

The Factors Determining the Decision of Vocational Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of price, promotion, and motivation mediated by brand image on students' decision to choose Lampung State Polytechnic in Lampung Province, Indonesia. The population in this study consists of all active students at Lampung State Polytechnic. The sampling technique used is the probability sampling method, with a stratified random sampling technique carried out proportionally, resulting in a sample size of 115 participants. This research design employs causal studies to examine the influence of variables on other variables. The analytical tools used in this study is quantitative analysis. Research data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed quantitatively using Partial Least-Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that price and promotion have a positive and significant effect on brand image. Additionally, promotion, motivation, and brand image also positively and significantly influence students' decisions to choose Lampung State Polytechnic (Polinela). Brand image serves as a mediator for the influence of price and promotion on students' decisions to choose Lampung State Polytechnic. The findings of this research can be used as a basis for policy makers to formulate effective promotions and cultivate a positive image within the community.

KEYWORDS

Brand Image; Higher Education; Motivation; Price; Promotion

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Introduction

Higher education plays an important and strategic role in determining the sustainability of development and change of a nation through increasing intellectual intelligence, moral and character development. Higher education will produce skilled personnel who are ready to work and future leaders. Higher education plays a crucial and strategic role in determining a nation's sustainability and its ability to adapt to change by enhancing intellectual intelligence, moral values, and character development. Higher education institutions are instrumental in producing skilled professionals who are prepared for the workforce and future leadership roles. As of 2020, there were 3,403 institutions (74.09%) offering Academic Education and 1,190 institutions (25.91%) providing Vocational Education (Dikti, 2020). Universities are categorized into State Universities (PTN), Private Universities (PTS), Religious Universities (PTA), and Official Universities (PTK), with private universities comprising the majority at 66.27%.

The large number of universities makes competition tighter to get quality students. Students generally still prioritize choosing a university compared to vocational education. Based the assumption that undergraduate education is superior to vocational education (LP3I, 2020). Higher education in the form of University (Academic Education) and Vocational (Vocational Education) has different emphases. Vocational education aims to prepare graduates ready to work and who have expertise and performance in their fields (Sukoco et al., 2019), while academic education graduates (Universities, Institutes, and Colleges) focus more on scientific depth (LP3I, 2020). Vocational education plays an important role in building a developing country. The importance of vocational education makes the government focus more on developing vocational education (Suciati & Maulidiyanti, 2019). The form of vocational education consists of Diploma 1, Diploma 2, Diploma 3, Diploma 4 or applied Bachelor, Applied Master, and Applied Doctoral programs (Sukoco et al., 2019).

A student's decision to choose their education plays a crucial role in shaping their future. Vocational higher education is designed to produce a skilled and competent workforce, making it an appealing option for students. Factors influencing students' choice of college include the cost of education and promotional efforts (Suciati & Maulidiyanti, 2019). Motivation also plays a significant role in students' decision-making process. Job security is a key motivator for students when choosing a university (Solikhah et al., 2016). Furthermore, a college's image also plays a pivotal role in a student's decision-making process. After learning about a college's brand image and forming a positive perception, students make their choice (Bayuaji et al., 2022). A favorable image of higher education institutions can also increase their appeal to prospective students (Sari & Sylvia, 2020). The results of previous research show that price and promotion are the main factors that determine consumer decisions. The results of research conducted by (Suciati & Maulidiyanti, 2019) show that the marketing mix element has the greatest influence on students' decisions to study Vocational Education at UI is promotion. The results of (Arifin et al., 2020) showing that promotions influence brand image and students' decisions to choose IPB. The results also show the motivation influences

students' decisions to study at IPB University. Research conducted by (Parmana et al., 2019) shows that promotions and prices influence the consumer purchasing decisions. While research on the marketing mix and its impact on university selection is prevalent, studies that integrate marketing mix components with community-perceived motivation and university image in the context of Vocational Education are less common. Given the significant role of Vocational Education in producing a workforce ready for employment, this research holds great importance. Its objective is to examine the influence of price, promotion, motivational factors, and brand image on the decision to choose vocational higher education.

Literature review

This study uses marketing theory, specifically the marketing mix. The marketing mix refers to the factors a company can control to meet market demand (Mohammadi & Gilaninia, 2016). It's a crucial concept for businesses as it can impact product demand (Eraqi, 2011) and a company's competitive position (Goi, 2006). The marketing mix consists of product elements, pricing strategies, promotional efforts for product introduction, and product distribution channels, all working together to elicit the desired response from a specific target audience (Solomon et al., 2015). The marketing mix plays a role in consumer decision making (Satit et al., 2012). Even though the marketing mix consists of several elements, this research only uses two elements of the marketing mix, namely price and promotion. As research conducted by (Arifin et al., 2020; Hermiyenti & Wardi, 2019; Parmana et al., 2019) shows that promotion and price are determinants of brand image and consumer purchasing decisions.

