



Determinants of Student Decisions in Choosing A College: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Student Decision Making, Social Media, Campus Reputation, Academic Service Quality

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Education plays a crucial role in human resource development, and students' decisions about which university to attend influence the quality of the education they receive. This study aims to analyze the impact of social media, campus reputation, academic service quality, and tuition fees on students' decisions in choosing Al-Azhar University Medan. A quantitative approach using multiple linear regression was used to analyze data from questionnaires completed by 289 respondents. The results showed that all four variables significantly influenced students' decisions. Social media and academic service quality had the most significant influence, followed by tuition fees and campus reputation. This study suggests the importance of integrating digital marketing and improving service quality to attract prospective students. This study's contribution enriches the understanding of the factors influencing student decisions, particularly at private universities. It can serve as a basis for developing more effective marketing strategies in higher education. Future research can expand the scope by considering external factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in national development, developing skilled, knowledgeable, and virtuous human resources. Obizue states that education is a long-term investment to prepare a superior generation to face global challenges. In the era of globalization, the education system must adapt to changes in technology, the economy, and the job market (Obizue et al., 2025). Therefore, education not only transfers knowledge but also develops creativity, innovation, and adaptability skills. It is important to examine the factors that influence students' decisions in choosing a university, which impact the quality of human resources.

The increasing number of universities in Indonesia, expected to exceed 4,400 by 2024, creates intense competition (Huda et al., 2025). Prospective students now consider factors such as tuition fees, academic quality, reputation, and facilities when selecting a university that best suits their needs. This competition demands that universities, especially private ones, have effective differentiation and marketing strategies. Therefore, it is important to understand how prospective students make decisions and the factors that influence their choice of university.

Many prospective students struggle to choose a university due to the sheer number of options available. Al-Azhar University Medan, as a private university, faces intense competition from other public and private universities in Medan. A preliminary survey of 30 students revealed that tuition fees, academic service quality, social media, and campus reputation were key factors in their university selection decisions (Aditya et al., 2025). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a significant role in shaping prospective students' perceptions of the university, highlighting the importance of digital marketing and academic service quality (Sarder et al., 2024).

Several studies have shown that students' decisions in choosing a university are influenced by various factors, such as educational aspirations, family support, and socioeconomic conditions (Wijaya, 2025), campus location, tuition fees, and facilities (Nurseno & Setiawan, 2025), as well as accreditation and academic service quality (Samah, 2023). However, there is still little research that explores the relationship between social media and campus reputation with student decisions, especially at private universities such as Al-Azhar University Medan, which opens a research gap to understand these factors more deeply. Previous studies have focused more on individual and institutional factors influencing college selection, but paid less attention to the role of social media in shaping prospective students' perceptions (Hidayat (2022) emphasized the importance of social media in promoting campus image). However, little research has addressed how social media strategies influence student decisions at private universities, particularly in large cities like Medan. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of social media, tuition fees, and academic service quality in university selection decisions.

This study provides new insights into the factors influencing students' decisions in choosing a college, particularly in the digital age. While previous studies have focused on internal and external factors, few have addressed social media as an effective marketing tool for private universities. This study also addresses this gap by examining the role of campus reputation, academic service quality, and tuition fees. Given the intense competition among universities in

Indonesia, these findings are crucial for enhancing the competitiveness of Al-Azhar University Medan and other universities.

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing students' decisions in choosing Al-Azhar University Medan, focusing on social media, campus reputation, academic service quality, and tuition fees. The findings are expected to help universities develop effective strategies to attract prospective new students. This research also contributes to the development of higher education marketing, particularly in utilizing social media to strengthen campus image and increase enrollment. Therefore, this research is crucial for the development of higher education and has a positive impact on higher education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a quantitative approach based on the philosophy of positivism, oriented toward hypothesis testing through numerical data analysis. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for identifying relationships between variables objectively and measurably in a specific population (Sugiyono, 2022). The research method used is associative, namely to examine the causal relationship between the independent variables of social media, campus reputation, academic service quality, and tuition fees on the dependent variable, namely students' decisions in choosing a university. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire distributed online to respondents. The data obtained were then analyzed using inferential statistical methods using SPSS version 26 software to test the research hypotheses. This approach allows researchers to obtain an accurate empirical picture of the determinants of student decisions at Al-Azhar University Medan. The research location is at Al-Azhar University Medan, located at Jalan Pintu Air IV No. 214, Kwala Bekala, Medan Johor District, Medan City, North Sumatra. Given that the student population in 2024 is 1,041, the sample size can be calculated as follows,

