

The Impact of Promotional Mix Strategy on New Student Admission, and School Image on Student School Choice Decisions Mediated By Student Interest (Case Study at Diponegoro Senior High School, Tumpang, Malang Regency)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of promotional mix strategy and school image on students' school choice decisions, with student interest as a mediating variable. The research was conducted at Diponegoro Senior High School in Tumpang, Malang Regency. A quantitative method with a SEM-PLS (Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares) approach was employed. The results indicate that both promotional mix and school image have a significant effect on student interest and their decision-making. Student interest was also proven to mediate the influence of these two variables on the final decision. These findings provide data-driven strategic insights for schools to design targeted promotional strategies, thereby enhancing student interest and increasing new student enrollment.

INTRODUCTION

Competition among schools, particularly in the New Student Admission (PPDB) process, has intensified in the globalization era. High schools no longer compete solely in academic achievement but also in marketing strategies that can attract prospective students and parents. In this context, promotional strategies or the promotional mix –encompassing social media, print media, and direct interactions such as open-house events –have become crucial. However, many schools, including SMA Diponegoro Tumpang, still face challenges in meeting enrollment targets due to suboptimal alignment of promotional strategies with audience preferences (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016). This phenomenon highlights an urgent need to evaluate and design more data-driven and relevant promotional approaches.

This study is essential in addressing the fundamental question of how effective promotional mixes are in increasing student interest and enrollment decisions. Previous research by Prasetya (2019) and Rahayu (2020) found that promotions influence student decision-making. However, the local context of SMA Diponegoro Tumpang, situated amid competition between public and private schools in Malang, presents an opportunity to examine a unique niche sample and uncover more specific dynamics. By employing an approach that analyzes both direct and indirect effects mediated by student interest, this study offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for assessing the impact of promotional strategies and school image.

Table 1 The PPDB Results of SMA Diponegoro Tumpang for the Academic Years 2022/2023, 2023/2024, and 2024/2025.

		L	P	J	L	P	J	L	P	J	L	P	J
1	X - A	11	25	36							11	25	36
2	X - B	10	25	35							10	25	35
3	X - C	13	23	36					1	1	13	22	35
4	X - D	10	25	35							10	25	35
5	X - E	10	25	35							10	25	35
6	X - F	9	26	35							9	26	35
7	X - G	12	23	35							12	23	35
Jumlah		75	172	247	0	0	0	0	1	1	75	171	246
1	XI - A	4	15	19							4	15	19
2	XI - B	12	23	35							12	23	35
3	XI - C	12	24	36							12	24	36
4	XI - D	9	24	33							9	24	33
5	X - E	10	23	33							10	23	33
6	XI - F	12	20	32							12	20	32
7	XI - G	12	20	32							12	20	32
Jumlah		71	149	220	0	0	0	0	0	0	71	149	220
1	XII - A	6	13	19							6	13	19
2	XII - B	11	19	30							11	19	30
3	XII - C	10	19	29							10	19	29
4	XII - D	11	24	35							11	24	35

		L	P	J	L	P	J	L	P	J	L	P	J
5	XII - E	14	22	36							14	22	36
6	XII - F	10	25	35							10	25	35
Jumlah		62	122	184	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	122	184
Jumlah Total		208	443	651	0	0	0	0	1	1	208	442	650

The data is sourced from www.ict2.smadita.sch.id

This study contributes to theoretical knowledge by enriching the field of education marketing through the integration of a promotional mix model, school image, and school choice decision-making using a mediation approach. Furthermore, from a practical perspective, the findings provide a foundation for schools to develop targeted and efficient promotional policies, particularly within the local demographic and competitive context of SMA Diponegoro Tumpang. This research also serves as a relevant reference for education policymakers and private school administrators in addressing the increasingly complex dynamics of educational institution marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Consumer Behavior Theory and S-O-R Model

This study is grounded in Consumer Behavior Theory (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007), which posits that individual decisions – including school choice – are influenced by external factors (e.g., promotional strategies and school image) and internal factors (e.g., student interest and quality perceptions). This theory aligns with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), where external stimuli (promotions and school image) affect the organism (student interest), subsequently triggering a response (school selection decision).

2. Promotional Mix Strategy

The promotional mix strategy refers to an integrated set of marketing communication tools, including advertising, sales promotions, public relations, personal selling, and direct marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In education, this strategy is critical for enhancing school visibility and shaping prospective students' and parents' perceptions. Effective promotions not only disseminate information but also cultivate institutional image and long-term engagement (Tjiptono, 2012; Lupiyoadi, 2013).

