

How Student Loyalty Bridges Service Quality, Satisfaction, And Brand Image: Insights From Private Higher Education In Indonesia

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Abstract

The study aims to verify the direct effect of service quality and student satisfaction on brand image, mediated by student loyalty. The research was conducted at the Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer Citra Buana Indonesia and Akademi Pariwisata Citra Buana Indonesia, using a quantitative survey method with a path analysis approach. The sample consisted of 155 respondents. Data collection techniques involved questionnaires, and data processing was divided into two stages: the outer and inner model, which were analyzed using SmartPLS. The results: (1) service quality has a positive and significant effect on brand image; (2) service quality has a positive and significant effect on student loyalty; (3) student loyalty has a positive and significant effect on brand image; (4) student satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on brand image; and (5) student satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on student loyalty.

Keywords: Service Quality, Student Satisfaction, Brand Image, Student Loyalty.

1. Introduction

Developing high-quality human resources is essential across various social, economic, and personal dimensions. Education plays a pivotal role in this endeavor. According to international literature, national education aims to cultivate abilities, shape character, and foster a dignified national civilization to improve the nation's intellectual life (Mok et al., 2021).

As one of the main components of the education system, higher education institutions play a strategic role in shaping knowledgeable, creative, independent, and responsible individuals as democratic citizens. Universities are expected to produce graduates with academic competence, professional skills, moral integrity, and strong character (Yao et al., 2021)

To achieve these goals, the learning process in higher education must consider various factors that affect student development. Effective learning should not only focus on academic aspects but also on developing interpersonal skills and moral understanding, which are essential in preparing students to face real-world challenges. Several factors that affect student development include the availability of competent educators and academic staff in their fields, adequate facilities at the university, and relevant teaching materials, methods, and strategies.

Amid increasingly intense competition in education, students now have various options. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency of Sukabumi City, the number of private universities in Sukabumi City amounted to 14 from 2018 to 2021. This is evidenced by data obtained by researchers from the Central Statistics Agency of Sukabumi City regarding village potential data collection.

Table 1. Growth of the Number of Universities in Sukabumi City

	The Number of Universities by District			
	2021	2020	2019	2018
Baros	1	1	1	1
Lembursitu	-	-	-	-
Cibeureum	1	1	-	-
Citamiang	2	2	2	2
Warudoyong	3	3	3	3
Gunung Puyuh	3	3	3	3
Cikole	3	3	5	5
Sukabumi City (Total)	13	13	14	14

Based on Table 1, the number of universities in Sukabumi City has steadily increased each year from 2018 to 2021. To achieve a competitive advantage in the future, universities must innovate and seek effective and creative methods to attract, retain, and strengthen relationships with students. Consequently, universities must pay closer attention to and address various factors that affect their ability to attract and retain students by enhancing service quality. Service quality, which needs to be well managed, can be defined as the degree of difference between students' expectations and the reality of the services provided by the university (Douglas et al., 2006; Sultan & Yin Wong, 2012).

Additionally, efficient time management and an organizational structure supporting student creativity development also play a crucial role. Therefore, educational service quality must be a primary focus for all universities, especially in efforts to develop and enhance students' comprehensive development. In the increasingly competitive field of education, universities must improve service quality to meet the needs of students as the primary consumers (Sultan & Yin Wong, 2012; Wilkins & Stephens Balakrishnan, 2013). Essential services for students include laboratory facilities that support their fields of study, faculty with adequate expertise, prompt and efficient responses to student requests, and a well-functioning academic information system. In addition, another important aspect of educational services in higher education is transparent administration for students and the provision of academic or non-academic organizational activities that support student development.

Improving service quality is crucial for student satisfaction, affecting student loyalty and brand image. Student satisfaction occurs when students' needs, wants, and expectations are met through the service's quality. Universities that can deliver high-quality services and meet student satisfaction will foster the creation of student loyalty.

