

Research Article

The Effects of Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction on Trust and the Decision to Enroll at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 In Surabaya

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Abstract. This study aims to examine and analyze the effects of Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction on Decision to Enroll, with Trust serving as a mediating variable among students of Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. The study employed a quantitative approach with a causal research design. The population consisted of students of Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, and 180 respondents were selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The findings indicate that Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction have positive and significant effects on both Trust and Decision to Enroll. Furthermore, Trust has a positive and significant effect on Decision to Enroll and is proven to mediate the relationships between Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction and Decision to Enroll. These results suggest that a strong institutional image, effective relationship marketing practices, and high customer satisfaction are essential factors in building students' trust and encouraging their enrollment decisions. Therefore, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya should continuously strengthen its brand image, enhance relationship marketing strategies, and improve customer satisfaction through high-quality academic and non-academic services to foster greater trust and increase prospective students' intention to enroll.

Keywords: Brand Image; Customer Satisfaction; Decision to Enroll; Relationship Marketing; Trust.

1. Introduction

The higher education sector in Indonesia is currently facing increasingly intense competition, particularly among private universities. Institutions are required not only to provide quality educational services but also to develop effective marketing strategies to attract prospective students. The growing number of universities, coupled with changes in prospective students' information-seeking behavior, has made the decision-making process for selecting a university more complex. Prospective students now rely heavily on digital information sources, social media, online reviews, and recommendations from peers rather than solely on conventional promotional activities. This phenomenon indicates that enrollment decisions are influenced by institutional reputation, communication effectiveness, and stakeholder experiences.

At Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, data on student information sources indicate that digital platforms, recommendations from friends and relatives, and institutional reputation contribute significantly to prospective students' decisions, whereas traditional media such as television and radio play a relatively minor role. Furthermore, demographic

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data reveal that most newly enrolled students originate from East Java, while the proportion of students from other provinces remains relatively limited. This condition suggests that the university's marketing reach has not yet been optimized at the national level and highlights the need for strategies capable of strengthening institutional attractiveness and public trust.

In service marketing literature, Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction are widely recognized as critical factors influencing consumer decision-making. Brand Image reflects public perceptions regarding institutional reputation, educational quality, facilities, and graduate prospects. A strong and positive image can enhance confidence in the institution and encourage prospective students to choose a particular university. Relationship Marketing emphasizes the development of long-term relationships between institutions and stakeholders through continuous communication and engagement, thereby fostering emotional attachment and trust. Meanwhile, Customer Satisfaction represents the extent to which services meet or exceed stakeholder expectations, which can generate positive perceptions and strengthen institutional attractiveness.

Trust plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between these marketing variables and enrollment decisions. In the context of higher education, prospective students cannot fully evaluate the quality of educational services before becoming part of the institution. Consequently, trust serves as a mechanism that reduces uncertainty and strengthens confidence in institutional credibility, competence, and integrity. A higher level of trust is expected to increase the likelihood of a positive Decision to Enroll, which refers to the final decision of prospective students to register and pursue education at a particular university.

Previous studies have reported significant relationships among these variables. Research by Juliana and Johan (2020) found that Brand Image and Brand Trust significantly influence students' university selection decisions. Lu (2011) demonstrated that Relationship Marketing positively affects Trust and purchase intentions, while Erkmén and Hancer (2019) reported that Brand Image positively influences Customer Satisfaction and Trust. However, inconsistencies remain in the literature. For instance, Yani et al. (2025) found that Trust failed to mediate the relationship between Brand Image and university selection decisions. In addition, most prior studies examined these variables separately and did not integrate Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction simultaneously within a single model to explain students' enrollment decisions.

To address these gaps, this study proposes an integrated framework that examines the effects of Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction on Decision to Enroll through Trust as a mediating variable. The study focuses on Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya as a case study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of enrollment decisions in private higher education institutions. The proposed model contributes to the higher education marketing literature by extending previous studies through the simultaneous investigation of multiple marketing constructs and the mediating role of Trust. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide practical insights for university management in designing effective strategies to improve institutional competitiveness and attract prospective students in an increasingly dynamic educational environment.

2. Literature Review

This section discusses the theoretical foundations used to develop the research model, including Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, Customer Satisfaction, Trust, and Decision to Enroll. Furthermore, this section reviews previous studies and highlights the research gap regarding the mediating role of Trust in explaining prospective students' enrollment decisions in private higher education institutions, which serves as the basis for the development of the proposed research model.

Theoretical Foundations

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), explains that individual behavior is determined by intention, which is influenced by three main factors: attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of higher education, prospective students' decisions to choose a university result from a process of evaluating various pieces of information obtained prior to enrollment.

In this study, Brand Image plays a role in shaping prospective students' positive attitudes toward the university. Relationship Marketing reflects the interactions and communication carried out by the university, thereby influencing subjective norms through recommendations and the influence of the social environment. Meanwhile, Customer Satisfaction relates to the experiences and evaluations of both current students and alumni regarding the institution. These three factors are believed to contribute to building Trust, which ultimately influences prospective students' Decision to Enroll.

Brand image is a set of perceptions, beliefs, and associations embedded in consumers' memories regarding a brand. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), a strong brand image can create a positive impression, thereby increasing trust and influencing consumer decisions. In the context of higher education, brand image is reflected through an institution's academic reputation, the quality of its educational services, campus facilities, accreditation, and the career prospects of its graduates. A positive brand image will increase prospective students' confidence in the institution's quality and encourage them to choose that university. Previous research has shown that brand image has a positive influence on trust and the decision to choose a university. Therefore, the better a university's image, the higher the level of trust and the greater the likelihood that prospective students will enroll.

