
Implementation of Differentiation Strategy for Competitive Advantage in the Disruption Era (Study Case at Dr. Soetomo University Surabaya)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Intense competition among private universities in Surabaya, including Dr. Soetomo University, necessitates differentiation strategies to achieve competitive advantage in the era of disruption. This study aims to explore the implementation of differentiation strategies as a key to achieving competitive advantage in private universities in Surabaya.

Design/methodology/approach: This research employs a qualitative method with in-depth interviews with the Vice Rector IV and the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business.

Findings: The results identify four main dimensions of differentiation strategy: academic quality differentiation, campus facilities, extracurricular activities, and support services. Suggested best practices include stakeholder involvement, focus on quality, human resource development, strategic partnerships, utilization of digital technology, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Practical implications: The implications of this research provide practical guidance for other private universities in developing similar strategies to enhance institutional reputation and attractiveness.

Paper type: Research Paper

Keyword: *Differentiation Strategy, Competitive Advantage, Private Universities, Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this era of rapid globalization and technological disruption, competition among universities has become increasingly intense and complex. Universities are no longer competing only on a local or national scale but are facing increasingly open global competition. Advancements in information and communication technology have enabled wider access to higher education across national borders, both through partnership programs and distance and online education offerings (Xing & Marwala, 2017). On the other hand, the demands of the labor market are becoming increasingly dynamic, requiring new skills from university graduates. The 4.0 industrial revolution, driven by technological developments such as artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things, has significantly changed the work landscape (Xing & Marwala, 2017). University graduates are required to possess 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and high adaptability to compete in the global job market.

In this situation, differentiation strategies have become one of the main approaches adopted by universities worldwide to build competitive advantage (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Differentiation strategy is one of the generic strategies proposed by Porter (1985) to achieve competitive advantage. This strategy involves efforts to differentiate an organization's products or services from its competitors in ways deemed important by customers. In the context of higher education, differentiation can be achieved through various aspects, such as academic quality, campus facilities, extracurricular activities, support services, or other elements that can create added value for students (Ivy, 2008). Research by Bunzel (2007) shows that differentiation strategies can provide significant

benefits for universities, including increasing institutional attractiveness, building student loyalty, and strengthening the overall reputation and image of the institution. Competitive advantage can be achieved by offering unique and valuable products or services to students and other stakeholders, such as parents, industry, and society in general (Barney, 1991). By having a competitive advantage, universities can increase attractiveness, maintain student loyalty, and strengthen the overall reputation and image of the institution.

However, the implementation of differentiation strategies also faces challenges such as the need for large resource investments, alignment with organizational vision and culture, effective communication, and the ability to adapt to changing student needs and technological developments (Alves et al., 2015; Bunzel, 2007; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Universities need to periodically evaluate and adjust the differentiation strategies implemented to remain relevant to changes in the external environment. Research in Indonesia related to the implementation of differentiation strategies in higher education is still limited, especially in the context of private universities with different accreditation levels (Harwati, 2019).

This study aims to identify and analyze effective differentiation strategies in achieving competitive advantage at Dr. Soetomo University, one of the private universities in Surabaya. The main focus of this research is to find approaches that can help private universities remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly dynamic education market. By emphasizing the local context of Surabaya, this research will provide more specific and practical insights for private higher education institutions in the region. Dr. Soetomo University, which is accredited with a B rating, is one of the private universities in Surabaya committed to providing quality education. However, this university also faces major challenges due to intense competition among private universities (PTS) in Surabaya. Data from LLDIKTI Region VII East Java shows that out of 47 private universities in Surabaya, 10 have A accreditation, 25 have B accreditation, and the rest are accredited C. Additionally, the number of existing students in private universities in Surabaya has fluctuated over the past five years, with some institutions experiencing significant increases while others have declined.

