

The Influence of Brand Image and Brand Trust on The Decision to Study in the Tax Accounting Study Program (Case Study at Politeknik Unggul LP3M)

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of brand image and brand trust on students' selection of Politeknik Unggul LP3M as their higher education institution. In the intensifying rivalry within the education sector, comprehending the determinants that affect prospective students' decisions is crucial. Brand image reflects public opinion of an institution, whereas brand trust signifies confidence in the institution's quality and dedication. This research utilized a quantitative methodology, gathering data using a questionnaire survey. The study's population consisted of all new students at Politeknik Unggul LP3M, from which a purposive sampling method was employed to pick a sample of 150 respondents. We employed regression analysis to assess the influence of independent variables on the decision-making process. The findings indicated that brand image and brand trust substantially affected students' choices. The managerial implications of these findings indicate that the administration of Politeknik Unggul LP3M must enhance its brand image by advocating for academic excellence, contemporary facilities, and community engagement. Moreover, maintaining uniformity in service and clarity in information helps enhance brand trust. We anticipate that this strategy will enhance the institution's competitiveness and attract additional students. The study's shortcomings encompass restricting the sample to new Politeknik Unggul LP3M students, potentially failing to fully represent the broader population of prospective students. We recommend broadening the sample size and incorporating more pertinent variables in subsequent study.

Keywords: Brand Image, Brand Trust, Decision to Choose

Introduction

Competition within Indonesia's higher education market is intensifying due to the rising number of schools providing high-quality academic programs (E. H. S. Nasib, 2020). Universities vie for potential students by offering several benefits, including contemporary facilities, job market-aligned academic programs, and assurances of favorable career opportunities post-graduation (Fadli, 2020). Universities utilize diverse tactics to cultivate an attractive and persuasive image, encompassing the promotion of academic quality and the demonstration of students' commitment to professional advancement (Ma'arif, 2021). This situation imposes significant pressure on educational institutions, such as LP3M Superior Polytechnic, to perpetually innovate and enhance student competitiveness in an increasingly saturated and competitive market.

Politeknik Unggul LP3M confronts a substantial problem in this competitive landscape: enticing prospective students and convincing them to select this institution over its competitors. This challenge becomes increasingly complex due to the presence of various higher education options that offer similar advantages. To maintain competitiveness, Politeknik Unggul LP3M must thoroughly comprehend the determinants that affect students' choices regarding their educational institutions. Multiple factors, including the institution's reputation, academic standing, confidence in educational quality, and post-graduation opportunities, impact student choices. Consequently, a comprehensive grasp of these elements is crucial for Politeknik Unggul LP3M to formulate an efficient and pertinent marketing plan. Politeknik Unggul LP3M must formulate a strategy to enhance the favorable perception of potential students, bolster student confidence, and emphasize its benefits in facilitating the academic and professional success of its students in the future.



Two significant aspects that affect prospective students' choices in selecting an educational institution are brand image and brand trust. These two factors significantly impact the decision-making process as they indicate the degree to which an institution can fulfill prospective students' expectations regarding the quality of education and experience provided (N. Sari et al., 2023). Multiple aspects, including academic reputation, faculty quality, campus amenities, and the institution's societal engagement, influence public impression of an educational establishment, so shaping its brand image (Najib, 2020).

Prospective students frequently see academic reputation as their foremost concern (Liu, 2022). The institution's reputation derives from its history of generating exemplary graduates and the pertinence of its curriculum (Nasib, 2021). An institution with a commendable reputation in academia is typically seen as possessing an educational system capable of adequately preparing students to confront obstacles in the professional realm (Onsardi et al., 2021). Consequently, prospective students frequently select colleges recognized for their strong history in educating the nation's future leaders (Husni, 2023).

The caliber of educators is an integral component of an institution's brand identity (Arifin et al., 2020). The experience, credibility, and expertise of educators significantly impact the quality of education delivered (Matli et al., 2021). Lecturers with a robust academic background and sufficient professional experience will be more capable of delivering practical insights and pertinent theories, hence enhancing the quality of students' learning experiences (Nasib et al., 2022). Consequently, prospective students typically select colleges with highly competent faculty and strong reputations in their respective professions (Khan & Fatma, 2023).

Moreover, sufficient campus facilities play a crucial role in influencing the institution's brand image. Comprehensive facilities, including fully equipped laboratories, pleasant classrooms, high-speed internet access, and many supportive amenities, demonstrate the institution's commitment to enhancing the teaching and learning experience. A campus equipped with comprehensive facilities fosters a suitable learning environment, hence influencing the quality of education and student comfort during their studies (Juhaidi et al., 2024).

