

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON BRAND AWARENESS AND STUDENT DECISIONS TO CHOOSE UNIVERSITY

Alfin Yoga Kharisma^{1*}, Tulus Haryono²

Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta¹²

*Correspondence Email : kharismaalfin0@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to analyze the influence of social media marketing activities on brand awareness and students' decisions in choosing higher education institutions. The population in this study was students of Universitas Duta Bangsa, data collection methods using online questionnaires, and data analysis methods using SEM-PLS. The results of this study found that marketing activities through social media have a positive effect on the decision to choose a university. The components of social media marketing activities that influence the decision to choose a university are entertainment, interactivity, trendy, customization, and E-WOM. Meanwhile, what affects brand awareness is entertainment, customization, and E-WOM.

KEYWORDS

Social media marketing, brand awareness, university decision



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INTRODUCTION

The reputation of a university, both public and private, is highly important and becomes the main capital for education management, because a good image reflects the quality of the university. But this is not an easy matter for every university to develop its higher education institutions in Indonesia, considering the increasingly fierce competition with other universities (Harahap *et al.*, 2018).

To face increasingly fierce competition in obtaining students, currently many universities have used the internet for marketing communications. Considering that the number of Internet users coming from various age groups is fundamentally growing in Indonesia. Data from We Are Social shows that internet users in Indonesia reached 204.7 million people or 73.7% of the population, while those who actively use social media as many as 191.4 million people or 68.9% of the population. Data also shows that the percentage of internet users in Indonesia comes from the age range of 18-24 years (student age) as much as 32%, followed by 32.6 percent from the age range of 25-34 years. This specific data clearly shows the importance of web communications and policies carried out

in influencing individuals to choose various products and services (Jan and Ammari, 2016). The results of research in higher education show that prospective students' decisions to choose universities are based on their exposure and online experience (Ayub, Hamid and Nawawi, 2014; Nixon, Scullion and Hearn, 2018).

A key strategy for universities to navigate a tough competitive environment is to create a distinct brand image for themselves. A unique brand image can positively affect reputation which can have a major influence on the student experience at university (Berry, 2000). A good reputation serves as a positive signal for prospective students and creates a differentiating factor for the university (Panda *et al.*, 2019). The combination of a good brand image and a good reputation should contribute to an increase in student satisfaction levels, which will ultimately result in positive word of mouth and brand loyalty. In the process, the university will create a differentiated factor for itself and contribute to its competitive advantage (Panda *et al.*, 2019).

Brand image was originally created just for products, but branding today has grown into a core part of services and nonprofits as well. Developing different features is a consideration for a service industry, this shows that brand image can play an important role for any service industry in building strong brand equity (Endo, de Farias and Coelho, 2019). A literature review shows higher education institutions are also undertaking brand-building activities to ensure their long-term superior position over their competitors. History and tradition are no longer the only reasons to achieve and maintain a positive brand equity-based image. Therefore, the comprehensive use of marketing communication tools is an indispensable strategy for every marketer (Šerić, 2017).

Many of these collegiate institutions adopt various promotional tools such as advertising, public relations, online communication and direct marketing to create their respective images. Meanwhile, many studies have not shown a strong influence of strategic coordination based on marketing communications with the internet in creating a brand image of higher education services towards overall consumer brand equity (Momen, Sultana and Haque, 2020). It should be noted that positive brand equity is a fundamental indicator that shows the effectiveness of each communication tool used (Raji, Mohd Rashid and Mohd Ishak, 2019).

To configure the right marketing mix in the era of social networking sites, the ever-changing variety of online views and algorithms in search engine optimization (SEO) has become a significant challenge today. The results showed that social media and search engines have a significant effect on brand image and brand image have a significant effect on brand equity (Momen, Sultana and Haque, 2020). Other studies show that brand equity has a significant effect on brand loyalty (Girard and Pinar, 2020; Pinar, Girard and Basfirinci, 2020). Barreda, Nusair, Wang, Okumus, & Bilgihan (2020) found that social media has a positive effect on brand *image* and *brand commitment*.