Price

The marketing mix comprises elements that companies can control to meet market demand (M. S. O. Mohammadi & Gilaninia, 2016). This concept is crucial as it can influence product demand (Eraqi, 2011) and a company's competitiveness (Goi, 2009). The marketing mix also plays a significant role in consumer decision-making (Satit et al., 2012). Price represents the amount consumers must exchange to receive an offer (Solomon et al., 2015). It is related to the sacrifice consumers make to obtain a product (Zeithaml, 1988). Marketers aim to enhance consumer perceptions of value by either increasing product quality or reducing prices, using the pricing element to pique consumer interest (Solomon et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2014). Price is frequently used as an indicator of quality for unfamiliar brands; high prices are often associated with good quality (Zeithaml, 1988). While higher prices can enhance perceptions of quality and buying interest, they can also deter purchases due to cost considerations (Dodds et al., 1991). Conversely, reasonable prices enhance value for consumers and influence purchasing decisions (Hermiyenti & Wardi, 2019). At times, marketers employ higher prices to convey messages about product quality or sophistication (Solomon et al., 2015). In college, the price, which includes tuition and donations to development agencies, exhibits a counterintuitive relationship with enrollment rates but shows a positive correlation with tuition set by competitors (Leslie & Brinkman, 1987). This section consists surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated.

Promotion

Promotion, or marketing communication, is the effort made by marketers to inform consumers about their products and encourage potential customers to make purchases (Solomon et al., 2015). Promotion involves developing appropriate communication with consumers regarding the company, its products, and services (Kucuk, 2017). Its aim is to inform consumers about a product's use, the actors using it, its location, and the timing of its use (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Promotions can take the form of personal sales, TV advertisements, store coupons, billboards, magazine advertisements, publicity releases, and an increasing amount of online communication like social media (Solomon et al., 2015).

Motivation

Motivation is a complex factor that influences customer attitudes, beliefs, and emotions, and it plays a crucial role in determining product-buying behavior (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019; Arifin et al., 2020). Humans have needs, drives and motives when engaging in social interactions (Reykowski, 1982), social motivation tries to explain impulsive actions caused by internal and external influences that cause intentions and behavior to act (DeCharms dan Muir, 1978). Motivation describes a person's motive for doing something, how long a person is willing to maintain an activity, and how hard they try to pursue the activity (Daumiller et al., 2020). Each individual has different motivations when choosing a college, but there is limited research on individual motivations in this context (Skatova & Ferguson, 2014). There are four reasons for choosing college, namely a promising career, liking a particular subject, the opportunity to help others, and ease of entering college (Skatova & Ferguson, 2014). Research conducted by (Wilkins et al., 2012) show that the motivation influenced by the comfort and appeal of the host country.

Brand Image

Brand image describes the extrinsic aspects of a product or service, including how a brand fulfills a customer's psychological or social needs (Kotler & Keller, 2016). It represents the overall consumer perception derived from information and knowledge about the brand (Wijaya, 2013). Marketing communications, especially advertising, play a significant role in shaping brand image (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The brand image of universities can be assessed based on how people perceive factors such as innovation, educational seriousness, business practices, ethics, social responsibility, as well as the provision of opportunities and individual attention (Sultan & Wong, 2019). Previous studies have shown a relationship between price, promotion, motivation, and brand image. (Sultan & Wong, 2019) demonstrated that brand image has a positive and significant impact on university choice behavior. Studies by Ambolau et al. (2015), Novansa & Ali (2017), and Sari & Sylvia (2020) also indicate that brand image influences decisions. However, research conducted by Ruhamak & Husniati (2018) suggests that brand image does not influence consumer decisions.

