The Role of Student Satisfaction Mediation on the Influence of Trust, Brand Image and Perceived Value on Students' Attitude towards Stimik Banda Aceh

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of student satisfaction, trust, brand image, and perceived value on students' attitudes towards STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh amid declining enrolment trends. Operating in a highly competitive environment with a decrease in new student admissions over the past five years, the university faces challenges in maintaining its reputation and attracting prospective students. The research aims to identify the key factors that shape student attitudes and determine the most dominant influences to inform strategic decision-making. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 178 students through structured questionnaires, with subsequent analysis employing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in IBM SPSS-AMOSS version 22. The validity and reliability of constructs were confirmed through measures such as Outer Loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The findings reveal that trust significantly affects both student satisfaction and attitudes, with strong correlations observed between brand image and student satisfaction. Perceived value also plays a crucial role, enhancing positive perceptions when students feel that the benefits outweigh costs. The results underscore the importance of building and maintaining high trust levels, a positive brand image, and perceived value to foster favourable student attitudes. Improving student satisfaction emerges as a mediating variable that can effectively influence perceptions and attitudes, thereby potentially reversing enrolment decline. The study provides meaningful insights for university management to develop targeted strategies aimed at enhancing service quality, strengthening institutional trust, and emphasizing the university's brand image. Ultimately, fostering positive student attitudes through these factors can bolster institutional reputation, increase loyalty, and attract new students in a competitive higher education landscape.

Keywords: student satisfaction, trust, brand image, perceived value, student attitude, enrolment decline, higher education

INTRODUCTION

STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh is one of 41 private universities operating in Banda Aceh City. This condition shows that Banda Aceh is a strategic location that is a magnet for the growth of universities, supported by its status as the capital city of Aceh Province with the availability of supporting facilities for students such as housing and public facilities (Mulyadi et al., 2021; Yusuf & Bahri, 2022). However, amidst these opportunities, competition between private universities is also getting tighter, including in attracting new students (Susanti, 2020). One of the problems faced by STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh is the number of new student admissions which has continued to decline in the last five years. Based on academic data from STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh in 2024, the realization rate of new student admissions for both S1 and D3 programs only reached around 33% of the set target, with a consistent downward trend from 2019 to 2023. For example, in 2020 and 2021, the realization of new student admissions only reached 79.17% and 43.75% of the target for each year.

This decrease in the number of students has created a unique phenomenon among active students, where the small number of students can cause feelings of doubt, anxiety, and doubt about the future of the study program

taken (Ali et al., 2021; Iskandar et al., 2024). These studies show that students who are in a campus environment with a small number of students tend to experience feelings of isolation, decreased motivation to learn, and concerns about the reputation of the study program they are taking (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1999). This psychological condition can affect students' attitudes towards the institution, both individually and collectively (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Therefore, this study is important to understand what factors influence students' attitudes towards STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh amidst the reality of the decreasing number of students.

This study examines the relationship between several major determinants of student attitudes, namely Student Satisfaction, Trust, Brand Image, and Perceived Value. Student satisfaction is an important indicator because students who are satisfied with academic services, facilities, and learning experiences generally show higher loyalty, recommend their campus to others, and have a positive attitude towards the institution (Clemes et al., 2008; Abdullah, 2006). Conversely, dissatisfaction can cause students to be apathetic, reduce motivation, and even affect the overall reputation of the campus (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Student trust in STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh is also a crucial factor, considering that trust is influenced by perceptions of institutional accreditation, transparency of academic information, and student or alumni experiences (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The higher the level of trust in the quality of the institution, the stronger the positive attitude of students.

In addition, the brand image of STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh, whether built through facilities, academic reputation, or external assessments such as scores on the Ayokuliah page, also shapes student perceptions. A strong brand image not only increases trust, but also strengthens the perception of the value of the education offered (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Helgesen & Nesset, 2007). Perceived value or value felt by students plays an important role in shaping their attitudes towards the campus. If students consider that the tuition fees they pay are comparable or smaller than the benefits they receive, such as quality of education, job prospects, and academic facilities, then a positive attitude towards the institution will be increasingly formed (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). This study found that perceived value is not only influenced by cost factors, but also by supporting facilities, internship opportunities, and access to technology-based learning innovations (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996). Thus, the interaction between student satisfaction, trust, brand image, and perceived value is seen as interrelated in influencing students' attitudes towards STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh.

