The Influence of Digital Promotion, School Service Quality, And Brand Image on Parents' Decisions In Choosing SMP Swasta Rk Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar

Posman Alponsus Simarmata[1]
Teguh Widodo[1]
Tin Agustina Karnawati[1]

[1]Affiliation: Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Asia Malang, Indonesia
Correspondence E-mail: posmansimarmata28@guru.smp.belajar.id

Abstract

Introduction/Main Objectives: The intensifying competition among private educational institutions requires schools to excel not only academically but also in building trust and appeal to parents as the primary decision-makers in school selection.

Background Problems: Enhancing teacher performance requires more than professional skills alone; it also depends on effective social interaction and strong teaching motivation, which are often overlooked in professional development efforts.

Novelty : The novelty of this study lies in the simultaneous testing of the influence of digital promotion, school service quality, and brand image on parental decisions within the context of private schools in non-metropolitan areas, a setting that remains empirically under-researched, particularly at the junior high school level.

Research Methods: This study employs an associative quantitative approach with a survey method. The research population consisted of 376 parents of grade VII students for the 2025/2026 academic year. A sample of 194 respondents was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected via Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression in SPSS.

Finding/Results: The findings indicate that partially, digital promotion has a positive but non-significant effect on parental decisions. Conversely, service quality and brand image have a positive and significant influence. Simultaneously, digital promotion, service quality, and brand image significantly influence parents' decisions in choosing the school.

Conclusion: This study concludes that parental decisions in choosing a school are more heavily influenced by perceived service quality and trust in the school's image than by digital promotion alone. Therefore, schools should prioritize enhancing service quality and strengthening their brand image while continuing to utilize digital promotion as a supportive tool for communication and information.

Keywords: digital promotion, service quality, brand image, parental decision

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology and intensifying competition among educational institutions have significantly transformed the landscape of school management. Schools are no longer only required to achieve academic excellence but must also be capable of building public trust through strategic communication, high service quality, and a robust institutional image. Empirical evidence indicates that parental decisions in school selection are increasingly influenced by a combination of digital information, service experiences, and the institution's reputation in the eyes of the public (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Within the context of education as a service, such decisions represent a complex and high-risk form of consumer behavior, as they directly impact a child's future.

This phenomenon is clearly reflected at SMP Swasta RK Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar. Internal school data reveal fluctuations in enrollment over the past seven years, characterized by a downward trend in certain periods followed by subsequent increases. These fluctuations serve as a critical indicator of dynamic parental preferences, heightened competition among similar private schools, and shifts in how parents acquire and interpret educational information. This condition underscores that a historical reputation is no longer sufficient; it must be bolstered by consistent service quality and communication strategies that remain relevant to current societal needs.
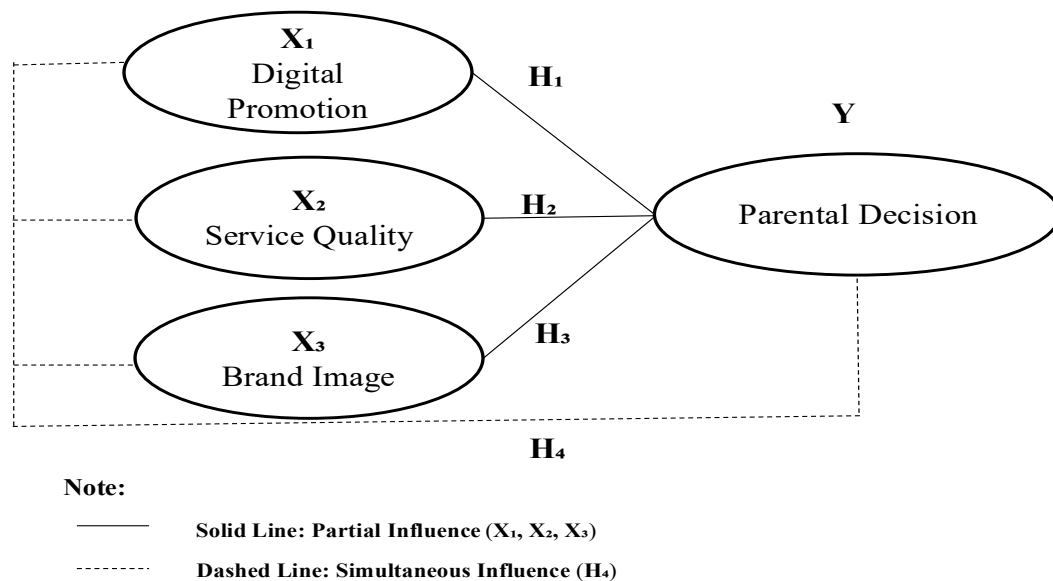
Based on these facts, this study is essential as it seeks to empirically explain the factors influencing parental decisions in school selection, focusing specifically on three primary determinants: digital promotion, school service quality, and brand image. Digital promotion serves as an information gateway and a tool for building initial awareness through online platforms (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Meanwhile, service quality constitutes the primary foundation for establishing parental trust and satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Furthermore, brand image functions as a psychological mechanism that reduces perceived risk and strengthens long-term confidence in the educational institution (Keller, 2013). A comprehensive understanding of the integration of these three aspects is vital, as the decision to choose a school results from the complex interaction between marketing stimuli, service experiences, and perceptions of institutional reputation.