Based on the above arguments and a review of related literature, research reveals the relationship of different types of web-based marketing communications to the brand image and brand equity of higher education institutions. Web-based communication is broadly categorized as social networking sites, various types of online displays and search engine related communication tools. As previously stated, social networking sites have many impactful benefits on a student's lifestyle and choices. Students like to share their views on social media and influence others in their activities (Jan and Ammari, 2016). Some research results advise adult students to decide any issues regarding their education. Online displays such as banner ads, pop up ads on many different platforms help students to know many offers and make decisions (Rutter, Roper and Lettice, 2016). Studies have also shown a large part about the effects of brand image mediation between social media variables and brand equity as non-free variables. The model shows also that there is a

positive relationship between brand image and brand equity (Raji, Mohd Rashid and Mohd Ishak, 2019).

Specifically, Malarvizhi, Al Mamun, Jayashreem, Naznen, & Abir (2022) found the relationship between social media activities consisting of *entertainment, interactivity, trendiness, customization*, and e-word of mouth with brand awareness and brand image and their impact on consumer behavior. Research conducted by Zollo, Filieri, Rialti, & Yoon (2020) also found a relationship between social media activity and *brand equity*. Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger, Leung, & Ting (2020) also found the relationship of social media activity to brand engagement and its impact on consumer behavior.

Based on the above literature review, this study aims to configure integrated online marketing communications towards the development of brand awareness and student decisions in choosing higher education institutions. The framework of this research model can be seen in Figure 1.

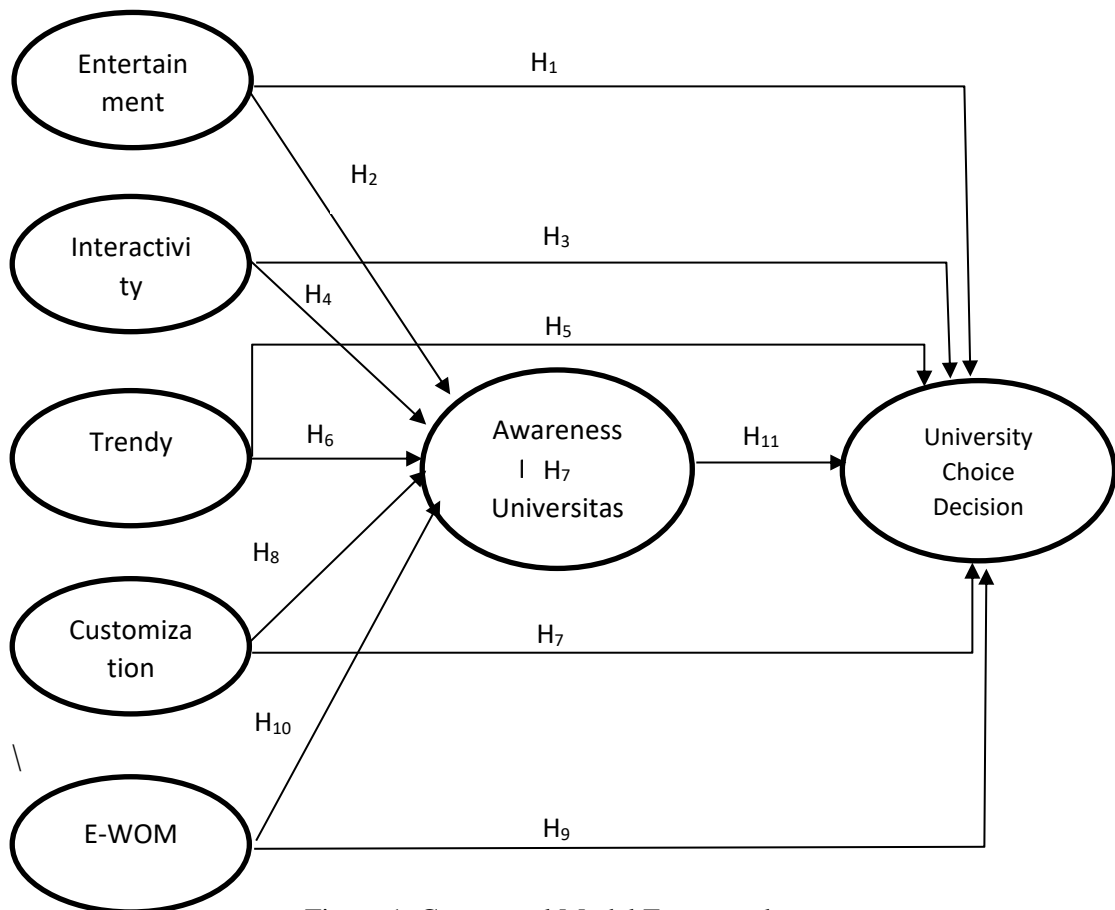


Figure 1. Conceptual Model Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

The population in this study is new students of Universitas Duta Bangsa Surakarta which amounted to 1547 students. The population is taken from four faculties, namely the Faculty of Law and Business (240 students), the Faculty of Health Sciences (711 students),

the Faculty of Computer Science (541 students), and the Faculty of Science and Technology (55 students).