The proactive involvement of organizations in society enhances their brand image. Institutions that participate in varied social activities, perform research advantageous to society, or partner with industry illustrate that students value education while also contributing to social and economic advancement (Asad, 2024). Engagement in such activities illustrates the institution's commitment to delivering superior education and equipping students for the labor market (Haryanto et al., 2024). A robust and favorable brand image enhances the institution's appeal to prospective students and fosters a profound sense of trust (Tosun et al., 2024). Prospective students possess a favorable perception of an institution, instilling confidence that it would deliver a quality educational experience and facilitate the advancement of their future professions (Celestin, 2024). A robust brand image fosters the notion that the school can deliver pertinent, high-quality education and facilitate long-term success.

A strong brand image influences potential students to prioritize the institution's ability to support their personal and professional aspirations over issues like location or tuition fees (E. Novirsari & Ponten Pranata, 2021). The brand image is a crucial factor in attracting potential students and distinguishing educational institutions from their competitors (Digdowiseiso, 2023). A robust brand image not only entices potential students but also fosters student loyalty throughout their academic tenure and post-graduation, thereby enhancing the institution's future reputation (Adzharuddin, 2021).

Brand trust denotes the degree of confidence that potential students possess in educational institutions (Martin & Nasib, 2021). This trust is crucial as it signifies the confidence that the institution can meet the expectations and commitments made to potential students (Widy & HS, 2021). Brand trust can be defined as the confidence in the integrity, transparency, and dedication of educational institutions to provide a high-quality educational experience (Haryani et al., 2023). Reliability in providing precise information, meeting educational quality commitments, and a demonstrated history of generating successful graduates in the workforce fosters this confidence (Daulay, 2021).

A key element of brand trust is the conviction among potential students that the institution offers a contemporary curriculum aligned with industry requirements (Parasari et al., 2024). A

curriculum that integrates the latest breakthroughs in science and technology ensures that students have knowledge and abilities that correspond with the requirements of the labor market (Laksono et al., 2024). Prospective students typically select colleges that offer pertinent resources and enhance their competitiveness in the professional arena. The degree to which an institution can exhibit that pupils are consistently revising their curriculum and instructional resources to be pertinent to swiftly evolving industry advancements is intimately linked to brand trust.

The institution's capacity to facilitate students' job advancement post-graduation affects brand trust (Lubis et al., 2023). An esteemed educational institution known for producing outstanding graduates will find it easier to establish trust with prospective students (Zhou & Soonthonsmai, 2024). Students assert that the college offers great education while also equipping them to confront the problems of the professional realm (Purnima & Kumar, 2024). This may encompass internship programs associated with prestigious organizations, partnerships with other industry, and alumni networks that provide assistance and job prospects (Kadwa & Alshenqeti, 2020). Concrete evidence of former graduates' achievements can enhance the confidence of potential students (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024). Data regarding graduate workforce absorption rates, alumni accomplishments, and partnerships with corporations or professional organizations serve as significant markers for prospective students evaluating institutional credibility (N. S. E. E. Sari, 2020). Prospective students need assurance that their education will not only impart knowledge but also allow significant prospects for job advancement (Nasib et al., 2019).

In addition, aspects of student service also influence the level of brand trust (N. D. T. E. Novirsari, 2022). Responsive service, transparency in registration information, clear academic processes, and attention to student welfare also show the institution's commitment to providing a good experience to students (Amelia et al., 2023). Prospective students feel valued and treated well during the admission and orientation process, students are more likely to trust the institution as the right place to pursue higher education (Khairani, 2023). Brand trust serves as a foundation for building long-term relationships between institutions and students (A. F. Nasib, 2019). The trust formed during the selection process can impact the student's experience during the student's studies as well as the relationship that is established after the student graduates (B. Nasib, 2019). Therefore, building and maintaining brand trust is very important to ensure not only success in attracting prospective students, but also to create sustainable and positive relationships with alumni that can further strengthen the institution's reputation in the future (I. L. Nasib, 2021).

Nonetheless, while brand image and brand trust are frequently recognized as crucial elements in decision-making, the literature lacks exploration of the precise relationship between these two variables and student decisions within the realm of polytechnic education (Nasib et al., 2024). Most prior research has predominantly concentrated on universities or larger educational entities, resulting in a scarcity of studies addressing institutions like Politeknik Unggul LP3M, which possess distinctive characteristics and play a significant role in vocational education in Indonesia. Moreover, the majority of current research frequently overlooks the unique dynamics and obstacles encountered by polytechnics in establishing a reputable brand among potential students.

