

The Meaning of Word of Mouth and Consumer Considerations in Choosing Andi Sapada Institute

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how word of mouth and consumer behaviour shape prospective students' decisions to choose the Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada as their place of study. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving prospective students, current students, and alumni selected using purposive sampling. Data were analyzed interactively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while ensuring data trustworthiness through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that word of mouth originating from alumni, current students, families, and other social networks functions as a crucial bridge between the institution's formal information and the actual experiences of users of educational services, thereby shaping prospective students' perceptions of the campus reputation, quality, and atmosphere. Furthermore, the consumer behaviour patterns of prospective students are characterized by a combination of rational considerations, such as reputation, program relevance, career prospects, and costs, and emotional considerations, including a sense of comfort, value congruence, and support from families and reference groups in the decision-making process. These findings underscore the importance of managing student experiences and strengthening relationships with alumni as strategic efforts to enhance the attractiveness and trustworthiness of Institut Andi Sapada.

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1. Introduction

In the context of increasingly intense competition among higher education institutions, particularly in the digital era, prospective students' decision-making processes in selecting a university can no longer be understood merely as a linear rational process. Rather, it should be viewed as a complex set of considerations embedded with social meanings, subjective

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experiences, and symbolic interactions with various sources of information.³ One of the key dynamics in this process is word of mouth (WOM), namely informal interpersonal communication through which individuals share information that shapes perceptions and influences a person's decisions regarding a product or service, including higher education institutions.⁴ From a qualitative perspective, word of mouth is not only treated as a measurable variable, but also as a social practice that embodies narratives, evaluations, and experiences that are interpreted differently by each actor.

Word of mouth in the higher education context may originate from alumni, current students, parents, academic staff, and the wider community who have direct or indirect experience with the institution. Information derived from lived experiences tends to be regarded as more authentic and credible than formal institutional promotional messages, so that both positive and negative testimonials have the potential to shape the image and reputation of a university in the eyes of prospective students.⁵ Informal narratives regarding the quality of teaching and learning, lecturer–student relationships, campus social life, and access to employment opportunities after graduation form part of the meaning-making structures that guide prospective students in assessing the suitability of a higher education institution as a place for further study.

Beyond WOM, consumer behaviour in the higher education domain reflects how prospective students interpret, experience, and respond to various institutional attributes, ranging from institutional reputation, academic quality, tuition costs, and career prospects to the comfort of the campus's social and physical environment.⁶ Within a qualitative approach, consumer behaviour is not merely understood as a response to marketing stimuli, but as a meaning-making process shaped by internal factors such as motivation, perception, values, and attitudes, as well as external factors including family recommendations, peer influence, alumni networks, and exposure to social media. Accordingly, the decision to choose a higher education institution represents a multilayered negotiation between personal preferences, family expectations, circulating information within the social environment, and the institution's representations in digital spaces.

The phenomenon observed in the Ajattapareng region indicates that the Institute of Social and Business Sciences Andi Sapada operates within an increasingly competitive environment alongside various other public and private universities. In this situation, prospective students tend to become more selective and critical, relying not only on official information from brochures, websites, or promotional events, but also on the experiences of alumni and current students that circulate through everyday conversations and digital platforms. Narratives shared by these actors ranging from the quality of academic interactions, access to academic advising, and flexibility of administrative services to the dynamics of student organizational life collectively shape prospective students' mental image of the Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada (hereinafter referred to as Institut Andi Sapada), which in turn influences their interest in applying.

Within this framework, word of mouth occupies a strategic position as a key mechanism for shaping public perceptions of higher education institutions. Positive testimonials regarding the quality of teaching, the relevance of the curriculum to labour market needs, the adequacy of

³ Ade Irwan. *Pengaruh Word of Mouth dan Perilaku Konsumen Terhadap Keputusan Berkuliah di Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada*. Skripsi. Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada

⁴ Sastra Mico, S. E. *Keputusan Mahasiswa Dalam Memilih Perguruan Tinggi: Perspektif Manajemen Pemasaran*. Scopindo Media Pustaka, 2020.