Fluctuations in student enrollment at private universities in Sukabumi are affected by various factors. One significant factor is dissatisfaction with the quality of educational services and the limited facilities provided by the institutions. Many students feel disconnected from the university environment and lack confidence in their chosen major, leading some to discontinue their education, switch majors, or even transfer to other universities.

These factors, particularly academic services, are critical elements that contribute to the decline in student enrollment, which, in turn, can affect the university's reputation in the future. Dissatisfaction with services, such as inadequate facilities and infrastructure, is a clear example of this issue. In recent years, the number of students continuing their education at the Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer Citra Buana Indonesia and Akademi Pariwisata Citra Buana Indonesia has experienced instability. Data from

researchers from the Higher Education Database (PDDIKTI) highlights this pattern, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Growth in Student Enrollment at Private Universities

The Number of University Students					
No.	School	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Citra Buana Indonesia Informatics and Computer Management Academy	2,115	1,697	1,533	1,502
2	Citra Buana Indonesia Tourism Academy	113	122	229	88

Based on Table 2 above, it can be observed that the Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer Citra Buana Indonesia and the Akademi Pariwisata Citra Buana Indonesia have experienced fluctuations in student enrollment each year from 2020 to 2023. This raises questions about the factors contributing to the decline in student numbers in 2023. Additionally, it prompts an inquiry into whether the service quality provided to students has not met their expectations, leading to dissatisfaction that impacts student loyalty and, consequently, affects the brand image of the institutions.

Good service quality can enhance student satisfaction, ultimately impacting student loyalty (Sultan & Yin Wong, 2012; Wilkins & Stephens Balakrishnan, 2013). Five key indicators measure the quality of education: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, information system, assurance, and empathy (Douglas et al., 2006; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Previous studies that have measured service quality using these indicators include research by Douglas et al. (2006), Sultan & Wong (2013), and Wilkins & Balakrishnan (2013).

Service quality can be effective if it increases student satisfaction and generates sustainable benefits in the education market (Sultan & Yin Wong, 2012). Generally, students choose educational institutions that offer high-quality services to gain a satisfying learning experience. Student loyalty can be influenced by various factors, both directly and indirectly. When students are satisfied with the services provided, they are more likely to remain loyal to their chosen institution. Quality education not only creates better learning opportunities but also demonstrates that satisfaction levels can affect the students' academic outcomes, both positively and negatively (Wilkins & Stephens Balakrishnan, 2013).

According to Douglas et al. (2006), educational institutions' success is often measured by the extent to which students feel satisfied. Several aspects measuring this satisfaction include cost, product, and service quality. When satisfied, students are likelier to demonstrate loyalty to the university that provides good services. This loyalty significantly impacts students' decisions, including choosing among various educational programs offered. Therefore, service quality, student satisfaction, and student loyalty are key elements that contribute to the brand image of private universities.

Based on the observed phenomenon, analyzing the effect of service quality and student satisfaction on brand image, mediated by student loyalty, at a private university in Sukabumi is necessary.

2. Literature Reviewer

2.1. Service Quality

Service quality is a measure used to evaluate how well a service meets consumer expectations, particularly in the context of student education. The quality of services students expect encompasses aspects such as the university's product, services, environment, and interactions with educators (Komljenovic et al., 2025; Seow & Hussain, 2024). In other words, service quality is a positive indicator of how well a product or service meets student expectations (Fumasoli & Hladchenko, 2023).

The quality of educational services refers to how students assess the level of service they receive compared to their expectations. This implies that educational institutions must strive to meet the needs and desires of students as customers, ensuring their satisfaction. Therefore, educational institutions must remain committed and continuously improve in line with students' requirements.

In the service delivery process, there is an interaction between two parties: (1) the service provider and (2) the service recipient. In higher education, the university is the service provider, while students are the service recipients. Another important factor in educational services is the provision of educators and academic staff who meet the criteria and needs of both students and the educational institution. This provision must comply with the National Education Standards (SNP) as regulated in Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021.