Relationship Marketing is a marketing approach that emphasizes the establishment, development, and maintenance of long-term relationships between an organization and its customers. Morgan and Hunt (1994) state that Relationship Marketing focuses on relationships based on trust and commitment between a company and its consumers. In the higher education sector, Relationship Marketing is realized through intensive communication, transparent information sharing, responsive service, and the university's active engagement with prospective students and other stakeholders. The effective implementation of Relationship Marketing is believed to enhance prospective students' emotional connection to and trust in the institution. Consequently, a strong relationship between the university and prospective students increases the likelihood that they will decide to enroll.

Customer satisfaction is the level of satisfaction a person feels after comparing their expectations with their perceived performance of a product or service. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), customers will be satisfied if the performance they receive meets or exceeds their expectations. In the context of higher education, satisfaction can be reflected in students' experiences with the quality of academic and non-academic services provided by the university. Several factors that influence student satisfaction include the ease of accessing information, the quality of campus facilities, administrative services, and an effective and efficient enrollment process. A high level of satisfaction fosters a positive perception of the university and increases the likelihood that prospective students will choose that institution to continue their education.

Trust is an individual's belief in the credibility, integrity, and ability of a party to fulfill promised expectations. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust is the primary foundation for building long-term relationships between organizations and their consumers. In the context of higher education, trust reflects prospective students' confidence in a university's reputation, educational quality, and ability to provide high-quality services. Trust is a crucial factor because prospective students cannot directly evaluate the quality of educational services before becoming part of the institution. Therefore, the higher the level of trust prospective students have in a university, the more likely they are to decide to apply.

The "Decision to Enroll" refers to a prospective student's final decision to select and apply to a college or university after going through a process of information search and evaluation of various alternatives. This concept aligns with purchase decision theory, which states that consumers go through the stages of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. In the context of higher education, this process is known as the college choice process. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), the decision to choose a college consists of three stages: predisposition (initial interest), search (information gathering), and choice (final selection). The Decision to Enroll reflects the final stage of this process the moment when a prospective student decides to enroll at a specific university.

Key Constructs and Measurement Indicators

This study examines five primary constructs: Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, Customer Satisfaction, Trust, and Decision to Enroll. Each construct was operationalized using established measurement scales adapted from prior theoretical and empirical literature to fit the specific context of higher education marketing. All indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Brand Image is defined as the set of perceptions, beliefs, and associations that consumers hold about a brand in their memory (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Aaker, 1997). In the context of this study, Brand Image represents prospective and current students' perceptions of the university's reputation, academic quality, facilities, and overall institutional standing. Following the framework proposed by Kotler and Keller (2016), this construct was measured using six indicators across three dimensions: Strength: Reflects how strongly the brand is embedded in consumers' memory. Sample item: "I can easily recognize Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya as one of my choices for higher education." Favorability: Reflects the positive perceptions consumers hold about the brand's attributes. Sample item: "I believe Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya has qualified teaching staff." Uniqueness: Reflects the distinctive characteristics that differentiate the brand from competitors. Sample item: "I believe Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya has a unique identity that differentiates it from other campuses."

Relationship Marketing is defined as the process of creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong and valuable relationships with customers and other stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This construct captures the university's efforts to build long-term relationships with prospective and current students through consistent communication, trust, commitment, and responsive service. Based on the indicators developed by Ndubisi (2006), Relationship Marketing was operationalized using eight items across four dimensions: Trust: The belief in the university's credibility and integrity. Sample item: "I believe Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya provides information honestly and clearly." Commitment: The university's dedication to maintaining the relationship. Sample item: "I feel the university is committed to providing the best service." Communication: The clarity, accuracy, and timeliness of information delivery. Sample item: "The information provided by the university is easy to understand." Conflict Handling: The ability to resolve complaints or problems effectively. Sample item: "I believe the university handles complaints and problems well."

Customer Satisfaction is defined as the feeling of pleasure or disappointment experienced by a customer when comparing a product's or service's perceived performance with their expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Tjiptono & Diana, 2019). In the context of higher education, this construct reflects students' satisfaction with the university's academic and administrative services. Following the indicators proposed by Oliver et al. (2009), Customer Satisfaction was measured using six items across three dimensions: Overall Satisfaction: The general level of satisfaction with the services received. Sample item: "I am satisfied with the services provided by the university." Expectation Confirmation: The alignment between expectations and actual performance. Sample item: "The services provided by the university meet my expectations." Repurchase Intention: The willingness to continue using or recommend the service. Sample item: "I am willing to recommend this university to others."

Trust is defined as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will act positively and reliably (Mayer et al., 2014; Gefen et al., 2002). In this study, Trust represents students' confidence in the university's reliability, honesty, competence, and benevolence. Following the indicators proposed by Gefen et al. (2002), Trust was operationalized using eight items across four dimensions: Reliability: The university's ability to deliver consistent and dependable services. Sample item: "I believe Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya is reliable in providing quality education." Honesty: The transparency and openness of information provided. Sample item: "I believe the university provides information honestly and transparently." Competence: The university's capability to provide quality education. Sample item: "I believe the university has competent and qualified teaching staff." Benevolence: The university's care and concern for students' needs. Sample item: "I feel the university cares about students' needs."

Decision to Enroll represents the final stage of the consumer decision-making process in which prospective students choose a specific university and register as students (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of higher education, this construct captures students' choices to select and enroll at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. The indicators for this construct were adapted from Kotler and Keller's (2016) purchase decision framework (Product Choice, Brand Choice, Dealer Choice, Purchase Timing, and Purchase Amount) and contextualized for the higher education setting. Ten items were used to measure this construct across five dimensions: Brand Choice: The decision to choose a specific university. Sample item: "I consider Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya as my main choice for higher education." Product Choice: The selection of a study program. Sample item: "I feel the study program I chose at this university is appropriate for me." Dealer/Channel Choice: The choice of information sources or enrollment channels. Sample item: "I used recommendations from others (friends/family) as a source of information in deciding to enroll at this campus." Purchase Timing: The timeliness of the enrollment decision. Sample item: "I feel that the time I chose to enroll was appropriate." Purchase Amount: The final decision to enroll. Sample item: "I am confident in my decision to enroll at this university."

