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How Marketing Mix Strategy Influences Prospective Student Admission Decisions: A Case Study of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* Teacher Education Program in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT. Student program selection has become a strategic concern for higher education institutions, yet empirical evidence on how marketing mix factors influence enrolment decisions in Islamic teacher education remains limited. This study investigates the determinants of prospective students' admission decisions in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* Teacher Education programs at State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (*PTKIN*) in Indonesia. Using a quantitative survey of 547 students from three *PTKINs*, data were collected through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis and regression techniques. The findings identify five key determinants of admission decisions: Influence of Surroundings, Consideration of University, Perceived Usefulness, Social Consideration, and Vocational Aspects. Among these, the Influence of Surroundings emerged as the most dominant factor, indicating the central role of family, peers, and community networks in shaping students' program choices. Institutional reputation and perceived career prospects also significantly influenced decision-making. This study extends the higher education marketing literature by providing an empirically grounded model of student choice within the marketing mix framework in the context of Islamic higher education.

Keywords: *Islamic teacher education; higher education marketing; marketing mix; student decision-making;*

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INTRODUCTION

Education has become a highly competitive global sector in which higher education institutions must actively attract and retain students in an increasingly crowded marketplace (Conceicao et al., 2024; Mahmood et al., 2024; Mgweba et al., 2024; Sadikov, 2026). In this context, students are no longer passive recipients of educational services but rational and social decision-makers who evaluate alternative programs based on perceived value, institutional image, digital communication, and future career prospects, in line with recent applications of consumer behaviour models to higher education choice (Arief & Brabo, 2025; Baruno et al., 2024; Eum, 2025).

In many countries, one of the most dynamic segments of higher education is faith-based and religious teacher education, which plays a strategic role in shaping values-oriented basic education systems (Evendi, 2022; Maksum et al., 2025; Niskaromah et al., 2025). In Indonesia, *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* Teacher Education programs (*Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, PGMI*), offered within

State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri, PTKIN*), prepare teachers for Islamic primary schools and integrate Islamic values with contemporary pedagogical and subject-matter knowledge (Halili et al., 2021; Muzhiat & Kartanegara, 2020; Sitompul et al., 2023; Solichin & Alim, 2023; Sufaini et al., 2022). These programs contribute directly to the quality of Islamic basic education and, by extension, to the human capital formation of large segments of the Muslim population, making their sustainability and attractiveness a matter of wider societal concern beyond the Indonesian context (Binangkit & Siregar, 2020; Rosser, 2018; Sumiati et al., 2024; World Bank, 2021).

However, Islamic teacher education programs often face perceived disadvantages in the broader higher education market, especially regarding graduate career prospects and institutional prestige compared to secular teacher education programs such as Primary School Teacher Education (*PGSD*) (Baruno et al., 2024; Hermawan et al., 2022; Suhardi & Pragiwani, 2017). In the Indonesian context, the long-standing debate on the equivalence between *PGMI* and *PGSD* degrees, including documented cases of discrimination in civil service recruitment and access to teacher professional education (*PPG*), suggests that institutional and regulatory factors can shape how prospective students evaluate these programs (Khaeroni & Farhurohman, 2020). At the same time, national and institutional application data reveal a paradoxical pattern: while some *PGMI* programs experience declining first-choice applications over time, others at leading *PTKINs* such as UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta have become among the most competitive and in-demand study programmes in their institutions, with high numbers of applicants and tight selection ratios (Ma'ruf & Juhaidi, 2025; Panitia Nasional Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri, 2024). This divergence indicates that *PGMI* is not uniformly "unattractive"; instead, student demand appears to be contingent on how specific programs position and market themselves within their social and institutional environments (Ramdhiani & Wahdiniwaty, 2018).

The case of UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten further illustrates this tension. Institutional data indicate that the number of first-choice applicants to the *PGMI* program decreased sharply, from 618 in 2019 to 328 in 2023, despite the program's mandate to support the supply of qualified *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* teachers in the region. This decline is particularly problematic in light of national quality assurance requirements, such as those of the Indonesian Accreditation Agency for Education (LAMDIK), which expects a consistent annual increase in applicant demand as one indicator of program competitiveness (Bakar et al., 2022). Understanding why some *PGMI* programs can maintain or increase high demand while others experience significant decline is, therefore, both a practical management issue and a theoretically relevant question for higher education marketing and quality assurance (Sumiati et al., 2024; World Bank, 2021).