According to Arikunto (2006), the sample is the part of the population that is the actual source of data whose characteristics are to be investigated. This study uses a structural equation model, where the sample size already has criteria to be processed. Sampling of the study population was carried out by Proportional Random Sampling technique. Sampling is carried out at each Faculty proportionally based on existing study programs in accordance with the number of samples that have been calculated. The number of samples taken was 318 students.

The data used is primary data, which is obtained directly from the respondents, namely new students of Duta Bangsa University Surakarta. The primary data collection method uses questionnaires, namely data collection using the distribution of questionnaires to respondents. The data analysis method used in this study *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) is a *multivariate* statistic technique that allows testing a series of causality relationships between variables. The pattern of causality relationships between complex variables can be constructed from one or several *exogenous* variables or several *endogenous variables*. Each *exogenous* and *endogenous* variable is a latent variable built from several indicator variables or manifest variables. Through SEM, one can answer research questions that are causality in structural and dimensional models.

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

Evaluation of the outer model or measurement model is carried out to assess the validity and reliability of the model (Ghozali, 2016). Convergent validity aims to determine the validity of each relationship between indicators and their latent constructs or variables. The convergent validity of the measurement model with reflexive indicators is assessed based on the correlation between the item score or component score with the latent variable score or construct score estimated with the PLS program (Ghozali, 2016). A loading value that has a high level of validity if it has a loading factor greater than 0.70 (Ghozali, 2016). However, according to Chin (1988) for early stage research, the measurement scale with a loading value of 0.5 to 0.6 is considered sufficient (Latan and Ghozali, 2012). In this study, the loading factor limit used was 0.70.

Table 1. Outer Loading (Measurement Model) Indicator

| | Brand Awareness | Customization | E-Wom | Entertainment | Interactivity | Trendy | University Choice |
|-----|-----------------|---------------|-------|---------------|---------------|--------|-------------------|
| BA1 | 0.703 | | | | | | |
| BA2 | 0.805 | | | | | | |
| BA3 | 0.836 | | | | | | |
| BA4 | 0.814 | | | | | | |
| BA5 | 0.771 | | | | | | |
| E1 | | | 0.739 | | | | |
| E2 | | | 0.782 | | | | |
| E3 | | | 0.753 | | | | |
| E4 | | | 0.815 | | | | |
| E5 | | | 0.856 | | | | |
| H1 | | | | 0.774 | | | |
| H2 | | | | 0.849 | | | |
| H3 | | | | 0.846 | | | |
| H4 | | | | 0.777 | | | |
| H5 | | | | 0.833 | | | |
| IN1 | | | | | 0.723 | | |

| | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| IN2 | | 0.745 | |
| IN3 | | 0.887 | |
| IN4 | | 0.864 | |
| IN5 | | 0.746 | |
| K1 | 0.747 | | |
| K2 | 0.875 | | |
| K3 | 0.816 | | |
| K4 | 0.876 | | |
| K5 | 0.707 | | |
| T1 | | | 0.858 |
| T2 | | | 0.735 |
| T3 | | | 0.823 |
| T4 | | | 0.834 |
| T5 | | | 0.767 |
| UC1 | | | 0.704 |
| UC10 | | | 0.718 |
| UC2 | | | 0.778 |
| UC3 | | | 0.831 |
| UC4 | | | 0.790 |
| UC5 | | | 0.707 |
| UC6 | | | 0.770 |
| UC7 | | | 0.775 |
| UC8 | | | 0.750 |
| UC9 | | | 0.732 |

In Table 1, it can be seen that the majority of indicators on each variable in this study have a loading value between 0.830 – 0.942 which is greater than 0.70, this shows that variable indicators that have a loading value greater than 0.70 have a high level of validity, so as to meet convergent validity.