The research gap in this study lies in the lack of previous studies that specifically examine students' attitudes towards private universities in areas with tight competition, especially in the context of Aceh. Most previous studies have focused more on single factors such as satisfaction or brand image alone, without integrating these four variables simultaneously to see their impact on students' attitudes in the context of the decreasing number of students (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; Thomas, 2011). Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap with a more holistic approach.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how student satisfaction, trust, brand image, and perceived value affect student attitudes towards STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh. This study also aims to identify which factors are most dominant in influencing student attitudes, so that it can provide strategic recommendations for institutional managers to increase new student admissions and improve public perception of the campus.

The benefits of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of educational service marketing science, especially in understanding student behaviour amidst tight competition between private universities. Practically, the results of this study are expected to be a reference for the management of STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh in designing marketing strategies, improving service quality, building institutional image, and strengthening student and community trust in the campus. Thus, the results of this study are expected to be able to help institutions overcome the challenges of decreasing student numbers and increasing competitiveness in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESIS

The Influence of Trust on Student Satisfaction

Trust plays an important role in shaping student satisfaction with an educational institution. When students have

confidence that the campus is able to fulfil academic promises, provide adequate facilities, and provide a supportive learning environment, they tend to feel satisfied with the experience they get. This trust is created through consistent interaction, transparency, and quality of service provided by the campus. With a high level of trust, students not only feel satisfied but also tend to show long-term loyalty and commitment to the institution.

Trust as a person's belief that another party will act in a way that is expected and does not harm their interests. Trust consists of three main components: (1) Ability (the competence possessed by the other party), (2) Goodwill (the willingness to act in a way that benefits the other party), and (3) Integrity (a commitment to act ethically and be trustworthy), (Kamaludin et al., 2024). In the context of STIMIK Banda Aceh, students' trust in the campus can influence their attitudes in choosing a campus and can be explained through these dimensions.

The Influence of Brand Image on Student Satisfaction

Brand image plays a significant role in influencing student satisfaction with an educational institution. When a campus' brand image is perceived positively, such as being known as a quality, innovative, and reputable institution, students tend to feel proud and satisfied to be part of that institution. A strong brand image also reflects reliability, credibility, and values that align with students' expectations. This not only increases students' trust in the campus but also reinforces their positive experiences during their education, thereby increasing overall satisfaction levels.

Brand image as a consumer's perception of a brand based on experience, communication, and information received, (Annisawati & Sitorus, 2022). Then, (Anita Kartika Sari & Tri Wahjoedi, 2022), identified important elements of brand image, such as Brand Identity (what the brand represents), Brand Association (characteristics associated with the brand), and Brand Equity Value (added value generated from brand association). The brand image of STIMIK Banda Aceh can influence prospective students' perceptions and their decisions to choose a campus, as well as how they assess the brand compared to competitors.

The Influence of Perceived Value on Student Satisfaction

Perceived value has a significant influence on student satisfaction. When students feel that the benefits they receive from educational institutions, whether in the form of teaching quality, facilities, learning experiences, or career prospects, are comparable to or even exceed the costs, time, and effort they spend, their level of satisfaction will increase. Perceived value includes emotional, functional, and social dimensions, which together form students' positive perceptions of the institution. High perceived value not only increases student satisfaction but also strengthens their loyalty to the campus. Perceived value is a consumer's evaluation of the benefits obtained compared to the costs incurred, (Azis et al., 2020). In this model, perceived value involves two main dimensions: Perceived Benefits (what consumers get from a product or service) and Perceived Costs (what consumers must sacrifice to obtain these benefits), (Iskandar et al., 2024). For students at STIMIK Banda Aceh, perceived value includes how much they feel they get educational benefits and career development compared to the costs they incur, and how this affects their satisfaction and decision to choose the campus.

