Post Pandemic: How Private Higher Education Reshapes University Branding

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Abstract. The private higher education gets a challenge in sustaining from the onslaught of the pandemic. This article will be carried out from various sources to find out how the strategy must be carried out by the private higher education. The literature review from several sources and narrow survey in a private higher education showed that the pandemic become a crucial matter and caused the decreasing of new students. Furthermore, this study attempts to reveal the root cause of the condition, then the strategy of reshaping the university will be obtained.

Keywords: **private higher education, pandemic, university branding**

1.   Introduction

The learning process at various levels of education has undergone very significant changes since the pandemic. This is marked by the emergence of various online media that are used as a means of learning. In the era of the digital media ecosystem, universities and higher education institutions use digital media platforms for self-branding [27]. Social media is one of the platforms that helps in influencing young consumers and which is the main target for universities and higher education institutions [26]. According to research studies, social media become an important role in the decision-making factors of prospective students to join with higher education and universities [24].

Branding at universities and other higher education institutions is carried out both by means of traditional and digital marketing. However, after the Covid-19 outbreak, branding in the education sector has moved more to digital media platforms. Marketing management in universities has made a lot of use of digital media, because now it has become a trend in all businesses around the world including other higher education institutions. Frequently, students use social media to find information about universities before getting the coveted university. The collaborative and engaging nature of social media provides an opportunity to stabilize educational control because the communication platform is built on the opinions and experiences of students and other stakeholders [28].

University branding using social media is one of the marketing tools, which will encourage and promote the image of universities and higher education institutions in this competitive era. Therefore, the current study will try to explain how private universities can continue to make efforts to improve the quality or quality of education for students. The results of research conducted by [37] show that during the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a change in the implementation of the learning process, which was originally carried out directly on campus, turned into online learning (on the network), including an increase in the use of technology.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it has had a proportional impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and has also modified the way people do things and has changed the way they view certain things, especially in this case students are limited in their learning activities on campus. Factors such as consumer beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes have been altered by the crisis during the pandemic. This has caused customers to be less enthusiastic about the trust factor among brands. This does not leave students unaffected by the crisis, as their studies, their planning and other schedules have been hampered due to the pandemic. For this aspect, universities or colleges have challenges to achieve the satisfaction and level of trust of students and other stakeholders, as well as loyalty to the university without direct interaction. Therefore, taking care of all the needs of these students through an online platform. In this way, social media platforms in particular, provide benefits for universities and higher education institutions to maintain their higher education performance, including in an effort to maintain and increase student satisfaction. Among all these student satisfaction is the initial factor for successful university brand performance [34]. The university follows various branding strategies through social media platforms which keeps the university interacting with customers/students and can maintain students' trust in them. Another factor that is responsible for building trust among which is the quality of service which can be described through Facebook and in return students can see the quality of services and facilities provided to them and will improve brand performance and brand image [34].

How about Indonesia? Unfortunately, the education sector is also affected. It was noted that new student admissions at a number of private campuses decreased in 2020 [11]. The following is a variety of information that describes the decline in the number of new students entering private universities in various regions in Indonesia.

Table A.1. Phenomenon of New Student Admission in Private Universities

Period 2020 - 2022

No	Statement (phenomenon)	Trend Information	Sources
1	Data from Dcode Economic and Financial Consulting (EFC) March 2020, shows that education is one of the sectors affected by the economy due to the corona virus pandemic. M. Budi Djatmiko, General Chairperson of the Association of Indonesian Private Universities or APTISI, said that there has been a decline in the number of registrants at Private Universities (higher education).	In the 5-year period from 2015-2019, the number of small private universities decreased by 5 to 10 percent compared to 2014.	[1]
2	Prof. Fasli Jalal (YARSI University Chancellor) in the webinar "Selection of State Universities (PTN) Independent Examinations, Makes higher education New Student Admissions noisy, Rhetoric or Reality?" So far, higher education had been waiting for the completion of new student admissions at PTN. Meanwhile, on average, private universities rely heavily on the abundance of new students who are prospective students who are not accepted at PTN.	Private universities (higher education) have decreased by 20-30%.	[2]
3	M. Budi Djatmiko (Chairman of the Association of Indonesian Private Universities or APTISI), in the discussion of the PTN Independent Examination Selection, made a lot of noise in the higher education new student admissions process in jakarta, saying that higher education managers protested that PTNs were too busy accepting new students. PTN opens at least three selection paths to enter PTN. So that this condition makes higher education increasingly difficult for financial management matters.	PTN should focus on improving quality to become a global-class university, not just competing to increase the number of students.	[3]
4	Wawan Hermawansyah, Head of the Information System Division of the Indonesian Private Higher Education	Since 2020, the number of new higher education	[4]