3. School Image

School image reflects public perceptions of an educational institution based on its reputation, service quality, faculty, and learning environment (Keller, 2003; Alma, 2007). A positive image strengthens student trust and loyalty, serving as a key differentiator in school selection (Tjiptono, 2011; Sutisna, 2003). Its determinants include quality, service, credibility, functional benefits, perceived risks, and cost.

4. Student Interest

Student interest denotes an intrinsic tendency to engage voluntarily in an activity (Slameto, 2010), shaped by internal drives, emotions, experiences, and social support (Crow & Crow, 1973; Hurlock, 1993).

5. School Choice Decision

The school choice decision-making process involves five stages: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, final decision, and post-decision behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Decisions are influenced by intuition, experience, rationality, and parental authority, alongside cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors (Assauri, 2011).

6. Intervariable Relationships

Prior studies confirm that promotional strategies and school image significantly affect student interest and enrollment decisions (Rahmawati, 2020; Prasetyo, 2021; Yuliana, 2020). Student interest acts as a critical mediator between external stimuli (promotions/image) and final decisions. Thus, a holistic approach to promotional mix and image-building is essential for enrollment strategies.

Hypotheses:

- H₁: Promotional mix strategy (X_1) has a positive and significant effect on school choice decisions (Y_2).
- H₂: Promotional mix strategy (X_1) has a positive and significant effect on student interest (Y_1).
- H₃: School image (X_2) has a positive and significant effect on school choice decisions (Y_2).
- H₄: School image (X_2) has a positive and significant effect on student interest (Y_1).
- H₅: Student interest (Y_1) has a positive and significant effect on school choice decisions (Y_2).
- H₆: Student interest (Y_1) mediates the positive and significant effect of promotional mix strategy (X_1) on school choice decisions (Y_2).
- H₇: Student interest (Y_1) mediates the positive and significant effect of school image (X_2) on school choice decisions (Y_2).
- H₈: Promotional mix strategy (X_1), school image (X_2), and student interest (Y_1) collectively exert a dominant influence on school choice decisions (Y_2).

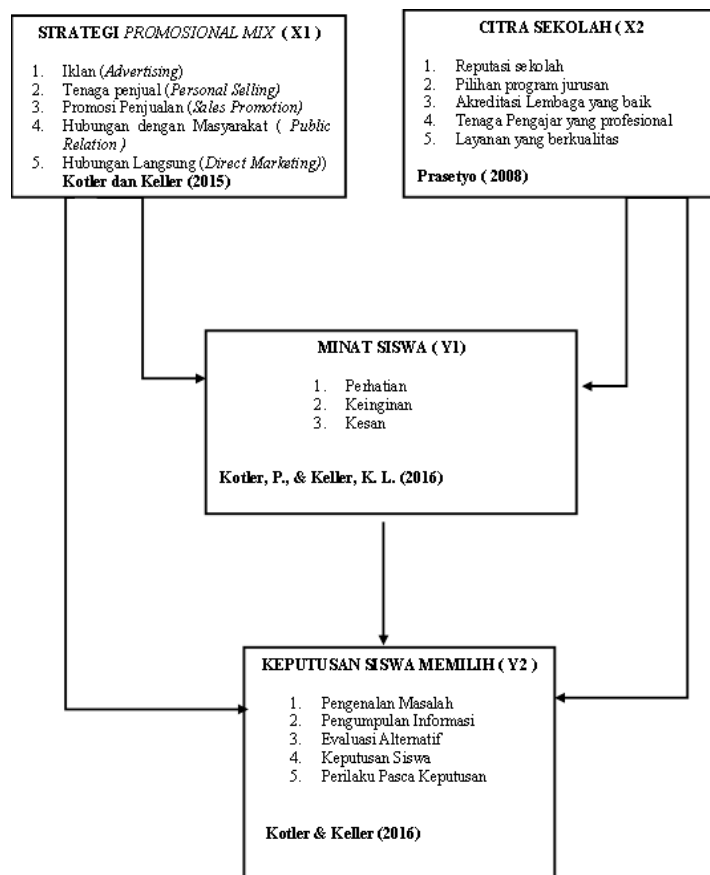


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to examine the causal relationships among promotional mix strategy, school image, student interest, and students' decision in choosing a school. The study was conducted at SMA Diponegoro Tumpang, Malang Regency, with a population comprising students enrolled through the New Student Admission (PPDB) process from 2022 to 2024. A total of 246 students were selected using proportional stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation across grade levels. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire based on theoretical indicators, employing a five-point Likert scale to measure perceptions of promotional efforts, school image, student interest, and decision-making. The questionnaire was pre-tested through a pilot study to confirm its validity and reliability.

