

# COMPETITION OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN INDONESIA: WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BEAT THE COMPETITORS?

<sup>1</sup>Furtasan Ali Yusuf

<sup>1</sup>*Bina Bangsa University, Indonesia, Email: fay@binabangsa.ac.id*

## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the competition of private universities in Indonesia. The research focuses on competitive strategies between universities in the new normal era using previous literature studies. Literature studies are taken from scientific articles in the last two years since the pandemic occurred in Indonesia. Relevant government regulations and policies support this research. The findings reveal four strategies that private university can adopt to beat competitors, including; student orientation strategies and social media; technology-based orientation; coordination strategy between intra-functional functions based on quality and competitiveness; government intervention and cooperation strategy. It can be concluded that the strategy to beat competitors can be obtained from empirical data in the literature. The success of private university in facing competition is to know its advantages and improve its weaknesses. Fair government intervention to support private university is urgently needed. Private universities in Indonesia need to consider effective strategies based on the experience of private universities in countries that have successfully adopted strategic management and their competitive advantages.

**Keywords:** Literature studies, government regulations, private university.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher Education is the main pillar in building productive and competitive human resources. Since the modern period in the 19th century until the digitalization era, higher education has high economic value because stakeholders benefit in the long term and support economic growth (Guo, 2022; Hamdan et al., 2020; McArthur, 2011; Brown & Heaney, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988). Schofer et al. (2021) reveal that global expansion has brought about social consequences for higher education. This is because universities are able to support modern professions and contribute to the rationalization of society and the state. The supranational and universalistic orientation of higher education provides a framework and global cultural identity. Its impact on social

change is related to human rights, environmental protection, and religious and cultural solidarity. The concept of education as a long-term investment has developed to date, where every country is moving to improve the quality of human resources through higher education.

In Indonesia, universities (PT) have experienced rapid growth for several decades (Chiara Logli, 2012). Even higher than China, which has the largest population in the world. Unfortunately the rapid growth of university is not balanced with high competitiveness in the international world. In 2021, universities will only be able to contribute 9.67 percent of the total population of Indonesia (Dirjen Kemdikbud, 2021). This means that the increasing university is not accompanied by its

contribution to national education goals. The Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education seeks to reduce the number of private universities because it is considered that not all have good performance and standards. The alternative being sought is to merge with the same foundation (Prodjomaroeto & Muhyidin, 2021). This effort was made as a definite step because since the Covid-19 pandemic, many universities, especially private ones, have closed, so it is very important to make private universities healthier and have stronger infrastructure. It was recorded that from 2015 to 2020, the merger resulted in 179 private universities out of 458 private universities being targeted by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kasih, 2021)..

Based on statistical data from the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education in 2021, there are 3,226 universities spread throughout the province. The province that has

the highest number of private university is West Java Province, namely 388, followed by East Java Province with 344, and in third place is Jakarta Province with 319. Thus, for the top three regions of Indonesia, the highest number of university comes from Java Island. Statistical data in table 1, it can be seen that a total of 68% or 4,616 universities are private university, while the second position is religious university as much as 25% (1,158 university), vocational university 4% (182 university), and public university only 3% or 122 university. Therefore, most universities in Indonesia are dominated by the private sector with a total of 4,922,855 students. The highest number of study programs based on management institutions comes from Private Universities (PTS) of 14,099 compared to 6,612 State Universities (PTN), 5,229 Religious Universities (PTA), and 800 vocational Universities (PTK) (Dirjen Kemdikbud, 2021 )

Table 1. *Statistics of Higher Education in Indonesia in 2019*

College	Study Programs	Total of college	Lecturers	Students
Private college	14.099	4.616	173.662	4.922.855
Public universities	6.612	122	73.607	2.237.749
religious college	5.229	182	27.762	896.874
official college	800	1.158	9.819	165.178

Sources:: (PDDikti, 2020)

The number of private private universities shows that the development of public interest in choosing favorite private private universities is increasing every year. The large development of private universities requires them to have high competitiveness, both in terms of facilities and teacher competencies (Mahdi et al., 2019). The literature states that the advantages of each private university are one of the factors in the decision of parents to choose certain private university for their children (Dwiyanti & Adisanjaya, 2022). Several well-known private universities have obtained accreditation A by national accreditation bodies, universities (BAN-PT) because of the quality of education, for example; University of Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University, and Bogor Agricultural

Institute (IPB University), and Padjadjaran University (Times Higher Education, 2020).

