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Analysis Of Consumer Perceptions And Preferences In Selecting A University For Higher Education

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Abstract: This research aims to explore consumers perceptions and preferences in choosing a university as a place to pursue higher education. This research is a qualitative study using interactive analysis primary and secondary data with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews with seven student informants of University of Indonesia Membangun known as INABA University, and analysis of related documents. The results show that there are internal and external factors of perceptions such as university reputation, quality of study programs, location, tuition fees, and flexibilities of the course in the decision to choose a university. And also internal factors such as motivation, interest, or psychological characteristics, from which students eventually choose Inaba as their university preference. This research contributes to an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence consumers decision to choose a university, as well as practical implications for higher education institutions to enhance their appeal. By understanding consumer preferences and perceptions, universities can develop marketing strategies improvements to meet prospective students expectations and build a positive image in the higher education market.

Keyword: Perceptions, Preferences , Consumers Decision , University

INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector in Indonesia has experienced significant developments over time, both public universities and private universities (Prasetyaningrum & Marliana, 2020). Referring to the Indonesian Statistics report, (west java statistical center) it is calculated that the number of universities spread across Indonesia in 2022 is 4004 university units, within West Java holds the highest number of 557 universities and Bandung as the capital of West Java province has 200 universities. Seeing the large number of universities in Bandung City itself makes the level of competition between universities is tight (Bundrant & Sellmann, 2021) so that only universities that have the ability to compete, are able to survive, and achieve the targets set can compete (Firdaus Helmi Adam & Agus Hariyanto, 2023). Each institution seeks to attract as many students as possible, and the number of students is a key factor in the survival of higher education. (Azman & Elsandra, 2018) Therefore, universities are trying to improve the quality of education by providing what is best for

students,(Hikmah & Sutrisno, 2022). Knowing how students as consumers perceive and choose universities is an important step for universities to fulfill the target and goals that make universities will always be sought out and desirable by consumers (rosianah, hambali, 2022) because the perception of students significantly affects their preferences in the decision to choose a university for their college (Riyadi S, Nuswantoro P, Merakati I, Sihombing I, 2023).

University of Indonesia Membangun known as INABA University is a private university in Bandung, West Java established in 2021 which is a transformation of STIE INABA (Indonesian College of Economics) established in 1986. After transforming, INABA University is expanding its market reach as an educational institution for students by opening various faculties other than economics, which currently totals 7 (seven) study programs such as Management, Accounting, Communication Science, Psychology, Information System Departement, Computer System Departement and Master of Management.

As a newly established university after transforming from STIE, INABA University which already has a Higher Education accreditation of B (Good) according to the Decree of the Director of the BAN-PT Executive Board No. 1795/SK/BAN-PT/Ak-PNB/PT/XI/2022 expands its market reach as an educational institution for students by opening various faculties other than Economics which currently totals 7 study programs including:

1. Management, with accreditation B according to BAN-PT Decree number: 11838/SK/BAN-PT/Ak-PNB/S/X/2021
2. Accounting, with B accreditation according to BAN-PT Decree number: 11841/SK/BAN-PT/Ak-PNB/S/X/2021
3. Communication Science, with Good accreditation according to BAN-PT Decree number: 10346/SK/BAN-PT/Ak.P/S/XII/2022
4. Psychology, with Good accreditation according to BAN-PT Decree number: 10330/SK/BAN-PT/Ak.P/S/XII/2022
5. Information Systems: with B accreditation according to BAN-PT Decree number: 12270/SK/BAN-PT/Ak-PPJ/S/XI/2021
6. Computer Systems: with B accreditation in accordance with BAN-PT Decree number: 4623/SK/BAN-PT/Ak-PNB/S / XII/2022
7. Master of Management: with BS accreditation according to BAN-PT Decree number: 358/DE/A.5/AR.10/IV/2023

(Source: Website DirekoriPT LLDikti 4)

As the transforming became university, the students that choose INABA as their choice to get higher education is increasing based on the number of student from marketing team INABA university.

