

Brand Image and Social Influence Analysis on Students' Decisions in Choosing Private University With Digital Marketing as Moderating

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Abstract

This research analyzes brand image and social influence on students' decisions in choosing private universities, with digital marketing as a moderating variable. Private universities increasingly utilize digital marketing to increase their visibility and attractiveness in the current digital era. This study uses quantitative methods with a survey of prospective students as respondents. The collected data was analyzed using multiple regression analysis techniques to identify the relationship between brand image, social influence, and student decisions, as well as the role of digital marketing in strengthening or moderating this relationship. The research results are expected to provide insight into how brand image and social influence influence college selection decisions and how digital marketing can be used to increase the effectiveness of private higher education marketing strategies. This research can help private university managers formulate marketing strategies that are more effective and relevant to the needs and preferences of prospective students. Based on analysis of variables that have a significant influence on student decisions, namely brand image, digital marketing and social influence

Keywords: Brand Image; Digital Marketing; Social Influence; Student Decision.

JEL Code: M10, M31, M54

How to Cite

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1. Introduction

When choosing a college, prospective students generally look for institutions that offer good quality education. Usually, prospective students prefer state universities. However, due to intense competition and limited quotas at state universities, many are unable to enter and end up switching to private universities. In facing this situation, private universities are trying hard to market themselves and attract the interest of prospective new students. Based on observations at the five best private universities in the city of Palembang, namely Bina Darma University, Muhammadiyah University, PGRI University, Indo Global Mandiri University and Musi Charitas Catholic University. Digital marketing has a significant impact on prospective students' decisions in choosing a university. Information disseminated through various online platforms often becomes the main reference for prospective students in determining their choices. Digital media, with its wide reach and accessibility, empowers prospective students to obtain information about higher education, and it makes it easy to respond to this information directly. With the easy access offered by digital media, prospective students can quickly obtain and evaluate relevant information in their decision-making process, making them feel more knowledgeable and in control of their choices.

In the current era of globalization, social influence is an important factor in determining a person's choice and view of a brand, including in the context of higher education. Although digital marketing plays a significant role in attracting the interest of prospective students, research by Juliana and Johan (2020) shows that brand image strongly influences students' decisions in choosing a higher education institution. This is also supported by research by Eka et al. and colleagues (2020), which revealed that brand image influences students' interest in choosing a university. The brand image reflects students' perceptions of a brand, in this case, a university. In the end, students' decisions in choosing private universities are greatly influenced by their own perceptions of the brand image. Additionally, opinions and experiences shared by alumni and existing students also influence prospective students' views of educational institutions, thereby contributing to their decision-making process.

From the description above, the author is interested in conducting a research entitled "Analysis of Brand Image and Social Influence on Student Decisions in Choosing Private Universities with Digital Marketing as Moderating."

2. Literature Review

2.1. Service Dominant Logic (SDL)

Service Dominant Logic (SDL) is a marketing approach that emphasizes the importance of interactions between producers, consumers and partners in the supply network. This concept emerged from the need to work collaboratively with other parties and is known as customer centric and responsive (Vargo et al., 2020). SDL introduces a new perspective in marketing, by placing service at the center of the exchange process, and viewing customers or consumers as an integral part of the company's internal processes. Service Dominant Logic (SDL) developed from a change in perspective in marketing that reduced the focus on resources, and placed more emphasis on creating value and relationships (Sulistiyowati & Rum, 2021).

2.2. Marketing strategy

A marketing strategy consists of a set of goals, policies and guidelines that provide guidance for a company's ongoing marketing activities. This strategy is designed to respond to changes in the environment and evolving competitive conditions, as well as to allocate resources effectively at

various levels and references. Thus, marketing strategy functions as a guideline that helps companies adapt and compete in a dynamic market (Siagian and Cahyono, 2021). As a key tool, marketing strategy is designed to achieve company goals through developing sustainable competitive advantages, with a focus on the market entered and the programs implemented to serve the target market (Endang, & Roni, 2021). Marketing strategy has four indicators, namely segmentation, targeting, positioning and differentiation (Ulfithroh, N, 2023).

