



Word of Mouth Dominance in the Growth of Bunga Bangsa Islamic University Cirebon: Factor Analysis and Dynamics for the Period 2013–2025

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of Customer-Owned Loyalty, Scholarships and Academic Support, and Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion on Word of Mouth (WOM) in the growth of Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBB). The research employed a quantitative associative approach involving 120 respondents consisting of students, alumni, and prospective students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results show that all independent variables have a positive and significant effect on WOM. Customer-Owned Loyalty has the most dominant influence ($\beta = 0.348$; Sig. 0.000), followed by Scholarships and Academic Support ($\beta = 0.297$; Sig. 0.001), and Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion ($\beta = 0.254$; Sig. 0.003). The R^2 value of 0.782 indicates that the model has a strong explanatory power in predicting WOM. The findings confirm that UIBBB's student growth is primarily driven by interpersonal communication and internal loyalty rather than formal promotion. Practically, the study recommends strengthening community-based educational marketing strategies that emphasize Islamic values and student loyalty.

Keywords: *Word of Mouth, University Growth, Alumni Loyalty, Islamic Marketing*

INTRODUCTION

The development of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia has shown dynamic growth over the past two decades. Many Islamic universities

have been able to expand and transform their institutions, not only through academic policies and quality improvement, but also through effective social communication mechanisms at the community level (Chairudin & Widodo, 2024). One form of communication that plays a significant role in disseminating information and shaping public perception of an institution is word of mouth (WOM) (Sabillah, 2025).

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), word of mouth is a form of informal communication that occurs between individuals regarding their experiences with a product, service, or institution (Wijaya, 2022). According to Buttle (1998), WOM has a power far beyond conventional promotion because it is based on personal trust. In the context of service marketing, particularly education, WOM has proven to be one of the most influential strategies in shaping consumer decisions (Ramadhan, 2025). The decision to choose a university is often based not only on advertisements but also on recommendations from close friends, such as family, friends, or alumni (Mico, 2020).

This phenomenon is particularly evident at Bunga Bangsa Islamic University Cirebon (UIBBC), an Islamic higher education institution that has experienced rapid growth since its inception. UIBBC began as an Islamic College (STAI) in 2003, then evolved into an Islamic Institute (IAI) in 2015, and finally transformed into an Islamic University in 2020. Each phase of this development has seen a significant increase in student numbers. Data on student growth was obtained from the internal archives of the Academic and Student Affairs Bureau of Bunga Bangsa Islamic University, Cirebon (Bunga Bangsa Islamic University, Cirebon, 2025). UIBBC's student population ranged from 700 to 1,000 in 2013, increasing to 1,000 to 2,000 in 2015, then to 2,000 to 3,000 in 2020, and reaching 3,000 to 5,000 in 2025.

This growth is inextricably linked to a unique marketing strategy rooted in the campus community. UIBBC does not rely on extensive digital promotion like other universities. Campus promotion occurs more organically through recommendations from current students, alumni, and the surrounding community. The university implements a simple incentive system where students who successfully recruit prospective new students receive compensation of approximately IDR 400,000 per person. This policy fosters active student participation in organically expanding the campus's communication reach.

Furthermore, UIBBC is known for its strong values in building the image of an Islamic-based institution. The campus has a positive reputation for affordable tuition, a close relationship between faculty and students, and a scholarship policy for Islamic boarding school graduates and Quran memorizers (tahfidz).

These factors play a significant role in shaping the public perception that UIBBC is a friendly, religious university committed to developing human resources based on Islamic values.

Interestingly, the dominance of word of mouth (WOM) at UIBBC remains even in the digital era. Despite the introduction of promotions through social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok, the primary influence on new student enrollment decisions still comes from personal interactions between individuals. This demonstrates that digitalization has not replaced the role of WOM but rather expanded its reach through broader media. WOM, which was previously local, has now evolved into electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), the dissemination of recommendations through online channels (Aynie et al., 2021).

