



## Instagram-Based School Marketing Communication and Students School Choice Decisions: The Mediating Role of Brand Image

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**Abstract.** This study examines the influence of Instagram-based school marketing communication on students' school choice decisions, with school brand image as a mediating variable. Using an explanatory quantitative approach, data were collected through a cross-sectional survey of 150 students at SMAN 3 South Jakarta who had seen or were aware of the school's Instagram content. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The measurement model showed that all indicators met the criteria for convergent validity, construct reliability, and discriminant validity. The structural model revealed that Instagram-based school promotion had a positive and significant effect on school brand image and students' school choice decisions. School brand image also had a positive and significant effect on students' decisions. Furthermore, the indirect effect test confirmed that brand image partially mediated the relationship between Instagram promotion and school choice decisions. These findings indicate that Instagram functions not only as an informative promotional channel but also as a strategic communication medium for shaping school image, strengthening students' perceptions, and influencing educational decision-making

**Keywords:** Brand Image; Educational Communication; Instagram Promotion; School Choice Decisions; School Marketing Communication.

### 1. BACKGROUND

The development of digital communication has transformed the way educational institutions conduct marketing communication and build relationships with prospective students. Schools no longer rely solely on conventional promotional media such as brochures, banners, education fairs, or recommendations from parents and alumni, but increasingly utilize social media as a strategic marketing communication channel to present institutional identity, academic quality, achievements, facilities, school culture, and students' learning experiences. In this context, Instagram has become one of the most relevant platforms because of its visual, interactive, fast, and youth-oriented characteristics. For senior high school students, information about schools is no longer obtained only through formal communication, but also through photo uploads, short videos, reels, stories, comments, testimonials, and repeated representations of school life on social media.

According to DataReportal (2025), Indonesia has more than 103 million Instagram users, with a substantial proportion belonging to the 13–24 age group, which represents the primary demographic of prospective senior high school students. This trend indicates that Instagram has become one of the most influential digital platforms for information seeking, social interaction, and educational exploration among adolescents. Consequently, educational

institutions increasingly utilize Instagram not only as a communication channel but also as a strategic marketing platform to reach prospective students and their parents.

In practice, many senior high schools in Indonesia actively manage Instagram accounts to showcase academic achievements, extracurricular activities, student experiences, school facilities, and institutional values. Schools such as leading public and private high schools in Jakarta regularly publish visual content, reels, and student testimonials to strengthen their institutional image and attract prospective students. These developments demonstrate that Instagram has evolved beyond a social networking platform and has become an important component of educational marketing communication and school branding strategies.

Therefore, Instagram-based school promotion can be understood not merely as the dissemination of information, but as a form of marketing communication that constructs perceptions, meanings, and emotional associations about the school. Social media has become increasingly important in educational marketing because it supports student engagement, institutional brand building, relationship management, and prospective students' decision-making (Pawar, 2024). In the context of higher education, social media communication has been shown to contribute to institutional image formation and international students' enrolment intentions (Li et al., 2025).

Senior high school choice decisions also involve evaluations of reputation, quality, social environment, facilities, academic value, and the alignment between students' identities and the school. Educational marketing communication through social media activities enables educational institutions to communicate their values, strengths, uniqueness, and appeal to prospective students. Thus, Instagram can be positioned as a strategic marketing communication medium that connects schools with prospective students through visually and narratively constructed images.

Students' school choice decisions are complex educational decisions. Students and parents usually consider academic quality, location, costs, reputation, facilities, peer environment, extracurricular activities, opportunities for university admission, and the overall impression of the school (Juhaidi, 2024; Nuseir & El Refae, 2022). Consequently, marketing communication through social media, such as Instagram, does not merely convey promotional messages but also builds symbolic associations about the type of school experience students expect to obtain.

