

## The Influence of Brand Image and Ethnic Identity on Decision to Study at Politeknik Unggul LP3M

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of brand image and ethnic identity on the decision to study at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. Prospective students form a perception of brand image based on the reputation and image of higher education institutions, and their awareness of their ethnic group influences their preferences and decisions when choosing an educational institution. This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey method that involves 200 respondents, specifically prospective students who are considering Politeknik Unggul LP3M as their educational choice. We collected data using a questionnaire, measured using a Likert scale, and analyzed the results using multiple linear regression. The results of the study show that brand image and ethnic identity have a significant influence on the decision-making process, with brand image dominating the decision-making process, followed by ethnic identity. The management of Politeknik Unggul LP3M expects these findings to provide insight into formulating more effective marketing strategies by considering the factors that influence prospective students' decisions.

**Keywords:** Brand image, Ethnic identity, Decision to choose.

### Introduction

In recent decades, Indonesia's higher education industry has seen significant expansion, marked by a growing number of new institutions providing diverse academic programs (Nasib et al., 2024). Polytechnics, a category of vocational higher education institutions, are crucial in cultivating a workforce equipped with specialized skills tailored to industry demands (Novirsari, 2022). Nonetheless, due to the growing rivalry among educational institutions, universities, especially polytechnics, must excel not only in academic excellence but also in establishing a robust brand image in the perceptions of potential students (Syaifullah, 2021).

The public develops an impression of a product or service, in this instance an educational institution, through its brand image (Fadli, 2020). A university with a favorable brand image can more readily attract potential students, since it is perceived to offer a guarantee of quality education, a strong reputation, and promising employment opportunities for its alumni (Nasib, 2022). A bad or obscure brand image may induce hesitation among prospective students when selecting the school (Lestari, 2019). For Politeknik Unggul LP3M, establishing and sustaining a robust brand image is a significant challenge, particularly in rivalry with other institutions that possess a more entrenched reputation and brand identity.

The ethnic identity component, with brand image, significantly influences the decision to select an educational institution, particularly in a nation characterized by ethnic variety like Indonesia (Waters, 2022). Ethnic identification denotes an individual's recognition of belonging to a certain ethnic group, typically accompanied by sentiments of pride and allegiance to the group's cultural values (Brass, 2024). In the realm of education, ethnic identification can affect prospective students' choices when selecting an institution that aligns with their cultural beliefs or fosters an environment conducive to ethnic diversity (Wibowo et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, although access to education is equitable, many prospective students select educational institutions based on the cultural familiarity and social atmosphere they provide. For instance, potential students from specific ethnic groups may have a greater propensity to select institutions situated in regions with a predominant population of their ethnicity or that provide programs aligned with their cultural values. Consequently, ethnic identification is a pertinent component to examine in studies about the decision to select a university. Politeknik Unggul LP3M, a vocational higher education school dedicated to cultivating practical and employable skills, acknowledges the significance of brand image and ethnic identity in appealing to prospective students. Nonetheless, despite several



initiatives to improve the brand image, including as advertising, industry partnerships, and enhancements in academic quality, the impact of prospective students' ethnic identification on their decision to attend Politeknik Unggul LP3M continues to pose a difficulty.

This study seeks to examine the impact of brand image and ethnic identity on the choice to enroll at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. This study aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing prospective students' decisions, serving as a foundation for developing more effective marketing strategies tailored to the needs and preferences of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. We anticipate that the results of this study will contribute to the academic literature about the influence of brand image and ethnic identity in Indonesian higher education.

## Theoretical Review

### The decision to choose

The selection of a college is a pivotal choice in a prospective student's life, significantly influencing their career, personal life, and intellectual growth (Arifin et al., 2020). From an academic standpoint, comprehending and shaping this decision is a crucial element of an institution's marketing and growth plan (Bobosatu et al., 2023). The selection of a college strongly impacts the caliber and characteristics of the students admitted by the school (Putra, 2021). Colleges that effectively attract competent, motivated, and value-aligned students typically possess a more robust student population, both academically and non-academically (Harahap et al., 2021). This not only improves the college's academic performance and standing but also enriches campus life with diverse ideas and experiences (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

