

The Effect of Brand Image, Price, and Electronic Word of Mouth on Student Interest in Choosing a Private College in Bandung City (Study at Pasundan 2 Cimahi High School)

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Abstract

Instruction plays a critical part in the advancement of Indonesia, but there are still inequalities in higher education opportunities. This study looks at the effect of Brand Image, Cost, and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on prospective students' interest in choosing a Private University (PTS) in Bandung City centred on Pasundan 2 Cimahi High School. This is done to analyze the effect of Brand Image, Cost, and e-WOM on interest in choosing PTS in Bandung City using a quantitative strategy with a purposive sampling method. Information was analyzed through validity, reliability, multiple linear regression, and F and T tests with an error rate of 5%. The results showed that Brand Image (X1) and e-WOM (X3) have a significant influence ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Thus, H1 and H3 are accepted, while H2 is rejected. This finding emphasizes that Brand Picture and e-WOM influence student interest, while Price has a smaller impact. This shows the importance of positive branding and computerized engagement for HEIs to remain competitive in attracting students. This research provides insights for educational institutions to develop strategies to address these factors and increase their attractiveness to prospective students amidst the increasingly fierce competition in higher education.

Keywords: Brand Image, Price, E-WOM, Interest in Choosing, Private College.

JEL CODE: D12, I23, L15

1. Introduction

Education is an important foundation for Indonesia's development. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, argues that education is an effort to improve or develop character (inner strength, mind, and character), as well as the physical and mental strength of children. This is in line with Law No. 20 of 2003 which states that "education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students can actively develop their potential, to have the spiritual and religious strength needed, both for themselves, society, and the nation and state." The government's efforts in developing the education system in Indonesia are quite

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significant from time to time, for example, curriculum system development, teacher development, student learning process development, and educational institution development (Website of Ministry of Education, 2024)

In this digital era, there is an important impact on the development of education. The increasing complexity and changes in the global environment have brought about great challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities in the field of higher education (Astomo et al., 2021) (Barrow & Zamzuri, 2024). In Indonesia, there is inequality in the opportunity to pursue higher education. For example, universities in Indonesia are divided into two, namely State Universities (PTN) and Private Universities (PTS). (Serfiyani, 2020).

Interest in entering PTN in Indonesia is still very high, according to the 2021 Akupintar Survey, 81.5% of respondents chose a PTN as a place to study and 42% of respondents said that university reputation is very important in determining where to study. PTN in Bandung are known for their strong reputation, reliable quality of education, and more affordable tuition fees (Karamang et al., 2024). However, the selection process for entering state universities in Indonesia through the Higher Education Entrance Test Institute (LTMPPT) severely limits students' opportunities to be accepted. Covering data from SNPMB BPPP 2024, the presentation of new student admission quotas at PTN is only 34.68% of the total 785,058 participants. The number will increase every year, so the opportunity to compete is even higher. Therefore, students who cannot pass the selection of PTN will take alternative steps such as choosing PTS.

In contrast to PTN, interest in entering PTS is still low, for example in Bogor, students have a presentation of only 15.61% of the total 302 respondents who are interested in choosing private universities (Yoesdiarti et al., 2018). The Association of Private Universities reports that the number of new student applicants is shrinking by 15% per year. Meanwhile, students are the main resource of universities, especially private universities, in obtaining funds to support their operations (Nas, 2021). This can result PTS reducing the quality of education and Indonesia will lack graduates with superior human resources.

In Indonesia, there are at least 2370 PTS spread throughout its territory. Meanwhile, there are 145 PTN (Website of Ministry of Education, 2024). This indicates that there are many options for students in the process of selecting PTS as a place of higher education. This condition requires students to know well about what they are interested in. For example, Bandung is the second education city in Indonesia with a presentation of 45% of students choosing Bandung as a place to pursue education (GoodStats Survey, 2023). This makes the process of choosing a campus to be fast, because Bandung has 32 academies, 14 polytechnics, 63 high schools, 4 institutes, and 28 PTS (PDDIKTI).

