

The Influence of Social Media Promotion and Educational Service Quality on Prospective Students' Enrollment Decisions: The Mediating Role of School Image (A Case Study of SMP Lab School FIP UMJ)

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ABSTRACT

Backgrounds: Growing competition among schools in Indonesia requires combining effective promotion with strong service quality to build a positive image, yet research on how these factors jointly drive enrollment decisions remains inconsistent, especially in a university-affiliated laboratory school like SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

Objectives: To examine the effect of social media promotion and educational service quality on new-student registration decisions at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ, with school image as a mediating variable.

Methodology: A quantitative approach was applied using a saturated sample of 216 respondents (students and parents), analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4.

Findings: Social media promotion and educational service quality positively and significantly affect school image. Educational service quality and school image significantly affect registration decisions, while social media promotion has no significant direct effect. School image fully mediates the effect of social media promotion, and partially mediates the effect of educational service quality, on registration decisions, making it the most influential factor in enrollment decisions.

Conclusions: The study supports service marketing and organizational image theory in education, and offers practical direction for schools to strengthen enrollment through integrated promotion, service-quality improvement, and image-management strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia continues to evolve, driving growth in the number of public and private schools at every stage, ranging from playgroup and kindergarten to elementary, middle, high school, and college. Data from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's Dapodik system indicate 158 private junior high schools in South Jakarta, and figures from the South Tangerang Central Statistics Agency show that South Tangerang has more than 200 private junior high schools. This data explains that private junior high schools in South Tangerang are more numerous compared to the number of junior high schools in South Jakarta. With the development of education in Indonesia, many entrepreneurs have begun to take interest and consider the education sector to be a promising business going forward. This has caused many schools to continue emerging and competing to provide their best quality, whether in academic achievement, non-academic achievement, teacher

quality, school security, facilities and infrastructure, and so on, with the hope of being able to become a choice amid this tight business competition.

The world of education falls into the category of a service business, where schools offer educational services to the community as a place to school their children. Promotion is an essential element that always accompanies any discussion of business. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), the service marketing mix is a set of marketing tools consisting of seven elements that an organization can control to influence consumer response in the service market. These seven elements are known as the 7Ps: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence.

Based on the description above, promotion and, in this case, People in the form of educational service quality are aspects that make an important contribution to building public perception of a school. Through promotion, schools can inform potential students and parents about their offerings, infrastructure, and competitive edges. Quality of service is demonstrated by how well academic and extracurricular services are carried out during schooling. With the rise of the digital age, social media has become a go to platform for businesses across sectors to advertise and introduce their offerings. Its effectiveness in promotion is well recognized, as it helps the public find and choose products that suit their preferences. In the context of education, the application of effective social media promotion must also be supported by good service quality so that it can build a positive school image in the eyes of the public. A positive school image is then expected to be able to increase public trust in the educational institution, thereby encouraging prospective students and parents to make that school their registration decision. Thus, social media promotion and educational service quality, as part of a service marketing mix strategy, play an important role in improving school image, which is ultimately expected to have a positive impact on increasing the number of new student registrations.

The development of information and communication technology has increased competition among educational institutions. Under these conditions, social media has become an important means for schools to convey information about programs, achievements, teacher competence, facilities, and other advantages to prospective students and parents. Promotion through social media not only expands the reach of information but also has the potential to build public trust, strengthen school image, and encourage new student registration decisions.

According to Kotler et al. (2017), educational service marketing is not only oriented toward promotional activities, but also encompasses meeting the needs of students and parents, developing educational programs, communication strategies, and building relationships with stakeholders. In line with this, Djogo (2022), emphasizes the importance of digital media management in marketing strategy. In the context of education, social media enables schools to convey information about programs, achievements, facilities, and school activities more broadly and effectively to prospective students and parents, thereby having the potential to support the formation of school image and the increase of new student registrations.

Besides promotion through social media, educational service quality is an important factor in shaping public perception of a school. Education as a form of service demands attention to the quality of service received by students and parents. Parasuraman et al. (1988), identified five dimensions of service quality, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In the school context, these five dimensions reflect the quality of facilities, service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and attention given to students and parents. Good service quality has the potential to shape a positive school image and influence new student registration decisions.

Various studies show that service quality plays an important role in shaping organizational image. A professional, responsive, reliable service experience that meets expectations can strengthen positive perception, credibility, and organizational reputation. Kandampully and Hu (2007), found that service quality has a positive and significant effect on corporate image, indicating that a consistent service experience can shape a better public perception of an organization.

Service quality that is able to meet customer expectations can increase trust, satisfaction, and positive perception toward an organization. Tu and Chih (2013), showed that service quality has a positive effect on brand image and perceived customer value. In line with this, Lupiyoadi (2018) and Tjiptono (2019) position service quality as a strategic factor in building positive image through a reliable, responsive, and satisfying service experience. Thus, service quality becomes an important aspect in shaping school image because the experience received by students and parents can influence perception, trust, and decisions in choosing an educational institution. However, Febrina et al. (2021)

reported different findings, showing that service quality does not directly influence brand image, but rather influences it through customer satisfaction as an intervening variable. This finding indicates that service quality does not always automatically shape a positive image, and that other factors may explain this relationship.