The following table shows data on the Top Favorite Private Universities in Surabaya according to UniRank, published by detik Jatim on Monday, May 27, 2024:

Table 1 List of Accreditations & Rankings of Favorite Private Universities in Surabaya According to UniRank

<i>No.</i>	<i>University Name</i>	<i>Institutional Accreditation</i>	<i>National Ranking (2023)</i>	<i>National Ranking (2024)</i>
1	<i>Universita Kristen Petra</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>43</i>
2	<i>Universitas Surabaya (Ubaya)</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>91</i>
3	<i>Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>84</i>
4	<i>Universitas Ciputra</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>120</i>
5	<i>Universitas Wijaya Kusuma</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>75</i>
6	<i>Universitas Nahdatul Ulama Surabaya</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>105</i>
7	<i>Universitas Dr. Soetomo</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>123</i>

8	<i>Universitas Narotama</i>	B	134	121
9	<i>Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya (Untag)</i>	B	135	129
10	<i>Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala</i>	A	137	122

Source: detik Jatim, Monday, May 27, 2024

This condition requires innovative strategies and strong differentiation for Dr. Soetomo University to maintain and improve its position in the higher education market. The era of disruption, characterized by technological advancements and rapid changes in the way we work and learn, has drastically changed the educational landscape. Universities, especially private ones, must adapt quickly to remain competitive (Hoshi, 2023). In Surabaya, many private universities face major challenges, ranging from declining applicant numbers to intense competition with other institutions. Differentiation strategy becomes key to facing these challenges, allowing these institutions to offer unique value not possessed by competitors (Premathilaka & more, 2023).

The main problem this research aims to solve is: "How can Dr. Soetomo University develop and implement a differentiation strategy to achieve competitive advantage in the era of disruption?" This question will guide the entire research, focusing on identifying the most effective and relevant strategies. This research not only aims to answer this question but also to provide practical recommendations that can be implemented by Dr. Soetomo University and other private universities in Surabaya.

Many studies have discussed differentiation strategies in higher education, but few focus on the local context in Surabaya and the current era of disruption. This research will fill this gap by providing more specific and contextual insights about the challenges and opportunities faced by Dr. Soetomo University and other private universities in Surabaya. This research offers innovation and significant new contributions. Through innovative research methods, this study is expected to make meaningful contributions, both academically and practically. The findings from this research will provide practical guidance for Dr. Soetomo University and other private universities in Surabaya in developing effective strategies, as well as provide insights for education policymakers to support these institutions in facing the era of disruption.

This research is highly relevant to be conducted now, given the rapid dynamics in higher education due to technological disruption. The results of this research are expected to provide practical guidance for Dr. Soetomo University and other private universities in Surabaya in developing effective strategies, as well as provide insights for education policymakers to support these institutions. Thus, this research not only contributes to academic knowledge but also provides real benefits for practitioners and policymakers in the field of higher education.

In the era of disruption, the ability to innovate and adapt becomes the key to success. Dr. Soetomo University must be able to identify and develop unique competitive advantages to attract and retain students (Puspitaningtyas et al., 2023). Effective differentiation strategies can cover various aspects, ranging from innovative curricula, superior educational facilities, to partnerships with industry and local communities (Holt, 2023). This research will also explore how Dr. Soetomo University can leverage digital technology to support their differentiation strategies. For example, the use of online learning platforms, technology-based education management systems, and digital marketing strategies can be an important part of the university's differentiation efforts. By utilizing this technology, universities can increase the accessibility, flexibility, and attractiveness of their educational programs.

II. METHODS

This research was conducted at Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya, during the period from April to June 2024. This university was chosen because it is one of the leading private universities in Surabaya accredited with a B rating, and faces intense competition among private universities (PTS) in Surabaya. This study aims to identify and analyze effective differentiation strategies in achieving competitive advantage in the era of disruption.

The research design used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. This design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the differentiation strategies implemented by Dr. Soetomo University. The case study approach allows for the exploration of complex phenomena through various relevant perspectives and contexts. Data collection will be conducted through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document study. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, namely Vice Rector 4, Prof. Dr. Nur Sayidah, M.Si, Ak and the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business at Dr. Soetomo University, Prof. Dr. Sukei, MM. The

selection of these informants was based on their strategic roles in decision-making and implementation of differentiation strategies at the university. The interviews were designed to explore the informants' understanding, experiences, and views regarding differentiation strategies and the challenges faced. The document study will include analysis of relevant documents, such as strategic plans, accreditation reports, marketing brochures, and other promotional materials.

