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## The Influence of Social Media and Brand Image on the Decision to Choose a College, Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram

Sugiartana<sup>1</sup>, Putu Somiartha<sup>2</sup>, Joko Prayitno<sup>3</sup>

Institut Agama Hindu Negeri Gde Pudja Mataram<sup>1,2,3</sup>

E-mail: [sugiartana345@gmail.com](mailto:sugiartana345@gmail.com)



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<b>Keywords:</b>	<b>Abstract</b>
<p><i>Social Media, Brand Image, Decision to Choose.</i></p>	<p><i>Higher education plays a key role in driving national change, with universities striving to enhance their educational quality amidst growing competition for top rankings. To stand out, promotional media, particularly social media, is crucial for disseminating information. The Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram, a Hindu religious higher education institution in West Nusa Tenggara, effectively uses social media to promote its programs and has developed a positive brand image within the community. This study investigates how social media promotions and brand image influence prospective students' decisions to choose this institution. Employing a quantitative research approach, the study analyzes numerical data to measure the impact of these factors on decision-making. Data were collected through questionnaires from 100 students at Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram and analyzed using Smart PLS software. The findings show that social media (X1) has a significant and positive impact on students' decisions to select a higher education institution (Y). Brand image (X2) also plays a significant role in influencing these decisions. Furthermore, the combined effects of social media and brand image demonstrate a positive and substantial influence on students' choices. These results highlight the importance of social media marketing and a strong brand image in attracting prospective students.</i></p>

<b>Kata kunci:</b>	<b>Abstrak</b>
<p><i>Media Sosial, Citra Merek, Keputusan Pemilihan.</i></p>	<p><i>Pendidikan tinggi memainkan peran kunci dalam mendorong perubahan nasional, dengan universitas-universitas yang berusaha untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan mereka di tengah persaingan yang semakin ketat untuk mendapatkan peringkat teratas. Agar dapat menonjol, media promosi, khususnya media sosial, sangat penting untuk menyebarkan informasi. Institut Agama</i></p>

	<p><i>Hindu Negeri Gde Pudja Mataram, sebuah institusi pendidikan tinggi agama Hindu di Nusa Tenggara Barat, secara efektif menggunakan media sosial untuk mempromosikan program-programnya dan telah mengembangkan citra merek yang positif di masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana promosi media sosial dan citra merek mempengaruhi keputusan calon mahasiswa untuk memilih institusi ini. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kuantitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis data numerik untuk mengukur dampak dari faktor-faktor ini terhadap pengambilan keputusan. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dari 100 mahasiswa di Institut Hindu Negeri Gde Pudja Mataram dan dianalisis menggunakan perangkat lunak Smart PLS. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa media sosial (X1) memiliki dampak yang signifikan dan positif terhadap keputusan mahasiswa untuk memilih institusi pendidikan tinggi (Y). Citra merek (X2) juga memainkan peran yang signifikan dalam mempengaruhi keputusan tersebut. Lebih lanjut, efek gabungan dari media sosial dan citra merek menunjukkan pengaruh yang positif dan substansial terhadap pilihan siswa. Hasil ini menyoroti pentingnya pemasaran media sosial dan citra merek yang kuat dalam menarik calon mahasiswa.</i></p>
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes a fundamental necessity for all strata of Indonesian society. Education significantly contributes to character development and the quality of human resources necessary to confront global competition. Consequently, the government is compelled to uphold the rights of every citizen to access services that enhance the quality of life for the Indonesian populace, as stipulated by the 1945 Constitution, which obligates the government to ensure national education and promote general welfare. Education impacts both current and future lives. Education alone exerts numerous effects; it can also impact social strata. Increased educational attainment correlates with enhanced perspectives and accomplishments. Education is a crucial factor that will ensure the prosperity, intelligence, and morality of the nation's future generation (Aini, 2018).

Government Regulation Number 60 of 1999 regarding Higher Education defines higher education as a formal educational track beyond the secondary education level, administered in institutions. Consequently, higher education serves as a crucial foundation anticipated to facilitate alteration inside a society, as it seeks to cultivate individuals' capacities to enhance and utilize reasoning in addressing diverse issues. Higher education serves as a framework for cultivating human values based on the ideal conception of humanity. To attain the anticipated objectives in higher education, diverse institutions must guarantee the delivery of quality

education. Higher education institutions are compelled to enhance their educational standards not only by numerous quality improvement demands but also by fierce competition, striving to be the 'best' among their rivals (Dewanthari, 2019).