	Association (APTISI) Region IV, stated that this unstable economy will have an impact on parents' last option for their children to continue their education to college. Therefore, universities must have innovation and creativity. The reason is, prospective students who graduate today have intelligence in choosing a college.	students has decreased by 50-60%.	
5	Prof. Dr. Raihan, M.Si, Chancellor of the Islamic University of Djakarta (UID) said that there are many problems at the moment, then higher education becomes an institution that continues to try to survive even though it is very difficult. The number of students is decreasing. "The number varies, the severe ones fall between 50%-90%".	Almost half the number of private universities in Indonesia which experienced a decline in students of more than 50%.	[5]
6	Muhammad, S.Kom (Plt. Ketua STIMIK PPKIA Tarakan, Kalimantan Utara), mengatakan bahwa jumlah pendaftar mahasiswa baru mengalami penurunan. Hal ini diakibatkan karena faktor ekonomi yang turun akibat pandemi, dan masih ada orang tua yang ragu anaknya kuliah di masa pandemi.	The number of new students enrolling fell by 30%.	[6]
7	Edy Suandi Hamid, Chancellor of the Widya Mataram University (UWM) Jogja, said that actually the number of registrants did not decrease or was the same as the previous year, but only half of them re-registered. The slowdown in the new student registration process and the decline in re-registration was not only felt by UWM, but also experienced by other private campuses.	The number of registrants has not decreased, but only half the number of new students who re-register.	[7]
8	New student admissions at PTN are carried out from February to July, where the admission schedule range is the same as that carried out at higher education.	Selection to enter PTN increasingly diverse paths (SBMPTN, and Independent Exams), and also the time is very long.	[8]
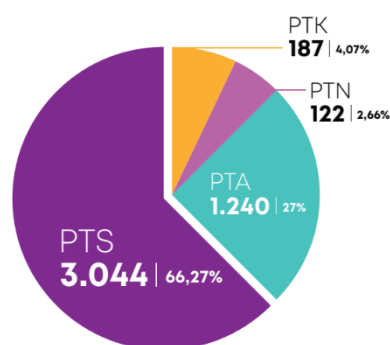
Figure A.1. Number of Private Higher Education in Indonesia

Source: [9]

Figure A.1 shows that the number of private universities (PTS) in Indonesia in 2020 was 3,044 universities. The total private higher education is 66.27%, then 2.66% are state universities (PTN) and 27% academic universities (PTA), and 4.07% are official universities (PTK). The number of private higher education that dominates, of course, cannot be separated from the goal of equal distribution of higher education throughout Indonesia. Including accommodating those who are not accepted at PTN. However, with the number of private universities in Indonesia, it is possible for problems to arise in higher education governance. As applied in state universities, the quality management approach requires all campus members to be of high quality, from input (new students), teaching staff, education staff, learning process to facilities and infrastructure. So, with quality management, it is expected that private higher education can produce quality output [25].

Table A.2. Data on the Number of New Students of Private Higher Education

Period 2017-2020

Year	Total amount of Students	
	Registered	New
2017	4.712.843	966.587
2018	4.459.021	921.359
2019	4.410.761	1.084.634
2020	4.374.994	1.068.912
2021	4.459.910	

Suorce: (pddikti.kemdikbud.go.id, 2021)

Nationally, as shown in the data in table A2, that the number of students enrolled since 2017 has decreased by an average of 2.4%, although in 2021 there has been a tendency to increase by 1.94%. As for the number of new students in 2020, there was a 1.5% decrease, when compared to 2019, and an increase again in 2021 by 4.1%. This shows that there will be a positive response again in 2021 regarding the number of new students entering higher education. Although, there are also several private universities that experienced a very drastic decline, even being directed to mergers, due to the high operational costs which almost entirely still came from new student admissions. Research results from Afendi, et al. (2021), new student admissions experienced a significant decline.

