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The Influence of Digital Marketing, Brand Image, and Price on Students' Interest in Choosing Mikroskil University (Case Study at the Faculty of Business 2024-2025)

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing, brand image, and price on students' interest in choosing Universitas Mikroskil, particularly in the Faculty of Business. The background of the study highlights the increasing competition among universities in attracting new students. A quantitative method was used, involving a survey of prospective students who have considered enrolling at Universitas Mikroskil. Data collection was conducted using questionnaires, and data were analyzed through the SmartPLS 4.0 application. The results show that digital marketing, brand image, and price each have a significant positive effect on students' interest in choosing a university. Furthermore, the combined influence of these three variables strongly determines students' purchase intention in the context of higher education. The study concludes that universities must enhance their digital marketing strategies, build a strong and consistent brand image, and offer competitive pricing to attract prospective students effectively. These findings are expected to assist higher education institutions in formulating more targeted marketing strategies to increase student enrollment.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand Image, Price, Student Interest, University Selection.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the interest of Indonesian students in pursuing higher education has increased significantly. This is evident from the rising number of students who continue their studies at the university level, both in public and private institutions. As competition among universities becomes increasingly fierce, private universities such as Universitas Mikroskil must implement strategic efforts to attract new students. One of the most effective strategies in today's digital era is the use of *digital marketing*, alongside building a strong *brand image*, and offering competitive *price* options.

University of Mikroskil, located in Medan, is a private higher education institution that focuses on the fields of technology and business. In order to remain competitive, the university

must understand the factors that influence prospective students in choosing an institution. According to Kotler and Keller (2016) purchase interest is strongly influenced by the marketing strategies adopted, the perceived value of the brand, and the affordability of the offering. Furthermore, digital marketing has been shown to enhance communication, expand market reach, and increase consumer engagement in educational services (Heidrick and market reach, and increase consumer engagement in educational services (Heidrick and Struggles, 2019). Meanwhile, a positive brand image serves as a strong psychological motivator for consumer decisions (Tjiptono and Chandra, 2021), and rpricing is often associated with perceived quality and accessibility of educational services (Tjiptono and Chandra, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to analyze how digital marketing, brand image, and price influence the interest of students in choosing Universitas Mikroskil, particularly within the Faculty of Business. This research also aims to provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of these factors in forming student purchase intentions in the context of higher education. The study uses a quantitative approach with data collected through surveys distributed to prospective students, and analyzed using the SmartPLS software.

Based on the background above, the formulation of the problems in this article are: (1) Does digital marketing influence students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil? (2) Does brand image affect students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil? (3) Does price affect students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil? (4) Do digital marketing, brand image, and price simultaneously influence student's interest in choosing University of Mikroskil?

METHOD

Type of Research

This research employs a quantitative approach with an associative method to examine the influence of digital marketing, brand image, and price on student' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil. The associative method is used to determine the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable in a structured and statistical manner (Sugiyono, 2017).

Population and Sample

The population in this study includes all prospective students who are considering enrolling in University of Mikroskil, particularly in the Faculty of Business, during the 2024-2025 academic year. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which selects individuals based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The final sample consisted of 116 respondents who had been exposed to University of Mikroskil's marketing campaigns and expressed interest in the programs offered.

Time and Place of Research

The research was conducted over a period of three months, from February to April 2025. Data collection took place in Medan, at University of Mikroskil and its digital outreach platforms.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this research was a structured questionnaire, consisting of statements related to each variable measured on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument was developed based on indicators derived from previous theoretical frameworks related to digital marketing, brand image, price, and purchase intention.

Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed both online and offline to reach a broad range of respondents. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability to ensure it met research standards. Respondents were given brief instructions and assured of confidentiality.

Data Analysis Technique

The data obtained were analyzed using the SmartPLS version 4.0 application, which is suitable for structural equation modeling (SEM) with partial least squares. The analysis included testing the outer model (validity and reliability), and the inner model (coefficient of determination, predictive relevance, and path coefficient). This approach allows researchers to examine complex relationships between variables and assess the direct and indirect effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research are based on the analysis of responses from 116 prospective students who were considering enrollment at Universitas Mikroskil's Faculty of Business. Data were analyzed using the SmartPLS 4.0 application. The purpose of the analysis was to evaluate the individual and simultaneous effects of digital marketing, brand image, and price on students' interest in choosing Universitas Mikroskil. The following sections present descriptive statistics, results of the measurement model (outer model), and structural model (inner model) testing, including path analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the respondents' perception of each variable. The results showed that:

a. **Digital Marketing** receiver an average score of 4.01, indicating that most respondents agreed that Universitas Mikroskil had implemented digital marketing strategies effectively, including through social media, search engine visibility, and website content.
b. **Brand Image** obtained an average score of 4.08, showing that the institution has built a fairly positive image in the minds of prospective students.
c. Price scored 3.85, suggesting that while most respondents considered tuition fees relatively affordable, some still perceived them as a barrier.
d. **Students Interest in Choosing Mikroskil** had an average score of 4.10, indicating a high intention among respondents to enroll.