Research shows that service quality positively affects student satisfaction (Komljenovic et al., 2025). Good service quality is closely related to student satisfaction, which in turn promotes their loyalty to the educational institution (Fumasoli & Hladchenko, 2023). According to Komljenovic et al., (2025), service quality involves a process that engages the mind, senses, and other body parts in delivering services without additional tools, intending to meet expectations or needs within the context of higher education.

The relationship between service quality and brand image in education can be analyzed through the mediating role of student loyalty. High service quality involves several indicators: (1) tangibles, which include the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, staff, and communication materials; (2) reliability, the institution's ability to consistently and accurately deliver the promised services; (3) responsiveness, the willingness to assist students and provide prompt services; (4) assurance, which encompasses the knowledge and behavior of staff and lecturers in instilling trust in students; and (5) empathy, the attention given to students and the institution's ability to understand their needs (Komljenovic et al., 2025; Seow & Hussain, 2024).

Thus, service quality significantly contributes to students' positive experiences, which in turn increases their satisfaction levels. When students perceive an adequate quality of service, they are more likely to develop loyalty towards the educational institution, as reflected in their commitment to remain affiliated with it and recommend it to others.

In this case, student loyalty is a mediator that links service quality with brand image. Satisfied and loyal students will act as positive brand ambassadors, influencing the perception of the public and prospective students toward the institution. Thus, improvements in service quality not only foster satisfaction but also strengthen student loyalty, which in turn contributes to enhancing the brand image of the educational institution.

Therefore, attention to service quality becomes crucial to build mutually beneficial relationships between universities and students while strengthening the brand image in higher education.

2.2. Student Satisfaction

Student Satisfaction. Student satisfaction refers to the response to the services received, both academically and in the campus environment. This emotional reaction reflects students' experiences with the products or services provided (Komljenovic et al., 2025;

Seow & Hussain, 2024). Therefore, student satisfaction becomes a significant indicator in assessing the quality of educational services. Attention to student satisfaction is crucial for educational service providers in higher education, as it closely correlates with the excellence of the services (Zhu & Guo, 2021).

In general, student satisfaction can be understood as an emotional reaction that arises when individuals evaluate the extent to which the reality they experience aligns with the expectations they have formed regarding the products or services received from the institution/university (Komljenovic et al., 2025). This satisfaction is crucial in maintaining long-term relationships with consumers/students. By sustaining high levels of satisfaction, institutions not only secure customer loyalty but also create opportunities for greater future benefits, such as increased recommendations, a positive reputation, and an enhanced brand image (Seow & Hussain, 2024).

Student satisfaction plays a crucial role in enhancing self-confidence and supporting the development of skills and intellectual abilities. Satisfied students not only act as promoters for the institution through positive recommendations but also contribute to the overall image of the institution. Therefore, measuring student satisfaction is essential for improving and developing services. According to Komljenovic et al. (2025), Seow & Hussain (2024), and Zhu & Guo (2021), there are several main factors influencing student satisfaction:

(1) Price refers to the cost students bear to obtain education. (2) Service quality refers to the institution's consistently meeting student expectations. The institution must understand the needs of students to provide satisfactory and relevant services. (3) Product quality includes the ability of educational services to function effectively, particularly in the learning process. A quality learning process will produce competent graduates, depending on the quality of teaching and the materials delivered. (4) Emphasizing these three factors is essential in enhancing student satisfaction, which can strengthen student loyalty, institutional image, and brand image.

Student satisfaction strategically shapes student loyalty toward educational institutions (Komljenovic et al., 2025). When students are satisfied with various aspects of academic services, such as the quality of teaching, campus facilities, and administrative support, they tend to develop a stronger emotional attachment to the institution (Seow & Hussain, 2024).

This satisfaction encourages students to continue their studies at the same institution and even recommends it to prospective students. According to consumer behavior theory, satisfaction is the foundation for forming more stable and long-term loyalty (Zhu & Guo, 2021). Students who feel valued and supported in education are more likely to proactively engage in academic and non-academic activities, further strengthening their connection with the institution.