One key concept in the relationship between Instagram-based marketing communication and school choice decisions is brand image. Brand image refers to the perceptions, associations, and impressions stored in the audience's mind regarding a brand or institution. In education,

brand image is not only about logos and slogans but also academic reputation, teacher quality, school culture, student achievements, facilities, safety, comfort, and the values the school presents (Nwajiuba & Onyeneke, 2023). Brand image plays an important role in the selection of educational institutions because prospective students tend to choose institutions whose image aligns with their expectations, aspirations, and social identity (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024).

School marketing communication through Instagram can influence brand image through several mechanisms. First, visual content such as photographs of buildings, laboratories, student activities, achievements, and school life can shape perceptions of the school's quality and atmosphere. Second, caption narratives, student testimonials, and alumni posts can convey credibility, emotional closeness, and institutional personality. Third, interactions through comments, direct messages, story polls, and live sessions can build an impression of responsiveness and openness (Perera et al., 2023). In this regard, social media marketing and brand credibility influence the brand equity of higher education institutions.

In addition, social media engagement can strengthen relationship quality and brand performance in higher education marketing (Song et al., 2023). This means that the quality of a school's Instagram-based marketing communication can strengthen its image in the eyes of prospective students.

From a marketing communication perspective, the relationship between social media marketing, brand image, and purchasing or choice decisions has been widely examined. Social media marketing can influence purchase intention through the mediating role of brand trust and brand image (Salhab et al., 2023; Mishra & Mishra, 2025). In the senior high school context, purchase intention can be conceptualized as a school-choice decision: students' decisions to choose, enroll in, or recommend a particular school.

However, the influence of Instagram-based marketing communication on school choice decisions is not always direct. Prospective students may not immediately choose a school simply because they have seen its Instagram content. Instagram communication first shapes perceptions of whether the school appears high-quality, modern, safe, prestigious, enjoyable, religious, creative, or aligned with students' aspirations. These perceptions then form brand image. Brand image subsequently acts as a psychological bridge between Instagram-based marketing communication and school choice decisions (Demircioglu et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the effects of social media marketing often operate through psychological variables such as trust, brand image, brand equity, and loyalty (Hafez, 2021; Pintol & Hadziahmetovic, 2023; Van & Fah, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, many schools in South Jakarta have distinct identities, whether academic, elite, religious, international, or creative, or schools that excel in non-academic activities. Students and parents do not choose schools solely based on distance or cost, but also on social image, perceived quality, and prospects. Educational decisions are often influenced by the cognitive, affective, and personality aspects of an institution's or destination country's image (Hendriana et al., 2023). In the local context, this means that school image can operate at both rational and emotional levels: a school is chosen because it is considered high quality, but also because it feels compatible with students' identities and aspirations.

Meanwhile, most studies on social media marketing and brand image still focus on commercial products, banking, tourism, or higher education (Cao & Weerawardena, 2023; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies of educational institution choice have more often been conducted in the university context, while relatively few have specifically examined senior high schools as institutions that also practise digital branding and marketing communication through Instagram. Few studies have explicitly tested brand image as a mediating variable in the relationship between school Instagram-based marketing communication and students' school choice decisions. Yet brand image can mediate the relationship between social media communication and preferences for educational institutions (Li, 2025).

Based on the discussion above, this study aims to examine the influence of Instagram-based school marketing communications on students' school choice decisions, with brand image as a mediating variable. Therefore, this study tests four main hypotheses that describe the direct and indirect relationships among variables. Instagram-based school promotion is the independent variable, school brand image is the mediating variable, and students' school choice decisions are the dependent variable. H1: Instagram-based school promotion has a positive and significant influence on school brand image, H2: School brand image has a positive and significant influence on students' school choice decisions, H3: Instagram-based school promotion has a positive and significant influence on students' school choice decisions, H4: School brand image mediates the influence of Instagram-based school promotion on students' school choice decisions.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employed an explanatory quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design. Explanatory research was used because this study does not merely describe students' perceptions of the school's Instagram promotion but also explains whether Instagram-based

school promotion influences students' school choice decisions, both directly and indirectly through brand image. A cross-sectional design was used because the data were collected once within a specific period from predetermined respondents (Maier et al., 2023).