Research Novelty The novelty of this research lies in the simultaneous examination of the influences of digital promotion, service quality, and brand image on parental decisions within the specific context of a private school in a non-metropolitan area. Most prior studies have predominantly focused on educational institutions in large metropolitan regions or have only partially analyzed one or two variables. Furthermore, empirical studies that integrate digital marketing approaches, service quality, and brand image into a unified analysis model—particularly at the junior high school level in regional areas—remain relatively limited. This study further enriches the perspective of educational consumer behavior by framing parental decisions as a synthesis of intertwined rational and emotional considerations.

Expected Contributions The expected contributions of this research are both theoretical and practical in nature. Theoretically, this study aims to expand the discourse on educational management and educational service marketing by providing empirical evidence regarding the relative roles of digital promotion, service quality, and brand image in shaping parental decisions. Practically, the findings are intended to serve as a strategic foundation for school administrators to formulate policies for service quality enhancement, institutional branding, and the management of digital promotions that are aligned with actual service performance.
Ultimately, this research is expected to provide a tangible contribution to enhancing the competitiveness of private schools amidst the increasingly complex dynamics of the educational landscape.

Research Conceptual Framework

Note:

———	**Solid Line: Partial Influence (X₁, X₂, X₃)**
- - - - -	**Dashed Line: Simultaneous Influence (H₄)**

Source: Data processed from Kotler and Keller (2016), Parasuraman et al. (1988), Aaker (1991), and previous research (2019–2025).

Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework
Source : Pocessed Data, 2025

Parents' decisions in selecting a school constitute a form of consumer behavior within educational services, which is influenced by marketing stimuli, perceived service quality, and institutional image. According to consumer behavior theory, purchase decisions are formed through a systematic process of rational and psychological evaluation of the information and experiences received by the consumer (Engel et al., 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In this study, digital promotion is regarded as the initial stimulus that builds awareness and interest through online media platforms (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). School service quality plays a critical role in shaping parental trust and satisfaction through service dimensions that are experienced directly (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Meanwhile, brand image functions as a representation of institutional reputation and long-term confidence, which serves to reduce perceived risk during the decision-making process (Keller, 2013). Based on this framework, digital promotion, service quality, and brand image are hypothesized to exert both partial and simultaneous influences on parents' decisions in choosing a school.

Research Methods

This study employs an associative quantitative approach aimed at analyzing the relationships and influences between variables, specifically digital promotion, school service quality, and brand image on parents' decisions in school selection. The quantitative approach was selected as it enables objective hypothesis testing through numerical measurement and inferential statistical analysis (Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

The research was conducted at SMP Swasta RK Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar, a private school grounded in Catholic religious values located in Pematangsiantar City. The research

subjects consist of parents of grade VII students for the 2025/2026 academic year, chosen because they are the primary stakeholders directly involved in the decision-making process regarding their children's education.