2.3. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is an activity in the marketing field that utilizes online platforms to reach target consumers. Apart from that, digital marketing can be interpreted as marketing products or services via the internet which includes various methods such as digital marketing, web marketing, online marketing, e-marketing, or e-commerce. The use of digital marketing is an attractive alternative because the costs are relatively low compared to conventional marketing and have a wider reach. In addition, digital marketing makes it easier for consumers to examine and compare products more conveniently. Digital marketing also offers broader information and the ability to store data accurately (Rustiana, 2022). Digital marketing is often equated with the terms online marketing or internet marketing. Basically, digital marketing involves all marketing efforts made to communicate with potential consumers through online communication channels, using devices connected to the internet with various digital strategies and media (Chakti, 2019). According to Istifadhoh et al. (2022) there are eight main benefits of digital marketing, namely increasing market coverage, cost effectiveness, ability to target audiences, interaction, measurement, increased visibility, customization, use of diverse content. By leveraging digital marketing, educational institutions can increase their visibility, communicate more effectively with prospective students, and ultimately, achieve their marketing and recruiting goals more efficiently.

2.4. Brand Image

According to Dewi et al (2020), brand image is the way consumers view a brand, which reflects a picture of what they think or feel about the brand. Brand image has a very important influence in influencing consumer interest and purchasing decisions. If the brand image of a product is good, then this can contribute to differentiating the product from its competitors (Erkmein & Hancer, 2019). Brand image is the perception embedded in the minds of buyers regarding a particular brand, which reflects how consumers perceive and feel the brand. With so many products available on the market, consumers tend to look for alternatives in choosing products, one of which is brand image. Testimonials or responses from other consumers to a product are also an important consideration in product selection (Mujid & Andrian, 2021). According to Firmansyah (2019), the benefits of brand image for private universities include several important aspects, namely attractiveness, increasing trust, reputation and alumni engagement.

2.5. Social Influence

According to Vahdat et al. (2020), social influence is a social factor that can influence someone's behavior by changing the way they think or act. Meanwhile, Kurniawan & Subhi (2021) stated that social influence is related to how individuals influence other people's perceptions of something that is considered important, so that it can motivate them to adopt new systems or technology. In other words, social influence includes how the interactions and opinions of others can influence an individual's decisions and behavior in the relevant context. According to Laela and Asdar (2022), there are several indicators of social influence, namely group, family, role and status.

2.6. Decision-making

Decision making involves the process of compiling and organizing available information to support a final choice. This process includes emotional considerations both before and after a decision is made, as well as dynamic interactions in the decision-making process. In addition, there is a difference between satisfaction and regret in the context of decision making, both before and after the process. Decision making is a process of evaluating one or more options with the aim of achieving the best expected results (Gonzalez, 2023). In general, decision making is the result of solving problems and answering questions to achieve certain goals. The results of decision making have two main functions: as the first step of conscious and directed individual or group activity, and as a strategic step for the future that has a long-term impact (Lipursari, 2019).

3. Research Methods

This research uses a quantitative approach by measuring the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable, independent variable and moderating variable. The type of data collected is the results of questionnaires from new students. The main data source comes from respondents who are part of a predetermined sample. The data collection process was carried out directly through distributing questionnaires to respondents. The questionnaire was formatted using Google Form, giving respondents the freedom to fill out the form online.

Primary data sources collected from the results of this questionnaire will include direct responses from new students regarding factors that influence student interest. Secondary data in this context refers to additional information obtained from previous questionnaires with the same respondents and direct observation by conducting interviews with new students at five Palembang Private Universities. In the of we the Slovi formula is method for determining number samples the and . Based on the Slovin formula, it is known that the number of employees who will be used as samples for this research is 400 respondents.