⁵ Puteri, Muthia Fadila. "Pengaruh Pengalaman Belajar, Kepuasan dan Loyalitas Mahasiswa Terhadap Word of Mouth dan Keputusan Memilih Perguruan Tinggi Swasta." PhD diss., Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2024.

⁶ Ade Irwan. *Pengaruh Word of Mouth dan Perilaku Konsumen Terhadap Keputusan Berkuliah di Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada*. Skripsi. Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada

learning support facilities, and the success of alumni in entering the job market can strengthen the trust of prospective students and their families in Institut Andi Sapada.⁷ Conversely, negative perceptions circulated through word of mouth for instance, concerning bureaucratic obstacles, slow administrative services, or facilities perceived as inadequate can rapidly spread via social media and informal conversations, thereby contributing to the construction of an unfavourable institutional image. The polarization between positive and negative narratives thus positions word of mouth as a critical arena for understanding how prospective students evaluate risks and benefits when considering their choice of university.⁸

In this context, consumer behaviour is no longer understood merely as a response to the marketing mix, but as a social process shaped by reference groups, local opinion leaders, and online communities in which prospective students interact.⁹ For Institut Andi Sapada, understanding how prospective students interpret the information they receive from both formal and informal channels is crucial for formulating a more holistic student experience management strategy. A qualitative approach enables researchers to explore in depth the stories, expectations, concerns, and latent considerations that are not always captured through quantitative instruments, such as how families influence educational choices, how alumni narrate their study trajectories, and how students ascribe meaning to the reputation of Institut Andi Sapada within their social networks.

Drawing on this background, the present study aims to qualitatively analyse how word of mouth and consumer behaviour shape students' decision-making processes in choosing to study at Institut Andi Sapada. This study seeks to interpret the experiences and narratives of prospective students, current students, and alumni to uncover meaning patterns that underlie their choice of Institut Andi Sapada, rather than merely testing relationships between variables statistically. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for higher education managers in designing experience-based marketing strategies and improving the quality of both academic and non-academic services, while at the same time enriching the theoretical discourse on higher education consumer behaviour in Indonesia, particularly in the context of universities in the Ajattapareng region.

2. Metode

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, focusing on an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings constructed by informants regarding word of mouth and consumer behaviour in the decision to choose Institut Andi Sapada as a place of study. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with prospective students, current students, and alumni who were purposively selected based on their level of involvement with and experience of the institution. In addition to interviews, data were also gathered through observations of the campus environment and an examination of relevant documents such as brochures, social media content, and institutional profile documents—to enrich the context and deepen the interpretations.

The data analysis process was conducted interactively and continued throughout the research stages, beginning with data reduction, followed by data display, and culminating in conclusion drawing and verification. The researcher carried out coding of interview transcripts and field notes to identify key themes related to the forms, content, and impacts of word of mouth, as well as patterns of consumer behaviour in choosing higher education institutions.

⁷ Sepriano, S., Judijanto, L., & Rustiyana, R. (2025). *Service Quality in Higher Education*. PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

⁸ Sudirjo, Frans, Nurlaela Jauhar, Nurchayati Nurchayati, Asmawati Ashari, Hijrayanti Sari, Meli Siagawati, Mas'ud Anis Anshari, Dedi Herdiansyah, Cahyadi Supyansuri, and Imriani Idrus. "Manajemen Pemasaran Jasa Pendidikan: Konsep, Model, dan Implementasi." (2023).

⁹ Harinie, Luluk Tri. *Perilaku Konsumen Bagi Pasar Produk Lokal*. CV. Intelektual Manifes Media, 2025.