The Influence of Trust on Student Attitudes

Trust is an individual's belief that another party will act in a way that is expected and will not harm their interests. In the context of higher education, students' trust in institutions such as STIMIK Banda Aceh includes their belief in the campus's academic abilities, good intentions in providing educational services, and integrity in implementing policies. According to (Suroso et al., 2022), trust has a significant effect on a person's attitude because it can build a sense of security and confidence in making decisions. Students who have a high level of trust in a campus tend to have a positive attitude and prefer the campus because they believe the campus is able to meet their academic and personal needs. This trust creates a sense of security and confidence that their academic and non-academic needs will be met. This positive attitude can be reflected in the form of appreciation, loyalty, and active involvement of students in campus activities. Conversely, if trust is disturbed, students' attitudes can change to be sceptical or even negative, which can ultimately affect their long-term relationship with the institution.

The Influence of Brand Image on Student Attitudes

Image Brand refers to the perceptions and associations that consumers have towards a brand, (Ramadhani et al., 2024) which in the context of higher education, refers to how students and prospective students view STIMIK Banda then (Aulia Rosty, 2024), explains that a positive brand image can improve consumer attitudes towards the brand because it creates strong and positive associations, such as a good reputation, high quality of education, and promising career opportunities. When the campus brand image is perceived positively, students tend to have a more supportive and loyal attitude towards the campus, and are more likely to choose and recommend the campus to others. Image Brand has a significant influence on students' attitudes toward educational institutions. When a campus' brand image is perceived positively—for example, as having a good reputation, excellent facilities, or high quality of education—students tend to have positive attitudes toward the campus. This attitude is reflected in students' sense of pride, trust, and loyalty toward the institution. A strong brand image can build supportive perceptions and inspire students to become more involved and feel part of the campus community. Conversely, a poor brand image can create negative attitudes that affect levels of trust, satisfaction, and long-term relationships with students.

The Influence of Perceived Value on Student Attitudes

Perceived values an individual's evaluation of the benefits obtained compared to the costs incurred, (Nuryakin et al., 2023). In the context of higher education, perceived value involves students' perceptions of the benefits they receive from STIMIK Banda Aceh, such as the quality of education, facilities, and career prospects, compared to the cost of education and time they invest. According to (Ilfida & Kristaung, 2023), when students feel that the value they gain is greater than the sacrifices they make, they tend to develop a positive attitude towards the campus. This positive attitude is then reflected in their willingness to continue studying at the campus and recommend it to others. Perceived valueor perceived value has a major influence on students' attitudes toward educational institutions. When students feel that the benefits gained from education, facilities, and experiences on campus are equal to or exceed the sacrifices made—whether in terms of cost, time, or effort—they tend to develop a positive attitude toward the campus. This perceived value not only increases satisfaction, but also forms proactive attitudes such as pride, loyalty, and involvement in campus activities.

The Influence of Student Satisfaction on Student Attitudes

Student satisfaction arises from the alignment between students' expectations and their actual experiences during interactions with the institution (Azis et al., 2020). According to Akram M. Alhamad et al. (2024), satisfaction serves as a key factor influencing consumer attitudes toward products or services. In the higher education setting, when students perceive that STIMIK Banda Aceh delivers quality education, efficient administrative services, adequate facilities, and meaningful social engagement, they are more likely to foster a favourable perception of the campus. This favourable attitude often manifests in increased loyalty, active involvement in campus life, and a willingness to promote the institution to others (Del Río-Rama et al., 2021). Furthermore, student satisfaction significantly impacts their intention to continue their studies at the same institution and shapes the overall image of the campus among potential future students. Overall, satisfaction contributes to the formation of positive attitudes, enhancing students' pride, engagement, and emotional connection to their educational environment.