Table 1. The number of INABA University students 2020 – 2022

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
2020	579
2021	617
2022	1395

Source : INABA University Marketing Division

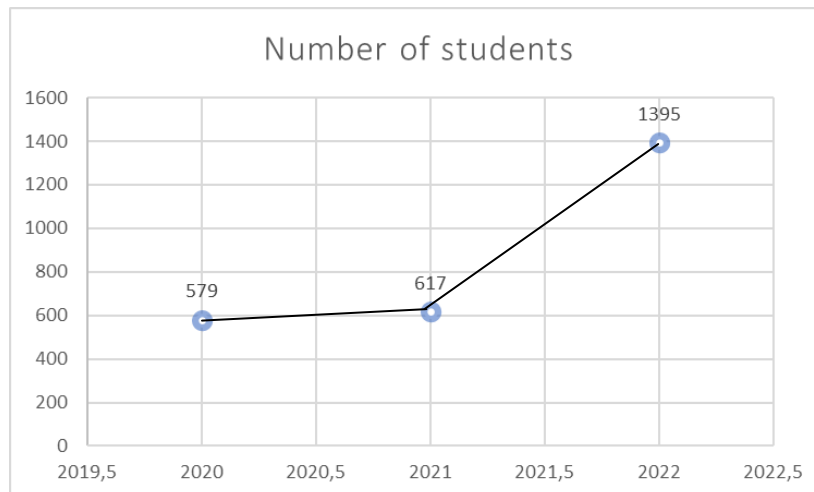


Figure 1. Graph of increasing number of students
Source : Processed by Researchers,2023

With the increasing number of students in INABA University, the purpose of this study is to find out the perceptions and preferences students as a consumers in selecting INABA University as the university for their higher education.

The benefits that can be obtained through the implementation of this research can be utilized as reference material to expand the theory of thought and develop scientific knowledge, and the results of the study can be noted for universities as a promotional medium that will affect how to build perceptions as well as make potential consumers have a preference to study at the University of Indonesia Membangun.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a study that focuses on researching the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or various materials. Data collection methods in qualitative research include observation, interviews, and document analysis (Fadli, 2021). Qualitative research aims to increase understanding of the phenomena shown by research subjects, including behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and other holistic components. (Milla & Dinda Febriola, 2022) This strategy aims to provide a thorough explanation, using precise language and various natural techniques, both in written and oral form.(rosianah, hambali, 2022). Researchers conducted research by conducting data collection techniques by in-depth interview. The interviews that researchers conducted were a form of structured question and answer to examine the perceptions and preferences of students as consumers who chose INABA University to study in a directed, organized and limited manner. The research was conducted at INABA University in the 2023/2024 odd semester. To obtain the necessary data, researchers made 7 (seven) research sources who are students of different study programs at the University of Indonesia Membangun.

To test the validity of qualitative method data, data source triangulation is used. In this research. Qualitative research diverges from relying on statistical approaches to guarantee the trustworthiness and accuracy of data and findings. Nevertheless, one can employ methodological techniques that prioritize transparency, systematicity, and adherence to evidence, ensuring the enhancement of generated data. This approach also ensures credibility and reliability throughout the planning and execution stages of the investigative methodology.

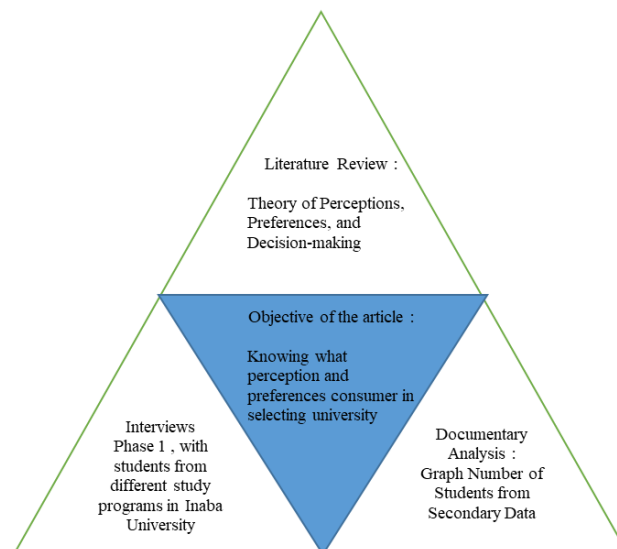


Figure 2. Triangulation Method of Research
Source : Processed by Researchers,2024