For data analysis, this study applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in modeling complex relationships involving mediating variables and its ability to work well with moderate sample sizes. The analytical process included evaluation of the measurement model to test the validity and reliability of the indicators, followed by testing of the structural model to examine path coefficients, R^2 values, and the significance of each relationship using t-statistics and p-values. The findings provide empirical insights into how promotional strategies and school image influence student decision-making through the mediating role of interest.

RESEARCH RESULT

1. Overview of Analytical Procedures

The analysis in this study follows a step-by-step approach to test the direct and indirect effects of the *promotional mix strategy* and *school image* on students' decision to choose a school, mediated by *students' interest*. The stages of testing include: (1) descriptive analysis, (2) outer model evaluation (validity and reliability), (3) inner model testing (path analysis and mediation), and (4) hypothesis testing using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS).

2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and perceptions of each variable. The results indicated that students generally gave high scores to promotional activities (especially personal selling and public relations), had a positive view of the school image, and showed high interest in enrolling at SMA Diponegoro Tumpang.

3. Outer Model Evaluation

The outer model was tested to determine convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability.

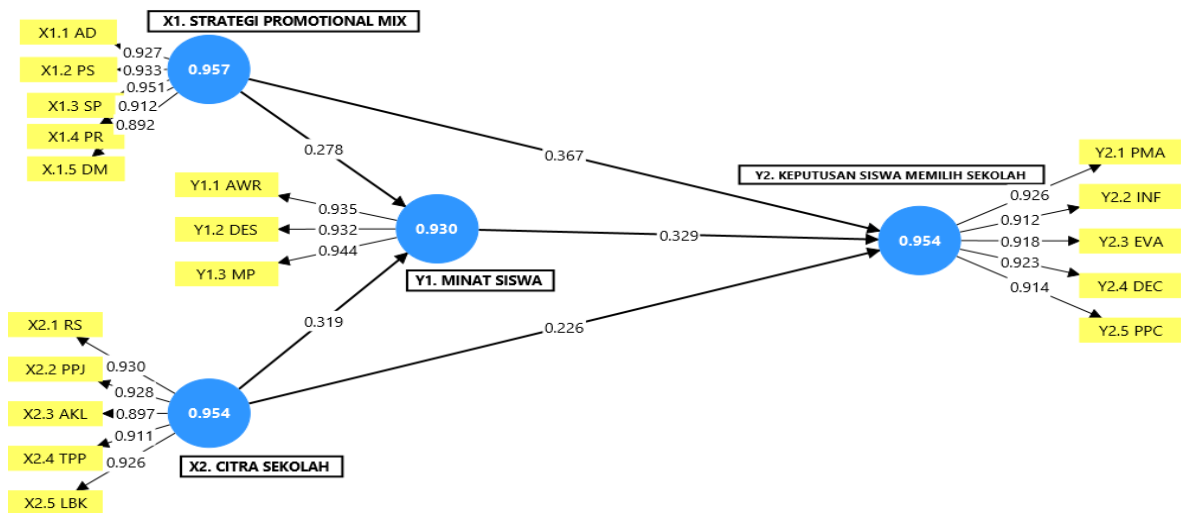


Figure 2. Outer Model

Figure 2 illustrates the Outer Model of the study, representing the relationships between latent variables and their respective indicators using the PLS-SEM approach. Each latent construct Promotional Mix Strategy (X1), School Image (X2), Student Interest (Y1), and Student School Choice Decision (Y2) demonstrates high outer loadings (all > 0.70), indicating strong validity and reliability of the measurement items. The construct Promotional Mix Strategy is reflected by five indicators (e.g., advertising, personal selling, sales promotion), with loading values ranging from 0.892 to 0.951. School Image is measured through aspects like reputation and service quality, with loadings between 0.897 and 0.954. Student Interest comprises awareness, desire, and motivation, each with high loading scores (0.932–0.944). Lastly, School Choice Decision includes decision-making elements like information search and post-purchase confidence, showing strong reflective validity (0.912–0.926). The high composite reliability

values (above 0.90) for all constructs confirm internal consistency, establishing a robust measurement model for further structural analysis.

