

# UNIVERSITY'S IMAGE MODERATES THE INFLUENCE OF LOCATION AND WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING ON THE DECISION TO CHOSE A COLLEGE

(Studies at University Management Study Program at LLDIKTI  
Region X in Riau Province)

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to develop a conceptual model of university's image moderating the influence of location and word of mouth marketing on the decision to choose a university at University Management Study Program at LLDIKTI Region X in Riau Province. The data was processed using Partial Least Square (PLS), the sample size was 197 students of management study programs at universities in Riau Province. The main finding in the research is that location and word of mouth marketing influence the decision to choose a college, college image moderates the influence of location and word of mouth marketing on the decision to choose a college. The research results strengthen the theory of planned behavior where students' intentions to choose a university are caused by location, word of mouth marketing and the image of the university.

**Keywords:** Location, word of mouth marketing, university's image, decision to choose a college.

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## 1. Introduction

The Association of Indonesian Private Universities or Aptisi Region X-A West Sumatera asked the government to review the acceptance of new independent students at state universities with legal entities or PTN-BH. For the past two years, private universities have had difficulty getting new students because of the massive number of independent admissions at PTN-BH. Chairman of Aptisi Region On average, PTS leaders complain about the decline in the number of new students due to the massive number of independent pathway PMBs at PTN-BH. "Acceptance for independent pathways at PTN-BH is endless, from waves I, II, III, to infinity. Until the end of August 2023, (near the first day of classes), they are still accepting students, even though previously it had finished in July. PTS loses time looking for new students. Due to the long opening period for the independent PMB pathway at PTN-BH, the time for PTS to recruit students is tight. Moreover, the gap between PTN and PTS first lectures is now only two weeks compared to 1-2 months previously.

The first lectures at PTN will start in the first week of September 2023, while at PTS the third week of September 2023. PTS is still less competitive than PTN. People still prioritize studying at PTN even though the quality of certain study programs at state campuses is no better than PTS. Therefore, the government needs to be fair and review the independent PMB regulations at PTN-BH. Resources for running PTS are still dominated by the number of students. The government needs to review the PTN-BH regulations and its derivatives. PTN-BH should prioritize quality by realizing its vision of becoming a world class university (WCU), not chasing quantity. The lecturer to student ratio at WCU is 1:10. Does PTN-BH want to go to WCU or just finish off private campuses? Moreover, currently many PTNs are starting to work together to build campuses in the regions. What is worrying is not only the

absence of students, but also the sustainability of PTS itself. There are many things, for example, regarding employees whose salaries are funded by student tuition fees. It's not just small or new private universities that complain about this problem. Large private universities with a long history of helping develop human resources in West Sumatra, Riau also experienced the same thing. Based on this description, research on students' interest in choosing higher education is still relevant to carry out.

The decision to choose a college by students is related to the location of the college, word of mouth marketing and the image of the college. Several studies state that the location of a university influences a student's decision to choose a university to study at (Adhiansyah and Rizkianfi, 2020); (Cynthia, Hermawan and Izzuddin, 2022); (Kelvinia et al., 2021); (Nuseir and El Refae, 2022); (Rachmawati et al., 2019); (Kao and Shimizu, 2020); (Sundari et al., 2021), other research also states that word of mouth marketing influences students' decisions in choosing a university (Chua et al., 2020); (Gosal et al., 2020); (Guerreiro and Pacheco, 2021); (Hikmah et al., 2022); (Ismagilova et al., 2020); (Prasad et al., 2019); (Sulthana and Vasantha, 2019); (Wiratama et al., 2022). Several studies state that location does not influence a student's decision to choose a university (Bachtiar and Purwanto, 2021); (Harahap et al., 2020), several studies also state that word of mouth marketing has no influence on students' decisions in choosing a university (Khanafi, 2021); (Slamet, Prasetyo and Azmala, 2022); (Suharyanto and Rahman, 2022).

There are still inconsistencies in research results regarding the influence of location and word of mouth marketing on students' decisions in choosing a university, so to fill this gap, the university's image variable was chosen as a moderating variable which has the potential to strengthen students' decisions in choosing a university. Universities with strategic locations, good word of mouth marketing, if reinforced by a good university's image, have the potential to increase students' decisions to choose a university. Several studies also state that brand image influences the decision to choose a university (Sanny et al., 2020); (Widayati et al., 2020); (Iskuntianti et al., 2020).