Empirical Evidence

Prior research has extensively investigated the interrelationships among Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, Customer Satisfaction, Trust, and Decision to Enroll in various contexts, yet findings remain inconclusive. Erkmén and Hance (2019) demonstrated that Brand Image exerts a positive and significant influence on both Customer Satisfaction and brand Trust, while Customer Satisfaction subsequently enhances Trust, ultimately increasing consumer preference. Similarly, Sultan and Wong (2019) confirmed that perceived service quality indirectly affects behavioral intention through the mediating roles of satisfaction, trust, brand image, and brand performance, with satisfaction and trust emerging as the most dominant mediators in higher education settings.

However, other studies have reported contradictory results. Ayu et al. (2024) found that Brand Image does not significantly affect purchase decisions, nor does purchase intention mediate the relationship between Brand Image and purchase decisions. Kurniawan et al. (2025) further revealed that Customer Relationship does not significantly influence purchase decisions, while Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) fails to significantly affect Brand Trust, indicating that relationship-based strategies do not always translate directly into consumer trust or behavioral outcomes.

Regarding Relationship Marketing, Long-Yi Lin and Ching-Yuh Lu (2011) established that corporate image and relationship marketing significantly influence purchase intention through the mediating role of Trust. Rahmat et al. (2024) confirmed that Relationship Marketing positively and significantly affects both Brand Trust and purchase decisions, with a direct impact stronger than its mediated effect. Riza and Santoso (2023) similarly found that Relationship Marketing positively influences customer trust and loyalty, with trust serving as a significant mediator.

The role of Customer Satisfaction in shaping Trust and behavioral decisions has also been widely examined. Besmanda et al. (2021) confirmed that perceived value and differentiation significantly affect customer satisfaction and trust, which exhibit a non-recursive relationship, while emotional branding influences trust through satisfaction mediation. Sumiati et al. (2019) demonstrated that service quality and price positively affect trust, and service quality, price, and trust collectively enhance customer satisfaction, though product innovation did not show a significant impact on satisfaction.

Studies specifically focusing on Decision to Enroll in higher education reveal important insights. Jannah (2019) found that Brand Image, tuition fees, and location positively and significantly influence students' decisions to choose a university. Kango et al. (2021) confirmed that promotion and educational brand image significantly affect university choice decisions, with brand image mediating the influence of promotion. Setyowati et al. (2025) further established that social media marketing and customer relationships affect the decision to choose a private university, both directly and through brand image mediation.

The mediating role of Trust has produced inconsistent findings. Kuncahyo and Khajar (2025) confirmed that Brand Image positively affects purchase decisions both directly and through customer trust mediation, while Suhaily and Darmoyo (2017) found that Brand

Image does not directly influence purchase decisions but does so indirectly through consumer trust. Notably, Yani et al. (2025) found that Trust fails to mediate the relationship between Brand Image and the decision to choose a university, while Rahmat et al. (2024) similarly reported that Brand Trust does not significantly mediate the effect of Relationship Marketing on purchase decisions. These inconsistencies highlight a significant research gap regarding the mediating role of Trust in the higher education enrollment context.

These inconsistencies indicate the absence of a unified model explaining how marketing and relational variables jointly influence student enrollment decisions in emerging market higher education contexts. Moreover, limited studies have simultaneously examined Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction as integrated predictors of Decision to Enroll, with Trust as a mediating variable, particularly in the context of Indonesian private universities in the post-pandemic era. The conceptual framework in Figure 2 illustrates the hypothesized relationships between Brand Image (X1), Relationship Marketing (X2), and Customer Satisfaction (X3) on Decision to Enroll (Y), both directly and indirectly through Trust (Z) as a mediating variable.

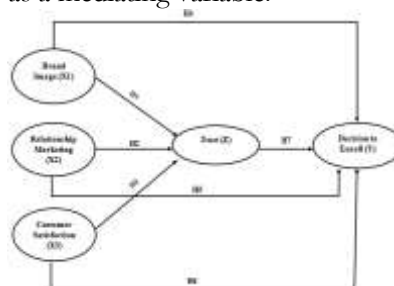


Figure 2. Conceptual Research Framework

Based on the problem formulation, literature review, and conceptual framework, the research hypotheses are formulated as follows: a.) H1: Brand Image has a significant and positive effect on Trust among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; b.) H2: Relationship Marketing has a significant and positive effect on Trust among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; c.) H3: Customer satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on trust among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; d.) H4: Brand image has a significant and positive effect on the decision to enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; e.) H5: Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945, Surabaya; f.) H6: Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945, Surabaya; g.) H7: Trust has a positive and significant effect on the decision to enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; h.) H8: Trust mediates the effect of brand image on the decision to enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; i.) H9: Trust mediates the effect of Relationship Marketing on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya; j.) H10: Trust mediates the effect of Customer Satisfaction on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya

3. Materials and Method

This section describes the research approach, research object and respondents, variable measurement, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques employed to test the proposed research model. The methodology was designed to achieve the objective of this study, namely to analyze the effects of Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction on Decision to Enroll through Trust as a mediating variable among students of Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya.