The strategy for higher education must highlight a campus's distinctive benefits, especially for the educational experience, teacher proficiency, curriculum availability, administrative support, and comprehension of student inclinations. This seeks to assist prospective students in making educated choices about their educational trajectory at higher education institutions. In this context, the strategy for higher education should emphasize the campus's strengths in the learning and teaching experience, faculty expertise, curriculum, and the provision of internet-based management services, particularly via social media, which is gaining popularity among the youth.

Higher education institutions are urged to enhance the quality of their educational programs in response to the escalating competition among universities aiming to be the 'best.' This initiative is essential to engage students' enthusiasm in pursuing their education at the institution. The competition among universities is advancing rapidly, exceeding the ability of institutions, especially those governed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to react effectively. The disparity in quality between universities overseen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other public universities is apparent. Moreover, the insufficient engagement of these institutions in the global sphere mirrors wider societal patterns, wherein the populace predominantly favors public colleges. This assertion is corroborated by data from the Central Statistics Agency of West Nusa Tenggara Province in 2024.

**Table 1. Data on the Number of Students in NTB**

No	Year	Number of Students	
		Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research	Ministry of Religious Affairs
1	2019	85.885	31.252
2	2020	94.464	1.371
3	2021	102.717	29.954
4	2022	112.812	31.905

According to the data in Table 1, it can be inferred that the enrollment of students in religious higher education institutions remains inferior to that in universities governed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. In West Nusa Tenggara, the Ministry of Religious Affairs oversees 32 universities, both state and private, while the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology manages a total of 55 universities,

including both state and private institutions (Central Statistics Agency of West Nusa Tenggara Province, 2024). This numerical discrepancy has resulted in a greater enrollment of students in universities governed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology compared to those overseen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Nonetheless, the data in the table clearly indicates that the enrollment of students in universities governed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2020 significantly declined relative to the preceding year. The fall resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which diminished student enrollment and precipitated adverse economic conditions, prompting numerous potential students to abandon their educational pursuits. In the subsequent years, from 2021 to 2022, the enrollment at the Ministry of Religious Affairs institutions rose markedly.

Students are essential for higher education institutions seeking to enhance and modernize their reputation. This assertion corresponds with Griffin's perspective (in Hurriyati, 2018:129), which posits that a notable benefit for institutions in the service industry, upon establishing a devoted client base, is the enhancement of favorable word-of-mouth promotion. Consequently, religious higher education institutions must cultivate favorable impressions among students and promote support. Social media has emerged as an essential instrument for colleges, functioning as a promotional platform to engage and recruit potential students.

Numerous types of promotional media are prevalent in contemporary society, with social media marketing emerging as a particularly efficient communication method. This method affects consumer perceptions and comprehension of marketing activities across five primary dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trends, personalization, and word-of-mouth promotion (Chen & Lin, 2019). Ardiansah and Maharani (2021) assert that social media functions as a platform for interaction among users, characterized by dynamic bidirectional communication.

Moreover, social media is frequently utilized to construct an individual's self-image or personal and serves as a marketing instrument for businesses. Utilizing social media as a marketing tool involves methods such as sharing photographs on platforms like Instagram, enabling consumers who follow the account to access the shared content. According to this report, effective utilization of social media can enable higher education institutions to recruit a substantial number of students. The evolution of marketing communication via social media has been swift and has emerged as a prominent promotional platform. This is propelled by the growing public awareness of information technology, necessitating companies, especially

higher education institutions, to become more transparent to the public. Ardiansah and Maharani (2021) assert that social media serves as a medium or platform that enables user interaction and embodies a two-way communication dynamic. Social media is frequently utilized to construct self-image or personal profiles. Higher education institutions employ social media to engage individuals, particularly current and prospective students, as potential future enrollers. The evolving communication trend, utilizing social media as a promotional instrument, prompts higher education institutions to contemplate its use as a channel for disseminating information and marketing their offerings to potential students, who are decision-making consumers.

Decision-making is a cognitive process, and the outcome of this process is termed a decision. Decision-making contrasts with thinking, which entails a transition from established knowledge to novel insights; choices are swayed by information propagated via social media or online marketing by organizations (Kotler, 2016, in Kristina, 2020). In addition to social media, prospective students must also evaluate other variables in their decision-making process, particularly the institutional brand image, which significantly influences their choice. It may be deduced from multiple definitions that a university must uphold a positive image in social media promotion to attract new students and compete with other universities.

The Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram is a Hindu religious higher education institution located in West Nusa Tenggara that utilizes the internet, particularly social media, for promotional purposes. The Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram has consistently grown its student enrollment annually. This educational institution prioritizes educational quality and provides several scholarships for potential and present students. Students can obtain financial assistance through scholarships and other accessible grants by merely producing an Indonesian Smart Card.

The author intends to conduct research at Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram, motivated by the annual increase in student enrollment, and to investigate the impact of social media promotions and the institution's brand image on prospective students' decisions to select Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram. The author seeks to investigate "The Influence of Social Media and Brand Image on the Decision to Select Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram as a Higher Education Institution."

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Media Marketing**

Tuten (2023) asserts that social media marketing encompasses the use of technologies, channels, and software integrated inside social media, with the objective of enhancing communication, delivery, exchange, and value provided to an organization's stakeholders. Social media marketing endeavors constitute an advanced marketing communication approach, illustrating consumers' perceptions and comprehension of these activities across five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, personalization, and word-of-mouth (Chen & Lin, 2019). Online advertising utilizes the intricate cultural aspects of social groups, including social networks, virtual environments, news-sharing platforms, and opinion-exchange websites, to accomplish targeted communication goals (Fauzi, 2018). Social media marketing is a strategy that employs online channels to enhance awareness, recognition, retention, and engagement for a brand, product, company, individual, or other entity.

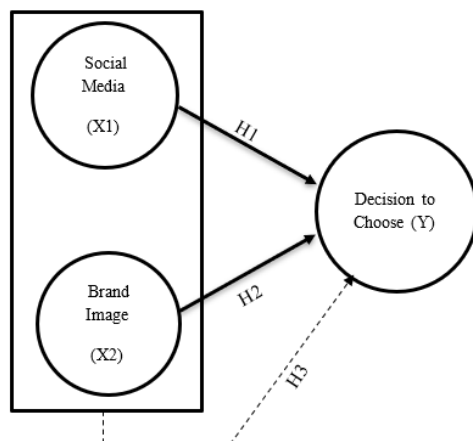
### **Brand Image**

According to Tjiptono (2019), brand image denotes the collection of associations and perceptions that customers have about a specific brand. These linkages are intrinsic characteristics of the brand and differ in intensity. Purwati (2022) elucidates that brand image, as perceived by customers, is reflected in diverse brand associations retained in their memory. Brand images comprise the information and concepts that customers identify with various branded items and their associated attributes. It signifies the perceptions of clients and other stakeholders regarding a brand (Arianty & Andira, 2021). Consequently, a robust brand image might enhance consumer interest and the probability of individuals acquiring or utilizing the given goods and services.

### **Decision Making**

Robbins (2001) posits that decision-making is a process whereby an individual chooses from multiple possibilities. According to Salusu (2016:47), decision-making is "the process of selecting alternative actions using efficient methods according to the situation." This process entails recognizing and resolving issues. Usman (2018:321) asserts that decision-making entails selecting from multiple possibilities. According to Salusu (2016:47), Higgins contends that decision-making is the paramount action among all endeavors, as it intrinsically encompasses leadership.

## Research Model



**Figure 1. Research Model**

This research model is founded on multiple prior studies concerning the variables investigated, specifically the impact of social media on decision-making and the effect of brand image on decision-making. Significant earlier research encompasses a study by Mutmainna (2023), which examined "The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Interest in Enrolling in Public Universities." This study sought to investigate the influence of social media marketing on the propensity to enroll in public colleges. The results demonstrated a relationship between social media marketing and the choice of academic degree. The research indicated that social media profoundly affects decision-making processes about university selection. A pertinent study conducted by Juliana and Johan (2020) is entitled "The Influence of Brand Image on University Selection Decisions with Brand Trust as an Intervening Variable." This study investigated the influence of brand image on the intention to enroll at a university. The findings indicated that brand image substantially affects students' decision-making processes when choosing a school and is regarded as a critical component by students. Furthermore, social media marketing and brand image were identified as key factors influencing university selection decisions (Anizir & Wahyuni, 2017). Considering these findings, the research hypotheses are articulated as follows:

H1: The Influence of Social Media on Students' Decision to Choose Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram.