Increasing competition in education has made parents consider not only academic quality, but also the overall quality of school service. Good service can strengthen trust, create positive experiences, and encourage recommendations, thereby having the potential to increase interest in new student registration. According to Blackwell et al. (2001), the consumer decision making process involves evaluating information and alternatives before determining a choice. In the context of education, parents' decisions in choosing a school can be influenced by various factors, including service quality, promotion, reputation, price, social environment, and institutional image.

The increasing ease of access to information allows prospective students and parents to compare schools before making a decision. School image is formed through direct experience, information received by the public, achievements, service quality, and school communication activities. Kotler and Keller (2016), the increasing ease of access to information allows prospective students and parents to compare schools before making a decision. School image is formed through direct experience, information received by the public, achievements, service quality, and school communication activities.

Although several studies show that promotion can influence purchasing decisions, Yahya and Sukandi (2023) found that promotion does not have a significant influence on purchasing decisions. This inconsistency indicates the possibility of an indirect mechanism in the relationship between variables. Baron and Kenny (1986), explained that intervening variables help clarify the mechanism connecting independent variables with dependent variables.

In this study, school image is positioned as an intervening variable connecting social media promotion and educational service quality with new student registration decisions. Effective promotion and good service quality can contribute to a positive school image, which in turn can influence parents' decisions in choosing a school. The increasing use of social media and digital platforms to obtain school information further emphasizes the importance of these factors.

SMP Lab School FIP UMJ, as an educational institution under the Faculty of Education of Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, has the opportunity to grow amid the increasing demand for quality education. However, increasingly tight competition requires the school to strengthen promotion through social media and improve the quality of educational service. Effective promotion can convey the school's programs and advantages to prospective students and parents, while quality service can increase satisfaction, trust, and positive perception. These factors can contribute to a positive school image and ultimately influence new student registration decisions.

Previous studies on social media promotion, educational service quality, school image, and new student registration decisions have produced inconsistent findings. Some studies report positive impacts of promotion and service quality, while others show that reputation, academic achievement, cost, location, and social recommendations may be more influential. This inconsistency signals an empirical gap that requires further investigation.

A theoretical gap also still exists because many previous studies focused on the direct relationship between social media promotion, educational service quality, and school choice decisions. Studies examining school image as a mediating mechanism among these variables are still relatively limited, particularly those using the SEM-PLS approach. In addition, there is a contextual gap because previous studies have largely examined elementary schools, vocational schools, and other private educational institutions in various contexts. Studies specifically examining the relationship between social media promotion, educational service quality, school image, and new student registration decisions at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ are still limited. As a laboratory school within a university environment, SMP Lab School FIP UMJ has distinctive characteristics in terms of competition, market segmentation, and marketing strategy.

Based on these empirical, theoretical, and contextual gaps, this study focuses on school image as a mediating mechanism explaining the relationship between social media promotion, educational service quality, and new student registration decisions. This study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in educational service marketing by examining the mediating role of school image in the context of SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Consumer Behavior Theory

As defined by Kotler and Keller (2016), consumer behavior examines the processes by which individuals, groups, and organizations select, acquire, utilize, and judge goods and services in order to fulfill their needs and preferences. In the context of education, parents and prospective students can be viewed as consumers of educational services who search for information, compare schools, evaluate service quality, pay attention to promotion, and form perceptions or images of a school before deciding to register (Engel et al., 1995).

2.2. Social Media Promotion

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media refers to Web 2.0 based online applications that facilitate the generation and exchange of content by users. Mayfield (2008) outlines five key attributes of social media, which include participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. In the present research, these attributes are adopted as the five dimensions of the Social Media Promotion construct. Ariwibowo (2019) adds that marketing strategy is an effort to convince and gain customer trust through a strategic marketing mix, while Djogo (2022) emphasizes the importance of digital media management and integrated marketing communication in digital marketing management in the globalization era.

2.3. Educational Service Quality

In developing the SERVQUAL model, Parasuraman et al. (1988), identified five dimensions for measuring service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These five dimensions are adopted in the current research to operationalize the Educational Service Quality variable (X2). According to Tjiptono (2007), service quality involves fulfilling consumer demands and preferences, as well as delivering services that align with what consumers expect. Tjiptono and Chandra (2016) further note that SERVQUAL rests on the idea that consumers evaluate service quality by comparing each attribute's performance with a perfect standard, and the difference between expectation and perceived performance shapes the overall quality judgment.

2.4. School Image as a Mediating Variable

Image, according to Ruslan (2018), is the main goal as well as the reputation and achievement to be attained in the field of public relations, while Afandi (2018) defines image as the impression, feeling, and public depiction of an institution that can be deliberately formed through communication strategy. Barnawi (2022) explains that brand image reflects the quality of an educational institution that excels academically with quality educator programs and supporting facilities and infrastructure. This study uses four dimensions of School Image (Z), namely personality, reputation, value, and school identity. As a mediating variable, school image explains how social media promotion and educational service quality influence registration decisions, both directly and indirectly (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001).