For students, the decision to choose a college is a major life decision. So, it needs to go through a long and complicated process. Launching from the results of the 2014 Mix Marcomm Survey, at least students in determining their choice to choose a college pay attention to important factors such as the reputation or brand image of the college and the suitability between costs and benefits obtained. A university with a good brand image can provide high benefits, because indirectly prospective students tend to recommend it to others. Conversely, if the image created is negative, it is inevitable that prospective students will spread this bad information to the community (Karamang, 2023).

Brand Image is a public response to a company or institution. where an image is formed

naturally or cannot be engineered but can be recommended (Costa & Pelissari, 2017) & (Patlán Pérez & Martínez Torres, 2017). Brand image has a very strong and positive influence on buying interest, and is proportional and brand image is the first step to introducing a product to consumers (Fauziah et al., 2019). This research is in line with the findings of (Muhamad Azriel Ardiansyah et al., 2023), who concluded that partially, Brand Image has an effect on interest. Thus, the Brand Image of higher education also has an influence on student decisions in choosing PTS and Brand Image shows a greater influence than Social Media Marketing (Karamang, 2023) Therefore, PTS must have positive branding to keep winning the competition among other PTS.

Furthermore, the cost of tuition has a major impact on the decision to attend a PTS (Qasim et al., 2021). For example, the system of PTN & PTS fees is different, PTN uses a system, namely the Single Tuition Fee (UKT), while PTS is quite diverse and includes fees such as registration, donations to institutions, re-registration, and tuition fees (Purnomo & Saifullah, 2022); (Putri, 2021). Price is defined as the total of all values that consumers pay in exchange for the benefits of owning or using a product or service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). Although PTS in Bandung generally offer high-quality education (Karamang et al., 2024), the high fees charged can be a major determining factor in prospective students' decision to choose the institution, because price has a significant influence in the decision-making process (Ali & Suciana, 2019).

In contrast to PTN, which have a UKT system that can be adjusted to the financial condition of students and supported by government assistance, so that tuition fees at PTN are more affordable than PTS (Karamang et al., 2024) Therefore, competition has become competitive and PTS must have effective strategies to attract prospective students (Putri, 2021).

Further still, in today's modern era, times are changing significantly, and the use of technology is becoming an important thing that students and universities, especially PTS, must master. In general, people tend to look at advertisements, reviews, and recommendations available on the Internet, such as on social media. Initially, communication was done directly through oral conversation (WOM), but along with the rapid development of the social media world, the Internet presents a universal source of communication called Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) (Elseidi et al., 2016). Electronic Word of Mouth is marketing that utilizes the internet to generate word-of-mouth effects to support marketing efforts and objectives (Kotler et al., 2019). E-WOM has emerged as an essential means of promotion via social media, effectively drawing consumer buying interest (Kadek et al., 2023). Consequently, Electronic Word of Mouth exerts a considerable impact on the intention to purchase (Elseidi et al., 2016).

This research looks into the impact of Brand Image, Price, and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on the interest of students in selecting PTS in Bandung. Pasundan 2 High School in Cimahi City was the location where this research was conducted as a case study. This study is intended to enhance understanding of the factors influencing students' decisions to choose private universities, especially across Bandung region.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Image

Brand image is a consumer response to a brand that has been formed through information and past experiences, which serves as a synthesis of all symbols and visual elements used by the brand to build an emotional connection with its consumers. (Wardhana, 2024). Brand Image is also considered as “a factor related to the perception of corporate image, from the point of view

of distance students in public universities” (Costa & Pelissari, 2017). According to (Patlán Pérez & Martínez Torres, 2017). Brand Image is a response that a person feels towards an object, item, or organization as a whole and then stored in the consumer's memory.

2.2 Price

Price is the amount of money given for a particular product (Sunyoto in Kotler & Keller, 2019). According to (Kotler & Keller, 2019), “Price is the amount of money charged for a product or service, or the amount of value charged to customers for the benefits derived from owning or using a product or service.” This implies that price is the cost of a product or service. This amount is equal to the value that customers exchange in order to receive a benefit, ownership, or use of the product or service. The price is the amount consumers must pay to acquire these goods or services (Ismanto, 2020). As defined by (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020), price is the monetary sum demanded or the value expended by consumers to get these products or services.