Research Design and Study Object

This research adopts a quantitative causal approach within the positivist paradigm to examine the hypothesized relationships between Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, Customer Satisfaction, Trust, and Decision to Enroll. The study focuses on students of Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, a private university in East Java, Indonesia. Using purposive sampling, 180 respondents who had completed the enrollment process were selected, ensuring all participants possessed direct experience relevant to the research

objectives. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale, measuring five constructs: Brand Image (Strength, Favorability, Uniqueness), Relationship Marketing (Trust, Commitment, Communication, Conflict Handling), Customer Satisfaction (Overall Satisfaction, Expectation Confirmation, Repurchase Intention), Trust (Reliability, Honesty, Competence, Benevolence), and Decision to Enroll (Brand Choice, Product Choice, Dealer Choice, Purchase Timing, Purchase Amount). The sample size was determined using the Hair formula, recommending five to ten observations per indicator. With 18 indicator items, the minimum required sample was 180 respondents, all of whom were successfully collected. The purposive sampling technique was applied based on predetermined criteria, specifically individuals who had firsthand experience in selecting a higher education institution. Data collection was carried out through direct questionnaire administration to ensure high response rates and comprehensive data acquisition from the target population.

Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, facilitated by SmartPLS software. The analytical procedure followed a two-stage process: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to assess validity and reliability through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability tests, followed by assessment of the structural model (inner model) to test hypothesized relationships. The inner model evaluation included path coefficient estimation, R-square analysis, f-square calculation, and Q-square assessment. Hypothesis testing was subsequently conducted using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to determine the significance of direct and indirect effects within the proposed research model.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the research findings, including respondent characteristics, descriptive analysis of the variables, evaluation of the measurement model, evaluation of the structural model, direct and indirect hypothesis testing, and discussion of the results. The presentation of the findings is intended to explain the effects of Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction on Decision to Enroll, both directly and indirectly through Trust as a mediating variable among students of Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. The discussion further interprets the empirical findings by relating them to the theoretical framework and previous studies, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' enrollment decisions in the context of private higher education institutions.

Validity Test Results

A questionnaire item is considered valid based on the decision criteria that if the calculated r value (r calculated) is greater than the table r value, the statement is considered valid. The validity test was conducted on 100 respondents, resulting in a table r value of 0.361 for the sample size, with the following results:

Table 1. Validity Test Results

Variable	Item	r -calculated	r table	Conclusion
<i>Brand Image (X1)</i>	X1.1	0,823	0,361	Valid
	X1.2	0,790	0,361	Valid
	X1.3	0,887	0,361	Valid
	X1.4	0,762	0,361	Valid
	X1.5	0,854	0,361	Valid
	X1.6	0,703	0,361	Valid
<i>Relationship Marketing (X2)</i>	X2.1	0,895	0,361	Valid
	X2.2	0,899	0,361	Valid
	X2.3	0,700	0,361	Valid
	X2.4	0,858	0,361	Valid
	X2.5	0,908	0,361	Valid
	X2.6	0,903	0,361	Valid
	X2.7	0,745	0,361	Valid
	X2.8	0,867	0,361	Valid
<i>Customer Satisfaction (X3)</i>	X3.1	0,807	0,361	Valid
	X3.2	0,945	0,361	Valid
	X3.3	0,951	0,361	Valid
	X3.4	0,941	0,361	Valid

Variable	Item	r-calculated	r table	Conclusion
<i>Trust (Z)</i>	X3.5	0,947	0,361	Valid
	X3.6	0,868	0,361	Valid
	Z1.1	0,854	0,361	Valid
	Z1.2	0,699	0,361	Valid
	Z1.3	0,890	0,361	Valid
	Z1.4	0,702	0,361	Valid
	Z1.5	0,773	0,361	Valid
	Z1.6	0,597	0,361	Valid
	Z1.7	0,610	0,361	Valid
	Z1.8	0,901	0,361	Valid
<i>Decision to Enroll (Y)</i>	Y1.1	0,963	0,361	Valid
	Y1.2	0,664	0,361	Valid
	Y1.3	0,943	0,361	Valid
	Y1.4	0,818	0,361	Valid
	Y1.5	0,883	0,361	Valid
	Y1.6	0,812	0,361	Valid
	Y1.7	0,839	0,361	Valid
	Y1.8	0,962	0,361	Valid
	Y1.9	0,963	0,361	Valid
	Y1.10	0,962	0,361	Valid

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on Table 2, the results for the most part, the indicators/items that make up each variable have a calculated R > table R (or a significance value < alpha), which means that, for the most part, the items are valid and suitable for use in further analysis.

Reliability Test Results

The basis for decision making in reliability testing is as follows: a.) If the Cronbach's Alpha value is > 0.70, then the statement is considered reliable;b.) If the Cronbach's Alpha value is < 0.70, then the statement is considered unreliable.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Item	Cronbach Alpha	Result
<i>Brand Image (X1)</i>	6	0,889	Reliable
<i>Relationship Marketing (X8)</i>		0,942	Reliable
<i>Customer Satisfaction (X.6)</i>		0,950	Reliable
<i>Trust (Z)</i>	8	0,893	Reliable
<i>Decision to Enroll (Y)</i>	10	0,966	Reliable

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on Table 2, the results Reliability test of the research instrument. It can be seen that each variable has a Cronbach's alpha value greater than the standard value (0.7). Thus, it can be concluded that each question item/indicator has high reliability and is suitable for use in further analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Data analysis for hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using SmartPLS version 4 software, with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) variants. Model testing in this study consisted of two main stages, namely the Outer Model and Inner Model.

