

The Role of Brand Trust as a Mediating Variable in the Relationship Between Brand Image and Promotion in the Decision to Choose a College

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to examine the role of Brand Trust, Brand Image and promotion in the decision to choose a college. Research provides the benefit of providing input for universities in their efforts to increase the number of students. The population in this study were students who had still been active at Semarang University. The total number of samples taken was 106 respondents using purposive sampling data collection techniques. The analysis technique used is multi-linear regression and path analysis. The research results show that Brand Image and Promotion partially influence Brand Trust. Brand Image, Promotion and Brand Trust partially influence the decision to choose a university. However, Brand Trust is not able to mediate the relationship between Brand Image and the Decision to Choose a college and the relationship between Promotion and the Decision to Choose a college. The results of this research have the implication that universities can develop more targeted strategies to create a positive image of universities and design appropriate promotional strategies to increase trust in universities and increase the number of students.

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Introduction

Higher Education is a level of education after secondary education that includes diploma programs, undergraduate programs, master's programs, doctoral programs, and professional programs, as well as specialist programs, which are organized by universities based on Indonesian culture [1]. In recent years, private universities (PTS) in Indonesia have faced many challenges. Slowly, campuses that were once full of students have become quieter. This indicates a significant decrease in the number of applicants. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, now Kemendiktisaintek) in 2022 recorded that the number of students in PTS reached 4.49 million people, while in State Universities (PTN) it was around 3.37 million [2]. However, currently PTN is aggressively increasing its student capacity in various ways, including recruiting two to three times more new students than in previous years. This has resulted in many prospective students now preferring PTN to PTS, making the sustainability of PTS difficult [3]. The decreasing number of prospective students choosing PTN causes PTS to have to compete tightly to win the number of students. Various strategies will be carried out by universities in facing the competition, including increasing promotion, prioritizing the image, trust, and reputation of the university through marketing activities. As stated by Kango et.al. [4] that the increasingly tight competition between universities in getting new students requires universities to carry out good marketing activities, one of which is through promotion and the formation of a good university image to influence the decisions of prospective new students in choosing a university.

Brand image is a consumer's response to a brand based on the good and bad of the brand that consumers remember [5]. Firmansyah [6] said that brand image is a perception that arises in the minds of consumers when remembering a brand from a particular product line. Furthermore, this experience will then be reflected or depicted on the brand so as to form a positive or negative brand image depending on various previous experiences and images of the brand or company. Meanwhile, according to Kotler & Keller [7] brand image is a consumer's perception and belief that is reflected in the associations that occur in the consumer's memory. These associations will equate or differentiate similar products with



different brands. Brand image is a differentiating image that is produced and used as a comparison in these associations. Based on the definition of brand image above, it can be concluded that the image of a college is the understanding, belief, and view of the community towards the college. The image of a college is usually seen as an organization as a whole. Therefore, the image of a college consists of ideas about the faculty (lecturers and academic staff), curriculum, teaching quality, and the harmonious relationship between cost and quality of education [8]. A good brand image will support students to make decisions in choosing a campus based on the image contained by the college.

Apart from forming the image of the university, it is no less important to increase the number of students by conducting promotions. Promotion is an element of the marketing mix that focuses on informing, persuading, and reminding consumers of the company's brand and products [9]. Laksana [10] defining promotion is a communication from sellers and buyers that comes from the right information that aims to change the attitude and behavior of buyers, who previously did not know to know so that they become buyers and still remember the product. According [7], promotion is an activity that communicates product advantages and persuades target customers to buy it.. From this statement, it can be seen that communication is the main activity of promotion. Communication can be done through electronic, print or other media, the purpose of which is to convey information and attract attention so that the number of students increases.

Brand trust or trust in the college brand also plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of prospective students. Brand trust is Consumer confidence in the integrity, competence, and consistency of a brand in meeting their expectations and needs [11]. Trust in a brand is formed when consumers believe that the brand is able to consistently provide the promised value [12]. In the context of higher education when a higher education institution has a good reputation, consistency in the quality of academic services, and transparency in communication, the level of public trust in the institution increases. This trust is a determining factor in choosing a college, because prospective students and parents

feel more confident that the investment of time, energy, and money will be commensurate with the quality of education and future prospects offered. Lau and Lee said brand trust is the willingness of customers to trust the brand at all costs and is a determining factor in strengthening purchase intentions[13]. Purchase intentions in question are the willingness to enroll in a university, the commitment to participate in all activities held and the willingness of students to actively complete their studies well.