The main aim of this study is to determine if brand image and brand trust significantly influence students' choices while picking a tax accounting degree at Politeknik Unggul LP3M, an educational institution. This study seeks to examine the degree to which each aspect affects students' decisions and to identify critical areas for institutional improvement. This study addresses a significant vacuum in the literature by concentrating specifically on polytechnics, an area frequently neglected in prior research. Prior research predominantly focuses on big universities, whereas there is a paucity of detailed analyses about the impact of brand image and brand trust within vocational education, exemplified by Politeknik Unggul LP3M. Moreover, while brand image and brand trust are recognized as significant elements in brand marketing, research that concurrently evaluates their influence on student decision-making at this school remains scarce.

Theoretical Review

Decision to Choose Collage

The choice of prospective students to attend a private university is vital for the managing foundation, since it directly influences the foundation's sustainability and the university's growth (Febriani & Selamet, 2020). Tuition fees paid by students provide a primary revenue stream for private colleges (Boeck, 2022). Students who opt to pursue their education at a private university supply the institution with essential revenue to support operations, curriculum enhancement, building maintenance, and other educational initiatives (Hurwitz, 2022). The foundation may encounter challenges in operating properly without a sufficient number of students (Radiman et al., 2021).

The foundation's reputation is influenced by students' choices to attend private universities (Pambajeng et al., 2024). The quantity of students who enroll and successfully finish their studies frequently serves as the primary metric for evaluating a university's reputation (Crano, 2020). Foundations that effectively attract a substantial number of high-caliber students will gain greater recognition, both locally and nationally, thereby enhancing the Foundation's reputation (Pan, 2022). This esteemed reputation will facilitate the foundation's ability to attract additional potential students, broaden its industrial partnering network, and create greater prospects for collaboration (Dame, 2020).

The choices made by students also impact the foundation's commitment in the enhancement of academic programs and campus infrastructure (Pelt, 2021). An increase in student enrollment enables the foundation to allocate additional resources for enhancing teaching quality, broadening program offerings, and upgrading campus amenities (Bell, 2021). A decline in student enrollment may compel the foundation to reduce expenditures or revise instructional practices, thereby diminishing the quality of academic offerings (Ujunwa, 2021).

The decisions made by students have enduring consequences post-graduation, since alumni significantly contribute to the Foundation's support (Lakshmi, 2020). Successful alumni can assist via gifts, industry collaborations, or by providing internship and employment chances for incoming students (DeLaney et al., 2022). The presence of numerous accomplished alumni enhances the university's reputation among the public, potentially increasing its appeal to future prospective students (Khairi, 2021). The Foundation's marketing approach is crucial in influencing potential students' choices to select a private university in a highly competitive educational landscape, especially in Indonesia, which offers a multitude of university options (Christopher et al., 2022). If the foundation can recruit numerous students, its standing in the higher education market will be enhanced, providing the foundation with greater prospects for innovation and the establishment of durable competitive advantages (Wibowo et al., 2022). The decision of students to enroll in private colleges allows the foundation to expand the accessibility of higher education to a broader segment of society, especially for those encountering difficulties in entering public universities (Wang, 2022). As an increasing number of students choose private colleges, the foundation can expand the reach of higher education, enhancing accessibility for a larger population and promoting more fair educational possibilities (Chen et al., 2024).

Brand Image

The impact of brand image on prospective students' choices about private universities is significant, since the perception of educational institutions might affect students' assessment of the quality of education they will obtain (Khan & Fatma, 2023). Brand image encompasses multiple elements that influence public impression of colleges, such as academic reputation, campus amenities, instructional quality, and their role in social advancement (Setyorini et al., 2023). The academic reputation of the university is a fundamental component of brand image. Institutions with a robust reputation are typically recognized for providing high-quality education and producing graduates who achieve success in their professional endeavors (Purwanto & Praditya, 2024). Consequently, prospective students often select universities with a strong academic reputation, as they believe these institutions can offer sufficient educational experiences and equip them to confront career obstacles (Dea Khoirunnisa & Albari, 2023).