Research conducted by Benhardy et al., (2020) shows the influence of price on brand image and purchasing decisions. Results from studies by Arifin et al. (2020) and (Novansa & Ali, 2017) also suggest that price influences decisions. Additionally, research by Suciati & Maulidiyanti (2019) indicates that the most influential element of the marketing mix on students' decisions to enroll in Vocational Education is promotion. These findings align with research by (Arifin et al., 2020), which shows that promotion affects brand image and student decisions. Based on the literature search that has been conducted, the following research model and hypothesis were formulated:

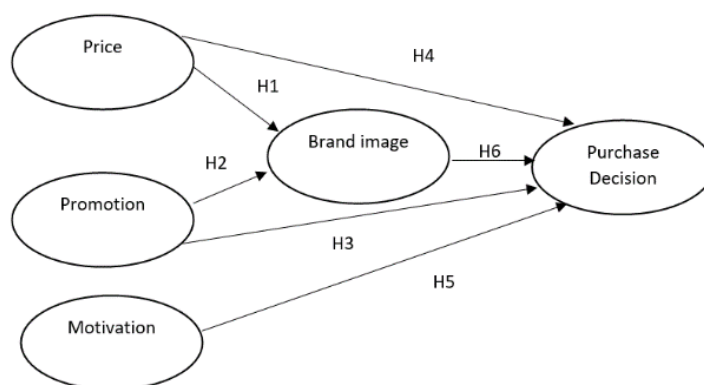


Figure 1. Research Model

- H1 Price has a significant effect on brand image
- H2 Promotion has a significant effect on brand image
- H3 Promotion has a significant influence on student decisions
- H4 Price has a significant effect on student decisions
- H5 Motivation has a significant effect on student decisions
- H6 Brand image has a significant influence on student decisions

Methods

This study employed quantitative methods, as described by (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative methods is the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and documenting research results. The population under investigation consisted of all students who were registered and actively enrolled at Lampung State Polytechnic (Polinela). According to data from the Polinela academic department, the total number of students at Polinela is 4,130 individuals. To select our samples, we used the probability sampling method, employing stratified random sampling techniques carried out proportionally. This approach ensures that different subgroups within the population are adequately represented in the sample. The determination of the sample size adhered to the guideline proposed by (Joseph F Hair et al., 2019), suggesting that the sample size should be at least 5-10 times the number of variable items under study. The sample size is 115 respondents. The study used a survey method by distributing questionnaires through Google Forms using a five-point Likert scale to gather the data. The data was analyzed using Partial Least-Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This statistical approach allows for the assessment of relationships and interactions among variables, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research model and hypotheses.

Results

Data collection take in May 2023. The respondents in this study were 115 people from 5 majors at the Lamp State Polytechnic, namely Food Crop Cultivation, Plantation Plant Cultivation, Agricultural Technology, Livestock, and Economics and Business. Respondents in this study were female (54%). Because of the distribution of questionnaires done in even semesters, the research respondents consisted of students in semester 2 (39%), semester 4 (23%),

semester 6 (25%), and semester 8 (13%). The instruments in this study are measured by indicators adopted from previous research, prices are measured by 2 indicators (Arifin et al., 2020), promotions are measured by 5 indicators (Arifin et al., 2020; Suciati & Maulidiyanti, 2019), motivation 4 indicators (Arifin et al., 2020; Solikhah et al., 2016), brand image 9 indicators (Arifin et al., 2020; Solikhah et al., 2016; Sultan & Wong, 2019) and decision of 3 indicators (Suciati & Maulidiyanti, 2019).

Measurement model result

Table 1. Validity and reliability test results

Variable	Indicators	Item	Loading Factor	AVE	Composite Reliability
Price	PR1	Affordable cost	0.803	0,676	0,807
	PR2	Scholarship	0.842		
Promotion	PRM1	Information from the school	0.715	0,701	0,824
	PRM2	Mass media	0.629		
	PRM3	Educational fairs	0.625		
	PRM4	Website	0.721		
	PRM5	Social Media	0.707		
Motivasi	M1	Increase knowledge	0.771	0,684	0,867
	M2	Personal pride	0.858		
	M3	Social status	0.824		
	M4	Location near home	0.269		
Brand Image	BI1	Reputation	0.855	0,644	0,942
	BI2	Quality of education	0.866		
	BI3	Research quality	0.889		
	BI4	Competitiveness of graduates	0.750		
	BI5	Complete facilities	0.736		
	BI6	Comfortable environment	0.766		
	BI7	Become desirable	0.783		
	BI8	Ethical standards	0.730		
	BI9	Innovative vocation	0.827		
Choosing Decision	PD1	Ease of getting a job	0.880	0,798	0,922
	PD2	Internship in Industry	0.884		
	PD3	Guaranteed competence	0.915		

The results of the convergent validity test indicated that two indicators related to the promotion variables were invalid and excluded from subsequent tests. The test results demonstrate that all variables possess an AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value exceeding 0.5, signifying that all research variables exhibit strong validity. Additionally, the composite reliability values are all above 0.7, indicating that all variables in this study exhibit high reliability. This aligns with the recommendation of (J. F. Hair et al., 2014), which suggests that to assess construct reliability, the Composite Reliability value must exceed 0.7.