The subjects of this study were active students of SMAN 3 South Jakarta. A total of 150 students participated in this study. The sample size was considered adequate for SEM-PLS analysis because it exceeded the minimum recommended sample size for models with a moderate level of complexity. The study employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique, in which respondents were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being an active student of SMAN 3 South Jakarta, (2) having access to social media, particularly Instagram, and (3) having viewed or been exposed to the school's Instagram content. Students who had never accessed or viewed the school's Instagram account were excluded from the study. This sampling approach was chosen to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient experience and knowledge to evaluate the school's Instagram-based promotional activities.

### Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire. The research instrument was developed around three main variables: Instagram-based school promotion, school brand image, and students' school choice decisions. The questionnaire used a 1–5 Likert scale, with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This scale was used because it can measure respondents' level of agreement with statements related to the research variables (Jebb et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** Data Collection Technique.

No.	Variable	Indicator	Scale
1	Instagram-Based School Promotion	Information quality, visual appeal, interactivity, message consistency, and content credibility	Likert 1-5
2	School Brand Image	School reputation, academic quality, facilities, achievements, social environment, alignment of school values with students' expectations	Likert 1-5
3	Students' School Choice Decisions	Confidence in choosing, interest in the school, consideration of alternative schools, and willingness to recommend the school	Likert 1-5

Source: Authors (2026)

The questionnaire was distributed to 150 students of SMAN 3 South Jakarta. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the school administration. The questionnaire was distributed during the data collection period through both printed questionnaires and online forms. Respondents were approached directly in the school environment and invited to participate voluntarily. Before completing the questionnaire, students received an explanation regarding the objectives of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to

withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Only questionnaires that were completed in full and met the inclusion criteria were included in the final analysis. The collected data were used solely for academic purposes and were processed anonymously to ensure respondent confidentiality. Thus, the data collection process was conducted ethically and in accordance with the principles of social research.

**Data Management and Analysis Technique**

The data obtained from the questionnaire were processed through several stages before being analyzed. The first stage was editing, which involved checking the completeness and appropriateness of respondents' answers. The second stage was coding, assigning a code to each answer, it enables statistical processing. The third stage was tabulation, which organized the data into a table format to meet the analysis requirements. The fourth stage was data cleaning, which involved double-checking for possible input errors, incomplete data, or inconsistent answers (Singh & Sagar, 2021). The data analysis in this study used Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) (Hair & Alamer, 2022). A mediation test was conducted to determine whether brand image mediated the relationship between Instagram-based school promotions and students' decisions to attend SMAN 3 South Jakarta.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)**

The evaluation of the outer model aimed to ensure that the indicators used were truly representative of their latent constructs. In PLS-SEM, reflective indicators are considered to meet convergent validity when their outer loadings exceed the recommended minimum threshold.

**Table 2.** Indicator Outer Loading Values.

No	Instagram Promotion	Loading	Brand Image	Loading	School Choice Decision	Loading
1	PSBI1	0.752	BIS1	0.713	KSMS1	0.818
2	PSBI2	0.761	BIS2	0.777	KSMS2	0.871
3	PSBI3	0.794	BIS3	0.759	KSMS3	0.709
4	PSBI4	0.794	BIS4	0.742	KSMS4	0.821
5	PSBI5	0.836	BIS5	0.799	KSMS5	0.848
6	PSBI6	0.822	BIS6	0.739	KSMS6	0.807
7	PSBI7	0.827	BIS7	0.818	KSMS7	0.724
8	PSBI8	0.809	BIS8	0.831	KSMS8	0.832
9	PSBI9	0.713	BIS9	0.773	KSMS9	0.759
10	PSBI10	0.828	BIS10	0.833	KSMS10	0.759

Source: Primary data processed using SEM-PLS (2026)

Table 2 shows that all indicators had loading values above 0.70. For the Instagram-Based School Promotion construct, loading values ranged from 0.713 to 0.836. For the School

Brand Image construct, loading values ranged from 0.713 to 0.833. For the Students' School Choice Decisions construct, loading values ranged from 0.709 to 0.871.