Semarang University is one of PTS located in the city of Semarang. Semarang University is inseparable from the competition in competing for prospective students with other universities. The phenomenon that occurs is that the number of students at Semarang University has decreased over the past 5 years, from 2019-2023 [2]. The following is data on the number of active students at Semarang University from 2019-2023 taken from PDDIKTI [2]:

Table 1. Number of Active Students at Semarang University in 2019-2023

Year	Number of students
2019	22.465
2020	21.644
2021	19.340
2022	19.497
2023	19.396

Source: PDDIKTI, 2023

Table 1 Shows data on the number of active students at Semarang University, which has shown a decreasing trend since 2019 to 2023. The decrease in the number of students must be a serious concern if the University wants sustainability. Therefore, efforts need to be made to increase the number of students again. Based on the phenomenon of the decline in the number of students, it is necessary to examine what factors can influence prospective students' decisions in choosing a university. Some factors that can influence students' decisions include Brand Image and promotion and Brand Trust. Several previous studies on brand image and promotion on the decision to choose a college show differences in research results. The results of previous studies on the influence of Brand Image on the decision to

choose have been proven [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] [19]. However, the results of the opposite study which states that Brand image does not influence purchasing decisions have been proven [20].

Meanwhile, research that proves the influence of promotion on the decision to choose a college has been conducted [14] [16] [17] [21] [4] [22]. Different research results prove that promotion does not affect purchasing decisions conducted [23]. This study took the object at Semarang University, aimed to examine the role of Brand Image and Promotion on the decision to choose a college, by including an intervening variable, namely brand trust. The benefit of the study is to provide input for colleges in their efforts to increase the number of students. The research framework can be seen in Figure 1 below:

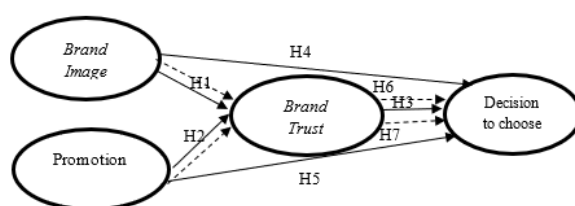


Figure 1. Research framework

Attractive promotions and the formation of a good college image will influence the decision of prospective new students in choosing a college. Promotion and college image will also shape prospective students' trust in the college, and this prospective student trust will increase the decision to enroll in college.

Method

This study uses an Explanatory approach, which is used to explain the causal relationship between variables through testing the formulated hypothesis. The research variables used in this study are independent variables, namely Brand Image and Promotion. While the dependent variable is the Student's Decision to choose a college with Brand Trust



as an intervening variable. This research was conducted in 2024 at Semarang University, which is currently experiencing a decline in the number of students over the past 5 years. The population in this study were all students of Semarang University from all faculties who were still active in 2023, amounting to 19,396 students [24]. Currently there are 6 faculties at Semarang University [25]. The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling technique, according to Sugiyono, [26] is a sampling determination technique with certain considerations. The considerations used in determining this sample are: 1) Students who are active in the odd semester of 2023-2024. 2) Students who have completed semester 4 in all faculties.

Determination of the number of samples varies according to experts. According to Sugiyono [26] the size of the appropriate sample size in research is between 30 and 500. If the research will conduct analysis with multivariate (correlation or multiple regression), then the number of sample members is at least 10 times the number of variables studied. In this study, the number of variables used was 4 and each variable will be sampled as much as 25. So, the minimum number of samples is 100. The number of samples in this study was 106 which was obtained based on the answers from the respondents collected. In this study, data collection used a questionnaire or also known as a survey. A questionnaire is a data collection technique that is carried out by giving a set of written questions to respondents to fill in. The measurement of the variables themselves will be carried out using a Likert scale using the following scoring method: Strongly Disagree (STS) = 1, Disagree (TS) = 2, Agree (S) = 3, Strongly Agree (SS) = 4, Strongly Agree (SSS) = 5. Validity and reliability tests of the questionnaire have been conducted, and the results show that all question items are valid and reliable.