This research aims to provide a solution to the gap research on the influence of location and word of mouth marketing on students' decision to choose a university. The results of this research are expected to strengthen the theory of planned behavior related to location variables, word of mouth marketing, university's image and the decision to choose a university by students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Decision to Choose a College**

Kotler and Armstrong (2016), stated that purchasing decisions are part of consumer behavior, consumer behavior itself is the study of how individuals, groups and organizations choose, buy, use and how goods, services, ideas or experiences satisfy needs and desires. they. Buchari Alma (2018), states that purchasing decisions are consumer decisions which are influenced by financial economics, technology, cultural politics, products, prices, locations, promotions, physical evidence, people and processes. So that it forms an attitude in consumers to process all information and draw conclusions in the form of responses that arise regarding what product they will buy.

From several explanations from the experts above regarding the meaning of purchasing decisions, it can be concluded that purchasing decisions are consumers' responses to goods, services, ideas or experiences, which are influenced by self-motivation in the form of needs and desires, as well as based on information gathered from other people. regarding the goods, services, ideas or experiences they will purchase.

### **Location**

According to Kotler & Armstrong (2016), location is the place where business activities are carried out, namely various company activities to make the products produced or sold affordable and available to the target market. Meanwhile, according to Tengku (2020) placement or location is a very important part. A place is a location where a company makes products that will be marketed to consumers (Lamb et al., 2016). From the understanding put forward by several experts, researchers conclude that the location or distribution channel is one of a group of organizations that work together to sell products or services for use or consumption by consumers.

### **Word of Mouth Promotion**

Word of mouth is a type of promotion that is powerful, effective and has the lowest cost. Satisfied consumers will tell and recommend others by word of mouth regarding good experiences with a product. Word of mouth marketing often has a more competitive advantage in conveying information about a business. This is because word of mouth marketing arises naturally from the opinion of the social environment which is felt to be more honest and there are no particular motives in conveying information to other consumers. The emergence of increasingly sophisticated technology no longer limits word of mouth marketing to face-to-face conversation situations, but can be done via telephone or social networks. Plus, today's people's lifestyles tend to use their smart devices which are known as smartphones to access the internet (Khotimah, 2020)

### **University's Image**

Kotler & Keller (2016) concluded that a brand is a product that has dimensions that differentiate it from others that are intended as substitutes. Bailey & Milligan (2022) state that brands can be a way to establish a self-label and establish attachment to the idea that we are what we buy. Adding colors, interests and preferences can help consumers make decisions because brands can be anywhere. Katz in Rahadhini (2010) means that image is another form of perspective in looking at an industry, individual, institute or activity. Eva & Widya (2021) stated that brand image is a representation of a brand that is born from consumers' memories. Meanwhile, Wulandari (2013) concluded that brand image is a collection of brand associations that create a belief and stick in the minds of consumers.

### **Conceptual Model and Hypothesis**

The conceptual model to be tested can be seen in Figure 1. Below:

Based on empirical and theoretical studies, inconsistencies are still found in the results of research on the influence of location and word of mouth marketing on the decision to choose a university, so the hypothesis that the researcher proposes is:

- H1. There is an influence of location on the decision to choose a college.
- H2. There is an influence of word of mouth marketing on college selection decisions.
- H3. University's image moderates the influence of location on college selection decisions.
- H4. University's image moderates the influence of word of mouth marketing on college selection decisions.

## **3. Method**

This research is causal associative research, causal associative research is research that aims to determine the relationship between two or more variables. With this research, a theory can be built that functions to explain, predict and control a phenomenon. A causal relationship is a relationship that is cause-and-effect in nature, one variable (independent) influences another