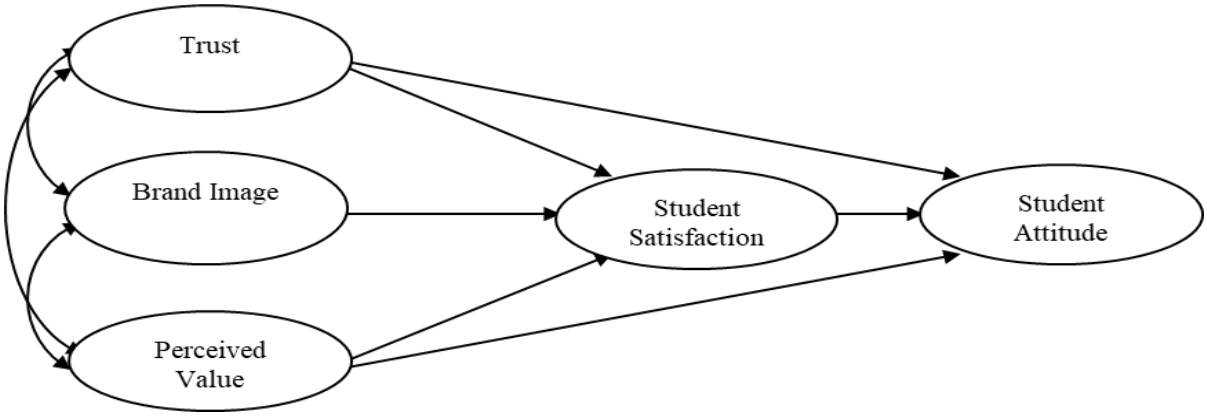

Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Methods

All measurement items in this study were adapted from established literature to maintain validity, with slight modifications to align with the research context. Trust and Perceived variables were measured using five indicators each from Kamaludin et al. (2024), while Brand Image utilized five indicators derived from Anita et al. (2022). Student Satisfaction was assessed using five context-relevant indicators, and Student Attitude was measured based on five indicators from Ali et al. (2021), ensuring each construct was grounded in reputable sources. The study population included all students at STIMIK Banda Aceh, with a sample size of 178 determined as adequate for populations exceeding 320, as supported by Suroso et al. (2022). The sampling method employed was simple random sampling. Data analysis involved both descriptive techniques to profile respondents and assess construct reliability, and verification analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via IBM SPSS-AMOS version 22 to examine the hypothesized variable relationships.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Respondents

In this study, 108 respondents (60.7%) were male, while 70 respondents (39.3%) were female, indicating the dominance of male respondents. Based on age, the majority of respondents were aged 20-22 years (37.1%), followed by 23-25 years (34.3%), then the 26-28 age group (15.7%), under 20 years (6.7%), and over 29 years (6.2%). In terms of marital status, 142 respondents (79.8%) were unmarried, while 36 respondents (20.2%) were married. Based on the year of the intake, the number of respondents is distributed as follows: 28 people in 2019 and 2020 each (15.7%), 26 people in 2021 (14.6%), 31 people in 2022 and 2023 each (17.4%), and 34 people in 2024 (19.1%). This data provides a detailed picture of the characteristics of the research respondents.

Research Instrument Testing

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for all constructs in this table is above 0.50, which means that convergent validity has been met. With AVE values ranging from 0.848 to 0.881, it can be concluded that each construct is able to explain more than 85% of the variance of its indicators, indicating that the indicators in each construct have a strong correlation with the latent construct being measured. The Brand Image construct has the highest AVE (0.881), indicating the strongest convergent validity among the other constructs.

Reliability Testing with Cronbach Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability Value (rho_A)

The Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs in this table are very high (above 0.90), indicating that the internal reliability of each construct is very good. Brand Image (0.932) is a construct with very good reliability. Then Trust (0.972), Student Satisfaction (0.970), Perceived Value (0.965), and Student Attitude (0.957) all show very high reliability, even approaching 1.0, which means that the indicators in each construct are very consistent in measuring the intended latent variables.