Discriminant validity is used to ensure that each concept of each construct or latent variable is different from other variables. According to Latan & Ghozali, (2012), a model has good discriminant validity if the correlation value of the construct with the measurement item is greater than the correlation value with other constructs.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

| | Brand Awareness | Customization | E-Wom | Entertainment | Interactivity | Trendy | University Choice |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------|---------------|---------------|--------|-------------------|
| Brand Awareness | 0.787 | | | | | | |
| Customization | 0.508 | 0.807 | | | | | |
| E-Wom | 0.683 | 0.463 | 0.790 | | | | |
| Entertainment | 0.690 | 0.414 | 0.541 | 0.816 | | | |
| Interactivity | 0.480 | 0.449 | 0.453 | 0.444 | 0.796 | | |
| Trendy | 0.515 | 0.359 | 0.460 | 0.525 | 0.489 | 0.805 | |
| University Choice | 0.684 | 0.531 | 0.669 | 0.620 | 0.523 | 0.578 | 0.756 |

The results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion cross loading estimation in Table 2 show that the correlation value of the construct with the indicator is greater than the correlation value with other constructs. Thus it can be concluded that all latent constructs or variables already have good discriminant validity, where the indicators in the indicator block of the construct are better than indicators in other blocks.

The outer model in addition to being measured by assessing convergent validity and discriminant validity can also be done by looking at construct reliability or latent variables measured in two ways, namely by looking at the value of composite reliability and cronbach alpha from the indicator block that measures the construct. The construct is

considered reliable if the value of composite reliability and the value of Cronbach alpha is greater than 0.70 (Latan and Ghazali, 2012). SmartPLS output results for composite reliability and cronbach alpha values can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Value of Composite Reliability and Cronbach Alpha

| | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Brand Awareness | 0.846 | 0.890 | 0.620 |
| Customization | 0.864 | 0.903 | 0.652 |
| E-Wom | 0.849 | 0.892 | 0.624 |
| Entertainment | 0.874 | 0.909 | 0.666 |
| Interactivity | 0.855 | 0.896 | 0.634 |
| Trendy | 0.865 | 0.902 | 0.648 |
| University Choice | 0.917 | 0.930 | 0.572 |

In the SmartPLS output results in Table 3, the model shows the composite reliability and cronbach alpha values for all constructs are above 0.70. Thus it can be concluded that all constructs have good reliability in accordance with the required minimum value limits. The value of average variance extracted (AVE) indicates greater than 0.5, this means that the variable tested has qualified.

1. Structural Model Evaluation

In the *structural model test (inner model)* using the help of *Bootstrapping* and *Blindfolding* procedures in SMART PLS. Tests on structural models are performed to test the relationships between latent constructs. The results of hypothesis testing can be seen in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4. Path Coefficient

| | Coefficient | T Statistics | P Values | Decision |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------|--------------|
| Entertainment -> University Choice | 0.151 | 2.864 | 0.004 | H1 accepted |
| Entertainment -> Brand Awareness | 0.376 | 8.648 | 0.000 | H2 accepted |
| Interactivity -> University Choice | 0.091 | 1.977 | 0.049 | H3 accepted |
| Interactivity -> Brand Awareness | 0.051 | 1.215 | 0.225 | H4 rejected |
| Trendy -> University Choice | 0.184 | 3.406 | 0.001 | H5 accepted |
| Trendy -> Brand Awareness | 0.079 | 1.656 | 0.098 | H6 rejected |
| Customization -> University Choice | 0.143 | 3.292 | 0.001 | H7 accepted |
| Customization -> Brand Awareness | 0.136 | 3.135 | 0.002 | H8 accepted |
| E-Wom -> University Choice | 0.269 | 4.917 | 0.000 | H9 accepted |
| E-Wom -> Brand Awareness | 0.357 | 7.151 | 0.000 | H10 accepted |
| Brand Awareness -> University Choice | 0.185 | 3.041 | 0.002 | H11 accepted |

The results of data processing in Table 4 showed that nine hypotheses were accepted and two hypotheses were rejected. This shows that the components of social media marketing activities consisting of entertainment, interactivity, trendy, customiztion, and E-WOM have a positive and significant influence on the decision to choose a university. While in the component of social media marketing activities there are two variables that do not have a significant effect, namely Interactivity and Trendy on brand awareness, while other variables have a positive and significant effect.