The quantity and characteristics of enrolled students significantly impact a university's financial viability (Le, 2020). Tuition fees and additional revenue streams associated with new student enrollment are critical elements of an institution's operational budget (Ma`arif, 2021). Consequently, institutions must comprehend the determinants that affect prospective students' choices to guarantee financial stability and expansion. A choice that enhances enrollment and student retention can fortify an institution's financial standing (Najib, 2020). A selection to select based on certain study programs may furnish colleges with essential insights into the programs that are most sought after and pertinent to market demands (Onsardi et al., 2021). Institutions may utilize this information to refine and modify their curricula, implement new programs, and create teaching methodologies to address anticipated student demand (Nurhasanah et al., 2021). This finally fortifies the university's standing in the competitive higher education sector (Rainanto, 2021).

### Brand Image

A favorable brand image is frequently linked to a strong academic reputation (Yohana et al., 2021). Institutions recognized for their superior academic programs, esteemed faculty, and pioneering research typically possess a robust brand identity (Gumilang, 2021). Prospective students and their parents generally exhibit heightened interest in choosing schools with a robust reputation, as they believe that the education provided will adhere to high standards and substantially impact their future (Siregar, 2021). A robust brand image is frequently linked to enhanced job prospects for its alumni. Universities with broad industry connections and prominent alumni across several sectors are often more appealing to prospective students (Dewi, 2020). The school is perceived as a conduit for attaining career aspirations, hence the selection of a university frequently hinges on the extent to which its brand image signifies promising future opportunities (Serić et al., 2024). The caliber of facilities and educational environment provided by an institution also impacts its brand image (Salsabila et al., 2023). Institutions equipped with contemporary amenities, comprehensive laboratories, extensive libraries, and a secure, comfortable campus atmosphere will be more appealing to potential students (Hasyim, 2022). A robust brand image in this regard indicates that the institution can deliver an exceptional learning experience, hence impacting the choices of potential students (Ziyadin, 2020).

## Ethnic Identity

Prospective students typically select universities that correspond with their cultural beliefs and customs. Educational institutions that exhibit respect for cultural diversity and foster an inclusive atmosphere for ethnic groups will be more appealing to students from certain ethnic backgrounds (Wang, 2022). Prospective students from ethnic groups that rigorously uphold their traditions may choose institutions with ethnic communities or organizations that foster and promote their culture (Stanton, 2023). A secure and welcoming social atmosphere, in which students feel acknowledged and esteemed, is essential in the college selection process (Levy & Rozmann, 2023). Ethnic identification affects a prospective student's perception of the college atmosphere (Reddy & van Dam, 2020). Institutions that prioritize and promote ethnic diversity, with a student body representing a range of cultural origins, tend to be more appealing to students apprehensive about prejudice or cultural alienation (Wibowo et al., 2022). Conversely, prospective students from minority ethnic groups may eschew universities with a detrimental past or reputation for ethnic discrimination (Nguyen et al., 2020). Community and family significantly influence the decisions of prospective students in several instances. Specific ethnic groups may choose particular educational institutions due to the favorable experiences of community members or graduates of the same ethnicity (Yao et al., 2022). If several individuals from a specific ethnic community have excelled at an institution and offered favorable feedback, potential students from that ethnicity are more inclined to pursue similar paths. Support from family and endorsements from the ethnic community might substantially impact this decision (Brass, 2024).

## Methodology

This research has a quantitative design utilizing a survey methodology. Researchers choose this design to objectively assess the variables (brand image, ethnic identity, and college selection) and examine their interrelationship via statistical methods. The participants in this study were all newly enrolled students at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. We employed a purposive sampling method to identify participants, concentrating on new students who had deliberately chosen a college and possessed varied ethnic origins. We deemed the sample of around 78 responders adequate to yield representative findings. The questionnaire utilized in this study was constructed based on a 5-point scale. We developed the questionnaire for this study by formulating questions according to the indicators established for each variable, drawing on pertinent prior research. The data analysis utilized a multiple regression model using Smart PLS.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

#### Hypothesis Testing

**Table 1.** Hypothesis Testing

	Original Sample ( <i>O</i> )	Sample Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	<i>T</i> Statistics ( $ O/STDEV $ )	<i>P</i> Values
Brand image ( <i>X1</i> )→ Decision to choose ( <i>Y1</i> )	0.462	0.557	0.574	2.438	0.000
Ethnic identity ( <i>X2</i> )→ Decision to choose ( <i>Y1</i> )	0.473	0.537	0.583	2.259	0.001

The findings of the hypothesis testing demonstrate that both brand image and ethnic identification have a substantial impact on the choice to enroll at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. The findings of this study demonstrate that brand image exerts a more significant impact than ethnic identification on the decision to pursue education.

