

CULTIVATION AND PROMOTION STRATEGY OF OPEN UNIVERSITY IN THE ISLAND REGION OF INDONESIA: MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH

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Abstract

Customer satisfaction is essential for the running and development of an institution. Thus, many institutions use various strategies to maintain and increase customer satisfaction, including socialization and promotion. However, studies that describe customer satisfaction, especially on open university's students Eastern Indonesia, are still very minimal. This mixed-method study aims to analyze the socialization and promotion strategies carried out by Universitas Terbuka (UT) regional offices in Ternate. The quantitative approach used an exploratory survey method, while the qualitative data were collected through observation and interview. Both methods were collected through four stages and methods, including primary data observation from socialization and promotion activities carried out by the UT Ternate regional office, academic activities, and non-academic activities for students. Data were collected from students registered from 2016 to 2020, namely 326 people spread across 10 city districts in North Maluku. The study results show that: (1) the promotion strategy, service quality, and customer value carried out by the UT Ternate regional office have a positive and significant influence on student satisfaction; and (2) the promotion strategy and service quality have a positive and significant impact on customer value at UT Ternate regional office; (3) it is essential to select media and content and maintain networks/partners as a promotional strategy that deserves attention; and (4) the service quality to students' academic achievement.

Keywords: promotion strategy, service quality, customer value, student satisfaction

1 INTRODUCTION

Universitas Terbuka is the 45th state university which was inaugurated in 1984. As the only state university that implements open and distance education (PTJJ), UT has 39 technical implementing units in the regions (UPBJJ-UT) and 1 Center for Overseas Student Management. The purpose of the opening of the regional offices is to provide wider access to the public for higher education, for those in cities, islands, and even Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged areas (3T). In this case, UT implements an open education without any restrictions on age, year of graduation, and location/area of residence to become a student. The concept of distance can be interpreted that the learning process does not have to be carried out face-to-face. However, UT provides other learning modes such as learning through online Moodle/tutorials, webinars, coursework, and Take-Home Exam (THE). Currently, the UT Ternate regional office has 1946 students, which are still far from the target set by UT Center, namely 5000 registered students (Universitas Terbuka, 2021). UT results in numbers that are evaluated every semester make every regional office feel the need to design strategies in socializing and promoting to prospective students, as well as improving the quality of service to students.

For the last five years, the UT Ternate regional office has taken various strategies to meet the student achievement targets as set by the UT Center. The following is a recapitulation of tips on

socialization and promotion through various media, approaches to the community, and visits to certain figures or institutions.

Table 1. Socialization and Promotion Activities at the Ternate UPBJJ-UT Office

No	Activities	Media	Frequency					
			2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
A Advertising								
1	Newspaper ads	Newspaper (month)	0	0	0	12	12	9
2	Online media ads	2 online news links (month)	0	0	0	0	5	3
3	Radio ads	2 Radios (month)	0	1	0	0	0	3
4	Cable TV ads	Cable TV (times)	0	0	0	1	0	0
5	Flyer distribution	Flyers (3000-5000)	500	200	300	300	300	400
6	Semi-permanent Billboard installation	Billboard (pieces)	8	10	0	0	0	0
7	Banner installation	Banner (pieces)	50	20	20	21	20	20
8	Billboard installation	Billboard (month)	0	0	0	2	0	2
9	Videotron installation	Videotron (month)	0	0	0	3	0	2
B Public Relationship								
10	Exhibition	Event (times)	0	1	0	0	0	0
11	Social media (FB)	FB account (month)	0	0	12	12	12	9
12	Social media (Instagram)	IG account (month)	0	0	0	0	12	9
13	Social media (Twitter)	Twitter account (month)	0	0	0	0	0	9
14	Social media (YouTube)	Channel (month)	0	0	0	0	12	9
15	Website	Website links (month)	12	12	12	12	12	9
16	WhatsApp	WhatsApp (month)	0	0	0	12	12	9
17	SMS Blast	Telkomsel (times)	2	2	4	4	4	4
C Personal Selling								
18	Visits and face-to-face meetings with high school students	Face to face and audience (times)	29	26	30	25	20	10
19	Visits and face-to-face meetings with local government	Face to face and audience (times)	10	10	5	15	10	12

20	Visits and face-to-face meetings with institution	Face to face and audience (times)	10	10	5	10	10	10
D	Sales Promotion		-	-	-	-	-	-
E	Direct Marketing		-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: UPBJJ-UT Ternate Office (2020)

Table 1 shows that the lowest frequency of socialization and promotion carried out by the UT Regional Office in Ternate is the printed media including flyers and banners. In addition, visits and face-to-face meetings with high school students include socialization and promotion with a frequency that stays in personal selling. However, according to the data collected by the Administration, the highest student enrollment is through information received from friends (53.15%) and family (21.31%).