Moreover, the quality of instruction at colleges substantially influences students' brand perception (Mardius et al., 2023). Prospective students frequently evaluate teaching quality based on the reputation of instructors and the pedagogical strategies employed (Sylvia, 2020). Universities with proficient and seasoned

instructors can enhance their reputation, thereby attracting greater attention from potential students (Lusiah et al., 2018). Campus facilities contribute to brand image; universities equipped with comprehensive and modern amenities, including sufficient laboratories, pleasant classrooms, and high-speed internet access, can enhance their favorable perception among prospective students (Husni, 2023). Quality facilities demonstrate the university's dedication to fostering a supportive and efficient educational atmosphere.

A university's engagement in social activities and its societal contributions affect its brand image, alongside academic factors and facilities (Achmad, 2021). Research-active universities engaged in social initiatives and collaboration with business or government enhance the perception of students, demonstrating that they are not solely dedicated to education but also contribute to societal and economic advancement (Arifin et al., 2020). This creates the perception among potential students that attending the university will provide a more thorough educational experience (Setyorini et al., 2023).

The choice of a private institution significantly depends on the trust established by its brand image (Laksono et al., 2024). Prospective students seek to ascertain that the institution they select can deliver pertinent education and facilitate their future job advancement (Najib, 2020). In a progressively competitive educational landscape, brand image functions as a distinguishing factor among private colleges (Martin & Nasib, 2021). Institutions with a superior reputation are more likely to attract potential students, differentiate themselves from competitors, and increase enrollment numbers (Matli et al., 2021).

Brand Trust

The impact of brand trust on prospective students' choices regarding private universities is substantial, as the degree of trust in an educational institution can shape students' perceptions of the university's capacity to fulfill their academic needs and expectations (Chavadi et al., 2023). Brand confidence denotes the degree to which potential students are assured that their selected university can deliver great education and facilitate their future job advancement. Prospective students with a strong trust in private universities typically believe that these institutions can deliver a learning experience that fulfills their expectations, encompassing a pertinent curriculum, high-quality instruction, and resources that facilitate the learning process (Kankam & Charnor, 2023). This trust will motivate students to select the university as their institution for further education (Gong et al., 2023).

Moreover, brand trust affects potential students' perceptions of the university's capacity to equip them for the workforce (Razaq et al., 2024). Universities with a reputable image are typically perceived as possessing significant industry networks and providing internship and partnership opportunities that enhance career development (Nasib, 2024). Confidence in the quality and pertinence of the education provided can enhance prospective students' convictions that attending the university can facilitate their future professional achievement (Harianto et al., 2024).

Universities with a strong brand trust are perceived as more reputable and reliable by prospective students and their parents (Sihombing et al., 2024). The institution's reliability in delivering great education and honoring its commitments establishes this credibility (Amelia et al., 2023). Prospective students are certain that the university will uphold the promised educational quality, hence enhancing their comfort and confidence in the decision to enroll (Sihombing et al., 2023). Alumni's positive experiences significantly contribute to establishing brand trust. Alumni success stories demonstrating prosperous professions post-graduation will enhance prospective students' confidence in the university's ability to deliver quality educational experiences (Zhou & Soonthonsmai, 2024). The testimonials and accomplishments of graduates enhance the institution's favorable reputation among potential students (Asad, 2024).

Honest, clear, and open communication regarding tuition fees, entrance procedures, and available programs are variables that affect brand trust (Haryanto et al., 2024). Prospective students are more inclined to trust organizations that offer transparent and comprehensible information, since it fosters a sense of being appreciated and cared for (Tosun et al., 2024). In the contemporary digital landscape, brand trust is significantly influenced by reviews and suggestions from many online sources, such as social media, educational forums, and official websites (Celestin, 2024). Prospective students who encounter favorable testimonials regarding their experiences at private colleges are more inclined to trust and subsequently enroll (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024). Favorable evaluations and proficient brand image management might augment the degree of brand trust (Juhaidi et al., 2024).

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative methodology to examine the impact of brand image and brand trust on students' selection of Politeknik Unggul LP3M as their higher education institution. We choose the quantitative technique due to its capacity for objective and systematic measurement of variables, resulting in generalizable findings. The study population comprised all new students at Politeknik Unggul LP3M, whereas the research sample included 150 respondents, chosen via a purposive sampling method. The sample was selected based on specific criteria, specifically new students who have chosen to pursue their studies at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. We anticipate that appropriate sample selection will enhance the relevance of the research findings to the research aims.

