



The Influence of Location on The Decision to Choose a Private University in Bali: The Mediation Effect of Brand Image

I Gusti Ngurah Satria Wijaya^{1*}, Annisa Rizky Nirmala², Putu Febby Aldora³ 

^{1,2}Department of Digital Business, Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Stikom Bali, Denpasar, Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan tinggi menjadi sumber inovasi dan solusi bagi pertumbuhan dan pengembangan bangsa seiring dengan berkembangnya zaman. Salah satu isu penting pendidikan tinggi adalah penurunan jumlah mahasiswa baru yang masuk ke perguruan tinggi swasta (PTS) dipengaruhi oleh karena adanya pandemi covid-19 dan perubahan beberapa Perguruan Tinggi Negeri menjadi Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Berbadan Hukum. Hal ini menyebabkan persaingan antar PTS semakin ketat, tidak dapat dihindari. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisa lokasi terhadap keputusan pemilihan perguruan tinggi swasta dengan variabel citra merek sebagai variabel mediasinya. Subjek penelitian ini berjumlah 200 mahasiswa. Data dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan metode kuesioner dengan instrumen berupa lembar kuesioner. Teknik analisis yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah analisa structural equation model (SEM). Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa, terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan antara citra merek terhadap keputusan perguruan tinggi swasta. Sehingga dapat disimpulkan bahwa, secara parsial lokasi dan citra merek berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keputusan pemilihan perguruan tinggi swasta serta lokasi berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap citra merek perguruan tinggi swasta. Sedangkan untuk pengaruh tidak langsung, citra merek mampu memediasi secara parsial pengaruh lokasi secara positif signifikan terhadap keputusan pemilihan perguruan tinggi swasta. Penelitian ini dapat menjadi panduan bagi pemerintah dan pengelola perguruan tinggi dalam merancang kebijakan pendidikan tinggi yang mendukung ketersediaan pendidikan berkualitas di berbagai lokasi, sehingga membuka akses yang lebih luas bagi siswa dalam memilih perguruan tinggi sesuai dengan kebutuhan dan nilai-nilai personal mereka.

ABSTRACT

Higher education is a source of innovation and solutions for the growth and development of the nation along with the times. One of the critical issues of higher education is the decline in the number of new students entering private universities (PTS) influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the change of several State Universities to Legal Entity State Universities. This causes competition between PTS to be tighter and unavoidable. This study aims to analyze the location of private university selection decisions with the brand image variable as the mediating variable. The subjects of this study amounted to 200 students. The data in this study were collected using a questionnaire method with an instrument in the form of a questionnaire sheet. The analysis technique used in this research is structural equation model (SEM) analysis. This study's results indicate a significant influence between brand image and private college decisions. So it can be concluded that, partially, location and brand image have a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose a private university, and the area has a positive and significant impact on the brand image of private universities. As for the indirect effect, brand image can partially mediate the considerable influence of location on private college selection decisions. This research can guide the government and higher education managers in designing policies that support the availability of quality education in various places, thereby opening more comprehensive access for students to choose universities according to their needs and values.

*Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ngurah_satria@stikom-bali.ac.id (I Gusti Ngurah Satria Wijaya)