Data credibility was ensured through source and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from different categories of informants and various data collection techniques, and by conducting member checks with key informants to confirm that the researcher's interpretations were aligned with their lived experiences.¹⁰ Accordingly, this study is expected to generate a rich and in-depth portrayal of the dynamics of word of mouth and consumer behaviour without relying on statistical calculations or quantitative data processing.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Dynamics of Word of Mouth in the Formation of Prospective Students' Perceptions

Word of mouth (WOM) in the context of university choice can be understood as an informal interpersonal communication process through which individuals share experiences, evaluations, and recommendations about an institution with others whom they perceive as relevant.¹¹ In the services marketing literature, WOM is regarded as more credible than advertising because it originates from individuals perceived as close or trustworthy, and thus exerts a strong influence on the formation of prospective consumers' perceptions, including those of prospective students.¹² This underscores that WOM constitutes one of the strategic communication channels for influencing further study decisions. In the higher education context, WOM sources do not only come from direct customers such as current students, but also from alumni, parents, community leaders, and peer networks who have access to information about a particular campus. Alumni, for instance, are often positioned as representations of institutional success because their performance and achievements in the labour market send quality signals to prospective students.¹³ When alumni demonstrate successful career trajectories, this reinforces the institution's image and enhances public trust in the quality of education it provides. Previous studies have shown that WOM exerts a positive and significant influence on study decisions across various higher education institutions. Research conducted at STIE Muhammadiyah Pringsewu and STTKD Yogyakarta, for instance, found that WOM communication affects prospective students' decisions to continue their studies, although these studies employed quantitative approaches. These findings indicate that the dynamics of WOM merit deeper qualitative investigation to understand how meanings, narratives, and experiences are constructed and negotiated by prospective students.

From a perceptual theory perspective, information received by prospective students through WOM is not absorbed passively, but is processed through selection, interpretation, and retention based on each individual's background, experiences, and expectations. Perceptions of a university do not depend solely on the content of information, but also on who conveys it, the context in which it is communicated, and the emotional relationship between the message sender and receiver.¹⁴ Accordingly, WOM becomes an arena in which the reality of higher education institutions is socially constructed. The dynamics of WOM are also strongly shaped by the socio-cultural context in which prospective students are embedded. In communities with strong communal ties, such as in many regions of Indonesia, educational decisions are often not

¹⁰ Rijali, Ahmad. "Analisis data kualitatif." *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 17, no. 33 (2018): 81-95. <https://doi.org/10.18592/alhadharah.v17i33.2374>

¹¹ Ade Irwan. *Pengaruh Word of Mouth dan Perilaku Konsumen Terhadap Keputusan Berkuliah di Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada*. Skripsi. Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada

¹² Putra, Robby Aditya, Intan Kurnia Syaputri, and Ayu Yulia Muhsari. *Rebut Perhatian Gen Z! Newsjacking & E-WOM sebagai Cara Ampuh Perguruan Tinggi Rebut Perhatian Generasi Z*. PT Kimhsafi Alung Cipta, 2026.

¹³ Siregar, Esli Zuraidah, M. Sos, M. Ag Magdalena, Anas Habibi Ritonga, Nuhariyah Hasibuan, M. Sos, Masrul Effendi Umar Harahap, M. Sos, Zulfa Noni Yuli Eviyanti, and M. M. Se. *Strategi Membangun Citra Fakultas Dakwah Dan Ilmu Komunikasi Di Ptkin*. Bypass, 2026.