The research population includes all parents of grade VII students for the 2025/2026 academic year, totaling 376 individuals. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 194 respondents. The sampling technique utilized was simple random sampling, which operates on the assumption that every member of the population has an equal opportunity to be selected as a participant (Sugiyono, 2019).

The research data consist of primary data collected through structured questionnaires. The research instrument was designed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," to measure respondents' perceptions of the variables: digital promotion, service quality, brand image, and parental decisions. The Likert scale was selected due to its effectiveness in quantitatively measuring attitudes, perceptions, and evaluations.

Prior to the primary analysis, the research instrument underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure measurement accuracy and consistency. Validity was assessed using item-total correlation, while reliability was measured via Cronbach's Alpha values, with a threshold of above 0.70 as an indicator of reliability (Ghozali, 2018).

The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis facilitated by SPSS software. This analysis was utilized to determine both the partial and simultaneous influences of digital promotion, service quality, and brand image on parental decisions.

Before proceeding with hypothesis testing, the data were subjected to classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests, to ensure that the regression model met the required statistical assumptions for BLUE (Best Linear Unbiased Estimator) (Ghozali, 2018). Hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test for partial effects and the F-test for simultaneous effects, alongside the coefficient of determination (R^2) to identify the extent of the independent variables' contribution to the dependent variable.

Result

Research Instrument Test Results
The research instrument was tested to ensure the feasibility and adequacy of the measurement tool prior to further analysis. This assessment encompassed both validity and reliability tests for all indicators associated with the variables of digital promotion, service quality, brand image, and parental decisions.

Validity Test Results
Table 1: Results of Questionnaire Validity Testing

Variable	Indicator	Statement Item	r-calculated	r-table	Status
Digital Promotion (X_1)	Content Quality	$X_1.1$	0.524	0.1409	Valid
		$X_1.2$	0.606	0.1409	Valid
	Media Design and Appeal	$X_1.3$	0.750	0.1409	Valid
		$X_1.4$	0.700	0.1409	Valid
	Interactivity and Engagement	$X_1.5$	0.617	0.1409	Valid
		$X_1.6$	0.618	0.1409	Valid
		$X_1.7$	0.659	0.1409	Valid

	Frequency and Consistency	$X_1.8$	0.650	0.1409	Valid
	Digital Media Used	$X_1.9$	0.744	0.1409	Valid
		$X_1.10$	0.633	0.1409	Valid
	Promotional Message Appeal	$X_1.11$	0.743	0.1409	Valid
		$X_1.12$	0.759	0.1409	Valid
Service Quality (X_2)	Tangibles	$X_2.1$	0.660	0.1409	Valid
		$X_2.2$	0.766	0.1409	Valid
	Reliability	$X_2.3$	0.812	0.1409	Valid
		$X_2.4$	0.686	0.1409	Valid
	Responsiveness	$X_2.5$	0.777	0.1409	Valid
		$X_2.6$	0.790	0.1409	Valid
	Assurance	$X_2.7$	0.794	0.1409	Valid
		$X_2.8$	0.801	0.1409	Valid
	Empathy	$X_2.9$	0.786	0.1409	Valid
		$X_2.10$	0.779	0.1409	Valid
Brand Image (X_3)	Brand Awareness	$X_3.1$	0.658	0.1409	Valid
		$X_3.2$	0.798	0.1409	Valid
	Brand Association	$X_3.3$	0.691	0.1409	Valid
		$X_3.4$	0.738	0.1409	Valid
	Perceived Quality	$X_3.5$	0.774	0.1409	Valid
		$X_3.6$	0.753	0.1409	Valid
	Brand Loyalty	$X_3.7$	0.793	0.1409	Valid
		$X_3.8$	0.738	0.1409	Valid
	Brand Personality	$X_3.9$	0.737	0.1409	Valid
		$X_3.10$	0.791	0.1409	Valid
Parental Decision (Y)	Need Recognition	Y.1	0.694	0.1409	Valid
		Y.2	0.751	0.1409	Valid
	Information Search	Y.3	0.536	0.1409	Valid
		Y.4	0.587	0.1409	Valid
	Alternative Evaluation	Y.5	0.362	0.1409	Valid
		Y.6	0.682	0.1409	Valid
	Purchase Decision	Y.7	0.665	0.1409	Valid
		Y.8	0.752	0.1409	Valid
	Post-Purchase Behavior	Y.9	0.743	0.1409	Valid
		Y.10	0.670	0.1409	Valid

