



Effective Communication Strategies for Enhancing Brand Reputation: Insight from “XYZ” an Indonesian University with Global Orientation

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Abstract. In the dynamic landscape of higher education institutions, it is crucial for universities to understand the impact of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) on customers' decision making (CDM) through Brand Reputation (BR). This study aims to examine the indirect relationship between IMC and CDM mediated by brand reputation. Data was collected through surveys from a sample of customers of the university with a sample size of 120 respondents.

The analysis revealed a significant indirect relationship between IMC and CDM through BR. The p-value associated with this relationship was found to be smaller than the significance level of 0.05, indicating statistical significance. These findings highlight the importance of maintaining a strong brand reputation as a mechanism for influencing customers' decision-making behaviours. Effective IMC strategies contribute to enhancing brand reputation, which in turn positively influences customers' perceptions and decisions regarding the university. As such, private universities with global orientations in Indonesia can leverage IMC initiatives to strengthen their brand reputations and ultimately attract and retain customers.

This research contributes to the understanding of the role of IMC in shaping customer decision making within the context of higher education institutions. It provides valuable insights for universities seeking to enhance their marketing strategies and improve their competitive positioning in the global market. Further research could explore specific IMC tactics and their effectiveness in differentiating brands and influencing customer behaviours.

Keywords: *Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Customers' Decision Making (CDM), Brand Reputation (BR), Higher Education Institution.*

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1. Introduction

In today's highly competitive landscape of higher education, universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of building and maintaining a strong brand reputation to attract prospective students, faculty, and stakeholders. Globalization and worldwide competitiveness are other issues that higher education must face. As a result, challenges and competition come from both within and beyond the nation [1]. Attracting prospective students, often referred to as "consumers" in contemporary discourse, has become increasingly competitive and complex. As the globalization trend continues to impact the international higher education market, institutions worldwide—including those in Indonesia—are adopting strategies focused on the global market to become more competitive. Certain research indicates a favourable correlation between the development of brand equity and the execution of integrated marketing communications by an organization or brand product [2].

On the other hand, consumers find the emergence of new products and services by involving marketing communication and using various tools in the process of communication. The universities, like any other organizations, rely on effective communication strategies to convey their value proposition to prospective consumers, which are the students. The more important the consumer finds the products and services, the deeper the process of communication, which relates to the implementation of integrated marketing communication [3]. A review of the literature reveals limited research on the impact of integrated marketing communication in relation to brand reputation and consumer decision making that are still various, however, not specifically in the sector of higher education [4], [5], [6]. Although a common marketing language is progressively developing in the field of higher education marketing [7], how marketing and communication processes are organized to have a significant impact in the higher education sector demands further exploration.

The Indonesian higher education landscape is highly competitive, with numerous institutions vying for the attention of both local and international students. As such, understanding the role of IMC strategies in shaping consumer decisions mediated by brand reputation is essential for universities seeking to distinguish themselves in this crowded marketplace. This research article delves into the realm of higher education marketing, focusing on the communication strategies employed by an Indonesian university with a global orientation that are aimed toward enhancing its brand reputation. Specifically, the study investigates the impact of IMC on customer decision making (CDM) through brand reputation, offering valuable insights into the interplay between communication efforts, brand perception, and consumer behaviour within the context of higher education.

The selected university, situated in Indonesia and boasting a global orientation, serves as an intriguing case study for examining the efficacy of communication strategies in a diverse and dynamic educational landscape. Indonesia, with its rapidly growing higher education sector and increasingly competitive market, presents a unique setting for exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by universities in managing their brand reputation amidst globalization and digital transformation.

Through empirical analysis and data-driven insights, this article aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on higher education marketing by shedding light on the effectiveness of communication strategies in enhancing brand reputation and influencing customer decision making. By understanding the mechanisms through which IMC impacts brand perception and consumer behaviour, universities can refine their marketing strategies, strengthen their competitive advantage, and position themselves as leaders in the global education market.

2. Literature Review

Studies on this review section focus on analysing some factors that influence consumer decision making in the higher education sectors.

