



## The Influence of Brand Image, Price Perception and Service Quality on Parents' Decisions in Choosing Private Schools with Brand Trust as an Intervening Variable at the Yayasan Perguruan F.Tandean Tebing Tinggi

Syahrika Luthfi<sup>1\*</sup>, Fadli<sup>2</sup>, Beby Karina Fawzee Sembiring<sup>3</sup>  
Universitas Sumatera Utara

**Corresponding Author:** Syahrika Luthfi [syahrika.leadership@gmail.com](mailto:syahrika.leadership@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the direct and indirect effects of Brand Image, Price Perception, and Service Quality on Parents' Decision to Choose a School in Tebing Tinggi City, with Brand Trust as an intervening variable. The method used is associative quantitative with Simple Random Sampling technique from 100 parents of students at Perguruan F. Tandean Foundation. Data analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square (PLS). The results showed that Brand Image, Price Perception, and Service Quality have a significant effect on Brand Trust, which then indirectly affects the decision to choose a school. Brand Trust also has a significant effect on the decision. In conclusion, improving these three factors can build parents' trust in schools and influence their decisions

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the right and obligation of every citizen, as stipulated in Law No. 20/2003, and is key in developing the quality of human resources. In the context of competition between educational institutions, private schools need to be unique to attract the public. School selection is an important decision for parents, but is often hampered by a lack of information. In Tebing Tinggi City, private schools dominate the kindergarten and junior high school levels, while primary schools are still dominated by public schools. Perguruan F. Tandean Foundation, as a well-known private institution with high accreditation, attracts attention because of its reputation, facilities, curriculum and strategic location. Previous research shows that price, location, promotion and teacher quality influence parents' decisions. In this case, marketing strategies, especially the establishment of brand image and brand trust, are important because they can shape parents' perceptions and trust, which in turn influence their decisions in choosing a school for their children.

Table 1. Brand Image Pre-Survey Results

No	Statement	Yes		No	
		People	(%)	People	(%)
1	The credibility of F.Tandean School continues to be strong	8	26	22	74
2	The learning system and high discipline that characteristic of F.Tandean School school is an advantage that is not found in school	13	43	17	57

Source: Processed by the Researcher (2024)

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents stated that the F. Tandean Foundation is now less able to maintain its credibility and main selling point, namely discipline, because other private schools in Tebing Tinggi offer more diverse advantages. The emergence of competing schools such as Kharisma School and Budi Dharma School marks the increasing competition among educational institutions. These new schools offer modern facilities, superior academic programs, as well as a variety of interesting extracurricular activities, so many parents have begun to consider alternatives to the F. Tandean Foundation.

Table 2. Price Perception Pre-Survey Results

No	Statement	Yes		No	
		People	(%)	People	(%)
1	The tuition fees at F.Tandean School are relatively affordable	11	36	19	64
2	The cost I spend is in accordance with the quality I get	9	30	21	70

Source: Processed by Researchers (2024)

Pricing is an important decision in education management, where price perceptions reflect parents' assessment of the balance between the costs and benefits of education received. Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents considered that the tuition fees at the F. Tandean Foundation were expensive and not comparable to the quality obtained. In addition, comparisons with competing schools such as Kharisma and Budi Dharma Schools show that F. Tandean offers higher fees without significant advantages in facilities or quality.

Table 3. Service Quality Pre-Survey Results

No	Statement	Yes		No	
		People	(%)	People	(%)
1	F.Tandean School has complete infrastructure facilities that support school activities	3	10	27	90
2	The school is reliable in carrying out procedures school service procedures	12	40	18	60

Source: Processed by Researchers (2024)

Table 4. Brand Trust Pre-Survey Results

No	Statement	Yes		No	
		People	(%)	People	(%)
1	I will not switch from F.Tandean school because I know the school will remain consistent in maintaining the quality of its education	12	40	18	60
2	F.Tandean School is a school that I can rely on	14	46,6	16	53,4

Source: Processed by the Researcher (2024)