1. Test Mediation

The results of the calculation of indirect influence can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effect

| | Coefficient | T Statistics | P Values |
|---|-------------|--------------|----------|
| Customization -> Brand Awareness -> University Choice | 0.025 | 2.070 | 0.039 |
| E-Wom -> Brand Awareness -> University Choice | 0.066 | 2.791 | 0.005 |
| Entertainment -> Brand Awareness -> University Choice | 0.069 | 2.950 | 0.003 |
| Interactivity -> Brand Awareness -> University Choice | 0.009 | 1.043 | 0.298 |
| Trendy -> Brand Awareness -> University Choice | 0.015 | 1.289 | 0.198 |

In Table 5 it is known that the effect of *E-Service Quality* on purchase interest mediated by Brand Image has a t value of 1.965 with a p value of 0.05, because the p value < 0.05, it can be concluded that Brand Image mediates significantly the relationship between *E-Service Quality* and purchase interest. The relationship between *E-Service Quality* and purchase interest mediated by E-Trust has a p value of 0.033 < 0.05, this shows that *E-Trust* mediates the relationship between *E-Service Quality* and purchase interest significantly.

In Table 5 it is also known that the effect of *Sales Promotion* on purchase interest mediated by Brand Image has a p value of 0.05, because the p value < 0.05, it can be concluded that Brand Image mediates significantly the relationship between *Sales Promotion* and purchase interest. The relationship between *Sales Promotion* and purchase interest mediated by E-Trust has a p value of 0.048 < 0.05, this shows that *E-Trust* mediates the relationship between *Sales Promotion* and purchase interest significantly. Graphically the structural model in this study can be seen in Figure 2.

