



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN TEKNIK SIPIL

Online (e-ISSN): e-ISSN 2715-0437 || Printed (p-ISSN): p-ISSN 2715-7601
2024, Volume 6, No 2, pp.68-82

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To cite this article:

Nuruzzaman M, Purniawan N, Aulia H R, Abidin M H (2024). Branding Vocational High School Graduates with Unique Selling Proposition Strategy to Increase Job Absorption: School Website Context. *Jurnal Pendidikan Teknik Sipil*, Vol 6 (2), Pp 68-81. doi: [10.21831/jpts.v6i2.78559](https://doi.org/10.21831/jpts.v6i2.78559)

To link to this article:

<http://doi.org/10.21831/jpts.v6i2.78559>





Research paper

Branding Vocational High School Graduates with Unique Selling Proposition Strategy to Increase Job Absorption: School Website Context

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: October 23, 2024

Accepted: November 23, 2024

Published: November 29, 2024

Keywords:

Branding strategy, vocational high school, graduate employment rate, unique selling proposition

How To Cite:

Nuruzzaman M, Purniawan N, Aulia H R, Abidin M H (2024). Branding Vocational High School Graduates with Unique Selling Proposition Strategy to Increase Job Absorption: School Website Context. *Jurnal Pendidikan Teknik Sipil*, Vol 6 (2), Pp 68-82. doi: [10.21831/jpts.v6i2.78559](https://doi.org/10.21831/jpts.v6i2.78559)

ABSTRACT

Background: Schools often brand themselves on websites for virtual communication, but rarely brand their graduates there. When both the school and its graduates have been branded, the strategies usually implemented are not by existing theory. The focus of this research is: (i) Have Vocational Schools provided branding to their graduates; (ii) What kind of branding has been carried out by SMK; (iii) What do schools carry out the average percentage of branding in fulfilling the 5 USP domains.

Method: The research method used is quantitative, with the number of SMK studied as many as 5 schools selected from 4 cities in the province of Yogyakarta Special Region which holds the title of SMK center of excellence. The instrument used is in the form of 5 USP domains and uses a Guttman scale.

Result: The results showed: (i) All schools have conducted branding of their graduates; (ii) Branding carried out by the majority of SMK is in the form of standard branding by explaining the competencies possessed by their graduates very briefly and less comprehensively; (iii) Of the 5 SMK studied, the average school obtained 55.54%, which indicates that the branding carried out by SMK so far is still not optimal and needs to be improved.

Conclusion: This research has an impact on vocational school managers to design branding that best suits the characteristics of their school. The branding displayed on the school website must be original, attractive, and convincing to the industry.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has been chosen by various countries to be a potential solution to solving the problem of unemployment among the young population (Lamb et al., 2011). Various countries have tried to allocate quite large budgets to form appropriate vocational education systems so that prospective workers have sufficient provisions (skills, competencies, knowledge, etc.) as capital to enter the world of work (Eichhorst et al., 2015; Essuman & Kwame, 2019; Subijanto, 2019). After the implementation of vocational education, the results obtained by various countries were very diverse, where many countries were successful in equipping their prospective workforce with appropriate competencies to reduce the unemployment rate among vocational high school graduates (Eichhorst, 2014; Mourshed et al., 2013).

The output of SMK graduates to be accepted in the job market must be more based on competitive advantage (Abuzar, 2011). Deeper than that, the learning curriculum needs to be adapted to industry needs, which is often referred to as a Production-based curriculum (Yoto, 2018). If this can be implemented, human resource development will be able to achieve the desired goal, namely becoming professional human resources by their field and able to apply the values of science and technology to support the smooth running of their duties (Bin Ola et al., 2018; Briggs & Desmond, 2013).