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2) = 1,041 / (1 + 1,041 \times 0.05^2) = 288.9 = 289$$

The research was conducted from June to August 2025, a period deemed sufficient to collect comprehensive data and conduct in-depth analysis of the variables studied. The study population included all 1,041 active students at Al-Azhar University Medan for the 2024 academic year. From this population, 289 respondents were selected as a sample using a random sampling technique, using the Slovin formula ($e = 0.05$) to maintain data representativeness (Aziza, 2023). The sample was divided proportionally within each faculty to reflect the characteristics of the population in a balanced manner. This sampling approach

is considered relevant for obtaining valid, reliable, and generalizable research results for the student population in a private university environment.

The data used included primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire distributed online to students using Google Forms, while secondary data was collected from scientific literature, institutional reports, and official university documents. Data collection procedures involved direct observation and questionnaire distribution to elicit respondents' perceptions of the research variables. Prior to widespread use, the research instrument was tested for validity and reliability on 30 respondents outside the primary sample. Validity was measured using Pearson correlation with $r_{count} > r_{table}$ criteria, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, where a value of ≥ 0.70 indicates a good level of instrument consistency. This instrument testing phase ensured the reliability of the measurement tool and improved the quality of data obtained from respondents. Data analysis was performed using multiple linear regression analysis, using the equation $Y = a + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + e$, where Y is student decision, and X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4 represent social media, campus reputation, academic service quality, and education costs, respectively. To test the hypothesis, the F test (simultaneous) and t test (partial) were used with a significance level of 5%, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to assess the extent to which the independent variables explain variations in student decisions. This analytical approach provides a strong empirical basis in explaining the determinants of student decisions at Al-Azhar University Medan.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The multiple linear regression test was conducted based on the assumption that the dependent variable (Y), namely Student Decisions, is derived from Social Media (X_1), Campus Reputation (X_2), Service Quality (X_3), and Tuition Fees (X_4), as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Multiple Linear Regression

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	,060	1,206		,050	,960
	Social Media	,372	,061	,256	6,093	,000
	Campus Reputation	,184	,039	,211	4,761	,000
	Academic Service Quality	,320	,052	,290	6,207	,000
	Tuition Fees	,279	,054	,250	5,162	,000

Source: Research Results, 2025

Based on the table above, the multiple linear regression equation can be

described as follows,

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + e$$

The regression constant (α) of 0.060 indicates the direction of the initial relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The positive sign on the constant indicates that when all independent variables – social media (X1), campus reputation (X2), academic service quality (X3), and tuition fees (X4) are unchanged or set to zero, student decision (Y) remains at 0.060. The regression coefficient for variable X1 of 0.372 indicates a significant positive relationship between social media and student decisions. This means that every one percent increase in social media usage intensity is followed by a 0.372 increase in student decisions, assuming other variables remain constant. Meanwhile, variable X2, or campus reputation, has a coefficient of 0.184, indicating that an increase in campus reputation also has a positive impact on student decisions, although the effect is smaller than that of X1. This demonstrates that students' perceptions of the campus's image and credibility also influence their preferences. These values illustrate the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable individually.

The academic service quality variable (X3) shows a coefficient of 0.320, meaning a one percent increase in academic service quality increases student decision-making by 0.320, assuming other variables remain constant. Similarly, tuition fees (X4), with a coefficient of 0.279, indicate a positive relationship between perceived tuition fees and student decisions. A proportional increase in fees and service quality significantly influences student decisions. These results confirm that student decisions are influenced by internal campus factors and perceptions of academic services, with all variables contributing positively to the likelihood of choosing Al-Azhar University Medan.

Table 2. Determination Test (R²)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,829 ^a	,688	,683	2,035

Source: Research Results, 2025

Table 2, the R-Square value of 0.668 or 66.8% indicates that variables X1 (Social Media), X2 (Campus Reputation), X3 (Academic Service Quality), and X4 (Education Fees) together explain 66.8% of the variation in student decisions (Y). The remaining 33.2% is likely influenced by other factors not included in this research model, thus indicating that there are external variables or other contexts that play a role in shaping students' decisions to choose Al-Azhar University Medan. This value reflects the strength of the model in explaining the relationship between independent and dependent variables simultaneously, while also marking room for further research that can identify additional relevant

factors.

