



The Influence Of Brand Image, Word Of Mouth And Brand Trust On The Decision To Choose A School Through Choosing Interest At Ira School Foundation Medan

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ABSTRACT

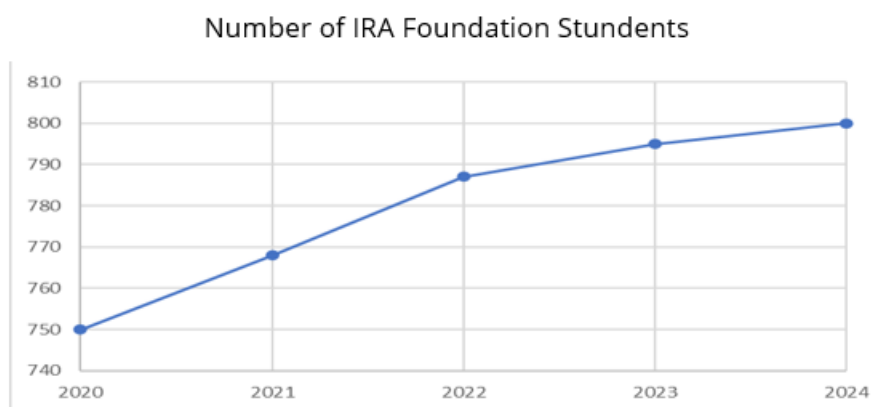
This study aims to determine the influence of Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust on the Decision to Choose a school at Yayasan Perguruan IRA in Medan City, with Interest in Choosing as an intervening variable. This quantitative research employs the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method using the SmartPLS 3 application to examine both direct and indirect relationships among Brand Image, Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, Interest in Choosing, and Decision to Choose. The study utilizes primary data collected through research questionnaires. Respondents consist of parents, teachers, and students of Yayasan Perguruan IRA Medan, totaling 100 participants. The hypothesis testing results indicate that Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust have a positive direct influence on the Decision to Choose. Interest in Choosing also has a positive influence on the Decision to Choose. Indirectly, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust exert a positive effect on the Decision to Choose through Interest in Choosing.

INTRODUCTION

Private educational institutions in Indonesia face increasingly complex competitive challenges, as they do not receive direct subsidies from the government like public schools do. In responding to these dynamics, educational marketing has become a strategic instrument essential for attracting prospective students and ensuring the sustainability of the institution. Unlike marketing practices in the commercial sector, educational marketing requires a more relational approach, where public perception, parental trust, and institutional reputation serve as key assets. Without an appropriate marketing strategy, even schools with excellent quality may lose their appeal in the eyes of the public.

Education is one of the fundamental needs for every individual in facing the rapid developments of an increasingly competitive era. Consequently, parents and students tend to be more selective in choosing educational institutions that are perceived to provide quality assurance, comfort, and trust in the learning process.

In the city of Medan, the number of private educational institutions continues to grow, leading to intense competition among schools to attract public interest. The current phenomenon shows that parents' and students' decisions in choosing schools are no longer solely based on factors such as location or cost.

Figure 1. Number of Students at Yayasan Perguruan IRA Medan

Although internal data indicate an increase in the number of students from year to year, this does not necessarily imply that the institution's position is secure from competitive challenges. Yayasan Perguruan IRA Medan demonstrates that, despite its long-standing establishment and public recognition, the level of competition among educational institutions still demands more effective management strategies for brand image, word of mouth, and brand trust. As a private school, Yayasan Perguruan IRA Medan must continue to innovate in maintaining its competitiveness, particularly in sustaining its brand image and public trust amid the emergence of new competitors employing more aggressive marketing strategies and offering increasingly diverse facilities. The greatest challenge lies not merely in increasing the number of new students but in ensuring consistency in service quality, educational reputation, and the development of long-term relationships with parents and students.

The complexity of factors related to brand image, word of mouth, and brand trust indicates that the marketing strategies implemented do not necessarily have a direct impact on school choice decisions. Therefore, an empirical evaluation is required to determine the extent to which brand image, word of mouth, and brand trust influence the decision to choose a school, either directly or indirectly through the mediating variable of interest in choosing — which serves as the psychological link between prospective students and their decision-making process (Munir & Ma'sum, 2022; Puspanada & Widyasari, 2024).