2.1 Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) highlights how crucial it is to plan several promotional components in order to send targeted consumers a coherent and consistent message. Supported by academics like [8], (Elena & Oancea, 2015), this idea has grown to be fundamental to understanding how companies successfully engage with their stakeholders. In order to establish a cohesive brand experience, IMC emphasizes the necessity of collaboration between advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, and digital marketing initiatives. Adopting IMC principles has become a critical tactic for colleges looking to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive higher education market. Universities may successfully communicate their value proposition to potential students, alumni, and other important stakeholders by merging traditional and digital platforms and aligning marketing strategies with institutional goals. IMC first generation still focuses on managing various elements of marketing communications (promotional mix) in an integrated manner. (Estaswara, 2016). Then, in the 1980s, this way of thought evolved as a reaction among academics to the state of agency.

The initial concept for IMC really originated with an agency that was losing business because their clients' budgets were being heavily allocated to below-the-line initiatives rather than mass media advertising. As a result, agency revenue started to decrease. The client selected below-the-line activities because, at the time, many supermarkets were

using optical scanners, making it possible to quantify sales and purchasing patterns. Advertising is therefore thought to be less effective than programs like sales promotion through event marketing. Despite the fact that it appears to be typical marketing communications, the concept of integration has provided an alternative viewpoint. The first generation of IMC has brought new concepts regarding the integration of messaging, media and marketing communication aspects, and audience when seen from the fundamentals of the communication discipline.

In terms of audience, message, channel, and communication factors, as well as research scope, the second generation of IMC is already more sophisticated. (Schultz & Patti, 2009). IMC leading thinkers in the second generation are Schultz and colleagues [8] and [11]. IMC second generation is more strategic by placing brand, customer, and relationships that involve all stakeholders in the achievement of its effectiveness. Integrating cross-functionally inside the organization is the biggest hurdle. Top management must take the initiative to oversee the IMC's implementation.

Higher education's adoption of IMC necessitates a multifaceted strategy that takes into account many aspects of university operations. From the perspective of a private institution, this study of IMC clarifies more about how IMC may be applied in higher education institutions and provides suggestions for training customer-focused staff members [12]. This entails encouraging cooperation between student services, admissions offices, and academic departments to guarantee a unified brand identity and message plan. By combining their efforts in social media, public relations, advertising, and alumni interaction, colleges may build a strong brand presence and successfully interact with their target audience.

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is the umbrella term for a wide range of initiatives designed to coordinate advertising campaigns in order to communicate a unified brand message. In order to effectively reach target audiences, these efforts include printed and digital advertisements that make use of textual and visual information across a variety of media platforms. Through direct mail, email marketing, and telemarketing, direct marketing makes it easier to communicate with clients in a personalized way, increasing engagement and conversion rates. Salespeople and potential clients engage one-on-one in personal selling, which facilitates customized communication and the development of relationships. Sales promotion strategies that encourage purchases and boost sales in the near term include discounts, coupons, and competitions. Using press releases, media relations, and corporate events, public relations efforts aim to manage the organization's reputation and develop good connections with the public and media. On the other hand, social media platforms are effective tools for promoting brand loyalty, interacting with consumers in real time and amplifying brand messages through user-generated content. Furthermore, websites work as digital centres for brand storytelling, information sharing, and online sales, providing a consolidated forum for consumers to engage with the business. Trade exhibits, conferences, and product debuts

are examples of marketing events that offer face-to-face interaction with partners, consumers, and industry stakeholders, increasing brand awareness and encouraging community involvement. All things considered, the unification of these disparate endeavours under the auspices of IMC guarantees a coherent and captivating brand story via numerous touchpoints, promoting awareness, engagement, and loyalty [13], [14], [15], [16].

From the above explanation, some indicators used are *frequently used, content clarity and design, WhatsApp and email blast, marketing tools, responsiveness, solution given, closing deal skill, incentive, internal & external communication, positive image, social media update, message and content management, collaboration, student engagement, accessibilities, great experiences and qualified event.*

2.2 Brand Reputation

The importance of brand reputation in the competitive world of higher education, where schools fight for enrollment and funding, cannot be underemphasized. In an increasingly competitive market, colleges and other related higher education institutions rely on their brand reputation to establish trust, reliability, and uniqueness. When it comes to building and maintaining brand reputation, integrated marketing communication (IMC) is a key tactic that has a significant impact on consumer decision-making in the higher education market. IMC fosters good views and associations among stakeholders, which in turn influences favourable consumer decisions, by coordinating a coherent and consistent brand narrative across multiple touchpoints.