The Composite Reliability (rho_A) values for all constructs in this table are above 0.70, which means that the construct reliability is met and the indicators in each construct have good internal consistency. With values ranging from 0.833 to 0.872, the reliability is stable and not excessive, indicating that there is no indication of indicator redundancy. The Trust construct has the highest value (0.872), indicating very good reliability.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis or Outer Model in SEM-PLS is an important stage to test the unidimensionality of the dimensions that form the latent variables, both exogenous, mediating, and dependent, in this research model. The main objective is to ensure that the indicators used accurately reflect one dimension of each latent variable, as well as to validate the suitability of the conceptual model with empirical data. The results of this analysis will show the extent to which the indicators measure the intended construct and provide an overview of

the suitability between the theoretical model and empirical reality. All data processing results will be displayed in a table to assess the contribution of each indicator to its variables, while supporting the validity testing of the model. A 0.50 loading factor is used to set up the validity.

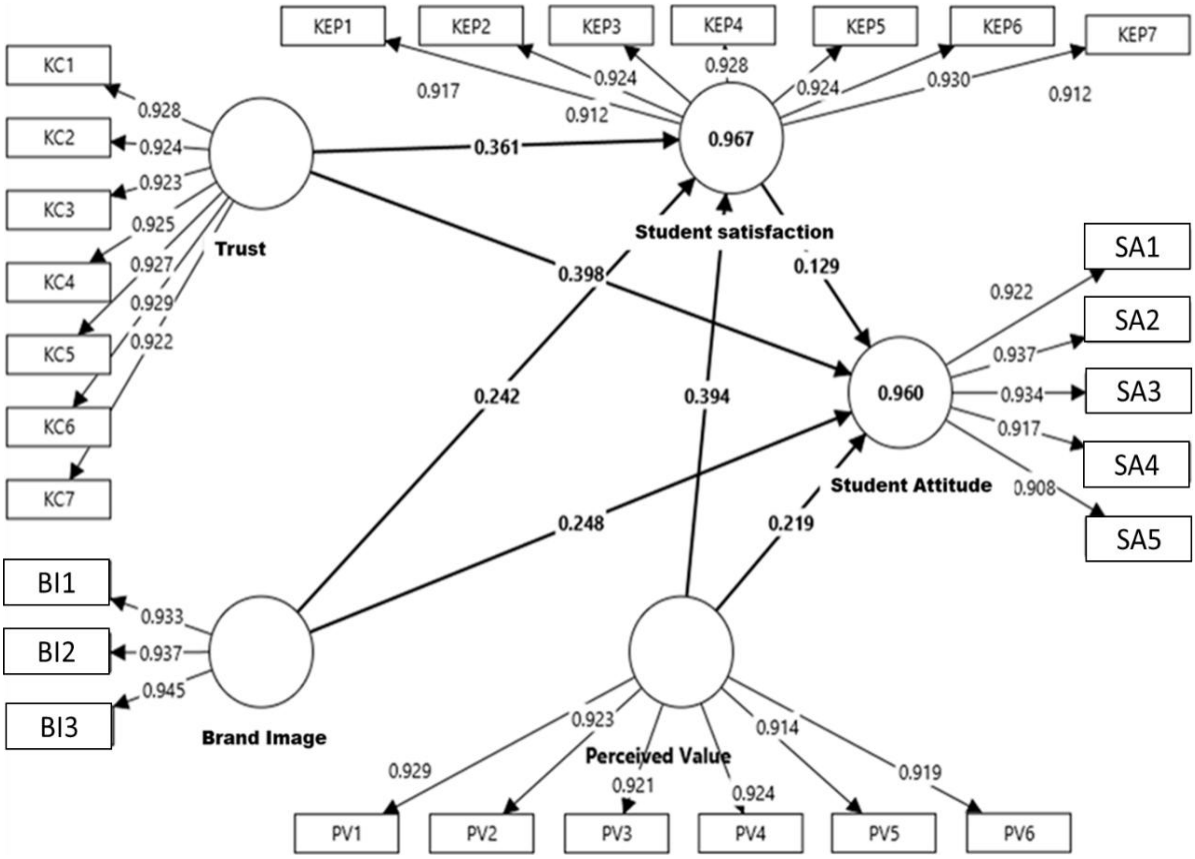

Figure 1. Measurement Model

The loading factors can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. The Loading Factor