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data obtained from interviews were coded and grouped into themes relevant to the research questions. The thematic analysis process involves several steps, namely transcription and familiarization, initial coding, theme determination, theme review, theme definition and naming, and reporting of findings. Transcription and familiarization involve the process of verbatim transcribing of interviews and repeated reading. After that, initial coding is carried out where data is identified and coded based on initial themes that emerge. Similar initial codes are then grouped to form broader themes. The formed themes are reviewed to ensure coherence and relevance to the data. Each theme is clearly defined and given a representative name before the thematic analysis results are reported by linking the themes found with the research objectives and relevant theoretical contexts. Document analysis was carried out on official documents such as strategic plans, annual reports, marketing brochures, and institutional websites. Observations will be made on campus facilities, academic activities, and student activities to directly observe the differentiation dimensions implemented.

To ensure data validity, this study uses data triangulation techniques. Triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from interviews with document data and field observations. In addition, member checking is carried out by asking informants to review and confirm the results of interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy and precision of the information provided. Research findings will be presented descriptively and interpretively, providing practical recommendations for universities in implementing effective differentiation strategies.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research results, there are several main dimensions that are the focus of differentiation strategies at Dr. Soetomo University, namely:

1. Academic Quality Differentiation

One of the most common differentiation strategies applied is offering superior academic quality. This can be achieved through providing unique study programs, relevant to market needs, and having promising career prospects. Examples include interdisciplinary study programs such as Data Science, Artificial Intelligence, or Biotechnology which are highly sought after fields in the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution (Xing & Marwala, 2017). Academic quality differentiation can also be achieved through recruiting competent, experienced lecturers with good academic reputations. Quality lecturers are not only able to deliver material effectively but can also inspire and guide students to develop their potential to the fullest. Research by Bornstein (2011) shows that lecturer quality is an important factor affecting student satisfaction and academic achievement. Dr. Soetomo University strives to maintain and improve its academic quality as a main differentiation strategy. According to Vice Rector IV, Prof. Dr. Nur Sayidah, M.Si, Ak, efforts to improve academic quality include continuous updating of learning materials and improving lecturer competencies. She stated, "The competence of lecturers is in accordance with their field of study and the materials are always updated. That's from internal." These efforts are important to ensure the relevance of the education provided in accordance with the latest developments in each field of study.

Dr. Soetomo University's focus on improving academic quality is in line with global trends in higher education that emphasize improvement and innovation (Ivy, 2008). By prioritizing regular updating of learning materials and improving lecturer competencies, the university ensures the relevance and quality of education provided. In addition, the university has also invited accreditation assessors to provide critical views and help improve academic standards on an ongoing basis (Nygren & Sjöberg, 2023). This step is part of the strategy to achieve the status of a superior university recognized by the community and can attract more students. The impact on theory shows that this differentiation strategy supports the theory of competitive advantage which underlines the importance of innovation and quality in higher education. Practically, this provides an example for other private universities in Surabaya to improve their academic quality as a main strategy in competition. In addition, universities can promote student and graduate academic achievements as a form of differentiation. These achievements can be in the form of accomplishments in academic competitions or contests, scientific publications, or other awards that demonstrate the quality of graduates.

2. Campus Facilities Differentiation

Modern, complete, and conducive campus facilities for learning become an important differentiating factor for universities. Good campus facilities not only create a pleasant learning environment but also demonstrate the university's commitment to providing adequate resources for students. Research by Kuh et al. (2011) shows that complete and quality campus facilities can increase student engagement and satisfaction in the learning process.

In terms of campus facilities, Dr. Soetomo University has made significant investments to provide learning facilities that support optimal academic and non-academic experiences. The Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Prof. Dr. Sukesri, MM mentioned that learning facilities such as e-learning media, libraries, and scientific journals are important elements of this differentiation. "For academic learning facilities, maybe e-learning media is also included in facilities, libraries, journals, and then there are extracurricular student activities," she said. Sports facilities and extracurricular spaces are also a focus, which not only support academic activities but also develop students' non-academic skills. By providing superior facilities, this university strives to create a comprehensive and conducive learning environment (Ivy, 2008). From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the literature that highlights the important role of educational facilities in improving institutional quality and attractiveness, setting a precedent for other higher education institutions to prioritize campus facility development as a strategy for student attraction and retention (Firman & Arnyana, 2023).