Structural Model

Table 2. Coefficient of determinant (R²)

Variable	R Square
Brand Image	0,371
Choosing Decision	0,613

Table 2 presents the R-squared (R²) value for students' decisions to choose Lampung State Polytechnic, which is 0.613. This indicates that 61.3% of students' decisions can be explained by the variables of brand image, price, promotion, and motivation, while the remaining portion is explained by other variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is conducted based on the results of the structural model testing (inner model), using t-statistic values and p-values. A hypothesis is considered accepted if the p-value is less than 0.05 and if it has a t-statistic value greater than the critical t-table value, which is typically set at 1.96.

Table 3. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Path	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value	Result
1	Price -> Brand Image	0.444	5.239	0.000	Supported
2	Promotion -> Brand Image	0.260	2.869	0.004	Supported
3	Promotion -> Purchase Decision	0.202	2.322	0.021	Supported
4	Price -> Purchase Decision	0.330	3.621	0.000	Supported
5	Motivasi -> Purchase Decision	0.198	2.211	0.027	Supported
6	Brand Image-> Purchase Decision	0.526	5.328	0.000	Supported

In Table 3, six hypotheses tested exhibit t-statistic values exceeding 1.96 and p-values below 0.05. Consequently, this confirms the support for all the proposed hypotheses.

Discussion

The SEM results analysis support for all the proposed hypotheses. The price (tuition fees) has a significant impact on brand image. The effect of education fees on brand image is 0.444, which implies that more affordable education fees (UKT) contribute to an improved brand image for Polinela. These findings align with previous research by Benhardy et al. (2020) and Hidayat et al. (2018), which also emphasize the significant influence of tuition fees on brand image. At Polinela, tuition fees (UKT) are determined based on students' parents' income and their ability to pay. Additionally, the choice of study program by the student also plays a role in determining the tuition fees (UKT). Programs with superior accreditation and high demand from students typically have different fee structures from other programs. The cost of education is a crucial factor in university selection, alongside the quality of education provided (Amri & Yahya, 2021). Polinela offers various scholarships that greatly assist students in financing their education. These scholarships include the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP), which benefits economically disadvantaged students. Moreover, sons and daughters of farmers and fishermen in Lampung Province receive educational scholarships from the Regional Government of Lampung Province. Additionally, some companies extend scholarships to their employees' children who study at Polinela.

Promotion has a positive and significant impact on brand image. The effect of promotion on brand image is 0.260, indicating that more effective promotion efforts enhance Polinela's brand image. also known as marketing communication, used by companies directly or indirectly inform, persuade, and remind consumers about the products and brands they offer. These findings align with previous research by Arifin et al. (2020) and Hidayat et al. (2018), which emphasize the significant influence of promotion on brand image. This underscores the importance of the information conveyed in promotional activities. According to respondents' feedback, they primarily obtain information about Polinela through its social media channels, namely Instagram ([politeknik_negeri_lampung](https://www.instagram.com/politeknik_negeri_lampung/)), Facebook (Public Relations of Lampung State Polytechnic), and the www.polinela.ac.id website. This illustrates that the growing accessibility of information technology to the wider community makes it the most effective means of promotion. Polinela should leverage its website and social media platforms to provide information about its developments, educational programs, new student admissions, majors and study programs, accreditation status, faculty competence, and learning facilities. Additionally, there is room for improvement in providing comprehensive information, including details about lecturers' competence, infrastructure (laboratories, teaching farms/factories), and the strengths of each study program. In addition to online promotion, Polinela can expand its outreach to high schools and vocational schools, utilizing educational exhibitions within and beyond Lampung Province. This comprehensive promotion strategy will help shape Polinela's brand image in the community. Brand image, as (Wijaya, 2014) notes, represents the overall consumer perception formed through information and knowledge about the brand.

Promotion has a positive and significant impact on the decision to choose. The influence of promotion on the decision to choose Polinela is 0.202, indicating that more effective promotional efforts lead to an increased likelihood of choosing Polinela. These findings align with research conducted by Suciati & Maulidiyanti (2019) and Arifin et al. (2020), which highlight the significant effect of promotion on university choice decisions. The decision to choose a university is influenced by the information from various sources like family, friends, or promotional materials from various media outlets. The wide array of university options in Lampung Province necessitates that Polinela intensify its promotional activities and provide information highlighting its distinctiveness from academic institutions such as universities, institutes, and colleges. Vocational education at Polinela focuses on preparing graduates for the workforce, emphasizing practical skills and expertise in their chosen fields. This is in contrast to academic education, which places greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge. Polinela's vocational education program places a significant weight (70%) on practical training and a 30% weight on theory. Furthermore, Polinela operates a Professional Certification Institute (LSP) that conducts Competency Tests for graduating students, granting them certificates of competence in their respective fields. The effectiveness of conveying this information through promotional efforts positively impacts the decision to choose Polinela.