¹⁴ Puteri, M. F. (2024). *Pengaruh Pengalaman Belajar, Kepuasan dan Loyalitas Mahasiswa Terhadap Word of Mouth dan Keputusan Memilih Perguruan Tinggi Swasta* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Islam Indonesia).

made individually, but through joint discussions and collective deliberation within families and social environments. Studies on the influence of perceptions and social environment on the decision to pursue higher education show that social environment contributes significantly to educational motivation and decision-making.¹⁵ On this basis, it is reasonable to assume that WOM in the Ajattapareng region is likewise likely to unfold within such a collective decision-making framework. The role of alumni in WOM dynamics becomes increasingly salient when they actively maintain relationships with their alma mater and contribute to various campus activities. High levels of alumni engagement not only strengthen the campus community, but also help construct a positive institutional image in the eyes of prospective students and external stakeholders. Theoretically, this is closely related to the concept of organizational identification, whereby alumni who have a strong psychological attachment to their institution are more inclined to disseminate positive WOM and act as informal ambassadors of the campus.

WOM does not manifest solely as face-to-face oral communication, but also evolves into electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) via social media and digital platforms. Studies on e-WOM on Instagram indicate that social media content and interactions can significantly influence study decision.¹⁶ In digitally connected youth environments, narratives about universities circulating on social media whether from official accounts or personal posts by students and alumni contribute to shaping prospective students' perceptions. The literature further emphasizes that positive WOM tends to increase intentions and decisions to choose a particular university, whereas negative WOM can diminish prospective students' interest. However, this influence is not always linear; prospective students may use negative WOM as a trigger to seek additional information, request clarification, or compare it with other information sources. From a qualitative standpoint, this illustrates that WOM forms part of an ongoing process of meaning negotiation rather than merely functioning as a stimulus to which individuals respond automatically.

The dynamics of WOM are also closely linked to the quality of students' experiences during their studies. Research on information quality, facilities, and alumni suggests that the combination of these three aspects has a positive effect on prospective students' decisions to choose a university. When students are satisfied with learning facilities, academic services, and their relationships with lecturers, they are more likely to share these experiences as positive WOM with those around them.¹⁷ Conversely, dissatisfaction may give rise to negative WOM that spreads rapidly, particularly through digital media. Within the framework of services marketing theory, WOM can be understood as an outcome of student satisfaction and loyalty. A study at Universitas Dharma Andalas, for example, shows that WOM has a significant effect on student satisfaction and on students' decisions to enrol at a particular higher education institution.¹⁸

This implies that the continuous management of the student experience from admission and learning processes to student services has direct implications for the narratives they disseminate within their social environments. The dynamics of WOM in higher education also intersect with the concept of institutional brand image. Empirical studies on the effects of WOM

¹⁵ Surokim, Nur'annafi Farni Syam Maella, Muhammad Yudiana Indriastuti, Fahrudin Bani Eka Dartiningsih Fadeli Abdullah, Tatag Handaka Syamsul Arifin, and Harliantara Rendy Pahrun Wadipalapa. *Potret & Dinamika Komunikasi Masyarakat Lokal Dalam Perspektif Jawa Timur*. Penerbit KBM Indonesia, 2026.

¹⁶ Nasution, Nurul Fadilah, Hendri Prasetya, and Abdul Khohar. "Peran Electronic Word of Mouth sebagai Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran pada Produk Avoskin." *Jurnal Indonesia: Manajemen Informatika dan Komunikasi* 5, no. 3 (2024): 2345-2355. <https://doi.org/10.35870/jimik.v5i3.900>

¹⁷ Sepriano, Sepriano, Loso Judijanto, and Rustiyana Rustiyana. *Service Quality in Higher Education*. PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia, 2025.

¹⁸ Haryeni, Haryeni, and Aulia Mawaddah. "Komunikasi Word Of Mouth Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keputusan Dan Kepuasan Mahasiswa Kuliah Di Universitas Dharma Andalas (Unidha) Padang." *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengkajian Ilmiah Sosial Budaya* 1, no. 1 (2022): 175-186.

and brand image on prospective students' decisions indicate that both variables contribute to the decision to pursue higher education at a particular institution.¹⁹ A strong brand image is not shaped solely by formal promotional materials, but also by the consistency of experiences narrated by students and alumni through WOM. Accordingly, WOM functions both as a reinforcing mechanism and, at times, as a corrective to the image that institutions seek to project. In the context of the Institute of Social and Business Sciences Andi Sapada, WOM can be viewed as a bridge linking formal institutional information such as accreditation status, academic programmes, and vision mission statements with the lived experiences of users of educational services. The literature indicates that prospective students often combine official information with others' experiential narratives to construct a more holistic understanding of the universities they are considering. At this point, WOM helps prospective students answer the question of "what it actually feels like to study there," which cannot always be fully conveyed through brochures or official institutional websites.