3. Extracurricular Activities Differentiation

Universities can offer various attractive and beneficial extracurricular activities for students, such as student organizations, social and humanitarian activities, sports or arts clubs, and international student exchange programs. Through these activities, students can develop leadership skills, teamwork, communication, and other soft skills needed in the workplace. Extracurricular activities can also be a means for students to explore interests and talents outside the academic field, as well as build extensive social networks (Ivy, 2008). Universities that are able to provide diverse and quality extracurricular activities will have their own appeal to prospective students.

Extracurricular activities are one of the differentiation strategies implemented to increase the attractiveness of Dr. Soetomo University. These activities include various events such as national seminars, social activities, and community service projects that reflect the university's commitment to national and populist values. The Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business explained, "Extra student activities means including non-academic facilities." These extracurricular activities not only provide additional learning experiences for students but also help them develop leadership skills, teamwork, and social awareness. This approach is in line with the university's brand personality as a "Campus of Nationality and Populism," which emphasizes inclusivity and social care. Interpretation of the results shows that this differentiation contributes to strengthening the university brand and attracting the interest of prospective students looking for a holistic educational experience. Theoretically, this supports the concept of experiential learning which states that active involvement in extracurricular activities can enhance learning and personal development.

4. Support Services Differentiation

In an era of increasing competition, one of the key aspects of differentiation is supplementary services that offer added value to customers. In the increasingly competitive higher education environment, the differentiation of supplementary services plays a crucial role for institutions in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. In this context, supplementary services refer to various facilities and additional services that complement the core offering of education and teaching (Kotler et al., 2015). Supplementary services include various facilities and additional services that complement the company's core offering, such as consulting, training, maintenance, and after-sales support. Through effective differentiation of supplementary services, companies can distinguish themselves from competitors, increase perceived customer value, and build loyalty. Higher education institutions must be able to identify the unique needs and preferences of students and prospective students and design supplementary service differentiation strategies that align with those market segments (Ostrom et al., 2015). This can be achieved through close collaboration with students, leveraging digital technology, and innovating in the delivery of supplementary services. Universities have an ethical obligation to fund support services for students to meet their diverse needs and promote inclusivity on campus. Quality support services can also be a differentiating factor for higher education institutions (Parasuraman et al., 2021).

Quality support services are also a key focus in Universitas Dr. Soetomo's differentiation strategy. According to the Vice-Rector IV, these services include partnerships with industries to facilitate job placements for graduates and career services that help students prepare for the job market. "We establish access to various stakeholders who are decision-makers so we can prepare students for employment," he said. These services ensure that students not only receive a good education but are also supported in their transition to the workforce. The university strives to create sustainable competitive advantage through continuously enhanced and updated support services. The impact on practice is that good support services can increase student employability, which in turn enhances the

university's reputation. Theoretically, this supports the idea that effective support services are a vital component of higher education differentiation strategies (Ivy, 2008).

5. Differentiation in Marketing and Branding Strategy

In a highly competitive business environment, differentiation in marketing and branding strategy plays a key role for companies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Differentiation in marketing strategy involves developing a unique and distinct marketing mix from competitors, while differentiation in branding focuses on building a strong brand identity and distinguishing oneself from other brands in the market (Keller, 2020). These two aspects are interrelated and must be managed synergistically to create superior value propositions for customers.

In the increasingly competitive higher education landscape, differentiation in marketing and branding strategy becomes a key factor for institutions to attract prospective students, build reputation, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Effective marketing strategy involves developing a unique marketing mix tailored to the needs and preferences of the target audience, while branding differentiation focuses on building a strong brand identity and positioning that distinguishes oneself from other higher education institutions. In the digital era, higher education institutions must leverage new technologies and media to develop innovative marketing and branding differentiation strategies. For example, institutions can utilize social media platforms and influencer marketing to build brand awareness, attract prospective students, and promote academic programs. Additionally, institutions can adopt integrated omni-channel marketing strategies to provide consistent and seamless experiences for prospective students across various online and offline channels.