H2: The Influence of Brand Image on Students' Decision to Choose Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram.

H3: The Influence of Social Media and Brand Image on Students' Decision to Choose Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study investigated the impact of social media and brand image on the selection of a higher education institution, specifically the Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram. The study utilized quantitative correlational methodology. The quantitative method employs numerical data and focuses on assessing objective outcomes using statistical analysis. The research instrument employed in this study consisted of sampling a population through a questionnaire. The target group was 100 students from the Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram. The sample size was established according to Hair's (2017) sampling methodology, which involves multiplying the number of indicators by five. This study included 20 indicators, necessitating a sample size of 100 respondents. The research employed the quantitative program SmartPLS for data analysis.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Reliability and Validity Test

The reliability and validity test examines the relationship between a group of indicators and their corresponding variables or constructs. Ghozali (2014) states that a latent variable is considered reliable if the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.7. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value should exceed 0.5. The results of the measurements for composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in this study are presented in the table below.

**Table 2. Reliability and Validity Test**

<b>Varibel</b>	<b><i>Cronbach's Alpha</i></b>	<b><i>Composite Reliability</i></b>	<b><i>Average Variance Extracted</i></b>
<b>Social Media</b>	0,882	0,911	0,629
<b>Brand Image</b>	0,918	0,932	0,605
<b>Decision to Choose</b>	0,846	0,890	0,619

#### Goodness of Fit Test

The goodness-of-fit model is a test used to examine whether the empirical data aligns with the theory and model by evaluating the values of several categories. One of the criteria is that the chi-square value should be greater than 0.5, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) should be less than 0.08 (Ghozali, 2014). Below are the values of the goodness-of-fit model in this study.

**Table 3. Goodness of Fit Test**

	<b>Saturnated Model</b>	<b>Estimated Model</b>
<b>SRMR</b>	0,067	0,067

Based on the above, the chi-square value in this study is 288.679, which is greater than 0.5. Furthermore, this study's Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value is 0.067, which is within the expected measurement standard of being less than 0.08. Therefore, it can be concluded that the model in this study is considered fit, as all categories have been met, making it suitable to proceed with the next test, which is to test the research hypotheses.

### Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing for direct effects can be conducted by examining the p-value through the bootstrapping procedure on the path coefficients (direct effect). If the  $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ , then  $H_0$  is accepted and  $H_1$  is rejected. Conversely, if the  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ,  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted (Ferdinand, 2000). To assess the significance of the relationships between variables, the T-statistic value can be used (Wong, 2013). This measurement aims to evaluate the significance of each construct in the study. The criteria for T-statistic testing are that the measurement value must be at least greater than or equal to 1.96 ( $>1.96$ ) to be considered significant, with a p-value of less than 0.05 ( $<0.05$ ) (Garson, 2016). In addition to examining the T-table value and p-value for each variable, the F-square test can be used to determine the simultaneous effect of endogenous variables on exogenous variables. According to Cohen's criteria (in Hu et al., 2023), the F-square values are classified as follows: 1) If F-Square  $> 0.02$ , it is small/weak; 2) If F-Square  $> 0.15$ , it is medium; 3) If F-Square  $> 0.35$ , it is large/strong. Below are the results of the hypothesis testing in this study.

### Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

**Table 4. Bootstrapping Output Results for Direct Effects**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistica ( O/STDE )</b>	<b>P Value</b>
<b>H1</b>	Social Media → Decision to Choose	0,270	0,269	0,108	2,500	0,013
<b>H2</b>	Brand Image → Decision to Choose	0,576	0,582	0,110	5,223	0,000

Table 4 presents the p-value and t-statistic values for the direct effects of the variables in this study, as explained below.

### **H1: The Influence of Social Media on the Decision to Choose Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram**

In the hypothesis testing results presented in Table 4, the p-value for the influence of social media on the decision to choose is 0.013, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. In addition to having a significant p-value ( $0.013 < 0.05$ ), the social media variable also has a t-statistic value of 2.500, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, it can be concluded that social media positively influences the decision to choose, meaning that H1 is accepted.

Based on the calculation results, this finding aligns with the previous study by Mutmainna (2023), which stated that there is a relationship between the role of social media promotion and the decision to choose a university. Social media remains an effective promotional tool for educational institutions, with research showing that 87.7% of students' decisions to choose a university are influenced by promotions through social media (Rahayu & Hasanah, 2020).