Indicators	Outer loading
BI1 <- Brand_Image	0.933
BI2 <- Brand_Image	0.937
BI3 <- Brand_Image	0.945
KC1 <- Trust	0.928
KC2 <- Trust	0.924
KC3 <- Trust	0.923
KC4 <- Trust	0.925
KC5 <- Trust	0.927
KC6 <- Trust	0.929
KC7 <- Trust	0.922
KEP1 <- Student Satisfaction	0.917
KEP2 <- Student Satisfaction	0.912
KEP3 <- Student Satisfaction	0.924

Indicators	Outer loading
KEP4 <- Student Satisfaction	0.928
KEP5 <- Student Satisfaction	0.924
KEP6 <- Student Satisfaction	0.930
KEP7 <- Student Satisfaction	0.912
PV1 <- Perceived_Value	0.929
PV2 <- Perceived_Value	0.923
PV3 <- Perceived_Value	0.921
PV4 <- Perceived_Value	0.924
PV5 <- Perceived_Value	0.914
PV6 <- Perceived_Value	0.919
SA1 <- Student Attitude	0.922
SA2 <- Student Attitude	0.937
SA3 <- Student Attitude	0.934
SA4 <- Student Attitude	0.917
SA 5 <- Student Attitude	0.908

Source: Data processing results (2025)

Table 1 presents the outer loading values of the indicators on the latent variables measured in the research model. Outer loading indicates how well each indicator represents the actual latent variable. The main focus is on the Original Sample (O) column, where a value greater than 0.50 suggests that the indicator is considered valid in measuring the corresponding latent variable. From these results, it can be concluded that, except for indicator a6 on Burnout, which is not valid (value <0.50), all other indicators are considered valid to measure the related latent variables in this research model. This shows that these indicators are reliable and relevant in helping to measure these constructs in the context of this study.

Verifying Hypothesis Testing

This section presents direct hypothesis testing. This will be followed by indirect and moderation hypothesis testing.

Table 2.Hypothesis Testing Results

	Original sample	STDEV	T value	P values
Brand Image -> Student Satisfaction	0.242	0.036	6,722	0.000
Brand Image -> Student Attitude	0.248	0.048	5.134	0.000
Trust -> Student Satisfaction	0.361	0.050	7.269	0.000
Trust -> Student Attitude	0.398	0.053	7,491	0.000
Student Satisfaction -> Student Attitude	0.129	0.065	1,982	0.047
Perceived Value -> Student Satisfaction	0.394	0.047	8.430	0.000
Perceived Value -> Student Attitude	0.219	0.054	4.020	0.000

Source: Processed Primary Data, (2025)

The analysis results indicate that Brand Image has a positive and significant impact on Student Satisfaction, with a coefficient of 0.242, a T-statistic of 6.722 (>1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (<0.05). Additionally, Brand Image positively influences Student Attitude, shown by a coefficient of 0.248, a T-statistic of 5.134, and a P-value of 0.000. Trust also significantly affects both Student Satisfaction (coefficient: 0.361, T-statistic: 7.269, P-value: 0.000) and Student Attitude (coefficient: 0.398, T-statistic: 7.491, P-value: 0.000). The influence of Student Satisfaction on Student Attitude is comparatively smaller, with a coefficient of 0.129, a T-statistic of 1.982 (>1.96), and a P-value of 0.047 (<0.05). Perceived Value demonstrates a strong effect on Student Satisfaction (coefficient: 0.394, T-statistic: 8.430, P-value: 0.000) and also affects Student Attitude (coefficient: 0.219, T-statistic: 4.020, P-value: 0.000). These findings highlight the critical role of these variables in driving student satisfaction and fostering positive attitudes toward the institution.