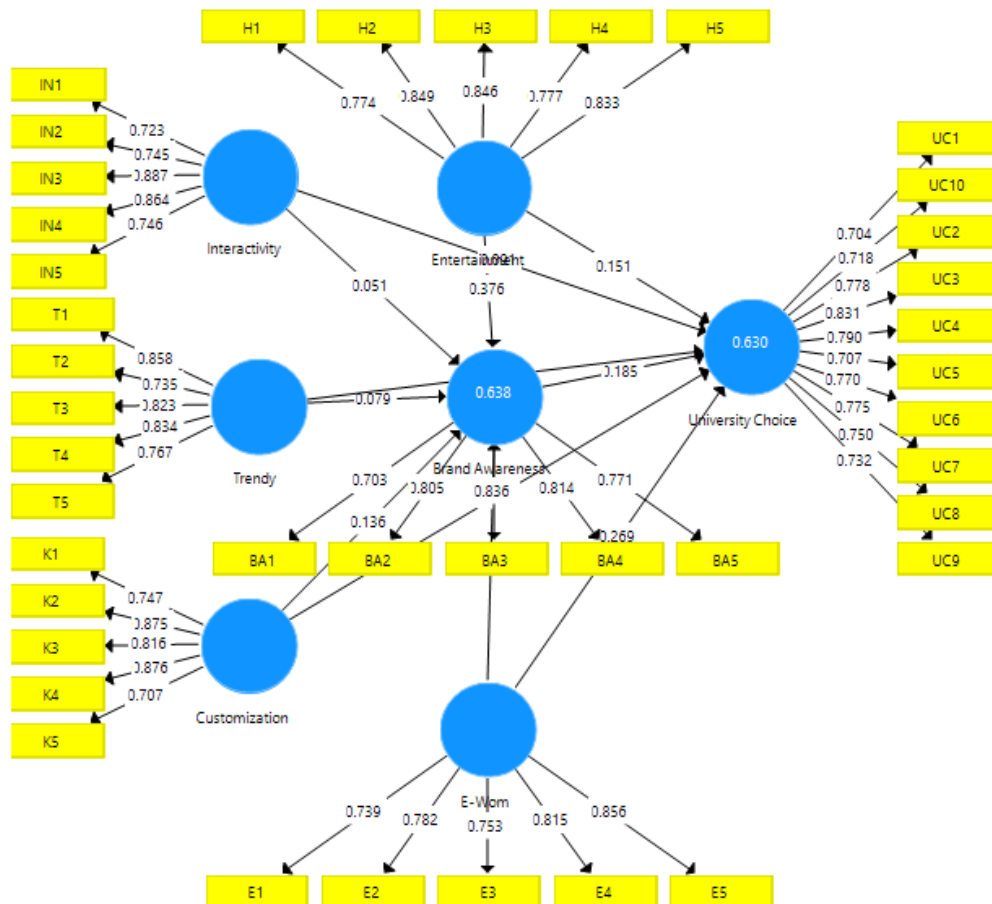


Figure 2. SEM Results

DISCUSSION

Entertainment refers to how consumers find something funny and interesting during shopping using social media (Godey *et al.*, 2016). Consumers can better enjoy marketing activities through social media, for example by watching videos from certain brands, participating in games and contests, and getting something free, so that these activities can build brand intimacy (France, Merrilees and Miller, 2016; Malarvizhi *et al.*, 2022). Consumers use brand-related social media content for a variety of entertainment, including taking their minds off routine day-to-day routines, relieving stress and emotional relief, indulging in cultural or artistic pleasures, or simply to pass the time (Muntinga, Moorman and Smit, 2011). The results of this study show that entertainment has a positive and significant effect on university selection decisions. The results of this study support the research conducted by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Cheung *et al.*, (2020) which found the influence of entertainment-related social media activities on consumer behavior. Related to the influence of social media on college or education selection decisions. Some research results advise adult students to decide any issues regarding their education. In addition, online displays such as banner ads, pop up ads on many different platforms help students to know many offers and make decisions (Rutter, Roper and Lettice, 2016).

Focusing on investigating the effects of social media marketing activities during the COVID-19 pandemic among Indian consumers, Mason, Brown, Mason, & Narcum (2021) concluded that the creative content of a brand that promotes fun and entertainment generates high brand value, in particular, is brand awareness. The results of this study support this statement and the results of the research of Malarvizhi *et al.* (2022) which found that entertainment has a positive effect on brand awareness. This means that engaging and entertaining social media content will further increase the university's brand awareness.

Interactivity indicates the extent to which social media marketing activities provide multiple ways, specifically brand to consumer, consumer to brand, and consumer to consumer, of exchanging opinions and information (Malarvizhi *et al.*, 2022; Masa'deh *et al.*, 2021). The results of this study show that interactivity has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose a university. This means that consumer interaction activities in this case prospective students on social media to exchange information and opinions influence decisions in choosing a university or further education. The results of this study support the research conducted by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Cheung *et al.*, (2020) which found the influence of social media activities in the form of *interaction* with consumer behavior.

Consumers contribute to a brand's social media by interacting and sharing ideas with other like-minded consumers to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various products and services (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2018). Consumers interact through social media, regardless of time, location, or medium, resulting in friendly attention and enthusiasm for a brand (Kim and Ko, 2012). The results of this study do not support this statement and the results of research by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Masa'deh *et al.*, (2021) which found that interactivity has a positive effect on brand awareness. This can be due to the lack of interaction made by the University on its social media or the interaction carried out is less interesting, so it has no impact on brand awareness.

Trendy means providing up-to-date information about goods or services on social media (Godey *et al.*, 2016). According to Yadav & Rahman (2017), social media users want fashion brands to provide items that are in line with modern trends and social styles. In educational institutions, the decision in choosing a university or college is also influenced by trends that occur in educational institutions, for example in majors that are

in great demand because they follow the needs of the world of work or follow the trend of technological developments. The results of this study found that Trendi had a positive and significant influence on the decision to choose a university. This means that the latest information provided by the University through its social media can improve the decision to choose a university. The results of this study support the study conducted by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Cheung *et al.*, (2020) which found that trendy has an effect on consumer behavior.

Through social media content, consumers analyze what products are being used by other consumers and obtain information to facilitate their product preferences according to the latest trends (Yadav and Rahman, 2017). Constantly updating the latest brand material on social media positively affects the subconscious mind of consumers by creating a sense of freshness and trendiness, contributing to brand loyalty (Malarvizhi *et al.*, 2022). The results of this study found that Trendy had no effect on brand awareness. Berart's results do not support the research conducted by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022), Cheung *et al.*, (2020), and Seo & Park (2018) who found the big influence of trends on brand awareness. The absence of Trendi's influence on brand awareness can be because the information submitted by the university is not the latest information that attracts the attention of prospective students.