UIBBC's transformation from IAI (Islamic Institute) to a university in 2020 also had a significant impact on public trust. The increase in the number of lecturers with doctorates and professorships, the development of academic facilities, and improvements in institutional quality have strengthened UIBBC's credibility in the eyes of the public. This institutional rebranding has been accompanied by increased public trust, which in turn has strengthened the positive WOM cycle in the social environment around Cirebon and the Ciyumajakuning region (Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka, Kuningan).

However, there has been little research specifically examining the factors shaping WOM dominance in the context of the growth of regional Islamic universities. Most previous research on WOM has focused on service sectors such as tourism, banking, and retail (Fitri, 2025), rather than on Islamic value-based educational institutions. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this research gap by analyzing the factors shaping WOM within a local Islamic university. Most previous studies on WOM have focused on commercial service sectors such as hospitality, banking, and tourism (Tasya, 2023). However, in the context of Islamic higher education institutions, WOM has distinct social and religious dimensions. Student and alumni loyalty is formed not only by academic satisfaction but also by the alignment of values and spirituality they find within the campus environment (Litasari, 2024).

Against this backdrop, this research is crucial to analyze the dominance of word of mouth in the growth of Bunga Bangsa Islamic University Cirebon during the period 2013–2025. This study aims to identify the key factors driving the spread of WOM, understand the dynamics of changes in campus communication strategies, and examine how Islamic values and social trust strengthen the effectiveness of WOM at UIBBC. The research findings are expected to provide an empirical contribution to the development of community-based educational

marketing theory and serve as a reference for other Islamic educational institutions in building sustainable growth through the power of social communication.

Based on the theoretical framework and research objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1 : Customer-Owned Loyalty has a positive effect on Word of Mouth.

H2 : Scholarships and Academic Support have a positive effect on Word of Mouth.

H3 : Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion have a positive effect on Word of Mouth.

METHOD

This quantitative study uses an associative approach to analyze the influence of several independent variables on the dependent variable. The research subjects focused on students, alumni, and prospective students of Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBC) who were involved or played a role in the process of disseminating information through word of mouth during the period 2013–2025.

The study population included the entire academic community and the surrounding community at UIBBC, with a sample size of 120 respondents consisting of current students, alumni, and prospective students who obtained information about the campus through personal recommendations. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, selecting respondents directly involved in informal campus promotional activities.

The sample size of 120 respondents was considered to meet the minimum threshold for multiple regression analysis (Hair et al., 2010), with a ratio of 10–15 respondents per variable.

The data used were primary data obtained through a closed-ended questionnaire using a Likert scale of 1–5, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The research instrument included a number of statements structured around the dimensions of student loyalty, scholarship receipt, academic support, and personal promotion effectiveness. Secondary data was also used as supporting data, such as reports on student development and campus scholarship policies.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 software, with several stages of statistical testing: validity, reliability, multiple regression, partial t-test, simultaneous F-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2). The multiple linear regression model in this study is formulated as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta^1 X^1 + \beta^2 X^2 + \beta^3 X^3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Word of Mouth (WOM)

A = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = Regression coefficients

X₁ = Customer-Owned Loyalty (student/alumni loyalty)

X₂ = Scholarships and Academic Support

X₃ = Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion

ε = Error term (noise)

Furthermore, the research variables are explained operationally as follows. In this study, the variables used consist of independent variables (X₁, X₂, X₃) and a dependent variable (Y).

The dependent variable (Y) is Word of Mouth (WOM), which refers to the behavior of students, alumni, and the community in recommending UIBBC to other prospective students, both through direct communication and social media. The independent variables include:

- X₁: Customer-Owned Loyalty, which refers to the level of student and alumni loyalty to the institution, reflected in feelings of pride, satisfaction, and commitment to remaining involved in campus activities.
- X₂: Scholarships and Academic Support, which refers to the extent to which financial assistance and faculty support influence students' motivation to recommend UIBBC to others.
- X₃: Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion, which refers to the ability of students or alumni to adapt their promotional communication style to prospective students based on their background and needs.

