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The Decision Of Prospective Students To Choose A Vocational College: The Role Of The Marketing Mix And Image

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the students' decision in choosing a vocational college which is influenced by the marketing mix strategy of vocational colleges and image. The sampling technique was purposive sampling, with a total of 200 respondents. The analysis technique used was SEM PLS. Results showed that the marketing mix strategy of the vocational colleges could influence the decision to choose a vocational college through the image of vocational college. The image directly influences the decision to choosing a vocational college. Education services, education costs, promotions, locations, quality of lecturers and staff, processes, and campus environments support in creating the image and decisions to choose a vocational college.

Keywords: marketing mix; image; decision to choose a vocational college.

Introduction

Indonesia, as a developing country needs college graduates who are ready to work, one of which is through vocational colleges. Industrial demand for graduates who are ready to work and quality forces vocational colleges to continuously improve their strategic approach in improving the quality of student input and output. It is important to analyze the factors that influence students' decisions in choosing vocational colleges and determine the right marketing strategy. The decision to choose a higher education is related to the marketing mix variable. The strength in sophisticated educational marketing is an educational program (Kalenskaya, 2015). Higher education institutions are recommended to use, in an integrated manner, a set of seven marketing-mix tools in planning their market relationships: programs, prices, places, promotions, processes, physical facilities, and

people (Filip, 2012). Marketing mix elements as an essential element in developing competitive strategies to examine what aspects of the marketing mix were important to students when selecting a vocational college. This research is important because it can provide an understanding of the role of the marketing mix in influencing prospective students' decisions in choosing vocational colleges.

The image of vocational colleges can influence students' decisions in choosing vocational colleges. Image is an important concept in consumer behavior research because it can affect individuals, subjective perceptions, consumer values, satisfaction, and purchase behavior intentions (Jin, 2015). The image of a vocational institution represents a series of attitudes, ideas, and impressions that a prospective student has concerning that vocational institution (Rodic-Lukic & Lukic, 2017) as well as perceived experiences, information, and marketing activities (Kai Li, 2009). The image of higher education is felt directly by students and how this image influences their behavior (Alves & Raposo, 2010). It is necessary to create and manage an image to present a good impression for prospective students. Image in the context of this study focuses on students' perceptions of a particular vocational college image. Students who see the positive image of a vocational college will form an interest in choosing a vocational college in the future. This research is important to analyze the vocational college image formed by the marketing mix. Therefore, it can provide an understanding of the marketing mix, image, and the decision to choose a vocational college. This can be a strategy for vocational colleges in designing a good marketing mix that can create a prospective student image and the decision to choose a vocational college.

It is important to analyze the factors that are considered by prospective students to choose vocational colleges. The scope of this study is limited to the problems of the decision of prospective students to choose vocational colleges in Indonesia caused by the image and the perception element of the marketing mix. This study also reveals the effect of marketing mix on the decision to choose a vocational college either directly or through the image.

Literature Review

The decision to choose a vocational college

The main concept of the decision to choose a vocational college is based on the concept of a purchasing decision. Consumer purchasing decisions are a series of choices made by consumers before making a purchase (Onigbinde & Odunlami, 2015). In the purchase process, consumers can use various combinations (online and offline) to find information about products, confirm this information, and then make a purchase (Flavián et al., 2016). Purchasing decisions are based on three stages, such as problem recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation (Onigbinde & Odunlami, 2015). Consumers choose products to be purchased and providers of products to be purchased (He & Wang, 2015). The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) consumers consider the consequences of alternative behavior before buying (Lien et al., 2015). Customers tend to have different behavior in buying, some might use the internet to assess the way companies communicate with their customers (Barhemmati & Ahmad, 2015). Purchasing decisions are influenced by the prices, brands, images (Calvo Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2016), relative advantages,

perceived ease of use, attitudes, desire to participate (Agag & El-Masry, 2016), values, prices, trust, and brand images (Lien et al., 2015). Thus, this study analyzes decision to choose a vocational college as the dependent variable.