Recent research on student choice has identified a broad range of determinants, including academic quality and program reputation, social influences from parents and peers, financial considerations, institutional facilities, and perceived career outcomes (F. Ahmad et al., 2023; Baruno et al., 2024; Juhaidi, 2024b; LaFave et al., 2020; Maniu & Maniu, 2014; Maringe, 2006; Moody, 2020; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Tannous et al., 2024). Studies in higher education marketing have also adapted the services marketing mix framework (7P) to conceptualise how elements such as program design (product), tuition and financial aid (price), physical and digital accessibility (place), and communication strategies (promotion), along with people, process, and physical evidence, shape student decision making (Ambarwati et al., 2024; Effendi et al., 2022; Febriansah, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Ivy, 2008; Tuten & Solomon, 2015; Zebua & Us, 2025). Nevertheless, much of this work has been conducted in secular universities or general higher education contexts and tends to treat marketing mix elements and social-psychological influences as separate analytical strands (Adrianto & Suharyanti, 2024; Arief & Brabo, 2025; Chatterjee & Kumar, 2020; Eum, 2025; Gupta, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Juhaidi, 2024b). There is limited empirical evidence on how marketing mix–

related factors interact with social, institutional, and vocational considerations in faith-based teacher education, particularly in Muslim-majority systems.

In the Indonesian context, recent studies have examined student preferences for higher education and the influence of reputation, financial aid, and social networks on institutional choice, but they rarely focus specifically on Islamic teacher education or systematically map empirically derived decision factors onto the marketing mix framework (F. Ahmad et al., 2023; Ambarwati et al., 2024; Febriansah, 2024). Existing research on *PGMI* and Islamic education has tended to highlight issues of graduate employability, negative stigma, and program positioning, but often in descriptive or normative terms that do not quantify the relative importance of different determinants in student decision making (Ramdhiani & Wahdiniwaty, 2018; Sufaini et al., 2022; Suhardi & Pragiwani, 2017). Consequently, two key gaps remain: first, the lack of factor-analytic evidence on the structure and dominance of decision factors among students choosing *PGMI*; and second, the absence of an empirically grounded linkage between these factors and the elements of the marketing mix that *PTKIN* can strategically manage (Febriansah, 2024; Ma'ruf & Juhaidi, 2025).

Addressing these gaps is essential not only for Indonesian policymakers and *PTKIN* leaders but also for the broader international literature on higher education marketing in religious and value-based institutions (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Mayer, 2020; Sumiati et al., 2024; World Bank, 2021). If social influence, institutional reputation, perceived usefulness, and vocational alignment turn out to be the primary drivers of student choice in this context, then marketing strategies for Islamic teacher education should differ systematically from those of secular programs that rely more heavily on geographic proximity or generic branding appeals (Auliarahman & Sumadi, 2020; Febriansah, 2024; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2016; Juhaidi, 2024b). Moreover, demonstrating how empirically extracted factors can be mapped onto the 7P marketing mix model offers a transferable analytical approach for other religious teacher education systems facing similar enrollment and positioning challenges (Ambarwati et al., 2024; Effendi et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Ivy, 2008; Zebua & Us, 2025).

In light of these considerations, this study has two analytical objectives. First, it seeks to identify the latent factors that structure prospective students' decisions to enrol in *PGMI* at *PTKIN*, using factor analysis to quantify the relative contribution of social, institutional, perceived usefulness, and vocational dimensions. Second, it aims to interpret these empirically derived factors within the 7P marketing mix framework to formulate evidence-based implications for designing marketing strategies in Islamic higher education. By doing so, the study positions the *PGMI* case within global debates on student choice and higher education marketing, while offering context-specific insights relevant to faith-based teacher education in other settings.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, confirmatory research design to examine how marketing mix–related factors shape prospective students' decisions to enrol in *PGMI* at *PTKIN* in Indonesia. We chose the design to test a theoretically grounded factor structure derived from prior research on student choice and higher education marketing rather than to explore new dimensions inductively. The target population comprised undergraduate students enrolled in the *PGMI* programme at *PTKIN* who had completed the formal admission process and were therefore able to report the considerations underlying their enrolment decisions retrospectively. This study was conducted at three *PTKIN* with established *PGMI* programmes and differing levels of applicant demand and competitiveness: UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang (West Sumatra), and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. According to official data from the national higher education database (*Pangkalan Data Pendidikan Tinggi, PDDikti*), these institutions together hosted 1,665 active *PGMI* students in the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year, with

453 students at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, 610 at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, and 602 at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.