Several researchers (Komljenovic et al., 2025; Seow & Hussain, 2024) have proven that the higher the level of student satisfaction, the greater the institution's chances of retaining them as part of the long-term academic community. Therefore, significantly improving the quality of educational services will strengthen student loyalty and have a positive impact on the institution's overall image and reputation.

2.3. Student Loyalty

Student Loyalty. In loyalty theory, loyalty is a customer's commitment to a product or service. High-quality educational services will create student satisfaction. Student loyalty can be demonstrated by continuing their studies at the same university or recommending the institution to others. In higher education, maintaining strong relationships with students is crucial. If students choose to withdraw or transfer to another institution for various reasons, it can be detrimental to the university. Conversely, if students remain

loyal and continue their education, it will positively impact the university's brand image and reputation.

Brand Image. Brand image is the rational and emotional perception of a particular brand. It reflects the consumer's/customer's belief in the brand functionally and symbolically.

2.4. Brand Image

Recent research shows that a strong brand image strengthens customer trust and loyalty, particularly in educational institutions (Ngo & Meek, 2019; Seow & Hussain, 2024). A positive brand image can be built through consistent service quality and satisfying experiences among students (Tahir et al., 2024).

A strong brand image can help educational institutions compete in an increasingly competitive market (Dugenio-Nadela et al., 2023). Moreover, a positive brand image can enhance student loyalty and satisfaction, thereby increasing the attractiveness of educational institutions in the eyes of prospective students (Ngo & Meek, 2019; Seow & Hussain, 2024; Tahir et al., 2024).

Referring to the theories previously mentioned, several hypotheses and conceptual models can be formulated as follows:

H1: The effect of service quality on brand image

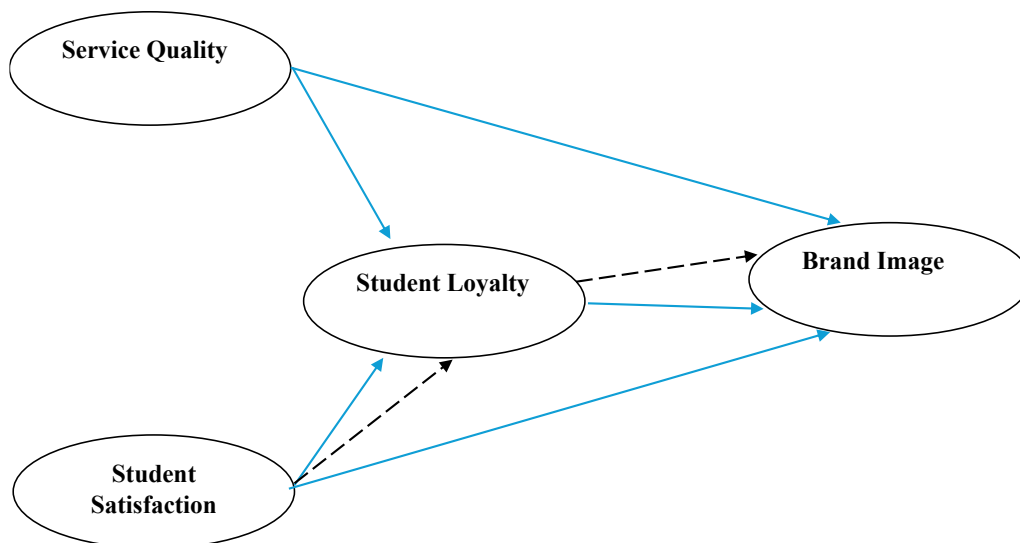
H2: The effect of service quality on student loyalty

H3: The Effect of Student Loyalty on Brand Image

H4: The Effect of Student Satisfaction on Brand Image

H5: The Effect of Student Satisfaction on Student Loyalty

Fig. 1 Conceptual Modeling



The competition among universities in Sukabumi for maintaining long-term relationships with students is intense. Therefore, universities must emphasize the service quality they provide in order to enhance student satisfaction. Consequently, students will be more loyal and likely to recommend the university, while the institution's brand image can be strengthened through student loyalty. This research model is illustrated in Figure 1, where student loyalty acts as a mediator between student satisfaction and brand image.