Table 3. Partial t-test

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	,060	1,206		,050	,960
	Social Media	,372	,061	,256	6,093	,000
	Campus Reputation	,184	,039	,211	4,761	,000
	Academic Service Quality	,320	,052	,290	6,207	,000
	Tuition Fees	,279	,054	,250	5,162	,000

Source: Research Results, 2025

The t-test results show that the variables Social Media (tcount = 6.093), Campus Reputation (tcount = 4.761), Academic Service Quality (tcount = 6.207), and Tuition Fees (tcount = 5.162) all have t-count values greater than t-table 1.650 with a significance of 0.000, which indicates a positive and significant influence on students' decisions in choosing Al-Azhar University Medan. This finding indicates that the four variables individually play an important role in shaping students' decisions, providing empirical evidence of the relevance of each factor in higher education decision-making.

Table 4. F Test Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2590,611	4	647,653	156,385	,000 ^b
	Residual	1176,157	284	4,141		
	Total	3766,768	288			

Source: Research Results, 2025

Discussion

The discussion of the results of this study reveals that social media, campus reputation, service quality, and tuition fees simultaneously significantly influence students' decisions in choosing a university. This finding aligns with previous research showing that these factors play a significant role in higher education decision-making (Siregar, 2023; Nurhawaeny et al., 2021). Social media has been shown to be a factor in increasing prospective students' engagement with universities, consistent with Kortin's findings, which emphasize the importance of digital platforms in conveying campus information (Al-Hail et al., 2023). In this regard, Al-Azhar University Medan effectively uses social media to promote campus activities and study programs, providing prospective students with easy access to relevant and reliable information. This also aligns with

Rahman's findings, which state that information transparency on social media helps shape positive perceptions of universities (Yusuf et al., 2024).

However, despite the significant influence of social media, the findings of this study indicate that tuition fees and the quality of academic services play equally important roles. Previous research, such as that presented by Sartika (2021) and Rahma (2023), also found that reasonable tuition fees and responsive service significantly influence prospective students' decisions. These findings confirm that, in addition to social media, financial aspects and the quality of academic services are important factors in choosing a university. The influence of reasonable tuition fees in this study aligns with the findings of Syakira & Ilmia (2022), which showed that transparent tuition fees commensurate with the quality of services provided increase prospective students' interest. Students' decisions to choose a university are also influenced by the availability of scholarship programs and payment convenience, which are key factors in reducing financial burden (Sartika, 2021).

The theoretical implications of these findings point to the development of a more comprehensive higher education decision-making model. The four variables tested in this study social media, campus reputation, service quality, and tuition fees interact simultaneously in shaping student decisions. This enhances our understanding of the factors influencing students' decisions in university selection, which previously focused on single variables such as academic quality or tuition fees. These findings also pave the way for further research that could explore external factors that may play a role in students' decision-making processes (Nguyen et al., 2025). This research provides important insights into how various internal campus factors can complement each other to increase a university's attractiveness to prospective students.

Practically, the results of this study have significant implications for university management in designing marketing and student recruitment strategies. Universities, such as Al-Azhar University Medan, need to prioritize effective social media management, provide clear and transparent information, and improve the quality of academic services. Social media should be utilized as an effective communication tool to attract prospective students, while the quality of academic services, including the speed of information and staff responsiveness, is key to creating a positive student experience. Furthermore, universities should set reasonable tuition fees commensurate with the quality of services provided, and offer a variety of flexible payment schemes to enhance their attractiveness to prospective students.

Overall, the results of this study highlight the importance of effectively

managing the four variables tested to increase a university's attractiveness. Universities that combine effective social media use, a strong reputation, responsive academic services, and tuition rates that are appropriate to prospective students' financial capabilities have a greater chance of attracting more applicants. This significantly contributes to the development of a more integrated higher education marketing strategy that is oriented towards prospective students' needs. Moving forward, universities need to focus more on these factors to ensure success in the increasingly competitive world of higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study found that social media, campus reputation, academic service quality, and tuition fees significantly influence students' decisions when choosing a university. Social media plays a crucial role in shaping prospective students' positive perceptions of the university, while affordable tuition fees and responsive academic services also contribute to decision-making. A key lesson learned is the importance of integrating digital marketing with improved service quality to attract prospective students, who are increasingly discerning in their university choices.

This study contributes to a richer understanding of the factors influencing student decisions, particularly at private universities. The findings, regarding social media as an effective marketing tool and the relevance of cost to service quality, can inform the development of adaptive university marketing strategies. However, this study is limited to Al-Azhar University in Medan and does not consider external factors. Further research could compare universities in different regions or explore the psychological and technological factors that influence student decisions.

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