Outer Model Measurement

Outer model testing is conducted to ensure that each indicator has the ability to adequately represent the dimension or variable being measured. The Outer Model stage focuses on testing the validity and reliability of indicators used to measure constructs or latent variables, which includes Convergent Validity, Construct Reliability, and Discriminant Validity tests. Convergent validity is a measure of the extent to which each indicator has a high correlation with the construct or latent variable it measures

Table 3. Loading Factor Values

	<i>Brand Image</i>	<i>Relationship marketing</i>	<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	<i>Decision to Enroll</i>	<i>Trust</i>	Conclusion
X1.1	0,851					Valid
X1.2	0,831					Valid
X1.3	0,843					Valid

	<i>Brand Image</i>	<i>Relationship marketing</i>	<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	<i>Decision to Enroll</i>	<i>Trust</i>	Conclusion
X1.4	0,784					Valid
X1.5	0,825					Valid
X1.6	0,806					Valid
X2.1		0,805				Valid
X2.2		0,799				Valid
X2.3		0,729				Valid
X2.4		0,826				Valid
X2.5		0,864				Valid
X2.6		0,870				Valid
X2.7		0,743				Valid
X2.8		0,819				Valid
X3.1			0,725			Valid
X3.2			0,910			Valid
X3.3			0,891			Valid
X3.4			0,805			Valid
X3.5			0,898			Valid
X3.6			0,845			Valid
Y1.1				0,883		Valid
Y1.2				0,742		Valid
Y1.3				0,852		Valid
Y1.4				0,786		Valid
Y1.5				0,869		Valid
Y1.6				0,749		Valid
Y1.7				0,782		Valid
Y1.8				0,874		Valid
Y1.9				0,869		Valid
Y1.10				0,865		Valid
Z1.1					0,767	Valid
Z1.2					0,804	Valid
Z1.3					0,849	Valid
Z1.4					0,772	Valid
....					0,806	Valid
Z1.8					0,767	Valid

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on the results of the loading factor analysis as shown in Table 3, it can be seen that all indicators in this research model have a loading factor value above 0.70, which means that they meet the criteria for Convergent Validity. Thus, each indicator can be said to be valid and capable of measuring its construct consistently.

Table 4. Average Extracted Variance (AVE) Values.

Variable	Average Variance Extracted	Description
<i>Brand Image</i>	0,678	Valid
<i>Relationship Marketing</i>	0,654	Valid
<i>Customer Satisfaction</i>	0,719	Valid
<i>Trust</i>	0,636	Valid
<i>Decision to Enroll</i>	0,687	Valid

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on Table 4, it can be seen that all variables in the research model have an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.50. This value indicates that each construct has met the criteria for good convergent validity

Table 5. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Image	0,905	0,907	0,927	0,678
Customer Satisfaction	0,921	0,929	0,939	0,719
Decision to Enroll	0,949	0,950	0,956	0,687

Relationship Marketing Trust	0,924	0,928	0,938	0,654
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Source: Processed by the author in 2026

All Cronbach's Alpha values are above the threshold of 0.70, indicating that each variable in the model has a good level of reliability and Based on the analysis results shown in Table 5, all research variables have a Composite Reliability value above 0.70. This indicates that each construct in the model has met the criteria for good composite reliability.

Discriminant validity is used to assess the extent to which a construct in the research model is truly different from other constructs. The evaluation of discriminant validity in the PLS-SEM approach is carried out using the cross loading method.

Table 6. Cross Loading Value.

	<i>Brand Image</i>	<i>Relationship marketing</i>	<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	<i>Decision to Enroll</i>	<i>Trust</i>
X1.1	0,851	0,350	0,430	0,654	0,478
X1.6	0,806	0,456	0,506	0,633	0,565
X2.1	0,456	0,805	0,643	0,586	0,486
X2.8	0,339	0,819	0,512	0,562	0,551
X3.1	0,468	0,457	0,725	0,529	0,474
X3.6	0,519	0,576	0,845	0,725	0,586
Y1.1	0,672	0,559	0,641	0,883	0,593
Y1.10	0,589	0,488	0,579	0,865	0,544
Z1.1	0,519	0,427	0,381	0,494	0,767
Z1.8	0,498	0,322	0,368	0,461	0,767

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

The cross-loading analysis results show that each indicator has the highest loading value on the respective construct it measures. Thus, all constructs in this research model have met the discriminant validity criteria, which means that each latent variable is unique and able to distinguish itself well from other constructs.

Inner Model Measurement

The inner model in PLS-SEM describes the relationships between latent variables and is evaluated to determine the strength and significance of these relationships. The evaluation includes R Square, Effect Size, and Hypothesis testing. Through this evaluation, researchers can determine whether the structural model has adequate predictive power.

Table 7. R-Square.

	R-square	R-square adjusted
<i>Decision to Enroll</i>	0,753	0,747
<i>Trust</i>	0,501	0,492

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on the R-squared test results, the "Decision to Enroll" variable has an R-squared value of 0.753 and an adjusted R-squared of 0.747. This indicates that the variables "Brand Image," "Relationship Marketing," "Customer Satisfaction," and "Trust" account for 75.3% of the variance in the "Decision to Enroll," while the remaining 24.7% is influenced by other variables outside the research model. These values indicate a strong (substantial) predictive ability of the model, so it can be concluded that the combination of variables in this study makes a very significant contribution to influencing consumers' decisions to enroll. Meanwhile, the Trust variable has an R-squared value of 0.501 and an adjusted R-squared of 0.492, meaning that the variables Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction account for 50.1% of the variance in Trust, while the remaining 49.9% is explained by factors outside the research model. Based on PLS-SEM evaluation criteria, an R-squared value of 0.50 falls into the moderate to substantial category. Thus, the R-squared test results indicate that the research model has good explanatory power in predicting the endogenous variable, particularly the "Decision to Enroll" variable, which exhibits a very high level of explanation.