When service quality becomes a primary factor in the relationship between students as customers and universities as service providers, students will evaluate their level of

satisfaction with the services received. If students perceive that the quality of services provided does not meet their expectations, there is a possibility that they will transfer to another university. Conversely, if satisfaction is achieved, students are more likely to remain loyal and potentially recommend the university to others, thereby strengthening the university's brand image through student loyalty.

3. Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative survey with path analysis through a variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) approach using Smart PLS 3.0. Data were processed in two stages: the outer model and the inner model. The population of students from Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer and Akademi Pariwisata Citra Buana Indonesia was selected using purposive sampling. A significance level of 5% was established, with a minimum path coefficient of 0.2 to indicate the strength of the relationship between variables. The sample size was calculated to ensure the validity of the research findings (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

Fig. 2 The formula for Determining Sample Size

$$\text{Significance level} = 5\%; n_{\min} > \left(\frac{2.486}{|p_{\min}|} \right)^2 \quad (1)$$

Source: (Kock & Hadaya, 2018)

4. Result and Discussion

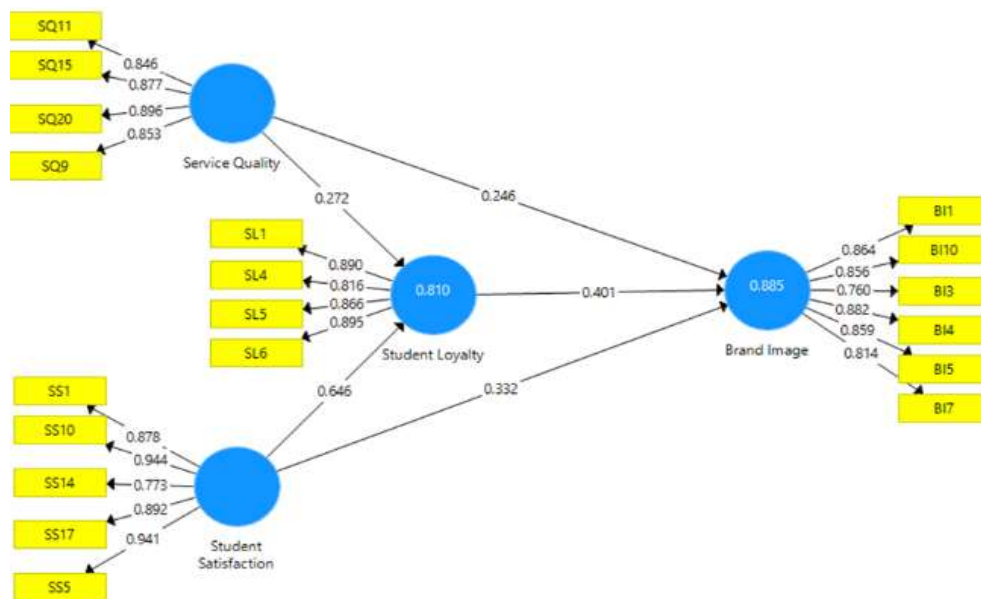
The measurement model in Table 3 shows that the outer loading values are all above 0.7, indicating reliability and meeting the minimum instrument criterion of >0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). The composite reliability values all exceed >0.7, which is considered valid according to the requirements (Hair et al., 2022). The Cronbach's Alpha and AVE values for each variable are reliable, as indicated by values greater than >0.7. Thus, all variables are considered highly reliable.