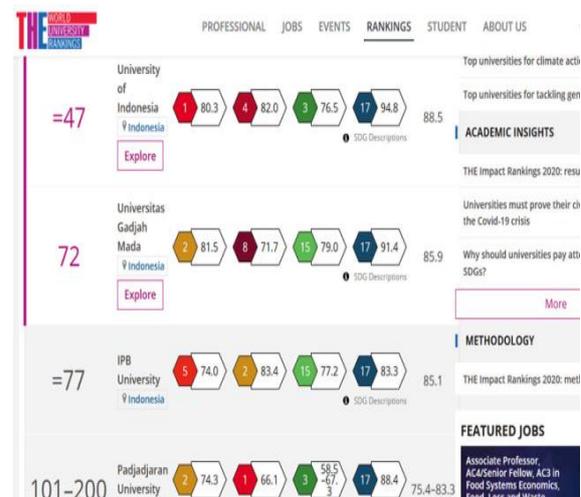


Figure 1. *The highest ranking universities based on Impact Rank*

Source: (Times Higher Education, 2020)

Figure 1 shows that private universities have a quality that is not less competitive with state universities. Public perception of private universities is quite positive and has a direct impact on the resilience of private universities in sustainable management and development. It is very important to investigate the literature study on how to compete in private universities in Indonesia and the right strategy to compete. This is because, the main source of funds for the sustainability of private university comes from students. Although several private universities showed significant progress, statistical data from the Ministry of Research and Higher Education stated that from 2015 to 2021, around 130 private universities were closed due to several cases, such as the absence of students, internal conflicts, not according to university standards, and the sale and purchase of certificates (Directorate General of Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

This is an irony that is happening in private university today. Whereas previously, the government strongly supported the easing to establish new universities through Permenristekdikti No. 51 of 2018 concerning the Establishment, Amendment, Dissolution of Higher Education and the Establishment, Amendment, Revocation of Private Higher Education Permits. On the one hand, it is able to support the goals of national education, but on the other hand a number of negative developments have become the worst phenomenon for private university. Previous studies related to competitive advantage have focused on the marketing mix during the Covid 19 pandemic (Pradipta, 2022; Canada, 2019; Rumina, 2018) and the influence of information technology management, social media, online learning systems and organizational climate (Daniel Hermawan, 2021; Putro et al. al., 2020; Maulani & Hamdani, 2019). An empirical study of 318 private universities in Indonesia found the influence of leadership style for sustainable competitive advantage mediated by management in private universities (Sriwidadi et al., 2016). The study conducted explained that financial management strategies during the pandemic, especially accountability and transparency were very important to get good

grades before obtaining cross-subsidized funds from the government (Riinawati, 2021).

Private universities in Indonesia have experienced consistent growth in the last few years, but on the other hand they have also experienced many challenges and problems so that many have closed. The novelty of the research is shown from the private university strategy proposed by the researcher, where previous studies have not explained in depth the competitive strategy to beat competitors which were analyzed based on the literature before and after the Covid 19 pandemic towards the new normal. The majority of the research conducted quantitative and qualitative research related to private university competition in the new normal era. This research is expected to contribute to the independent campus competition program for private universities in Indonesia and support healthier private universities to be able to support national education goals.

#### Question Research

Based on the background of the research problems presented, the researchers identified problems that occur in private universities in Indonesia, including the number of private universities that were closed during the Covid 19 pandemic, competition with public university, and mergers. From the various problems raised by previous studies, the focus of this research is on the phenomenon of private university competition and strategies to beat competitors, both private university and public university in attracting students. The formulation of the research problem that will be answered is Explain how the strategies that can be carried out by private university in order to be able to beat competitors?

## THEORY

### Private College

Colleges are educational institutions that award academic degrees in several disciplines. The college offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs or different faculties of learning. Private universities are not operated or funded

by the government, all operational costs are through tuition fees, and are subject to applicable laws in the country (Altbach, 1999). Private universities have the same degree-granting powers and are bound by many of the same educational standards as private university. Studies have found that private universities tend to work harder to enhance the student experience, focus on the professional side and prepare students for future careers.