Each variable is measured using a 1-5 Likert scale, with statements reflecting respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences regarding each indicator. The obtained values were then processed quantitatively to determine the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable through multiple regression analysis. The empirical research model was formulated as follows:

$$Y = 1.215 + 0.348X_1 + 0.297X_2 + 0.254X_3 + \varepsilon.$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Theoretical Description

1. Word of Mouth (WOM) Concept

Word of Mouth (WOM) is a form of interpersonal communication that occurs naturally when consumers or service users share their experiences,

opinions, and recommendations with others about a product, service, or institution (Kotler & Keller, 2016). WOM plays a strategic role in building public trust because its information sources are considered more credible than formal promotions conducted by institutions (Purwitasari, 2024).

According to Harrison-Walker (2001), WOM can be either positive or negative. Positive WOM occurs when someone is satisfied and then recommends a service to others, while negative WOM occurs when someone experiences disappointment and warns others against choosing that product or service. In the context of educational institutions, positive WOM contributes significantly to increasing new enrollments, while negative WOM can significantly degrade the institution's image (Kurniasih, 2021).

According to Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan (2008), in the digital era, WOM communication has evolved into electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), namely the dissemination of information and recommendations through social media, online forums, and other digital platforms (Nasution et al., 2024). However, in the context of higher education based on socio-religious values, such as the Bunga Bangsa Islamic University of Cirebon (UIBBC), traditional WOM remains dominant due to the strong social relationships and close community that form its core. WOM functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a means of building the institution's image. Positive communication between students, alumni, and the surrounding community can strengthen the institution's reputation and create collective trust that is difficult to achieve through conventional advertising. This is one of the keys to UIBBC's growth over time.

2. Student and Alumni Loyalty as Drivers of WOM

Loyalty is a psychological commitment demonstrated by individuals to continue supporting and recommending an institution (Raharjo et al., 2023). Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as a deep attachment to a brand or organization, characterized by the intention to repurchase or provide positive recommendations. In the context of higher education, student loyalty is reflected in satisfaction with academic services, faculty, facilities, and social experiences on campus (Adi, 2025).

Loyal students tend to have an emotional connection to the institution and feel proud to be part of the campus community. When this emotional connection is strong, students and alumni will voluntarily spread positive information about the campus to other prospective students. This phenomenon is known as customer-owned loyalty, which is loyalty that grows from within the customer and forms the basis for the continuous spread of word of mouth (Barusman & Ec, 2021).

At UIBBC, student loyalty is formed from a combination of emotional, social, and religious factors. Students not only benefit academically but also feel accepted spiritually and socially. Scholarship programs for Islamic boarding school graduates and awards for those who memorize the Quran demonstrate that UIBBC places Islamic values at the core of the institution's identity. The loyalty born of these values then develops into a consistent word of mouth strength year after year.

3. Marketing Communications in Islamic Educational Institutions

Kotler & Armstrong (2018) state that marketing communications is the process of conveying an institution's messages and values to the public with the aim of building awareness, interest, and trust (Sembiring, 2024). In the context of Islamic educational institutions, marketing communications not only aim to attract prospective students but also to instill the values of da'wah (Islamic outreach) and social service.

Islamic values-based marketing emphasizes the principles of honesty (sidq), trustworthiness (amanah), and service (khidmah). These values create social trust, which strengthens the effectiveness of word-of-mouth (WOM). Communication conducted with a spiritual approach has a stronger impact because it touches the emotional and moral aspects of the community (Lusianti, 2024).

UIBBC is a concrete example of the application of Islamic values-based marketing communications in the Cirebon area. Campus promotion is primarily conducted through a network of mosques, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), religious teachers, and alumni active in the community. This approach fosters the perception that UIBBC is not only an academic institution but also a center for Islamic character development. The success of this strategy is reflected in the increasing number of students, most of whom are recruited through direct recommendations from alumni or current students.

4. Word of Mouth in the Perspective of Educational Institution Growth

According to Day (1971), WOM is "the most powerful form of marketing communication," because it arises from the real experiences of consumers. In educational institutions, WOM plays a role not only in increasing the number of new students but also in strengthening the institution's image and maintaining long-term sustainability (Gildin, 2022).