Price (tuition fees) has a significant effect on choosing decisions. The effect of price (education costs) on the decision to choose is 0.330 which means that the more affordable the cost of education (UKT) will increase the decision to choose Polinela. Purchasing decisions are based on the way consumers perceive prices and presumed current actual prices Kotler & Keller (2016) Different people will interpret prices in different ways. Price (cost of education) is one of the factors that influence consumer purchasing decisions. The results of respondents' responses stated that the cost of education (UKT) at Polinela was quite affordable, students got the opportunity to do internships (Field Work Practices) in the business world and industry that could increase their knowledge and insight. In addition, students also believe that the certificate of competence they have is a guarantee that Polinela graduates have competencies according to the scientific field. The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Amron (2018), Suciati & Maulidiyanti (2019), Hidayat et al. (2018).

Motivation has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose. The influence of motivation on the decision to choose is 0.198, which means that the better the motivation, the more decision to choose Polinela. The results of this study are in line with research conducted by (Solikhah et al., 2016) and (Hung & Yen, 2020) which show that motivation affects the decision to choose a university Arifin et al. (2020) Motivation is a dynamic and complex process of internal psychological factors (individual needs, desires, and goals) and is a key element that determines decisions Ahmad & Buchanan (2017) Motivation is a complex construct that affects customer attitudes, beliefs, and emotions Dean & Suhartanto, (2019). Motivation is everything that drives students to study at Polinela. According to the results of respondents' responses to questions, their motivation for choosing Polinela was among others to increase knowledge. Polinela as vocational education provides knowledge and application of knowledge in the form of practice to improve students' abilities and expertise. Personal pride was also felt by respondents when accepted as Polinela students, but also to improve social status.

Brand image has a positive and significant influence on choosing decisions. The influence of brand image on the decision to choose is 0.526 which means that the better the brand image, the more the decision to choose Polinela. The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Muzakki et al. (2022), Bayuaji et al. (2022) and (Hidayat et al., 2018) which shows that brand image affects students' decisions to choose universities. According to the responses from respondents, Polinela's brand image is good. They state that Polinela has a reputation as a vocational education that provides graduates who are ready for work. The quality of good education is seen from graduates who have competitiveness in the world of work. The facilities in Polinela and the comfortable environment stated by respondents to be quite good. The completeness of facilities to support the learning process is important to get attention, considering that learning can be carried out properly if the required facilities and infrastructure are available. Polinela has a teaching *farm / teaching factory* to support the learning process.

Respondents also stated that the choice of study program at Polinela gave them an alternative to choose a study program as they wished and helped students to improve their competencies. The high ethical and disciplinary standards at Polinela also make a good impression on students. Students should follow the morning apple every Monday and Friday starting at 07.00. Students who are late in participating in apple and learning activities will punish in accordance with applicable regulations. Polinela is an innovative vocational higher education. Polinela's innovations include food technology, plantations, and nimal husbandry that have obtained copyrights and patents. In addition, agricultural varieties produced by Polinela include the Ginsen Makuwauri Variety Melon. The quality of products and services that are perceived well by consumers can form a positive brand image (Sallam, 2014) will affect the decision to choose Polinela. The results also showed that brand image partially mediates the influence of price and promotion on student decisions. These results show that promotion and price will influence student decisions both directly and indirectly through brand image.

Conclusion

Price (Tuition fees) have a significant effect on brand image. This shows that the UKT determination policy that is in accordance with the income of parents and the study program chosen by students, affects the brand image of Lampung State Polytechnic as a university with affordable education costs but has a good reputation, innovative, and graduates have competitiveness in the world of work. Promotion has a significant effect on brand image. This shows that the information conveyed in the promotion plays a role in shaping the brand image of the Lampung State Polytechnic. Promotion has a significant effect on the purchase decision. This shows that the promotion carried out affects student decisions. The better the information conveyed through promotion will have a positive influence on students' decisions to choose the Lampung State Polytechnic. Price / Tuition Fees have a significant effect on purchase decision. This shows that the increasingly affordable cost of education (UKT) affects the decision of students to choose to study at the Lampung State Polytechnic. Motivation has a significant effect on the purchase decision. The motivation that influences students' decision to choose to study at Lampung State Polytechnic is to increase their knowledge, personal pride when accepted to college and their social status.

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