As interest increases, individuals tend to exhibit behavioral tendencies such as seeking further information, conducting visits, and ultimately deciding to enroll. Thus, brand image not only exerts a direct effect but also indirectly influences purchasing decisions (in this context, school choice) through the enhancement of interest as a psychological mediating process (Miati, 2020; Talopod et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Image

Brand image is the consumer's perception of a brand, reflected through associations stored in their memory. Brand image helps consumers recognize, recall, and differentiate a brand from its competitors, which can influence their decision to purchase or choose a product or service. Consumers with a positive image of a brand are more likely to make a purchase (Talopod et al., 2020). In addition, brand image can also be defined as the consumer's perception of a brand that is reflected through brand associations in their memory, providing specific meaning to consumers. Brand image encompasses consumer perceptions and beliefs, which are reflected in associations formed in their memory (Miati, 2020). It is shaped by consumer

experiences with the brand, marketing communications, product quality, and associations built through consistent interaction with the brand (Keller, 2013).

Word of Mouth

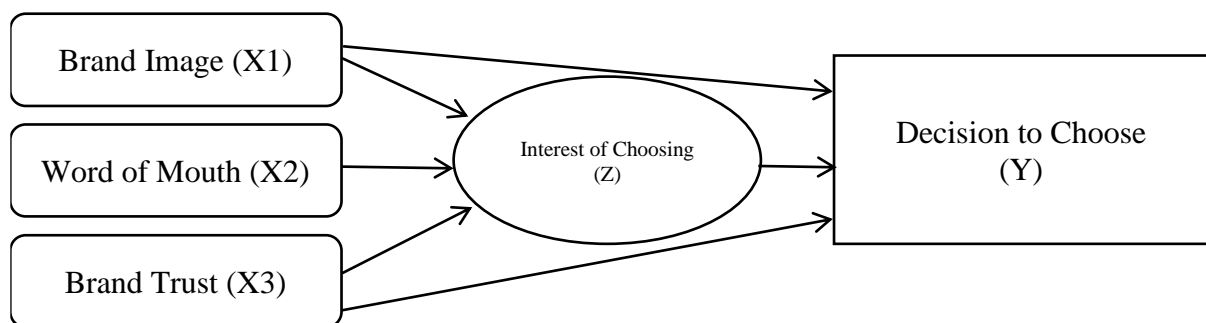
Word of mouth, known as promotion through personal recommendations, has become a compelling phenomenon in the world of marketing. Consumers' opinions and recommendations regarding their experiences with a service have a strong influence on consumer decision-making and purchasing behavior (Rizkiani & Setiawan, 2023). What makes word of mouth especially important is the confusion often experienced by prospective customers due to the overwhelming variety of advertisements in the media. As a result, prospective customers tend to trust product recommendations given by others, such as family or friends. Word of mouth is considered more trustworthy than advertisements because it is personal, honest, and independent (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The indicators of word of mouth include four main aspects: communication intensity and the tendency to influence (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the level of confidence or sense of security that consumers have in a brand, allowing them to feel assured that the brand will consistently deliver on its promises and meet their needs. For individuals, the process of developing trust in a brand is based on their experiences with that brand. Brand trust can also be defined as the sense of security consumers feel when interacting with a brand, based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and well-being of consumers (Suntoro & Silinktowe, 2020). There are three indicators that can be used to measure brand trust: brand reliability, brand honesty, and brand concern.

Based on the explanations above, the following research model is developed:

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework



METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research design, which involves statistical procedures, sampling techniques, and data collection using research instruments to test hypotheses formulated based on relevant theories. The type of research used is causal associative research. Causal associative research is characterized by examining cause-and-effect relationships between independent and dependent variables (Ghozali, 2020). The population refers to a community, event, or subject of interest that the researcher intends to investigate (Ghozali, 2020). The population in this study includes all individuals directly associated with Yayasan Perguruan IRA, such as students, teachers, and parents or guardians. The sampling technique applied in this study is the quota sampling method. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula, resulting in a total of 100 respondents. The questionnaire consists of questions related to the research objects, designed according to variable indicators within the research

instrument, with measurements using a Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents for completion and subsequently collected by the researcher to serve as the primary data for this study. In this research, hypothesis testing was conducted using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS). Each hypothesis was analyzed using specialized statistical software applications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The characteristics of respondents in this study include gender, age, status, and familiarity with Yayasan Perguruan IRA Medan.