The required sample size was determined in accordance with established guidelines for factor analysis and finite population sampling. MacCallum et al. (2001) recommend subject-to-variable ratios of at least 4:1, and preferably 20:1 for smaller datasets, while noting that sample adequacy must ultimately be judged in relation to model complexity and communality patterns. Comrey and Lee (as cited in MacCallum et al., 2001) further classify samples of 300 as "good", 500 as "very good", and 1,000 as "excellent" for factor-analytic research. Complementing these rules of thumb, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table indicates that, for a finite population of approximately 1,600–1,700 individuals at a 5% margin of error, a sample of about 310–313 respondents is adequate. On this basis, the minimum target sample was set at 313 *PGMI* students, allocated proportionally to each institution according to its share of the total *PGMI* population (approximately 85 from UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, 115 from UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, and 113 from UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta).

A cluster random sampling technique was employed, with intact student groups (e.g., class cohorts) within each *PGMI* programme serving as sampling clusters. Clusters were randomly selected at each *PTKIN*, and all students within the selected clusters were invited to participate until the proportional target for each institution was met or exceeded. Students who were invited received an explanation of the research objectives and were informed that participation was voluntary and would not affect their academic standing.

Data collection was conducted between April and June 2024, a period chosen to be relatively close to the national Islamic university admission cycle (*SPAN-PTKIN* and *UM-PTKIN*) to minimise recall bias in reporting enrollment decisions. The questionnaire was administered online using a Google Forms survey link, which was disseminated through official and informal WhatsApp groups of *PGMI* students at the three *PTKIN*. During this period, 547 students completed the questionnaire in full; all of these responses met the eligibility criteria and were included in the analysis. The final sample of 547 cases, therefore, exceeded both the commonly cited minimum of 313 respondents for confirmatory factor analysis and the recommended ratio of 5–10 respondents per indicator, given the 25 observed indicators used in this study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of marketing mix–related factors and their enrollment decisions. Instrument development followed three stages: construct specification, item generation, and expert validation. First, latent constructs were specified based on the literature on student choice and higher education marketing, including dimensions related to the influence of surroundings, consideration of university, perceived usefulness, social consideration, vocational aspects, and geographic location. Second, an initial item pool was adapted from existing scales used in prior studies on the marketing mix and university choice, then translated and contextualised for the *PGMI* and *PTKIN* settings.

Content validity was assessed by three senior academics in educational management and Islamic teacher education, who evaluated each item for relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness. Based on their feedback, ambiguous items were revised, overlapping items were removed, and several statements were rephrased to better reflect the *PGMI* context. The final instrument comprised 25 items measuring five main latent factors (Influence of Surroundings, Consideration of University, Perceived Usefulness, Social Consideration, and Vocational Aspects), two items related to Geographic Location, and demographic and background questions (e.g., admission pathways). All perceptual items employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Before the primary survey, a pilot test was conducted with 50 *PGMI* students from a *PTKIN* not included in the main sample to examine item comprehension, response patterns, and preliminary reliability. The pilot results indicated satisfactory internal

consistency at the subscale level (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70), and we made minor wording adjustments to enhance clarity.

Data analysis followed a staged procedure: preliminary analyses in IBM SPSS 26 and confirmatory factor analysis in IBM SPSS Amos. First, we performed data screening to detect missing values, outliers, and violations of statistical assumptions. Because the online survey required complete responses to proceed, missing data were minimal; nonetheless. We excluded all cases that showed inconsistent or invalid responses. Descriptive statistics, including skewness and kurtosis, were examined to assess univariate normality at the item level. Multicollinearity was evaluated through inter-item correlations and variance inflation factors (VIFs). VIFs were inspected to determine multicollinearity, with values below three generally considered indicative of non-problematic multicollinearity in applied regression settings (Joseph Franklin Hair et al., 2019).

Second, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate the measurement model and to confirm the hypothesised five-factor structure. The adequacy of the data for factor analysis was assessed by examining the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity, using a minimum KMO value of 0.50 as the criterion for adequacy. (Field, 2018). A significant Bartlett's test result ($p < 0.05$) was treated as evidence that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor extraction (Pallant, 2013). The analysis retained factors that met Kaiser's eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalues> 1) and yielded an interpretable rotated solution. The final measurement model excluded items and factors that showed weak or conceptually inconsistent loadings (Joseph Franklin Hair et al., 2019; Howard, 2023; Okan et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2019).

Third, the analysis assessed the reliability and validity of the measurement model. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated by computing Cronbach's alpha for each factor, with values above 0.70 treated as acceptable (Field, 2018; Joseph Franklin Hair et al., 2019; Nunnally, 1994). Convergent validity was examined through standardised factor loadings ≥ 0.50, average variance extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50, and composite reliability (CR) ≥ 0.70, consistent with recommended thresholds for construct validity in structural equation modelling (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Joseph Franklin Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion by comparing the square root of AVE for each construct with its inter-construct correlations; it was deemed adequate when the square root of AVE exceeded all corresponding correlations, indicating that each construct shared more variance with its own indicators than with any other construct (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2021; Mohamed & Ahmed, 2020; Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Items with low loadings or problematic cross-loadings were considered for removal, as this improved the overall model fit without compromising theoretical coherence (Hair et al., 2019; Kock & Lynn, 2012), a practice commonly recommended in CFA (M. A. N. Ahmad et al., 2016).

Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive strength of the five latent factors on students' self-reported interest and decisions to enrol in the *PGMI* program. Factor scores derived from the validated CFA model were used as independent variables, while indicators of enrollment interest and program choice served as dependent variables. Before estimation, assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, and absence of multicollinearity were checked and met acceptable criteria. The analytic strategy, therefore, remained within a confirmatory factor and regression framework, rather than a complete structural equation model, consistent with the study's primary objective of identifying and interpreting the dominant determinants of student choice (Dash & Paul, 2021; Joe F Hair et al., 2020; Xiong et al., 2025).

Model fit in the CFA was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices, including the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) < 3.0, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ≥ 0.90, the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) ≥ 0.90, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08, and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.08 (Dash & Paul, 2021; Goretzko et al., 2024; Joseph Franklin Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016), which are widely used

benchmarks in confirmatory factor analysis (Hassim et al., 2020). These indices were used to guide iterative model refinement while avoiding overfitting and preserving theoretical interpretability.

The study adhered to standard ethical procedures for social and educational research. Before data collection, institutional permission was obtained from the relevant faculties and programme heads at each participating *PTKIN*, as well as from *Perkumpulan Dosen PGMI Indonesia* (*PD-PGMI*). Student participation was entirely voluntary, and no incentives or academic penalties were associated with participation or non-participation. An information sheet attached to the online questionnaire explained the research aims, the anonymous and aggregate nature of data reporting, and respondents' rights to withdraw at any time before submission. Informed consent was obtained electronically before students could access the main questionnaire. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were stored securely and used solely for research purposes in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Sample characteristics

A total of 547 *PGMI* students from three *PTKIN* (UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta) participated in the study and provided complete responses. The sample consisted predominantly of female students, with 484 (88.48%) females and 63 (11.52%) males.

Table 1. Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	n	Percentage
Male	63	11,52%
Female	484	88,48%
Total	547	100,00%

Most respondents were admitted through the national State Islamic Higher Education Entrance Exam (*UM-PTKIN*), accounting for 221 students (40.4%). Meanwhile, 104 students (19.0%) entered via *SPAN-PTKIN*, and 192 students (35.1%) were admitted through independent or institutional admission pathways. In terms of age, the majority were between 18 and 22 years, with a mean age of 20.5 years (SD = 1.8). Furthermore, 481 students (88.0%) indicated that *PGMI* was their first-choice programme at the time of application, while 66 students (12.0%) reported *PGMI* as a second or alternative choice.

Exploratory factor analysis

Before factor extraction, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the KMO measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value was 0.898, indicating excellent sampling adequacy for factor analysis, as values closer to 1.0 suggest a compact pattern of correlations and the extraction of distinct, reliable factors. Generally, KMO values above 0.80 are considered meritorious, indicating that the variables in this dataset share sufficient common variance to justify the application of factor analysis techniques.

Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded an approximate chi-square value of 4963.882 with 300 degrees of freedom and a p-value of < 0.001, indicating that the null hypothesis of an identity correlation matrix can be rejected. This result confirms that the correlations among variables are statistically significant and that the data matrix is appropriate for factor analysis. Together, the KMO and Bartlett statistics provide strong evidence that the observed variables are interrelated and suitable for factor extraction.

Inspection of the anti-image correlation matrix showed that all Measures of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) values, as reflected in the diagonal elements, were above 0.50, ranging from 0.648

to 0.939. MSA values greater than 0.50 indicate that individual variables are appropriate for inclusion in the factor model, as their partial correlations with other variables are lower than their zero-order correlations.

Factor extraction was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. The Total Variance Explained table showed that five components had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, satisfying Kaiser's criterion for factor retention, whereas the sixth component had an eigenvalue below 1.0 and was therefore not retained in the final model. The five retained components jointly accounted for 67.579% of the total variance, indicating that they capture a substantial proportion of the shared variance among the 25 indicators. Factor loadings were examined using the Rotated Component Matrix, with loadings of 0.30–0.40 or higher.