The survey results show that parents consider the quality of services at the F. Tandean Foundation, especially in terms of infrastructure and administrative services, to be suboptimal. This has led to a decline in trust in the school, which has resulted in a decline in the number of students at the kindergarten, primary and junior secondary levels in the last five years. Competition from new private schools such as Kharisma and Budi Dharma also amplified this challenge. Therefore, the F. Tandean Foundation needs to evaluate marketing strategies, strengthen brand image and brand trust, and improve service quality to remain competitive. Based on these conditions, this study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the effect of brand image, price perception, and service quality on parents' decisions in choosing a school, with brand trust as a mediating variable. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the field of marketing educational services as well as practical benefits for schools and parents in understanding the factors that influence the decision to choose a school.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Brand Image**

Brand image is the consumer's perception of the brand based on a collection of associations that are embedded in their minds. A brand is not just a name or symbol, but a company's identity and promise to its consumers. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), brand is an important element in building relationships with consumers. Sangadji and Sopiah (2019) emphasize that a strong brand can combine all brand values and place them in the right market segment. Meanwhile, according to Tjiptono (2015), brand image reflects customer beliefs and associations with a brand, and is one of the important factors in consumer decision making, including in choosing educational services.

According to Keller (2020), brand image is formed by three main dimensions: favorability, which is the level of consumer preference for brand associations; strength, which is the strength of associations arising from consumer experience; and uniqueness, which is the uniqueness of the brand that distinguishes it from competitors. To measure this, there are three main indicators: corporate image (reputation and credibility of the institution), product/consumer image (product attributes and benefits), and user image (user characteristics that reflect the brand image).

### **Service Quality**

Service Quality or service quality is defined as the level of service excellence provided by an institution in meeting customer expectations. According to Tjiptono (2017), service quality reflects the extent to which services are able to meet or exceed customer expectations. Meanwhile, Kotler & Keller (2016) emphasize that service quality starts with customer needs and ends with their perception of the service. If the service received matches or exceeds expectations, then the quality is considered good; conversely, if it is lower than expected, then the quality is considered poor.

Indicators of each of these dimensions include adequate facilities, courteous staff, scheduled service, response to complaints, and concern for customer interests. By fulfilling these indicators, educational institutions can improve service quality and strengthen parents' trust in the school.

### **Brand Trust**

Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence in a brand, which arises from the expectation that the brand will deliver positive outcomes, even when there is some risk involved in its use. According to experts such as Tjiptono (2017), Manulang (2015), and Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2022), brand trust reflects the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand in various situations, based on the belief that the brand has the ability to fulfill its promises and deliver value.

Three main factors influencing brand trust, as identified by Tingkir (2014), include brand characteristics (such as reputation and competence), company characteristics (consumers' knowledge about the company behind the brand), and consumer characteristics (perceptions and attitudes toward the brand).

The dimensions of brand trust, according to Allan et al. (2013), consist of brand reliability (the level of dependability of the brand) and brand intention (the brand's concern and care for the consumer). Meanwhile, indicators of brand trust as stated by Deodata and Soamole (2019) include trustworthiness, reliability, honesty, and security. In other words, brand trust is not only built through product quality, but also influenced by consumer perceptions of the brand's overall values and integrity.

### Purchase Decision

A purchase decision is a crucial process in consumer behavior that involves a series of steps in selecting and buying products or services to fulfill their needs and desires. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), a purchase decision results from the interaction between marketing stimuli and the consumer's behavioral response, which is shaped by individual habits.

Engel (2015) highlights that a purchase decision involves choosing among several available alternatives. Several factors influence this decision, including easy access to the product, attractive store and product appearance, clarity of information, product quality, and pricing that aligns with consumer expectations (Lalamove, 2020).