Image

Image is an important concept in consumer behavior research because it affects individuals, subjective perceptions, consumer values, satisfaction, and purchase behavior intentions (Jin, 2015). Image is the sum of a person's beliefs, ideas, and impressions of the organization (H. C. Wu, 2014). Institutional Image is composed of creating a positive corporate personality, marketing communications, and channels, as well as constant feedback from the target audience and, can influence competitive advantages (Arendt & Brettel, 2010). The image of vocational colleges is a good perception of vocational colleges to study at, perceptions of vocational colleges focusing on the future, and perceptions of vocational colleges that provide excellent preparation for their students (Alves & Raposo, 2010). The image of a vocational institution represents the attitudes, ideas, and impressions of prospective students related to the vocational institution (Rodic-Lukic & Lukic, 2017). The overall image is divided into cognitive and affective images (Molinillo, 2018). The image of vocational colleges has a significant influence on the choice of vocational colleges. The image becomes the main indicator of the uniqueness of higher education with the emergence of brandings, such as brand identity and image to develop the identity of higher education, enhance the image, and enhance reputation (Hemsley-Brown, 2016). Competition among universities increases the need for universities to understand and manage the position of university reputation (Rauschnabel, 2016). Previous research has analyzed the effect of image on choosing or buying decisions in various contexts (Lee & Lee, 2018; Ramesh et al., 2019; P. C. S. Wu et al., 2011). This study analyzes the effect of image on the decision to choose a vocational college. Thus, the hypothesis is as follows:

H1. Image significantly influences decision to choose a vocational college

Marketing mix in Higher Education

A compelling marketing mix allows marketers to make a combination to achieve the desired goals (Rafidinal, 2019). The service marketing mix consists of products, prices, locations, promotions, employees, processes, and physical evidence. In the case of a university, what is being sold is widely debated. Some argue that students register for a degree are the raw materials of education and that the graduates are the product, with employers being the customers (Ivy, 2006). When considering marketing mix in vocational colleges in the curriculum and services that will be offered, partners and other public, all programs and services provided by vocational colleges (Gajić, 2012). Price is the factor affecting consumers; it helps to understand the value of the product (Išoraitė, 2016). Promotions help spread information, encourage purchases, and influence the buying decision (Išoraitė, 2016). Place or distribution method that the university adopts to provide the tuition (Ivy, 2006) offline or online (Rodic-Lukic & Lukic, 2017). The people element includes all the staff that interacts with prospective students and indeed, once they are enrolled as students (Ivy, 2006) and other partners in the vocational environment (Gajić, 2012). Processes are all administrative and bureaucratic functions: from the handling of inquiry to registration, from course evaluation to examinations, from result dissemination to graduation (Ivy, 2006). Physical evidence is evaluated by a higher education institution's target markets, ranging from the teaching materials to the

appearance of the buildings and lecture facilities (Ivy, 2006). Several previous studies have shown there is an effect of the marketing mix on image (Eneizan et al., 2018; Esmaili et al., 2017; Kim & Hyun, 2011) and buying decisions or choosing decisions (Hossain et al., 2020; Mahmoud, 2018; Mahmoud et al., 2017) either directly or indirectly. Thus, the hypothesis is made as follows.

- H2. Marketing mix significantly influences decision to choose a vocational college
- H3. Marketing mix significantly influences image
- H4. Marketing mix significantly influences decision to choose a vocational college through image

Methods

There are two main stages in this research: 1) The preparation stage, consisting of pre-research observations, literature studies, instrument development, and questionnaires; 2) Data analysis stage, consisting of data screening, analysis of respondent characteristics, descriptive analysis, and Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis. The number of samples in this study was as many as 200 respondents spread across several regions in Indonesia. The sampling technique in this study was purposive sampling. Several criteria were applied, such as high school students in class XII and interested in registering vocational colleges. These criteria are evidenced from the control questions in the questionnaire. We ensure that respondents are willing to make statements that are truthful. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. Measurement of each statement item used a 5 point Likert scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The marketing mix instrument was adopted from several studies on the marketing mix at vocational colleges developed by (Rodic-Lukic & Lukic, 2017) and (Gajić, 2012). The image of a vocational institution was measured by three indicators developed by (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). Then the instruments to measure college selection decisions were based on research (Lien et al., 2015) and (Agag & El-Masry, 2016).