This means that the Instagram promotion indicators were able to capture the dimensions of information quality, visual appeal, interactivity, message consistency, and content credibility; the brand image indicators captured students' perceptions of reputation, quality, facilities, achievements, and the school environment; and the choice decision indicators captured students' confidence, interest, and tendency to choose the school.

**Table 3.** Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Conclusion
School Brand Image	0.928	0.939	0.608	Reliable and valid
Students' School Choice Decisions	0.935	0.945	0.634	Reliable and valid
Instagram-Based School Promotion	0.935	0.945	0.631	Reliable and valid

Source: Primary data processed using SEM-PLS (2026)

The reliability test results in Table 3 indicate that all constructs in the study have met the measurement feasibility criteria. Each construct has a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 and a Composite Reliability above 0.70; it can be concluded that the instrument used has excellent internal consistency and stability. This finding indicates that each indicator consistently measures its construct. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for all constructs is also above the minimum limit of 0.50. School Brand Image obtained an AVE of 0.608, Student School Choice Decision of 0.634, and Instagram-Based School Promotion of 0.631. Thus, the measurement model meets convergent validity because the latent construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

**Table 4.** Discriminant Validity Based on HTMT.

Construct Relationship	HTMT	Conclusion
School Choice Decision ↔ Brand Image	0.675	Meets discriminant validity
Instagram Promotion ↔ Brand Image	0.619	Meets discriminant validity
Instagram Promotion ↔ School Choice Decision	0.720	Meets discriminant validity

Source: Primary data processed using SEM-PLS (2026)

Discriminant validity was tested to ensure that each construct had a clear conceptual distinction. The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values in Table 4 were below the critical threshold of 0.85 or 0.90. The highest HTMT value was found in the relationship between Instagram Promotion and School Choice Decision, at 0.720. This indicates that the three constructs did not overlap excessively. In other words, Instagram promotion, school image, and school choice decisions are three distinct concepts, although they are interrelated in the research model.

The multicollinearity examination also indicated that the model did not exhibit multicollinearity. The VIF value for the path from Instagram Promotion to Brand Image was 1.000, while the VIF values for the paths from Instagram Promotion and Brand Image to School Choice Decision were each around 1.527. These values are far below the maximum threshold of 5, so the relationships among predictor variables in the model can be interpreted safely.

**Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)**

The evaluation of the inner model was conducted to test the model's predictive ability and the strength of relationships among latent variables. Two constructs in the model were designated as endogenous: School Brand Image and Students' School Choice Decisions. The R-square value indicates the proportion of variation in an endogenous construct that can be explained by the predictor constructs in the model.

**Table 5.** R-square and Q2 Predict Values.

Endogenous Construct	R-square	Q2 Predict	Interpretation
School Brand Image	0.345	0.330	Instagram Promotion explains 34.5% of the variation in Brand Image; the model has predictive relevance
Students' School Choice Decisions	0.552	0.453	Instagram Promotion and Brand Image explain 55.2% of the variation in School Choice Decisions; the model has predictive relevance

Source: Primary data processed using SEM-PLS (2026)

Table 5 shows that the R-square value for School Brand Image is 0.345. This means that Instagram-Based School Promotion explains 34.5 percent of the variation in School Brand Image, while the remaining variation is influenced by factors outside the model. This value indicates that Instagram promotion makes a significant contribution to shaping school image. Meanwhile, the R-square value for Students' School Choice Decisions is 0.552. This means that Instagram-Based School Promotion and School Brand Image together explain 55.2 percent of the variation in students' school choice decisions. These values indicate that the model has sufficient explanatory power to understand students' decisions, although other factors, such as cost, location, parental influence, academic quality, peer environment, and prospects, may also influence school choice. The Q2 Predict value for School Brand Image is 0.330, and for Students' School Choice Decisions it is 0.453. Since all Q2 values are above zero, the model is predictive.

