and international programs, IIB Darmajaya theoretically are the most superior campus among other private universities, even for state universities that don't hold the same program.

Despite all its merits and the good imaginary assumption above, a surprising statement emerged from the students interviewed. 4 of the participants informed the researcher that they did not get the socialization about any of the scholarships Darmajaya offers before, especially in this Covid-19 Pandemic. They added, before the pandemic spread, IIB Darmajaya would usually come to all high schools in the whole Lampung in order to introduce the campus. But they did not receive the information about the scholarship. They said that IIB Darmajaya still did not cover their high school up to socialize about any of the programs mentioned above, Perintis 1 High School for example. They also added that IIB Darmajaya should better outspread more about scholarship and international program in social media in order to get more student's interest which can lead to buying decision particularly for the Covid-19 Pandemic approach.

e. The Use of Social Media

As many as 11 out of 14 interviewees or the majority of students uttered some good perceptions about the use of social media that IIB Darmajaya has done. In the number of 10 students stated that IIB Darmajaya has done a great job of exposing its products to social media like Instagram and TikTok especially in the middle of Covid-19. Instagram and TikTok became the most frequent words mentioned when they think of social media IIB Darmajaya utilizes during the pandemic. They revealed that before they made their decision to enroll in Darmajaya,

they searched a lot about the information of IIB Darmajaya through Instagram since there is a physical distancing regulation. Things that the students searched a lot are courses, accreditation, student organizations, and campus visual, and facilities features. All the information they want to know was acquired easily and in perfect coverage that they expected and made them form a good perception of IIB Darmajaya. They think IIB Darmajaya has accommodated much broad information in such good care and attention even to social media. It is a strength and the plus point, according to the students. They said because compared to other universities they've searched for before, i.e Teknokrat, UBL, and Unila, IIB Darmajaya is the one that has the most post on social media uploaded frequently every day. They are satisfied with the reality that Darmajaya took good care to information socialization in social media underlining that we are facing the spreading virus.

However, the students also uttered the inadequacy that they think IIB Darmajaya hasn't covered up yet so far. It's the exposure of the students organizations as well as the program. They did really hope to find or to hear anything about students organizations from the Instagram but they found nothing. Or if they find anything, it's really still lacking. For this, they didn't get sufficient information from Instagram.

Moving on, there is this TikTok that has come as an atom bomb to the Millenials. Students also uttered a good perception to IIB Darmajaya for the effort to outspread information into TikTok. They mentioned that the effort to penetrate Tiktok as the trend is going up is really a remarkable job. There are so many Millenials that have TikTok account. As they have the account there are a big opportunity that they will get exposed from the Darmajaya's Marketing Team in relation with its product promotion. Darmajaya has gained quite many followers on TikTok and is growing higher everyday. This is a good medium to seminate the word of mouth marketing (WOM) to other people who will later on follow IIB Darmajaya account on TikTok. Plus, the penetration to outspread the information of IIB Darmajaya will attract more students to enroll in and promote it to the wider range of area.

f. Website and On-Site Promotional Activities

Another strength of IIB Darmajaya in the students' mind is the ease of website accessibility. They stated that compared to other universities such as Unila, Teknokrat and Itera, IIB Darmajaya has the easiest accessibility of website usage because the information provided are complete, up-to-date and the features are not made to complicate students. During the pandemic of this Coronavirus, website has been one of the tools that helps a lot to find information about enrollment related to fees, location, lecturers, degree provided, courses, accreditation, news from the campus and how to enroll in. Darmajaya, is in the first number of list that students made in relation of ease accesbility compared to Unila which they said, extremely not up-to-date, too many options, and is confusing students. Heading forward, Itera, is even worse. Students conveyed that by just looking at the features inside the website they got lazy immediately to find out due to the complicated allowance to access the information. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Darmajaya is perceived has the best website accessibility ease and is the winner compared to all.

For on-site promotional activities, students also told the researcher that Darmajaya has provided the satisfying service in order to answer every questions asked. The response for every question and feedback is fast and agile. During the pandemic, they considered the on-site promotional activities are already obeyed the government regulation protocol such as wearing a mask, wash hands, use hand sanitizer and face shield added.

But again, there is one thing that Darmajaya needs to pay attention next time. According to the extension student, Darmajaya hasn't yet provided a really accurate information regarding study hours. Especially for the evening class students, the information acquired is that the study hour is flexible, but the reality is, it is not. It could make a negative perception of word of mouth in the future if IIB Darmajaya does not provide the accurate information later in the future. But overall,

other than that, students give an average score of 8,5 out of 10 for what they think of website and on-site promotional activities.

g. Marketing Strategy

Out of 10, students give an average score of 8 to overall marketing activities that IIB Darmajaya has done. They have a good thought of IIB Darmajaya's overall marketing activities during this Covid-19 outbreak because Darmajaya has covered up every platform that Millennials use such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and now TikTok. The language approach to attract and leave a good opinion to them is considered as very interesting and "*close to Millennials*" while the information gives is considered as clear and quite accommodating what students need to know.

What the Marketing Team of IIB Darmajaya needs to expose more either online or in direct promotion activities are the exposure about the students organizations as well as the program, scholarship along with its technical enrollment, and also the international programs. Those three important things need to be socialized more in every IIB Darmajaya's marketing activities in order to form a more superb perception.

4. CONCLUSIONS

From 14 students interviewed, all of them perceive that Darmajaya was exceptional at accreditation, lecturers' quality, achievements, customer service, web, and social media accessibilities as well as popular events and competitions.

Nevertheless, Darmajaya lacks scholarship socialization to some high schools and vocational schools outside Bandar Lampung, needed to expose more of the students' organizations (UKM) in social media, and needs to enrich the major/courses in order to attract the new enrollers to register in.

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