Consumer behaviour theory posits that decisions to purchase educational services are shaped not only by functional aspects (such as tuition fees and facilities), but also by psychological and social dimensions, including feelings of security, social recognition, and opportunities for self-development. WOM becomes critical because it conveys symbolic information for example, that a university is perceived as "like a family," "disciplined," or "creative" which helps prospective students assess the fit between their own identities and the institution's perceived character.²⁰ Accordingly, WOM contributes to shaping the perceived campus identity in the minds of prospective students. The dynamics of WOM must also be understood against the backdrop of intensifying competition among higher education institutions in Indonesia. Various studies underscore that amid the proliferation of institutional choices, promotional activities cannot rely solely on one-way communication, but must also attend to how student and alumni experiences are articulated and circulate in the public sphere. In such a context, universities that are able to manage student experiences consistently and cultivate enduring relationships with alumni are more likely to generate positive WOM organically.²¹

Conceptually, the existing literature provides a foundation for understanding that the dynamics of WOM in shaping prospective students' perceptions constitute a complex process involving interactions among experience quality, social networks, digital media, individual perceptions, and institutional image. By employing a qualitative approach, these dynamics can be explored more deeply through the unpacking of narratives, symbols, and meanings embedded in stories about universities, thereby offering richer insights for Institut Andi Sapada's management in formulating strategies to strengthen institutional image and manage relationships with students and alumni.

3.2. Patterns of Consumer Behaviour in Students' Decisions to Enrol at Institut Andi Sapada

Prospective students' behaviour in choosing a university essentially represents a form of consumer behaviour in educational services that involves a series of stages, including need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and decision-making. In the context of Institut Andi Sapada, this process appears to combine both rational and emotional

¹⁹ Tampubolon, Nora, Dini Anggraini, and Edwin Agung Wibowo. "Pengaruh Word of Mouth, Brand Image, Biaya Pendidikan dan Lokasi Terhadap Keputusan Mahasiswa Memilih Berkuliah di Universitas Riau Kepulauan (Studi Kasus Pada Mahasiswa Baru Program Studi Manajemen Angkatan 2022/2023)." (2025).

²⁰ Kusumawati, Andriani. *Perilaku Konsumen dan Pemasaran Pendidikan Tinggi*. Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2018.

²¹ Ade Irwan. *Pengaruh Word of Mouth dan Perilaku Konsumen Terhadap Keputusan Berkuliah di Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada*. Skripsi. Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Andi Sapada

considerations, consistent with consumer behaviour theory, which posits that purchase decisions are shaped not only by cost–benefit calculations but also by psychological and social needs.

From a rational standpoint, numerous studies indicate that prospective students tend to consider institutional reputation, academic quality, the availability of programmes that match their interests, career prospects, facilities, and tuition fees as key factors in their decision-making. Research on the factors influencing university choice has found that institutional reputation, programme image, educational facilities, and programme prospects play a significant role in attracting prospective students.²² This aligns with the context of Institut Andi Sapada, where its reputation in the Ajattapareng area, the relevance of its study programmes to local and regional labour market needs, and a relatively affordable fee structure constitute important rational attractions. Such rational considerations are often understood by prospective students as a long-term investment associated with expectations of social mobility and future employment opportunities. The higher education consumer behaviour literature emphasizes that prospective students view universities as service providers that can enhance their competencies, social status, and competitiveness in the labour market. Consequently, career prospects and alumni success become key indicators in assessing whether a university including Institut Andi Sapada is perceived as a worthy choice.