Therefore, the UT regional office in Ternate requires a better design of socialization, promotion, and service strategies. It is expected that the strategies planned and implemented can be achieved, as realized in the higher number of new student admission. In this case, author is conducting research entitled “Socialization and Promotion Strategy for Open University in the Archipelago Region.”

2 METHODOLOGY

This mixed-method research (Harrison, Reilly, & Creswell, 2020) was conducted for 9 months from March 2021 to November 2021 at the UT regional office Ternate. Quantitative data were obtained using a questionnaire with a Likert scale (Mirahmadizadeh, Delam, Seif, & Bahrami, 2022) with an explanatory survey approach (Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich, Stewart, & Sunkpho, 2020). This study uses two independent variables, promotion strategy (X1) and service quality (X2), and two dependent variables, customer value (Y1) and student satisfaction (Y2), as shown in Diagram 2. The structural equations can be made with the following equations:

$$Y1 = \beta_{y1x1} X1 + \beta_{y1x2} X2 + \epsilon_1$$

$$Y2 = \beta_{y2x1} X1 + \beta_{y2x2} X2 + \epsilon_2$$

The qualitative data in this study were obtained using the FGD method (O. Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018) and direct observation of the activities organized by the UT regional office Ternate, including socialization, promotion, and academic and non-academic service activities. The population in this study were students registered from 2016 to 2021, i.e., 1768 people.

Meanwhile, for qualitative data collection, the researcher selected 20 students as FGD informants. They come from different year admission and regency/city. The FGD took place in 4 stages, namely in the cities of Ternate, East Halmahera, West Halmahera, and Taliabu Island. Furthermore, for the analysis of the two data, the researcher conducted several statistical tests including: (1) Structural Equation Test to determine the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable, (2) Correlation coefficient test (R2) to determine the value of the strength of the relationship between/both variables, (3) F test to find out the independent variables simultaneously affecting the dependent variable, (4) t-test to find out the influence of each independent variable, namely promotion strategy, service quality, and customer value partially or individually affecting the dependent variable, i.e., student satisfaction. The data obtained from interviews/FGDs were then transcribed and coded (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2018). The next analysis stage of this qualitative data is to make a categorization (Belgrave & Seide, 2019) after being presented as a research result.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Hypothesis test

The results of testing the three hypotheses considering the calculated t value is greater than t table, and the significance value is less than alpha (α) 0.05, are as follows:

1. Promotion strategy (X1) has a positive and significant effect on Student Satisfaction (Y)
2. Service Quality (X2) has a positive and significant effect on Student Satisfaction (Y)
3. Customer Value (M) has a positive and significant effect on Student Satisfaction (Y)

The study results indicate that indicators with a good level of validity and reliability are able to make a positive contribution to the independent and dependent variables. In other words, the implementation of indicators/instruments is able to form a construct of student satisfaction related to: (1) provision of information through printed media such as flyers, leaflets, posters, and catalogs; (2) interest in information on UT in attractive flyers, leaflets, posters, and catalogs; (3) UT information contained in flyers, leaflets, posters, and catalogs is able to encourage students to register for lectures at UT; and (4) the consistency of UT information in flyers, leaflets, posters, and catalogs in accordance with the reality that students feel when registering for UT, so as to increase student satisfaction. The study results are also in line with the results of research conducted by Fisher et al. (2019) showing that promotional strategies positively affect customer

satisfaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that the promotion strategy at UPBJJ-UT in Ternate as a whole is able to provide satisfaction to students.

In addition, the test result of hypothesis 2 show that the services provided by UT Ternate have an impact on student satisfaction. This is related to the indicators of constructing these results including: (1) ease of students in accessing and connecting with UT Ternate staff, (2) fast responses from UT Ternate staff to complaints and problems faced by students related to academics, (3) the information provided can be understood because it is clear and structured, adapted to the needs of students, (4) provision of service time in accordance with student expectations, and (5) the accuracy of UT Ternate staff in receiving and verifying student documents.

The hypothesis test of customer value variable shows that the students' emotional attachment to the UT is represented by UT Ternate. This attachment has hope to be maintained and enhanced. This statement is supported by the following indicators: (1) the decision to study at UT is the best choice, (2) the implications of academic services/lectures in the form of flexible and advanced study assistance, and (3) the structure of the UT recruitment system, lectures, and evaluation of learning. This presentation shows that the overall customer value of UT Ternate can provide satisfaction to students.