2.5. New Student Registration Decision

According to Engel et al. (1995), the decision to purchase involves several steps, from need identification and information gathering to alternative evaluation, actual purchase, and follow up behavior. For the purposes of this research, the New Student Registration Decision (Y) is measured through four indicators: registration choice, how well it meets requirements, intent to recommend, and assurance in the selection made.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study places Social Media Promotion (X1) and Educational Service Quality (X2) as exogenous variables that influence New Student Registration Decision (Y), both directly and indirectly through School Image (Z) as a mediating variable. Effective social media promotion and good educational service quality are believed to form a positive school image, which

then encourages the public's decision to register their children at that school. The relationship between these variables is depicted in Figure 1.

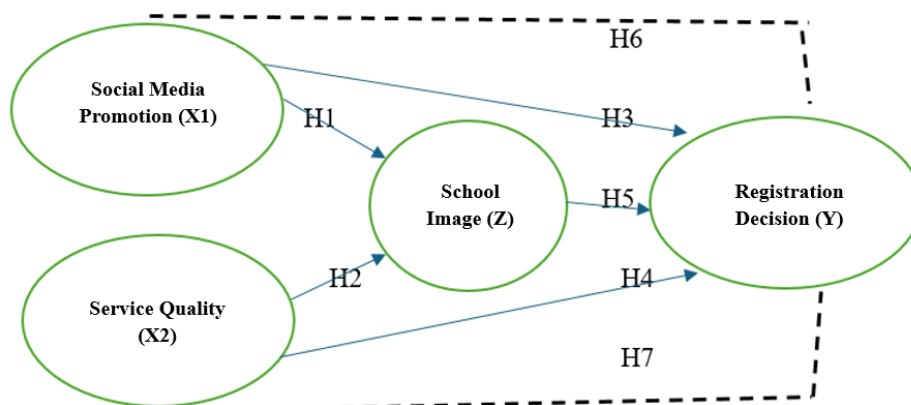


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Author compilation (2025)

H1: Social Media Promotion has a positive effect on New Student Registration Decision at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

H2: Educational Service Quality has a positive effect on New Student Registration Decision at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

H3: Social Media Promotion has a positive effect on School Image at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

H4: Educational Service Quality has a positive effect on School Image at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

H5: School Image has a positive effect on New Student Registration Decision at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

H6: Social Media Promotion has a positive effect on New Student Registration Decision through School Image as a mediating variable at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

H7: Educational Service Quality has a positive effect on New Student Registration Decision through School Image as a mediating variable at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

Employing a quantitative methodology and a causal associative framework (Sugiyono, 2022), this study tests the influence of Social Media Promotion and Educational Service Quality on the decision to register new students, while also considering School Image as a mediator. Fieldwork took place at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ in East Ciputat, South Tangerang, Banten, and spanned about 2 to 3 months.

3.2. Population and Sample

The research population totaled 216 people, consisting of students and parents of new students at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ. Sample determination used a saturated sampling technique (census), in which all members of the population were used as the research sample because the population size was relatively limited and all population members could be reached in the data collection process. Thus, the research sample size was set at 216 respondents. In the context of SEM-PLS analysis, Hair et al. (2022) mention a rule of thumb of five times the number of indicators as one initial consideration in determining sample adequacy, so that 48 indicators produce a reference figure of 240 respondents (48×5). However, this figure was not used as the primary basis for sample determination in this study because the available population was only 216 people. Therefore, the entire population was used as the sample through the saturated sampling technique in order to maximize population representativeness in the SEM-PLS analysis.

3.3. Operationalization of Variables

The measurement of each research variable was developed by adapting the dimensions relevant to their respective constructs and adjusting them to the context of the school environment. Social Media Promotion was operationalized through participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness, because these dimensions represent the way schools provide information, facilitate interaction, and build relationships with prospective students and parents through social media. Educational Service Quality was measured using the aspects of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy because these dimensions capture the physical and interpersonal aspects of educational service received by students and parents. School Image was assessed through personality, reputation, value, and school identity, which reflect perceptions of the school's character, credibility, educational value, and distinguishing characteristics. Registration Decision was measured through the decision to register, suitability with needs, willingness to recommend, and confidence in that decision, which represent the evaluative and decision-making aspects of parents and prospective students when choosing a school. The research variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). A summary of the dimensions of each variable is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Variable Operationalization

Variable	Dimensions	Number of Items	Scale
Social Media Promotion (X1)	Participation, Openness, Conversation, Community, Connectedness	15	Likert
Educational Service Quality (X2)	Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy	15	Likert
School Image (Z)	Personality, Reputation, Value, School Identity	8	Likert
Registration Decision (Y)	Decision to register, Suitability with needs, Willingness to recommend, Confidence in decision	10	Likert

Source: Author compilation (2025)

3.4. Data Collection Method

Data were collected through a questionnaire as the main instrument to obtain primary data, complemented by documentation techniques for secondary data (school profile, number of students), as well as literature study as the basis for developing the theoretical framework and discussion.