Table 2 Outer Loading, Composite Reliability dan Average Variance Extracted

Variabel	Indikator	Loading of faktor	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
X1. STRATEGI PROMOTIONAL MIX	X1.1 AD	0.892	0.958	0.967	0.853
	X1.2 PS	0.927			
	X1.3 SP	0.933			
	X1.4 PR	0.951			
	X.1.5 DM	0.912			
X2. CITRA SEKOLAH	X2.1 RS	0.93	0.956	0.964	0.843
	X2.2 PPJ	0.928			
	X2.3 AKL	0.897			
	X2.4 TPP	0.911			
	X2.5 LBK	0.926			
Y1. MINAT SISWA	Y1.1 AWR	0.935	0.931	0.956	0.878
	Y1.2 DES	0.932			
	Y1.3 MP	0.944			
Y2. KEPUTUSAN SISWA MEMILIH SEKOLAH	Y2.1 PMA	0.926	0.954	0.964	0.844
	Y2.2 INF	0.912			
	Y2.3 EVA	0.918			
	Y2.4 DEC	0.923			
	Y2.5 PPC	0.914			

The table presents the results of the measurement model assessment, focusing on the constructs of Promotional Mix Strategy (X1), School Image (X2), Student Interest (Y1), and School Choice Decision (Y2). Each construct demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha recorded as 0.958 for X1, 0.956 for X2, 0.931 for Y1, and 0.954 for Y2. The Composite Reliability values also confirm this reliability, with scores of 0.967 for X1, 0.964 for X2, 0.956 for Y1, and 0.964 for Y2. In terms of validity, all constructs achieved high Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values of 0.853 for X1, 0.843 for X2, 0.878 for Y1, and 0.844 for Y2. These results indicate that each construct not only has reliable indicators but also possesses adequate convergent validity, ensuring the measurement model is both statistically sound and theoretically robust.

4. Inner Model Testing

The inner model evaluation includes testing R-square, Q-square, and the significance of path coefficients.

Table 3 R-Square and Q-Square

	R-square	Q ² prediksi
Y1. MINAT SISWA	0.239	0.228
Y2. KEPUTUSAN SISWA MEMILIH SEKOLAH	0.506	0.414

The table presents the R-square and Q² predictive relevance values for the endogenous variables in the structural model. The R-square value for student interest (Y1) is 0.239, indicating that 23.9% of the variance in student interest can be explained by the promotional mix and school image variables. Meanwhile, the R-square for school choice decision (Y2) is 0.506, suggesting that 50.6% of the variation in students' decisions to choose a school is influenced by promotional mix, school image, and student interest. Additionally, the Q² predictive relevance values for Y1 and Y2 are 0.228 and 0.414 respectively, both exceeding the threshold of 0.00, which confirms that the model has strong predictive accuracy and relevance for the dependent variables in the context of educational decision-making.

5. Hypothesis Testing (Path Analysis)

Path coefficients were analyzed using bootstrapping to test the direct and indirect relationships. The following are the summarized results:

Table 4 Path Analysis

	Path Coefficient (O)	P Value	97,5% Kepercayaan		f-square	t-statistik	Conclusion
			2.5%	97.5%			
X1 → Y1 (Strategi Promotional Mix → Minat Siswa)	0.278	0.000	0.170	0.386	0.090	5.004	Accepted
X1 → Y2 (Strategi Promotional Mix → Keputusan Memilih)	0.367	0.000	0.283	0.447	0.221	8.682	Accepted
X2 → Y1 (Citra Sekolah → Minat Siswa)	0.319	0.000	0.207	0.423	0.119	5.786	Accepted
X2 → Y2 (Citra Sekolah → Keputusan Memilih)	0.226	0.000	0.134	0.318	0.082	4.751	Accepted
Y1 → Y2 (Minat Siswa → Keputusan Memilih)	0.329	0.000	0.241	0.416	0.167	7.390	Accepted

The table presents the hypothesis testing results for the structural model using path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, confidence intervals, and effect sizes (f²). All six hypothesized relationships were statistically significant with p-values = 0.000 and t-values > 1.96. The promotional mix strategy (X1) significantly influences both student interest (Y1) with a path coefficient of 0.278 and school choice decision (Y2) with a stronger effect of 0.367. Similarly, school image (X2)

also shows significant influence on both student interest (0.319) and decision (0.226). Notably, student interest (Y1) has a substantial direct effect on students' decision to choose a school (Y2) with a coefficient of 0.329. The f-square values indicate small to medium effect sizes, with promotional mix having the largest impact on decision-making ($f^2 = 0.221$). These findings support the theoretical model and confirm the mediating role of student interest while highlighting the strategic importance of promotion and school image in influencing educational choices.