Table 8. F-Square (Effect Size)

Brand Image	Customer satisfaction	Decision to Enroll	Relationship marketing	Trust
Brand Image		0,317		0,154

Customer satisfaction	0,219	0,079
Decision to Enroll		

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on the results of the f-square test, it can be seen that the magnitude of the influence of each exogenous variable on the endogenous variable in the research model falls into the small to moderate category. The Brand Image variable's influence on the Decision to Enroll has the highest f-square value of 0.317, which falls into the moderate category (medium effect size), indicating that Brand Image is one of the most dominant factors influencing consumers' decisions to enroll. Furthermore, the f-square value for the relationship between Customer Satisfaction and the Decision to Enroll is 0.219, which also falls into the medium category, indicating a significant contribution to the decision to enroll. The f-square value for the relationship between Trust and the Decision to Enroll is 0.113, which falls into the small category (small effect size), yet it still exerts an influence on the decision to enroll. Regarding the relationship with the Trust variable, Brand Image has an f-square value of 0.154, indicating a small to nearly moderate effect, while Customer Satisfaction (0.079) and Relationship Marketing (0.064) fall into the small effect size category. Meanwhile, Relationship Marketing's f-square value for the Decision to Enroll is the lowest at 0.026, indicating a very small effect in the research model. Thus, the f-square test results show that Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction are the variables that contribute most significantly to explaining the Decision to Enroll, while the other variables have a relatively small influence on the endogenous variable in the research model.

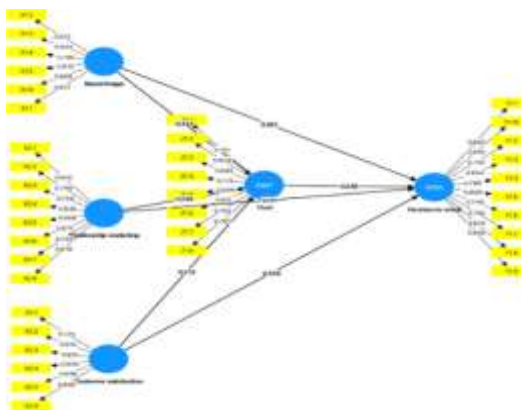


Figure1. Research Model

Direct effect is an effect that occurs directly from one latent variable (independent) to another latent variable (dependent) without going through an intermediary variable (mediator). In PLS-SEM analysis, direct effect is measured through path coefficients, which indicate how large and in what direction the effect of one construct is on another construct. Figure 1 shows the research model between independent variables, intervening or moderating variables, and dependent variables

Table 9. Direct Effect Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T statistics	P values	Description
<i>Brand Image -> Decision to Enroll</i>	0,361	0,364	0,063	5,680	0,000	Significant
<i>Brand Image -> Trust</i>	0,332	0,332	0,076	4,369	0,000	Significant
<i>Customer satisfaction -> Decision to Enroll</i>	0,338	0,336	0,069	4,890	0,000	Significant
<i>Customer satisfaction -> Trust</i>	0,278	0,277	0,084	3,323	0,001	Significant
<i>Relationship marketing -> Decision to Enroll</i>	0,111	0,108	0,055	2,019	0,043	Significant
<i>Relationship marketing -> Trust</i>	0,239	0,240	0,069	3,436	0,001	Significant
<i>Trust -> Decision to Enroll</i>	0,236	0,236	0,072	3,269	0,001	Significant

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on the table 9 above, the results of the hypothesis testing can be summarized as follows: a.) H1 = Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Trust among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 in Surabaya. The analysis results show that brand image has a positive and significant effect on trust, with a coefficient of 0.332, a t-statistic of 4.369, and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, H1 is accepted. This finding indicates that the better the brand image of the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, the higher the level of student trust in the university. A positive university image enhances students' confidence in the institution's reputation, quality, and credibility, leading students to place greater trust in the university; b.) H2 = Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on student Trust at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. The analysis results show that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on trust, with a coefficient of 0.239, a t-statistic of 3.436, and a p-value of 0.001 (< 0.05). Thus, H2 is accepted. These results indicate that the better the university's implementation of Relationship Marketing, the higher the students' trust in the university. Good relationships fostered through communication, attention, and service can create positive, long-term bonds that enhance students' trust in the institution; c.) H3 = Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on Trust among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945, Surabaya. The analysis results show that Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on Trust, with a coefficient of 0.278, a t-statistic of 3.323, and a p-value of 0.001 (< 0.05). Thus, H3 is accepted. This finding indicates that the higher the level of Customer Satisfaction experienced by students, the higher their level of Trust in the university. Students' satisfaction with the services, facilities, and experiences provided by the university strengthens their confidence in the institution's quality; d.) H4 = Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 in Surabaya. The analysis results show that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll, with a coefficient value of 0.361, a t-statistic of 5.680, and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, H4 is accepted. These results indicate that the better the university's Brand Image, the higher the likelihood that students will decide to enroll. A university with a good reputation and a track record of providing high-quality education can increase students' interest and confidence in choosing that university; e.) H5 = Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945, Surabaya. The analysis results show that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll, with a coefficient of 0.111, a t-statistic of 2.019, and a p-value of 0.043 (< 0.05). Thus, H5 is accepted. This finding indicates that the better the university's Relationship Marketing, the higher the students' decision to enroll. Good relationships with students through effective service and communication create a positive impression, thereby influencing students' decisions when choosing a university; f.) H6 = Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 in Surabaya. The analysis results show that Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll, with a coefficient of 0.338, a t-statistic of 4.890, and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, H6 is accepted. These results indicate that the higher the students' Customer Satisfaction, the higher their decision to enroll. Students' satisfaction with the quality of service and the experience provided by the university fosters positive perceptions, thereby increasing their confidence in choosing that university; g.) H7 = Trust has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. The analysis results show that Trust has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll, with a coefficient of 0.236, a t-statistic of 3.269, and a p-value of 0.001 (< 0.05). Thus, H7 is accepted. These findings indicate that the higher the level of students' trust in the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, the more likely students are to decide to enroll. Students' trust in the university's reputation, educational quality, and credibility enhances their confidence in deciding to choose that university.