Based on the data on the level of open unemployment at the level of education completed (Figure 1), it is obtained that from the lowest level (elementary school and below) to the highest (doctoral degree), the largest value of open unemployment is SMK (9.6%) followed by SMA (7.69%) in 2023. Although the trend of unemployment at all levels is decreasing in the last 3 years, the unemployment rate is still very high. This indicates that efforts to increase the absorption rate of the quality of SMK graduates taken at this time need to be improved and supplemented with other methods to reduce the number of open unemployment

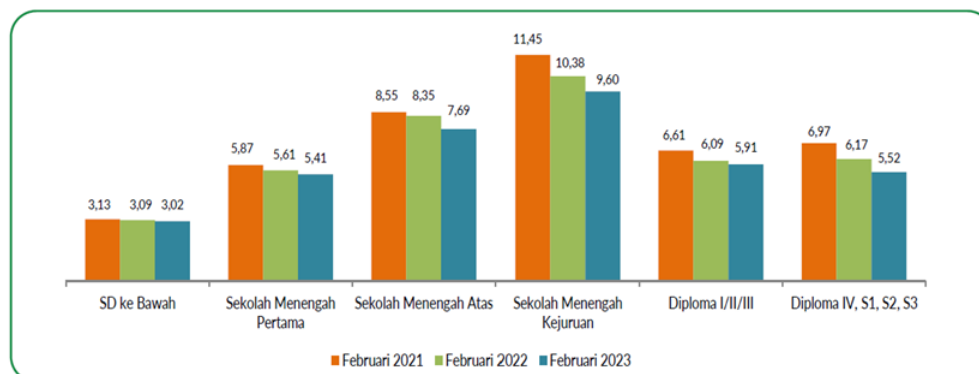


Figure 1. Unemployment by Highest Education Completed February 2021- 2023 (BPS, 2023)

One key factor that may contribute to the effectiveness of vocational education is strong partnerships between schools and local employers (Eichhorst et al., 2015). It is necessary to discuss together between schools and industry several dimensions such as quantity, quality, competency, location, and time (Jaedun et al., 2020). When vocational programs align with labor market needs, they can better prepare students for in-demand jobs and facilitate their transition from school to the workforce (Cheng & Zhou, 2022). When viewed from an industrial perspective, they can benefit from vocational education in the form of ease in obtaining quality human

resources, reducing training budgets for workers, and getting suggestions and input from schools to improve the industry (Afandi & Wijanarka, 2019; Sari & Mariah, 2019).

The relationship between school with the world of work (Ekawati, 2012) includes: 1) The role of the world of work in supporting the success of the school education process in the form of assistance in developing a school curriculum oriented to the labor market, 2) the world of work helps schools in shaping a good work ethic for students through internships. 3) The role of the world of work in the placement of SMK graduates, the world of work helps train students to communicate/interact professionally in the real world of work.

Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

The branding strategies currently known are very diverse, such as resonance, positioning, brand image, affective, generic, preemptive, and unique selling propositions (Frazer, 1983). Next, USP was chosen from the many marketing strategies, because USP is one of the marketing strategies that has been successfully implemented since 1960 and has become the most important creative persuasive advertising strategy since then (Conley et al., 2013; Shirkhodae & Rezaee, 2014). Although initially USP was closely related to product marketing, the USP concept has also included services (Chiagouris, 2005; Linning, 2005). Therefore, this is very suitable to be applied to vocational schools because vocational schools are educational institutions that produce graduates in the form of workers whose services will be used in the form of abilities and skills. USP has 5 domains in its implementation, namely Favourability, Believability, Distinctiveness, Compatibility, and Attractiveness (Niu & Wang, 2016).

Based on marketing science, one strategy to promote products to consumers is the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) strategy. Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is a strategy that is often chosen by sellers to promote their goods to potential consumers. When viewed from the context, this relates to the context that vocational schools annually produce graduates (products) that will be promoted to potential consumers (industry). Furthermore, the revision of the previous USP domain concept (Reeves, 1961) states that 5 domains can be used to measure the effectiveness of USP (Niu & Wang, 2016). The first is likability, in which there are clear, positive, approachable, pleasant, and commendable subdomains. Furthermore, the second domain is trustworthiness with subdomains of assured, realistic, and reliable. The third is the domain of distinctiveness, in this case, the subdomains are distinctive, innovative, and original. Furthermore, the fourth domain is compatibility with the subdomains of compatibility, meaningfulness, and unity in feelings. Finally, the fifth domain is attractiveness with subdomains of desirable, seductive, and charming.

