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Antecedents of Private University Brand Image and Reputation: An Examination of Social Media Content, Influencers, Student Interactions, and Social Impact

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The higher education sector in Indonesia faces intense competition, compelling private universities to strategically enhance their brand reputation to attract prospective students. This research aims to examine the influence of shared content, social media influencers, consumer-brand interaction, social impact actions, and brand image to brand reputation of private universities. A quantitative methodology was employed for this study. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, designed with a 5-point Likert scale, administered online via Google Forms. Data collection was conducted between January 12 and February 25, 2025. The sample comprised 400 respondents from various private universities in Indonesia. The conceptual model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM 4). The empirical findings provide robust support for all five hypothesized relationships. Specifically, shared content, social media influencers, consumer-brand interaction, and social impact actions were found to positively and significantly influence the brand image of private universities. Crucially, the study confirmed that brand image positively and significantly impacts the brand reputation of these institutions. The findings offer valuable theoretical contributions to higher education branding literature and provide actionable managerial insights for private university administrators seeking to enhance their competitiveness and appeal in the dynamic educational market. **Keywords:** share content, social media influencer, consumer brand interaction, social impact action, brand image, brand reputation

INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector in Indonesia is characterized by intense competition, as evidenced by the presence of 6,509 institutions, with private universities comprising the majority at 4,555 institutions. This competitive landscape is further intensified by the uneven geographical distribution of private universities, particularly concentrated in Java and Jakarta, where 319 private institutions operate (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Concurrently, public perception continues to favor state universities as the preferred choice, compelling private universities to continuously innovate and differentiate themselves to attract prospective students [1] [2] [3]. This competitive pressure drives private universities to enhance their reputation and educational quality, aiming to compete effectively not only within the national context but also on an international scale, reflecting an overall improvement in the quality and competitiveness of private higher education institutions.

The widespread adoption of social media in Indonesia presents significant strategic opportunities for private universities to engage with prospective students amidst this competitive environment. As of early 2025, Indonesia had approximately 143 million social media users, representing 50.2% of the total population, with an average daily usage time of 3 hours and 11 minutes [4] Key platforms such as YouTube (143 million users), TikTok (108 million), and Instagram (103 million) serve as primary channels for digital interaction, while WhatsApp remains the most frequently accessed application with a penetration rate of 91.7%. This trend is particularly relevant given that 73% of prospective students rely on social media as their main source of information regarding universities and academic programs [5]. The preference of Generation Z for visually oriented platforms like Instagram (84.6% active users) and TikTok (77.4%) necessitates that PTS optimize their digital content strategies, emphasizing creative video content

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and real-time engagement [6]. Furthermore, the fact that 54.6% of prospective students also visit official university websites highlights the importance of integrating social media efforts with other digital communication channels [7] [8]. Collectively, these behaviors underscore the critical role of digital communication strategies in shaping the brand image and reputation of private universities in the eyes of both prospective students and their parents.

In the context of higher education, brand reputation extends beyond marketing efforts to encompass the actual quality of education, the student experience, and the institution's engagement with the broader community [9] [10]. While a positive brand image may initially attract prospective students, a robust brand reputation is cultivated through consistent delivery of positive educational outcomes and stakeholder experiences [11]. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is essential, one that combines digital marketing initiatives with sustained academic excellence, student support services, and meaningful external engagement. This study's conceptual framework identifies four key factors influencing the development of private universities brand image: shared content, social media influencers, consumer-brand interaction, and social impact actions. These elements are posited to have a direct effect on brand image, which subsequently influences brand reputation. The model underscores that building a strong reputation requires not only effective digital marketing but also high-quality interactions, social responsibility, and consistent positive experiences for students and stakeholders. Hence, integrating these four dimensions represents a strategic approach for private universities to enhance their competitiveness and reputation amid the increasingly challenging higher education market in Indonesia.