Table 3 Convergent Validity, Composite Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, and AVE

Variable	Outer Loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
SQ 9	0.853	0.925	0.891	0.754
SQ 11	0.846			
SQ 15	0.877			
SQ 20	0.896			
SS 1	0.878			
SS 5	0.941	0.949	0.931	0.789
SS 10	0.944			
SS 14	0.773			
SS 17	0.892			
SL 1	0.890	0.924	0.890	0.752
SL 4	0.816			

SL 5	0.866			
SL 6	0.895			
BI 1	0.864			
BI 3	0.760			
BI 4	0.882			
BI 5	0.859	0.935	0.916	0.706
BI 7	0.814			
BI 10	0.856			

Fig. 3 Caption: Validity Test of Loading Factor in SmartPLS



In Figure 2, the validity test results indicate that the service quality variable has the highest loading factor value of 0.896 on the SQ20 indicator. In contrast, the student satisfaction variable reaches its highest value of 0.944 on the SS10 indicator. The student loyalty variable achieves the highest value of 0.895 on the SL6 indicator, and the brand image variable records the highest value of 0.882 on the BI4 indicator. Based on these validity test results, it can be concluded that all tested variables and indicators are valid and reliable.

The results of the validity and reliability test using the Fornell-Larcker criterion method are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Fornell-Larcker Criterion Results

	Brand Image	Student Loyalty	Student Quality	Student Satisfaction
Brand Image	0.987			
Student Loyalty	0.889	0.983		
Student Quality	0.812	0.868	0.925	
Student Satisfaction	0.806	0.856	0.867	0.914

In Table 5, the results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion test indicate no higher correlation between one latent variable and another. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables pass the validity test.

One critical step in inner model analysis is evaluating the quality of the research model through the R^2 value. R-square values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are used to assess the model's strength. Models with $R^2 > 0.75$ have strong predictive power, and $R^2 > 0.50$ are interpreted as having moderate predictive power. In contrast, models with R^2 around 0.25 have weak predictive power (Hair et al., 2022), as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 R-Square Results

Variable	R-square	Result	Interpretation
Brand Image	0.885	88.5%	Strong
Student Loyalty	0.810	81%	Strong

In Table 6, the R-square results show a value of 0.885 for brand image, meaning that 88.5% of the variance in brand image can be explained by service quality, student satisfaction, and student loyalty. The remaining 11.5% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study. The R-square value for student loyalty is 0.810, indicating that 81% of the variance in student loyalty is influenced by service quality, student satisfaction, and brand image. In comparison, the remaining 19% comes from other variables.

Additionally, the predictive relevance test (Q-Square) is used to assess how effectively the model predicts outcomes based on changes in the data. The higher the Q^2 value, the better the predictive ability. A Q^2 value is considered significant if it is greater than 0, with a range of 0–0.25 indicating low relevance, 0.25–0.5 indicating moderate relevance, and above 0.5 indicating high relevance (Hair et al., 2022). Table 7 presents the results of the blindfolding Q^2 output from SmartPLS in this study.

Table 7 Q-Square Results

Variable	Q^2	Description
Brand Image	0.609	Large
Student Loyalty	0.596	Large

In Table 7, based on the analysis results, the Q-Square values indicate significant predictive ability in explaining the dependent latent variables through the effect of the independent latent variables.

Structural Model. The output of the path coefficients can be obtained in the hypothesis testing results, as shown in the following table.

Table. 8. Path Coefficients Results

Hypothesis	Original Sample	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
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H1: Service Quality > Brand Image	0.246	2.367	0.009	Accepted
H2: Service Quality > Student Loyalty	0.272	1.758	0.040	Accepted
H3: Student Loyalty > Brand Image	0.401	2.532	0.006	Accepted
H4: Student Satisfaction > Brand Image	0.332	1.865	0.031	Accepted

Table 9 Specific Indirect Effect Results

Hypothesis	β	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1: Student Satisfaction > Student Loyalty > Brand Image	0.259	2.176	0.015	Accepted

Based on Table 8 and Table 9, it can be seen that all variables prove a significant effect, as indicated by the P-values being smaller than α ($0.000 < 0.05$) and the T-table value of 1.653. It can be concluded that all variables have a significant positive effect on brand image.

Table 9 shows that student satisfaction has a significant positive effect on brand image, mediated by student loyalty.