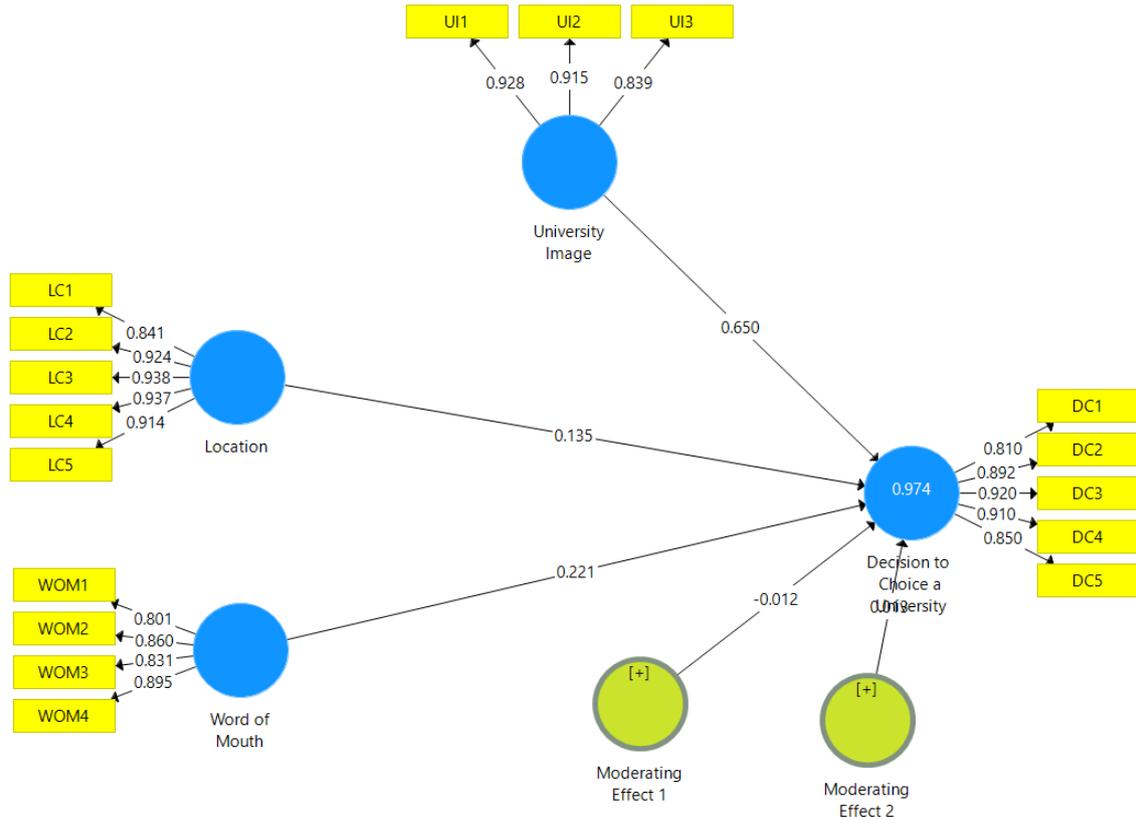
variable (dependent) (Sugiyono, 2013). The research subjects were students of the university management study program at LLDIKTI region X in Riau Province, the population was all students of the university management study program in LLDIKTI region X in Riau Province, the sample was 197 students taken using the Slovin formula.

The measurement of the decision variable for choosing a higher education institution was developed by Kotler and Keller (2016), namely: 1) recognition of needs, 2) information search, 3) evaluation of various alternatives, 4) purchase decision, 5) post-purchase behavior. For location variables, indicators were developed from Tjiptono et al., (2016), namely: 1) access, 2) visibility, 3) traffic, 4) place, 5) expansion. For the word of mouth marketing variable, indicators were developed from Word of mouth marketing indicators were developed from Kotler and Keller (2016), namely: 1) word of mouth content (content of word of mouth communication), 2) negative valence word of mouth (negative word of mouth communication), 3) positive valence word of mouth (positive word of mouth communication), 4) word of mouth intensity (intensity of word of mouth communication). Cltra university indicators were developed from Kotler and Armstrong, (2017) with indicators: 1) easy to recognize, 2) good reputation, 3) always remembered.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The research respondents numbered 197 people with family backgrounds: 23.3% were employees, 25.6% were self-employed and the remaining 51.1% were palm oil and rubber farmers and fishermen. 30.5% stated that the campus is less than 30 km from their residence, 40.6% stated that the campus is less than 60 km from their residence and 28.9% stated that the campus is more than 60 km from their residence so they have to rent or board a boarding house near the campus.