### Conceptual Framework

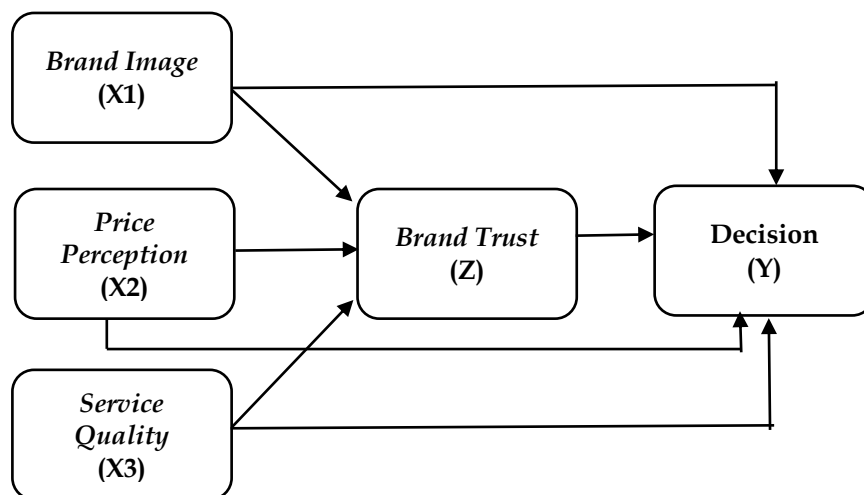


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

### METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative approach with an associative research design, aiming to examine both the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables—brand image, price perception, and service quality—on the dependent variable, which is parents' decision in choosing a school, with brand trust serving as the intervening variable. The research was conducted at the F. Tandean Education Foundation in Tebing Tinggi, with the population consisting of all parents of students at the school. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique, ensuring that each member of the population had an equal chance of being chosen. A total of 100 respondents participated in the study. Data were collected using a questionnaire instrument developed based on a Likert scale. The validity and reliability of the instrument were tested prior to analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS), following the stages of evaluating the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model), including testing for both direct and indirect hypotheses.

This study explores how the three main variables influence the level of trust in the school brand, which ultimately affects parents' decisions in selecting a school for their children.

## RESULT

### Description of Research Variables

The questionnaire in this study was completed by 100 respondents, who are parents of students that chose F. Tandean School as their children's educational institution, with their responses described as follows:

#### Brand Image

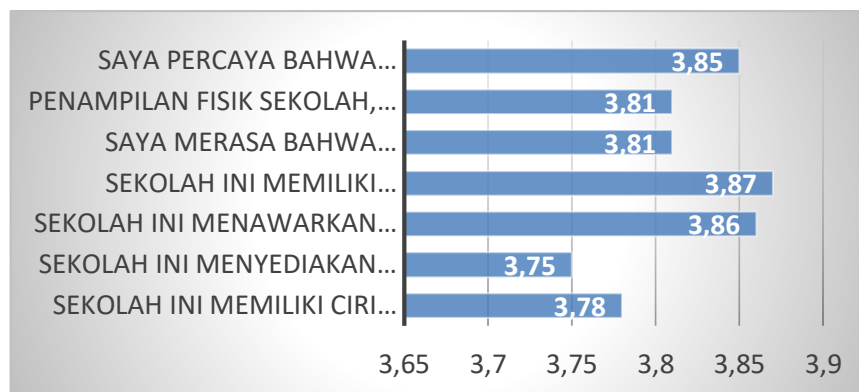


Figure 2. Distribution of Respondents' Answers on the Brand Image Variable (X1)

Overall, respondents' perceptions of the Brand Image variable fall into the "Agree" category, with a grand mean score of 3.82. Three statements that received scores above this average were: the school's reputation in the community (Statement 1), the availability of supporting learning facilities (Statement 4), and additional services that support education (Statement 5). These aspects are considered the main strengths contributing to the formation of the school's brand image. Meanwhile, the other four statements – namely, the physical appearance of the school (Statement 2), the alignment between price and quality (Statement 3), price variation (Statement 6), and the school's distinctive physical features (Statement 7) – scored below the average. These areas require further attention to enhance the overall positive perception of the school's brand image.