The analysis technique used is quantitative analysis, which includes: 1) Instrument test, namely the validity and reliability test of the instrument. 2) Classical assumption test which includes the normality test, multicollinearity test and heteroscedasticity test. 3) Multiple Linear Regression Analysis. To determine the effect of independent variables on

the dependent variable, multiple regression analysis is used. 4) Path Analysis. To test the ability of the intervening variable, path analysis is used. Regression analysis is carried out in two stages, namely regression analysis model I and regression analysis model II, where:

Regression equation model I: $Y_1 = b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + e$(1)

Regression equation model II: $Y_2 = b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3Y_1 + e$(2)

Results and Discussion

Multicollinearity Test Model I

The multicollinearity test aims to test whether there is a correlation between independent variables in the regression model. A good regression model is one in which there is no correlation between independent variables.

Table 2. Model I Multicollinearity Test

		Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Tolerance	VIF
1	Brand_Image	.579	1.726
	Promotion	.579	1.726
a. Dependent Variable: Brand_Trust			

Source: processed data

Multicollinearity test based on analysis with SPSS program can be seen in Table 2. Where it appears that the VIF value is below 10 and the tolerance value is above 0.10, there is no multicollinearity in the regression model.

Heteroscedasticity Test Model I

The heteroscedasticity test aims to test whether in a regression model, there is inequality of residual variance from one observation to another. If the residual variance from one observation to another remains the same, then it is called homoscedasticity. And if the variance is different, it is called Heteroscedasticity. A good regression model is one in which

heteroscedasticity does not occur. Heteroscedasticity test with test *Glejser* based on analysis with SPSS program can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Model 1 Heteroscedasticity Test

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.364	.597		2.284	.024
	Brand_Image	-.054	.037	-.190	-1.472	.144
	Promotion	.056	.058	.125	.969	.335

a. Dependent Variable: AbsRes_1

Source: processed data

Table 3 shows that the number is significant Brand Image 0.144 and promotion of 0.355 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. This means that there is no heteroscedasticity problem in the regression model.

Normality Test Model I

Normality Test aims to test whether in a regression model, the dependent variable, the independent variable or both have a normal distribution or not. A good regression model is a normal or near-normal data distribution. Normality test, with Test *Kolmogorov-Smirnov* (*K-S*) based on analysis with SPSS program shown by Table 4.

Table 4. Model 1 Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Unstandardized Residual
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.200c,d

Source: processed data

Table 4 shows that a significant number of 0.200 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. This means that the data is normally distributed.

Classical Assumption Test Model II

Multicollinearity Test Model II

Multicollinearity test is also conducted on model II. which aims to test whether there is a correlation between independent variables in the regression model. A good regression model is one where there is no correlation between independent variables. Multicollinearity test based on analysis with SPSS program can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Model II Multicollinearity Test Table

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Brand_Image	.429	2.333
	Promotion	.516	1.938
	Brand_Trust	.438	2.285

a. Dependent Variable: Decision to Choose

Source: processed data

Table 5 shows VIF values below 10 and tolerance values above 0.10. This means that there is no multicollinearity in regression models.

Heteroscedasticity Test Model II

The heteroscedasticity test aims to test whether in a regression model, there is inequality of residual variance from one observation to another. If the residual variance from one observation to another remains the same, then it is called homoscedasticity. And if the variance is different, it is called Heteroscedasticity. A good regression model is one in which heteroscedasticity does not occur. Model II heteroscedasticity test with test *Glejser* can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Model II Heteroscedasticity Test

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig..
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	1.876	.787		2.385	.019
	Brand_Image	-.022	.056	-.059	-.395	.694
	Promotion	.078	.081	.132	.965	.337
	Brand_Trust	-.091	.080	-.168	-1.134	.259

a. Dependent Variable: AbsRes_2

Source; processed data

In Table 6 it can be seen that the probability of significance on all independent variables is greater than 0.05. This means that there is no heteroscedasticity problem in the regression model.