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

Validity testing was conducted using item-total correlation. The test results indicated that all statement items for each variable yielded correlation coefficients (*r-calculated*) greater than the *r-table* value; consequently, all indicators were declared valid and suitable for further statistical analysis. These findings demonstrate that each item is capable of accurately measuring the intended construct (Ghozali, 2018).

Reliability Test Results
Table 2: Results of Questionnaire Reliability Testing

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Status
Digital Promotion (X_1)	0.918	Reliable

Service Quality (X_2)	0.943	Reliable
Brand Image (X_3)	0.937	Reliable
Parental Decision (Y)	0.890	Reliable

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

Reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The test results indicate that all variables yielded Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70; consequently, the research instrument is declared reliable. This indicates that the instrument possesses good internal consistency in measuring respondent perceptions (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Classical Assumption Test Results

Prior to conducting multiple linear regression analysis, the data were tested to satisfy classical assumptions to ensure that the regression model employed is BLUE (Best Linear Unbiased Estimator) (Gujarati & Porter, 2009). This step is crucial to guarantee that the statistical inferences drawn from the model are valid and reliable.

Normality Test

Table 3: Results of the Normality Test (One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

				Unstandardiz ed Residual
N				194
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean			.0000000
	Std. Deviation			2.33876288
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute			.085
	Positive			.085
	Negative			-.080
Test Statistic				.085
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)				.002[c]
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.			.117[d]
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound		.108
		Upper Bound		.125

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

The Normality Test indicates that the data are normally distributed, as evidenced by a Kolmogorov–Smirnov significance value greater than 0.05.

Multicollinearity Test

Table 4: Results of Multicollinearity Testing (Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor)

Coefficients[a]

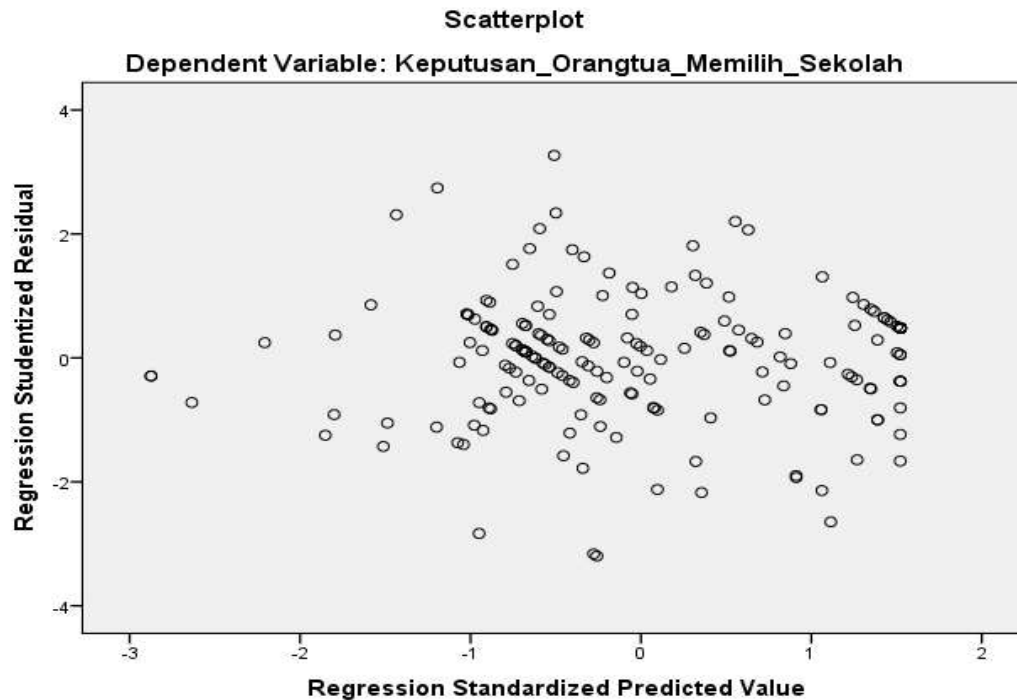| Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Digital Promotion	.385	2.594
	Service Quality	.302	3.313
	Brand Image	.291	3.432