In addition, tuition fees and financial support (such as scholarships or fee reductions) also shape prospective students' rational considerations, particularly among families with limited economic resources. However, several studies suggest that cost does not always serve as the sole determining factor, as programme image and institutional reputation may offset perceptions of high fees as long as the long-term benefits are perceived as substantial. In the case of Institut Andi Sapada, which offers relatively affordable tuition fees, this position may constitute a competitive advantage, especially within the Ajattapareng region.

At the same time, emotional dimensions play an important role in shaping consumer behaviour patterns among prospective students. University choice decisions are often influenced by feelings of comfort, psychological closeness to the campus environment, and the perceived alignment between personal values and institutional culture.²³ Prospective students tend to seek universities that are not only strong academically, but are also experienced as places where they can grow, be socially accepted, and build supportive friendship networks. Higher education consumer behaviour theory positions experience and “student experience” as key factors in shaping preferences and decisions. A study at a campus in Makassar, for example, found that student experience including interactions with lecturers, classroom atmosphere, and involvement in campus activities has a significant effect on the intention to choose that campus. In the context of Institut Andi Sapada, positive student experiences related to close relationships with lecturers, support for student organizations, and a conducive academic atmosphere can foster emotional bonds that strengthen prospective students' decisions.

Consumer behaviour patterns among prospective students can also be analysed through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which highlights the roles of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping intentions and decisions. Prospective students' attitudes toward Institut Andi Sapada are shaped by their beliefs about the benefits of studying there, such as employment opportunities, teaching quality, and the social environment.²⁴ When

²² Rahmayani, Umi. "Reputasi Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara Dalam Pandangan Mahasiswa Baru Fakultas Hukum Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara." PhD diss., Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu politik, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, 2025.

²³ Kusumawati, Andriani. *Perilaku Konsumen dan Pemasaran Pendidikan Tinggi*. Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2018.

²⁴ Utami, Anisa Putri. "Analisis Minat Mahasiswa Membuka Tabungan Haji Dengan Pendekatan Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Analysis of Student Interest in Opening Hajj Savings Using Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB))." (2023).

such beliefs are predominantly positive, students' attitudes toward Institut Andi Sapada also tend to be positive, thereby increasing their propensity to choose it. Subjective norms—that is, perceptions of the views held by significant others such as parents, siblings, teachers, and friends have also been shown to play a significant role in intentions to choose a university. Studies on reference groups and integrated marketing communications indicate that reference groups exert an important influence on students' intentions to select a higher education institution. In the context of Institut Andi Sapada, parental support grounded in the perception that the campus aligns with family values, together with positive recommendations from peers and teachers, reinforces prospective students' motivation to enrol there.

Perceived behavioural control relates to the extent to which prospective students feel realistically capable of attending their chosen university, for example in terms of geographical accessibility, financial capacity, and the availability of family support. A study in the city of Surabaya shows that individual interests, collective decision-making, career prospects, and university image influence students' decision-making processes in choosing higher education institutions.²⁵ When prospective students perceive that studying at Institut Andi Sapada is realistically attainable in terms of distance, cost, and family support, their perceived behavioural control regarding this choice is strengthened. The literature also underscores that university choice is the outcome of interactions between individual preferences and collective dynamics, and is therefore relational rather than purely individual. In Indonesia, many higher education decisions are made through family deliberation, in which the views of parents, siblings, and relatives contribute to the formation of the final decision. This pattern is highly relevant to Institut Andi Sapada, particularly within local communities that uphold strong family values and collective considerations in major decisions, including education.

The role of reference groups in higher education consumer behaviour is also reflected in the influence of peers, teachers, and school counsellors. Peers often serve as primary reference points for sharing information about universities, while teachers and guidance counsellors provide legitimacy and more rational explanations regarding institutional and programme quality. Accordingly, Institut Andi Sapada's efforts to build partnerships with schools and networks of guidance counsellors can strengthen its position within prospective students' consideration set.

