

Strategy to Improve the Competitiveness of Higher Education Based on Community Engagement: A Descriptive Study of The Free Health Check Service Program of Stikes Holistik on Car Free Day Purwakarta

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ABSTRACT

The high competition between universities requires strategies that extend beyond conventional promotion and emphasize meaningful stakeholder engagement. In the regional level, the community service initiative can serve as a strategic tool in the form of institutional differentiation. This study aims to analyze how the free health check up program, conducted during Purwakartas Car Free Day (CFD), contributes to strengthening the competitiveness of STIKes HOLISTIK through a Community Engagement approach. The research use a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing observation, documentation, and indepth interviews with program organizers and community participants. Data collection focus on 5 program implementations between September and November 2025, including 221 participants. The findings in this research indicate that consistent community engagement is not just an incidental social activity, but the institutional efforts of strategic positioning that results in sustainable competitive advantage. Past the direct experiential interactions between institutions and the community, institutions compete to create and build reputations and establish emotional relationship with the community that're considered difficult for competitors to imitate. This interaction based differentiation past institutions and communities has proven more effective and efficient than conventional like oneway promotion in building public trust. For that reason, the free community based health check initiative serves as an effective stakeholder oriented strategy for regional campus to enhance their legitimacy and also competitive position.

Keywords: *Higher Education Competitiveness; Community Engagement; Strategic Differentiation; Health Services*

INTRODUCTION

Competition between universities (colleges), both state and private at the regional level, is now increasingly profound in attracting public interest at large. Increasing public awareness of the quality of education requires campus to excel not only academically, but also in the direct social involvement. Currently, the competitiveness of universities or colleges is no longer determined solely by accreditation scores or facilities, but also by the institutions business capabilities in building a positive/good image and close relationships with the community as the universities main stakeholders [1].Tactically, sustainable competitive advantage can only be achieved if the university institution is able

to create unique values that are difficult for competitors to imitate [2]. Consequently, a campus strategy that's adaptive and responsive to social needs through community service (direct interaction) will gain stronger legitimacy and social reciprocity (a community assessment) [3]. The concept of community involvement have evolved from just a form of "service" to a sustainable integrated institutional strategy. This practice seems similar to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), where social activities function strategically in create and building the image and sustainability of the institution (here is university) [4]. In Purwakarta, there are about 17 universities, where competition to create public trust is very real. One noticeable practice is the free health check up service provided by students of the Nutrition Science Study Program at STIKes HOLISTIK during Car Free Day (CFD) at Situ Buleud, Purwakarta, on a regular basis. The stability of this program is considered a key differentiator because in competitive advantage theory, sustainability is key to building strong brand associations in the minds of the public [2].

From a public communication theory perspective, the health check up service at CFD have a more significant impact than conventional (like one way promotions), which are considered relatively expensive. Direct interaction allows the public to experience the students competency in a tangible way, create a deeper impression than conventional advertising [5]. Beside enhancing the external image, this involvement also improves the quality of students internal learning through hands on practice and encourages social empathy and professional practice [6]. Despite its significant potential, studies positioning community service as a strategy for campus competitiveness are still very limited. So, this study seeks to examine how the implementation of the STIKes HOLISTIK free health check program in Purwakarta CFD activities as a strategic instrument in strengthening the reputation and differentiation of institutions at the regional level. Based on that background, this study is designed to answer by the following questions:

- 1) How the free health check up service program implemented by the STIKes HOLISTIK Nutrition Science undergraduate program during the Purwakarta Car Free Day event, in terms of the frequency, scale, and interaction with the community?
- 2) How does students and the community view this program as a form of community engagement that contributes to the universitys competitiveness strategy?
- 3) What're the advantages of the routine health check up service strategy at Car Free Day compared to conventional promotional methods and similar activities at universities, especially other health colleges in Purwakarta?
- 4) How do this program contribute to the institutions reputation and its potential for strategic differentiation at the regional level (competitive advantage)?

This research contributes by showing how community based health service programs can function not only as community service activities, but also as a campus strategy in building differentiation and competitiveness of higher education at the local level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this research, the primary theoretical foundation using a Stakeholder Theory, developed by R. Edward Freeman in his book, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* [1], and more expanded upon in subsequent works [7]. Freeman highlighted that an institution is besides responsible to internal stakeholder, but also to all interested parties (external stakeholders), both those who influence and those who are influenced by the institutions activities [1]. Easy, stakeholders are individuals or groups (that have a direct or indirect relationship) with the institution [1]. In higher education, this includes internal stakeholders such as lecturers and students, as well as external stakeholders such as the spacious community, local governments, and business partners [4]. Accordingly, for modern campus/university, managing relationships with external stakeholders is a strategic aspect that cannot be ignored [4].