3.5. Data Analysis Method

Data analysis was carried out using Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM PLS) via SmartPLS 4, with all constructs modeled as reflective. The outer model was assessed through convergent validity (outer loadings at or above 0.70, AVE at or above 0.50), discriminant validity (cross loadings, Fornell Larcker, and HTMT below 0.90), and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability above 0.70). The inner model evaluation covered R Square, effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and multicollinearity (VIF under 5.00). Hypothesis testing relied on bootstrapping, using thresholds of $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$. For mediation, the specific indirect effect was examined, with partial mediation declared when both direct and indirect effects are significant, and full mediation when only the indirect effect reaches significance, following Hair et al. (2022).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 216 respondents, consisting of 108 students and 108 parents, with each group representing 50 percent of the total sample. Both respondent groups were included because both students and parents are directly involved in the school selection and registration process, as well as interact with the school's social media and educational services. Therefore, their responses

were considered relevant for assessing perceptions of social media promotion, educational service quality, school image, and registration decisions. Students represent prospective users of educational services, while parents represent the party who makes decisions and provides support in the registration process. Thus, both groups were treated as respondents within the same unit of analysis because this study examines perceptions and factors related to school registration decisions from the perspective of the main stakeholders involved in that process. Table 2 presents a comprehensive summary of the respondents' demographic profile.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics (n = 216)

Category	Group	Frequency/Percentage
Status	Student	108 (50.00%)
	Parent	108 (50.00%)
Gender	Male	99 (45.83%)
	Female	117 (54.17%)
Parent's Profession	Civil Servant	20.6%
	Private Employee	5.9%
	Other Profession	73.5%
Age	11-25 years old	120 (55.56%)
	26-35 years old	32 (14.81%)
	36-45 years old	40 (18.52%)
	46-55 years old	22 (10.19%)
	> 56 years old	2 (0.93%)

Source: Primary data processed (2025)

Based on the characteristics of respondents in Table 2, this study involved students and parents as respondents. The composition of respondents by gender shows relatively diverse representation, with a larger proportion of female respondents compared to male. In terms of parents' occupations, respondents came from various professional backgrounds, including the government sector, the private sector, and other professions. Meanwhile, the age characteristics show variation across age groups, reflecting the involvement of respondents from different backgrounds. Overall, the respondent characteristics provide a picture of the diversity of the sample background used in this study and serve as a descriptive context for the analysis of relationships between variables in the study.

4.1.2. Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

A. Convergent Validity Test

The results of the outer loading test show that the majority of indicators on all constructs have values above 0.70. Three indicators on Social Media Promotion (X1.6, X1.8, X1.15) fall within the range of 0.60-0.70, but were still retained because the AVE and Composite Reliability values of the construct had met the requirements (Hair et al., 2022). A summary of the results is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Outer Loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Outer Loading Range	AVE	Conclusion
Social Media Promotion (X1)	0.634-0.773	0.516	Valid
Educational Service Quality (X2)	0.716-0.821	0.598	Valid
Registration Decision (Y)	0.763-0.851	0.658	Valid
School Image (Z)	0.768-0.868	0.689	Valid

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

With AVE scores above 0.50 for every construct, the indicators are judged to represent the underlying factors effectively. The model is thus ready for the next step, which is discriminant validity assessment.

B. Discriminant Validity Test

To evaluate discriminant validity, the study employed cross loading, Fornell Larcker, and HTMT procedures. The cross-loading findings indicate that each indicator exhibits its highest loading on the intended construct. The Fornell Larcker criterion outcomes are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	School Image (Z)	Registration Decision (Y)	Service Quality (X2)	Social Media Promotion (X1)
School Image (Z)	0.830			
Registration Decision (Y)	0.830	0.811		
Service Quality (X2)	0.761	0.755	0.773	
Social Media Promotion (X1)	0.713	0.707	0.759	0.718

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

The square root of AVE (diagonal) for Service Quality (0.773) and Social Media Promotion (0.718) is higher than their correlation with other constructs, so both constructs meet the Fornell-Larcker criteria. The Fornell-Larcker criterion indicates a potential issue related to discriminant validity between School Image and Registration Decision, because the square root of AVE value for Registration Decision (0.811) is lower than its correlation value with School Image (0.830). To further evaluate this issue, testing was conducted using the HTMT criterion. The HTMT value between School Image and Registration Decision is 0.883, which is still below the recommended threshold of 0.90. Although the two constructs show a relatively strong empirical relationship, the HTMT results provide additional evidence that the two constructs can still be distinguished. Conceptually, School Image represents respondents' perception of the school's reputation, characteristics, and overall image, while Registration Decision represents respondents' decision to enroll at the school. Therefore, both constructs are retained as theoretically distinct constructs in the proposed mediation model. This condition was further clarified through the HTMT test, which according to Henseler et al. (2015) is more sensitive in detecting discriminant validity.

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio Values

Relationship Between Constructs	HTMT Value	Remark
School Image (Z) - Registration Decision (Y)	0.883	Valid
School Image (Z) - Service Quality (X2)	0.803	Valid
School Image (Z) - Social Media Promotion (X1)	0.758	Valid
Registration Decision (Y) - Service Quality (X2)	0.795	Valid
Registration Decision (Y) - Social Media Promotion (X1)	0.747	Valid
Service Quality (X2) - Social Media Promotion (X1)	0.801	Valid
Z × X1 - School Image	0.374	Valid
Z × X1 - Registration Decision	0.294	Valid
Z × X1 - Service Quality	0.380	Valid
Z × X1 - Social Media Promotion	0.317	Valid
Z × X2 - School Image	0.415	Valid
Z × X2 - Registration Decision	0.352	Valid
Z × X2 - Service Quality	0.466	Valid
Z × X2 - Social Media Promotion	0.369	Valid
Z × X2 - Z × X1	0.966	Exceeds the 0.90 Threshold

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

The HTMT results in Table 5 show that all pairs of main constructs are below the 0.90 threshold (School Image-Registration Decision = 0.883; Service Quality-Social Media Promotion = 0.801; School Image-Service Quality = 0.803; Social Media Promotion-Registration Decision = 0.747; Social Media Promotion-School Image = 0.758), so the discriminant validity between the main constructs of the study is declared fulfilled.