Factors influencing the effectiveness of WOM in higher education include (Pamula, 2025):

- a. Student Satisfaction, which encourages the desire to recommend the campus to others.

- b. Social Trust, namely the community's belief in the institution's credibility and integrity.
- c. Alumni Loyalty, which acts as a primary agent for disseminating positive information.
- d. Religious Values, which strengthen the moral and spiritual alignment between the institution and the community.

UIBBC's growth during 2013–2025 demonstrates that the combination of these four factors creates a solid communication ecosystem. Student and alumni loyalty, community trust, and an orientation toward Islamic values are the dominant foundations for the emergence of sustainable positive WOM.

Thus, this theoretical foundation leads to the understanding that the dominance of WOM is not a coincidence, but rather a manifestation of a social communication system that grows out of loyalty, satisfaction, and the institution's spiritual values. This research seeks to identify and analyze these factors empirically in the context of Bunga Bangsa Islamic University, Cirebon.

5. Research Conceptual Model

Based on the theory outlined, this research constructs a relationship model between three independent variables—Customer-Owned Loyalty (X_1), Scholarships and Academic Support (X_2), and Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion (X_3)—and Word of Mouth (Y).

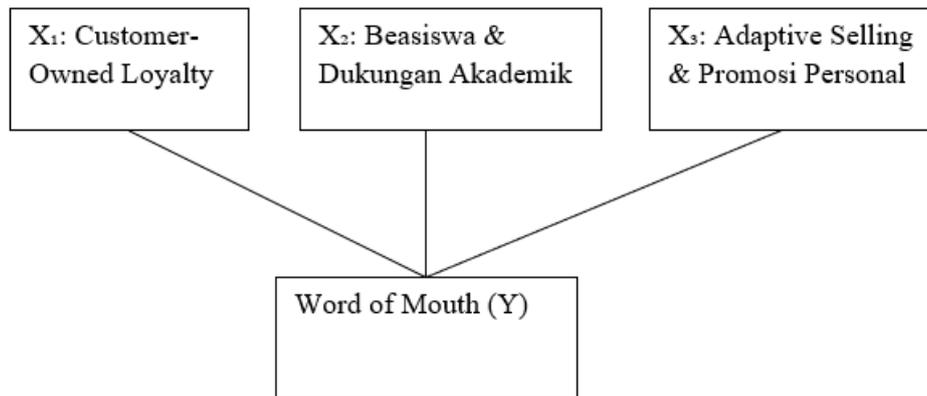


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

The model in Figure 1 depicts the relationship between three independent variables: Customer-Owned Loyalty (X_1), Scholarships and Academic Support (X_2), and Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion (X_3), and the dependent variable, Word of Mouth (Y). Each variable is assumed to have a positive and significant influence on WOM, as formulated in the research hypothesis. This model also emphasizes that positive communication about the campus is formed

through a combination of emotional loyalty, academic support, and personal promotion based on Islamic values that are unique to the UIBBC environment.

B. Research Results

1. Respondent Description

This study involved 120 respondents, consisting of current students, alumni, and prospective students at the Islamic University of Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBC). The majority of respondents were aged 18–25 (70%), with 62% female and 38% male. Based on membership status, 55% were current students, 35% alumni, and 10% prospective students.

The majority of respondents reported learning about UIBBC through direct recommendations from friends, family, or alumni (81%), while the remainder learned about it through campus social media or promotional brochures.

2. Description of Research Variables

The results of data processing show the average value (mean) and standard deviation for each variable as follows:

Table 1. Respondents' Average and Standard Deviation

Variable	Mean	Category	Standard Deviation
<i>Customer-Owned Loyalty (X₁)</i>	4.12	High	0.54
Scholarships and Academic Support (X ₂)	4.05	High	0.58
Adaptive Selling & Personal Promotion (X ₃)	4.08	High	0.60
<i>Word of Mouth (Y)</i>	4.20	High	0.51

The average value of all variables is in the high category (≥ 4.00), indicating that students and alumni have a positive perception of loyalty, academic support, and the effectiveness of personal promotion at UIBBC. This reinforces the assumption that campus growth is largely driven by internal satisfaction, which then triggers the spread of positive recommendations.