The essence of this theory is the creation of shared value for all parties involved [7]. An institution that wants to be sustainable must not only focus on internal achievements but also be able to make a real contribution to society directly. This relationship is reciprocal; When a campus provides tangible social benefits, the community will respond with support, trust, and even social legitimacy [3]. In the context, the free health check up program at CFD is seen as a concrete implementation of Stakeholder Theory. This program is not only a community service program, but rather

a strategy for managing relationships with the Purwakarta community to encourage emotional bonds and a positive reputation [4].

Strategically, a good reputation is a crucial intangible asset for increasing public trust and ensuring the sustainability of an institution [5]. The uniqueness of this program, which addresses basic community needs free of charge, build a strong differentiation compared to other similar campuses. In competitive strategy theory, differentiation based on social values like this leans to be more difficult to imitate and can become a source of sustainable competitive advantage going forward [2]. So, through stakeholder theory, the free health screening service at CFD is not simply a social act, but a strategic step to gain stronger legitimacy, reputation, and competitiveness at the regional level [5].



Figure 1. Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the role of community involvement in strengthening the competitiveness of higher education institutions/campus. A qualitative approach is used to explore stakeholder perspectives and the implementation of the program in a real-world, contextual environment. This approach is appropriate because this study aims to understand social phenomena rather than simply test hypotheses [9], while descriptive methods are used to systematically describe the program and its relevance to the competitiveness of campus institutions [8]. This research was conducted during the Car Free Day (CFD) event at Situ Buleud, Purwakarta, focusing on a free health checkup program organized by students of the Nutrition Science Program at STIKes HOLISTIK. Data were collected from five programs between September and November 2025.

Table 1. Research Respondent

No	Full Name	Information
1	R01	Institutional management
2	R02	Student
3	R03	
4	R04	Health Service Recipients
5	R05	
6	R06	

The subjects in this study were determined using a sampling technique, by selecting a respondents who were directly involved and relevant to the program being studied [8]. A total of six (6) respondents were involved, consisting of key informants (campus management and also students) and supporting informants (community members who received health check up services). This category was intended to obtain a balanced perspective between institutional strategies, program implementation, and direct community experiences. In addition, community members encountered during the activities were also involved use a accidental sampling approach to support data obtained from interviews.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, documentation, and limited observation. Data were analyzed descriptively through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions [10]. For validity, this study applied source triangulation and member checking [10].

DISCUSSION

Findings: Visitor Data and Participant Profile

Table 2. Health Check Visitor Data (2025)

No	Month	Date	Number of Visitors	Average
1	September	September 14, 2025	61	61
2	October	October 5, 2025	57	47.5
		October 19, 2025	38	
3	November	November, 16 2025	22	32.5
		November, 30 2025	43	
		Total	221	44.2

Table 3. Visitor Demographic Data

Characteristics	Amount	%
Gender		
Male	72	32.6%
Female	149	67.4%
Region of Origin		
Local	171	77.4%
Outside	50	22.6%
Age Group		
18–25	20	9%
26–58 (productive age)	155	70%
≥59	46	21%
Total Respondents	221	100%

Demographic data shows that the majority of visitors (67.4%) are women, and the majority (77.4%) are local residents of Purwakarta. Findings indicate that 70% of visitors are in the productive age group (26–58 years). This demonstrates that this health program is highly relevant to the needs of economically and socially active groups, particularly in Purwakarta, and aligns with theories regarding community involvement in public activities [8, 9].

Strategic Analysis of Community Engagement

This study contends that community involvement is no longer only an additional or complementary activity in the "Tridharma" of higher education, but fairly a part of a strategic institution/campus that contributes directly to the competitiveness of the higher education institution [4]. In the context of intense competition between campus (especially health campus) in Purwakarta, West Java, this analysis highlights how community service programs are transformed into an integrated stakeholder relationship strategy that is oriented towards the institutions reputation.

1) Program Implementation and Strategic Integration

Based on interviews with management campus (R01), the STIKes HOLISTIK health check program at CFD was initially an internal initiative for Nutrition Science students to practice courses such as Nutritional Status Assessment, Nutrition Counseling, and others. However, the campus later recognize that this activity provided "real/tangible evidence" of student competency in the public. From a stakeholder theory perspective, this indicates a shift in orientation from only an academic activity to an external legitimacy instrument for building a positive institutional image [3, 7].