The main factors that influence the choice of prospective students include; student perceptions, access and opportunities, learning environment, teacher quality, course design, and graduate success (Shah et al., 2013). With a smaller number of students, private universities will provide higher personal attention and encouragement, as well as service quality and standards that are more adequate because they compete with state universities to attract students (Wan, 2007). The findings reveal that private universities are able to create a truly open system to encourage actual student choice and attractive institutional competition as a competitive advantage in reaching the top (Ramachandran et al., 2009).

Some private university have more expensive tuition fees, but some were found to also have lower tuition fees than public universitu. More in-depth findings reveal that the factors that influence competitive advantage consist of market orientation, product innovation, and environmental adaptability. Among the three factors, environmental adaptability has the greatest significant influence. Therefore, government policies must focus on implementing environmental adaptability and private university market orientation (Nanang Wahyudin, 2015).

### Strategy Management

Strategic management is the art of formulating, implementing and evaluating decisions with different functions. Thus enabling the organization to meet all the needs in order to meet the goals and objectives of the organization (Kazmi & Kazmi, 1992). Previous studies revealed that there are three main factors that influence the organization to

achieve its goals, namely business culture, employee skills and competencies, organizational structure (Pogue, 2009).

Basically strategic management is about understanding the organization clearly in its vision and mission to determine the actions to be taken. To achieve the vision, mission and goals that have been set, strategic planning must also include the allocation of the required resources (Henry, 2021). Flexible businesses find it easier to make changes to their strategic structures and plans, while inflexible businesses may feel annoyed with a changing environment (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

The background to the need for effective strategic management is due to changes in the business environment. The processes brought about by strategic management help organizations to understand their current situation, develop appropriate strategies, disseminate them, and analyze the effectiveness of the management strategies that have been implemented. The benefits of strategic management are divided into two, namely financial and non-financial benefits. In addition, strategic management helps leadership in an organization to fulfill its responsibilities and gain a competitive advantage in its business.

Therefore, strategic management can be effective if it is carried out continuously, following technological developments, and business conditions (Hill et al., 2014). According to Nasution et al. (2021), Universities can use strategic management as a way to create and meet goals. For example, in terms of improving internal quality in the form of financial support from the government, monitoring, and evaluating monthly reports. While the external consists of opportunities in the delegation of authority for quality assurance and technology utilization.

### Competitors

Competitors are people or organizations/businesses that compete with the same organization/business and target market. The existence of competitors can be a challenge as well as motivating themselves to be more

advanced and able to run their business better. The concept of competition is highly dependent on the goals of the agent in the competitive process. There are at least six dimensions for effective competitiveness, including; focus unit criteria, competition objectives, competition objectives, internal and external determinants of competitiveness, configuration of relationships affecting the competitive process, combination of static and dynamic elements in the field of competition as well as modeling objectives. With the model, it will create a framework to clarify the aggregation needed when designing strategies (Listra, 2015).

Studies reveal that if there are no competitors, there will be a monopoly that creates concern or has a negative impact on society. Therefore, government intervention in terms of regulations and policies will minimize this (Hamid, 2016). Theoretically, a business in any field where there are many competitors shows good prospects for the long term. Business people only need to strengthen their marketing strategies and financial management in order to survive. And conversely, business people who are not able to strengthen their strategic management will be left behind (Clark & Montgomery, 1999).

There are two types of competitors. First, direct competitors where the products/services, markets, and prices offered are the same as those of competitors. Second, indirect competitors, namely providing different products/services to the same consumers. This is done by using an approach to customer needs. The effect of more competitors increases the motivation to compete, and conversely less competition reduces the motivation of competitors (Garcia & Tor, 2009).

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

The research design used is a literature study. According to Sugiyono (2009), literature study is a way of completing a research by surveying books, scientific articles, and other sources relevant to a particular problem, field of

research or particular theory being researched. The purpose of the literature is to provide an overview of the private university phenomenon in Indonesia and strategies to beat competitors (Basrowi & Utami, 2019). Literature studies have an organizational pattern and combine summaries and synthesis in certain conceptual categories. The summary contains important information from the source, with the synthesis as a reorganization to investigate the research problem. The development of the literature study goes through four stages, including; (1) the problem formulation stage by examining the topic under study and its components; (2) literature search relevant to the subject being explored; (3) evaluation of data to make a significant contribution to understanding the topic; and (4) analysis and interpretation to discuss findings and conclusions from the relevant literature. The topics studied are private university competition and competitor strategy.