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix (Factor Loadings)

No	Indicator	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Commun ality
1	I1	.789					.681
2	I2	.756					.648
3	I3	.742					.627
4	I4	.831					.712
5	I5	.805					.698
6	I6	.773					.671
7	I7	.761					.659
8	I8	.814					.703
9	C1		.758				.654
10	C2		.749				.643
11	C3		.721				.619
12	C4		.685				.589
13	P1			.763			.656
14	P2			.741			.637
15	P3			.728			.623
16	S1				.751		.645
17	S2				.738		.634
18	S3				.719		.615
19	V1					.756	.649
20	V2					.743	.629
21	V3					.721	.608
22	V4					.712	.598
Eigenvalue		5.834	2.947	2.156	1.834	1.521	
% Variance Explained		27.78	14.03	10.27	8.73	7.24	67.58
Cumulative %		27.78	41.81	52.08	60.81	67.58	
Extraction Method		Principal Component Analysis (PCA)					
Rotation Method		Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation					
Note		Loadings < 0.30 are suppressed for clarity. All loadings shown are significant at $p < 0.001$.					

After Varimax rotation, the Rotated Component Matrix (Table 2) displays the standardised factor loadings for each indicator on the five extracted factors. All retained indicators loaded meaningfully (≥ 0.68) on their respective factors, with no cross-loadings above 0.30 on alternate factors, confirming the measurement model's discriminant validity.

The Influence of Surroundings factor (F1) exhibited the highest eigenvalue (5.834) and explained 27.78% of the total variance, with loadings ranging from 0.74 to 0.83 across indicators I1–I8. The remaining four factors—Consideration of University (F2, eigenvalue = 2.947, 14.03% variance), Perceived Usefulness (F3, eigenvalue = 2.156, 10.27% variance), Social Consideration (F4, eigenvalue = 1.834, 8.73% variance), and Vocational Aspects (F5, eigenvalue = 1.521, 7.24% variance)—demonstrated robust and internally consistent factor structures with loadings between 0.68 and 0.76. Geographic Location indicators (G1, G2) were excluded because their factor loadings were below 0.40 across all components, indicating insufficient contribution to the latent

factor structure. The cumulative variance explained by all five factors was 67.58%, supporting the adequacy of the factor solution.

In contrast, the two indicators for Geographic Location (G1 and G2) exhibited low and diffuse loadings across the extracted components, with values below the usual significance thresholds, suggesting they did not form a distinct, substantively meaningful factor. Given their weak contribution to the factor structure, the Geographic Location indicators were excluded from subsequent analyses, and the final measurement model was defined in terms of the five dominant latent factors. Overall, the EFA results demonstrate that the initial six conceptual dimensions can be parsimoniously represented by five statistically and substantively coherent latent factors, with Influence of Surroundings emerging as the strongest factor in terms of eigenvalue and loading pattern.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then performed on the 23 retained indicators to validate the five-factor measurement model identified in the exploratory phase. Overall model fit indices indicated an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2/df < 3.0$, CFI ≥ 0.90, TLI ≥ 0.90, RMSEA ≤ 0.08, and SRMR ≤ 0.08. These values satisfy commonly used benchmarks in confirmatory factor analysis and support the adequacy of the proposed measurement model. Table 3 presents the standardised factor loadings, AVE, and CR for each latent factor. All indicators loaded significantly ($p < 0.001$) onto their respective factors, with loadings ranging from approximately 0.57 to 0.84, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50.

Table 3. Summary of CFA results: factor loadings, AVE, and CR

Factor	Indicators	Standardised loading	AVE	CR
Influence of Surroundings	C1–C5	0.66–0.83	≥ 0.50	≥ 0.70
Consideration of the University	P1–P3	0.69–0.79	≥ 0.50	≥ 0.70
Perceived Usefulness	S1–S3	0.63–0.78	≥ 0.50	≥ 0.70
Social Consideration	V1–V4	0.61–0.77	≥ 0.50	≥ 0.70
Vocational Aspects	I1–I8	0.57–0.84	≥ 0.50	≥ 0.70

Reliability and validity

All indicators loaded significantly ($p < 0.001$) on their intended latent factors in the CFA, with standardised factor loadings ranging from approximately 0.57 to 0.84. AVE values supported convergent validity at or above 0.50 and CR values above 0.70 for all five constructs. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, whereby the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, indicating that the latent factors are empirically distinct. Internal consistency reliability, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, also met recommended thresholds ($\alpha > 0.70$) for each factor, demonstrating satisfactory reliability of the measurement scales.

Factors influencing enrolment decisions

Regression analysis using factor scores for the five latent constructs as predictors and students' reported interest in and decision to enrol in *PGMI* as the outcome showed that the overall model was statistically significant (F-test, $p < 0.001$) and accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in enrolment decisions (R^2 as reported in the SPSS output). Influence of Surroundings emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by Consideration of University, Perceived Usefulness, and Vocational Aspects. At the same time, Social Consideration had a more minor but still positive and significant effect on students' decisions.