Even since 2017, the Institute for Higher Education Services (LLDIKTI)13 stated that several private universities had been identified and directed to be able to merge [17]. Continuing in 2022, LLDIKTI again accelerates the higher education merger and unification program (lldikti5.kemdikbud.go.id, 2022). It was also stated in a mass media that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in recent years facilitated the merger of a number of small private universities (PTS) in order to provide quality higher education. At least 600 small private universities have merged [19]. In line with this, the quality of private universities is one of the main reasons why a merger should be carried out. As a consequence of the merger, there is a new brand that is the name of the college. There is no doubt that with this new brand, an appropriate and relevant university branding strategy is needed.

The existence of universities, in addition to quality and quantity in fulfilling adequate facilities for the entire academic community, also needs to consider the branding strategies. Students who are "customers" of universities, must still be given attention from all elements. However, students who are satisfied with the services and facilities they receive will have a positive impact on the university. The process of getting new students during the enrollment period and retaining students who are already studying, universities must develop a competitive advantage that focuses on the quality of their services [13].

The competition between universities is growing along with the digital era that has entered every aspect of education. According to Ramadhan (2020), that every university, both public and private, strives to improve its excellence. These advantages are expected to provide different values from other universities (Haryono & Octavia 2020). Meanwhile, according to Mujahidin, et al., (2018), alumni recommendations can also increase the number of students. The patterns and strategies of each of these universities, of course, are to maintain the reputation of the university in the aspect of the assessment of the accreditation agency, or more importantly, the community's assessment. It is this public perception that must be built, including the perception of students who have become part of the university. Their existence is crucial to the survival of the university. Thus, student satisfaction must be a priority, so that they continue to study at the university until graduation.

The result of research from Ambartiasari, et al. (2018) revealed that student loyalty will be strongly influenced by student satisfaction who expects what students want. Students' expectations for these universities must be considered and accommodated. Students as the main stakeholders of higher education should be able to get what they want. Student loyalty creates a brand image for colleges during and after their campus life, therefore student loyalty refers to loyalty both during and after the student's study period in college.

The challenges of higher education in an effort to maintain a brand image in order to maintain a positive perception in society are increasingly complex. So that universities must remain consistent and continue to improve in providing the best service to students. Students can also be said to be "brand ambassadors" of universities, meaning that whatever their opinion, will shape their perception. Have students who want to recommend the college they choose an easy problem [14]. Thus, higher education management must continue to improve to maintain the level of student satisfaction during studies. If student satisfaction is getting better, student loyalty will also be maintained. Because student loyalty is very important for the sustainability and management of higher education [15]. It is possible that the student will provide recommendations to others to enter college. Based on the research results of Nafil & Nasib (2019), it is stated that many universities have involved students in marketing efforts to increase interest in the higher education community. In other words, the cost of student loyalty will also have an impact on the promotion of a university which can be reduced.

Student satisfaction is the one indicator of the success of a university in carrying out its duties and functions as an educational institution. With positive student satisfaction, of course it will affect their behavior in recommending to the public. Universities must continue to conduct surveys on the satisfaction of the performance of lecturers and education staff in providing the expected value to students. So that the survey results can be used as input in improving better services to students. Thus, this will be a proof of the university's commitment in providing satisfaction to all parties.

The brand image of a university is a reflection of how the higher education institution is perceived by the community and stakeholders. Accurate information about the quality of a university is very much needed by the community in order to find a college as a destination for study. Thus, higher education management must also pay attention to what information will be used in marketing programs to create a good brand image in the public. The results of his research state that brand image will be very supportive, especially for prospective new students to decide which university has the best quality. This decision is certainly not easy, considering that prospective students will compare all the brand images of other universities.