OBJECTIVES

Brand Image and Brand Reputation in Higher Education

From a marketing perspective, brand image and brand reputation represent two fundamental constructs that, while interconnected, possess distinct conceptual differences [12] [13] [14]. Brand image can be defined as the holistic sum of perceptions and impressions held by individuals or stakeholder groups regarding a brand at a given time [15]. This perception is shaped by a variety of attributes, encompassing both functional aspects (e.g., academic program quality, campus facilities) and emotional dimensions (e.g., a supportive learning environment, academic culture) [16] [17]. These attributes are largely influenced by marketing communications and initial experiences. In the context of higher education, brand image reflects how prospective students, parents, or the broader public envision a university— whether it is perceived as an innovation-driven institution, one with strong academic traditions, or deeply committed to holistic student development [11].

Conversely, brand reputation refers to the collective and long-term assessment by stakeholders concerning a brand's quality, performance, and credibility, formed through the accumulation of real experiences and consistent actions over time [18] [19]. Reputation is generally more stable and less amenable to rapid change compared to brand image, as it encapsulates a profound level of trust, esteem, and recognition from various parties [20]. In the realm of higher education, a strong reputation is critically vital for attracting top talent and ensuring institutional sustainability amidst global competition. Consequently, brand image can be considered a prerequisite or an initial foundation that contributes to the formation of a robust brand reputation; consistent positive perceptions ultimately lead to superior and enduring reputation [21].

Share Content

Digital transformation has rendered social media an indispensable and strategic communication channel for higher education institutions to engage with various stakeholders [22] [23]. Social media platforms empower educational institutions to project their image and influence public perception through several key elements. Firstly, shared content disseminated by universities on social media, such such as posts highlighting academic achievements, vibrant campus life, research innovations, or alumni success stories, directly shapes the brand image in the audience's mind [1]. The quality, relevance, and consistency of messages within this content are crucial for effectively communicating the university's core values and competitive advantages [13].

Relevant, high-quality, and consistent content distributed by higher education institutions via social media serves as a significant stimulus that shapes audience perceptions. Through compelling visual and textual narratives, such as showcasing academic achievements, research innovations, or dynamic campus life, universities can effectively project

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their desired image [24]. Informative and authentic content on digital platforms has consistently demonstrated its capacity to build positive brand associations and enhance credibility among prospective students and other stakeholders [25] [26] [27]. Consequently, optimally managed shared content is expected to cultivate a strong brand image.

H1: Shared content positively influences the brand image of private universities.

Social Media Influencer

Social media influencers now play a significant role in shaping brand perceptions among target audiences, particularly Generation Z and millennials. Collaborations with accomplished alumni, prominent academics, student ambassadors, or relevant public figures who possess credibility and broad reach can foster positive brand associations and enhance a higher education institution's brand image [28] [25] [18]. Recommendations from influencers are often perceived as more authentic and are trusted more by their followers compared to traditional advertising [29].

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media influencers have emerged as a highly effective communication channel for reaching target audiences, especially younger demographics [30] [31]. When an influencer, possessing credibility, expertise, and relevance to the target audience, endorses or features a brand, that brand's image tends to improve in the eyes of the influencer's followers due to a transfer of trust [32] [33]. Within the context of higher education, strategic collaborations with successful alumni, respected academic figures, or active student ambassadors on social media can contribute to creating positive perceptions regarding the university's quality, student experience, and core values, concurrently enhancing its emotional appeal [34] [9].

H2: Social media influencers positively influence the brand image of private universities.

Consumer Brand Interaction

Consumer-brand interaction on social media is also essential in brand formation. The way higher education institutions respond to inquiries, engage in comments, and host live Q&A sessions directly influences audience perceptions regarding the institution's responsiveness, friendliness, and attentiveness, which, in turn, cultivates a brand image of an accessible and student-oriented university [25] [23].

Direct and continuous interaction between universities and their audiences on social media, such as prompt responses to comments, online Q&A sessions, or active dialogue, serves as a crucial indicator of institutional openness and responsiveness [35] [36]. This effective two-way communication on digital platforms can foster deeper emotional connections and establish a brand image that is perceived as caring, amiable, and stakeholder-oriented [36] [37]. Consequently, higher education institutions actively engaged in positive social media interactions are expected to achieve a superior brand image in the public eye due to their demonstrated commitment to their audience [38].

H3: Consumer-brand interaction positively influences the brand image of private universities.