### Price Perception

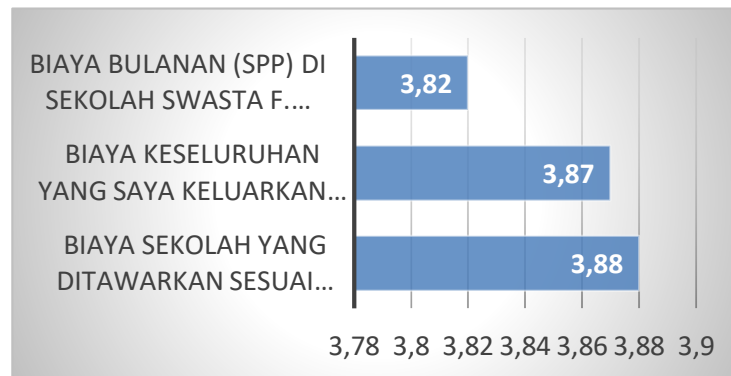


Figure 3. Distribution of Respondents' Answers on the Price Perception Variable (X2)

Overall, respondents' perceptions of the Price Perception variable fall into the "Agree" category, with a grand mean score of 3.86. Two statements that scored above the average were the perception of overall cost fairness (Statement 2) and the alignment between costs and service quality (Statement 3). These aspects were viewed positively by respondents and are considered strengths in shaping price perception. However, the statement regarding the affordability of monthly fees (Statement 1) scored below the grand mean. This indicates an area that requires further attention and improvement to strengthen the overall price perception of F. Tandean Private School.

### Service Quality



Figure 4. Respondents' Assessment of the Service Quality Variable (X3)

In general, respondents' perceptions of the Service Quality variable fall into the "Agree" category, with a grand mean score of 4.02. Five statements received scores above the average, namely: the professionalism of teachers and staff (Statement 3), the appropriateness of operational hours (Statement 5), the school's responsiveness to students' needs (Statement 7), the school's accuracy in resolving student issues (Statement 8), and instructors' understanding of students' learning needs (Statement 10). These aspects are considered strengths that contribute positively to the overall service quality of the school.

Meanwhile, the other five statements—namely, the condition of the classrooms (Statement 1), the use of learning technology (Statement 2), the reliability of service procedures (Statement 4), the school’s readiness to address students’ needs (Statement 6), and the services provided by teachers and staff (Statement 9)—scored below the grand mean. This indicates that these aspects require improvement in order to enhance the overall perception of service quality at F. Tandean Private School.

**Brand Trust**

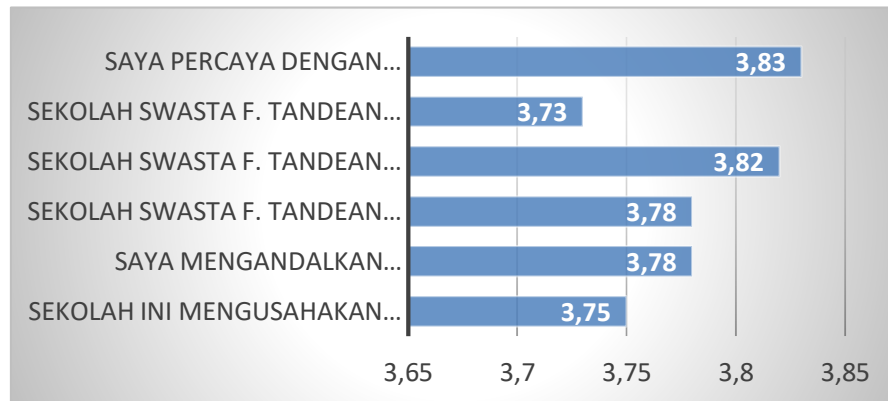


Figure 5. Respondents’ Assessment of the Brand Trust Variable (Z)

Overall, respondents’ perceptions of the Brand Trust variable fall into the "Agree" category, with a grand mean score of 3.79. Two statements received scores above the average: trust in the quality of the school (Statement 1) and the fulfillment of parents’ expectations (Statement 3). These are considered the key strengths in building trust in the school’s brand. On the other hand, four other statements—namely, the belief that the school will not disappoint (Statement 2), honesty in responding to concerns (Statement 4), the school’s reliability in providing education (Statement 5), and the school’s commitment to doing its best (Statement 6)—scored below the grand mean. This indicates that these aspects still require improvement in order to strengthen overall parental trust in F. Tandean Private School.