Descriptively, 40% of respondents acknowledged that peers significantly influenced their choice of programme and university, and 35% reported guidance from academic counsellors, underscoring the central role of social networks. In addition, 80% emphasised university reputation, 85% believed that *PGMI* graduates have good employment opportunities, 65% favoured institutions with active outreach (e.g., open houses and campus visits), and 70% indicated

that testimonials from current students or alums reinforced their decision, highlighting the importance of social, institutional, and career-related considerations in *PGMI* enrolment.

Discussion

Opening conceptual takeaways

The findings indicate that students' decisions to choose *PGMI* at *PTKIN* are influenced by a mutually reinforcing interplay among social influence, institutional reputation, perceived usefulness, and vocational calling, rather than by isolated individual preferences. Religious values do not merely form a cultural background; they function as a social amplifier, strengthening family and peer endorsement of Islamic teacher education as a meaningful life pathway. The results also indicate that in this context, digital accessibility and social networks can partly substitute for geographic proximity, signalling a shift towards socially embedded, digitally mediated decision-making in Islamic higher education.

Compared with previous studies on marketing strategies in higher education (Maringe, 2006), this study underscores the need for tailored promotional efforts, particularly through digital platforms and community engagement (Benchekroun et al., 2024; Juhaidi, 2024a; Pamungkas et al., 2023; Rawat et al., 2022; Tobing & Rufaidah, 2025). The exclusion of geographic location as a significant factor suggests a shift towards online-based marketing strategies, indicating that digital accessibility may outweigh physical proximity in influencing students' decisions. This insight contributes to the broader discourse on digital transformation in educational marketing.

Social reinforcement and religious values

Social factors emerged as the strongest determinant of enrolment, with a large proportion of students reporting that family, peers, and religious communities directly influenced their decision to enrol in *PGMI*. This pattern is consistent with Social Influence Theory, which posits that compliance with parental expectations, identification with religiously oriented peer groups, and the internalisation of Islamic values collectively translate faith commitments into concrete educational choices (Azmi & Khoeri, 2025; Liang et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2023).

Religious values, in this sense, act as a social amplifier, intensifying the persuasive power of family and community narratives that frame *PGMI* not only as a study program but also as a morally significant vocation. Consistent with recent work on Islamic higher education, Students are drawn to institutions that simultaneously strengthen their religious identity and provide credible academic pathways, indicating that value congruence and social belonging are central drivers of enrollment in faith-based programs (Albustomi & Hefniy, 2025; Cook, 2022; Juhaidi, 2024b; Sánchez-Tabernero, 2024).

Perceived usefulness, vocational meaning, and employability

Perceived usefulness and vocational aspects constitute the second layer of decision-making, in which students evaluate *PGMI* in terms of career prospects, skill acquisition, and alignment with a sense of calling to teach in religiously oriented primary schools. In line with contemporary human capital perspectives, students interpret *PGMI* as an investment that yields both labour-market returns and religious–moral fulfilment, rather than as a narrow or inferior track compared with secular teacher education (Arifin & Wahzudi, 2020; Lundeto, 2023; Suyadi et al., 2022).

This result reframes *PGMI* from a "less competitive programme" into a vocationally meaningful pathway in which employability is defined not only by salary and sectoral flexibility but also by the opportunity to serve Islamic schooling ecosystems. Extending recent studies on employability and Islamic higher education, the present results suggest that vocational commitment and perceived societal relevance can offset lingering stigma when institutions successfully communicate graduate outcomes and career trajectories in religious and public education settings.

Digital accessibility, marketing mix, and socio-religious modification

The non-salience of Geographic Location as a factor, combined with evidence that students respond strongly to outreach, testimonials, and institutional reputation, implies that digital channels and social networks reduce the importance of physical distance in *PGMI* recruitment. Consistent with studies on digital marketing in Islamic higher education, social media, institutional websites, and digital public relations now function as key "Places" and "Promotion" vehicles through which prospective students and their families encounter information, narratives, and role models (Albustomi & Hefniy, 2025; Juhaidi, 2024a; Maulana et al., 2026; Riofita & Dimasadra, 2022).

These findings extend the traditional 7P marketing mix by embedding socio-religious dynamics within Product, Promotion, People, and Place for Islamic higher education. The empirically validated five-factor structure (Influence of Surroundings, Consideration of University, Perceived Usefulness, Social Consideration, Vocational Aspects) effectively operationalises a marketing mix in which social reinforcement and religious identity are not external constraints but integral components of how the "product" (*PGMI*) is perceived and demanded. In this sense, the study implicitly modifies conventional marketing-mix models by incorporating religiously framed social capital and digital accessibility as core elements of educational choice in *PTKIN*.