Table 10. Indirect Effect

Hubungan	Original Sample (O)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P values	Keterangan
Relationship marketing -> Trust -> Decision to enroll	0,056	0,056	0,022	2,566	0,010	Signifikan
Brand Image -> Trust -> Decision to enroll	0,078	0,079	0,033	2,401	0,016	Signifikan
Customer satisfaction -> Trust -> Decision to enroll	0,066	0,066	0,031	2,132	0,033	Signifikan

Source: Processed by the author in 2026

Based on the table 10 above, the results of the hypothesis testing can be summarized as follows: a.) H8 = Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll through Trust among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 in Surabaya. The analysis results show that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll through Trust, with a coefficient value of 0.078, a t-statistic of 2.401, and a p-value of 0.016 (< 0.05). Thus, H8 is accepted. These results indicate that Trust mediates the effect of Brand Image on the Decision to Enroll. The better the university's image as perceived by students, the higher their level of trust in the university, thereby increasing their decision to enroll. A positive brand image fosters students' confidence in the university's quality and reputation, thereby strengthening their decision to choose that university;b.) H9 = Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll through Trust among students at the University of 17 August 1945, Surabaya. The analysis results show that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll through Trust, with a coefficient value of 0.056, a t-statistic of 2.566, and a p-value of 0.010 (< 0.05). Thus, H9 is accepted. This finding indicates that Trust mediates the effect of Relationship Marketing on the Decision to Enroll. The better the university's implementation of Relationship Marketing, the higher the students' level of trust in the university, which ultimately increases students' decision to enroll. Good relationships with students through effective communication and service can strengthen trust, thereby encouraging students' decision to enroll;c.) H10 = Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll through Trust among students at the University of 17 August 1945 Surabaya. The analysis results show that Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll through Trust, with a coefficient value of 0.066, a t-statistic of 2.132, and a p-value of 0.033 (< 0.05). Thus, H10 is accepted. These findings indicate that Trust mediates the effect of Customer Satisfaction on the Decision to Enroll. The higher the level of student satisfaction with the services and experiences provided by the university, the higher the students' trust in the university, which in turn increases their decision to enroll. High student satisfaction fosters positive perceptions and confidence in the university, thereby strengthening students' decision to choose that university.

Discussion and Implication

The results of the study indicate that all of the proposed hypotheses were accepted, meaning that Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction have a positive and significant influence on Trust and the Decision to Enroll, with Trust found to mediate the influence of these three independent variables on the Decision to Enroll among students at the University of 17 Agustus 1945 in Surabaya.

First, Brand Image was found to have a positive and significant effect on Trust, with a coefficient of 0.332 ($t=4.369$, $p=0.000$). This indicates that the better the university's image as perceived by students, the higher their level of trust in the university. Universities with a

positive image will more easily gain students' trust because they are perceived as capable of providing quality educational services. A positive image fosters a sense of security and confidence among students as they navigate their educational journey. This finding aligns with the research by Erkmen & Hance (2019), which demonstrated that Brand Image has a positive and significant influence on Brand Trust.

Second, Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Trust with a coefficient of 0.239 ($t=3.436$, $p=0.001$). This indicates that good relationships fostered through communication, attention, and the services provided by the university can create positive long-term relationships with students. When students feel cared for and receive good service, they will have greater confidence in the university. Harmonious relationships foster a sense of comfort, thereby enhancing student trust. This study supports the theory proposed by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and the research by Ndubisi (2007), which state that relationship marketing has a significant effect on trust in building long-term relationships.

Third, customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on trust with a coefficient of 0.278 ($t=3.323$, $p=0.001$). This indicates that the higher students' satisfaction with university services, the higher their level of trust. Student satisfaction can stem from the quality of academic services, campus facilities, faculty quality, and students' experiences throughout their education. Satisfied students will have positive perceptions, thereby strengthening their trust in the institution. This study supports the research by Oliver (1999) and Asyrof & Siregar (2025), which states that customer satisfaction is the primary foundation for the formation of consumer trust.

Fourth, Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll with a coefficient of 0.361 ($t=5.680$, $p=0.000$). This represents the strongest influence among all independent variables on the Decision to Enroll. Brand image is a primary consideration for prospective students when choosing a university because it reflects the quality of education, the institution's reputation, and students' future opportunities. Universities with a positive image are more trusted and sought after. This study supports the research by Lu (2011), Aaker (1997), and Permatahati & Setyanto (2023), which found that brand image has a significant influence on the decision-making process.

Fifth, Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll, with a coefficient of 0.111 ($t=2.019$, $p=0.043$). Although its effect is the smallest among the independent variables, this relationship remains significant. A good relationship between the university and its students or prospective students can create a positive impression of the institution. Effective communication, friendly service, and attention to students' needs can increase comfort and confidence in choosing a university. This study supports the research by Rahmat et al. (2024), which states that enhancing relationship marketing can improve consumer purchasing decisions.

Sixth, Customer Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll with a coefficient of 0.338 ($t=4.890$, $p=0.000$). This effect is the second largest after Brand Image. Student satisfaction is a key factor influencing the decision to choose a university. Satisfied students tend to have positive experiences and will provide positive recommendations to other prospective students. This study supports Oliver's (1997) research, which states that customer satisfaction influences consumer decisions.

Seventh, Trust has a positive and significant effect on the Decision to Enroll with a coefficient of 0.236 ($t=3.269$, $p=0.001$). This indicates that trust is a crucial factor in the students' decision-making process. Students' trust in the university is shaped by its reputation, the quality of education, services, and the institution's credibility. Students with high levels of trust are more confident that the university can provide a quality education. This study supports the research by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and Gefen (2002), which states that trust has a significant influence on consumer decisions.