Universitas Dr. Soetomo also implements differentiation strategies in marketing and branding to enhance its visibility and appeal. According to the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business, branding through good image and reputation is crucial in attracting prospective students. "We must be really astute in our strategies...one of the strategies we recently implemented was inviting the executive director," he said. By strengthening its brand personality as "Kampus Kebangsaan dan Kerakyatan" (Patriotism and Community Campus), the university emphasizes values of patriotism and inclusivity. Consistent marketing strategies and programs reflecting these values help the university build a positive image in the community.

Differentiation in marketing and branding strategy must also be tailored to the unique preferences and behaviors of younger generations, such as millennials and Gen Z. For example, institutions can adopt more authentic, transparent, and socially-oriented branding strategies to attract the interest of younger generations. Additionally, institutions can utilize data analysis and marketing intelligence to deeply understand the needs and preferences of prospective students, enabling them to design more effective differentiation strategies.

Overall, the research findings show that Universitas Dr. Soetomo implements various differentiation strategies to achieve competitive advantage in the era of disruption. These strategies include enhancing academic quality, developing campus facilities, enriching extracurricular activities, providing superior support services, and strengthening marketing and branding strategies. Through a holistic approach focused on improving quality across various aspects, the university strives to remain relevant and appealing amid the intense competition among private higher education institutions in Surabaya. These findings offer valuable insights for other higher education institutions aiming to enhance their competitiveness in this rapidly changing era.

6. Challenges in Implementing Differentiation Strategies

Although differentiation strategies can provide competitive advantage for higher education institutions, there are several challenges in their implementation:

1. Large Resource Investment

Differentiation strategies often require significant resource investment, whether in terms of finances, human resources, or infrastructure (Bunzel, 2007). For example, to offer unique new study programs, institutions need to provide competent teaching staff, adequate laboratory facilities, and funds for curriculum development and program promotion. Resource investment is also required to build modern campus facilities, provide quality support services, or develop attractive extracurricular activities.

2. Alignment with Vision, Mission, and Organizational Culture

Higher education institutions need to ensure that the differentiation strategies implemented are aligned with their vision, mission, and organizational culture (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). If not, these strategies may cause conflicts or resistance from internal stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, and students. For example, if an institution has a culture that highly values traditional academic principles, differentiation strategies that are too commercially or business-oriented may not be well received.

3. Effective Communication

Differentiation strategies must be communicated well to both internal and external stakeholders to ensure solid understanding and support (Bok, 2015). Institutions need to promote the uniqueness and added value offered through these differentiation strategies to prospective students, parents, industry, and the wider

community. Ineffective communication can lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the differentiation strategies by the target audience.

4. Adapting to Changing Needs and Trends

Higher education institutions also need to pay attention to the changing needs and preferences of students, as well as anticipate technological changes and industry trends that may affect demand for certain study programs or services (Xing & Marwala, 2017). For example, with the increasing popularity of online learning since the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions need to adjust their differentiation strategies by offering innovative and quality online learning experiences (Dill et al., 2020).

5. Evaluation and Adjustment of Strategies

Therefore, differentiation strategies must be periodically evaluated and adjusted to ensure their relevance. Institutions need to conduct regular market research to understand the needs and preferences of prospective students and monitor technological developments and industry trends that may impact their service offerings. Differentiation strategies that are no longer relevant or less attractive to the target audience may cause institutions to lose their competitive advantage (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

7. Best Practices in Implementing Differentiation Strategies

Based on research findings, there are several best practices that higher education institutions can apply in implementing differentiation strategies:

1. Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, students, alumni, industry, and the community, in the planning and implementation process of differentiation strategies is crucial for ensuring success (Alves et al., 2015). Input and perspectives from various stakeholders can provide valuable insights into their needs and preferences and help identify opportunities for unique and valuable differentiation.