Theoretical contributions and novelty

First, the study integrates social reinforcement and digital accessibility into a single explanatory framework for Islamic higher education marketing, showing how online channels magnify family and peer influence rather than replacing them. Social factors are the most dominant determinant in students' decisions to enrol in the *PGMI* Study Program. The influence of family, peers, and community is crucial in shaping students' academic choices. This finding indicates that educational decisions are not merely individual choices but are firmly embedded within prevailing social norms. In this context, Kelman's Social Influence Theory provides a framework for understanding how social norms and influences from significant others, such as family members, shape individual decision-making (as cited by Davlembayeva & Papagiannidis, 2025). Kelman identifies three types of social impact: compliance, identification, and internalisation. In the educational context, many students may comply with their parents' expectations or identify with family norms that emphasise the importance of religious education. Some students may even internalise these values, perceiving religious education as integral to their life purpose.

However, social influence is also dynamic. In societies increasingly exposed to digital media and global information flows, broader educational trends can shape parental and peer preferences. In this regard, *PTKIN* institutions can play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing the choices of families and prospective students through well-designed and strategic campaigns. For instance, integrating successful alumni as inspirational role models in family and community settings can be effective.

Additionally, local communities play a significant role in shaping educational choices. In many regions of Indonesia, madrasahs or Islamic schools are often the preferred choice for families due to their alignment with religious values. This phenomenon is consistent with Putnam's (2000) research, which suggests that social engagement, such as membership in spiritual communities, substantially influences individual preferences, including educational decisions. Therefore, *PTKIN* institutions must actively involve local religious communities in their promotional strategies to attract more prospective students.

Second, it reframes *PGMI* as a vocationally meaningful pathway in which religiously motivated teaching careers and perceived usefulness jointly underpin students' choices, challenging deficit narratives that portray *PGMI* as a second-tier option. One of the primary challenges identified in this study is the persistent stigma attached to *PGMI* graduates. Some students expressed concerns that *PGMI* graduates are often undervalued or perceived as less competitive

than graduates from other programs, such as PGSD or non-religious disciplines. This stigma is frequently linked to the perception that *PGMI* graduates have limited career opportunities, mainly confined to religious education sectors, such as madrasahs or other Islamic educational institutions.

Despite this stigma, the majority of *PGMI* students remain optimistic about their future career prospects. This positive outlook is driven by the belief that religious education remains highly relevant in society, particularly in primary schools that require qualified Islamic studies teachers. Furthermore, many students view the teaching profession as a calling, where the ability to contribute to society and shape future generations outweighs financial rewards. To address this stigma, *PTKIN* institutions must implement strategic measures. One practical approach is strengthening partnerships between *PGMI* programs and general education institutions or non-religious educational sectors. By fostering these collaborations, *PGMI* graduates can demonstrate their competencies in broader educational settings, proving they possess skills relevant beyond madrasahs.

Third, the research provides empirical validation of a marketing-mix-informed measurement model in the under-researched context of *PTKIN*, demonstrating that the five latent factors map coherently onto extended 7P dimensions while remaining sensitive to socio-religious specificities. *PTKIN* institutions can enhance *PGMI* students' employability by offering additional skill-based training in educational technology, modern pedagogy, and classroom management. These supplementary qualifications will equip graduates with the necessary skills to adapt to diverse teaching environments, making them more competitive in the broader job market. *PTKIN* institutions must also take an active role in reshaping public perceptions of *PGMI* graduates. This goal can be achieved by promoting the success stories of *PGMI* alums who have excelled in various career paths within religious education and other professional fields. Public campaigns highlighting the achievements of *PGMI* graduates can be an effective strategy to mitigate negative stereotypes and elevate the program's perceived value.

Amidst the growing popularity of programs such as *PGSD, PGMI* is often perceived as less flexible. PGSD offers broader career prospects, as its graduates can teach in various primary schools—both public and private—without being restricted to a religious-based curriculum. This approach makes PGSD more appealing to prospective students seeking wider career opportunities beyond religious education. Additionally, the marketing and branding campaigns for *PGSD* programs are generally more extensive, making prospective students more familiar with them than with *PGMI*. Universities offering *PGMI* must enhance their marketing strategies to highlight the program's unique advantages. For instance, a notable case demonstrates *PGMI*'s strengths: a *PGMI* graduate in Bekasi successfully introduced an interactive learning method based on Islamic technology in their classroom. This innovation gained recognition and was eventually adopted by other schools. This case illustrates that *PGMI* possesses distinctive qualities that can serve as unique selling points if effectively communicated.

Fourth, by showing that geographic location is not a distinct factor while social and digital influences are, the study implicitly modifies existing marketing-mix models to account for socio-religious embeddedness and digital mediation in faith-based higher education decisions. A strategic approach that incorporates these elements can enhance institutional attractiveness and strengthen the competitive positioning of *PGMI* programs in the higher education market.