The results of the analysis show that variables such as brand image, trust, student satisfaction, and perceived value play an important role in shaping students' attitudes and satisfaction towards the institution. The positive influence of brand image and trust indicates that perceptions of institutional reputation and service reliability are the main factors in building student loyalty. In addition, perceived value is a strong determinant of satisfaction, indicating that students tend to evaluate the benefits of the institution in terms of facilities, academic quality, and service excellence. Meanwhile, although the influence of satisfaction on student attitudes is recorded as smaller, it is still relevant to consider as part of the strategy for managing institutional relationships with students. The combination of these variables reinforces the importance of building relationships based on trust, positive image, and experiences that meet student expectations to achieve sustainable loyalty and engagement.

Managerial Implications

Based on the research findings, there are several managerial implications that can be applied to improve student satisfaction and attitudes towards the institution:

a) Brand Image Strengthening
   Institutions need to invest in branding strategies that reinforce their positive reputation. This can be done through marketing campaigns that highlight the excellence of the institution's academic services, facilities, and achievements. Building a strong brand image can encourage student loyalty and increase student engagement.
b) Increasing Student Confidence
   Management needs to ensure transparency in the management of the institution and provide consistent and reliable services. By building trust through open communication and quality services, institutions can create a more satisfying academic experience.
c) Optimizing Perceived Value
   Institutions need to continually evaluate and improve the value they offer to students, such as campus facilities, curriculum relevance, and service quality. By providing value that matches student expectations, institutions can create higher levels of satisfaction.
d) Focus on Student Experience
   Providing students with fun and interactive experiences can have a positive impact on their attitudes toward the institution. Programs that support student engagement, such as extracurricular activities, workshops, or mentoring sessions, can increase satisfaction and shape positive attitudes.
e) Satisfaction Management for Positive Attitude
   Although the influence of satisfaction on student attitudes is not as large as other variables, institutions must still pay special attention to elements that can increase satisfaction, such as responsiveness of academic services, personal approach, and fast feedback.

These implications can help institutions design more effective strategies to enhance student experience, create loyalty, and strengthen the relationship between students and the institution.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL MARKETING

This study concludes that brand image, trust, student satisfaction, and perceived value significantly contribute to student satisfaction and attitude toward their institution. Among these, trust and perceived value emerged as

the most powerful predictors, highlighting students' sensitivity to reliability and perceived benefits. While student satisfaction itself has a statistically significant influence on attitude, the effect size is smaller. This suggests that building a strong institutional image and cultivating student trust may be more effective strategies in shaping student attitudes than relying on satisfaction alone.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the literature by reaffirming the role of branding and trust in the education sector and by highlighting perceived value as a central construct in student experience frameworks. It also invites further exploration into affective components of attitude and the role of emerging variables like academic engagement. From a managerial standpoint, institutions should: Strengthen their brand positioning through consistent excellence in services and communication. Reinforce trust by delivering transparent, fair, and responsive academic services. Enhance perceived value through continuous improvements in facilities, curriculum, and career support. Recognize that satisfaction alone is not sufficient, and emotional connections should be nurtured to create deeper student loyalty and advocacy. Finally, future research would benefit from: Including moderation and mediation analysis, conducting cross-institutional comparative studies, and integrating qualitative insights to enrich the interpretation of statistical findings. These efforts would further advance our understanding of student behavior and contribute to more sustainable student–institution relationships in private higher education.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite producing statistically significant and theoretically meaningful findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged: The sample used may not fully represent the diverse characteristics of students across different private higher education institutions in Indonesia. Therefore, the generalizability of these findings to other educational contexts or public universities may be limited. The study adopted a cross-sectional approach, which restricts the ability to infer causal relationships or track changes in student satisfaction and attitude over time. Future research is encouraged to apply a longitudinal design to observe how these relationships evolve throughout the academic journey. While the direct relationships among variables were examined, potential moderating effects such as gender, year of study, or field of specialization were not explored. A multigroup analysis could uncover important subgroup differences that may inform more targeted institutional strategies. Although the constructs measured were based on validated scales, the actual questionnaire used was not included in this manuscript. Including the data collection instrument in the appendix would support future replication or model adaptation efforts. Future studies might consider expanding the model by incorporating additional variables such as academic engagement, career expectations, or perceived employability, which may offer deeper insights into the determinants of student loyalty and advocacy.

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