We gathered data by administering a questionnaire survey to our participants. This questionnaire comprises multiple sections that assess respondents' impressions of brand image, brand trust, and students' decision-making regarding Politeknik Unggul LP3M. Each characteristic is measured using a 5-point Likert scale, enabling respondents to express their evaluations from strongly disagree to strongly agree. We developed the questionnaire instrument to guarantee valid and reliable measures, according with the research aims.

Regression analysis approaches will evaluate the acquired data to assess the impact of independent variables, such as brand image and brand trust, on the dependent variable, the decision to select Politeknik Unggul LP3M. This analysis will elucidate the association between the studied parameters and the decisions students make when choosing an educational institution. Additionally, we do validity and reliability assessments to confirm the precision and consistency of the study instrument in quantifying the specified variables.

Results and Discussions

Results

Hypothesis Testing

Based on the table above, it shows that brand image and brand trust have a significant effect on the Decision to Choose College in the tax accounting study program at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. In this study, brand trust has a more dominant influence compared to brand image in increasing the Decision to Choose College.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Brand Image (X1) → Decision to Choose College (Y1)	0.241	0.305	0.154	2.153	0.002
Brand Trust (X2) → Decision to Choose College (Y1)	0.244	0.304	0.235	2.728	0.000

Discussions

The Influence of Brand Image on Decision to Choose College

The findings of the hypothesis test in this study demonstrate that brand image significantly affects students' decisions to enroll in the Tax Accounting Study Program at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. This suggests that a favorable assessment of the brand or image associated with Politeknik Unggul LP3M can motivate potential students to make this significant decision. The institutional image, including academic repute, instructional quality, exceptional facilities, and acknowledgment from both the community and the professional sphere, has been demonstrated to be a pivotal component affecting students' interests and academic decisions. Consequently, enhancing brand image can serve a strategic function in attracting additional prospective students and bolstering the competitiveness of academic programs in the face of rival higher education institutions.

The findings of this study correspond with those of other prior studies, demonstrating that brand image considerably affects prospective students' choice of a particular college (Chan et al., 2021). As stated in (Foroudi et al., 2020), the favorable perception of an educational institution, including academic reputation, alumni achievements, instructional quality, and market competitiveness, significantly influences the academic decision-making of prospective students (Febriani & Selamat, 2020). This discovery reinforces the notion that brand image is not merely a supplementary factor but a strategic component that directly affects individual perceptions and decisions (Widnyana, 2021). Consequently, institutions that excel in establishing and preserving a robust brand image are more adept at attracting high-caliber prospective students, thereby enhancing their students' competitive standing among universities (Todia, 2022).

The Influence of Brand Trust on Decision to Choose College

The findings of the hypothesis test in this study demonstrate that brand trust exerts a strong direct impact on students' decisions to enroll in the Tax Accounting Study Program at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. This research suggests that prospective students' trust in the institution's brand or image, encompassing its reputation for integrity, reliability in delivering academic commitments, and consistency in educational quality, significantly influences their decision-making. Strong brand trust instills confidence in potential students that the education they will get aligns with the institution's promised expectations and standards. This confidence is founded not just on communication and promotion conducted by the campus but also on tangible evidence, like alumni testimonials, academic performance records, and program accreditation.

This study's results corroborate prior research indicating that brand trust greatly affects the decision to pursue higher education (Lubis et al., 2023). The credibility of the institution's brand significantly influences the decision-making process of potential students (Zulfansyah & Dermawan, 2024). Brand trust encompasses prospective students' convictions that the selected college can deliver quality education, meet academic commitments, and foster a learning atmosphere conducive to student self-development (Santoso, 2021). Brand trust serves as an assurance that the educational institution will uphold its reputation and academic standards, thereby offering students a sense of comfort in making this significant decision (Kinawy, 2024). Favorable experiences from former students, acknowledgment from the broader community, and the institution's dedication to upholding transparency and honesty frequently establish this confidence (Safira et al., 2023).

Conclusions

This study shows that brand image and brand trust significantly influence students' decisions to choose Politeknik Unggul LP3M. A strong brand image and institutional trust, reflected in academic excellence, facilities, and service consistency, are key factors that attract prospective students. To enhance its appeal, Politeknik Unggul LP3M should intensify efforts to promote its strengths, such as academic achievements, flagship programs, and modern facilities, while strengthening social engagement through community activities and partnerships. To build trust, the institution must ensure consistent and professional service delivery, transparency in program information, tuition fees, and graduate prospects. Future research should expand the sample scope and explore additional variables like social media influence, alumni recommendations, and personalized learning experiences for a more comprehensive understanding.

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