The effect of service quality on brand image (H1). Service quality's effect on student satisfaction has been proven significant. The results show a t-statistic of 2.367 with a p-value of 0.009. This confirms that service quality has a significant positive effect on brand image. Therefore, service quality is important in shaping students' perceptions of the institution. Good service quality includes reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible evidence that students perceive throughout the learning process. Students will likely have positive experiences when these aspects are fulfilled, ultimately affecting their perceptions of the institution's image.

The image of an institution in higher education reflects how students, alumni, and the public perceive its reputation, credibility, and quality. A positive image will be formed if the service quality meets or exceeds expectations. Conversely, the institution's image will be negatively affected if the service quality is perceived as inadequate.

The research results indicate that the better the academic service quality provided to students by Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer Citra Buana Indonesia and Akademi Pariwisata Citra Buana Indonesia, the more it enhances the campus brand image. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Ngo & Meek (2019), which confirmed that service quality significantly affects campus brand image. Furthermore, the results align with a previous study conducted by Dugenio-Nadela et al. (2023). Therefore, institutions that consistently provide high-quality services will have greater appeal and be able to build a strong institutional image in the education market.

The effect of service quality on student loyalty (H2). Service quality's effect on student loyalty has been proven significant. The results show a t-statistic of 1.758 with a p-value of 0.040. This confirms that service quality has a significant positive effect on student loyalty. Service quality plays a crucial role in shaping student loyalty in higher education. Delivering quality academic services involves more than accuracy; it encompasses

reliability, responsiveness to student needs, confidence in resolving issues, genuine empathy during interactions, and providing a welcoming, supportive learning environment. All these factors shape a positive student experience throughout their educational journey.

When students are satisfied with the services they receive, they become more committed to the university. This loyalty might be shown by their desire to continue their studies at the school or by promoting it to others. In contrast, if students perceive poor service quality, they may opt for alternative options, such as transferring to another school or submitting negative feedback, which could undermine the university's image.

These findings align with earlier work by Komljenovic et al. (2025), which confirmed the substantial impact of service quality on student loyalty. Also aligned is previous research conducted by Fumasoli & Hladchenko (2023), which stated a positive relationship between service quality and student loyalty. With service quality, the likelihood of students maintaining loyalty to the university increases.

Improving customer service is crucial for helping an organization strengthen student loyalty.

The Impact of Student Loyalty on Brand Image (H3). The impact of student loyalty on brand image is remarkable. The findings indicate a t-statistic of 2.532 with a p-value of 0.006. This shows that student loyalty is a significant predictor of brand image. Students loyal to an institution complete their courses and serve as "ambassadors" for promoting the institution through their behavior and recommendations. This phenomenon is characterized by their readiness to recommend the institution to other prospective students, leave favorable comments, and demonstrate involvement in its life.

They say happy students make happy spokespersons for universities, which is quite true. Connected learners must share their experiences with the institution, enhancing the brand. On the contrary, students who have weak emotional ties with the institution and do not feel included have a damaging effect, as apathetic learners will either badmouth the institution or give no word-of-mouth recommendations. So, the brand image can be positively or negatively impacted by the student's emotional connection with the institution.

This is further confirmed by the latest studies (Zhu & Guo, 2021), which have shown that student loyalty has a significant impact on brand image. Additionally, previous studies conducted by Seow & Hussain (2024) have shown that the stronger the student loyalty, the stronger the accentuated brand image of the university. Good student loyalty improves the brand image of the institution.

The Impact of Student Satisfaction on Brand Image (H4): Student satisfaction has a measurable impact on brand image and is proven significant. With a t-statistic of 1.865 and a p-value of 0.031, it is evident that student satisfaction has a positive influence on brand image. This suggests that universities need to be concerned with students' perceptions and the experiences that shape their view of the institution. Student satisfaction stems from interactions with numerous factors, from teaching to the institution's facilities, administrative help, and the learning environment. If students are satisfied with these factors, there is a higher chance that their view of the university will be positive.

The relationship between student satisfaction and student brand image can enhance the university's brand image and perception. Satisfied students are more likely to spread good impressions in person and on social media. Furthermore, consistent satisfaction can foster student retention, positively impacting the brand image.