**Table 6.** Effect Size (F-Square).

Path of Influence	F-Square	Interpretation
Instagram Promotion ↔ Brand Image	0.527	Large
Instagram Promotion ↔ School Choice Decision	0.311	Medium to strong
Brand Image ↔ School Choice Decision	0.202	Medium

Source: Primary data processed using SEM-PLS (2026)

The effect size values in Table 6 show that the influence of Instagram Promotion on Brand Image had the largest effect size, namely 0.527. This finding indicates that school promotion activities through Instagram are a very strong factor in shaping school image. The influence of Instagram Promotion on School Choice Decision had an F-squared of 0.311, which falls in the medium-to-strong range. Meanwhile, the influence of Brand Image on School Choice Decision had an F-squared of 0.202, or a medium category. Thus, Instagram promotion plays an important role both as a shaper of school image and as a factor directly related to students' school choice decisions.

**Table 7.** Results of Direct Path Hypothesis Testing.

Path of Influence	Coeff	T-statistics	P-value	Description	Hypothesis
Instagram Promotion ↔ Brand Image	0.587	8.912	0.000	Significant	Accepted
Brand Image ↔ School Choice Decision	0.372	4.665	0.000	Significant	Accepted
Instagram Promotion ↔ School Choice Decision	0.461	5.416	0.000	Significant	Accepted

Source: SEM-PLS bootstrapping output (2026)

The results of direct path testing in Table 7 show that all relationships among variables in the complete model were positive and significant. The path from Instagram-Based School Promotion to School Brand Image had a coefficient of 0.587, a t-statistic of 8.912, and a p-value of 0.000. This value indicates that the better the school's Instagram promotion, the more positive the school image is in students' perceptions. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that Instagram-based school promotion has a positive influence on School Brand Image is accepted.

The path from School Brand Image to Students' School Choice Decisions had a coefficient of 0.372, a t-statistic of 4.665, and a p-value of 0.000. This means that a more positive school image increases students' tendency to choose that school. This result confirms that school choice decisions are not determined only by promotional information, but also by students' perceptions of reputation, quality, comfort, achievements, and the alignment of school values with their expectations.

The path from Instagram-Based School Promotion to Students' School Choice Decisions was also significant, with a coefficient of 0.461, a t-statistic of 5.416, and a p-value of 0.000. This finding shows that Instagram promotion continues to have a direct influence on

students' decisions, even when Brand Image is included as a mediating variable. In other words, visual information, activity narratives, interactivity, and the credibility of the school's Instagram content can directly strengthen students' confidence in choosing the school.

**Table 8.** Results of Indirect Effects and Total Effects Testing.

Path of Influence	Coeff	T-statistics	P-value	Description
Instagram Promotion ↔ Brand Image ↔ School Choice Decision	0.218	4.056	0.000	Significant
Total Effect: Instagram Promotion ↔ School Choice Decision	0.680	-	-	Strong total effect

Source: SEM-PLS bootstrapping output (2026)

The indirect effect test results in Table 8 show that the influence of Instagram-Based School Promotion on Students' School Choice Decisions through School Brand Image had a coefficient of 0.218, a t-statistic of 4.056, and a p-value of 0.000. This result indicates that School Brand Image acts as a significant mediating variable. Because the direct influence of Instagram Promotion on School Choice Decision remained significant, and the indirect influence through Brand Image was also significant, the form of mediation was partial. This means that Instagram promotion influences students' decisions through two pathways simultaneously: directly through information and content appeal, and indirectly through the formation of a positive school image.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

##### **Instagram-Based School Promotion and the Formation of School Brand Image**

The findings of this study indicate that Instagram-based school promotion has a positive and significant influence on school brand image. The path coefficient from Instagram-based school promotion to school brand image is 0.587 ( $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that the quality of promotional communication via Instagram significantly contributes to students' perceptions of the school. This finding is consistent with previous research that argues that social media marketing activities can shape brand perception, brand credibility, relationship quality, and brand equity in educational institutions (Pawar, 2024; Perera et al., 2023; Song et al., 2023; Ruangkanjanase et al., 2022).