Promotion through social media, or Social Media Marketing, is a marketing technique that uses social media platforms to promote products or services more specifically. Well-designed content can attract visitors to a product or service website, making them interested in the products and services displayed (Novila, 2018). Social media marketing is a form of online advertising that leverages the cultural context of social communities, including social networks, virtual worlds, social news sites, and opinion-sharing sites, to achieve communication goals (Fauzi, 2018). Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that social media marketing is a form of business communication between businesses and consumers, whether for products or services, that conveys information through social media that benefits all parties. Therefore, Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram must continue to intensify its promotion through social media to increase its recognition among a wider audience.

### **H2: The Influence of Brand Image on the Decision to Choose Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram**

In the hypothesis testing results presented in Table 4, the p-value for the influence of brand image on the decision to choose is 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. In addition to having a significant p-value ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ), the brand image variable also has a t-statistic value of 5.223, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, it can be concluded that brand image positively influences the decision to choose, meaning that H2 is accepted.

The results are consistent with the study by Juliana and Johan (2020), which aimed to analyze the influence of brand image on the purchase intention in choosing a desired university. Their research showed that brand image significantly affects the decision to choose a university. Additionally, the study by Ningsih (2019) indicated that brand image plays a crucial role in students' decision-making when choosing a campus, which students highly consider. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that brand image impacts the decision to choose a university.

According to Kotler (2016), brand image is the public's perception of a company or its products. Meanwhile, Tjiptono (2019) defines brand image as a description of consumers' associations and beliefs about a particular brand. These associations are attributes within the brand and possess varying levels of strength. In Purwati's (2022) study, it is explained that brand image, as a consumer's perception and preference for a brand, is reflected in various types of brand associations stored in the consumer's memory. Based on these explanations, it can be concluded that if a university has a good brand image, it will be considered by prospective students when choosing that university. Therefore, in this case, Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram must maintain its reputation to ensure it remains the top choice for prospective students when deciding.

### **Indirect Effect Hypothesis Testing**

**Table 5. F-Square Test**

	<b>Brand Image</b>	<b>Decision to Choose</b>	<b>Social Media</b>
<b>Brand Image</b>		0,255	
<b>Decision to Choose</b>			
<b>Social Media</b>		0,056	

### **H3: The Influence of Social Media and Brand Image on the Decision to Choose Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram**

According to Table 5, the F-squared value for the brand image variable for the decision to pick is 0.255, whereas for social media, it is 0.056. Consequently, it can be argued that social media and brand image exert a favorable influence and meet the medium criteria. Consequently, according to the F-square test calculation, the collective impact of each exogenous variable on the endogenous variable is categorized as medium, leading to the acceptance of hypothesis (H3).

The findings align with multiple research studies investigating the influence of social media marketing and brand image on students' choices about higher education institutions. The

research conducted by Hajatina (2024) indicated that social media marketing methods had favorably influenced university selection decisions. Brand image significantly influences students' decisions, with some research indicating it may exert a greater effect than social media marketing (Karamang, 2023). Effective social media marketing can improve brand perception and affect decision-making (Darmaningrum, 2024). Educational institutions are urged to utilize social media as a potent promotional approach to attract potential students and maintain competitiveness in the educational market (Hajatina, 2024). Elements including academic excellence, infrastructure, and employment opportunities for graduates foster a favorable impression among potential students (Manullang, 2024). These findings highlight the significance of amalgamating social media marketing methods with brand image to impact decisions regarding educational institutions, particularly the Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram.

## CONCLUSION

According to Table 5, the F-squared value for the brand image variable regarding the decision to choose is 0.255, while for social media, it is 0.056. In conclusion, social media and brand image exert a positive influence, categorizing them within the medium criteria. Based on the F-square test calculation, the simultaneous influence of each exogenous variable on the endogenous variable is classified as medium, leading to the acceptance of hypothesis (H3). The analysis of the structural model testing indicates that both social media and brand image have a significant impact on the decision to select Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram. The analysis indicates that enhanced promotion via social media elevates the probability of prospective students choosing the institution as their educational destination. A stronger brand image positively influences the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of prospective students selecting Gde Pudja State Hindu Institute of Mataram. The F-square test substantiates that the joint effect of social media and brand image is both positive and significant, indicating that effective social media marketing enhances brand image and is pivotal in shaping students' decisions regarding their preferred institution.

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