3. Research Instrument Testing

a. Validity Test

The validity test results showed that all statement items had calculated r values between 0.451–0.812, greater than the table r (0.176) at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Thus, all statement items in the questionnaire were declared valid.

b. Reliability Test

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Criteria
<i>Customer-Owned Loyalty (X₁)</i>	0,872	Reliable
Scholarships and Academic Support (X ₂)	0.841	Reliable
Adaptive Selling & Personal Promotion (X ₃)	0.854	Reliable
<i>Word of Mouth (Y)</i>	0.889	Reliable

The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha yielded the following values:

$$X_1 = 0.872$$

$$X_2 = 0.841$$

$$X_3 = 0.854$$

$$Y = 0.889$$

All Cronbach's Alpha values were > 0.7 , so all variables met the reliability criteria. The validity test results showed that all statement items had calculated r values between 0.451–0.812, greater than the table r (0.176) at the 5% significance level. Thus, all statement items in the questionnaire were declared valid.

4. Classical Assumption Test

The classical assumption test was conducted before conducting multiple linear regression analysis to ensure the regression model met basic statistical requirements.

a. Normality Test

The normality test was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test using SPSS version 26.

Table 3. Normality Test Results

Variable	Statistik K-S	df	Sig.	Description
Word of Mouth (Y)	0.089	120	0.200	Normal

The test results show an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200 $>$ 0.05, indicating that the data is normally distributed. Histogram and plot visualizations also support this finding, showing that the residual points follow a diagonal line.

b. Multicollinearity Test

This test aims to ensure there is no strong relationship between the independent variables. The test results are presented in the following table:

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test Results

Independent Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Description
<i>Customer-Owned Loyalty (X₁)</i>	0.612	1.635	No multicollinearity
Scholarships and Academic Support (X ₂)	0.598	1.672	No multicollinearity
Adaptive Selling & Personal Promotion (X ₃)	0.644	1.553	No multicollinearity

All Tolerance values are >0.10 and VIF <10, thus concluding that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables.

c. Heteroscedasticity Test

This test uses the Glejser Test.

The results show that all independent variables have a Sig. value >0.05, thus concluding that there are no symptoms of heteroscedasticity, meaning that the residual distribution is homogeneous.

5. Multiple Linear Regression Test

Based on the results of data analysis using SPSS version 26, the following regression equation was obtained:

$$Y = 1.215 + 0.348X^1 + 0.297X^2 + 0.254X^3 + \varepsilon$$

Table 2 below shows the results of the multiple regression test between the variables Customer-Owned Loyalty (X₁), Scholarships and Academic Support (X₂), and Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion (X₃) on Word of Mouth (Y).

Table 5. Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Test

Independent Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-test	Sig.	Description
(Constant)	1.215	–	–	–
<i>Customer-Owned Loyalty (X₁)</i>	0.348	4.612	0.000	Significant
Scholarships and Academic Support (X ₂)	0.297	3.985	0.001	Significant
Adaptive Selling & Personal Promotion (X ₃)	0.254	3.121	0.003	Significant
R² = 0.782	F- test = 42.186	Sig. F = 0.000		Model is suitable

R² = 0.782 F-calculated = 42.186 Sig. F = 0.000

Interpretation of Results:

- a. A high R² value indicates a strong relationship between variables, but also indicates the possibility of common method bias because all data comes

from respondents' perceptions. Therefore, interpretation of the results needs to consider this potential bias. The remaining 21.8% is explained by factors outside the model, such as institutional reputation, faculty quality, and alumni experience.