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is one of the main pillars of Indonesia's education system, functioning at an advanced level after secondary education (Afida et al., 2024; Djuhartono et al., 2022; Sumiyaty et al., 2023; Zulfikar, 2024). This level aims to provide a more in-depth and specific education according to the student's chosen scientific field. Higher education provides instruction in science and skills and contributes to the formation of professionalism and character development. Universities in Indonesia offer a variety of academic programs, ranging from diploma, bachelor, professional education, master, to doctoral programs. Diploma programs usually focus more on practical and work-ready skills, while undergraduate programs emphasize mastery of theory and solid scientific foundations. Master's and doctoral programs, on the other hand, provide more in-depth advanced education emphasizing research and scientific development in specific fields. Institutions that organize higher education in Indonesia consist of state universities (PTN) and private universities (PTS) (Freeman et al., 2023; Trisna Nugraha & Siti Nur Azizah Puji Ayu Lestari, 2024). Both have similar objectives in providing access to quality education but with differences in management, funding, and accountability. The government generally funds state universities, while private universities rely on student fees and other funding sources. Many higher education institutions in Indonesia include universities, institutes, colleges, polytechnics, academies, and community colleges (Dalimunthe, 2023; S & Wijoyo, 2023; Scorita & Handayani, 2022; Zakki, 2023). Universities offer various disciplines, while institutes and colleges usually focus on a particular field, such as technology or social sciences. Polytechnics and academies provide vocational education that focuses on practical skills in various fields. Meanwhile, community colleges are more oriented towards education and training tailored to the needs of the local community, which is usually designed to improve job skills or meet the specific needs of the local area (Kango et al., 2021; Prajayanti & Ulya, 2022; Sulaiman & Press, 2022).

Human priorities change over time, and uncertainty affects the selection process. Prospect theory proposed by Tversky and Kahneman in 1992 shows that the assessment of losses and gains affects choices made in uncertain situations (Frank Fischer, 2021; Hartono et al., 2020; Nanath et al., 2022). New situations due to policy changes by governments and the COVID-19 pandemic are challenging for universities and prospective students. This requires an assessment of how decision criteria have changed over time. This research seeks to fill some of the gaps in the literature on university decision-making systems and offer some perspectives on decision-making priorities in such changing scenarios. Factors that influence student choice models is another common theme in the literature. These criteria refer to the various features or benefits that students look for when deciding to choose between alternatives. The factors can be categorised into (1) academic, (2) non-academic (3) and career-related factors. One of the academic factors discussed is the reputation of the college, which is closely related to the image of the institution from the marketing side of the private college. The image of the institution is formed through practical marketing activities. Universities must implement effective marketing to improve their image in front of consumers or prospective students. A good image is expected to influence the decision to choose a college. For non-academic factors, it is represented by geographical location, where in the post-pandemic situation learning uses a lot of offline systems and online systems so that it becomes a topic of discussion to research its influence on college selection decisions (Adha & Irawan, 2022; Nanath et al., 2022).

This study's novelty is that by highlighting the mediating effect of brand image in the context of location choice, it provides a new, more comprehensive perspective on student decision-making. The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need for private universities to understand the factors that can increase their attractiveness, especially amidst increasingly fierce competition in the higher education sector. Previous research on the factors that influence university selection decisions states that university reputation directly influences university selection. Other researchers also stated that university reputation directly influences student loyalty behavior. Other researchers also state that university reputation directly influences student loyalty behavior (Kaushal & Ali, 2020; Nanath et al., 2022; Nuseir & El Refae, 2022). In addition, other studies also state that there is a significant influence between brand image and student interest in choosing XYZ College, while location is found to have no effect. Different results were obtained by other researchers who stated that the factor that has an influence on university selection in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the location of (Nuseir & El Refae, 2022; Perkasa & Putra, 2020).

Based on the issues from the formulation of the problem, supporting theories, and the development of the theory from the previous studies above, the authors surveyed to analyze location selection on private college decisions in Bali with brand image variables as mediating variables. This case study takes research objects from STIKOM Bali College of Computer Science and Business students in Denpasar. This selection is because STIKOM Bali Institute of Technology and Business has a high and stable student enrollment history compared to other private universities. The analysis method used to solve this problem is the SEM-PLS analysis technique so that the study results will provide appropriate recommendations for managers of

private universities in the future. This study aims to analyze how the location of private universities affects choosing a campus by considering the brand image as a mediating variable. It is expected to provide strategic guidance for private universities in developing an image that can increase the campus's attractiveness in the eyes of prospective students.