C. Construct Reliability Test

Table 6. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho a)	Composite Reliability (rho c)	Remark
Social Media Promotion (X1)	0.933	0.935	0.947	Very Reliable
Service Quality (X2)	0.952	0.943	0.950	Very Reliable
Registration Decision (Y)	0.942	0.953	0.957	Very Reliable
School Image (Z)	0.935	0.934	0.941	Very Reliable

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Looking at Table 6, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceeding 0.90 for every construct, the measures demonstrate very strong internal consistency. Having satisfied the requirements for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability, the measurement model is now suitable for structural model evaluation.

4.1.3. Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

A. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 7. R-Square Values

Endogenous Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted	Category
School Image (Z)	0.622	0.619	Moderate
Registration Decision (Y)	0.735	0.729	Moderate to Strong

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Looking at Table 7, the combination of Social Media Promotion and Educational Service Quality accounts for 62.2 percent of the variation in School Image. Including School Image along with the two predictors explains 73.5 percent of the variance in Registration Decision. Both R Square values suggest that the structural model demonstrates good predictive capability.

B. Effect Size (f^2)

Table 8. Effect Size (f^2) Values

Relationship Between Variables	f^2	Category
Social Media Promotion (X1) → School Image (Z)	0.115	Small
Service Quality (X2) → School Image (Z)	0.300	Medium
Social Media Promotion (X1) → Registration Decision (Y)	0.027	Small
Service Quality (X2) → Registration Decision (Y)	0.053	Small
School Image (Z) → Registration Decision (Y)	0.461	Large
Mediating School Image - Social Media Promotion → Registration Decision	0.004	Negligible
Mediating School Image - Service Quality → Registration Decision	0.001	Negligible

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Based on the results of the Effect Size (f^2) test in Table 8, the contribution of each independent variable to the endogenous variable shows fairly clear variation. Social Media Promotion (X1) on School Image (Z) produces an f^2 value of 0.115 (small category), indicating a relatively limited contribution compared to other variables. Service Quality (X2) on School Image (Z) obtained an f^2 value of 0.300 (medium category), indicating that improving service quality is more effective in forming school image compared to social media promotion.

School Image (Z) on Registration Decision (Y) recorded the highest f^2 value of 0.461 (large category), confirming that school image is the most dominant factor influencing the decision to register new students. The direct influence of X1 and X2 on Y is 0.027 and 0.053 respectively (both

small category), showing that their direct contribution is much lower compared to the indirect influence through School Image. Meanwhile, the mediating effects of School Image x Social Media Promotion ($f^2 = 0.004$) and School Image x Service Quality ($f^2 = 0.001$) are below the 0.02 threshold, so they are classified as negligible and practically do not provide a meaningful contribution to the registration decision.

C. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Table 9. Q^2 Values

Variable	Q^2	Remark
School Image (Z)	0.622	Good predictive relevance
Registration Decision (Y)	0.608	Good predictive relevance

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Table 9 present that both endogenous variables have relatively high Q^2 values, namely 0.622 and 0.608. These results indicate that the structural model built has good predictive relevance, so that it is suitable for use in explaining the relationship between variables in the study. In other words, the model is not only able to explain the causal relationship between constructs, but also has a good ability to predict empirical data regarding School Image and New Student Registration Decision.

D. Multicollinearity Test (VIF)

Table 10. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Values

Variable	VIF Value Range	Highest Value	Remark
Social Media Promotion (X1)	1.799-2.428	2.428	No multicollinearity
Service Quality (X2)	2.224-3.140	3.140	No multicollinearity
Registration Decision (Y)	2.064-3.411	3.411	No multicollinearity
School Image (Z)	2.183-3.594	3.594	No multicollinearity

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Table 10 presents that the minimum VIF value is 1.799 and the maximum VIF value is 3.594. Because all VIF values are below the 5.00 threshold as recommended by Hair et al. (2022), there is no symptom of multicollinearity in the research indicators. This shows that the research instrument has met the collinearity assumption and can be used for further SEM-PLS analysis.

4.1.4. Hypothesis Testing

A bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4 was used for hypothesis testing. The direct effect findings are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. Direct Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship Between Variables	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
Social Media Promotion (X1) → School Image (Z)	0.321	4.726	0.000	Accepted
Service Quality (X2) → School Image (Z)	0.517	7.307	0.000	Accepted
Social Media Promotion (X1) → Registration Decision (Y)	0.135	1.954	0.051	Rejected
Service Quality (X2) → Registration Decision (Y)	0.224	3.050	0.002	Accepted
School Image (Z) → Registration Decision (Y)	0.563	7.875	0.000	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Looking at Table 11, all relationships show a positive direction of influence. Four of five direct hypotheses are accepted. The relationship School Image → Registration Decision has the largest path coefficient ($\beta = 0.563$), followed by Service Quality → School Image ($\beta = 0.517$). H1 (Social Media

Promotion → Registration Decision) is rejected because the p-value (0.051) is above the 0.05 threshold, although the value is close to the significance boundary.