**Decision to Choose**



Figure 6. Respondents’ Assessment of the School Selection Decision Variable (Y)

Overall, respondents' perceptions of the School Selection Decision variable fall into the "Agree" category, with a grand mean score of 3.95. Three statements scored above the average: considering alternative schools based on available information (Statement 5), the decision to choose F. Tandean School (Statement 6), and the willingness to recommend the school to others (Statement 10). These three aspects are identified as strengths that contribute positively to parents' decision-making in selecting a school

Meanwhile, the other seven statements—related to awareness of educational needs, awareness of the school's capabilities, information seeking, benefit consideration, final decision-making, perceived benefits, and satisfaction with school selection—scored below the grand mean. These aspects require further attention and improvement in order to enhance the overall strength of the School Selection Decision variable at F. Tandean Private School.

**Discriminant Validity**

Table 10. Results Discriminant Validity

	Brand Image	Price Perception	Service Quality	Purchase Decision	Brand Trust
Brand Image					
Price Perception	0,525				
Service Quality	0,456	0,378			
Purchase Decision	0,701	0,677	0,658		
Brand Trust	0,565	0,527	0,524	0,829	

Source: Processed Data from Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 10 above, it can be seen that all Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values are below 0.90, indicating that all constructs meet the criteria for discriminant validity.

**Composite Reliability Dan Cronbach's Alpha**

Table 11. Test Result Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Image	0.943	0.944
Price Perception	0.793	0.808
Service Quality	0.935	0.938
Purchase Decision	0.959	0.959
Brand Trust	0.947	0.950

Source: Processed Data from Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 4.15, it is evident that each research variable has a Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability value greater than 0.70. Based on these results, it can be concluded that all variables used in the study are considered reliable.

## Hypothesis Test Results

Table 12. Results of Path Coefficient of Direct and Indirect Influence

Direct Effect	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values	Hypothesis
BI -> KM	0,229	0,227	0,089	2,574	0,010	Accepted
BI -> BT	0,305	0,303	0,120	2,533	0,011	Accepted
PP -> KM	0,197	0,194	0,069	2,865	0,004	Accepted
PP -> BT	0,232	0,237	0,096	2,423	0,015	Accepted
SQ -> KM	0,233	0,235	0,088	2,662	0,008	Accepted
SQ -> BT	0,293	0,295	0,108	2,711	0,007	Accepted
BT -> KM	0,460	0,457	0,123	3,735	0,000	Accepted
BI -> BT -> KM	0,140	0,139	0,069	2,026	0,043	Accepted
PP -> BT -> KM	0,107	0,107	0,050	2,136	0,033	Accepted
SQ -> BT -> KM	0,135	0,137	0,067	2,008	0,045	Accepted

Source: Processed Data from Smart-PLS (2025)

### Direct Effects

All independent variables in this study were found to have a positive and significant influence on both the dependent variable and the mediating variable. The test results indicate the following:

- Brand Image has a significant effect on School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.229$ ;  $p = 0.010$ ) and on Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.305$ ;  $p = 0.011$ ).
- Price Perception has a significant effect on School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.197$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ) and on Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.232$ ;  $p = 0.015$ ).
- Service Quality has a significant effect on School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.233$ ;  $p = 0.008$ ) and on Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.293$ ;  $p = 0.007$ ).
- Brand Trust also has a direct and significant effect on School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.460$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

### Indirect Effects

The indirect effects show that Brand Trust mediates the relationship between the exogenous variables and the school selection decision, with significant results as follows:

- Brand Image  $\rightarrow$  Brand Trust  $\rightarrow$  School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.140$ ;  $p = 0.043$ ).
- Price Perception  $\rightarrow$  Brand Trust  $\rightarrow$  School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.107$ ;  $p = 0.033$ ).
- Service Quality  $\rightarrow$  Brand Trust  $\rightarrow$  School Selection Decision ( $\beta = 0.135$ ;  $p = 0.045$ ).