Table 1. Description of Respondent Characteristics

NO.	CHARACTERISTIC	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY
1.	Gender	Male	37
		Female	63
2.	Age	13–15 Years	32
		15–18 Years	57
		>18 Years	11
3.	Status	Student	58
		Parent	32
		Teacher	10

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Based on the table above, it can be observed that, in terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female, totaling 63 individuals, while male respondents accounted for 37 individuals. In terms of age, the largest group of respondents was aged 15–18 years, comprising 57 individuals, while the smallest group consisted of respondents aged over 18 years, totaling 11 individuals. Regarding status characteristics, the majority of respondents were students, totaling 58 individuals, followed by parents with 32 respondents, and the smallest group was teachers, with a total of 10 respondents.

Validity Test

Table 2. Loading Factor Test Results

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	Criteria	Threshold	Result
<i>Brand Image</i>	X1.1	0,964	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.1	0,964	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.2	0,969	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.3	0,963	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.4	0,976	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.5	0,975	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.6	0,955	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.7	0,981	>	0,70	Valid
	X1.8	0,983	>	0,70	Valid
<i>Word of Mouth</i>	X1.9	0,966	>	0,70	Valid
	X2.1	0,957	>	0,70	Valid
	X2.2	0,960	>	0,70	Valid
	X2.3	0,943	>	0,70	Valid

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	Criteria	Threshold	Result
	X2.4	0,953	>	0,70	Valid
	X2.5	0,970	>	0,70	Valid
	X2.6	0,973	>	0,70	Valid
	X2.7	0,951	>	0,70	Valid
<i>Brand Trust</i>	X3.1	0,975	>	0,70	Valid
	X3.2	0,972	>	0,70	Valid
	X3.3	0,957	>	0,70	Valid
	X3.4	0,952	>	0,70	Valid
	X3.5	0,968	>	0,70	Valid
	X3.6	0,964	>	0,70	Valid
	X3.7	0,973	>	0,70	Valid
<i>Interest in Voting</i>	Z1	0,978	>	0,70	Valid
	Z2	0,979	>	0,70	Valid
	Z3	0,961	>	0,70	Valid
	Z4	0,977	>	0,70	Valid
	Z5	0,983	>	0,70	Valid
	Z6	0,987	>	0,70	Valid
<i>Voting Decision</i>	Y1	0,946	>	0,70	Valid
	Y2	0,969	>	0,70	Valid
	Y3	0,944	>	0,70	Valid
	Y4	0,927	>	0,70	Valid
	Y5	0,965	>	0,70	Valid
	Y6	0,951	>	0,70	Valid
	Y7	0,971	>	0,70	Valid

Source: SmartPLS 3 Output (2025)

Based on the table above, the convergent validity test shows that all indicators in each variable have values greater than 0.70, thus all indicators in variables X1, X2, X3, Z, and Y are declared valid.

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

Variable	AVE	Criteria	Threshold	Result
Brand Image	0.942	>	0.50	Good
Brand Trust	0.933	>	0.50	Good
Decision to Choose	0.909	>	0.50	Good
Interest in Choosing	0.956	>	0.50	Good
Word of Mouth	0.918	>	0.50	Good

Source: SmartPLS 3 Output (2025)

Based on the table above, all tested variables (Brand Trust, Word of Mouth, Brand Image, Interest in Choosing, and Decision to Choose) have AVE values greater than 0.50. This indicates that all latent variables meet the criteria for convergent validity and are classified as good.