a. Dependent Variable: Parental Decision

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

The multicollinearity test results indicate the absence of multicollinearity symptoms, as evidenced by Tolerance values greater than 0.10 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values of less than 10 across all independent variables.

Heteroscedasticity Test
Table 5: Heteroscedasticity Test Results

Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Keputusan_Orangtua_Memilih_Sekolah

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

The heteroscedasticity test demonstrates that there is no discernible pattern in the distribution of residuals, and the significance values for each variable are greater than 0.05. Consequently, the model is declared free from heteroscedasticity issues, ensuring that the variance of the residuals remains constant across all observations. This finding confirms that the regression model satisfies the required statistical assumptions (Ghozali, 2018).

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results
Table 6: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.350	1.687		1.986	.048
	Digital Promotion	.079	.048	.093	1.623	.106
	Service Quality	.239	.058	.266	4.097	.000
	Brand Image	.578	.068	.565	8.549	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Parental Decision

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that digital promotion, school service quality, and brand image collectively contribute to parents' decisions in choosing SMP Swasta RK Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar. The regression coefficients demonstrate a positive relationship across all independent variables, indicating that an increase in each variable tends to enhance parental decisions.

The research findings reveal specific regression coefficients for the variables: 0.079 for Digital Promotion (X1), 0.239 for Service Quality (X2), and 0.578 for Brand Image (X3), with a constant value of 3.350. Based on these values, the multiple linear regression equation for this study is as follows:

$$Y = 3,350 + 0,079\ X_1 + 0,239\ X_2 + 0,578\ X_3 + e$$

Furthermore, the analysis confirms that digital promotion, school service quality, and brand image simultaneously influence parents' decisions in choosing SMP Swasta RK Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar. All independent variables exhibit a positive direction of influence, meaning that improvements in digital promotion, service quality, and school image are typically followed by an increase in parental decisions. However, the most robust contributions within the regression model are derived from service quality and brand image, whereas digital promotion serves primarily as a supporting factor.

Partial Test (t-test)

Table 7: Results of the Partial Test (t-test)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.350	1.687		1.986	.048
	Digital Promotion	.079	.048	.093	1.623	.106
	Service Quality	.239	.058	.266	4.097	.000
	Brand Image	.578	.068	.565	8.549	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Parental Decision

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2025.

The t-test results indicate the following:
1. Digital promotion has a positive but non-significant effect on parents' decisions.
2. School service quality exerts a positive and significant influence on parents' decisions.
3. Brand image has a positive and significant effect on parents' decisions.

These findings demonstrate that parental decisions are more profoundly influenced by tangible service quality and the school's image than by digital promotion alone. This suggests that while digital promotion serves as an initial stimulus, the final decision is driven by rational evaluations of service excellence and long-term trust in the institution's reputation.

Simultaneous Test (F-test)
Table 8: Results of the Simultaneous Test (F-test)

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3311.667	3	1103.889	198.678	.000^b
	Residual	1055.674	190	5.556		
	Total	4367.340	193			

a. Dependent Variable: Parental Decision

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Digital Promotion, Service Quality

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2026.

The F-test results demonstrate that digital promotion, service quality, and brand image simultaneously exert a significant influence on parents' decisions in school selection. This indicates that these three variables constitute a unified set of complementary factors that collectively shape parental decision-making. In the context of educational marketing, this synergy suggests that an informative digital presence must be harmonized with consistent service delivery and a credible institutional brand to effectively secure parental commitment.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)
Table 9: Results of the Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Test

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.871^a	.758	.754	2.35715

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Digital Promotion, Service Quality

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2026.