4.1.5. Mediation Analysis

Table 12. Mediation Testing Results (Indirect Effect)

Mediation Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision	Type of Mediation
Social Media Promotion → School Image → Registration Decision	0.181	4.036	0.000	Accepted	Full Mediation
Service Quality → School Image → Registration Decision	0.291	5.131	0.000	Accepted	Partial Mediation

Source: SmartPLS 4 processed data results

Table 12 shows that the direct influence of Social Media Promotion on Registration Decision is not significant (H1 rejected), while its indirect influence through School Image is significant. This indicates that School Image acts as a full mediator on that relationship (H6 accepted). Conversely, because the direct influence of Educational Service Quality on Registration Decision is significant (H2 accepted) and its indirect influence through School Image is also significant, School Image acts as a partial mediator on that relationship (H7 accepted).

4.2. Discussion

The research results show that Social Media Promotion and Educational Service Quality are related to School Image, but both work through different mechanism characteristics. The more dominant role of Educational Service Quality shows that perception of the school is shaped more by the actual experience received by users than by digital communication exposure alone. Substantively, parents and prospective students have the opportunity to evaluate the reliability of academic and administrative processes, the responsiveness of teaching and education staff, the quality of facilities, school communication, and the service experience directly. This experience provides more concrete evidence in assessing the school's credibility, competence, and ability to meet educational needs. Thus, the significance of the relationship between Educational Service Quality and School Image not only shows a statistical relationship, but also indicates that the quality of service experience is a stronger source of information in the formation of institutional perception. This explanation is in line with Kandampully and Hu (2007) as well as Tu and Chih (2013), who position service quality as one of the important factors in the formation of positive perception and organizational image. In the education context, the relationship between service quality, institutional image, and various user outcomes has also been found by previous works (Chandra et al., 2019; Hossain et al., 2025; Masserini et al., 2019; Melean Romero et al., 2024).

The relationship between Social Media Promotion and School Image shows that social media does not only function as a channel for delivering information, but also as an environment in which prospective users form interpretations regarding the school's characteristics. Content about academic achievement, student activities, facilities, extracurricular activities, school culture, and the school's interaction with the community provides cues used by parents and prospective students to estimate the institution's quality and identity before obtaining a direct service experience. Therefore, the significance of this relationship can be understood through social media's ability to provide information that reduces prospective users' uncertainty when evaluating a school. This finding is in line with Maresova et al. (2020), who show the relevance of social media activity in the university branding process and the formation of an educational institution's presence in the digital space. Wahyunto et al. (2024) also show that digital marketing strategy can strengthen school branding and increase public interest, and Lieyani et al. (2025) found that the use of social media by an educational institution's public relations unit contributes to improving institutional image.

However, the relationship between Social Media Promotion and School Image needs to be understood as the result of information quality and the perception formed, not merely the frequency of publication. Frequent exposure does not automatically produce a positive image if the information

conveyed is not relevant, inconsistent, lacking in authenticity, or not trusted. Conversely, content that displays real evidence of achievement, learning quality, educator competence, student activities, and school culture can provide a more convincing basis for evaluation for prospective users. This is in line with Al-Rahmi et al. (2022); Barus et al. (2023); and Bonilla Quijada et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of digital communication characteristics in building perception. Li et al. (2025) also show that consistent exposure to various positive attributes can strengthen institutional credibility. This perspective is in line with Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015), who view educational branding as a cumulative process formed through various points of contact between the institution and stakeholders.

The difference in the strength of the relationship between the two predictors can be explained by the characteristics of educational services as a service with a high level of intangibility. Promotional information provides a picture of what the school offers, while service quality provides an experience of how that offer is actually realized. When there is alignment between the promotional message and the service experience, positive perception of the school becomes more credible. Conversely, if digital communication portrays a quality that does not match the user's experience, promotional information can lose its persuasive power. Thus, the dominance of Educational Service Quality in the formation of School Image signals that external communication is more effective when supported by internal quality that can be genuinely felt. Hamzah et al. (2023) show that educational service quality can shape school image and subsequently drive word of mouth among parents (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Masserini et al. (2019) link educational service quality and institutional image with student outcomes, while Chandra et al. (2019) find the role of service quality and university image toward satisfaction and loyalty. Melean Romero et al. (2024) reinforce the link between service quality, institutional image, and loyalty, while Hossain et al. (2025) show that the profile of teaching staff, curriculum, research activity, institutional facilities, and management policy contribute to institutional image and student satisfaction.