Social Impact Action

Social impact initiatives, effectively communicated through social media, can significantly strengthen a higher education institution's brand image. Participation in community engagement programs, sustainability initiatives, or support for relevant social issues, when publicly disseminated via social media, can portray the university as a socially responsible and ethical entity [39] [40]. Transparent communication about these social contributions not only elevates the institution's image as a caring body but also builds public trust and legitimacy [41] [42]. Thus, social media serves not merely as a promotional tool but as a crucial platform for building and maintaining a comprehensive brand image.

Higher education institutions demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility and sustainability through various social impact actions (e.g., community service programs, environmental initiatives, support for vulnerable communities) can significantly enhance their image as ethical and responsible institutions [43] [44]. When these actions are communicated effectively and transparently through social media, it reinforces positive perceptions, establishing the university's brand image as an entity that makes tangible contributions to society and upholds high moral values [23] [31] [7] [45]. This naturally fosters positive brand associations and increases public esteem.

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H4: Social impact action communicated via social media positively influences the brand image of private universities

Influence of Brand Image on Brand Reputation

A positive brand image is widely recognized as a foundational and crucial element for establishing and maintaining a robust and sustainable brand reputation [13] [20]. When stakeholders cultivate favorable perceptions of a brand, manifesting as a positive brand image, this inherently elevates the level of perceived trustworthiness, enhances perceived credibility, and favorably shapes their overall evaluation of the brand's quality and reliability [33] [46]. This collective positive assessment is a direct contributor to the brand's overarching reputation [47] [48].

In the specific context of higher education, a positive brand image is particularly vital. For instance, if a university successfully projects an image of being high-quality, innovative, or deeply committed to student development [16] [13], this consistently leads to a more favorable view of the institution's reputation [16]. The brand image serves as an initial reflection that actively shapes stakeholder expectations and builds preliminary trust, which subsequently solidifies into a long-term reputation [15]. Empirical evidence from recent studies consistently supports this direct link, demonstrating that a well-crafted and effectively managed brand image significantly underpins and drives the establishment of a strong university reputation [25] [49] [50] [11]. Thus, strategic efforts to cultivate a desirable brand image are paramount for higher education institutions aiming to enhance their reputational standing in a competitive landscape.

H5: Brand image positively influences the brand reputation of private higher education institutions.

METHODS

To fulfill the research objectives, this study employed a quantitative methodology. A structured questionnaire served as the data collection technique for gathering primary data. This questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. On the Likert scale, respondents could select from 1, representing "strongly disagree," up to 5, signifying "strongly agree." The questionnaire was launched online using Google Forms. Data was collected between January 12 and February 25, 2025. Duplicate response elimination was performed according to a rigorous protocol that involved evaluating unique identifiers (such as email addresses) and meticulously examining responses to confirm the absence of any overlap. This approach aligns with the statements of [51] who emphasize that complete validation and data cleaning are fundamental to maintaining the quality and integrity of research data.

The conceptual model underpinning this research is supported by statistical techniques based on PLS-SEM 4 analysis. According to [52], the PLS-SEM approach demonstrates high robustness, even when the data used are not normally distributed and the sample size is relatively small. The sample used in this study comprised 400 respondents and was deemed sufficient. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is a contemporary technique that combines the advantages of multivariate regression and principal component analysis.

The initial stage of the analysis involved evaluating the measurement model, which was subsequently followed by the evaluation of the structural model and hypothesis testing. In the process of evaluating the measurement model, various aspects were examined, including factor loadings, reliability, and validity. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, convergent validity was determined through the average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). To validate the proposed model and hypotheses, PLS bootstrapping resampling estimation was applied, as suggested by [52]. Following this, multicollinearity (VIF), the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect size (f^2), and the estimated significance of the path coefficients were checked. A significance level of 5% was set for hypothesis testing, and the Beta value (β), the probability of significance (p-value), and the t-value (which is a complementary value to the p-value) were calculated.

The conceptual model underlying this research proposes that brand reputation is influenced by several factors. Specifically, shared content, social media influencers, consumer-brand interaction, and social impact action are hypothesized to have a direct impact on brand reputation. These relationships are explored through hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5.