2. METHODS

This research uses a quantitative approach with an experimental design, which aims to test the influence of several variables by involving empirical data (Yudatama et al., 2019)(Aithal & Aithal, 2020). The experimental design was chosen to see the impact of certain factors on college selection decisions. This research relies on primary data as the main source of information, which is obtained directly from respondents through an online questionnaire. The subjects of this study were students of class 2023 from STIKOM Bali. A sample of 200 students was selected from the population using the purposive sampling technique, which ensures that the sample has characteristics relevant to the research objectives. The selection of subjects was based on the consideration that this new generation of students has a fresh outlook on determining the decision to choose a college. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires containing questions about the variables to be tested in the study. Each questionnaire instrument has been arranged in a grid that ensures its content validity, where each question item is designed to measure a specific aspect of the variable under study. The validity of the instrument is carried out through content validity tests by experts as well as statistical tests to ensure that the instrument can measure concepts appropriately. The data obtained were analyzed using quantitative analysis methods with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3 software. This PLS-SEM technique was chosen because it does not require the assumption of normal distribution in the data and can be used on a relatively small sample size. SEM analysis is carried out to test the hypothesis thoroughly, where this technique allows direct parameter estimation on the model without goodness of fit requirements. PLS-SEM is suitable for models with complex causal structures and is widely used in management and education because it effectively estimates relationships between variables based on empirical data (Hair et al., 2019; Purwanto & Sudargini, 2021).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondents in this study were new students of batch 2023 of various study programmes at ITB Stikom Bali from . The number of respondents was 121 respondents. Data collection through questionnaire distribution through a few obstacles due to the very small number of questionnaires responded or answered by respondents. However, the number of samples used in this study has met the processing standards which refer to Hair's opinion in Lin et al. (2020), namely the number of parameters multiplied by 5-10. The profile of questionnaire fillers is explained based on gender, study programme, region of origin, domicile and student status. Details of the respondent profile can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

| Characteristics | Category | Amount |
|------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| Gender | Man | 76 |
| | Female | 45 |
| Study Programme | Information System | 26 |
| | Information System | 10 |
| | Information Technology | 21 |
| | Digital Business | 57 |
| | Management of Informatic | 7 |
| Region of Origin | Bali | 96 |
| | Outside Bali | 25 |
| Domicile | Denpasar | 68 |
| | Badung | 26 |
| | Gianyar | 10 |
| | Tabanan | 6 |
| | Bangli | 2 |
| Student Status | Klungkung | 4 |
| | Karangasem | 3 |

| Characteristics | Category | Amount |
|-----------------|----------------------|--------|
| | Jembrana | 2 |
| | Studying | 99 |
| | Studying and working | 22 |

Testing the measuring instruments for all variables in this study using a questionnaire, submitted to respondents to be able to provide statements according to what they feel and experience. Questionnaires as instruments must meet the main requirements, namely valid and reliable. The following are the results of testing the validity and reliability of the research questionnaire. The validity test with a sample of 50, so the value of r table $(50 - 2; 0.05) = 0.284$ which will be compared with the value of r count. If r count is greater than r table, it can be said that the measuring instrument used is valid (Siregar et al., 2022). The results of the validation test can be seen in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Validity Test Results

| Question | r count | r table | Description |
|----------|---------|---------|-------------|
| X2.1 | 0.781** | 0.284 | Valid |
| X2.2 | 0.835** | 0.284 | Valid |
| X2.3 | 0.718** | 0.284 | Valid |
| X2.4 | 0.651** | 0.284 | Valid |
| X2.5 | 0.855** | 0.284 | Valid |
| M1 | 0.739** | 0.284 | Valid |
| M2 | 0.811** | 0.284 | Valid |
| M3 | 0.728** | 0.284 | Valid |
| M4 | 0.732** | 0.284 | Valid |
| Y1 | 0.729** | 0.284 | Valid |
| Y2 | 0.719** | 0.284 | Valid |
| Y3 | 0.676** | 0.284 | Valid |
| Y4 | 0.547** | 0.284 | Valid |
| Y5 | 0.459** | 0.284 | Valid |