Eighth through tenth, trust was found to mediate the effects of brand image, relationship marketing, and customer satisfaction on the decision to enroll, with coefficients of 0.078 ($t=2.401$, $p=0.016$), 0.056 ($t=2.566$, $p=0.010$), and 0.066 ($t=2.132$, $p=0.033$). This indicates that students' decisions in choosing a university are influenced not only directly by brand image and service quality but also through the trust that is established. These findings align with Morgan & Hunt's theory, which positions trust as a critical factor in building long-term relationships between organizations and consumers. Trust acts as a bridge that

strengthens the influence of brand image, relationship marketing, and customer satisfaction on students' decisions to enroll at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that brand image, relationship marketing, and customer satisfaction are interrelated strategic factors in building trust and driving students' decision to enroll. These findings enrich the literature on higher education marketing and provide an empirical foundation for higher education administrators in formulating effective marketing strategies. By understanding that trust serves as a crucial mediating mechanism, universities can design integrated approaches that focus not only on image building and satisfaction but also on strengthening trust through consistency, transparency, and sustained service quality.

This study has important implications, both theoretical and practical, for the development of marketing management and higher education administration. Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of service marketing, particularly in the field of higher education marketing. The findings, which show that Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction have a positive and significant effect on student Trust and Decision to Enroll, reinforce the theories of relational marketing and consumer behavior previously developed by experts.

These findings specifically support the theory of Morgan & Hunt (1994), which positions trust as a central factor in building long-term relationships between organizations and consumers. Furthermore, this study successfully demonstrates that Trust acts as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between Brand Image, Relationship Marketing, and Customer Satisfaction and the Decision to Enroll. This indicates that students' decisions in choosing a university are not only directly influenced by the institution's image and the quality of services provided but also through the trust formed as a result of positive experiences and perceptions of the institution. Thus, this study enriches the literature on higher education marketing and can serve as a reference for future research examining the factors that influence students' behavior in selecting a university.

In practical terms, the results of this study provide clear guidance for the University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya in formulating more effective marketing strategies to increase interest among prospective students. Based on the finding that brand image has the greatest influence on the decision to enroll with a coefficient of 0.361 the university needs to prioritize enhancing its institutional image through various strategic efforts. These efforts include improving academic quality by continuously developing a curriculum relevant to the needs of the job market and current trends; achieving student and faculty accomplishments at both the national and international levels as a form of recognition of the institution's quality; strengthening program accreditation as evidence of a commitment to high educational quality standards; and conducting consistent promotional campaigns through various media both conventional and digital to expand reach and reinforce a positive image in the community.

Comparison

Overall, the results of this study show strong consistency with various previous studies, while also offering new insights through a more comprehensive model in the context of higher education marketing. The finding that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Trust (coefficient 0.332) and Decision to Enroll (coefficient 0.361) is consistent with the research by Erkmen & Hance (2019), Chen (2017), Juliana & Johan (2020), and Kuncahyo & Khajar (2025), which demonstrate that a positive brand image can enhance consumer trust and decision-making; meanwhile, its most dominant influence on the Decision to Enroll is further supported by the findings of Jannah (2019), Permatahati & Setyanto (2023), and Sari & Sylvia (2020), who identify Brand Image as the most critical factor in students' decisions to choose a university.

Similarly, the positive influence of Relationship Marketing on Trust (0.239) and the Decision to Enroll (0.111) supports the theory of Morgan & Hunt (1994) as well as the research by Abubakar (2015), Maryati (2011), Riza & Santoso (2023), and Rahmat et al. (2024), which show that effective relationship marketing through communication, commitment, and conflict resolution can build trust and drive consumer decisions, although in this study its influence was relatively smaller compared to other variables.

Furthermore, the positive influence of Customer Satisfaction on Trust (0.278) and Decision to Enroll (0.338) is consistent with the research by Erkmen & Hance (2019), Asyrof & Siregar (2025), Susan et al. (2023), Waluya & Iqbal (2019), and Satriatama & Mujanah (2022), which demonstrate that customer satisfaction is a key foundation for building trust and influencing decisions; in this study, its influence ranks second in magnitude after Brand Image.

The main novelty of this study is its success in demonstrating the role of Trust as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between the three independent variables and the Decision to Enroll (mediation coefficients: Brand Image 0.078, Relationship Marketing 0.056, Customer Satisfaction 0.066), which aligns with the findings of Sultan & Wong (2019), Lin & Lu (2011), and Kuncahyo & Khajar (2025) while simultaneously addressing a research gap identified in the study by Yani et al. (2025), which previously found that Trust did not mediate the relationship between Brand Image and the decision to choose a university.

Thus, this study not only reinforces existing theories but also makes a new contribution through a research model that simultaneously integrates three independent variables with Trust as a mediator in the context of private universities in Indonesia, which has been proven to have excellent predictive power with an R^2 value of 75.3% for the Decision to Enroll, thereby providing important practical implications for university administrators in formulating integrated marketing strategies focused on strengthening image, relationships, satisfaction, and trust to increase prospective students' interest.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed the effects of brand image, relationship marketing, and customer satisfaction on decision to enroll through trust among students at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. The results show that brand image, relationship marketing, and customer satisfaction have positive and significant effects on both trust and decision to enroll. In addition, trust is also proven to have a positive and significant effect on decision to enroll. The findings confirm that trust serves as a mediating mechanism in the relationships between brand image, relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, and decision to enroll. This means that the better the brand image of the university, the more effective the relationship marketing practices implemented, and the higher the level of customer satisfaction perceived by students, the stronger the trust that is formed. This trust ultimately encourages improved decision to enroll among students.

Theoretically, this study extends higher education marketing research by positioning trust within the context of integrated marketing strategies, in which students are simultaneously influenced by brand perception, relational engagement, and satisfaction with institutional services. Practically, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya needs to strengthen its institutional image through academic quality enhancement and facility development, improve relationship marketing through effective communication and responsive services, and increase customer satisfaction by providing quality academic and non-academic services so that students feel supported and are able to make confident enrollment decisions. Future research is recommended to expand the research object to other universities or to use a qualitative approach to obtain a deeper understanding of the dynamics among brand image, relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, trust, and decision to enroll.

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