Normality Test Model II

Normality Test aims to test whether in a regression model, the dependent variable, the independent variable or both have a normal distribution or not. A good regression model is a normal or near-normal data distribution. The normality test with the *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (K-S)* can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Model II Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Unstandardized Residual
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.200c,d

Source: processed data

In Table 7, we can see a significant probability number of 0.200 greater than an alpha level of 0.05. This means that the data is normally distributed.

Multiple Linier Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is used to analyze the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. Regression analysis is carried out in two stages, namely regression analysis model I and regression analysis model II. Model I regression analysis was calculated to determine the influence of brand image and promotion on brand trust.. Meanwhile, model II regression analysis is used to see the influence of brand image, promotion and brand trust on the decision to choose.

Table 8. Summary of model parameter estimation results

Model	Path coefficient	T	Sig..	Adj R ²
Model 1				
p(Brand Trust ← Brand Image)	,515	5.990	,000	0,554
P(Brand Trusts ← Promotion)	,305	3.542	,001	

Model 2

P(Decision to Choose ← Brand Image)	,297	2.818	,006	0,506
P(Decision to Choose ← Promotion)	,205	2.141	,035	
P(Decision to Choose ← Brand Trust)	,311	2.987	,004	

Source: processed data

Table 8 is a summary of the results of the model parameter estimation after multiple regression analysis using the SPSS program, which shows the parameter estimates for regression models I and II. Meanwhile, Figure 2 shows an image of the regression model produced based on the regression analysis carried out.

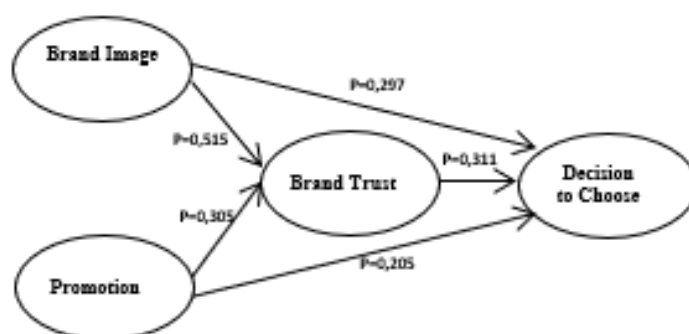


Figure 2. Regression model based on analysis with SPSS

Interpretation of the results of the regression analysis of model I

Model I regression analysis was calculated to determine the influence of brand image and promotion on brand trust. Table 8 shows that the regression coefficients Brand Image of 0.515, and the Promotion regression coefficient of 0.305, a positive sign. While the significance figure Brand Image of 0.000 and Promotion of 0.001 which is less than the alpha rate of 5%. This indicates that there is a partial positive and significant influence between Brand Image and promotion of Brand Trust. This shows that the better the brand image, the more it will increase trust in higher education. Likewise, the better the promotional activities carried out, the more it will increase trust in higher education.

Interpretation of the results of the regression analysis of model II

Model II regression analysis is used to see the influence of brand image, promotion and brand trust on the decision to choose. Table 8 shows that the Brand *Image* regression coefficient of 0.297, the Promotion regression coefficient of 0.205, and the Brand Trust coefficient of 0.311 all bear positive signs. Meanwhile, the significance of Brand *Image* is 0.006, Promotion is 0.035 and Brand Trust is 0.004, all of which are smaller than the alpha level of 5%. This indicates that there is a positive and significant influence between Brand *Image*, promotion and Brand Trust on the decision to choose a university. This means that the better the brand image, the decision to choose a college will increase. If the promotion is better, the decision to choose a college will also increase. Likewise, the higher the level of trust of prospective students in college, the higher the decision to choose a college.

Determination Coefficient

The determination coefficient explains how much the independent variable in the regression model is able to explain its dependent variable. In table.8, the determination coefficient of model I can be seen as 0.554. This means that 55.4% of the variation in Brand Trust can be explained by the two independent variables, namely Promotion and Brand Image. While the remaining 44.6% is explained by other factors outside the study. While the determination coefficient of model II is 0.506, which means that 50.6% of the variation in the Decision to Choose can be explained by Brand Image, Promotion and Brand Trust, while the remaining 49.4% is explained by other factors outside the study.

Path Analysis

Path analysis is used to test the ability of intervening variables to mediate the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. Path diagram developed based on regression models I and II. The first path analysis examines the Brand Trust variable as an intervening variable of the influence of Brand Image on Choosing Decisions. The path diagram of model I can be seen in Figure 3.