Respondents' responses to the decision variable in choosing a university were in the good achievement category, the highest achievement indicator was the evaluation of various alternatives. Respondents' responses to the location variable were in the good achievement category, the highest achievement indicator was place, for the word of mouth marketing variable the highest achievement indicator was positive word of mouth communication. Meanwhile, the university's image is in the good achievement category with the highest achievement indicator being a good reputation. The following is the research path model:



**Figure 2. Research Path Model**  
Sources: SmarPLS 3.3 Programs

**Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)**  
**Convergent Validity Test**

The results of the convergent validity test of the data in this study can be seen in table 1:

**Table 1. Loading Factor**

Indicators	Original Sample (O)
DC1 >- Recognition of need	0.810
DC2 >- Information search	0.892
DC3 >- Evaluate alternatives	0.920
DC4 >- Purchase decision	0.910
DC5 >- Post-purchase behavior	0.850
LC1 >- Access	0.841
LC2 >- Visibility	0.924
LC3 >- Traffic	0.938
LC4 >- Place	0.937
LC5 >- Expansion	0.914
WOM1 >- Communication content	0.801
WOM2 >- Negative Communication	0.860
WOM3 >- Positive communication	0.831
WOM4 >- communication intensity	0.895
UI1 >- Easy to recognize	0.928
UI2 >- Good reputation	0.915
UI3 >- Always keep in mind	0.839

Sources: SmarPLS 3.3 Programs

Based on the results of the convergent validity test in table 1, if the factor loading value is <0.5 then it must be removed from the model and the factor loading value must be re-estimated. By removing several factor loadings <0.5, all indicators are used to continue the

analysis to the next stage. It is said to meet convergent validity if all factor loadings are  $>0.5$ . Because all factor loadings in this study are  $>0.5$ , it means that all indicators are valid to form variable constructs.

### Discriminant Validity Test

The results of the discriminant validity test from the research data can be seen in table 2:

**Table 2. Discriminant Validity**

	D.C	LC	WOM	Moderating Effect 1	Moderating Effect 2	UI
DC1	0.784	0.831	0.056	0.121	0.129	0.584
DC2	0.832	0.895	0.020	0.090	0.130	0.671
DC3	0.841	0.926	0.044	0.132	0.054	0.784
DC4	0.942	0.880	0.137	0.130	0.112	0.840
DC5	0.989	0.057	0.998	0.097	0.091	0.081
LC1	0.098	0.967	0.999	0.092	0.085	0.092
LC2	0.098	0.969	0.994	0.110	0.099	0.092
LC3	0.103	0.971	0.998	0.101	0.097	0.100
LC4	0.976	0.969	0.128	0.088	0.076	0.859
LC5	0.976	0.906	0.159	0.135	0.122	0.862
WOM1	0.958	0.894	0.001	0.037	0.047	0.834
WOM2	0.910	0.833	0.002	0.043	0.033	0.755
WOM3	0.915	0.847	0.087	0.086	0.067	0.794
UI1	0.941	0.880	0.143	0.126	0.105	0.936
UI2	0.976	0.870	0.129	0.089	0.078	0.958
UI3	0.721	0.656	0.080	0.018	0.038	0.803

Sources: SmarPLS 3.3 Programs

From table 2 above, the model has good discriminant validity if each indicator loading value of a latent variable is greater than other correlated variables. The cross loading value in this study for each indicator is greater than for other latent variables. This shows each variable has good discriminant validity.

### Construct Reliability Test

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) has a value of  $>0.5$  and Composity Reliability (CR) has a value of  $>0.7$ , meaning that the construct that was built is good or reliable. (Hair et al., 2019).

The following is the Construct Reliability table:

**Table 3. Construct Reliability**

	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Decision to Choose a University	0.985	0.904
Location	0.935	0.781
Word of Mouth Marketing	0.999	0.995
Moderating effect 1	1,000	1,000
Moderating effect 2	1,000	1,000
University's image	0.953	0.804

Sources: SmarPLS 3.3 Programs

### Measurement Model Analysis (Inner Model)

#### Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)

The following are the R-Square values in this research which can be seen in table 3:

**Table 3. R-Square**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Decision to Choose a University	0.849	0.842

Sources: SmarPLS 3.3 Programs

The R<sup>2</sup> result is 0.67; 0.33; and 0.19 indicates that the model is "good", "moderate", and "weak"(Hair et al., 2019). Based on table 3, the Adjusted R-Square value for the Academic Performance variable is 0.842, meaning that the percentage influence of location variables, word of mouth marketing and university's image on the decision to choose a university is 84.2% and the model is categorized as good.