In its implementation, many schools often do brand to get short-term benefits, namely branding using various kinds of media to attract students to register at the school (Fradito et al., 2020; Nuranita, 2022; Nurbawani, 2021; Rahman, 2015). This is only related to the high interest of applicants so that schools can easily get excellent students in the selection of new students. However, these schools very rarely do branding/promotion to brand their graduates (long-term benefits) to increase the absorption of graduates in the industry (Istiqomah & Setyowati, 2016). Therefore, this research will look in more detail at whether vocational schools do brand to increase the absorption rate of their graduates. In this case, if the school has done branding, then what branding will they have done? Then it will be sought how much branding effectivities

they have done. If they have not done branding, then we will suggest some things that schools can do to help increase the absorption rate of their graduates.

This research is important to find out (1) Whether SMK has branded their graduates; (2) What kind of branding has been done by SMK; (3) What is the average percentage of branding done by schools in fulfilling the 5 USP domains. The novelty of this research is the idea of conveying the appearance of a school website about how the school compares its graduates with industry. It is hoped that the results of this evaluation can help schools provide an overview of the extent of the quality of branding that has been carried out. Furthermore, schools are expected to be able to improve the quality of their branding by considering various influencing factors (subdomains). The results of this research can be used as a reference by managers of vocational institutions to design branding that best suits the characteristics of their school.

METHODS

Participant

The population of vocational high schools to be studied are vocational high schools in the province of Yogyakarta Special Region that have the construction and property engineering expertise program with a concentration on Modelling Design and Building Information (MDBI) expertise, both private and public schools. Furthermore, the sample selected is a vocational high school that has been selected by the directorate general of vocational as a vocational high school center of excellence. Based on this, 5 public and private schools were obtained that held the Center of Excellence (CoE) vocational high schools. One of the reasons why a Center of Excellence school was chosen as a sample is because the school is a superior pilot school in the surrounding city. Table 1 shows the list of centers of excellence schools that were selected as the research sample. If the school is good, then other schools around it are also expected to follow the goodness. If the school is not maximized in branding graduates, it can be expected that the surrounding schools are in the same condition or even worse.

Table 1.

CoE that were selected as samples in 2021 and 2022.

No	City	School Name	Type	Concentration of Expertise
1	Yogyakarta	SMKN 3 Yogyakarta	Public	MDBI
2	Sleman	SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem	Private	MDBI
3	Sleman	SMKN 2 Depok	Public	MDBI
4	Kulonprogo	SMKN 2 Pengasih	Public	MDBI
5	Gunungkidul	SMKN 2 Wonosari	Public	MDBI

CoE is a development program for SMK with certain expertise competencies in improving quality and performance that is strengthened through partnerships and alignment with the business world, the industrial world, and the world of work, which eventually becomes a

reference SMK that can function as a driving school and center for improving the quality and performance of other SMKs. SMK CoE is not about creating an "ivory tower" or a favored school that is superior to other schools. Instead, schools that become CoE SMK are expected to become reference schools and centers for improving the performance and quality of surrounding schools. Thus, CoE is expected to be increasingly relevant to the needs of industry and the world of work (Romanti, 2023).

Data Collection and Research Instrument

This research is quantitative research, where the research will be carried out by looking at and scrutinizing the websites of each SMK assessed. The information that will be observed and scrutinized on each school's website is information related to the branding or promotion carried out by each school for its graduates. If the branding or promotion of graduates is found, it will continue to be assessed using the instrument from Niu and Wang (2016) where there are 5 domains with a total of 18 subdomains.

Table 2.

USP domain and Sub domain (Niu & Wang, 2016)

No	Domain	Sub Domain
1	Favourability	
1.1		Vivid
1.2		Positive
1.3		Approachable
1.4		Pleasant
1.5		Commendable
2	Believability	
2.1		Assured
2.2		Realistic
2.3		Reliable
2.4		Dependable
3	Distinctiveness	
3.1		Distinctive
3.2		Innovative
3.3		Original
4	Compatibility	
4.1		Sympatric compatible
4.2		Meaningful to me
4.3		emotionally bonded
5	Attractiveness	
5.1		Desirable
5.2		Tempting
5.3		Captivating

In this research, information gathering is limited to the SMK website because the website is the first information that can be easily searched by prospective graduate user industries in searching for their prospective workforce. It is on the school website that updated information can be found and known. After knowing the information through the school website, if they want additional information, graduate users (industry/ the world of work) search for information using the school's official social media or direct contact with the school principal, vice principal, special job exchange administrator or head of each department.