The results of the Cronbach's Alpha method reliability test calculation (r count) can be seen in the Cronbach's Alpha column Table 3. So it can be said that the Cronbach's Alpha results for 50 data from items or 19 questions. To find out whether the data is reliable or not, then if the calculation of r count $>$ r table 5%, where r count is seen from the calculation table while r table 5% is 0.4555. From this value it can be concluded that r count $>$ r table 5%, so that the data is reliable or reliable and consistent.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|
| Location | 0.817 | 5 |
| Brand Image | 0.741 | 4 |
| Decision to Choose | 0.598 | 5 |

In data analysis techniques using SmartPLS 3, there are criteria that are carried out to assess the outer model, namely convergent validity which can be seen from the loading factor and AVE values, discriminant validity can be seen in the cross-loading between indicators and their constructs, for reliability testing can be seen from the composite reliability value and Cronbach's alpha. Convergent validity relates to the principle that the measure (manifest variable) of a construct should be highly correlated. The convergent validity test is carried out by looking at the loading factor value and compared with the rule of thumb (> 0.70), then looking at the average variance extracted (AVE) value and compared with the rule of thumb (> 0.50). For discriminant validity, if the correlation of the construct with the indicator is greater than the size of the other constructs, then it shows that the latent constructs predict the size of their block better than the size of the other block. Reliability test with the aim of proving the accuracy, consistency, and accuracy of the instrument in measuring constructs. The reliability test is carried out by looking at the value of the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha value, then compared with the rule of thumb (> 0.70). Adapun hasil nilai Loading Factor, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, dan Composite Reliability disajikan pada Tabel 4.

Table 4. Loading Factor, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability Values

| Variable | Indicator | Loading Factor | AVE | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------|-------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Brand Image | M2 | 0.824 | 0.635 | 0.715 | 0.838 |
| | M3 | 0.859 | | | |
| | M4 | 0.699 | | | |
| Location | X1.1 | 0.884 | 0.762 | 0.896 | 0.927 |
| | X1.2 | 0.846 | | | |
| | X1.3 | 0.869 | | | |
| | X1.5 | 0.892 | | | |
| Decision to Choose | Y1 | 0.75 | 0.596 | 0.777 | 0.855 |
| | Y2 | 0.828 | | | |
| | Y3 | 0.751 | | | |
| | Y5 | 0.756 | | | |

Based on Table 4 for the loading factor value on each indicator on each variable in the test, has a value greater than the rule of thumb value (> 0.70) except for the M1 brand image indicator of 0.699. However, these results are still acceptable for model validity. For the average variance extracted (AVE) value of each variable, it has a value greater than the rule of thumb (> 0.50). From the results of reliability testing for the value of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, it turns out that it is able to produce a value > from the rule of thumb value (> 0.70).

Table 5. Cross Loading

| | Brand Image | Decision to Choose | Location |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------|
| Brand Image | 0.797 | | |
| Decision to Choose | 0.524 | 0.772 | |
| Location | 0.564 | 0.602 | 0.873 |

For the discriminant validity of the indicators in the test, it can be seen in the cross-loading between the indicators and their constructs. From Table 5, it can be seen that the correlation between the brand image construct and its indicators is higher than that of other constructs. This also applies to other constructs with each indicator. This shows that latent constructs predict indicators in their blocks better than other constructs. The following results of the evaluation of the structural model (inner model) through the bootstrapping procedure for testing the hypotheses proposed in this study are presented in Figure 1 and Table 6.