The method used to analyze the data is Smart-PLS version 3.0 software which is run on a computer. In general, SEM models are built using a covariance-based approach (Covariance-Free Structural Equation Model or CB-SEM) and variance or component-based (Variance-Based Structural Equation Model or Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model or PLS-SEIM) (Gunarto and Cahyawati, 2022). PLS- SEM is becoming a popular and effective choice, especially in the context of exploratory and confirmatory research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent Demographics

The general characteristics of respondents are based on sex/gender, age, and university in the decision to choose a private university. The results obtained from each previously determined respondent characteristic will be used to provide an overview of the respondents studied. Detailed demographic statistics of respondents can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. *Respondent Demographics*

Items	Option	Amount	Percentage
Gender	Man	210	52.3%
	Woman	190	47.7%
Age	18	59	14.6%
	19	273	68.3%

	20	68	17.1%
University	Muhammadiyah	80	20%
	PGRI	80	20%
	Bina Darma	80	20%
	Indo Global Mandiri	80	20%
	Catholic Musi	80	20%
	Charitas		

Based on the respondent demographic table above, the results obtained were a total of 400 respondents consisting of male respondents who dominated 210 people with a frequency of 52.3% and female respondents were 190 people with a frequency of 47.7%. Meanwhile, based on age, the majority of respondents were 19 years old and these results were obtained from new students at the university.

4.2 Test Outer Model

The Outer Model assessment of brand image and social influence analysis of students' decisions in choosing private universities with digital marketing as moderating is an important step to assess the factor load, validity and consistency of the constructs in the model. The main objective of this evaluation is to measure the extent of variables such as loading factors, validity and reliability of the constructs used in the model. The results of this test help ensure that the student decisions used in the research have strong conceptual validity and can be trusted in identifying factors that influence students' decisions in choosing private universities in the city of Palembang. Based on the results of the loading factor test, most items or indicators had a loading factor above 0.7 and there were two indicators that were invalid, namely the BI3 and SI2 indicators, so they were removed from the model and then a new model was formed without these indicators.

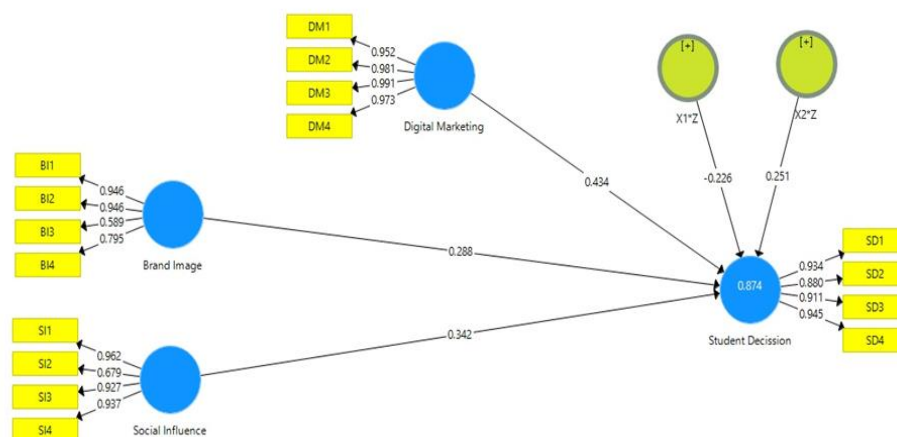


Figure 1. Outer Model

The convergent validity test results of all latent variables have an AVE value that reaches or exceeds 0.5, indicating that all latent variables are able to measure well the indicators that are

part of the construct. By conducting a convergent validity test, you can ensure that the results of measuring the variables in Brand Image of 0.692, Digital Marketing of 0.949, Social Influence of 0.781 and Student Decision of 0.842 are declared valid and reliable for understanding and measuring student decisions.

One of the reliability indicators used is the Composite Reliability coefficient, where the expected value to be considered reliable is usually 0.7 or higher. When the Composite Reliability coefficient value of a variable exceeds 0.7, the variable is considered consistent in measuring the construct being tested. The variables tested were Brand Image at 0.897, Digital Marketing at 0.987, Social Influence at 0.934 and Student Decision at 0.955, where all variables had values above 0.7 so the variables were said to be reliable or consistent in producing similar results at different times.