The next finding shows that Social Media Promotion does not have a significant direct relationship with Registration Decision. Statistically, the insignificance of the direct path means that changes or variation in social media promotion activity is not sufficient to explain variation in registration decision when that path is tested directly. Substantively, this condition shows that the decision to enroll a child in a school is not formed merely because prospective users see or receive promotional information. Social media is more likely to function at the early stage of information search and evaluation, while the final decision requires more complex consideration, such as school reputation, service quality, facilities, education costs, learning environment, safety, teacher competence, and recommendations from other parties. This finding is consistent with Ali and Naushad (2023) as well as Ardiansyah and Sarwoko (2020). Ardiansyah and Sarwoko (2020) show that social media marketing can build brand awareness, but its direct relationship with consumer decisions is not always the main mechanism. Further, Ali and Naushad (2023) also show that brand image acts as a mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. Thus, the insignificance of the direct path in this study does not mean that social media has no strategic value, but shows that its influence on decisions is more likely to occur after digital information is translated into a particular perception of the school.

This pattern becomes logical in the context of school choice decisions because educational decisions have long-term consequences for children and families. Parents not only seek information about school programs, but also try to reduce the risk of choosing the wrong institution. Under these conditions, social media information needs to obtain validation through perceptions of credibility, quality, safety, school culture, and the institution's ability to provide educational service. Therefore, the influence of digital promotion can become directly insignificant when the registration decision considers many attributes simultaneously. This perspective is consistent with Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015), who explain educational branding as a process of perception formation through various interactions between the institution and prospective service users.

The mediation testing results provide a more important explanation than merely the direct effect testing results. Social Media Promotion has an indirect effect on Registration Decision through School Image, while its direct path is not significant. The combination of these two results shows a full mediation pattern, in which the contribution of social media promotion to registration decision mainly occurs after that activity forms a particular perception of the school. Conceptually, the process

can be understood as an information-perception-decision sequence. Social media provides information and symbols regarding the school's identity; that information is then interpreted into School Image; subsequently, the image that is formed becomes a more concise basis for evaluation in determining a choice. Thus, School Image functions as a psychological mechanism that translates digital communication activity into decision consideration.

This mediation pattern is consistent with digital marketing research showing that social media marketing can influence intention or decision through brand image and perception (Armawan et al., 2023; Salhab et al., 2023). Ardiansyah and Sarwoko (2020) also show the importance of an intervening mechanism in the relationship between social media marketing and consumer decisions, while Ali and Naushad (2023) find the role of brand image as a mediator between social media marketing and purchase intention. In the education context, the results of this study extend that understanding by showing that School Image can perform a similar function: not merely being the outcome of promotion, but becoming the mechanism that connects digital information with the registration decision.

Unlike Social Media Promotion, Educational Service Quality has a significant direct relationship with Registration Decision. This finding shows that when parents evaluate school choices, service quality can be the basis for a decision without having to fully depend on image formation first. Experience with the service process, interaction with teachers and education staff, the school's speed of response, facility quality, and ease of obtaining information provide concrete evidence of the school's ability to meet the child's educational needs. Because educational decisions contain relatively high uncertainty and risk, observable service evidence can have greater evaluative value than promotional messages. Wahyuni et al. (2023) showed that the quality of educational service, together with school image, school culture, and education costs, contributes to the decision to continue education at a private school. Likewise, Zakri (2022) also showed that service quality, cost, and promotion are factors related to parents' decisions in choosing a school. Oktradiksa and Santri (2025) further showed a positive relationship between the quality of educational service and parents' decisions in choosing a school or madrasah.

Educational Service Quality also has an indirect relationship with Registration Decision through School Image. Because the direct path and the indirect path both play a role, School Image functions as a partial mediator. Substantively, this result shows two mechanisms occurring simultaneously. Service quality can increase parents' confidence directly through real experience, while at the same time producing positive perception that accumulates into institutional image. That image then strengthens consideration in the registration decision. In other words, the service experience does not stop at an individual evaluation of a single interaction, but can develop into a more general assessment of the school's reputation and credibility. This pattern reinforces the findings of Masserini et al. (2019), Chandra et al. (2019), Melean Romero et al. (2024), and Hossain et al. (2025) regarding the relationship between service quality, institutional image, and outcomes for users of educational services. Hossain et al. (2025), in particular, show that the characteristics of educational service contribute to perception of the institution and student satisfaction, while also showing the importance of institutional image in carrying forward the influence of service on user outcomes.

The difference between full mediation for Social Media Promotion and partial mediation for Educational Service Quality is a theoretically important finding. This difference shows that a communicative source of information and a source of information originating from actual experience do not have identical paths of influence. Social media promotion primarily provides external cues that must first be interpreted through School Image before contributing to a decision. In contrast, service quality provides experiential evidence that can be directly used in evaluating school choice while simultaneously shaping institutional image. Thus, School Image functions as a connector for both variables, but the degree of dependence differs: the influence of promotion is highly dependent on image formation, while the influence of service quality can continue to occur even when image is not the sole path.

School Image, which serves as a connecting variable while also holding an important position in explaining Registration Decision, shows that image functions as an evaluative summary of the various information received by prospective users. In the process of choosing a school, parents must consider many attributes at once, such as reputation, credibility, educational quality, facilities, school

culture, stakeholder experience, and safety. School Image allows this various information to be constructed into a general perception of the institution so that the evaluation process becomes simpler. From a decision-making perspective, image can function as a cognitive shortcut when prospective users face many attributes that are difficult to compare directly.