Students' trust in universities has a huge impact on the reputation and credibility of the college. Although, internally, the reputation of the university is also strongly supported by the quality of the implementation of the tri dharma or even the chess dharma of the university which is carried out by all lecturers. However, according to Syaifullah (2018), student trust in higher education should not be misinterpreted because it will have a major impact on the future of the university. This of course is closely related to the brand trust built and maintained by universities.

The quality of higher education is closely related to the value of the college. Quality universities can be seen from various aspects, including aspects of accreditation, completeness of lecture facilities, collaboration with domestic and foreign institutions, as well as various internationalization programs and scholarship offers. The process of creating shared value in the type of mental stimulus from services such as higher education is very important, because its success can only be achieved through the involvement and relationship of students with universities to participate in creating the best services. University branding is very important, because it makes the concept of higher education more realistic and promises a certain quality of experience for students and positive perceptions [20]. Thus, with a promotional program for the right university brand, it will be able to reaffirm the decision of prospective students to apply to the offered colleges.

According to Robinson & Celuch (2016), a university must remain aware that students are supporters who create genuine value in the delivery of educational services. Higher education value creation efforts are also inseparable from the active participatory role of students to interact and collaborate with teachers or lecturers. Strong brand relationships are needed by higher education institutions to increase awareness of their existence or often referred to as brand awareness.

In terms of brand awareness of a university, it is closely related to how the university's efforts are in developing brand relationships with students in particular and society in general. Universities that have good quality with all aspects attached to the institution will not be conveyed properly and widely to the public, if there is no good brand management. Brand management or often called branding, not only conveys about the quality of the university, but is also closely related to how to maintain quality and also focuses on student satisfaction as stakeholders.

Various phenomena from various sources, both the media and the results of previous research, can be narrowed down that private universities must pay attention to many aspects in an effort to improve their branding. What things must be improved and developed in order to improve the brand, of course, is not only the task of the private universities concerned, but also the role of the government in carrying out "balancing" so that competitive conditions occur but remain focused on mutual progress. However, the main key remains with these private universities, on how to improve university branding after the pandemic period that demands rapid changes, whether ready or not.

In this study, it aims to analyze what are the basic reasons that can improve the brand of private universities, apart from accreditation or other complete facilities.

2. Literature Review

Studies on university branding or various matters related to efforts to improve or even change the community's paradigm regarding the existence of private universities are not only as "alternative options", because they are not accepted in PTN. Efforts to improve a brand, of course, cannot be separated from sharing efforts that must be carried out continuously and continuously, so that significant results will be obtained.

Consumer brand knowledge can be defined in terms of the personal meaning about the brand stored in the consumer's memory, that is, all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information [31]. Various sources and levels of knowledge such as awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences related to the brand and its understanding by consumers. In an effort to improve the brand, a private campus, it takes time in the long term to build a brand to be very strong. There are two models for making these efforts, namely from product excellence to intangible value, or from value to product. However, over time, this two-way movement became the core of brand management, so it is termed that the brand has "two legs", which means that everything is important to do [32].

As one indicator that an organization or university is successful in building its brand is the loyalty of the community to always provide recommendations to others to enter the university and have a positive image on community day [32]. In research on university branding, the results show that brand image and brand trust have a significant influence on student loyalty [38].

Brand Loyalty

In the field of marketing, the loyal attitude shown by consumers can be seen from future purchasing decisions in accordance with the perceived needs (Sutisna, 2012). According to Rangkuti (2013), consumers find it difficult to switch to other products or services, if they already have high loyalty. Even from the results of research Durianto, et al. (2013), stated that even though consumers get recommendations from other products or services, they will not be easily influenced to switch to other products or services. Likewise, if a student already feels satisfaction with everything that is in college, they will have high loyalty too.

According to Griffin (2010), consumers will be happy to recommend products and services to their relatives and colleagues. Of course, what is recommended is something that has very good benefits and facilities according to their perception. Thus, every company must increase consumer loyalty which can reduce operational costs incurred by the company, one of which is marketing costs.