Table 2. Results of Convergent Validation Test and Reliability Test

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability
Brand Image	0.692	0.897
Digital Marketing	0.949	0.987
Social Influence	0.781	0.934
Student Decision	0.949	0.955
X1*Z	1,000	1,000
X2*Z	1,000	1,000

4.3 Inner Model

Inner models or inner measurements, which are also known as structural models, are part of path analysis in research to test the relationship between latent variables that are relevant in the analysis of Digital Marketing, Brand Image, Social Influence in students' decisions in choosing a college private. Test path coefficients (path coefficients) to analyze and test the relationship between variables that are relevant to student decisions. These path coefficients provide information about the strength and direction of the relationships between latent variables in the model. The relationship between these variables is significant by looking at the resulting T-statistic value. A T-statistic value greater than 1.96 indicates that the hypothesis proposed is acceptable or the variable being tested has a significant effect on other variables. It can be seen in table 4.6 that some variables have values above 1.96 and there are two variables that have values below 1.96, so the variables are said to not have a completely significant effect.

Table 3. Path Coefficients Test Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	T statistics (O/Stdev)	P value	Information
Brand Image -> Student Decision	0.288	3,751	0,000	Positive and significant influence
Digital Marketing -> Student Decision	0.434	3,660	0,000	Positive and significant influence
Social Influence -> Student Decision	0.342	3,237	0.001	Positive and

				significant influence
X1*Z > Student Decision	-0.226	1,253	0.211	Has a positive and insignificant effect
X2*Z > Student Decision	0.251	1,356	0.176	Has a positive and insignificant effect

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Correlation Between Variables	Information
H1	Brand Image -> Student Decision	Supported
H2	Digital Marketing -> Student Decision	Supported
H3	Social Influence -> Student Decision	Supported
H4	X1*Z > Student Decision	Not Supported
H5	X2*Z > Student Decision	Not Supported

Based on the results of questionnaire data analysis in students' decisions in choosing private universities using smartPLS. These hypotheses were formulated to test the relationship between the identified variables and student decision levels, as follows:

H1 has a coefficient value of 0.288, a T statistic value of 3.751 and a p value of 0.000, which means that Brand Image has a significant effect on Student Decision. This can help students filter the available options and make a decision that is deemed to best suit their needs, aspirations and hopes.

H2 has a coefficient value of 0.434, a T statistic value of 3.660 and a p value of 0.000, which means that Digital Marketing has a significant effect on Student Decision. This can make it easier for students to get information about the college by easily accessing information, interacting with brands, getting recommendations from influencers and reviews, and enjoying a customized and interactive experience. Students are more likely to be influenced by digital marketing messages than traditional methods.

H3 has a coefficient value of 0.342, a T statistic value of 3.237 and a p value of 0.001, which means that Social Influence has a significant effect on Student Decision. This can help them determine what is considered appropriate, popular, or acceptable within their social group, ultimately influencing their choices and decisions in various aspects of their lives.

H4 has a coefficient value of -0.226, a T statistic value of 1.253 and a p value of 0.211, which means that Digital Marketing on Brand Image has a positive but not significant influence on Student Decision. This occurs due to factors such as ineffective targeting and personalization, inconsistent messaging, the predominant influence of external factors, ad fatigue, quality of user experience, lack of emotional connection, and the complexity of the decision-making process. Although digital marketing can have a positive impact, its influence may not always be strong enough to significantly change a student's decision if other factors are more influential.

H5 has a coefficient value of 0.251, a T statistic value of 1.356 and a p value of 0.176, which means that digital marketing on social influence has a positive but not significant influence on student decisions. This influence is important, because students are a group that is highly connected to technology and social media. Through strategies involving influencers, online reviews, interesting content, and community involvement, brands can harness the power of social influence to effectively influence student perceptions and decisions.

4.5 Coefficients of Determination (R²)

Based on the results of the Coefficients of Determination research, the R² value has a higher influential value close to or greater than 0.670, indicating that the independent variable significantly and strongly influences the dependent variable. Conversely, lower R² values, such as between 0.333 to 0.670, indicate a moderate influence, while values below 0.190 indicate a weak influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Table 3. Results of Coefficients of Determination

Variable	R Square Adjusted
Student Decision	0.874

5. Conclusion

Based on analysis of various variables such as Digital Marketing, Brand Image, and Social Influence, most respondents showed a high level of decision regarding their interest in registering for private universities. Four variables that are proven to influence student decisions significantly are Digital Marketing, Brand Image, and Social Influence. These variables positively influence the level of students' decision to continue studying at the private university they choose.

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