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RESULTS

Sample Characterisation

In a recent study examining the demographic profile of respondents, a total of 400 individuals participated, comprising 175 males and 225 females. The respondents were drawn from a selection of prominent private universities, reflecting a diverse academic background. Specifically, 50 respondents were from Universitas Prasetiya Mulya, 75 from Universitas Pelita Harapan, 85 from Universitas Bina Nusantara, 40 from Universitas Mercu Buana, 60 from Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, 30 from Universitas Trisakti, 30 from Universitas Gunadarma, and 30 from Universitas Tarumanegara. Furthermore, the collegiate status of the participants varied, with 75 respondents in their 1st year, 100 in their 2nd year, 75 in their 3rd year, and a substantial 150 in their 4th year. This distribution provides a comprehensive overview of the participant pool, encompassing a balance across gender and a representation of students from various stages of their university education within leading private institutions.

Table 1. Sample Characterisation

		Frequensy	%
Gender	Male	175	43
	Female	225	57
Private University	Universitas Prasetiya Mulya	50	12.5
	Universitas Pelita Harapan	75	18.5
	Universitas Bina Nusantara	85	21.5
	Universitas Mercu Buana	40	10
	Universitas Multimedia Nusantara	60	15
	Universitas Trisakti	30	7.5
	Universitas Gunadarma	30	7.5
	Universitas Tarumanegara	30	7.5
College Status	1st Year	75	18.5
	2nd Year	100	25
	3rd Year	75	18.5
	4th Year	150	38

Reliability and Validity of The Measurement Model

Table 2. Factor Loading and Construct Reliability

Indicator		Outor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c	AVE
SC1	When interacting with the private university's social media, they efficiently clarify questions asked by students, respond to messages, and address comments.	0.774	0.859	0.860	0.895	0.587

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Indicator		Outor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c	AVE
SC2	Digital content on the private university's social media provides the latest information.	0.795				
SC3	Digital content on the private university's social media meets my needs (e.g., for academic information, campus events, or student life updates).	0.766				
SC4	Digital content on the private university's social media is fun.	0.791				
SC5	Digital content on the private university's social media is exciting.	0.747				
SC6	Digital content on the private university's social media is attractive.	0.774				
SMI1	A social media influencer promoting the private university has a good personality.	0.716	0.792	0.861	0.829	0.573
SMI2	A social media influencer promoting the private university demonstrates strong intellectual abilities or knowledge.	0.732				
SMI3	A social media influencer promoting the private university is credible.	0.727				
SMI4	A social media influencer promoting the private university is trustworthy.	0.771				
SMI5	A social media influencer promoting the private university must be knowledgeable about the university and its programs/student life.	0.823				
SMI6	A social media influencer promoting the private university has a personality that resonates with students (or prospective students).	0.836				
SMI7	There is a authentic connection between the social media influencer and the private university they are promoting.	0.802				
SMI8	The private university, as portrayed by social media influencers, appears trustworthy.	0.791				
SMI9	Social media influencers effectively convey their experience or perspective on the private university.	0.735				
SMI10	The social media influencer can communicate effectively to attract prospective students to the private university.	0.775				
CBI1	I frequently express my personal needs or ask questions to the private university on its social media platforms.	0.849	0.837	0.859	0.901	0.752
CBI2	I often find solutions to my problems or get answers to my questions by interacting with the private university on its social media platforms.	0.901				
CBI3	I am actively involved (e.g., commenting, liking, sharing) when the private university posts updates, events, or information on its social media platforms.	0.851				
SIA1	The private university is transparent when it discloses information about its social responsibility initiatives on social media.	0.858	0.853	0.866	0.896	0.637
SIA2	The private university, by sharing information about its social responsibility efforts on social	0.864				

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Indicator		Outor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c	AVE
	media, makes it easier for me (as a student/prospective student) to know what they do.					
SIA3	The private university, when communicating its social responsibility activities on social media, appears to be open and not hiding anything from its stakeholders.	0.822				
SIA4	The private university, when disclosing information about its social responsibility on social media, is likely a responsible institution.	0.816				
SIA5	The private university's disclosure of information about its social responsibility on social media indicates that it aims to avoid appearing irresponsible.	0.799				
BI1	This private university is a leader in the higher education sector.	0.787	0.766	0.738	0.811	0.595
BI2	I have fond memories regarding this private university.	0.827				
BI3	This private university is student centered.	0.871				
BR1	The private university, through its presence on social media, appears trustworthy.	0.839	0.876	0.877	0.915	0.729
BR2	The private university, based on its social media presence, has a good reputation.	0.901				
BR3	I feel like I have a clear reason to choose this private university (as seen on social media) over other universities.	0.874				
BR4	The private university makes honest statements on its social media platforms.	0.799				

Source: Smart PLS 4 Data Processing Outputs, (2025)

The reliability of the indicators in this study is confirmed by several key findings. As shown in Table 2, all indicator items exhibit loading factor values above 0.708, signifying their strong individual contribution to their respective constructs.

Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha values are all greater than 0.7, while the composite reliability values are below 0.95. These results collectively affirm that all indicators within this research model are reliable measures for their intended constructs.

In terms of validity, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the variables in the research model exceed 0.5, meeting established criteria. This indicates that the indicators in this model are collectively valid in measuring their respective constructs.

Tabel 3. Heterotrait -Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Brand Image	Brand Reputation	Consumer Brand Interaction	Share Content	Social Impact Action	Social Media Influencer
Brand Image						
Brand Reputation	0.718					
Consumer Brand Interaction	0.321	0.216				

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Share Content	0.466	0.415	0.152		
Social Impact Action	0.438	0.319	0.524	0.147	
Social Media Influencer	0.415	0.380	0.127	0.456	0.133

The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio for each variable, as presented in Table 3, is below 0.9. This finding confirms the discriminant validity of the research model, indicating that the indicators effectively and precisely measure their intended constructs.

Hypothesis Model and Main Effects
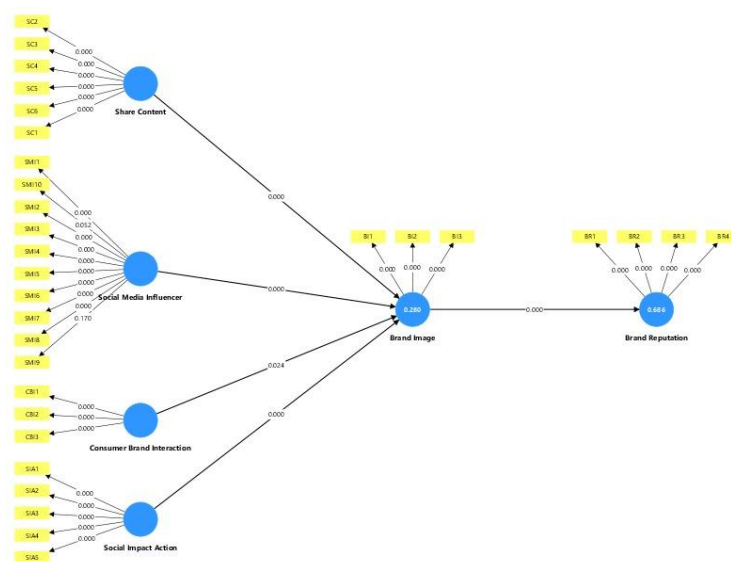
Source: Smart PLS 4 Data Processing Outputs, (2025)

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Result
H1	Share Content -> Brand Image	0.228	0.230	0.043	5.262	0.000	Supported
H2	Social Media Influencer -> Brand Image	0.250	0.258	0.046	5.453	0.000	Supported
H3	Consumer Brand Interaction -> Brand Image	0.087	0.089	0.044	1.983	0.024	Supported
H4	Social Impact Action -> Brand Image	0.261	0.260	0.043	6.083	0.000	Supported
H5	Brand Image -> Brand Reputation	0.828	0.829	0.017	47.516	0.000	Supported

The results show that all hypotheses are supported

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the critical factors influencing Brand Image and its subsequent impact on Brand Reputation within the specific context of private universities. The empirical findings, as summarized in Table 3,

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provide robust support for all five hypothesized relationships, offering valuable theoretical and practical insights pertinent to higher education marketing and institutional management.

The results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between Share Content and Brand Image (H1), with a t-statistic of 5.262 (p<0.001). This finding underscores the importance of student testimonials, shared campus experiences, program success stories, or research achievements disseminated by university stakeholders (e.g., students, alumni, faculty) in shaping prospective students' and parents' perceptions of the institution. This aligns with contemporary marketing theories emphasizing the power of viral marketing and organic reach in building brand awareness and positive associations, particularly crucial for universities seeking to attract competitive applicants. The ease with which content related to a private university can be shared through digital platforms amplifies its message and reach, contributing directly to its public image.

