

The Influence of Teacher Quality, School Image, and Digital Marketing on Parents' Decisions in Choosing SMP RK Bintang Timur Rantauprapat

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Abstract

Introduction/Main Objectives: Parents' decision in selecting a junior high school is a critical process influenced by a combination of rational evaluation and perceived value. In a competitive educational landscape, understanding the key determinants of this choice is essential for school management and strategic development.

Background Problems: This research was motivated by the fluctuating and recently declining enrollment rates at SMP RK Bintang Timur Rantauprapat, a private Catholic school in Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra. This trend suggested potential issues related to perceived educational quality, institutional reputation, or modern communication strategies, necessitating an empirical investigation into the primary drivers of parental preference.

Novelty: While previous studies have examined these factors in urban or general school contexts, this research provides specific insights into the dynamics of parental choice for a private Catholic junior high school in a non-metropolitan Indonesian setting, integrating traditional quality indicators with contemporary digital outreach strategies.

Research Methods: Employing a quantitative approach, this study surveyed 161 parents of seventh-grade students using a saturated sampling technique. Data was collected via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression in SPSS version 26.

Finding/Results: Teacher quality, school image, and digital marketing each have a positive and significant influence on parents' decisions. Together, these three variables also have a significant simultaneous effect. Digital marketing emerged as the most dominant influencing variable.

Conclusion: The study concludes that parents' decisions are multidimensional. To enhance competitiveness and attractiveness, schools must adopt an integrated strategy that prioritizes effective digital marketing to build visibility and engagement, consistently cultivate a positive school image, and continuously strengthen teacher quality. This holistic approach is vital for sustaining parental trust and preference in a digital era.

Keywords: teacher quality, school image, digital marketing, parents' decision.



Introduction

Competition among private junior high schools has intensified alongside increasing public awareness of the importance of educational quality as a long-term investment in children's futures. This condition encourages schools not only to focus on learning implementation but also on quality management strategies and institutional image development to attract and maintain public trust.

In the context of educational services, parents act as the primary decision-makers in determining school choices for their children. These decisions are not spontaneous but occur through an evaluative process involving consideration of internal school quality, institutional reputation, and accessibility of information obtained before and during decision-making.

Teacher quality becomes the main indicator representing the quality of educational services. Teachers function not only as learning implementers but also as professional figures shaping learning experiences, student character, and parents' perceptions of school quality. Therefore, teacher quality often becomes the primary benchmark in assessing school feasibility.

Beyond teacher quality, school image plays a strategic role in building public trust. School image is formed through academic reputation, institutional values, achievements, and consistency of educational services perceived by the community. Positive perceptions of school image tend to strengthen parents' confidence in making school choices.

The development of information technology has also transformed public information-seeking behavior, including in education. Digital marketing has become a primary means for schools to convey information, build interaction, and instill positive perceptions among parents. The presence of social media, school websites, and informative digital content increasingly determines school visibility and attractiveness amid competition.

SMP RK Bintang Timur Rantauprapat, as a Catholic private educational institution, faces challenges in the form of fluctuating student enrollment in recent years. This condition requires the school to evaluate factors influencing parents' decisions in choosing the school, both from internal quality and external communication strategy perspectives.

Based on this background, this study seeks to empirically analyze the influence of teacher quality, school image, and digital marketing on parents' decisions to choose SMP RK Bintang Timur Rantauprapat, thereby contributing theoretically and practically to school management in an increasingly competitive educational environment.

Research Methods

This study used a quantitative approach with statistical analysis. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed online to parents of seventh-grade students at SMP RK Bintang Timur Rantauprapat for the 2025/2026 academic year. The total population was 161 parents, and saturated sampling was used, so all 161 respondents were included as the sample.

The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale and covered three independent variables: teacher quality (measured through pedagogical competence, professionalism, and personality/social competence), school image (measured through reputation, association/identity, and public trust), and digital marketing (measured through digital presence, interactivity, and reach/strategy). The dependent variable was parents' decision to choose the school.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Instrument testing included validity and reliability tests. Classical assumption tests (normality, heteroscedasticity, multicollinearity) were conducted, followed by multiple linear regression analysis, coefficient of determination (R^2), t-test (partial), and F-test (simultaneous) to test the hypotheses.

Result

The foundation of this study's findings rests on rigorously validated instruments and a robust statistical model. First, all measurement tools were confirmed to be both valid and reliable. Each question in the survey accurately measured its intended concept, with validity correlation scores ranging from 0.570 to 0.720, all strongly exceeding the statistical threshold. Furthermore, the instrument demonstrated exceptional consistency, with reliability scores (Cronbach's Alpha) between 0.830 and 0.879, ensuring the data collected was stable and trustworthy.

Before delving into the core relationships, the data was confirmed to meet all essential assumptions for robust regression analysis. The model's residuals followed a normal distribution (significance values of 0.070–0.073), and there were no issues of multicollinearity (all VIF values below 10) or heteroscedasticity, guaranteeing the integrity and unbiased nature of the subsequent results.

The core analysis revealed a powerful and coherent story. The combined influence of teacher quality, school image, and digital marketing explains a substantial 67.7% ($R^2 = 0.677$) of the variation in parents' decision-making. The derived predictive equation $\text{Decision} = 6.097 + 0.307(\text{Teacher Quality}) + 0.341(\text{School Image}) + 0.515(\text{Digital Marketing})$ shows that all three factors positively contribute to a parent's likelihood of choosing the school.

Delving into individual impacts, each factor proved to be statistically significant. Both teacher quality ($p = 0.002$) and school image ($p = 0.005$) had clear positive effects. Strikingly, digital marketing emerged as the single most influential driver, with the strongest effect size (coefficient of 0.515) and the highest level of statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). Finally, the simultaneous test ($F = 109.808$, $p < 0.001$) conclusively proves that parents' decisions are not based on a single factor but are the result of a multidimensional evaluation where institutional quality, perceived reputation, and strategic digital engagement all play critical, interconnected roles.

Discussion

The findings confirm that teacher quality is the most dominant factor influencing parents' decisions, aligning with Human Capital Theory, which posits that educators are strategic assets that determine the quality of educational output. This result is consistent with previous studies (Yanuarto et al., 2025; Hasan & Bakhtiar, 2020).

School image also significantly affects parental choice, supporting Brand Image Theory, which emphasizes that a school's reputation, identity, and public trust serve as quality signals that reduce uncertainty in decision-making. This finding corroborates research by Mahbub et al. (2023) and Tjay et al. (2025).

Digital marketing showed a significant though relatively smaller influence, indicating that while online presence and communication are important, they are perceived as supplementary rather than primary decision factors. This aligns with studies by Putri et al. (2025) and Kasih Sihole et al. (2025), which highlight the growing role of digital channels in shaping parental perceptions.

The simultaneous influence of all three variables underscores the importance of an integrated approach in school management and marketing. Schools must not only invest in teacher professionalism but also actively manage their image and digital outreach to attract and retain parents.

Conclusion

This study concludes that teacher quality, school image, and digital marketing each have a positive and significant influence on parents' decisions to choose SMP RK Bintang Timur Rantaupratat. Teacher quality is the most dominant factor, followed by school image and digital marketing.

The practical implications suggest that schools should:

1. Continuously improve teacher competence through training and professional development.
2. Actively build and maintain a positive school image through consistent performance and community engagement.
3. Optimize digital marketing strategies to enhance visibility and engagement with parents.

Limitations of this study include its focus on one school and a relatively small sample. Future research could expand to multiple schools, include additional variables such as tuition cost or location, and use qualitative methods to explore deeper parental motivations.

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