### **Data collection technique**

Data collection techniques using literature studies are carried out by examining relevant previous studies from secondary data sources in the form of books, public document materials, and scientific articles (Basrowi & Utami, 2020). Government regulations and policies as a source of data supporting research. Researchers collected data from previous literature from 2018 to 2022. The literature was selected because the study was related to the Covid 19 pandemic that occurred in 2020, so the majority of data sources came from years before and after Covid 19 occurred in Indonesia.

### **Research data analysis**

Data analysis uses the content analysis method, namely by investigating the causes of a phenomenon that occurs in a particular content/content related to the research. Content analysis refers to the theory put forward by Krippendorff (2018), which is a research technique to make valid inferences and can be re-examined based on content/context.

The steps of content analysis are as follows; (1) collect data to be analyzed, the research

analyzed is the private university phenomenon in Indonesia; (2) simplification of data, research focuses on private university strategies to beat competitors; (3) recording data to facilitate description and drawing conclusions obtained by researchers and adjusted based on the focus of the assessment, namely community orientation, competitor orientation, and coordination between intra- private university; (4) data reduction of irrelevant data with the aim of simplifying the data so that it is easy for readers to understand; (5) drawing conclusions based on the data that has been obtained and in accordance with the formulation of the problem; (6) describe documents that have been analyzed based on conclusions and are accompanied by relevant theories and previous studies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Private University strategy that can beat competitors

The findings reveal that the private university strategy in beating competitors consists of four dimensions. The competitiveness of private universities in Indonesia is reflected in the number of private universities that display their advantages and resources. The phenomenon of competition as a business entity, the large growth of higher education institutions, and attracting prospective students have forced private universities to face competition and present strategies to face their competitors. Based on previous studies, it was stated that the development of a private university competitive strategy to beat competitors includes; market orientation, competitor orientation, coordination between intra-organizational functions. application of technology and cooperation with local government/private sector. (see Figure 2)