## DISCUSSION

### **Brand Image Has a Significant Influence on Brand Trust**

The statistical analysis reveals that brand image has a positive and significant influence on brand trust, with a T-statistic of 2.533 and a p-value of 0.011. Although parents generally perceive the school's brand image positively, differences in opinion exist regarding the flexibility of the fee structure, particularly related to the variation in tuition fees. This suggests that the lack of pricing diversity may reduce the school's image of inclusiveness. A strong brand image, according to Kotler (2016), reflects psychological and social values that influence consumer trust. This finding is supported by the studies of Dehesti et al. (2016), Rachim et al. (2023), and Hanaysha (2016), which state that brand image is strongly influenced by perceived value, including pricing. Therefore, the school is advised to adopt more transparent fee communication strategies and provide a flexible fee structure to enhance parental brand trust.

### **Price Perception Has a Significant Influence on Brand Trust**

The test results show that price perception significantly influences brand trust, with a T-statistic of 2.423 and a p-value of 0.015. One of the lowest-scoring indicators is the perception of monthly fee affordability, indicating lingering doubts among some respondents. In the context of private education, perceived fairness and transparency in pricing are critical in shaping parental trust. Price perception is influenced by household income, comparisons with other schools, and the perceived value of services received. The school is encouraged to improve price perception by communicating benefits, ensuring cost transparency, and offering scholarships or discounts. A clear explanation of how educational funds are allocated can further strengthen trust. These findings align with Kotler's (2016) theory and are supported by Caterin & Tuti (2023), Kournifoka et al. (2023), and Zeithaml (1988), who emphasize the crucial role of price perception in building brand trust, which ultimately affects school selection decisions.

### **Service Quality Has a Significant Influence on Brand Trust**

The statistical analysis confirms that service quality significantly affects brand trust ( $T = 2.711$ ;  $p = 0.007$ ). While overall perceptions of the school's service quality are favorable, the lowest mean score was found in the item concerning classroom comfort (mean = 3.96), indicating some parental concerns regarding the physical learning environment. This is consistent with the SERVQUAL model, which highlights the importance of tangible dimensions in shaping service quality perceptions. A comfortable, clean, and well-maintained learning environment plays a major role in enhancing parental trust in the school. This finding is in line with the studies of Ningsih & Kardiyem (2020) and Abdullah (2006), which assert that service quality, including physical facilities, significantly impacts brand trust. The school is advised to improve its facilities and communicate its commitment to providing an optimal learning environment as a tangible reflection of service improvement.

### **Brand Image Has a Significant Influence on School Selection Decision**

The analysis shows that brand image has a direct and significant influence on the school selection decision ( $T = 2.574$ ;  $p = 0.010$ ). One of the lowest mean values (3.78) was found in the statement regarding the uniqueness of the school's physical appearance, indicating that its visual aspects have not yet sufficiently differentiated the institution from others. In branding, physical appearance and visual identity play a crucial role in creating positive associations and strong positioning in the minds of consumers (Keller, 2001; Berry et al., 2000). Therefore, strategies such as visual design revitalization, the use of attractive media, and consistent brand identity are recommended to strengthen the school's appeal and influence parents' school selection decisions. This aligns with Kotler's (2016) view that brand image is shaped by consumer perception, not merely by the organization's intent.

### **Price Perception Has a Significant Influence on School Selection Decision**

Statistical testing indicates that price perception significantly influences the school selection decision ( $T = 2.865$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ). The second-lowest mean value was recorded for the item concerning the fairness of overall costs (mean = 3.87), suggesting that while overall perceptions are positive, some parents still question whether the fees match the benefits provided. In education, value-for-money is a key determinant of school selection (Zeithaml, 1988; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). If costs are perceived as disproportionate to service quality, trust and decision-making may be negatively affected. Therefore, schools must manage price perception through transparent fee structures, clear explanations of each cost component, and flexible payment options. This is in accordance with Kotler's (2016) theory that emphasizes the importance of consumer price perception over nominal price.