- b. The F-value of 42.186 with a Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05 indicates that the regression model is suitable for predicting word of mouth.
- c. Partially:
 - 1) X1 (Customer-Owned Loyalty) has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth, meaning that the higher the loyalty of students and alumni, the more likely they are to recommend BBC University.
 - 2) X2 (Scholarships and Academic Support) also has a positive and significant effect, indicating that scholarship programs, especially for Islamic boarding school and tahfidz graduates, enhance the positive image of the university.
 - 3) X3 (Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion) has a positive and significant effect, meaning that direct promotion from current students and alumni (a fee system of approximately IDR 400,000 per new student) effectively creates sustainable positive word of mouth.

Based on the results of partial and simultaneous tests, all hypotheses proposed in this study were accepted.

- 1) H1 is accepted: Customer-Owned Loyalty has a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.348$; Sig. 0.000).
- 2) H2 is accepted: Scholarships and Academic Support have a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.297$; Sig. 0.001).
- 3) H3 is accepted: Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion have a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.254$; Sig. 0.003).

Thus, all relationships formulated in the research conceptual framework are empirically supported by the results of the multiple regression analysis.

C. Discussion

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that all three independent variables have a positive and significant effect on word of mouth. This finding strengthens the previously proposed conceptual model. Based on the results of the partial and simultaneous tests, all research hypotheses were accepted, meaning all independent variables have a positive effect on word of mouth at the Islamic University of Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBC).

1. H1 is accepted: Customer-Owned Loyalty has a significant positive effect on word of mouth ($\beta = 0.348$; Sig. 0.000).

2. H2 is accepted: Scholarships and Academic Support have a significant positive effect on word of mouth ($\beta = 0.297$; Sig. 0.001).
3. H3 is accepted: Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion have a significant positive effect on word of mouth ($\beta = 0.254$; Sig. 0.003).

Thus, these results confirm that student growth at UIBBC is driven more by the power of interpersonal communication than formal promotion.

1. The Influence of Customer-Owned Loyalty on Word of Mouth

The regression coefficient of 0.348 and the calculated t-value of 4.612 (Sig. 0.000) indicate that student and alumni loyalty has the largest contribution to the formation of positive WOM. Students who are satisfied with the academic services, facilities, and familial relationships on campus are more likely to voluntarily recommend UIBBC to friends or family. This finding is consistent with research by Kotler & Keller (2016), which confirms that customer satisfaction is a primary factor driving advocacy behavior or voluntary recommendations.

2. The Influence of Scholarships and Academic Support on Word of Mouth

This variable has a coefficient of 0.297 and a calculated t-value of 3.985 (Sig. 0.001), indicating a significant influence on WOM. At UIBBC, scholarships for tahfidz students, Islamic boarding school alumni, and high-achieving students have been shown to enhance the institution's positive image. The support of active lecturers and a religious academic atmosphere are factors that strengthen students' emotional attachment.

This aligns with research showing that academic support and financial aid have a strong influence on student loyalty and campus recommendation behavior (Puteri, 2024).

3. The Effect of Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion on Word of Mouth

This variable obtained a coefficient of 0.254 with a t-test of 3.121 (Sig. 0.003), indicating a significant positive effect. However, because the β coefficient value is the lowest among the three variables, it is necessary to improve students' persuasive communication skills to ensure more equitable WOM effectiveness. Personal promotion conducted by current students and alumni, particularly with an incentive system of approximately IDR 400,000 per new student, forms a trust-based marketing network.

In the communal and religious cultural context of Cirebon, personal promotion methods are far more effective than formal media. This aligns with the Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) model, which emphasizes the importance of the credibility of personal information sources over advertising.

4. Implications and Contextual Analysis

The dominance of WOM at UIBBC has proven to be a major growth driver since the institutional transformation:

- a. 2003: STAI (Islamic College)
- b. 2015: IAI (Islamic Institute)
- c. 2020: Islamic University (UIBBC)

During the 2013–2025 period, the number of students increased rapidly from around 700 to over 4,000, making UIBBC one of the fastest-growing private Islamic universities in the Cirebon and Ciayumajakuning areas.