Table 4. Cross Loading Values

Indicator	Brand Image	Brand Trust	Decision to Choose	Interest in Choosing	Word of Mouth
X1.1	0,964	0,000	0,348	0,346	-0,105
X1.2	0,969	0,002	0,418	0,353	-0,061
X1.3	0,963	0,027	0,423	0,357	-0,107
X1.4	0,976	0,047	0,408	0,376	-0,102
X1.5	0,975	0,037	0,407	0,382	-0,076
X1.6	0,955	-0,018	0,361	0,307	-0,051
X1.7	0,981	0,059	0,440	0,411	-0,083
X1.8	0,983	0,062	0,427	0,376	-0,112
X1.9	0,966	0,014	0,408	0,365	-0,086
X2.1	-0,087	0,042	0,274	0,217	0,957
X2.2	-0,075	-0,033	0,274	0,226	0,960
X2.3	-0,121	0,084	0,291	0,250	0,943
X2.4	-0,069	0,069	0,306	0,251	0,953
X2.5	-0,096	0,101	0,295	0,255	0,970
X2.6	-0,110	-0,016	0,232	0,190	0,973
X2.7	-0,044	0,019	0,234	0,213	0,951
X3.1	0,011	0,975	0,398	0,411	0,042
X3.2	0,023	0,972	0,391	0,431	0,027
X3.3	0,071	0,957	0,376	0,415	-0,031
X3.4	0,035	0,952	0,371	0,427	0,010
X3.5	0,007	0,968	0,435	0,440	0,096
X3.6	0,052	0,964	0,419	0,431	0,076
X3.7	-0,014	0,973	0,347	0,365	0,067
Y1	0,362	0,397	0,946	0,550	0,234
Y2	0,419	0,347	0,969	0,627	0,292
Y3	0,379	0,394	0,944	0,582	0,324
Y4	0,413	0,467	0,927	0,615	0,271
Y5	0,393	0,397	0,965	0,615	0,244
Y6	0,428	0,317	0,951	0,586	0,287
Y7	0,420	0,389	0,971	0,602	0,262
Z1	0,340	0,394	0,596	0,978	0,216
Z2	0,373	0,395	0,612	0,979	0,229
Z3	0,384	0,409	0,597	0,961	0,232
Z4	0,345	0,477	0,627	0,977	0,273
Z5	0,397	0,420	0,625	0,983	0,234
Z6	0,366	0,442	0,618	0,987	0,226

Source: SmartPLS 3 Output (2025)

Based on the table above, the results indicate that each indicator meets discriminant validity, as evidenced by outer loading values greater than 0.70 for each variable.

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variable	Decision to Choose	Interest in Choosing	Brand Image	Word of Mouth	Brand Trust
Brand Image	0.970				
Brand Trust	0.028	0.966			
Decision to Choose	0.422	0.407	0.953		
Interest in Choosing	0.376	0.433	0.627	0.978	
Word of Mouth	-0.090	0.043	0.287	0.241	0.958

Source: SmartPLS 3 Output (2025)

Reliability Test

Table 6. Nilai Cronbach's Alpha dan Composite Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Sign	Limit	Test Results
Brand Image	0,992	0,993	>	0,70	Reliabel
Brand Trust	0,988	0,990	>	0,70	Reliabel
Decision to Choose	0,983	0,986	>	0,70	Reliabel
Interest in Choosing	0,991	0,992	>	0,70	Reliabel
Word of Mouth	0,985	0,987	>	0,70	Reliabel

Source: SmartPLS 3 Output Results (2025)

Based on the table above, all research variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values greater than 0.70. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables used in this study are reliable, meaning the indicators used are consistent in measuring their respective latent variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variable	Original Sample	T-Statistic	P-Value	Remark
Brand Image → Decision to Choose	0,299	3,493	0,001	Significant
Word of Mouth → Decision to Choose	0,217	3,425	0,001	Significant
Brand Trust → Decision to Choose	0,232	3,393	0,001	Significant
Choosing Interest → Decision to Choose	0,361	3,558	0,000	Significant
Brand Image → Choosing Interest → Decision to Choose	0,140	2,749	0,006	Significant
Word of Mouth → Choosing Interest → Decision to Choose	0,093	2,095	0,037	Significant
Brand Trust → Choosing Interest → Decision to Choose	0,149	3,056	0,002	Significant