Satisfaction

Consumers will evaluate the performance results offered by the products and services they have consumed so far in search of satisfaction. Satisfaction will be felt when products and services can provide the value expected by consumers (Minor & Mowen, 2012). According to Tjiptono & Chandra (2011), consumers who have a good response indicate that they are satisfied with the products and services they use. They will be proud to use products and services and feel confident. They are also willing to pay more if the products and services have the expected performance (Lupiyoadi, 2013). Thus, companies must understand the products and services expected by consumers, and aim to minimize complaints.

Brand Image

Creating a good brand must be done by companies to create consumer loyalty (Semuel & Wibisono, 2019). Having a great and easily recognizable brand makes it easy for companies to win the competition (Sinurat et al., 2017). College brands can be recognized from their slogans and visions (Tjiptono & Chandra, 2011). Maintaining the university's brand image so that it remains good in the eyes of the community needs to be done, especially for all universities (Nurhayati, 2017), which is expected to increase people's choice of higher education (Setiadi, 2013).

Brand Trust

Brand trust will be considered good if consumers feel safe when consuming the product or using the service. The credibility of products and services will provide strong trust to consumers [24]. Putra & Sin (2020) stated that three factors build brand trust: brand characteristics, company characteristics, and the relationship between brands and consumers. These three factors are very important to predict consumer confidence in brand trust, which leads to brand loyalty. One of the efforts made to increase brand trust is to maintain the credibility of products and services. The ability of universities to build brand trust will increase student satisfaction and loyalty.

From the various components of branding above, this research will be directed to the process of improving university branding, so that private universities are able to survive and remain a reference for students who will continue to higher education. As one of the references in this research, the PCDL Model (figure A.2.) will be used as a reference in developing this research. PCDL is an abbreviation of: positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging the brand equity. PCDL Model was developed by Ghodeswar [22], as shown in the following figure.
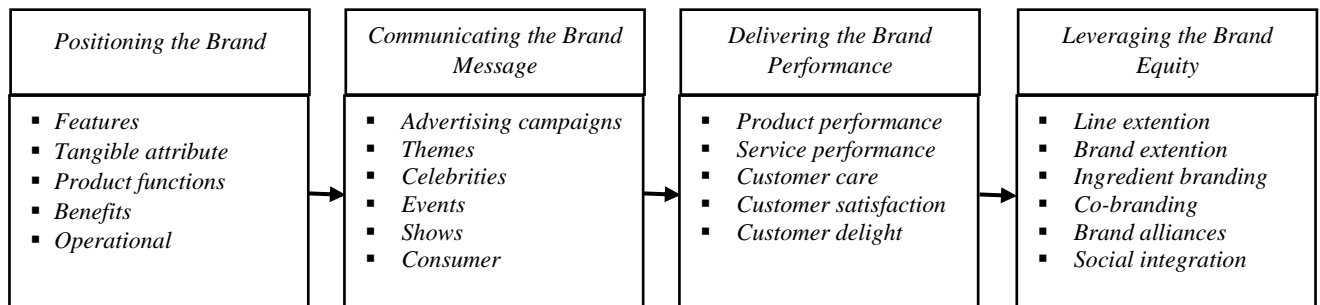


Figure A.2. **PCDL Models**

In order for private universities (higher education) to be known as private universities coveted by the public, one of the important things that must be done is to position themselves in the midst of competition between private universities. After that, communicate it (communicating the brand message) and convey the quality of the private higher education (delivering the brand performance) to the public. So that the equity of private higher education (brand equity) will increase. This will be one of the indicators of the success of increasing the university brand of the private higher education.

The results of the research by Wiwitan & Yulianita (2017) state that in preparing marketing public relations plans, university public relations must manage relationships with students, teachers/schools, parents, journalists and stakeholders through continuous communication.

3.   Methodology

The exposure of mainstream media about the slackening of amount prospectus students occurs in almost private higher education become the regarding attention. In this paper will employ some resources in quarrying of the root cause and the particular phenomenon in the higher education. The literature from the media and previous research will be used as a study material in an effort to determine what method is appropriate in this research.