Based on the domains previously created (Niu & Wang, 2016) there are 5 main domains as indicators in assessing the branding that has been carried out to increase the quantity of absorption of the number of graduates. Each domain is divided into each subdomain with a different number for each domain. When viewed as a whole, there are 18 subdomains (Table 2) used in measuring branding.

The measurement scale used in the instrument is the Guttman Scale because the answers needed are firm, namely "yes" and "no". For example, one of the 18 subdomains of the research instrument is the "assured" category. If the website explains that the advantage of graduates of the SMK is that they have certain graduate competencies, then there must be information from graduate service users (industry/world of work) who confirm that graduates from the SMK do have these abilities when working, so that what is conveyed about the competence of graduates is guaranteed. The answer "yes" will be given a number 1 and the answer "no" will be given a number 0. All numbers obtained from the assessment of the SMK website are then summed up and presented to obtain the results of the analysis. The assessment given must match the reality on the website of each SMK, so it is necessary to ensure that the information is searched carefully and carefully on each SMK website.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on careful observation and scrutiny of each website in each vocational school, data analysis was then carried out by grouping each domain.

1. Favorability

In the Favorability domain, there are 5 subdomains which are explained in each school (Figure 2). The Vivid subdomain can be seen in how the website provides clear information, at least it is not clear in certain fields if it cannot provide clear information in all fields. Then the positive subdomain can be seen in how much effort the school makes in providing information on the website, focusing on what positive values graduates have, thereby increasing the interest of graduate users. The next subdomain is Approachable, which focuses on how likely website readers are to be able to approach the information presented on the website, such as photos of practical room information so that readers can imagine what it is like and how the practicum will occur in the workshop. Pleasant subdomains can be seen from the responses of readers when viewing and reading each school's website. If the website has an appearance that makes readers willing to give more time (pleases readers) and makes it easy to present information, then the website can fulfill this subdomain category. The final subdomain is commendable which focuses on how the website chooses sentences, photos, or other information to conform to values or norms that are considered commendable to the public/readers. This includes no typos and no incomprehensible sentences. No harsh words, inappropriate words unclear photos, or other information that the reader would not expect.

Furthermore, analysis of the SMKN 3 Yogyakarta, SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem, and SMKN 2 Depok websites on the favorability domain obtained an assessment figure of 60%, in other words, the website displayed met 3 of the 5 expected subdomains. SMK 3 Yogyakarta fulfills the subdomains of positive, approachable, and commendable. This is slightly different from SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem and SMKN 2 Depok which fulfill the subdomains Vivid,

Positive, and Pleasant. Furthermore, SMKN 2 Pengasih obtained the lowest percentage, namely 40% with the contents of the Vivid and Positive subdomains. This is different from SMKN 2 Wonosari which obtained the highest percentage, namely 80%, by fulfilling all subdomains except commendable.