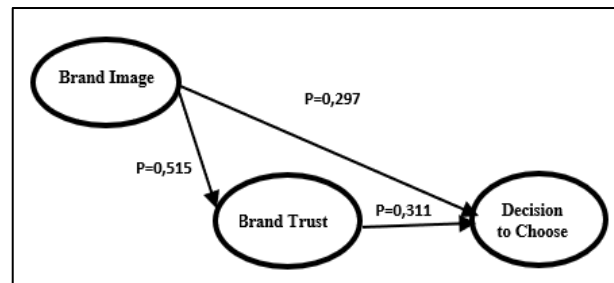


Figure 3. Path diagram model I

The amount of direct influence between Brand Image on Choosing Decisions is 0.297. While the amount of indirect influence between Brand *Image* on the Decision to Choose through Brand Trust is $0.515 \times 0.311 = 0.160165$. The magnitude of the coefficient of direct influence is greater than indirect influence, so it can be concluded that Brand Trust does not mediate the influence of Brand Image on Choosing Decisions. The second path analysis is to examine the Brand Trust variable as an intervening variable of the influence of Promotion on Choosing Decisions. The path diagram of model II can be seen in Figure 4.

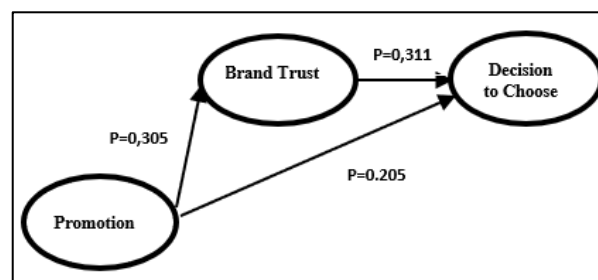


Figure 4. Path diagram model II

The amount of direct influence between Promotions on Voting Decisions is 0.205. While the amount of indirect influence between Promotion on the Decision to Choose through Brand Trust is $0.305 \times 0.311 = 0.094855$. The magnitude of the coefficient of direct influence is greater than indirect influence, so it can be concluded that Brand Trust does not mediate the influence of Promotion on Choosing Decisions.

Discussion

The results of the study show that there is a significant influence of Brand Image on Brand Trust. Menurut Kotler dan Keller, Citra merek yang positif akan meningkatkan kepercayaan pelanggan yang pada gilirannya akan berdampak pada kepercayaan mereka terhadap suatu merek [7]. Universities with a convincing brand image and in accordance with student expectations tend to build a higher level of trust. Therefore, it is very important for universities to be consistent with the relationship between the image formed by the university and what students expect. The implication of the results of this study is that universities can create a more targeted strategy to create a positive university image which will ultimately increase student trust. These results are in line with research conducted by Juliana & Johan [15], Ramadhani [27] and Rahman [16] which revealed that a positive Brand Image will have a direct impact on Brand Trust.

The results of the study show that Promotion has a significant effect on Brand Trust. This shows that prospective students who are more frequently exposed to promotions tend to have a high level of trust in a college. This study increases the understanding of how promotions can play an important role in building and maintaining consumer trust in a brand. This study supports the research conducted by Rahman [16] which states that Promotion has an effect on Brand Trust. The research results prove that Brand Image has a significant effect on the Decision to Choose. This is in line with the theory put forward by Keller, which states that brand image is able to motivate consumers to make purchases [28]. These results indicate that when prospective students consider a college to continue their education, they are naturally attracted to a brand image that can reflect their own values or self-image. Prospective students' initial perceptions of a college are influenced by elements such as design, logo, visual imagery, and marketing messages. In this case, the image of the college is very important in the decision-making process of prospective students in choosing a college. These results are in line with research conducted by Murti [14] and Juliana & Johan [15] which states that Brand Image has an effect on purchasing decisions

This study proves that promotion has a positive effect on the decision to choose a college. This is in accordance with the theory put forward by Kotler and Keller which states that promotion is an activity that communicates product advantages and persuades target customers to buy it [7]. Promotion can increase prospective students' awareness of the college. Prospective students who access and respond positively to various forms of promotion are more likely to choose that college. Creative and informative promotions can form a positive perception of colleges. This study shows that promotion can be an effective tool in influencing prospective students' decisions to choose a college. This study supports research conducted by Wulandari et al. [17], Wiliana [21] and Kango et al. [4], which states that promotion has a positive effect on student decisions. This study shows that Brand Trust has a significant effect on the Decision to Choose a College. According to Adiwidjaja & Tarigan, consumer purchasing decisions will be determined by the brand and in creating high-value relationships, trust is required [29]. This shows that students who have great trust in a college will tend to choose that college. This finding reflects the importance of building prospective students' trust in college.

Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that Brand trust does not mediate the relationship between Brand Image and Promotion on the Decision to Choose a College. This result contradicts the hypothesis that brand trust mediates the relationship between Brand Image and Promotion on the Decision to Choose a College. The failure of brand trust in mediating the relationship between brand image and promotion with the decision to choose a college is likely caused by the college failing to build trust. Prospective students feel that the college is unable to create enough value to build trust in the college. Or prospective students compare it with the value of other colleges that are better. This has an impact on the decision of prospective students in choosing a college. Based on these findings, it is very important for universities to create the right strategy to create a positive image of the university and to carry out effective, creative and informative promotions to form a positive perception of the university, so that trust in the university is created. Building brand trust can be done through the creation of customer value. Zubac states that customer value is an

inherently multidimensional concept that reflects customers' perceptions of what they receive (benefits) relative to what they sacrifice (costs), shaped by functional, emotional, and symbolic dimensions [30] Customers who feel that if the brand values are in line with their personal values will find it easier to build trust and loyalty [31]. Creating relevant and meaningful customer value strengthens customer identification with the brand, which ultimately forms trust. This customer value creation can be done by providing consistent service, honesty, providing a positive experience, being responsive to input and complaints, and relevant innovation according to evolving needs.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that there is a significant influence of Brand Image on Brand Trust. Universities with a convincing brand image that is in accordance with student expectations tend to build a higher level of trust. Therefore, it is very important for universities to be consistent with the relationship between the image formed by the university and what students expect. The results of the study show that Promotion has a significant effect on Brand Trust. This shows that prospective students who are more frequently exposed to promotions tend to have a high level of trust in a college. This study increases the understanding of how promotions can play an important role in building and maintaining consumer trust in a brand. The research results prove that Brand Image has a significant effect on the Decision to Choose. These results indicate that when prospective students consider a college to continue their education, they are naturally attracted to brand images that can reflect their own values or self-image. Prospective students' initial perceptions of a college are influenced by elements such as design, logo, visual imagery, and marketing messages. In this case, the image of the college is very important in the decision-making process of prospective students in choosing a college

This study proves that promotion has a positive effect on the decision to choose a college. This shows that promotion can increase prospective students' awareness of colleges.

Prospective students who access and respond positively to various forms of promotion are more likely to choose that college. Creative and informative promotions can form a positive perception of colleges. This study shows that promotion can be an effective tool in influencing prospective students' decisions to choose a college. This study shows that Brand Trust has a significant effect on the Decision to Choose a college. This shows that students who have great trust in a college will tend to choose that college. This finding reflects the importance of building prospective students' trust in college. Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that the influence of Brand Image and Promotion on the Decision to Choose is not mediated by Brand Trust. This shows that brand images such as visual and narrative factors can create a strong appeal, which can influence prospective students' decisions without going through a stage of deep trust in the institution. The inability of brand trust to mediate the relationship between brand image and promotion on the decision to choose a college indicates a failure in building brand trust.

The implication is that universities can create a targeted strategy to create a positive university image and carry out effective, creative and informative promotions to form a positive perception of the university, so that trust is created in higher education. The limitations of this study can be seen from the adjusted R square of 0.506, meaning that 50.6% of the variation in the Decision to Choose can be explained by Brand Image, Promotion and Brand Trust, while the remaining 49.4% is explained by other factors outside the study. In addition, the object of the study was only at one university, so the results cannot be generalized. Further research is recommended to add variables that influence the decision to choose a college, such as brand personality, brand awareness and applying purchasing interest as an intervening variable. The sample should be expanded to include students from all private universities in Indonesia

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