These results align with findings showing that customer loyalty and emotional engagement significantly strengthen word-of-mouth (WOM) in the education sector. This phenomenon demonstrates that customer-owned loyalty and adaptive selling are not merely marketing strategies but also part of a university's social capital. Students and alumni act as informal ambassadors who continuously strengthen the university's reputation (Casidy, 2014).

These research findings reinforce the Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) theory, which states that interpersonal communication has a greater impact than formal promotion, especially in service-based institutions such as higher education (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In the context of the Islamic University of Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBC), word of mouth dominance has been a key strategy for the institution's growth since its transformation from STAI (Islamic College) (2003) to IAI (Islamic Institute) (2015) and then to an Islamic University (2020). Student enrollment increased significantly, from around 700 students in 2013 to over 4,000 in 2025.

These findings indicate that customer loyalty is a strategic social force. Satisfied students and alumni tend to act as informal campus ambassadors. The existence of a scholarship program for students studying the tahfidz (Islamic memorization) and Islamic boarding school (pesantren) graduates further strengthens emotional loyalty and builds the campus's image as a commitment to Islamic education.

Furthermore, the implementation of adaptive selling and personalized promotion through an incentive system creates a uniquely local form of trust-based marketing. In Cirebon's communal and religious culture, a personalized approach is far more effective than formal digital campaigns. These results align with findings showing that customer loyalty and emotional engagement play a crucial role in strengthening word of mouth in the service sector (Marcos & Coelho, 2022).

Overall, UIBBC's word of mouth-based promotional model has proven relevant, efficient, and sustainable, making the campus one of the fastest-growing private Islamic institutions in Cirebon and the surrounding area.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings on the dominance of Word of Mouth (WOM) in the growth of Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBC) from 2013 to 2025, the following conclusions were obtained:

1. The significant student growth at UIBBC is largely influenced by the power of word of mouth-based promotion. Since the institution's transformation from STAI (2003), to IAI (2015), and then to Universitas Islam (2020), the number of students has increased from around 700 in 2013 to over 4,000 in 2025. This increase is not solely the result of formal promotion, but predominantly comes from personal recommendations from students and alumni.
2. The results of the multiple linear regression test indicate that the three independent variables have a positive and significant effect on Word of Mouth:
 - a. Customer-Owned Loyalty (X_1) with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.348$
 - b. Scholarships and Academic Support (X_2) with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.297$
 - c. Adaptive Selling and Personal Promotion (X_3) with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.254$.

The R^2 value of 0.782 indicates that 78.2% of the variation in Word of Mouth can be explained by these three variables.

The R^2 value of 0.782 is considered very high for social research, indicating that the model used has strong explanatory power for the WOM phenomenon. However, this high value also needs to be interpreted with caution because all data is sourced from respondents' perceptions, thus there is the possibility of common method bias.

3. Student and alumni loyalty is a dominant factor in shaping positive campus promotion. Students and alumni who are satisfied and emotionally connected to the campus tend to play an active role as informal ambassadors who recommend UIBBC to other prospective students.
4. Scholarship programs and academic support strengthen positive perceptions of the campus. Providing scholarships to Islamic boarding school (pesantren) and tahfidz graduates not only attracts prospective new students but also strengthens the campus's socio-religious image as an institution committed to developing quality and inclusive Islamic education.

5. A personal promotion strategy with an incentive system has proven effective locally. A reward scheme of approximately Rp 400,000 per new student encourages current students and alumni to participate in promotions, creating a sustainable, trust-based WOM cycle.
6. Overall, the word-of-mouth marketing model has proven to be most appropriate for the religious, communal, and trust-based characteristics of the Cirebon community. Therefore, this strategy is one of the main keys to UIBBC's success as a rapidly growing private Islamic university in the Ciayumajakuning area.
7. Theoretically, this study broadens the understanding of word-of-mouth in the context of community-based Islamic education, a previously underexplored area in the service marketing literature. Practically, these results provide recommendations for other Islamic educational institutions to develop promotional strategies based on loyalty, academic support, and the communication of Islamic values.

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