Based on the results of the distribution of the research questionnaire to 210 respondents and collecting data, and 200 usable responses (84%) were used for the final data analysis. Male respondents constituted 51.6% of the sample and female respondents 48.4%. The income of the respondent's parents above Rp. 10,000,000 was 12%. Then, the income of Rp 7,500,000 to Rp 9,999,000 was as much as 35.6%. Parents' income of Rp. 5,000,000 to Rp. 7,499,000 was 36.8%. Then the parents' income below Rp 5,000,000, was as much 15.6%.

Findings

The Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used to analyze the data in an SEM. It is necessary to estimate the accuracy of the measurement instrument in providing numbers free from random errors and the extent to which the numbers obtained on a scale reflecting the actual differences between objects and measured features. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used to evaluate cover-validity (Fornell, 1981). The recommended minimum AVE value of 0.5 for all constructs (Table 1).

Table 1. Construct Validity and Reliability

Item	Loading factor	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Marketing Mix	0.663-0.866***	0.870	0.899	0.562
Image	0.638-0.805***	0.853	0.899	0.534
Decision to choose a vocational college	0.774-0.876***	0.828	0.885	0.660

Note. ***p<0.001

All loading scores are not below 0.5; there are no indicators that must be removed from the research model. The next step is the discriminant validation test. There are three methods used to measure discriminant validity. First, by measuring the cross-loading of indicators (Hair et al., 2014). Second, by using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which may be whether the correlations between the dimensions are lower than the square root of the AVE (Fornell, 1981) (Table 2). Third, using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations between two constructs should be below 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015) (Table 2). All of these values are below the specified standard limit.

Table 2. Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	1	2	3
1. Marketing Mix	0.750	0.621	0.362
2. Image	0.555	0.731	0.654
3. Decision to choose a vocational college	0.321	0.556	0.812

Note. Fornell-Larcker criterion (below the main diagonal) and HTMT (above the main diagonal).

The evaluation of the structural model meets all common requirements. First, the value of R² affects how much of the construct's variance can be explained by the model, with values around 0.19, 0.33 and 0.67, which are considered to be weak, moderate and substantial, respectively. The value of R² on the decision to choose a vocational college variable is 0.303 and the image variable is 0.304. Second, The Stone-Geisser test or Q² was estimated using the blindfolding procedure (Omission Distance = 7), resulting in values is 0.175. The larger Q², the more relevant the predictive model. Q2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 reveal a small, medium, or large predictive relevance of a certain latent variable (Henseler et al., 2015). Third, the size of the effect (f²) also verified the suitability of the proposed model. Values of f² from 0.02 to 0.15, 0.15-0.35, and 0.35 or greater indicate that an exogenous latent variable has a small, medium, and large impact, respectively (Chin, 1998). This model shows an impact of marketing mix on image (f² = 0.444) and image on decision to choose a vocational college (f² = 0.299).

Table 3. Direct and Indirect Effect

Relationship	Path	Supported
H1 Image – decision to choose a vocational college	0.546	Yes
H2 Marketing Mix – decision to choose a vocational college	0.018	No
H3 Marketing Mix – Image	0.555	Yes
H4 Marketing Mix – Image - decision to choose a vocational college	0.303	Yes

Note. p < 0.001

Based on the hypothesis testing showed that the marketing mix directly does not significantly affect the decision to choose a vocational college with a path coefficient of 0.018. However, the marketing mix has a significant effect on decision to choose a vocational college through image with a coefficient of 0.303. This means that the marketing mix can influence decision to choose a vocational college if influenced by image. The marketing mix directly has a significant effect on image with a path coefficient of 0.555 and

image has a significant direct effect on decision to choose a vocational college with a path coefficient of 0.546. These results suggest that only the relationships in hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 are generalizable. These results prove that the better the marketing mix supported by a good image will improve the decision to choose a vocational college.