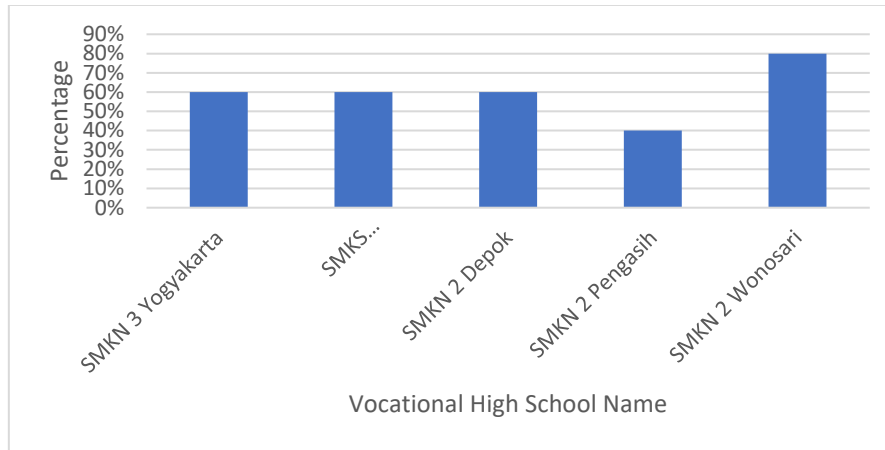


Figure 2. Favorability Percentage Data for each school

2. Believability

In the believability domain, 4 subdomains are analyzed in each school (Figure 3). The assured subdomain can be seen in how the website provides information that can guarantee that the competence of the school is very good and beyond doubt. This can be seen from the testimonials of graduate users who are satisfied with the competence of graduates, and then the achievements obtained from graduates who work. clearly, or other evidence that can guarantee the quality of the graduates produced. Then the realistic subdomain can be seen in how realistic the information provided on the website is. It cannot be denied that to increase the interest of graduate users, schools often exaggerate information which is not the case. This is what causes the information to be unrealistic or not what it is. The next subdomain is reliable, which focuses on how much the reader trusts the information on the website. If the information presented is complete, clear, and in line with what is expected by the industry, then they do not need to come to school to look for further information about the school. The last subdomain is dependable, that is, society or industry depends on the website if they want to find information about schools.

Furthermore, analysis of the SMKN 3 Yogyakarta, SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem, SMKN 2 Depok, and SMKN 2 Pengasih websites on the believability domain obtained an assessment figure of 25%, in other words, the website displayed meets 1 of the 4 expected subdomains. These 4 schools only fulfill the realistic subdomain where the information is limited to information on school facilities, while information on graduate user testimonials is not available on any of the websites of the 4 schools. Furthermore, SMKN 2 Wonosari obtained a score of 50% where apart from the realistic subdomain it also met the reliable subdomain. This can be seen from the complete information provided on the website. Even on the website, there is space for discussions, job searches, and job vacancy information, and parents are also given space to

contribute. However, the available space still lacks data, there are very few job vacancies coming in, and not many industries have joined the page.

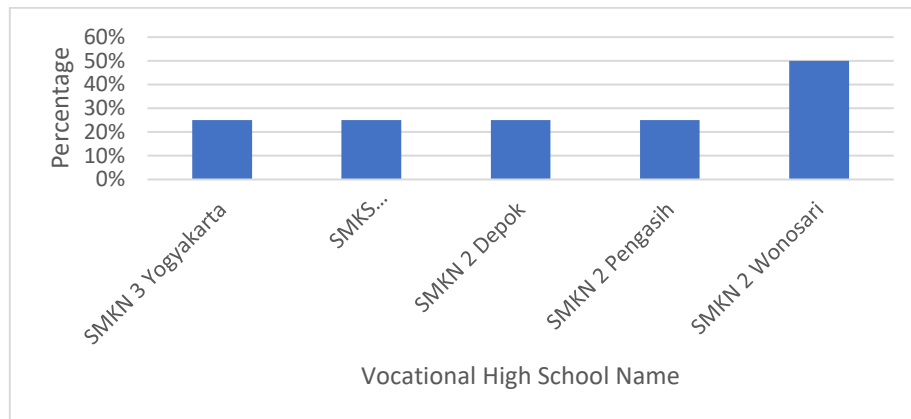


Figure 3. Believability Percentage Data for each school

3. Distinctiveness

In the distinctiveness domain, there are 3 subdomains analyzed in each school (Figure 4). The distinctive sub-domain can be seen in how the website provides the value of instantaneous characteristics that are different from other agencies. Different in this case is not just different but different because it has unique characteristics and even different because it is superior to others. This is often used as one of the most famous branding strategies, namely making a unique selling proposition (USP) by Reeves (1961). The next subdomain is innovative, this can be seen from the attractive website display and can communicate well to its readers so that the information sought and needed by readers can be obtained properly and completely. The last subdomain is original, namely, the delivery of information presented on the website must be as it is, not added and subtracted, and following what is in the location/school.