3.2 Simultaneous Testing

The F test was conducted to determine the significance level of the influence of the Promotion Strategy (X1), Service Quality (X2), and Customer Value (M) variables on Student Satisfaction (Y) together. This test is carried out by comparing the F_c value with the value in the F table, with the following conditions: If $F_{count} > F_{table}$, then H_0 is rejected; and if $F_{count} < F_{table}$, then H_1 is rejected. The results of the F test can be seen in the following table.

Table 3.2.1 Result of Simultaneous Hypothesis Testing ANOVA

<i>Model</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1 Regression	36084.796	3	12028.265	420.676	.000 ^b
Residual	9092.487	318	28.593		
Total	45177.283	321			

a. Dependent Variable: Y

b. Predictors: (Constant), M, X1, X2

Table 3.2.1 shows the calculated F value of 420.676 at a significant level of 0.000. By using a 95%

confidence level, = 5%, df1 (number of variables – 1) or 4 -1 = 3, df2 (n-k-1) or 322 – 3 – 1 = 318, so that the results obtained are $F_{table} = 2.633$. The calculation results show that the value of F_{count} is greater than F_{table} ($420,676 > 2,633$) at a significance level of 0.000 less than the alpha value (0.05), which means that Promotion Strategy (X1), Service Quality (X2), and Customer Value (M) simultaneously positive and significant effect on student satisfaction at the UPBJJ-UT Office.

Table 3.3.2 Model Summary

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
1	.894 ^a	.799	.797	5.34722

Source: Data processed in 2021.

Table 3.3.2 (model summary) shows R value is 0.894 or 89.94%, which means that there is a positive relationship between Promotion Strategy (X1), Service Quality (X2), and Customer Value (M) variables with Student Satisfaction (M). The relationship between these variables is in the strong category, as Sugiyono (2007) argues that the score ranges from 0.60 to 0.79 means a strong relationship of 89.94%. Meanwhile, the value of determination R² (R squared) is 0.799, which means that the percentage contribution of the variables of Promotion Strategy (X1), Service Quality (X2), and Customer Value (M) to student satisfaction at the UPBJJ-UT Office is 79.90%; while the remaining 20.10% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study.

3.3 Findings and Discussion of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data analysis is focused on the results of data categorization regarding promotion strategies and service quality that have been implemented by UPBJJ-UT Ternate affecting customer value and student satisfaction. Through interviews with 16 students from several regencies and cities, it is known that UT Ternate has carried out a series of promotions and services that are recognized as according to student expectations. The following are some detailed presentations dealing with this matter.

3.3.1 Selection of appropriate content on promotional media is a consideration that deserves attention

The choice of information material to be presented in the media should be considered carefully. This is an effort to generate public interest to read and find out more details about the information. In the end, the consequence of this stage is the community's decision to choose the product offered (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020). The presence of content about the UT study program in printed and online media has attracted the attention of the public. The reason is that

prospective students try to correlate the study program with the work they are currently doing. It is expected that the knowledge and experience gained in lectures can support their main tasks in institutions or companies.

P.1.Q1.2 At that time, I planned to study in Bali, but an earthquake hit. Thus, I was recommended to study at UT since UT offers translation study in English literature. In addition, I am also interested in distance learning.

Information about the academic administration system (Wicaksono & Mariono, 2021) and the advantages if prospective students choose to study at UT can also be important points to be displayed in the media. According to several articles, there are various considerations for a consumer to choose a product, one of which is usually their reference for choosing is the positive side of the product or what benefits are caused when consuming the product (Hamilton, Mittal, Shah, Thompson, & Griskevicius, 2019). The jargon most often echoed by UT related to its education system is that students can attend lectures in remote mode, both online and offline and can still carry out activities at their respective workplaces. Elements like this are able to attract prospective students with working status.

P8.Q1.3 Because the system makes it easier for students, the semester packages have been explained, and the course composition has been arranged, so that it is neater. On the one hand, we work so we are enough with what we are given. For example, we are given a task, so we just need to make assignments, just follow the command. In addition, it is also included with the book, so we don't need to look for books anymore.

Another consideration for prospective students in choosing a place to study is the accreditation of institutions and study programs. This point is important because it is related to the guarantee of the quality of lectures that will be presented by the UT and the quality of graduates after completing their studies. Regarding this quality assurance, it will be a recommendation for government institutions or companies that want to accept workers from the UT. As a complement in providing substance, the inclusion of the university's website address is considered to help prospective students to get to know the educational institution in more detail. In addition, prospective students are also able to get other explanations that are not presented in promotional media. These two

reasons confirm that the placement of the UT website address is another important material that should be included in the promotional media.