1. Community-Based Campaigns

A community-based approach is an effective strategy to strengthen *PGMI*'s appeal. This strategy involves direct engagement with key stakeholders, including alumni, local communities, and educational institutions, to create a positive image of *PGMI*. Successful alumni can serve as ambassadors, providing tangible evidence of the program's potential. Research by Perna and Titus (2005) indicates that alum testimonials significantly influence prospective students' decisions. By leveraging alum experiences, institutions can build trust and credibility.

Additionally, *PGMI* can engage in educational outreach programs, such as teacher literacy training, digital learning initiatives, and community education projects. These initiatives contribute to local communities and demonstrate the program's broader social impact. Research by Cummings and Worley (2014) highlights that community engagement strengthens institutional reputation and enhances public perception.

2. Digital Promotion

With the rise of digital media, leveraging platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube is essential for reaching younger audiences. Studies by Duggan et al. (2015) suggest that over 70% of young individuals rely on social media for educational decisions. Creating engaging content, such as student testimonials, academic activities, and alumni success stories, can enhance *PGMI*'s visibility. Furthermore, interactive features like live Q&A sessions and virtual campus tours can foster direct engagement with prospective students. A well-designed website is also a critical promotional tool. Research by Tuten and Solomon (2015) emphasises that transparent and user-friendly websites significantly influence prospective students' enrollment decisions. A comprehensive *PGMI* website should provide information on curriculum structure, career opportunities, and accreditation status. Additional features such as real-time chat support and virtual campus tours can enhance the user experience and attract more applicants.

3. Positive Branding

Shaping a strong and positive brand image for *PGMI* requires reframing its narrative. Instead of focusing solely on religious education, *PGMI* should emphasise its graduates' versatility and professional competencies. Research by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) suggests that a well-constructed brand narrative can strengthen public perception. Institutions should highlight graduate employability, success stories, and the integration of Islamic values with modern educational competencies. Infographics and inspirational videos are compelling branding tools. Studies by Mayer (2020) indicate that visual information is processed faster and retained longer than text-based content. Institutions can reinforce *PGMI*'s relevance and credibility by showcasing alumni's achievements and career prospects. Additionally, research by Berger and Milkman (2012) suggests that emotionally engaging content is more likely to be shared, further amplifying *PGMI*'s reach.

The findings also propose theoretical implications by challenging the assumption that Islamic education programs struggle to compete with secular programs. While previous research suggests that *PGMI* graduates face employment challenges, this study finds that vocational aspects and institutional reputation significantly influence enrollment, suggesting that strategic branding can enhance the attractiveness of *PGMI* programs (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). These findings indicate that existing theoretical models should be revised to incorporate social reinforcement and digital accessibility as key determinants of marketing Islamic education.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations need to be acknowledged. The sample is drawn from three *PTKIN* and relies on self-reported perceptions at a single point in time, which may be influenced by concurrent promotional campaigns or by local institutional dynamics. The design does not explicitly model potential moderating variables—such as family socioeconomic status, type and quality of prior schooling, or intensity of digital media use—that might shape the strength of social or vocational influences. Future research should incorporate multi-site or longitudinal designs, include broader geographic coverage, and collect richer contextual data (e.g., marketing exposure, school background, family income) to test moderation effects and address possible sampling or context bias. Subsequent studies could also compare *PGMI* with other Islamic and non-Islamic teacher education programmes, use experimental or quasi-experimental designs to assess the impact of specific digital campaigns, and apply more advanced modelling (e.g., multigroup SEM) to examine whether social reinforcement operates differently across demographic and regional subgroups.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies the principal determinants shaping prospective students' decisions to enrol in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* Teacher Education (*PGMI*) programs at State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (*PTKIN*) in Indonesia. The findings indicate that enrolment decisions are predominantly driven by social influence from family, peers, and religious communities, followed by institutional reputation, perceived career prospects, and vocational commitment to becoming Islamic primary school teachers. At the same time, geographic proximity plays a minimal role. The study advances higher education marketing theory by proposing and empirically validating a five-factor model of student decision-making that extends the traditional marketing mix framework within the context of Islamic higher education. Specifically, the results highlight how social networks and religious communities operate as strategic amplifiers of institutional reputation and marketing communication, rather than merely contextual influences. In practice, the findings suggest that *PTKIN* should prioritise community-engaged promotion, digital communication strategies, and the clear articulation of graduate career pathways. Future research should employ broader samples and comparative designs to further examine the interaction among social, institutional, and vocational drivers in higher education choice.

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