Brown and Mazzarol (2008) position institutional image as an important factor in shaping satisfaction and loyalty in higher education, while Chandra et al. (2019) also showed that university image plays a role in shaping student outcomes. In the context of school selection, Arintonang et al. (2026) also show the importance of School Image, Service Quality, and Parental Trust in school choice decisions. These results reinforce the view that institutional reputation and credibility are strategic assets in competition among schools.

From a managerial perspective, this finding shows that schools should not separate promotion strategy from service quality management. Social Media Promotion can increase visibility and provide information about the school's advantages, but the strength of its communication depends on the school's ability to build a credible image. At the same time, Educational Service Quality needs to be maintained because it has the ability to influence decisions directly while also shaping School Image. A strategy oriented solely toward increasing publication has the potential to produce awareness without decision conversion if the service experience does not support the message communicated. Conversely, good service quality that is not communicated effectively can cause the school's advantages to be less known to prospective users. Integration between digital communication, service quality, and image formation is therefore more relevant than optimizing one aspect separately.

Overall, the research results show that Registration Decision is formed through a layered mechanism, not through a single source of information. Social Media Promotion primarily functions through School Image, while Educational Service Quality has both a direct path and an indirect path through School Image. This difference in pattern provides a substantive explanation of why digital promotion activity can produce an insignificant direct relationship, yet still has a contribution through school image. Conversely, service quality is able to produce decisions because users obtain experiential evidence that can be evaluated directly. This finding reinforces the view of Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) as well as Lestari et al. (2025) that the effectiveness of educational marketing cannot be adequately assessed from the intensity of promotion alone, but from the institution's ability to integrate communication with a credible service experience.

Thus, the main contribution of this study is not merely to confirm the existence of relationships between variables, but to explain why and through what mechanism Social Media Promotion and Educational Service Quality are related to Registration Decision. Social Media Promotion requires the formation of School Image in order to contribute to the decision, while Educational Service Quality can work through two paths, namely directly based on user experience and indirectly through institutional image. This difference implies that school marketing strategy needs to move from a promotion orientation toward an approach that integrates digital communication, experience quality, and institutional reputation. When the message conveyed through social media is consistent with the service experience received by the public, the School Image that is formed has a stronger basis and has the potential to increase prospective users' confidence in choosing a school.

Interpretation of these findings still needs to take the research design into account. Because the study uses a cross-sectional design, the relationships found should be understood as a pattern of association consistent with the theoretical framework, not as definitive evidence of causality. The mediation results also show a statistical mechanism pattern that supports the role of School Image as an intervening variable, but cannot definitively prove the temporal order. Future research can use a longitudinal design to observe changes in Social Media Promotion, Educational Service Quality, School Image, and Registration Decision over time. In addition, future research can include Parental Trust, Perceived Value, School Reputation, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, education costs, and perceptions of education outcomes so that the decision-making process in school choice can be explained more comprehensively.

5. CONCLUSION

The research findings at SMP Lab School FIP UMJ show that Social Media Promotion and Educational Service Quality are positively and significantly related to School Image, with Educational Service Quality showing a greater influence. Registration Decisions are significantly influenced by Educational Service Quality and School Image, while Social Media Promotion does not show a significant direct influence on Registration Decisions. School Image fully mediates the relationship between Social Media Promotion and Registration Decisions, and partially mediates the relationship between Educational Service Quality and Registration Decisions. Thus, in the context of SMP Lab School FIP UMJ, School Image serves as an important mechanism connecting promotional activity and service quality with registration decisions. Theoretically, this finding supports the relevance of service marketing theory, SERVQUAL, and organizational image theory in explaining the relationships between variables in the context of educational service. Practically, the management of SMP Lab School FIP UMJ can consider strengthening School Image through continuous improvement of service quality, presenting social media promotional content that displays real evidence of achievement and service quality, and implementing an integrated educational marketing strategy.

This study has limitations because it was conducted at only one school, namely SMP Lab School FIP UMJ, with four research variables using a quantitative approach based on questionnaires and the SEM-PLS method. Therefore, the findings of this study need to be understood contextually and cannot be broadly generalized to other schools or educational institutions. The use of questionnaires and SEM-PLS also places greater emphasis on relationships between variables, so it has not deeply explored respondents' experiences and perceptions. Future research can test the model at several schools with different characteristics and consider other variables that potentially relate to Registration Decisions, such as education costs, location, facilities, and word of mouth. The use of a mixed methods approach can also be considered to complement the quantitative findings with a deeper understanding of the considerations of prospective students and parents in choosing a school. In addition, further analysis such as Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) or Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) can be used to explore differences in relationships between groups and determine the aspects that need to be prioritized in improving school competitiveness.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest exist regarding the publication of this paper.

Author Contributions

A.I. : Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, and Writing - Original Draft.
D.S. : Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Software, Data Curation, Resources, and Writing - Review & Editing.

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Ethical Approval

This study involved human participants (students and parents) who voluntarily provided verbal informed consent prior to participation. The research adhered to ethical standards of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for respondents' rights.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [A.I.] upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude (Sonnet 5) to improve the language, readability, and grammar of the text. The authors critically reviewed and edited all AI-generated outputs to ensure factual accuracy, clarity of expression, and adherence to established academic standards.

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