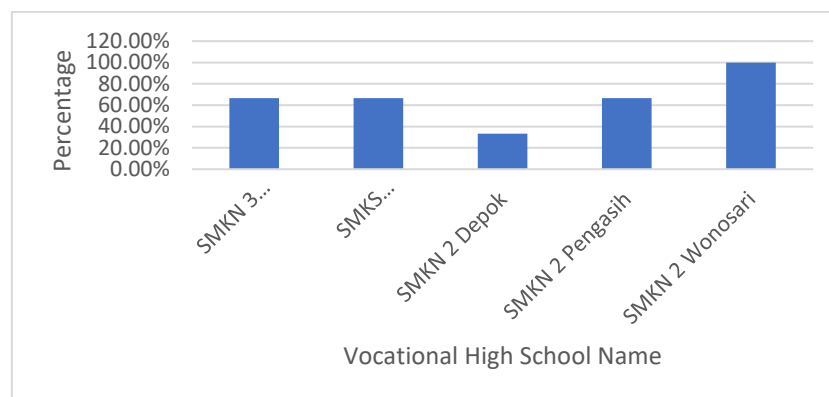


Figure 4. Distinctiveness Percentage Data for each school

Furthermore, website analysis at SMKN 3 Yogyakarta, SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem, and SMKN 2 Pengasih in the distinctiveness domain obtained an assessment rate of 66.67%, in other words, the website displayed fulfills 2 of the 3 expected subdomains. Although the three schools

meet the same 2 subdomains, not all of them are the same, for SMKN 3 Yogyakarta and SMKS Muhammadiyah Pakem meet the distinctive and original subdomains, while SMKN 2 Pengasih meets the distinctive and innovative subdomains. SMK 2 Depok fulfills only one of the three subdomains, namely distinctive (33.34%). This contrasts with SMKN 2 Wonosari which fulfills all subdomains, namely distinctive, innovative, and original (100%).

4. Compatibility

In the Compatibility domain, there are 3 subdomains analyzed in each school (Figure 5). The Sympatric compatible subdomain can be seen from the compatibility or harmony and accordance between the website and the real conditions at the school. Furthermore, the meaningful to me subdomain can be seen from how much website information provides information/influences its readers so that what is expected by graduate providers and graduate users can be achieved. Furthermore, the last subdomain is emotionally bonded, which can be identified by looking at the extent to which the information on the website attracts the psychological side of its readers so that they can participate and sink so that they are integrated and a sense of belonging to the school can arise.

Website analysis conducted at SMKN 3 Yogyakarta and SMKN 2 Depok obtained an assessment result of 33.34%, in other words, each school fulfills 1 of the 3 existing subdomains. While SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem and SMKN 2 Pengasih obtained an assessment rate of 66.67%, in other words, the website displayed fulfills 2 of the 3 expected subdomains. Furthermore, the assessment of SMKN 2 Wonosari obtained a score of 100% so it can be interpreted that the required 3 subdomains have been fulfilled by the school.

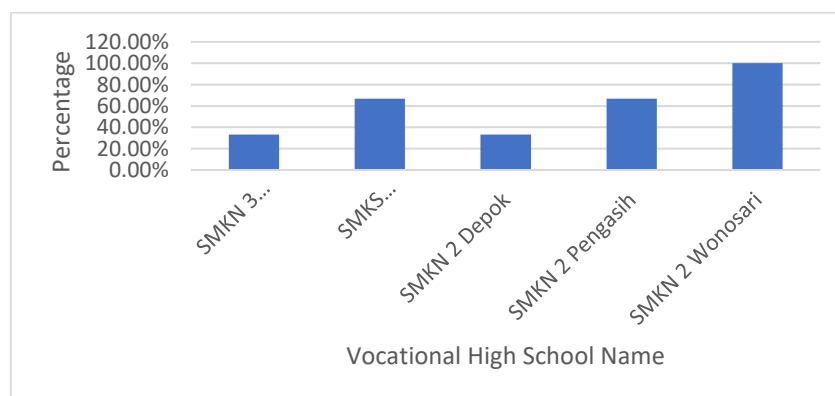


Figure 5. Compatibility Percentage Data for each school

5. Attractiveness

In the Attractiveness domain, there are 3 subdomains analyzed in each school (Figure 6). The desirable subdomain can be seen in how the website provides clear information, about what the reader wants, so that simply by reading the website what is expected and desired can be obtained easily. Then the tempting subdomain can be seen in how much effort the school makes in presenting an attractive appearance that even tempts readers to continue and continue to read all the information presented on the website. The next subdomain is captivating, which focuses on how the website displays information wrapped in a charming and elegant presentation.