Discussion

Prior research has not analyzed the relationship between the image of vocational colleges in influencing the relationship between the marketing mix of higher education and the decision to choose a vocational college. Based on the results of the analysis of the first hypothesis, that the marketing mix does not significantly influence the decision to choose a vocational college. However, the results of testing the indirect effect showed that the marketing mix affects decision to choose a vocational college through college image. If the better the marketing mix supported by image can increase the decision to choose a vocational college. The results showed an important role of the image in influencing decisions in choosing a vocational college. In conducting its activities, vocational college should give attention to the marketing mix in the product side of the course, marketing products for new students, and services when planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating teaching and learning activities. Price, promotion and product, Parent-Teacher Communication, professor, and privilege are effective in increasing student enrolment (Alipour et al., 2012). These factors are important to improve in forming a better vocational college image. Thus, this can increase decisions in choosing a vocational college.

Then the second hypothesis testing results showed that the marketing mix has a significant effect on image. This result illustrates that the marketing mix consisting of services, education costs, location of the vocational college, promotion and cost relief, staff and lecturers, service delivery processes, and physical evidence of college infrastructure can affect image of vocational college. Several previous studies have shown there is an effect of the marketing mix on image (Eneizan et al., 2018; Esmaili et al., 2017; Kim & Hyun, 2011). Vocational colleges need to consider and manage these factors to create a better vocational image. Marketing strategies (product, people, price, place, and promotion) affect the school image (Kai Li, 2009). In vocational colleges, staff and teaching staff play an important role in the delivery of educational services. Human resources can influence the image of an institution (Dominguez, 2011). Some elements of the marketing mix, promotion, and channel, influence the image of the institution (Kim & Hyun, 2011). The result of this study provides evidence of the effect of the marketing mix on image in the context of vocational college.

Furthermore, the results of testing the third hypothesis indicated that the image of a vocational college has a significant effect on the decision to choose a vocational college. It is important to increase the decision of prospective students to choose a vocational college by creating a better image. If vocational colleges have to compete through the image, the first step to take is to measure the university image held by its students (Alves & Raposo, 2010). The institutional image can improve if service users are satisfied with the perceived marketing activities (Kai Li, 2009). The image of a college can influence the expectations, grades, and satisfaction of its students (Alves & Raposo, 2010). Thus, this study provides

an understanding that image in the context of a vocational college can affect decision in choosing a vocational college.

The results found that the marketing mix can improve the decision of prospective students in choosing a vocational college if the vocational college has a good image. The marketing mix strategy in vocational colleges is relevant in creating images and decision in selecting a vocational college. Vocational colleges should consider factors such as good education services, tuition fees, online and offline college locations, education promotions and scholarships, staff and teaching staff, service delivery processes, and higher education infrastructures to create a good image so that they can influence the decision of prospective students in choosing a vocational college.

Conclusion

The results have relevant implications for improving the decision to choose a vocational college. First, the marketing mix and image play a critical role in improving the decision to choose a vocational college. Vocational higher education practitioners need to build the image of vocational colleges by implementing an appropriate marketing mix marketing strategy. Second, it is necessary to maximize the experience of the current students in order to increase the image. Third, this study confirms that the marketing mix can influence the decision to choose a vocational college through a good image. Consequently, vocational colleges practitioners need to develop appropriate marketing mix strategies such as good services, appropriate tuition fees, availability of online learning in addition to hands-on learning, education costs and promotions of the university, the process of delivering services by staff and staff professional instructors, and physical evidence of vocational colleges that can improve the image of vocational colleges. Fourth, competition among vocational colleges in obtaining students needs to be taken into consideration by vocational colleges which then can be used in planning for their future marketing strategies and plans.

However, some limitations should be noted. First, this research was limited to vocational colleges. Future research is expected to add non-vocational colleges to the object of research. Second, this research was still limited to a narrow area and did not yet cover the national scale. The findings were not generalized across all countries that host vocational colleges. Future research is expected to broaden the scope of research with respondents from various regions in Indonesia. Third, we must emphasize that our study is a snapshot in time. The higher education market is fast-changing and students' demands and expectations can change quickly. Future research is expected to be able to adjust to the demand at that time, such as by adding relevant variables and adjusting the variables used in this study for future situations. Fourth, the number of respondents was still limited due to the limited resources available in gathering data. Future research is expected to increase the number of respondents with different backgrounds.

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