Customization addresses how well a product or service meets consumer needs and preferences (Seo and Park, 2018). Social media marketing customization shows a brand's level of social media marketing activity (APMS) providing individually tailored information retrieval options and services (Godey *et al.*, 2016). Cheung *et al.*, (2020) states that the formation of consumer cognitive experiences is influenced by marketing activities through social media. These social media marketing activities can generate preferences for making purchasing decisions. The results of this study found that customization had a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose a university. The results of this study support the results of a study conducted by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Cheung *et al.*, (2020) which found the influence of customization on consumer behavior such as purchasing decisions. The positive influence shows that the APMS conducted by the university provides individually tailored information retrieval options and services.

Customized APMS can influence consumers' formation of cognitive experience and brand affection, resulting in their primary preference for a particular brand when they make purchasing decisions (Cheung *et al.*, 2020). The results of this study support this statement, as well as support the results of Seo & Park's (2018) research which found customization as a component of APMS affects brand equity. As well as supporting the findings of Malarvizhi *et al.* (2022) and Masa'deh *et al.* (2021) who found customization had a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.

The EWOM level is related to how consumers share and publish content about brand experiences through social media (Malarvizhi *et al.*, 2022). Consumers are heavily influenced and guided by online reviews and/or ratings, which are WOM's primary source (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Reviews made by other people or friends on social media on a product or service can influence consumers who are looking for the product they want in deciding their choice (Farzin *et al.*, 2021). The results of this study found that E-WOM had a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose a university. These results support the results of a study conducted by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Cheung *et al.*, (2020) which found that E-WOM affects consumer behavior such as purchasing decisions.

The influence of EWOM on brand equity is significantly stronger than that of conventional WOM due to ease of use, timeliness, independence of place, and easy accessibility (Farzin *et al.*, 2021). Consumers rely on the EWOM bias for product and service selection because EWOM keeps referring to potential customers throughout the

entire buying process (Roy *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, Mason *et al.* (2021) observed the use of social media to publish reviews on the buying experience (such as: disappointment, happiness, or satisfaction) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic among Indian consumers increased sharply. The results of this study found that E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness. These results support the results of research by Malarvizhi *et al.*, (2022) and Masa'deh *et al.*, (2021) which found that EWOM has a positive effect on brand awareness.

Brand awareness is an approach for consumers to know, recognize, and remember a particular brand (Barreda *et al.*, 2020). APMS can help increase awareness and build brand image by allowing brands to connect with potential and existing consumers (Seo and Park, 2018). Since time and place are not constraints for APMS, a brand's presence on social media platforms can effectively educate, familiarize, and increase brand awareness (Moments, Sultana and Haque, 2020; Malarvizhi *et al.*, 2022).

The results of this study found that brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose a university. These results support the research of Barreda *et al.* (2020), which found that strong brand awareness influences brand-related factors, including brand image and brand loyalty. In addition, Anselmsson, Bondesson, & Johansson (2014) found a positive influence of brand awareness on brand loyalty and willingness to pay a premium price. Consumers who recognize a brand's logo are more likely to suggest a brand and are prepared to pay a premium price for its products or services (Malarvizhi *et al.*, 2022). Previous studies have also revealed that a high level of brand awareness can help brands to generate premium prices in the market (Anselmsson, Bondesson and Johansson, 2014; Bougenville and Ruswanti, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Competition between universities in competing for prospective students is getting tighter. One way to win the competition is to have a good image. A good image is built through good communication and on target. Because the target of prospective students today uses social media more as their means of communication, marketing communication through social media activities is the right marketing strategy. The results of this study found that marketing activities through social media have a positive effect on the decision to choose a university. The components of social media marketing activities that influence the decision to choose a university are entertainment, interactivity, trendy, customization, and E-WOM. Meanwhile, what affects brand awareness is entertainment, customization, and E-WOM.

Brand awareness partially mediates the relationship between entertainment, interactivity, and E-WOM with the decision to choose a university. Brand awareness does not mediate the relationship between trendy and customization and the decision of choosing a university. The implication of the results of this study is that to improve the decision to choose a university for prospective new students, the university must carry out marketing activities through social media that are entertaining, able to interact well with prospective new students, convey trending or up-to-date information, provide service options according to consumer needs, and strive to obtain positive E-WOM from prospective new students.

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