#### Predictive Relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>)

The Q<sup>2</sup> value has the same meaning as the coefficient of determination (R-Square). A Q Square (Q<sup>2</sup>) value of 0 indicates the model has Predictive relevance; conversely, if the Q<sup>2</sup> value is less than 0, it indicates that the model has less predictive relevance; or in other words, where all Q<sup>2</sup> values are higher, the model can be considered to fit the data better(Hair et al., 2019). The Q<sup>2</sup> value in the research can be seen as follows:

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R^2_1)(1 - R^2_2) \dots (1 - R^2_n)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.842)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - 0.158$$

$$Q^2 = 0.842$$

The calculation results show that the Q<sup>2</sup> value is 0.842, meaning that the variables studied can be explained by this model and the remaining 0.158 is influenced by variables not studied.

#### Analytics Hypothesis

The following are the results of the hypothesis test in table 4:

**Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results**

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Location -> Decision to choose a university	0.825	0.824	0.118	6,985	0,000
Word of mouth marketing -> Decision to choose a university	0.630	0.631	0.042	5,728	0.001
Moderating effect 1 -> academic performance	0.460	0.459	0.127	3,472	0.011
Moderating effect 2 -> academic performance	0.511	0.510	0.140	4,082	0.019

Sources: SmarPLS 3.3 Programs

The first hypothesis which states that location influences the decision to choose a university is accepted because the p-value is <0.05 and the t-statistic value is > 1.96, meaning that the location of the dictionary influences the decision to choose a university to study at. This result strengthens the theory of planned behavior where a student first chooses a place to study before plan by considering the location of the university, word of mouth marketing and the image of the university. The results of this study are in line with research (Adhiansyah and Rizkyanfi, 2020); (Cynthia, Hermawan and Izzuddin, 2022); (Kelvinia et al., 2021);

(Nuseir and El Refae, 2022); (Rachmawati et al., 2019); (Kao and Shimizu, 2020); (Sundari et al., 2021) which states that location influences the decision to choose a university.

The second hypothesis which states that word of mouth marketing influences university selection decisions is accepted because the p-value is  $<0.05$  and the t-stastic value is  $>1.96$ . This means that word of mouth marketing influences the decision to choose a university. These results strengthen the theory of planned behavior where a student, before choosing a place to study, first plans by considering the location of the university, word of mouth marketing and the image of the university. The results of this study are in line with research (Chua et al., 2020); (Gosal et al., 2020); (Guerreiro and Pacheco, 2021); (Hikmah et al., 2022); (Ismagilova et al., 2020); (Prasad et al., 2019); (Sulthana and Vasantha, 2019); (Wiratama et al., 2022) who stated that word of mouth marketing had a positive influence on the decision to choose a university.

The third hypothesis which states that university's image moderates the influence of location on university selection decisions is accepted because the p-value is  $<0.05$  and the t-stastic value is  $>1.96$ . This means that the image of the university moderates the influence of location on university selection decisions. The nature of the moderation is quasi-moderation. These results strengthen the theory of planned behavior where a student, before choosing a place to study, first plans by considering the location of the university, word of mouth marketing and the image of the university. The results of this study are in line with research (Sanny et al., 2020); (Widayati et al., 2020); (Iskuntianti et al., 2020) which states that the image of the university has a positive influence on university selection decisions.

The fourth hypothesis which states that university's image moderates the influence of word of mouth marketing on university selection decisions is accepted because the p-value is  $<0.05$  and the t-stastic value is  $>1.96$ . This means that the university's image moderates the influence of word of mouth marketing on university selection decisions. The nature of the moderation is quasi-moderation. These results strengthen the theory of planned behavior where a student, before choosing a place to study, first plans by considering the location of the university, word of mouth marketing and the image of the university. The results of this study are in line with research (Sanny et al., 2020); (Widayati et al., 2020); (Iskuntianti et al., 2020) which states that the image of the university has a positive influence on university selection decisions.

## 5. Conclusions

This research aims to develop a theory of planned behavior through a conceptual model of decision variables in choosing a university, location, word of mouth marketing and university's image. The research results show that the four proposed hypotheses are accepted, the most effective path in improving the decision to choose a university is the brand image variable because it has the largest regression coefficient value, it can be concluded that this model can strengthen the theory of planned behavior, where students before choosing a university carry out planning carefully. considering campus location, word of mouth marketing about the campus and the image of the college. For future research, it is recommended to explore the role of location, where this variable provides a small regression coefficient, researchers can also include the role of other variables related to college selection decisions.

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