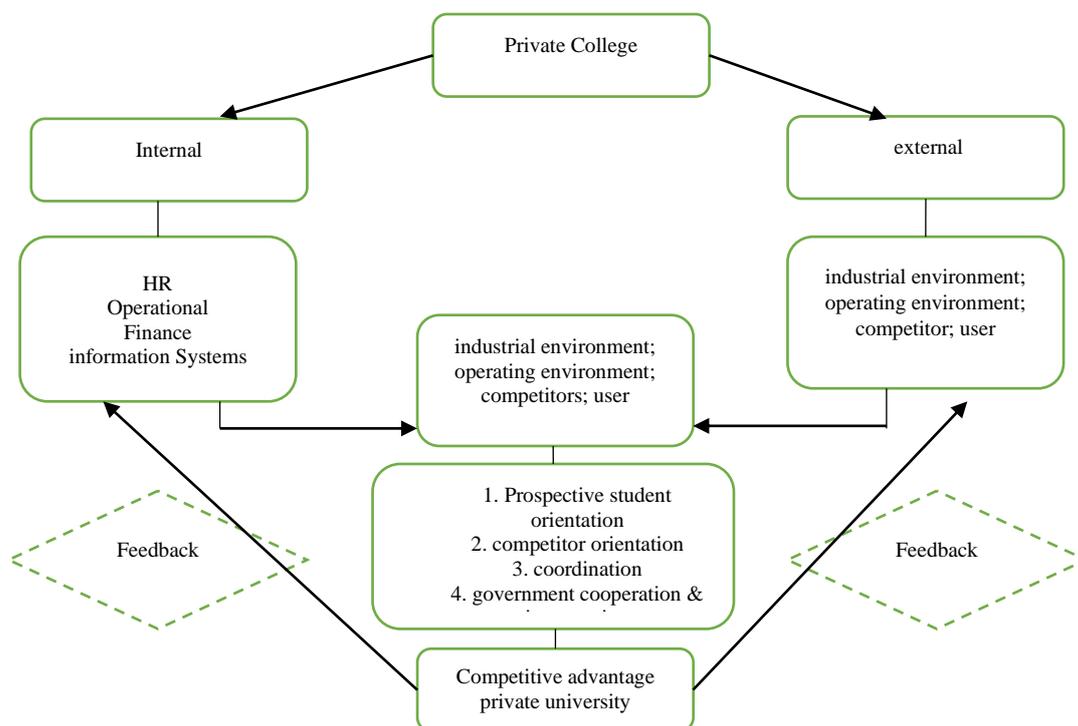


Figure 2. Four Strategies to beat Competitors

Source: Data processed, 2022

1. Prospective Student Orientation and Social Media

Millennials and social media are the current trends. Therefore, the orientation that is

specifically aimed at attracting the interest of generations and the use of social media cannot be separated from one another. prospective students, especially from the millennial generation and generation Y can be the center of strategic planning and implementation to create superior value for Competitive advantage. Various previous studies investigated the implementation of education in the millennial generation. The millennial generation is the most widely used object of research to develop competitive advantage strategic plans. They are able to represent the public's perception to find out the competitive advantage needed by private universities in today's modern era. The most important information is related to the availability of facilities, services, fees, and information on scholarship opportunities (Suci & Nanda, 2018). Social media and Generation Y cannot be separated (Bolton et al., 2013). Therefore, social media can be an alternative to promote Competitive advantage to attract more prospective students. The literature reveals that the use of social media is relatively high in the modern era, including in marketing strategies for business people. The use of social media carried out by Competitive advantage is quite successful as a communication medium and educational marketing media (Rustandi & Gustini, 2021; Nurmallasari & Masitoh, 2020).

## 2. Technology-based Competitor Orientation

Digital competence is currently under the hot spotlight. Most of the Colleges in the world focus on digital competence. Previous research on digital competence from 2015 to 2021 shows that universities are encouraged to focus on developing digital competence of students and lecturers, creating relevant learning strategies, and using tools in the appropriate process of academic services and teaching and learning to improve the quality of education (Zhao et al, 2021). In terms of strategic planning, information systems to increase competitive advantage are the most difficult for private universities which have limited operational funds sourced from students.

In the era of digitalization, Competitive advantage demands to meet the community's needs for new science and advanced technology. The new knowledge needed is in the fields of information technology, biotechnology, and multidisciplinary sciences. Implementation of competitor orientation in the short term is done by investigating the strengths and weaknesses of potential competitors. Meanwhile, in the long term, private universities must understand what capabilities and strategies they use. The literature reveals that Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIEd) and adaptive learning technology are one of the fields that are being developed in modern educational technology. Research from 2007 to 2018 shows that AI applications are the most widely used in universities. Failure to adopt IT reflects a weakness against competitors. Competitive advantage need to adopt IT that is equivalent or superior and also minimizes the risks that may be faced. The considerations recommended by previous findings are; assessment and evaluation strategies, adaptive and personalization systems and intelligent learning systems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Another important consideration is the risk of stress faced by students. The implementation of technology needs to consider students' abilities. Academic-related stress can reduce academic achievement, decrease motivation, and increase the risk of dropping out (Pascoe et al., 2020). This problem can have an impact on the low Competitive advantage graduation rate and lead to negative perceptions among the public. Therefore, it is necessary to be careful in adopting technology that is also carried out by competitors.

## 3. Coordination between intra-Functions based on quality and competitiveness

Coordination between intra Competitive advantage functions is intended as a coordinated reflection of the available resources to create superior customer value for prospective students. In order to provide the right response to prospective students, it is necessary to coordinate the use of integrated resources. In addition, according to Toquero (2020), to improve quality and competitiveness,

universities need to produce and multiply studies and document the impact of the pandemic on the education system. Competitive advantage management and development is a must. The principles of modern quality-based management are applied according to national to international standards. What is clear, the coordination strategy is focused on core processes that include teaching, research, and service. The literature explains that the three core processes aim to respond to global changes, both innovative new work skills and the demands of the current era in terms of teaching and research.