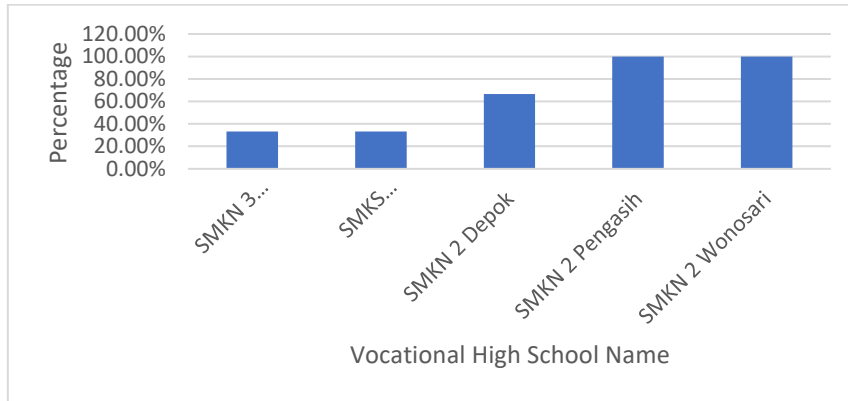


Figure 6. Attractiveness Percentage Data for each school

Furthermore, Figure 7 displays the average percentage value for each school. The analysis of the websites of SMKN 3 Yogyakarta and SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem resulted in a percentage of 33.34% or fulfilling 1 of the 3 subdomains. Furthermore, SMKN 2 Depok in the favorability domain obtained an assessment rate of 66.67%, in other words, the website displayed fulfills 2 of the 3 expected subdomains. This is different from SMKN 2 Pengasih and SMKN 2 Wonosari, which obtained the highest percentage of 100%, in other words, the desirable, tempting, and captivating subdomains are already present in the website display.

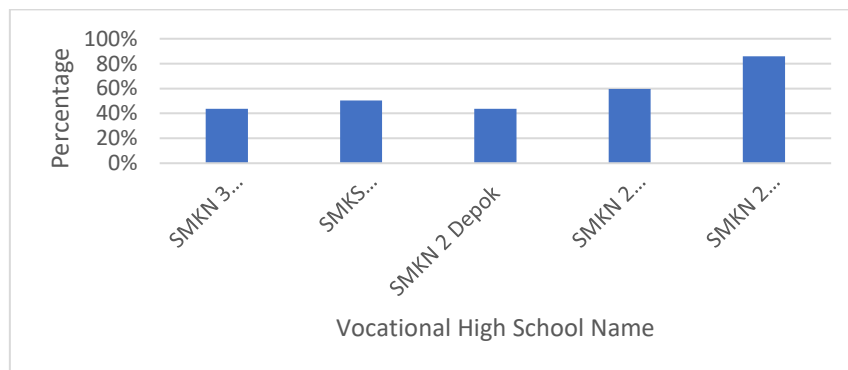


Figure 7. The average percentage value of each school

Furthermore, if schools are identified based on the total results of 18 subdomains, the average percentage value of each school is obtained. Based on Figure 7 obtained information that the website that fulfills the most subdomains is from the website of SMKN 2 Wonosari. Where SMKN 3 Yogyakarta and SMKN 2 Depok have an average value of 44.44%, SMK Muhammadiyah Pakem has an average value of 50% and SMKN 2 Pengasih has an average value of 55.56%. Furthermore, the comparison of subdomains with the 5 schools studied can be seen in Figure 8.