Similarly, Social Media Influencers were found to significantly impact Brand Image (H2), evidenced by a t-statistic of 5.453 (p<0.001). This result reinforces the growing prominence of utilizing key opinion leaders—who might be prominent alumni, popular students, or even educational consultants—in the digital age. These influencers, by virtue of their credibility and reach within specific student demographics or academic communities, can effectively transfer positive attributes and perceptions to a private university, thereby enhancing its image among target audiences. This finding corroborates studies highlighting the efficacy of opinion leaders in shaping attitudes, particularly concerning educational choices and institutional preferences.

The hypothesis that Consumer Brand Interaction positively influences Brand Image (H3) also received support (t = 1.983, p=0.024). This indicates direct engagement and meaningful interactions between a private university and its stakeholders (e.g., prospective students, current students, parents, alumni) play a crucial role in cultivating a favorable institutional image. Whether through responsive admissions offices, interactive campus tours, engaging social media Q&A sessions, or accessible faculty, these interactions foster a sense of connection, transparency, and responsiveness, which are vital components of a positive brand perception in higher education. This finding aligns with relationship marketing tenets that emphasize long-term engagement with the university community.

Furthermore, Social Impact Action demonstrated a significant positive effect on Brand Image (H4), with a compelling t-statistic of 6.083 (p<0.001). This highlights the increasing emphasis placed by prospective students and parents on a university's commitment to societal betterment. Private universities engaged in community service, sustainability initiatives, ethical research, or programs addressing societal challenges are perceived more favorably, leading to an enhanced brand image. This result underscores the strategic importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives—or more accurately, institutional social responsibility—as a cornerstone of brand building for higher education institutions.

Finally, the strong positive relationship between Brand Image and Brand Reputation (H5) (t = 47.516, p<0.001) confirms the foundational role of image in establishing a robust reputation for a private university. A positive and consistently perceived brand image directly contributes to the overall trust, academic credibility, and esteem that stakeholders (including accreditation bodies, employers, and the public) hold for the institution. This reinforces the notion that while a university's image is often about immediate perceptions shaped by marketing, its reputation is a more enduring and cumulative assessment, largely built upon sustained positive imagery and consistent performance.

CONCLUSION

This study rigorously examined the intricate relationships between content sharing, social media influencer engagement, consumer brand interaction, and social impact action on Brand Image, further assessing the subsequent impact of Brand Image on Brand Reputation within the competitive landscape of private universities. The empirical findings consistently and strongly support all five hypothesized relationships. Specifically, the results underscore that proactive content dissemination, strategic collaborations with social media influencers, diligent fostering of consumer (stakeholder) interactions, and authentic commitment to social impact initiatives are pivotal drivers in cultivating a positive Brand Image for a private university. This favorable image, in turn, is a critical precursor to establishing and maintaining a robust Brand Reputation.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical validation for a comprehensive model of brand building in the higher education sector, particularly within the digital environment. It highlights the synergistic interplay of various marketing and communication touchpoints in shaping an institution's perceived value and standing.

Managerial Implications

Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for private university administrators, marketing teams, and admissions professionals, emphasizing the strategic importance of integrated digital branding efforts and genuine engagement with stakeholders to enhance their institutional appeal and secure a distinguished reputation. In an increasingly competitive educational market, investing in these identified drivers of brand image and reputation is not merely an optional marketing expense but a fundamental strategic imperative for sustainable growth and long-term success.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to certain limitations. The cross-sectional nature of the data collection limits the ability to infer causal relationships definitively over time regarding brand image and reputation development. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design to observe the evolution of these relationships within private universities. Additionally, while the focus on private universities provides specific insights, the generalizability of these findings to public universities or different national higher education systems may require further investigation. Future studies could explore mediating or moderating variables that might influence these relationships, such as the university's size, academic discipline focus, or the level of competition in the region. Investigating the qualitative aspects of content sharing, influencer authenticity, and stakeholder interactions could also provide richer insights into the specific nuances of university branding.

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