#### 4. Government Cooperation and Intervention

Cooperation with local governments and private companies is part of the Merdeka Learning-Independent Campus education program. Government policies and universities vision and mission must be in line with and adapt to the conditions of the industrial revolution 4.0. Private universities must be able to answer the challenges of the relevance of education and work through this collaboration. One of the interesting collaborations is the collaboration with Amil zakat agency, National (BAZNAS), namely the zakat management institution which also provides many scholarships to students throughout Indonesia. Meanwhile, private industry must target the international standard job market, which requires a combination of various skills that are different from those offered by universities in Indonesia. Academic abilities, especially foreign languages and self-competence in technology form the public perception that private university graduates are able to compete not only as academics but also practitioners to foreign countries. The achievement of service quality through national and international cooperation increases the positive assessment of the community towards domestic private universities. So it is not only focused on cooperation to improve the competence of lecturers, but also students. Many previous studies reveal the importance of lecturer competence, but this is not the case with the competence of graduates. Chetty & Wilson (2003) explain that cooperation in accessing external resources based on competitors is a

strategy to obtain resources. The resources in question are physical, organizational, technical, and temporary external reputation and reputation resources.

According to Musselin (2018), there has been a competitive transformation in higher education in the modern era. Not only competition and competition schemes that developed significantly, but also student competition, budget competition, and professor competition, while the strongest competition was research-based Universities. The competition between universities is not only between individuals and countries, but has been transformed into an institution that leads to multi-level competition, thus turning universities into competitors. Another study found that resource-based competition could focus on market segmentation strategies and public policies, quality and impersonal appraisal tools (Hunt & Arnett, 2004). The theory of resource-based competitive advantage explains that business people must create competitive advantages in order to compete with competitors, both in price, management ability, profit, position, and also a strategic place (Grant, 1991). Competitive advantage is the most effective business benefit strategy. factors that affect competitive advantage. First, the basis of competition where strategy is based on assets, skills, and abilities. Thus, private universities must consider the assets, skills, and abilities they have and then improve them so that they can maintain their competitive advantage. Second, the market in which business actors compete. Private university must choose a target market that is in accordance with the implemented strategy, so that assets, skills, and abilities can support it effectively. The target for now can be aimed at the millennial generation and digitalization. Third, who are the competitors? By knowing who the competitors are the competitive targets, private university can consider the weaknesses and strengths that must be created in the strategy carried out.

In the end, the findings of this literature review reveal the importance of competitive advantage in the strategy undertaken by private university to beat competitors. Previous studies have

shown that higher education has high economic value because of its long-term benefits and supporting economic growth (Guo, 2022; Hamdan et al., 2020; McArthur, 2011; Brown & Heaney, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988). . In addition, the presence of technology has inspired a shift in competitive strategy to an integrated technology-based environment and requires private university to work hard in facing a tight competitive situation. This competitive environment provides an opportunity to develop private university excellence from all directions. The significant influence of the daytime environment in terms of information technology management, social media, online learning systems and organizational climate was found in a study conducted by Daniel Hermawan (2021); Putro et al. (2020); Maulani & Hamdani (2019). Unfortunately, private universities that are unable to implement the aforementioned strategies must be excluded from their competitive environment. Those who are able to adapt and innovate well are the strongest to survive and gain business success. The framework in the Campus-Merdeka program is no less important, only in this case fair government policy intervention is also a major factor in future strategies. This has been emphasized by a previous study by Salmi & D'Addio (2021) that the competitive strategy of universities is influenced by government policies. Effectiveness of policies such as financial aid programs in the form of grants and loans and non-monetary interventions including outreach, affirmative action, retention and specialized institutions is needed to make significant changes to achieve inclusion in higher education.

### Conclusion

Research has revealed findings about the competition for private universities in Indonesia and competitive strategies between universities that are needed in the new normal era. From the literature reviewed, the findings identify four strategies to beat competitors, including; millennial student orientation strategies and social media; technology-based

orientation; coordination strategy between intra-functional functions based on quality and competitiveness; government intervention and cooperation strategy. The conclusion obtained is that the phenomenon of private university competition has resulted in various strategies to beat competitors. The success of private university in facing competition is to know the competitive advantage it has. Future studies can examine four strategies that researchers found as indicators of competitive advantage strategies for private universities. The expected implication is that the government pays special attention to private universities affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. The government needs to merge faster so that more private universities can be saved from the devastation caused by this pandemic.

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