### **Service Quality Has a Significant Influence on School Selection Decision**

The statistical test shows that service quality significantly affects the school selection decision ( $T = 2.662$ ;  $p = 0.008$ ). The lowest mean score was found in the indicator related to the quality of teacher and staff interaction. Although the score remains positive, it reflects some lingering doubts among parents regarding professional conduct. In the SERVQUAL model, the dimensions of responsiveness, assurance, and empathy are key in shaping decision-making. It is recommended that schools enhance service quality through staff training in excellent service, consistent quality interactions with parents and students, and efforts to build long-term loyalty and reputation.

### **Brand Trust Has a Significant Influence on School Selection Decision**

Brand trust has been shown to have the strongest and most significant influence on the school selection decision ( $T = 3.735$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Although parental trust is generally high, some uncertainty remains, especially in emotionally driven statements such as "the school will not disappoint." Brand trust encompasses belief in the institution's integrity, consistency, and quality. This result supports Kotler's (2016) theory and previous studies that show trust as a foundation for loyalty and long-term preference toward educational institutions. The school is advised to strengthen open communication, highlight student achievements, and foster emotional connections with parents.

### **Brand Image Influences School Selection Decision Indirectly Through Brand Trust**

Brand image indirectly influences the school selection decision through brand trust ( $T = 2.026$ ;  $p = 0.043$ ). This means that a positive school image alone is not sufficient to affect parental decisions without the presence of trust. Visual identity and reputation must be supported by consistent service and integrity to drive actual decision-making. Brand image-building strategies should align with trust-building efforts, such as transparency, professional interactions, and proven achievements.

### **Price Perception Influences School Selection Decision Indirectly Through Brand Trust**

Price perception also has an indirect influence on the school selection decision through brand trust ( $T = 2.136$ ;  $p = 0.033$ ). Perceived affordability affects decision-making only when accompanied by institutional trust. Parents do not judge price solely based on amount, but also on whether the value received justifies the cost. Therefore, schools should balance pricing strategies with reputation, service quality, and transparent communication.

### **Service Quality Influences School Selection Decision Indirectly Through Brand Trust**

Service quality significantly influences the school selection decision indirectly through brand trust ( $T = 2.008$ ;  $p = 0.045$ ). This suggests that service quality only effectively drives decision-making when it successfully fosters trust. Professional interactions, comfortable facilities, and responsive services must be consistently communicated to establish strong trust. Brand trust serves as a crucial bridge that transforms positive service perceptions into concrete parental decisions to enroll their children in the institution.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that brand image, price perception, and service quality have a positive and significant influence on both brand trust and school selection decisions among parents at the F. Tandean Educational Foundation in Tebing Tinggi. In addition to their direct effects, these three variables also have indirect effects on school selection decisions through brand trust as a mediating variable. This finding highlights the critical role of brand trust in strengthening the relationship between parents' perceptions of the school's image, pricing, and service quality, and their ultimate decision in choosing a school.

It is recommended that the F. Tandean Educational Foundation enhance the school's brand image by reinforcing its visual identity, offering interest-based extracurricular programs, and introducing a more flexible pricing structure. Transparency in both costs and associated benefits should be improved to strengthen price perception. In terms of service quality, the school is encouraged to upgrade physical facilities, incorporate educational technology, and enhance the professionalism of teachers and staff. To build and sustain brand trust, the institution should prioritize open communication, provide regular student progress updates, and actively engage parents in the educational process. Finally, to reinforce parents' school selection decisions, the school should introduce

flagship programs and consistently evaluate parental satisfaction to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with parental expectations.

Implement two-way communication and a participatory approach consistently so that parents' trust and loyalty continue to grow.

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