The results of the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicate that a substantial portion of the variation in parents' school selection decisions can be explained by digital promotion, service quality, and brand image within this research model. The remaining variance is attributed to other factors outside the model that were not examined in this study, thereby providing avenues for future research to investigate additional relevant variables.

Discussion

Based on the results of the data analysis and instrument testing in this study, the following findings are presented:

The Influence of Digital Promotion on Parental Decisions
The research results indicate that digital promotion has a positive but non-significant influence on parents' decisions in choosing SMP Swasta RK Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar. This finding suggests that digital promotion functions primarily as a tool for providing initial information and building awareness, yet it has not yet become the primary determinant in the final decision-making process for parents. This is consistent with the perspective of Kotler &

Keller (2016), who posit that marketing communication serves as an initial stimulus within the consumer decision-making process.

Furthermore, this finding reinforces previous research indicating that the effectiveness of digital promotion is highly dependent on the alignment between the promotional message and the actual experience of educational service consumers (Manik & Septiadi, 2024). Consequently, digital promotion that is not supported by robust service quality and a strong institutional reputation tends to be insufficient in significantly influencing parents' decisions. In this context, while digital media serves as an important information gateway, parents' ultimate commitment is more heavily dictated by the perceived credibility and real-world performance of the school.

The Influence of Service Quality on Parental Decisions
School service quality is proven to exert a positive and significant influence on parental decisions. These results underscore that directly perceived service experiences serve as a primary factor in cultivating parental trust and satisfaction. This finding aligns with the SERVQUAL theory, which emphasizes the critical roles of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles in shaping perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988).
Empirically, the results of this study are consistent with findings by Yanuarto (2024) and Fedriani (2024), which state that service quality is a dominant determinant in parents' school selection decisions. Consequently, enhancing the quality of academic and administrative services serves as a key strategy for maintaining and bolstering public trust in the school. This commitment to consistent service delivery is essential for schools to remain competitive amidst the increasingly complex dynamics of the educational landscape.

The Influence of Brand Image on Parental Decisions
Brand image also demonstrates a positive and significant influence on parental decisions. This finding indicates that a strong institutional image is capable of reducing perceived risk and reinforcing long-term confidence among parents when selecting an educational institution. Keller (2013) asserts that a positive brand image creates associations of trust and consumer loyalty.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of Fadhilah & Sudarwanto (2024) and Florencia et al. (2025), which state that school image often serves as a dominant psychological factor in school selection decisions. Academic reputation, institutional values, and graduate success emerge as essential elements in the formation of a school's brand image. Within the context of this research, these psychological mechanisms act as a bridge between the school's historical reputation and the modern expectations of parents in a non-metropolitan setting.

Simultaneous Influence of Digital Promotion, Service Quality, and Brand Image
Simultaneously, digital promotion, service quality, and brand image exert a significant influence on parents' decisions. This finding indicates that the decision to select a school is the result of an interaction between communication stimuli, service experiences, and perceptions of institutional reputation. This is consistent with consumer behavior theory, which posits that purchase decisions are the outcome of an integrated evaluation of various internal and external factors (Engel et al., 2011).

These results further indicate that effective educational marketing strategies cannot rely on a single factor alone; rather, they require synergy between informative digital promotion, consistent service quality, and a credible school image. The integration of these three factors is key to building sustained parental trust and commitment. By harmonizing digital communication with tangible service excellence and a strong reputation, schools can better navigate the competitive landscape of private education in non-metropolitan areas.

Conclusion

The research results indicate that school service quality and brand image have a positive and significant influence on parents' decisions in choosing SMP Swasta RK Bintang Timur Pematangsiantar, while digital promotion exerts a positive but non-significant partial influence. However, digital promotion, service quality, and brand image simultaneously exert a significant influence on parental decisions. These findings confirm that parents' decisions are predominantly driven by rational considerations and long-term trust in service quality and institutional reputation, rather than promotional communication alone.

Acknowledgement

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