3.3.2 Excellent Service of Ternate UPBJJ-UT Staff as the Front Guard of Institutional Image

When students have decided to join UT, the next crucial task to do is to provide care and assistance to them. This guidance can be represented by various activities such as providing the information needed when they ask questions, assisting in technical matters related to academics, finding solutions to lecture problems faced by students, etc. (Pandapotan & Andayani, 2019; Yosephine, 2018). In addition, the best quality of assistance is also an essential matter to create student satisfaction in studying at UT.

P9.Q2.1 UT Ternate officers are easy to contact. I have contacted Pak Anfas several times, and he responds quickly. UT Ternate officers are very friendly and polite in serving us. Yes, UT Ternate officers are very fast and responsive in serving us. Their UT Ternate service staff provide the right service for what we need.

Excellent service is in line with the opening quote delivered by Damon Richards, an expert in customer service which states that “Customers don’t care how smart you are, until they know how much you care for them.” It can be understood that the attention and care of UT staff is needed to be able to provide satisfaction to students in academic services. In line with the reality that occurred at UPBJJ-UT Ternate, several informants admitted that UT staff served the students with a friendly, polite, and solution-oriented not only during working hours but also when the staff was at home. If a problem that occurs needs to be resolved immediately, the UT staff does not hesitate to help at midnight or at dawn.

3.3.3 Pokjar (UT Managers in Regencies/Cities) Provide the Best Service

Study Groups (POKJAR) is the division of the domicile area of prospective students and UT students. Because the coverage area of North Maluku is very wide, UPPBJJ-UT Ternate sorts out study groups based on Regency and City. In one POKJAR, the UT team will choose one manager from an individual or group as a partner. The main tasks and functions in accordance with the

guidelines are to promote, recruit, and treat students from registration to graduation (Kristanti, 2018). Thus, POKJAR management is an extension of UT in the regions. It needs the best service from POKJAR to students so that there is synchronization of UT staff.

P10.Q2.2 Their service officer is easy to contact, as well as the management of the Malifut Study Group. UT Ternate service officers are very good at providing services to us and according to what we need.

The presence of POKJAR administrators answers the challenges of distance education with a very wide area coverage and diverse distribution of students. They cannot come to the UPBJJ office all the time to take care of academic administration and other stuffs. So that fast, responsive, and wholehearted service from POKJAR management as UT representatives in regencies/cities is so needed to satisfy the students. This excellent service is of course influenced by the quality of human resources from POKJAR management who are capable as well as the facilities and infrastructure provided by UT (Rahmaddian, Koesanto, & Surapto, 2019).

P6.Q3.2 Yesterday, we collected the requirements to Pak Ahmadi. Later, Pak Ahmadi might send it to UT, we don't know. It's just that all of us from Bacan, we all give it to Pak Ahmad, and Pak Ahmad will take care of it. No, we give all the requirements as Pak Ahmadi said, and we love this.

3.3.4 Miscellaneous of Registration as Part of the Academic Administration System is the Initial Milestone of UT Services

Registration is the beginning of UT's services to students at the beginning of lectures and semester. At this stage, some student data will be inputted by UT staff including personal data, latest education and accompanying documents, selected study programs, semester packages related to learning modes, and other stuffs. If UT staffs do not provide complete and directed information, students will be confused when the lecture begins. However, if the staff is thorough, detailed and nurturing during the registration process, they can minimize student anxiety when facing lectures because they think they have received the complete information needed.

P12.Q3.4 There are no mistakes because we are always assisted by the Pokjar

management and staff from UT Ternate during registration process. It was very smooth, because the first registration was directly directed by the Pokjar, from filling out forms to paying tuition fees.

In addition, the facilities and infrastructure that support registration affect student satisfaction. Payment for student billing can make transactions in various ways (offline or online) through various banks that have collaborated with UT. These two things, of course, make it easier for students to fulfill their obligations to UT. If only the billing payment system could only be implemented at the UT office, it would certainly make it difficult for students in the regions.

3.3.5 Various Learning Evaluations Before and During the Pandemic

At UT, learning evaluation before the pandemic was carried out face-to-face at a location determined by the POKJAR management. The school or office chosen is usually located in an easily accessible location and has facilities following the standards set by UT. The quality assurance in this place is guaranteed so that students feel comfortable while taking the exam. However, the reality is that there are exam locations that do not meet the given standards, so a gradual evaluation is needed.