Figure 2. Nutrition Science students in CFD

A crucial point identified was consistency. This program have been running since 2017. In competitive advantage theory, consistency is a key differentiator because it is very difficult for competitors to imitate, who might conduct similar activities on a casual, non sustainable base [2]. This continuity ultimately succeeded in building a strong and stable brand association, particularly in the minds of the Purwakarta community.

2) Differentiation Through Experiential Engagement

The differentiation of STIKes HOLISTIK is not built through one sided/one way advertising claims, instead through direct experience in the field. Students (R02 & R03) explained that the two way interaction in CFD provided a deeper understanding of residents health characteristics that cannot be obtained in the classroom (on campus).

This conforms with the concept of community engaged learning, which integrates theory and practice in a direct, real world context [6].

Demographic data shows that 70% of visitors are of productive age (26–58 years old), a socially and economically active group. This finding ultimately supports preceding research on community group involvement in community physical activity initiatives [11, 12]. Community responses (R04 & R06) indicate that the friendly interaction patterns between students and the community successfully fostered emotional intimacy. Inside experiential marketing framework, this two way communication is far more effective in forming positive perceptions than conventional one (1) way promotions [5]. This ultimately can create and build organizational legitimacy through repeated experience felt by the public [13].



Figure 3. Free Health Check Activities

3) Value Co-Creation & impact on Competitiveness

This program is considered to created share value (value co creation) for all parties (especially universities and community) [1, 7]. Students gain increased competency, the community receives regular free healthcare access, and as a result, the campus gains strong social legitimacy. In fact, the local government implicitly assists in its efforts to promote preventative public health [14].

Triangulation results indicate that the community feels more trust in the institution/campus due to its consistent presence. The "Holistic" approach creates a unique identity directly felt by all resident. Strategically, the use of CFD as a social communication platform has proven effective and costefficient, strengthening the campus bargaining position at the regional level (Especially in Purwakarta) [2]. Although internal challenges such as logistics remain, managerial commitment makes this program a solid long-term relationship marketing strategy to face increasingly competitive global competition in the future [15].

Despite making positive contributions and gaining legitimacy, author believe there're several ongoing challenges ahead. Respondent (R1) acknowledged that student motivation, logistical readiness, and team consistency are crucial factors in maintaining service quality. The key is future consistency. The presence of competitors from other health and non health campus conducting similar activities is certainly a challenge that institutions must address in a complex manner. In the context of higher education, increasing competition among university is encouraging institutions to develop differentiation strategies through programs that provide added value and strengthen the institutions position among increasingly competitive conditions [15].

This demonstrates that an engagement based strategy requires strong internal commitment. Without managerial support and a aligned/synchronous organizational culture, the program has the potential to decline in quality. However,

precisely because it requires consistency and collective commitment, this program is difficult for competitors to copy [2].

Based on the overall findings, the conceptual flow can be formulated as follows:



Figure 4. Conceptual Model

This model demonstrates that community engagement functions as a strategic, stakeholder-based mechanism that connects social activities with the competitive outcomes of educational institutions. Overall, the results of this study also confirm about the free health checkup program at the CFD event has evolved from a student organization initiative into an integrated and strategic institutional strategy. Community engagement, in this context, is not just about an implementation of the Tri Dharma (Three Pillars of Community Empowerment), but can also serve as a strategic differentiation tool to strengthen the competitiveness of higher education institutions, particularly health campus at the regional level, through the creation of sustainable social value.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that the free health checkup program during the CFD event in Purwakarta had evolved from a student initiative into a vital institutional strategy for strengthening the competitiveness of the STIKes HOLISTIK campus. Using stakeholder theory, this activity has been proven to create share value (value co creation) and benefit all parties, including students who gain practical space to hone their clinical and communication skills, and the community who gain access to healthcare services with a consistent and friendly, holistic approach. The consistent activity, conducted once or twice a month, is a key differentiator that is difficult for competitors to replicate. It also builds the institution's reputation through experiential engagement, which is far more effective than conventional media promotion.

As a recommendation, the author observed that the campus needs to maintain managerial commitment and logistical support to maintain service quality and begin optimizing visitor data as a strategic asset for sustainable public relations. The results of this research can also inform local government regarding the role of universities in implementing public health promotion programs. Because, community engagement is no longer just an "additional" activity, but rather the main weapon in building public trust and legitimacy and the sustainability of institutions at the regional and even national levels.

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