Source: SmartPLS 3 Output (2025)

The data presented in Table 7 show the results of hypothesis testing. The original sample value of 0.299 indicates that brand image has a positive effect on the decision to choose. The t-statistic of 3.493 > 1.96 and the p-value of 0.001 < 0.05 confirm that the hypothesis is accepted. This also proves that word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose, with an original sample value of 0.217, a t-statistic of 3.425 > 1.96, and a p-value of 0.001 < 0.05. Furthermore, the original sample value of 0.232 indicates a positive influence of brand trust on the decision to choose, with a t-statistic of 3.393 > 1.96 and a p-value of 0.001 < 0.05.

The results also show that choosing interest has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose, with an original sample value of 0.361, a t-statistic of $3.558 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The results further indicate that the indirect effect of brand image on the decision to choose through choosing interest has an original sample value of 0.140, with a t-statistic of $2.749 > 1.96$ and a p-value of $0.006 < 0.05$, thus the hypothesis is accepted. The indirect effect of word of mouth on the decision to choose through choosing interest shows an original sample value of 0.093, with a t-statistic of $2.095 > 1.96$ and a p-value of $0.037 < 0.05$, meaning the hypothesis is also accepted. This indicates that word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose through choosing interest. Similarly, the indirect effect of brand trust on the decision to choose through choosing interest has an original sample value of 0.149, with a t-statistic of $3.056 > 1.96$ and a p-value of $0.002 < 0.05$, which confirms that the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that brand trust positively and significantly influences the decision to choose through choosing interest.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the partial test (t-test), it was found that leadership (X1) had a significance value of $0.043 < 0.05$ with a t-count of $2.061 > t$ -table of 1.666, education and training (X2) had a significance value of $0.001 < 0.05$ with a t-count of $3.438 > t$ -table of 1.666, career development (X3) had a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with a t-count of $3.775 > t$ -table of 1.666, and job satisfaction (X4) had a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with a t-count of $6.836 > t$ -table of 1.666. Therefore, H_0 is rejected for all variables, which means that leadership, education and training, career development, and job satisfaction each have a significant effect on employee performance. It can be concluded that, partially, leadership, education and training, career development, and job satisfaction have a significant effect on the performance of employees at the Department of Industry, Trade, Energy, and Mineral Resources of North Sumatra Province.

Based on the results of the simultaneous test (F-test), the significance value was 0.00, which is smaller than 0.05, and the F-count value was 15.769, which is greater than the F-table value of 2.51. From these two results, H_0 is rejected, meaning it can be concluded that simultaneously leadership, education and training, career development, and job satisfaction have a significant effect on the performance of employees at the Department of Industry, Trade, Energy, and Mineral Resources of North Sumatra Province.

From the coefficient of determination test, the Adjusted R Square value obtained was 0.451 or 45.1%. This indicates that 45.1% of employee performance is significantly influenced by leadership, education and training, career development, and job satisfaction at the Department of Industry, Trade, Energy, and Mineral Resources of North Sumatra Province.

CONCLUSION

1. Brand image, word of mouth, and brand trust have a positive and significant influence on the decision to choose.
2. Choosing interest has a positive and significant influence on the decision to choose.
3. Choosing interest acts as an intervening variable that strengthens the influence of brand image, word of mouth, and brand trust on the decision to choose.

SUGGESTION

1. The IRA Medan Educational Foundation should continue to strengthen its positive image through consistent branding, high-quality education, adequate supporting facilities, and clear and transparent communication with the community.
2. The foundation can encourage positive testimonials from students and alumni, organize activities involving parents, and utilize social media to disseminate positive experiences.

3. It is important for the foundation to maintain integrity and credibility, provide satisfactory services, and ensure consistency in the quality of education.
4. Since choosing interest mediates the relationship between the main factors and the decision to choose, the foundation's strategy should integrate efforts to enhance brand image, build positive word of mouth, and strengthen brand trust simultaneously, so that prospective students' interest increases and leads to stronger final decisions.

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