6. Mediation Test

Indirect effects were tested using the Sobel test and bootstrapping method:

Table 5. Indirect Effect

Hipotesis Mediasi	Path Coefficient	P-value	CI 2.5% (Lower Bound)	CI 97.5% (Upper Bound)	Upsilon V	Conclusion
X1. Strategi Promotional Mix → Y1. Minat Siswa → Y2. Keputusan Memilih Sekolah	0.092	0.000	0.052	0.140	0.092	Accepted
X2. Citra Sekolah → Y1. Minat Siswa → Y2. Keputusan Memilih Sekolah	0.105	0.000	0.063	0.155	0.105	Accepted

The table displays the results of mediation hypothesis testing, examining whether student interest acts as a mediator between the independent variables (promotional mix and school image) and the dependent variable (school choice decision). Both mediation paths show statistically significant effects, with p-values = 0.000, confirming the presence of partial mediation. The indirect effect of the promotional mix on school choice decision through student interest is 0.092, while the indirect effect of school image through student interest is 0.105. These results suggest that student interest meaningfully mediates both relationships. The Upsilon V values (0.092 and 0.105) further support the strength of these mediating effects. This implies that even though promotional strategies and school image directly affect students' decisions, their influence is stronger when they also succeed in generating genuine interest among students.

Among all predictors, promotional mix → interest showed the highest standardized path coefficient (0.539), indicating that promotional strategy is the most dominant factor influencing students' interest and decision.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that promotional mix strategies have a significant role in influencing students' school choice decisions. This result is consistent with the theories of Kotler and Keller (2016), who argue that an

effective promotional mix comprising advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and sales promotion plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions and guiding their decision-making process. In the context of education, promotional efforts are not merely informative but persuasive in nature. When executed well, they can create awareness, attract attention, and ultimately encourage students and their families to consider and choose a particular school. The case of SMA Diponegoro Tumpang demonstrates that well-targeted promotional activities can directly affect students' perception and confidence in the institution, especially when combined with consistent messaging and relevant media channels.

Additionally, school image was found to be a strong determinant in influencing students' interest and decisions. This supports Keller's (2003) brand image theory, which emphasizes that positive brand associations such as strong reputation, quality teaching, and supportive learning environment build trust and credibility in the minds of prospective students. In educational settings, school image becomes a reflection of academic values, cultural identity, and institutional reliability. The findings are in line with previous research by Yuliana (2020) and Kurniawan & Lestari (2022), which suggest that school image significantly shapes students' emotional and cognitive assessments, particularly when considering the long-term investment of choosing the right educational path.

The mediating role of student interest in this study also reflects the principles of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Promotional messages and school image serve as external stimuli, while student interest functions as an internal psychological response that ultimately triggers behavioral actions, in this case, school choice. The study demonstrates that interest is not formed solely by promotional exposure but is also heavily influenced by emotional resonance, relevance of school programs, and prior experiences. This highlights the importance of designing promotional content that not only informs but engages and resonates with students' aspirations and motivations.

Overall, this study enriches the literature on education marketing by integrating promotional mix strategies, school image, and psychological engagement in a unified model. The practical implication suggests that schools, especially in competitive regions, must not only invest in promotional visibility but also in building an authentic and consistent school image that aligns with students' expectations. Furthermore, the recognition of student interest as a mediating factor provides valuable insight for school leaders and marketers to create more targeted, meaningful, and student-centered outreach strategies that foster both emotional connection and rational decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that both the promotional mix strategy and school image have a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing a school, with student interest serving as a mediating variable in this relationship. The findings underscore that promotional efforts when effectively designed and

targeted can not only increase visibility but also enhance the emotional and rational appeal of the institution to prospective students. Similarly, a strong and positive school image builds trust and shapes student perceptions, which are critical in highly competitive educational environments. Student interest, positioned as a psychological response to external promotional and institutional stimuli, plays a pivotal role in transforming awareness and perception into actual enrollment decisions.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that school administrators prioritize an integrated marketing communication strategy that aligns promotional activities with the institution's values and academic identity. Promotional efforts should go beyond information delivery and focus on building meaningful emotional engagement through storytelling, student-centered content, and interactive platforms such as social media, open houses, and community involvement. Furthermore, maintaining and consistently communicating a strong school image anchored in academic excellence, professional staff, and supportive learning environments is essential for sustaining student interest. Schools should also regularly evaluate student preferences and feedback to refine their promotional approach and better match the evolving expectations of their target audience.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at a single school SMA Diponegoro Tumpang thus limiting the generalizability of the findings to other educational institutions with different demographics, reputations, or promotional contexts. Second, the study used cross-sectional data, which captures student perceptions and decisions at one point in time, without considering possible changes in behavior or preferences over time.

Future research is encouraged to expand the sample by involving multiple schools, both public and private, across various regions to enhance external validity. In addition, longitudinal studies could better capture the dynamics of student interest and decision-making processes over time. Further exploration of digital marketing strategies, especially the role of social media engagement and content effectiveness, is also recommended to enrich the model in the era of digital communication.

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