Outer Model Testing (Measurement Model)

The outer model was evaluated to test the validity and reliability of the indicators used for each construct. The result showed:

a. All **factor loadings** were greater than 0.7, confirming **indicator reliability**.
b. The **Average Varians Extracted (AVE)** values for all variables exceeded 0.5, indicating convergent validity.
c. The **Composite Reability (CR)** and **Cronbach's Alpha** values were above 0.7 for each construct, confirming **internal consistency reliability** (Hair et al., 2017).

Inner Model Testing (Structural Model)

The structural model was evaluated using R^2, Q^2, and path coefficients.

1. **R-Square (R^2)**
   The R^2 value for the dependent variable, **student interest**, was 0.672. This indicated that **67.2% of the variance** in students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil

can be explained by the three independent variables: digital marketing, brand image, and price.

2. **Predictive Relevance (Q^2)**

The Q^2 value obtained was greater than 0, indicating that the model has good predictive relevance.

3. **Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	Result
H1	Digital Marketing → Student Interest	0.331	4.582	0.000	Supported
H2	Brand Image → Student Interest	0.421	6.732	0.000	Supported
H3	Price → Student Interest	0.248	3.152	0.002	Supported

All three variables have a **positive and significant effect** on students' interest in choosing Universitas Mikroskil, as indicated by the t-statistic values above 1.96 and p-values less than 0.05.

Interpretation and Discussion

The results of hypothesis testing demonstrate that **digital marketing** significantly influences students' interest. The growing use of internet and social media platforms among high school graduates has made digital marketing a powerful tool for universities to engage with potential students. This is consistent with the findings of Mangold and Faulds (2009), who argue that digital platforms enhance brand visibility and foster trust through constant interaction.

Secondly, the results of hypothesis testing demonstrate that brand image significantly influences students' interest. The growing use of internet and social media platforms among high school graduates has made digital marketing a powerful tool for universities to engage with potential students. This is consistent with the findings of Mangold and Faulds (2009), who argue that digital platforms enhance brand visibility and foster trust through constant interaction.

Third, the role of **price** is also significant, although not as dominant as brand image or digital marketing. Price influences the perceived value of education; thus, affordable tuition fees and flexible payment schemes enhance accessibility. Tjiptono and Chandra (2021) emphasize that pricing in the education sector not only reflects affordability but also indirectly signals quality.

Overall, the combined effect of the three variables confirms that a university's **marketing communication strategy, brand positioning**, and **tuition pricing** policy are all critical in shaping prospective students' decisions. For University of Mikroskil, these results suggest that investment in digital infrastructure and branding efforts must be continued, while price offerings should remain competitive to appeal to a broader market segment.

Answer to Research Questions

1. **Does digital marketing influence students' interest?**
   Yes, Digital marketing has a positive and significant impact on students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil
2. **Does brand image affect students' interest?**
   Yes, Brand image shows the highest impact among the three variables and strongly influences students' decisions.

3. **Does price affect students' interest?**
   Yes, Although to a slightly lesser extent, price still significantly affects student interest.
4. **Do all three variables jointly influence student interest?**
   Yes. The model shows a strong explanatory power (R^2 = 67.2%), confirming that digital marketing, brand image, and price collectively influence students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing, brand image, and price on students' interest in choosing University of Mikroskil, specifically in the Faculty of Business. Based on the data analysis and hypothesis testing, it can be concluded that all three independent variables have a positive and significant of effect on students' interest, both individually and collectively. Digital marketing plays an important role in increasing visibility and engagement with prospective students, especially in an era where internet-based information search behavior dominates the decision-making process. A strong and consistent brand image was found to be the most influential factor, suggesting that students form perceptions of institutional quality not only from academic offerings but also from the university's public reputation and visual identity. Furthermore, although price had a relatively smaller effect compared to the other variables, it remains a critical determinant in shaping students' consideration of accessibility and value for money in their education choices. and engagement with prospective students, especially in an era where internet-based information search behavior dominates the decision-making process. A strong and consistent brand image was found to be the most influential factor, suggesting that students form perceptions of institutional quality not only from academic offerings but also from the university's public reputation and visual identity. Furthermore, although price had a relatively smaller effect compared to the other variables, it remains a critical determinant in shaping students' consideration of accessibility and value for money in their education choices.

The implication of this study for education management, particularly in higher education marketing practices, lies in integrating modern promotional tools with strategic branding and value-based pricing. For Universitas Mikroskil and similar institutions, this research highlights the need to optimize digital platforms, enhance institutional branding strategies, and review tuition structures to remain competitive and relevant. By aligning these elements effectively, universities can not only attract a higher number of prospective students but also build a sustainable positioning in an increasingly dynamic education market. Future improvements in educational marketing should focus on data-driven decision making, personalized digital engagement, and long-term brand trust-building initiatives.

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