This study extends the discussion by demonstrating that digital branding also operates effectively at the high school level. Students evaluate schools not only through formal information, parental recommendations, or academic reputation, but also through repeated exposure to Instagram-based representations of school life.

### **School Brand Image, School Brand Image, and Students' School Choice Decisions**

This study also found that school brand image has a positive and significant influence on students' school choice decisions. The path coefficient from School Brand Image to Students' School Choice Decisions is 0.372, with a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that a positive school image strengthens students' confidence, interest, and willingness to choose or recommend the school. This finding supports previous research stating that brand image is an important factor in educational institution selection (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024), while an institutional image can influence satisfaction, identification, and word-of-mouth intentions (Schlesinger et al., 2023). Theoretically, these results suggest that school choice decisions are not purely rational or administrative.

### **Direct and Indirect Influence of Instagram Promotion on School Choice Decisions**

Another important finding is that Instagram-based school promotions directly influence students' school choice decisions. The path coefficient from Instagram-based school promotions to students' school choice decisions is 0.461, with a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that Instagram promotions not only shape school image but can also directly strengthen students' intentions, beliefs, and preferences in choosing a school. Furthermore, the indirect effect of Instagram-based school promotions on students' school choice decisions through school brand image is also significant, with a coefficient of 0.218 and a p-value of 0.000.

Since both direct and indirect effects are significant, brand image serves as a partial mediator. This means that Instagram promotions influence school choice decisions through two simultaneous pathways. First, they directly influence students by providing information, visual appeal, interaction, and credibility. Second, they indirectly influence students by shaping a positive school image. This study confirms that in the high school context, brand image serves as a bridge between Instagram promotions and school choice decisions.

### **Integration with Current Understanding of Educational Marketing**

The results of this study can be integrated into broader discussions on educational marketing and digital communication. In today's competitive educational landscape, schools are increasingly required to communicate their identity, values, achievements, and learning environment through digital platforms. Instagram allows schools to present not only factual information but also emotional and symbolic representations of school life. The R-squared values indicate that Instagram-Based School Promotion explains 34.5% of the variation in School Brand Image, and that Instagram-Based School Promotion and School Brand Image together explain 55.2% of the variation in Students' School Choice Decisions.

These values indicate that the proposed model has adequate explanatory power. However, they also indicate that school choice decisions are influenced by factors beyond the model, such as location, school fees, parental expectations, peer influence, academic track record, safety, university entry opportunities, and students' long-term aspirations. Thus, this study advances current understanding by positioning Instagram-based promotion within a broader decision-making ecology.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results, Instagram-based school promotions have been shown to have a positive, significant influence on the formation of school brand image and students' school choice decisions. The quality of information, visual appeal, interactivity, message consistency, and credibility of Instagram content can shape students' positive perceptions of a school's reputation, academic quality, facilities, achievements, and environment. SEM-PLS test results indicate that Instagram promotions have a strong influence on brand image, while brand image also significantly influences school selection decisions. Furthermore, Instagram promotions continue to directly influence students' decisions, so social media serves not only as a means of disseminating information but also as a strategic tool for building student trust and preference.

These findings confirm that brand image partially mediates the relationship between Instagram-based school promotions and school selection decisions. This means that Instagram influences students' decisions through two channels: directly through the power of promotional content and indirectly through the creation of a positive school image. Therefore, schools need to manage Instagram in a more targeted, consistent, informative, interactive, and representative manner to strengthen the institution's image and increase the school's attractiveness to prospective students.

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