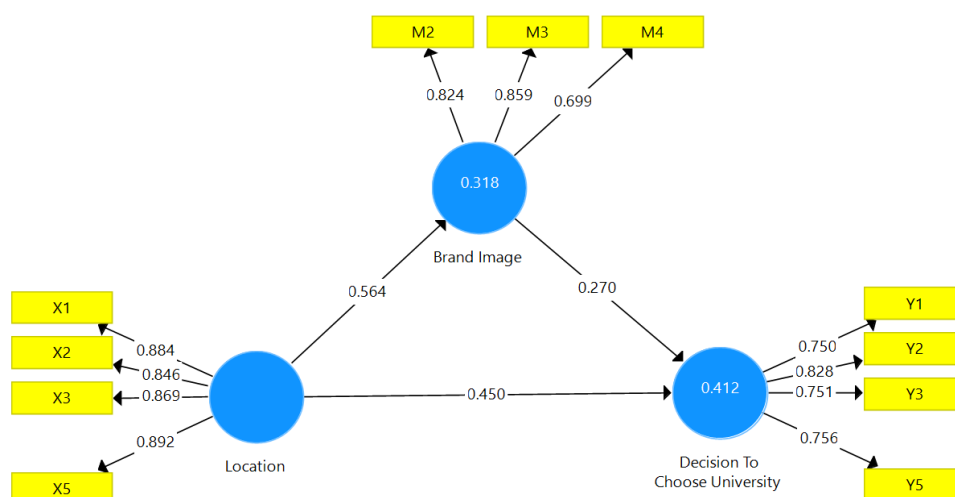


Figure 1. Measurement Inner Model

Table 6. R Square

| | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Brand Image | 0.318 | 0.312 |
| Decision To Choose | 0.412 | 0.402 |

The structural model or inner model is evaluated by looking at the percentage of variance explained, namely by looking at the R Square value for the dependent latent construct. The rule of thumb value for R Square, namely 0.75 is categorised as strong; 0.50 is categorised as moderate, and 0.25 is categorised as weak (Anshori et al., 2022)(Romy et al., 2024). From the analysis results for testing (Table 5, Table 6), the R Square value for each construct is obtained, namely the PT selection decision construct of 0.412, meaning that the variability of marketing performance that can be explained by location and brand image in the model is 41.2% and is included in the weak model category. The Hypothesis results, Path Coefficients (Direct Effect), T Statistics, and P Values for model testing are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Hypotheses, Path Coefficients (Direct Effects), T Statistics, and P Values for Model Testing

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | P Values |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Brand Image-> Decision To Choose | 0.27 | 0.259 | 0.105 | 2.562 | 0.011 |
| Location -> Brand Image | 0.564 | 0.571 | 0.075 | 7.538 | 0 |
| Location -> Decision To Choose | 0.45 | 0.465 | 0.103 | 4.379 | 0 |

From Table 7, the results of the path coefficient can be seen that for the effect of location on the decision to choose University, namely location has a direct positive and significant effect on the decision to choose university, namely with a significance value of 0.000 <5% alpha level. For location to brand image, namely location has a direct positive and significant effect on brand image, namely with a significance value of 0.000 <5% alpha level. For brand image on PT selection decisions, namely brand image has a direct positive and significant effect on university selection decisions, namely with a significance value of 0.001 <5% alpha level. The Hypothesis results, Path Coefficients (Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects), T Statistics, and P Values for testing are presented in Table 8. For indirect effects in table 8, location has a positive and significant indirect effect on university selection decisions mediated by brand image, namely with a significance value of 0.028 < from the 5% alpha level.

Table 8. Hipotesis, Path Coefficients (Direct, Indirect, and Total effect), T Statistik, dan P Values for Test

| Exogenous | Path Coefficient | | | P Values | | Result | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------|-------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Direct | Indirect | Total | Direct | Indirect | Direct | Indirect |
| Brand Image-> Decision To Choose | 0.27 | - | | 0.011 | | Supported | |
| Location -> Brand Image | 0.564 | | | 0 | | Supported | |
| Location -> Decision To Choose | 0.602 | 0.152 | 0.754 | 0 | 0.028 | Supported | Supported |