P2.Q6.8 There was a new set time for my learning system since the first time I took college. However, starting from the second semester, I started reading at night. Sometimes in the office, if there is no work. That's where I spend my time studying. In my opinion, it elevated my knowledge. It helped me a lot in my exams.

Regarding the schedule and test results, students will be informed as set in the academic calendar that has been determined through the UT page. And simultaneously, the staff in each UPBJJ-UT will distribute it through a WhatsApp group to reach students who less monitor information on the UT website. In addition, the exam schedule has also been stated on the billing (proof of payment) for lectures obtained by students after registering at the beginning of the semester.

P6.Q6.1 For information, the exam went very smoothly, sir. We didn't ask it again, sir. Indeed, the Halsel pokjar has already informed long ago before the D-day. We just need to monitor the group, what information is given by the tutor. For results, we always communicate with the Pokjar. For self-access, when the scores are

already published, we can ask for the link. They tell us to open a page and the score is available there. Thus, we usually access it ourselves, sir. We don't feel any difficulty. It's just that on the D Day, a lot of people have access, so it's a bit slow.

The exams use multiple choice questions with the code of the question script adjusted to the course code. To avoid cheating during the exam, UT arranges in one room to enter student data from different study programs and question texts. The students sit at one table and another, there are different questions so that it can minimize seeing other students' answers.

P14.Q6.7 For final test, the order must be improved, especially when the final test is at the location in the East Halmahera Regency. The exams are sometimes too demanding for the examinees, so my suggestion is that it should be more orderly or more closely monitored. Thus, the exam can be orderly, safe, and smooth.

When the pandemic stroke, several lecture activities at UT had some adjustments, including learning evaluations. The exam, which was previously conducted face-to-face and with multiple-choice questions, turned into an online exam or commonly known as a take home exam (THE) equipped with description questions. Students are asked to download and upload answers at the specified time and the implementation may be at home or in a place that does not create a crowd. Many parties claim that this type of exam is a solution for evaluating learning during the pandemic. In addition, if students can take advantage of this moment of description, they are able to get satisfactory academic achievements compared to multiple choice questions.

P13.Q6.4 For exams, face-to-face meetings are short, i.e., 90 minutes or per course. During the pandemic, it was a take-home exam, if I'm not mistaken. It was scheduled for 12 hours, so we are more flexible to work on. Moreover, we work in the office, so maybe we finish working at the office at night and then we work. We can still get it.

3.3.6 Student Satisfaction with UT is a Combination of Wholehearted Service and Customer Value

Student satisfaction is the estuary of UT's efforts, such as promotional strategies, providing services in various aspects related to academics, study assistance, and exams. In addition, UT sometimes hold regular events that help maintain the presence of students at UT such as seminars, training, scientific meetings and art and sports competitions. Some of these activities are recognized as a forum for students to accelerate their knowledge, insight, and networking. The culmination of student satisfaction with various programs and activities organized by UT is their enthusiasm to share knowledge and make them useful in society.

Q3.Q8.7 Yes, especially in the school environment where I work. And that I learned from the module and then I applied it to teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Yes, I am very proud to be a UT student. Because UT can compete with other campuses.

In addition to devoting oneself to the community for the knowledge and experience that has been gained during studying at UT, they hope that UT will continue to guard and guide them to be able to graduate on time and have satisfactory grades.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis results show that the UT regional office in Ternate has carried out various promotion strategies and services to students. This turned out to have an influence on increasing customer satisfaction and value, in this case UT students.

The first hypothesis test shows that UT Ternate provides information on a number of printed and online media. Furthermore, it was found that there was consistency of information obtained by students on promotional media, regarding the registration process to lectures in the field. These two findings are reinforced by the results of qualitative data analysis, i.e., the need for careful selection of content on promotional media. The content should be related to the advantages of UT as distance education, what benefits are obtained when studying at UT, as well as other materials that are able to attract the attention of the public/prospective students.

The second hypothesis test shows that students are satisfied with the services provided by UT

Ternate, including the ease, speed, and accuracy of UT staff in providing consultation on academic services. The results of this analysis are in line with the findings of the interview data, namely, the excellent service of UT staff and partners (Pokjar management in the regency/city) as the front line to represent the portrait of UT as an educational institution. This good relationship has implications for the growth of emotional bonds between students and UT Ternate. Another service is the provision of varied learning modes, providing students with a number of alternative lecture methods that can be adapted to their time and activities.

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