2. Focus on Quality

Although differentiation strategies emphasize uniqueness and distinguishing oneself from competitors, quality remains a key factor that cannot be overlooked. Higher education institutions must ensure that the implemented differentiation strategies do not compromise the quality of academics, services, or other important aspects for students (Bok, 2015). Quality should be the top priority in every differentiation effort undertaken.

3. Human Resource Development

Implementing differentiation strategies requires quality and motivated human resources. Therefore, higher education institutions need to invest in developing the competencies and capacities of faculty, staff, and leaders through training programs, workshops, or continuing education (Altbach et al., 2019). Quality human resources will ensure that differentiation strategies can be well executed and provide optimal results.

4. Strategic Partnerships

Building strategic partnerships with industry, research institutions, or other organizations can be key to the success of differentiation strategies (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). These partnerships can help institutions access new resources, expertise, or opportunities that support differentiation efforts. For example, partnerships with technology companies can help higher education institutions develop technology-oriented study programs or research centers.

5. Leveraging Digital Technology

In the current digital era, higher education institutions need to leverage digital technology to support their differentiation strategies. For example, by developing innovative online learning platforms, institutions can offer unique and flexible learning experiences for students (Dill et al., 2020). Additionally, leveraging technology can also support administrative processes, marketing, and other support services that are part of the differentiation strategy.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, higher education institutions need to regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of differentiation strategies. This is important to ensure that these strategies remain relevant and effective in achieving the desired competitive advantage (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Institutions can collect feedback from students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders, and analyze performance data and metrics related to differentiation strategies. The results of these evaluations can form the basis for adjustments or improvements to strategies in the future.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Conclusion

This research reveals that Dr. Soetomo University in Surabaya implements various differentiation strategies to achieve competitive advantage in the disruption era. Academic quality differentiation is achieved through updates to learning materials and enhancement of faculty competencies, ensuring education relevance with the latest developments in the field. Campus facilities differentiation includes investments in learning media, libraries, and modern facilities that support comprehensive learning experiences. Diverse extracurricular activities help students develop non-academic skills and support the university's brand personality as the "National and People's Campus." Support services, including industry partnerships and career services, strengthen graduates' competitiveness in the job market. Lastly, consistent marketing and branding strategies help the university build a positive image and attract prospective students.

B. Recommendations

1. **Continuous Improvement of Academic Quality:** Dr. Soetomo University should continue to focus on curriculum updates and innovative teaching methods. Engaging more industry experts as guest lecturers and expanding collaborations with leading universities domestically and internationally will enrich student learning experiences and enhance the university's competitiveness.
2. **Development of More Inclusive Facilities:** Further investment in inclusive and student-friendly campus facilities is recommended. Enhancing accessibility for disabled students, improving laboratory quality, and providing creative spaces for students to innovate will support more holistic academic and non-academic development.
3. **Strengthening Extracurricular Programs:** Developing more diverse extracurricular programs relevant to industry needs will help students develop necessary skills for the workforce. Internship programs, collaborations with local communities, and more intensive social projects can be key focuses.
4. **Optimization of Support Services:** Support services such as career centers and industry partnerships should be optimized by expanding collaborative networks and providing comprehensive career mentoring programs. Utilizing technology in career services, such as job search platforms and online career guidance, will add value for students.
5. **Innovative Marketing and Branding Strategies:** Marketing strategies should continually adapt to current digital trends. Strategic use of social media, creative digital marketing campaigns, and promotional content reflecting university values will help attract a broader range of prospective students. Additionally, engaging successful alumni as university ambassadors can strengthen Dr. Soetomo University's image and reputation.

C. Social Implications and Research Limitations

The social implications of these findings are that by implementing comprehensive differentiation strategies, Dr. Soetomo University not only enhances its competitiveness but also contributes to community development through high-quality, job-ready graduates. Community service programs and other social activities also strengthen the relationship between the university and the local community, supporting inclusive social development.

This research has limitations. The focus on a single university in Surabaya may not fully reflect the differentiation strategies implemented by other private higher education institutions in the region or across Indonesia. Additionally, data obtained through interviews may contain subjective bias, potentially influencing the results.

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