Discussion

For the results of hypothesis testing, namely the relationship between brand image and university selection decisions, the results obtained in the form of a direct positive and significant influence on university selection decisions. These results are in line with research conducted by (Kango et al., 2021; Kaushal & Ali, 2020; Nanath et al., 2022). The brand image variable is supported by indicators in the form of the reputation (good name) of the college, the superiority of the college's study programme, and the uniqueness of the college's study programme. For the relationship between location selection and university selection decisions, the results obtained in the form of location have a direct positive and significant effect on university selection decisions. The location variable is supported by indicators in the form of easy access to the location of the college, a safe location and wide parking available, an environment that supports a learning culture, and visibility (easy to observe / monitor) of the location of the college. For the relationship between location and brand image awareness, the results show that location has a direct positive and significant effect on the brand image of university.

For indirect effects, location has an indirect positive and significant effect on university selection decisions mediated by brand image. Mediation from brand image is partial mediation, because the direct relationship between location and university selection decisions shows a significant relationship and for the indirect relationship through brand image shows a significant relationship as well. The managerial implication of the results of this study is that college management needs to pay attention to location variables and brand image for the basis for prospective students to choose their college. For location, it is supported by indicators of easy access to the location of the college, a safe location and wide parking available, an environment that supports a learning culture, and visibility (easy to observe / monitor) of the location of the college. For brand image, it is supported by indicators of the reputation (good name) of the college, the excellence of the college's study programme, and the uniqueness of the college's study programme.

The results showed that brand image has a positive and significant influence on university selection decisions, which means that the better the university's image, the more likely students are to choose the university. This finding is consistent with previous research, which identified that reputation and excellence of study programs are essential indicators in influencing prospective students' decisions. In addition, research from other researchers also supports that a strong brand image increases the attractiveness of universities, especially for prospective students who prioritize academic quality and reputation. This study also reveals that location has a significant and positive effect on the decision to choose a university, which means that prospective students tend to select universities with strategic locations that are easily accessible. This result is from other researchers, who found that the convenience and safety of the area, as well as the availability of supporting facilities such as parking lots, are essential factors in determining the choice of university. In addition, this study confirms that location influences direct selection decisions and impacts the university's brand image, where strategic location increases brand awareness and reputation among prospective students.

This study has advantages in its comprehensive approach to the factors influencing college selection decisions. By including the mediating variable of brand image, this study provides deeper insight into the interaction between location and brand image in influencing decisions. In addition, the SEM-PLS analysis method allows this study to obtain accurate results in estimating the causal relationship between variables (Otok, 2019; Qotrunada & Hascaryani, 2024). This research significantly contributes to understanding the factors that influence college selection decisions, especially in Indonesia. The main contribution is the role of the brand image variable as a mediator that strengthens the influence of location on selection decisions. This research can be a reference for universities in developing more effective marketing strategies, focusing on improving their image and choosing a strategic location.

The managerial implication of this research is that universities need to pay attention to both location and brand image to attract prospective students. A strategic and safe location, with supporting facilities such as parking and easy access, will increase the college's attractiveness. In addition, building a strong brand image through improving reputation, uniqueness of study programs, and academic quality is an effective strategy to strengthen the college's position in the education market. This study has several limitations, one is that the sample coverage is limited to one university in Bali, so the results may not fully apply to a broader context. In addition, this study only considered the variables of location and brand image without including other variables that may be relevant, such as tuition fees or career prospects after graduation. Recommendations for future research include expanding the scope of the study by involving various universities in different locations and adding other variables that have the potential to influence college selection decisions so that the research results can provide more comprehensive and applicable insights.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research model, location has a positive and significant effect on private higher education selection decisions, brand image has a positive and significant effect on private higher education selection decisions, location has a positive and significant effect on the brand image of private universities. For indirect effects, brand image is able to partially mediate the effect of location on private college selection decisions. The results of this study can provide recommendations for the management of higher education management. From the results of this study, it is hoped that other researchers in the future will carry out further research by re-analysing other variables that influence university selection decisions, and using other research methods and expanding the scope of the sample used to other universities so as to strengthen and generalise the population of the results of this study.

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