## Discussions

### The Influence of Brand image on Decision to choose

The findings of data testing indicate that brand image has a substantial impact on students' decisions to enroll at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. Considering the significance of brand image, Politeknik Unggul LP3M must leverage social media and digital marketing more vigorously. Digital channels may be utilized to enhance brand image and expand consumer reach. Collaborations with industry, alumni, and other educational institutions can enhance the brand image of Politeknik Unggul LP3M. This will enhance value for prospective students who evaluate several factors prior to making an enrollment decision.

The findings of this study corroborate earlier research, demonstrating that brand image substantially affects decision-making (Lubis, 2020). The principles and culture embraced by a university are crucial elements of its marketing image (Sari et al., 2023). Institutions recognized for fostering tolerance, diversity, ethics, and social responsibility typically possess enhanced attractiveness (Nasib et al., 2022). Prospective students frequently seek colleges that provide both academic instruction and assistance for personal and social growth (Nasib, Syaifuddin, et al., 2023). Consequently, a corporate image that embodies these favorable qualities might significantly influence the choice to select an institution (Haryani et al., 2023). The experiences and evaluations of current students and alumni significantly influence a university's brand image. Favorable experiences disseminated by word of mouth, social media, and review sites can enhance an institution's brand image (Martin & Nasib, 2021). Conversely, adverse experiences might tarnish the brand image and diminish the attention of potential students (Husni, 2023). Consequently, university administration must actively cultivate good relationships with students and alumni to maintain a robust and attractive brand image (Nasib, Julitawaty, et al., 2023).

### The Influence of Ethnic identity on Decision to choose

The hypothesis testing findings demonstrate that ethnic identification greatly affects the choice to enroll at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. Politeknik Unggul LP3M must reinforce the cultural values and ethnic identity present within the campus milieu. Initiatives that promote the preservation of specific ethnic groups' culture and language might draw potential students from these communities. Modifying the curriculum to encompass ethnic diversity and offering extracurricular activities that promote cultural preservation and ethnic identification might enhance the campus's appeal to prospective students who prioritize ethnic identity in their educational choices. The study's findings corroborate prior studies, demonstrating that ethnic identification substantially impacts decision-making (Ching et al., 2023). Geographical location frequently correlates with ethnic identity, as specific ethnic groups mostly inhabit particular regions (Waters, 2022). Colleges situated in regions mostly inhabited by a single ethnic community may appeal more to potential students seeking proximity to their cultural and social milieu (Salle-Finley et al., 2024). These universities are perceived to provide enhanced comfort for cultural and social adaptation, rendering them more appealing to potential students from the relevant ethnic group (Finley et al., 2024). Ethnic identity may also affect choices in selecting an academic program. Certain ethnic groups may exhibit a propensity for specific courses of study that align more closely with their cultural context or community requirements (Ting & Ting, 2020). Institutions that provide academic programs in community development, cultural studies, or specific ethnic languages are generally more appealing to potential students seeking to preserve or enhance their cultural heritage (DeLaney et al., 2022).

## Conclusions

The research determines that both brand image and ethnic identity substantially affect the choice to enroll at Politeknik Unggul LP3M. A robust brand image may foster a favorable view among potential students, therefore motivating them to select Politeknik Unggul LP3M as their educational institution. Moreover, ethnic identification substantially impacts the decision-making process, as prospective students frequently choose schools that correspond with their cultural and ethnic beliefs. The synergy of a robust brand image and the valorization of ethnic identity are important in enticing

potential pupils. This study suggests that Politeknik Unggul LP3M should persist in enhancing its brand image by consistent and inventive marketing techniques. Incorporating social media, alumni testimonials, and graduation achievement into a marketing campaign can enhance the institution's favorable perception among potential students. To entice potential students from many ethnic origins, Politeknik Unggul LP3M must provide programs that promote the preservation and advancement of cultural and ethnic identity. This may encompass academic programs, recreational pursuits, and cultural events that foster intercultural ideals.

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