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions and Preferences of INABA University students in decisions to choose INABA University for study

Analysis of the interview findings that most of the informants revealed that the perceptions by students as consumers have a large contribution to determine the preferences of students to make decisions in choosing INABA University as a place to study. As a result of the identification, the components that form the basis of the perception of the informant are considered both external and internal factors. External factors where these factors come from outside the individual, in this case the form of influence such as the influence of public views on the inaba campus, starting from the activeness of the inaba website and social media, testimonials from other people and graduates, the campus environment which is in a strategic location, is famous for its affordable fees and can be paid in installments, is popular with the ease of students to undergo college with hybrid learning.

Known as a flexible campus and also makes it easier for students who are already working to still be able to carry out college. popular with the ease with which students can undergo lectures with hybrid learning. As stated by our research informant (NA) *"studying at inaba because I saw from the campus learning program that can allow students to choose a class schedule and can choose offline or online"* then regarding the convenience for employees and testimonials of other parties (AS) gave a statement *"from the advertisement, inaba also has classes for special employees, it turns out that many of my friends who work also recommend inaba"*. the informant (AO) said *"the image of inaba has been good from the first time my parents said"*. (FH) who had similar factors said *"My perception of inaba has been positive from the beginning because studying can be while working and also my mother who is an inaba alumni really supports the perception of inaba positively for me"* The external factor of the influence of inaba's active social media was conveyed by informant (IK) who mentioned that he saw advertisements and image posts from inaba's Instagram attracting the informant's attention. (IK) *"Seeing inaba's advertisements in explore instagram and then posting it actively, it turns out that when you look at it, it's alive, the social media is good"*. The good reputation of the university makes one of the things that the community and students see, (NR) gave a statement *"Inaba University is from STIE to University, it's really good, I was told by friends who have studied there that Inaba's academic reputation has*

improved since it became a University". Regarding the fame of INABA University because of the many scholarships, it is also one of the perceptions of inaba students according to what was said by (DA) our informant, "I know that Inaba is a campus, from the dormitory because the dormitory suggested it, then it is well known, especially since it turns out that management and accounting study programs can have different scholarships."

Internal factors relate to influences or qualities that arise from within the individual, such as motivation, interest, or other psychological characteristics. Researchers found internal elements that shape the attitudes of Inaba University students through interviews to choose Inaba University as a college for college which can make students have a preference to study at Inaba, including the interest of students to be able to sit in college, as well as the motivation that students really have to be able to study according to their majors of interest. Which of these internal factors students finally chose inaba as the university of choice for college. (OA) mentioned *"after a one-year gapyear I finally became interested in going to college and after looking for alternative campuses that have psychology majors, inaba became my preference for college because it was my intention to major in psychology"*. (NA) *"Personally, I was already attached to going to college if I wanted to major in communication, and it was fitting that communication science was the first major at inaba university so my preference was to go to inaba"*. (IK) *"The interest in migrating to pursue a college degree is the reason why I chose inaba as my university preference for college"* (AS) *"My motivation to go to college has been there since I started working, but I only got inaba as my preference for college with the employee class."*

CONCLUSION

The perception of INABA University students is a positive perception that creates a high preference. The perceptions formed in Inaba students are influenced by various variables. The majority of these aspects, which contribute to positive perceptions, come from external sources such as experiences shared by others and neighborhood influences. Student interest and motivation contribute to the formation of a favorable view, among internal influences.

Positive perceptions from students as well as the community towards INABA University are essential for preferences in choosing a university. The importance of positive perceptions will determine the long-term viability of the university. A favorable perception will also contribute greatly to INABA University receiving positive comments from the public, thus increasing student interest, quality and satisfaction levels.

The results show that there are internal and external factors of perceptions such as university reputation, quality of study programs, location, tuition fees, and flexibilities of the course in the decision to choose a university. And also internal factors such as motivation, interest, or psychological characteristics, from which students eventually choose Inaba as their university preference.

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