The literature review section examines recent or historically significant research studies, company data, or industry reports that act as a basis for the proposed study. The study will begin from the discussion of the related literature and relevant secondary data from a comprehensive perspective, moving to more specific studies that are associated with your problem [10].
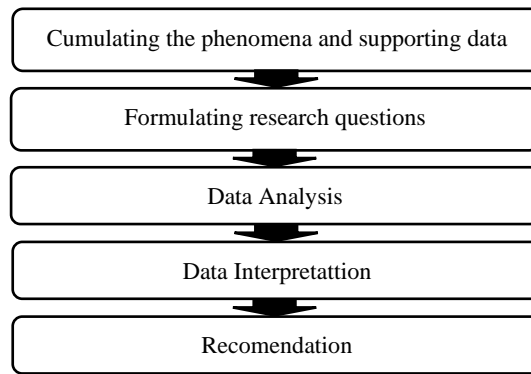
Figure A.3. **The Model of Linkage Research Process**

Problem Statement

The decline in the number of new students at various private universities (PTS), occurred during the last four years, although the percentage of the number of declines in each private higher education was different. However, it is very significant and of course will have a bad impact on the financial health of the college. This problem, of course, is not solely due to the influence of the pandemic, but various other important things also have an impact. Although adjustments have been made in the learning process (learning process), by means of a network (online), it does not necessarily mean that students can adjust it because of various factors. One of the results of the study showed that almost all participants were dissatisfied with online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and they faced different challenges such as lack of stable Internet and electricity connection, lack of adequate technological facilities and financial problems, which negatively impacted the experience. their learning during the Covid-19 pandemic [22].

The decreasing of new students, another problem that arises is how to restore the brand of private universities that have already been "hit" by the pandemic, and at the same time the implications of online learning. Not to mention another problem, namely state universities that open many new student admission routes, which do not seem to provide opportunities for higher education to get students. This is something that must be studied in depth and accurate sources from various related sources are needed.

In an effort to sharpen the direction of research questions, researchers conducted a survey in June 2022, using google form, on 137 students with the following results.

1. Source of Higher Education admission information

    From the 137 students surveyed, 23.4% answered that they got information about higher education from their high school friends. Furthermore, it becomes very important when higher education can communicate its brand to high school students through various media or ways. Then, this study will be directed to find out in detail about the more precise reasons intended by the respondents in the survey.
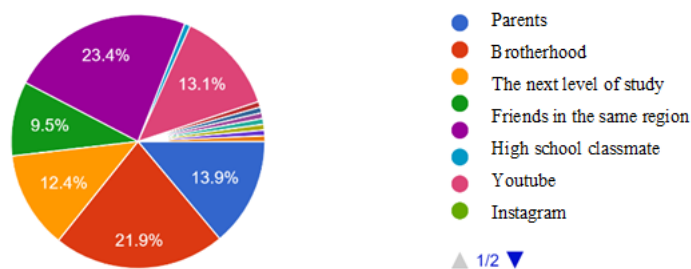

Figure A.4. Percentage of Information Sources

2. Recommendations to join with the Private Higher Education

    On the question of who recommended these prospective students to enter the intended private higher education, 48.8% answered from their parents. It is undeniable that parents have an important role in determining where their children will continue to higher education. So, from this data it can be seen that the communication that must be built by private higher education must also include parents. For this reason, this study will further explore information regarding what things are instilled early in their child's education, or related to what is the determining factor, why parents recommend their children to certain private universities.

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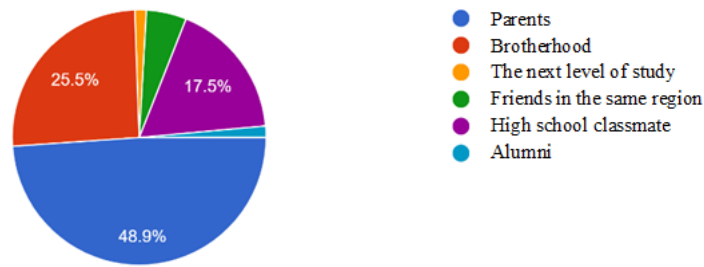
Figure A.5. Recommended Percentage