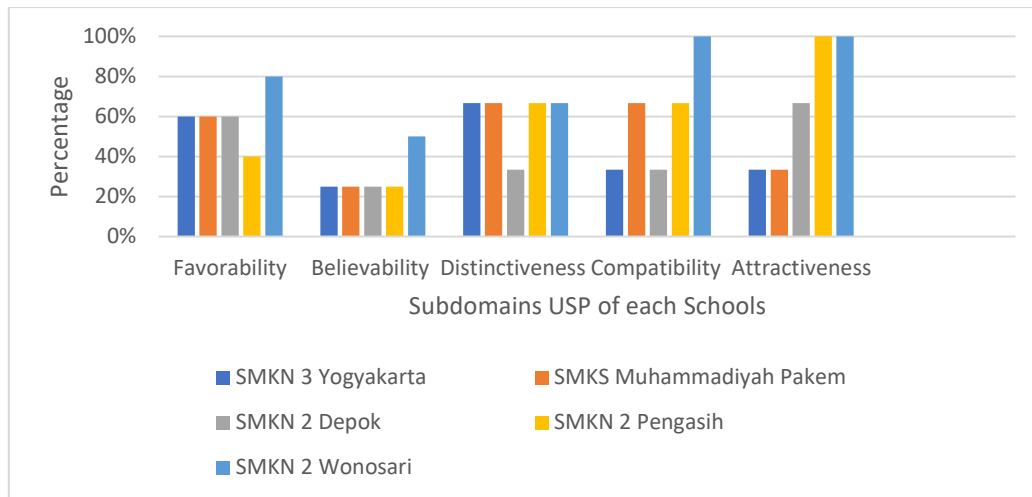


Figure 8. Comparison of subdomains each Schools

Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis of all domains and subdomains of the websites of the 5 SMK, various results were obtained. Each school has advantages and disadvantages in presenting information on its website. In general, when examined, in the domain of favorability, the vivid subdomain, the shortcomings that occur are the unclear information presented. If it is described that graduates are competent in something, it needs further explanation of the details of that competence as well as evidence and what training/education has been done to support that competence. The display on the website is generally limited to mentioning a list of competencies without any explanation. Furthermore, the positive subdomain has been owned by all school websites. Then in the Approachable subdomain, the shortcomings that often occur are the lack of video photo information and explanations about practical rooms, workshops, laboratories, classes, and other facilities owned and which are superior to schools. This will provide insight to readers so that they can imagine and approach the information. Analysis of the pleasant subdomain Most schools have displayed their websites well so that they give a good and pleasant impression to visitors, but there are still website displays that are not pleasant, limited choices, and difficult to understand. The commendable subdomain is only fulfilled by one school, while other schools have not yet fulfilled it. There are often incorrect sentences, typos, and other problems.

In the believability domain, 2 subdomains are not found at all on the websites of the 5 schools. The 2 subdomains are assured and dependable (believability domain). The assured subdomain cannot be fulfilled because there is no information from service users about testimonials in using these school graduates. This is not easy to do because it requires other parties outside the school to participate. The realistic subdomain has been implemented by all schools. The reliable subdomain only exists in 1 school while the others have not been applied. This is because the school website is not yet reliable in finding information. Furthermore, the dependable subdomain has not been fulfilled by all schools. Presentation of website content needs to be added with explanations and equipped with explanatory photos or videos. The distinctiveness domain has largely been found in the 5 schools. The distinctive subdomain has

been fulfilled by all schools, but the innovative subdomain needs to be a concern for all schools because it has not been applied in these schools. The website display is still very simple with no innovation value in it. Furthermore, the original subdomain needs to be added so that the information obtained is more complete.

The compatibility domain consists of sympatric compatible, meaningful to me, and emotionally bonded subdomains where all subdomains have been mostly implemented by the school. Then what needs to be noted is the need for a website design that provides data, documents, or other information that can make readers take ownership of the school and place the school in the reader's subconscious as a school that is close to them. If the service user needs labor, it can be assured that the school will be the main consideration in the choice.

The attractiveness domain has desirable, tempting, and captivating subdomains. In general, all subdomains already exist on all school websites, but some things need to be considered. When designing a website as much as possible make an attractive website display that can make readers become tempted to read the information presented so that it does not feel that the information has been read entirely. The appearance of the website as much as possible is made elegant, this is like a person's clothes will determine the level of his degree. Wearing does not necessarily have to be expensive but neat, fitting, and fragrant. The website is the same, it does not have to be designed expensively, but elegant, neat, not excessive, and functional.

CONCLUSION

Branding done by schools on the website is often not optimal in its presentation. More effort is needed by schools to improve the quality of the website, especially in terms of the information provided and the appearance of the website design. Then the guarantee that the information displayed is reality must be given. It is time for the school website to become a representative of the school to explain the advantages of graduates to graduate users without being limited by time. The website needs to be developed into a tool that is not only able to communicate in one direction but needs and can communicate in two directions and even more than that. This can happen if supported by an adequate user interface and system. This research focuses on school websites in displaying their school branding. This needs to be deepened by conducting research on school principals, teachers, and other stakeholders about school branding.

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