These findings corroborate the results of previous research (Zhu & Guo, 2021), which demonstrated that student satisfaction directly impacts brand image. Moreover, the findings are consistent with a 2023 study by Seow & Hussain (2024), which noted a

positive association between brand image and student satisfaction. The perception of the university's brand image increases as the students' satisfaction level increases. An important finding of this study is that enhancing student satisfaction remains the most important priority for universities regarding brand building and marketing in education. The Effect of Student Satisfaction on Student Loyalty (H5). It has been empirically observed that the effect of student satisfaction extends significantly to student loyalty. Specifically, the findings indicate a t-statistic of 4.107 and a p-value of 0.000, suggesting student satisfaction significantly positively affects student loyalty. Thus, student loyalty can be understood as a strategic factor of educational institutional governance. In this case, the learner's level of satisfaction reflects the degree to which the university's learning opportunities, requirements, and expectations are fulfilled. Satisfied students tend to demonstrate a higher level of commitment to the institution, and, as a result, allegiance toward the institution increases.

Several explanations regarding the relationship between student satisfaction and student loyalty can be presented.

To begin with, students who are satisfied with the services offered are likely to continue studying at the same university, as they believe the institution has fulfilled their expectations. Also, satisfaction enables students to advocate for the university, motivating other prospective students and showcasing their commitment to the university.

These results align with earlier research conducted by Komljenovic et al. (2025), which verified that student satisfaction significantly impacts student loyalty. Additionally, these results align with those of Zhu & Guo (2021), who observed a positive correlation between student satisfaction and student loyalty. There is a direct relationship between students' higher satisfaction levels and greater loyalty to the university. This calls for enhancing student satisfaction at universities by improving the quality of services, facilities, academic assistance, and other supportive factors, which would enhance loyalty.

The Effect of Student Satisfaction on Brand Image Mediated by Student Loyalty (H6). The impact of brand image on student satisfaction, mediated by student loyalty, has been validated as significant. A t-statistic of 2.176 and a p-value of 0.000 indicate that student satisfaction significantly impacts brand image, which is mediated by student loyalty.

Therefore, educational institutions' marketing strategy considers student satisfaction's impact on brand image, as mediated by student loyalty. Brand Image refers to the perception of a university held by the public and is shaped mainly by the university's students. When students are satisfied with the learning experiences offered by educational institutions, they perceive the university positively, and there is also a probability of their demonstrating increased loyalty.

There are various ways to describe the phenomena of student satisfaction and brand image. One of the strongest focuses on student satisfaction is student retention. More specifically, satisfied students are more likely to remain associated with and retain the institution. Strong retention and loyalty promote strong recommendations to prospective students, fostering advocacy. A second explanation is that the impact of positive advocacy and loyalty on brand image is further enhanced through word-of-mouth marketing and social media mentions.

These results align with earlier work conducted by O'Dea (2024), which verified that student satisfaction has a considerable impact on brand image mediated by student loyalty. Moreover, the results are consistent with a prior study by Komljenovic et al. (2025), which established a positive relationship between student satisfaction and brand image, with student loyalty acting as a mediator.

The stronger the satisfaction students experience, the greater their loyalty, which enhances the institution's brand image.

Universities should focus on enhancing student satisfaction to improve the quality of services, facilities, and academic support offered. This will enhance student loyalty and improve their brand image within the community.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed the effect of service quality and student satisfaction on brand image, mediated by student loyalty, at a private university in Sukabumi. The results show that several conclusions can be drawn from the findings: service quality has a positive and significant effect on brand image, service quality has a positive and significant effect on student loyalty, student loyalty has a positive and significant effect on brand image, student satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on brand image, and student satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on student loyalty. The fulfilment of students' needs positively and significantly impacts the institution's brand reputation, as mediated by the students' loyalty. This implies that high levels of service quality and student satisfaction strongly influence student loyalty and the institution's brand reputation.

Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to continuously improve service quality and focus on the student experience to build loyalty and a strong brand image in the competitive education market.

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The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could be considered to influence the work reported in this paper.

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