Prospective students and their families are faced with a plethora of options in the higher education sector, and they must make well-informed decisions based on academic offers, campus culture, and institutional reputation. Within this framework, consumer perceptions and decisions are significantly influenced by the brand reputation. Strong brand reputations give institutions the impression of being prominent, reliable, and trustworthy, which inspires confidence and the total educational experience. Assuring that the institution's brand identity is successfully communicated and connects with its target audience, IMC is essential in forming and maintaining these views. IMC supports the spread of positive brand narratives and messaging by coordinating efforts across a variety of platforms, including social media, alumni involvement, public relations, and advertising. This enhances the reputation of the company.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of brand reputation in higher education since it has a significant impact on how consumers make decisions in the higher education industry. Several studies highlight how important brand reputation is in influencing the attitudes, actions, and perceptions of funders, potential students, graduates, and other stakeholders. Strong brand reputations help universities project credibility, trustworthiness, and prestige, which inspires confidence in the qualifications of their curricula, student experiences, and graduation rates. Scholarly research [7], [17] indicates that positive perceptions of an institution's brand reputation have a significant impact on enrollment rates, alumni engagement, philanthropic support, and industry partnerships. It also highlights the positive correlation between brand reputation and consumer decisions.

Furthermore, since prospective students and stakeholders increasingly rely on digital channels to acquire information, seek recommendations, and assess institutional reputations, the emergence of digital media and online platforms has magnified the importance of brand reputation. These results make it clear that, in the very competitive world of higher education today, universities must build and protect their brand name in order to draw in, keep, and involve stakeholders.

The indicators used in this study are *positive image*, *strong network*, *qualified learning process*, and *professional lectures* [7], [17], [18].

2.3 Consumer Decision Making

Making the crucial decision to pursue higher education requires a significant commitments of time, money, and goals. Prospective students carefully consider a number of things before choosing a university, and one important consideration is brand reputation. The perceived quality, legitimacy, and general status of an institution of higher learning are all part of its brand reputation in the academic and professional worlds. This reputation influences enrollment decisions, shapes preferences, and acts as a compass for consumers. Prospective students tend to favor universities with strong brand names because of their reputedly excellent academic programs, renowned faculty, large alumni networks, and bright futures for careers after graduation (Marjanović & Križman Pavlović, 2018).

On the other side, integrated marketing communication (IMC) is essential for enhancing and strengthening brand reputation, which directly affects customer choice in higher education. IMC tactics are a range of promotional efforts that are carefully planned and coordinated to convey a consistent brand message. These activities include public relations, social media, advertising, and alumni involvement. Brand reputation is strengthened by an appealing message that is consistent across a variety of media, inspiring confidence and trust in stakeholders and potential students. Substantial previous research offers a number of decision-making models and frameworks which can be applied to consumers in many sectors. A customer's decision-making is determined by the effectiveness of interactions at various touch points, with positive interactions resulting in higher levels of credibility and trust placed toward a higher education institution. Thus, the experiences felt by the potential applicants' perceived touch point interactions will directly influence their decision-making process. These relevant stakeholders perceive and value a particular establishment could bring positive impact to student recruitment within the higher education institution [20].

It is obvious that prospective students are more inclined to think about and favour universities with well-established brand names and captivating brand stories that are shared across IMC channels. Additionally, contented students and involved alumni act as brand ambassadors, promoting the school and enhancing its reputation via social media endorsements and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Based on the explanation above, the indicators used to measure the decision making process of consumers in the higher education sectors are willingness to a directed action response to choosing a university, pre-enrolment process and experiences and financial resources aspects [19], [20], [21], [22].