3. The Motive of taking Private Higher Education

In this question, students may choose more than one answer choice. Then, of the 137 students who were asked the reason for choosing the private higher education, it was because of the accreditation factor (111 students/81%), complete facilities (55 students/40.1%) and a nice building (48 students/35%). Other reasons must also be known further, so that in the process of improving university branding it will be more accurate and in line with expectations.
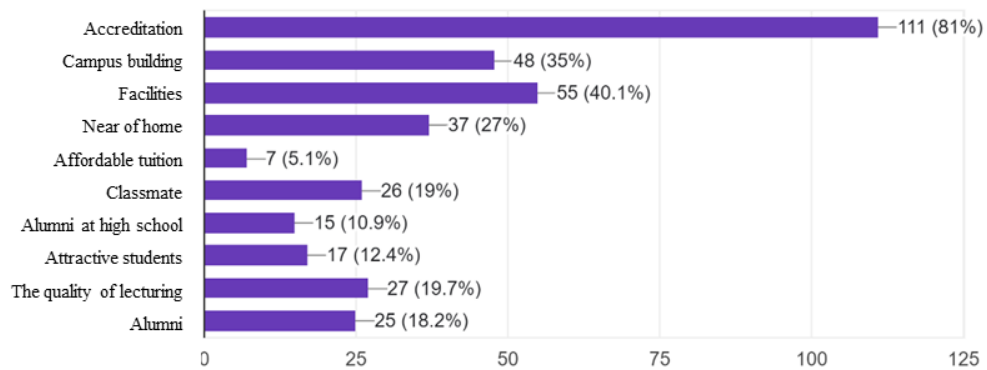
Figure A.6. The Motive of choosing Higher Education

The survey, which was conducted on June 18, 2022, is one of the methods used by researchers to facilitate the process of preparing research questions that will be further sharpened to find out more relevant factors. Figures A.4 and A.5, which show that the dominant source of information for prospective students are high school friends, then their parents are the main source of recommendation. Then in Figure A.6, it shows that in addition to accreditation and complete facilities and a good building, it turns out that there are other factors that can be the reason why students choose the intended private higher education.

On condition that it is related to the various phenomena that explained in the introduction, there was decrease in the number of students, which is caused by the pandemic and at the same time "competing" with state universities.

Research question

The problem that arises in this study is the narrowing of the gap phenomenon that occurs. According to Haynes (2006), that interest in a particular topic usually starts the research process, but it is familiarity with the subject that will help determine the appropriate research questions for a study. The question then arises from the perceived lack of knowledge in the subject area or field of study. So, in this study, the questions that will be explored further are as follows:

1. How is the effort to reshape the university branding, after the online learning process (as an implication of the pandemic) and the main cause why there has been decreasing in the number of new students entering the private higher education?

2. What a continual improvement should be reshape for public trust, especially parents and school friends of prospective new students will increase. Therefore, with their confidence they will immediately make a decision to get into the private higher education?

3. Beside the institution accreditations, what are the essential facet that affect toward elevating of public trust in the private higher education?

4. Research Contribution

The strategy in communicating of university brand become the foremost matter in advancing of the higher education to be sustainable. The result of survey reveal that the prospectus student will consider about the competitive advantages of the university. Moreover, the accreditation of institution, campus facilities, and other facet they joined to university.

In cascading of the suggestion in this study, the strategic plan of university branding will break down into three ways in reshaping university branding (figure A.7).

Channel	Content	Contact
• Updating and optimizing social media (instagram, facebook, toutube, etc) and the official website of the institution. • Adding and optimizing other channels: social media ads, school, industry, all students, alumni, networking, etc.	• Database maintanance • Content related to academic, non-academic, student affairs, etc. • Content in the form of videos, images, and others are made periodically and interestingly.	• Creating events that attract audience interest (webinars, competitions, etc.) Creating events that attract audience interest (webinars, competitions, etc.). • Conducting the treatment for audiences who have entered through the event funnel (WA center, social media engagement, for example: active in DM replies on Instagram, replying to comments on social media within the first 30 minutes).

Figure A.7. Reshaping of University Branding

The proper time of the executing of reshaping university branding have to notice about the selection new students schedule in the state higher education. It has become the main attention for the private higher education admission. Therefore, the decision maker at the campus have to ensure all of stakeholder to identify early and properly in order to fit the arrangement of university branding strategy.

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