2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is both positive and negative communication expressed by consumers and previous users regarding goods or services offered by companies via the internet. (Kotler & Keller, 2019). E-WOM is considered capable of encouraging promotion and shaping the desired corporate image (Mariasih & Setyaningrum, 2021). E-WOM is a statement made by users about a product through various platforms that facilitate this communication. Types of E-WOM in the form of opinions, online tools, feedback, reviews, comments, or experiences on the internet through various online communication platforms (Mishra & Satish, 2016)

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Metode

This study employs a quantitative approach and survey methodology to get data from respondents using questionnaires and Purposive Sampling data collecting methods. This research investigates brand image, pricing, and e-WOM as independent factors that affect the dependent variable, which is the interest in opting for a private college in Bandung City. Data analysis occurred through simple linear regression through SPSS version 26 software.

3.2. Data Collection Techniques

The sample in this study included SMA Pasundan 2 Cimahi City grades 11 and 12 with a total population of 835 students divided into Science and Social Majors. (Sugiyono, 2017) This study explains that the number of samples must be at least ten times the number of variables studied, so that a sample of 130 respondents was obtained. The data collection technique used is purposive sampling, which is according to (Sugiyono, 2017), The sampling technique in this study is based on certain considerations. The number of samples was calculated using the Slovin formula by considering the factors described below:

1. Active Students with grades 11 and 12;
2. Have interest in studying at PTS.

Sample should accurately represent SMA Pasundan 2 Cimahi's population. The Slovin formula is used to determine sample size :

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

With the above formula, the population of Pasundan 2 Senior High School in Cimahi City is 835 students divided from grades 10, 11, and 12. With an error tolerance of 10% (0.1), the results can be found as follows:

$$n = \frac{835}{1 + 835 (0.1)^2} = 89,305 \sim$$

The Slovin formula calculated the number of respondents obtained to be 89. However, the researcher set 130 respondents in this study due to the high enthusiasm shown by the respondents during the research process.

Each research variable was tested using a Likert scale questionnaire. Each criterion used, such as age, current grade, and interest in PTS, was applied to measure Brand Image (X_1). Price (X_2) was evaluated based on elements such as price compatibility with the facilities obtained, price compatibility with the quality of education obtained, and scholarship offers provided. For E-WOM (X_3), the analyzed aspects include the number of comments on the university's website, positive reviews on the university's social media, and students' assessment of the university. Meanwhile, PTS interest in Bandung City (Y) is assessed by transactional, referential, preferential, and exploratory interest.

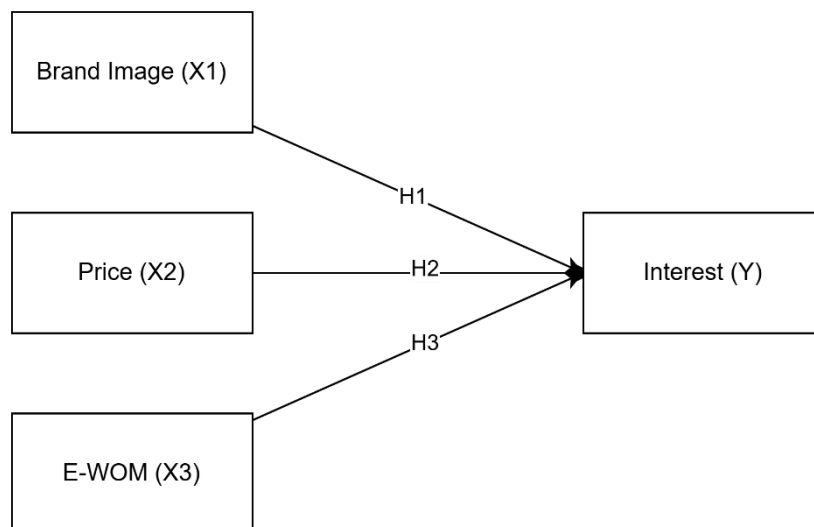


Figure 1. Research Model

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Validity Tests

Researchers conducted a validity test to determine whether or not each question item was valid on each variable, if the instrument can measure what will be measured, then the instrument is considered valid. (Sugiyono, 2017), The product moment correlation formula is used to measure the validity test, by comparing each item score with the overall item score of the question. The validity of an item can be known if the value of r counts with r table at a significance level of 5%. The number of samples is 130 with a significance level of 5%, the

validity test results are compared with the r table, resulting in $df = 130 - 2 = 128$ and the r table value is 0.1723.