3. Methods

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to investigate the effectiveness of communication strategies in enhancing brand reputation, focusing on an Indonesian university with a global orientation, specifically “The XYZ University.” The study utilized a mixed-methods approach to gain comprehensive insights from parents and new students who were familiar with the university. The research design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a nuanced understanding of the topic.

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was adopted to capture diverse perspectives and generate comprehensive insights into communication strategies' impact on brand reputation. This approach facilitated the triangulation of data from multiple sources, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. The study integrated quantitative surveys with qualitative focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to gather both statistical data and in-depth narratives from participants.

3.2 Sampling

The sample population consisted of 120 participants, comprising parents and new students who had prior knowledge of “The XYZ University.” Convenience sampling was employed to recruit participants from the university's parent and student networks. The sample size was deemed sufficient to achieve saturation and ensure representativeness of diverse viewpoints within the target population.

3.3 Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected through structured survey questionnaires administered to participants. The questionnaire included items assessing participants' demographic characteristics, awareness levels of the university, perceptions of brand reputation, and effectiveness of communication strategies. Likert-scale questions were used to measure the extent of agreement or disagreement with statements related to brand attributes and communication channels.

Qualitative data was obtained through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews conducted with a subset of participants. These qualitative methods allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards the University's communication strategies. Open-ended questions were utilized to elicit rich narratives and uncover nuanced insights.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize participants' demographic profiles and responses to survey items. Statistical techniques such as mean scores and frequency distributions were utilized to examine patterns and trends in participants' perceptions of brand reputation and communication effectiveness.

Qualitative data analysis employed thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends within participants' narratives. Transcripts from focus group discussions and interviews were coded and categorized to extract key insights regarding the strengths and weaknesses of communication strategies, as well as recommendations for improvement.

4. Result and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings are presented and discussed. The chapter begins with an overview of the respondents' profile, providing insights into the demographic characteristics and familiarity with the university. Subsequently, the validity and reliability of the research instruments and data collection methods are assessed to ensure the robustness of the findings. The chapter then delves into the data analysis, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to examine the relationship between communication strategies and brand reputation indicators. Finally, the hypotheses formulated in the study are evaluated based on the data analysis results, leading to discussions on the implications and recommendations for future research and practical applications in the higher education sector.

4.1 Respondents' Profile

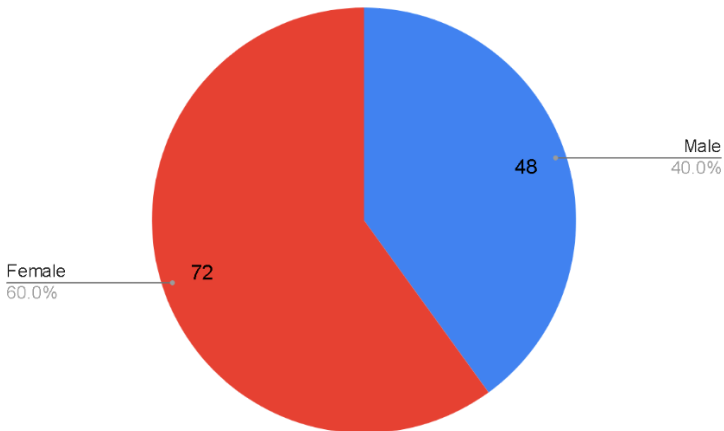


Figure 1. Gender

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of gender within a sample of 120 individuals surveyed for research purposes. Among the total sample size, 48 individuals, representing 40% of the sample, identified as male, while 72 individuals, accounting for 60% of the sample, identified as female. The chart visually represents the proportion of men and women within the sample, highlighting the larger representation of women compared to men.