The close relationship between prospective students' consumer behaviour and universities' marketing mix has also been identified in various studies. A study at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi IPWI Jakarta, for instance, shows that the marketing mix and consumer behaviour jointly exert a significant influence on students' decisions to choose a university, although the partial effect of consumer behaviour is positive but not always statistically significant. Conceptually, this highlights that higher education marketing strategies need to be designed in alignment with a deep understanding of prospective students' mindsets and preferences.

From a higher education marketing perspective, prospective students' behaviour which combines rational and emotional dimensions indicates the importance of marketing approaches that do not merely highlight factual data such as accreditation and facilities, but also foreground experiences and stories that illustrate real campus life.²⁶ This is consistent with findings that student experiences and testimonials constitute one of the primary drivers of intentions to choose a university, including in Makassar and other cities. For Institut Andi Sapada, narratives

²⁵ Diajeng Fitri, W. U. L. A. N. "Faktor yang Memengaruhi Persepsi dan Minat Berkariir Sebagai Akuntan Publik (Survei pada Mahasiswa Sarjana dan Magister Jurusan Akuntansi di PTN se-Sumatera tahun 2023)." PhD diss., Universitas Lampung, 2024.

²⁶ Kusumawati, Andriani. *Perilaku Konsumen dan Pemasaran Pendidikan Tinggi*. Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2018.

concerning close lecturer–student relationships, academic culture, and support for talent and interest development can serve as important content in marketing communications.

Prospective students' consumer behaviour patterns at Institut Andi Sapada can also be interpreted as responses to intensifying competition among universities in the Ajattapareng region and its surroundings. Amid the proliferation of campus options, prospective students tend to engage in more comprehensive comparisons, both rational and emotional, before reaching a decision. Universities that can offer a balanced combination of academic reputation, affordable tuition, career prospects, and a comfortable, inclusive campus atmosphere will enjoy a stronger bargaining position in the minds of education consumers.

Overall, consumer behaviour patterns in the decision to choose Institut Andi Sapada reflect a multilayered decision-making process: beginning with rational considerations regarding reputation, study programmes, career prospects, and costs; subsequently enriched by emotional considerations related to feelings of fit and comfort; and significantly shaped by family and reference groups. A nuanced understanding of these patterns provides a foundation for Institut Andi Sapada's management to formulate strategies for strengthening service quality, managing the student experience, and building partnerships with families and feeder schools, thereby enhancing the institution's attractiveness and trustworthiness among prospective students in the future.

4. Conclusion

Word of mouth and consumer behaviour play a strategic role in shaping prospective students' decisions to choose Institut Andi Sapada as a place of study. Word of mouth, whether originating from alumni, current students, families, or other social networks, functions as a bridge between the institution's formal information and the lived experiences of users of its educational services, thereby shaping perceptions of reputation, academic quality, and campus atmosphere in the minds of prospective students. The identified consumer behaviour patterns indicate that prospective students do not rely solely on official promotional messages, but are strongly influenced by experiential narratives circulating within their social environments, both through direct communication and via digital media.

Moreover, prospective students' consumer behaviour in choosing Institut Andi Sapada emerges from interactions between rational and emotional considerations that unfold within relational and collective contexts. On the rational side, institutional reputation, programme relevance, career prospects, and affordability constitute key decision criteria, while on the emotional side, feelings of comfort, value congruence, and connectedness with the campus community reinforce their choices. These decisions are further consolidated by the influence of families and reference groups, which provide legitimacy and social support for prospective students' choices. These findings imply that Institut Andi Sapada's management needs to manage the student experience comprehensively, strengthen relationships with alumni, and design communication strategies that integrate rational and emotional dimensions in order to enhance the institution's attractiveness and public trust.

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