Table 1. Results of Validity Test of Research Variables

Variable	No. Item	R count	R table	Desc
<i>Brand Image</i> (X_1)	1. I am interested in universities that have a good quality of education.	0.859	0.1723	Valid
	2. I am interested in a university with a clear vision and mission.	0.852		
	3. I want to study at a university that produces competent graduates.	0.848		
	4. I prefer universities that have social responsibility programs.	0.777		
	5. I am interested in universities that have professional human resources.	0.907		
	6. I am interested in a University with quality academic services.	0.9		
	7. I want to choose a University with quality administrative services.	0.829		
	8. I tend to choose a university that is able to compete with other universities.	0.582		
	9. I am more interested in a university that is recognized by society.	0.652		
	10. I am interested in a campus that supports open communication.	0.774		
	11. I am interested in a university that provides a comfortable place to study.	0.88		
	12. I want to choose a university that is able to provide positive stimulation to the surrounding environment.	0.887		
	13. I am attracted to universities that have a good identity.	0.872		
	14. I am interested in a university with a good reputation.	0.815		
	15. I prefer a university that has more value than other universities.	0.632		
Variable	No. Item	R count	R table	Desc
<i>Price</i> (X_2)	1. Tuition fees at this University influence my interest in choosing a study program that suits the educational facilities provided.	0.861	0.1723	Valid
	2. The cost of tuition at this University influences my interest in continuing my studies because it is comparable to the knowledge and skills that I will gain.	0.828		
	3. The offer of tuition fee waivers for outstanding students at this University increases my interest in enrolling.	0.837		
	4. The tuition fees at this campus, which are still affordable compared to other private universities, are one factor that influences my interest.	0.789		
Variable	No. Item	R count	R table	Desc

<i>e-WOM</i> (X_3)	1. I often access this University's information through social networking sites	0.769	0.1723	Valid
	2. I know this University because I often interact with other users on social media.	0.795		
	3. The number of reviews from social media that make me interested in studying at this University	0.845		
	4. I am interested in studying at this University because of the many positive comments written by other users on social media.	0.858		
	5. I am interested in studying at this University because of the many positive comments written by other users on social media.	0.869		
	6. I am confident to study at this University if many people study here.	0.802		
	7. I am sure to study at this University if it has good accreditation	0.708		
	8. I am confident to study at this University if the price is affordable	0.563		
Variable	No. Item	R count	R table	Desc
<i>Interest in Choosing</i> (Y)	1. I am interested in studying at this University in the near future	0.690	0.1723	Valid
	2. Before being interested in studying at this University I always consider the University	0.621		
	3. If I study at this University, I am interested in giving a review	0.756		
	4. If I study at this University, I am interested in recommending the University to Family / Friends / Siblings	0.743		
	5. I think this University is very good compared to other Universities	0.670		
	6. I have a very keen interest in this University	0.793		
	7. I always look for information about this University	0.713		
	8. I always look for positive information as a consideration for studying at the University	0.740		

Sources: Data managed by researchers (2025).

The computation results are compared with the r table according to the validity table. The r value is determined using the r table formula, namely $df = N - 2$. By substituting the value into the calculation, $df = 130 - 2 = 128$ is derived, resulting in a r value of 0.1723 at the 5% significant level. If the computed r value exceeds the r table value, the statement demonstrates strong construct validity. The calculation results indicate that the correlation coefficient r count exceeds r table, with a computed value more than 0.1723; thus, the assertions regarding the variables Brand Image (X_1), Price (X_2), e-WOM (X_3), and Interest in Choosing (Y) are deemed valid.

4.2 Reliability Test

A reliability test, as defined by (Sugiyono, 2017) An evaluation is performed to ascertain the reliability of a questionnaire employed as a measurement tool. The reliability of this study was evaluated using the Cronbach Alpha method. It was determined that the study is considered

reliable if the coefficient value α is more than or equal to 0.6 (Ghozali, 2018) A questionnaire reliability test assesses data measurement consistency. Reliability assessment results :

Table 2. Results of Reliability Test of Research Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Limit Interval Description	Desc
Brand Image (X_1)	0.959	0.600	Reliable
Price (X_2)	0.848	0.600	Reliable
e-WOM (X_3)	0.905	0.600	Reliable
Interest in Choosing (Y)	0.863	0.600	Reliable

Source: Data managed by researchers (2025).