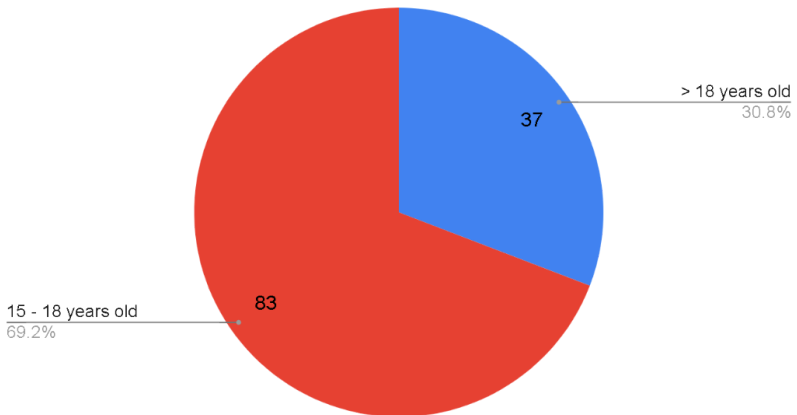


Figure 2. Age

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of respondent age within the study sample. The data reveals that out of the total respondents surveyed, 37 persons (30.8%) of the sample, are above 18 years old. Conversely, the majority of respondents, comprising 83 persons (69.2%) fall within the age range of 15 to 18 years old.

The presence of a significant proportion of respondents between the ages of 15 and 18 suggests a focus on younger individuals, potentially reflecting the demographic composition of the target audience to strengthen the analysis.

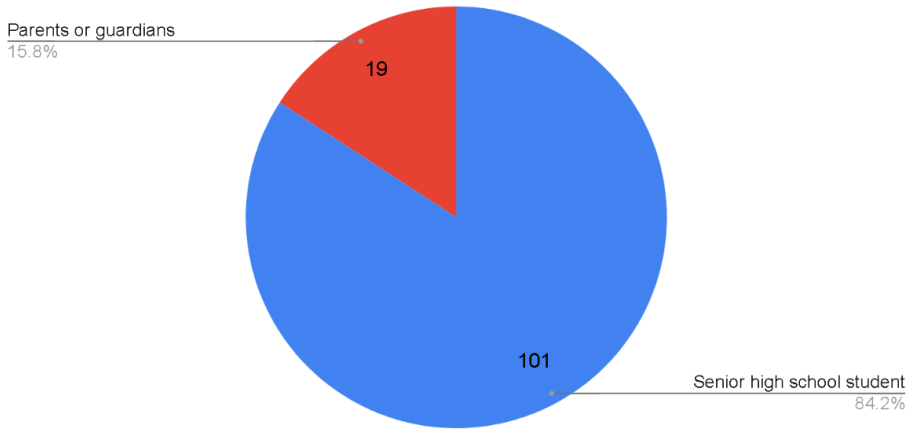


Figure 3. Occupation

Figure 3 provides an overview of the occupational distribution among the respondents in the study sample. The data indicates that out of the total respondents surveyed, 19 persons (15.8%) identified as parents, teachers or guardians. In contrast, the majority of respondents, consisting of 101 persons (84.2%) are high school students.

The presence of a significant proportion of high school students reflects the focus on persons who are potential future students or have recently become acquainted with the university. Additionally, the inclusion of parents or guardians in the sample highlights the involvement of key stakeholders who may influence decision-making processes related to higher education choices.

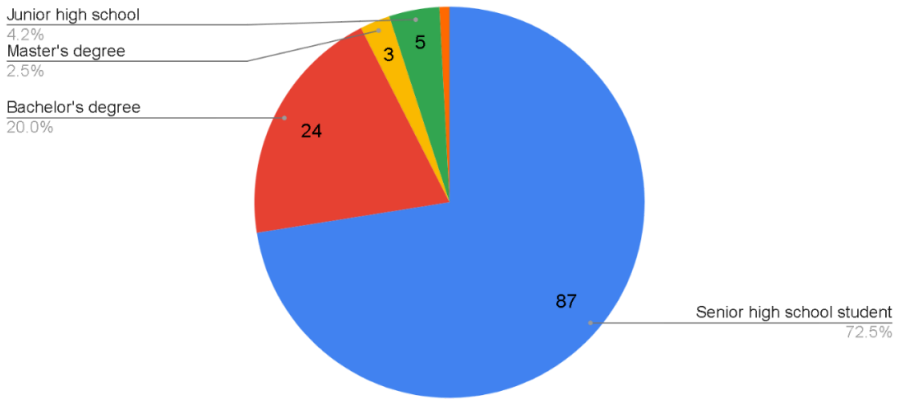


Figure 4. Education Background

Figure 4 presents an overview of the educational backgrounds of the respondents within the study sample. The data reveals that the majority of respondents, comprising 87 persons (72.5%), are currently enrolled in high school. Additionally, 24 respondents (20%) have completed a bachelor's degree, while 3 individuals (2.5%) hold a master's degree. Moreover, 5 respondents (4.2%) have completed their education at the junior high school level.

The significant representation of high school students reflects the focus on individuals who are actively engaged in the education system and are potential future university students.

4.2 Validity and Reliability

Table 1. Validity & Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BR	0.877	0.884	0.924	0.802
CDM	0.879	0.887	0.926	0.806
IMC	0.881	0.890	0.904	0.512

From the results at Table 1, the AVE values for all variables are greater than 0.5, indicating that all convergent validity indicators effectively form their respective variables. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha and CR values are also obtained, both exceeding 0.6 for all variables. It can be concluded that all variables and items used in this study meet the validity and reliability criteria in measuring the variable.

4.3 Coefficient Determination

Table 2. Coefficient Determination

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
BR	0.227	0.220
CDM	0.593	0.586

Through Table 2, it can be observed that the R-Square values for the variables BR and CDM are 0.227 and 0.593, respectively. These figures depict that the variable IMC contributes 22.7% to explaining the variable CDM, while the remaining 77.3% is explained by other variables outside the model. Additionally, the variables IMC and BR can explain 59.3% of the variable CDM, with the remaining 40.7% being explained by other variables outside the model.

4.4. Model Fit Test

Table 3. Model Fit Test

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.074	0.074
d_ ULS	0.660	0.660
d_ G	0.287	0.287
Chi-Square	203.895	203.895
NFI	0.811	0.811

rms Theta	0.189
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Based on the output at Table 3, it is obtained that the SRMS value is 0.074, which is less than 0.08. Additionally, the NFI value is 0.811, which is less than 0.900. The RMS theta value is generated as 0.189, which is close to 0. From these three indicators, it can be concluded that the form model meets the fitness criteria, indicating that the model can be used and is good at describing the relationships between variables.

4.5 Data Analysis (Direct and Indirect Effect)

Table 4. Direct Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
BR -> CDM	0.707	0.693	0.071	9.885	0.000
IMC -> BR	0.476	0.504	0.105	4.545	0.000
IMC -> CDM	0.118	0.135	0.064	1.843	0.066

From the output shown in Table 4, there are 2 p-values that are less than 0.05, while there is 1 p-value that is less than 0.05, thus not meeting the significance criteria.

Table 5. Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
IMC -> BR -> CDM	0.337	0.345	0.065	5.142	0.000

From the output shown in the Table 5, it can be seen that the indirect relationship between variables has a p-value smaller than the significance level of 0.05, thus indicating significance.

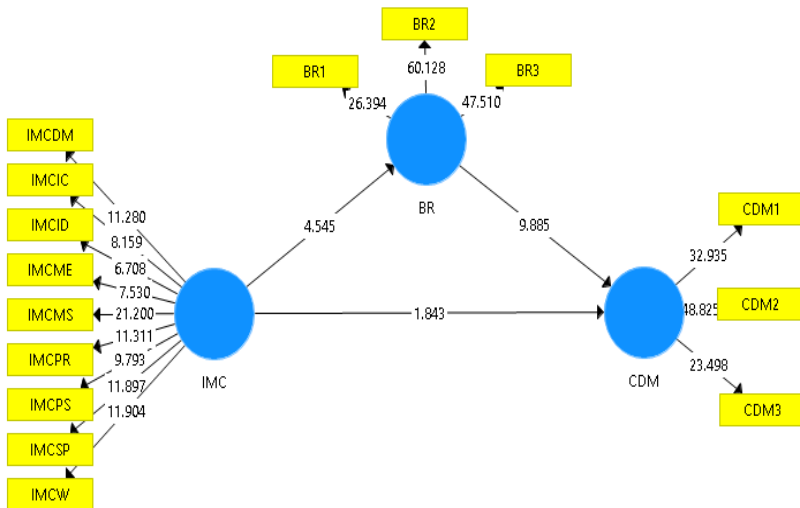


Figure 5. SEM PLS Data Analysis

From Figure 5, it can be concluded as follows:

- a. The relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Brand Reputation (BR) has a path coefficient of 0.000, indicating significance. This suggests that there is a significant, direct effect of IMC on BR.
- b. The relationship between BR and Decision-making (DCM) has a path coefficient of 0.000, indicating significance. This implies that there is a significant, direct effect of BR on DCM.
- c. The relationship between IMC and DCM has a path coefficient of 0.066, indicating insignificance. This means that there is no significant direct effect of IMC on DCM.
- d. However, the relationship between IMC and DCM, when mediated by BR, has a path coefficient of 0.000, indicating significance. This suggests that the indirect effect of IMC on DCM through BR is significant, even though the direct effect of IMC on DCM is not significant.

5. Conclusion & Managerial Implication, Recommendation for Further Studies

5.1 Conclusion

The findings from the SEM-PLS model provide valuable insights into the relationships between Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Brand Reputation (BR), and Decision-making (DCM) within the context of study on effective communication strategies for enhancing brand reputation in a case study of an Indonesian university with global orientation. The results indicate significant direct effects of IMC on BR and BR on DCM, highlighting the importance of communication efforts in shaping brand perception and influencing decision-making processes.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Essentially, the results suggest that while direct sales efforts are important, the sales and marketing team should prioritize building and reinforcing the reputation of XYZ University. Firstly, investing in effective IMC strategies can lead to improved brand reputation, ultimately influencing stakeholders' decision-making behaviours such as enrollment, advocacy or provide positive recommendation. This implies that stakeholders are more likely to be swayed by the perceived reputation and credibility of the university rather than solely by direct sales pitches or promotional messages. This could involve highlighting the university's achievements, accreditation, faculty expertise, student success stories, and positive experiences. By emphasizing these aspects, the team can effectively leverage the indirect impact of IMC on decision-making through brand reputation, ultimately driving desired outcomes.

Secondly, prioritizing brand-building initiatives and reputation management efforts can enhance the university's competitiveness and attractiveness in the higher education market. Brand-building initiatives involve strategic efforts to cultivate a strong and positive brand identity for the university. This includes defining and articulating the university's unique value proposition, mission, and values. By establishing a distinct brand image, universities can differentiate themselves from competitors and create a compelling narrative that resonates with stakeholders, such as prospective students, faculty, donors, and partners.

Reputation management efforts are aimed at actively monitoring, maintaining, and enhancing the university's reputation among key stakeholders. This involves proactive measures to safeguard the university's integrity, address any negative perceptions or incidents, and highlight its strengths and achievements. By managing its reputation effectively, a university can build trust, credibility, and goodwill, which are essential for attracting and retaining students, faculty, and supporters.

5.3 Recommendation

- a. **Differentiation:** A strong brand identity sets the “XYZ” University apart from competitors, helping it stand out in a crowded marketplace. By highlighting its unique strengths, values, and offerings, the university can attract students and stakeholders who align with its mission and vision.
- b. **Perceived Value:** A positive reputation enhances the perceived value of the “XYZ” University among stakeholders. It includes confidence and trust in the quality of education, research, and services offered, making the “XYZ” University a preferred choice for students, faculty, and partners.
- c. **Recruitment and Retention:** A compelling brand and positive reputation attract high-qualified students, faculty, and staff, enhancing recruitment and retention efforts. Students are more likely to choose a university with a strong reputation, while faculty and staff are more inclined to stay at an institution known for its excellence and supportive culture.
- d. **Partnerships and Collaborations:** A reputable university is seen as a valuable partner for collaborations, research partnerships, and industry engagements. A positive brand image can attract corporate sponsors, research funding, and strategic partnerships, further enhancing the “XYZ” University's standing and impact.
- e. **Based on the study findings,** several recommendations can be made for future research and practice. Future studies could be applied by adding the new variables such as consumer retention. The number of sample sizes could also be larger and classified into some categories such as *prospective students* and *parents*. The locus of research could also be enriched with the master program that “XYZ” University delivered.

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