The brand image variable (X_1) is valued at 0.959 (> 0.600), according to the findings of the reliability test. Hence, it is considered reliable and appropriate for usage. The Price variable (X_2) is valued at 0.848, exceeding the threshold of 0.600, indicating that it is trustworthy. The e-WOM variable (X_3) exhibits a value of 0.905, which exceeds the threshold of 0.600, indicating its reliability. The interest in choosing the (Y) variable is valued at 0.863, exceeding the threshold of 0.600, thereby confirming the reliability and suitability of the instrument. The data for all variables in this study demonstrate consistent results.

4.3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Research hypothesis testing was carried out with Multiple Analysis Regression. The results of linear regression analysis to test the hypothesis of this study are as follows:

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Model	B	Std. Error	t	Sig
(Constant)	2.491	2.287	1.089	0.278
Total.BI	0.237	0.039	6.009	0.000
Total.P	0.214	0.134	1.592	0.114
Total.E	0.279	0.067	4.147	0.000

Source: Data managed by researchers (2025).

a. Dependent Variable: Interest in Choosing (Y)

The multiple linear regression equation is derived from the results of the regression analysis as follows:

$$Y = 2.491 + 0.237X_1 + 0.214X_2 + 0.279X_3$$

a. The constant value (a) is 2.491, a positive number. This positive indication denotes a unidirectional relationship between the independent and dependent variables. If all independent variables, namely Brand Image, Price, and e-WOM, are set to 0, the value of Interest in Choosing (Y) will be 2.491.

b. The regression coefficient for the brand image variable is 0.237, signifying a positive relationship. An increase of 1 in the variable will result in a 0.237 increase in the interest in selecting Y, assuming all other independent variables are held constant.

c. The regression coefficient for the price variable is 0.214, signifying a positive relationship. This indicates that a unit increase results in a 0.214 increase in interest in

choosing (Y), assuming that other independent variables remain constant.

d. The regression coefficient for the E-WOM variable is 0.279, signifying a positive relationship. This suggests that a unit increase will lead to a 0.279 increase in the likelihood of selecting Y, assuming other independent variables remain constant.

4.4. T Test (Partial)

The determination is ascertained by examining the significance value in the coefficient Table 3. Regression results are tested at a significance level of 5%. ($\alpha = 0.05$):

1. Accept H_0 and reject H_a if the t-test significant value exceeds 0.05. As a result, there is no correlation between the independent and dependent variables.
2. With a t-test significance value below 0.05, we can accept H_a as the alternative hypothesis and reject H_0 as the null. This proves that the independent and dependent variables are interacting with one another.

The results of the hypothesis test (t-test) indicate that the significance value for the Brand Image (X_1) and e-WOM (X_3) variables is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that variables X_1 and X_3 affect Interest in Choosing (Y). The significance value for the Price variable (X_2) is 0.114, exceeding 0.05. This signifies that the X_2 variable exerts no impact on the Interest in Choosing (Y). The t-test results indicate that hypotheses H_1 and H_3 are accepted, however H_2 is rejected.

4.5 Model Feasibility Test (F-test)

Table 4. Anova^b

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	1649.244	3	549.748	47.095	.000 ^b
	Residual	1470.826	126	11.673		
	Total	3120.069	129			

Source: Data managed by researchers (2025).

The model feasibility table (F test) rejects H_0 and accepts H_1 . The calculated F value of 47.095 demonstrates this. The obtained significance value is 0.000, falling below the 0.05 threshold. So, this multiple regression model is valid, and the independent variables—Brand Image (X_1), Price (X_2), and e-WOM (X_3)—influence Interest in Choosing (Y).

4.6 Correlation Coefficient (R) and Determination (R^2)

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.727 ^a	0.529	0.517	3.417

Source: Data managed by researchers (2025).

According to the results of the coefficient of determination test in the R^2 table, the corrected R-Square value is 0.517 (51.7%). The independent variables in this study account for 51.7% of the influence on the dependent variable, while the remaining 48.3% is attributed to external variables not included in this study.

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