

## The effect of subjective norm and electronic word of mouth on university choice

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### ARTICLE INFO

Received 18 May 2023  
Accepted 30 June 2023  
Published 30 August 2023

#### Keywords:

Subjective norm; e-wom; brand equity; university choice

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of subjective norms and electronic word of mouth on university choice with brand equity as a mediating variable (case studies at Universitas Negeri Padang). This research is quantitative research with the positivistic method. The sampling technique in this study used the nonprobability sampling method, namely the purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using a questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale with five alternative answers. The data analysis technique used SEM-PLS with software SmartPLS version 3. The results of the study found that subjective norms had a direct and significant effect on university choice. E-wom has a direct and significant effect on university choice. Brand equity has a direct and significant effect on university choice. Subjective norms have a direct and significant effect on brand equity. E-wom has a direct and significant effect on brand equity. There is an influence of subjective norms on university choice mediated by brand equity. There is an influence of e-wom on university choice mediated by brand equity.

**How to cite:** Alkautsar, T. A., & Abror. (2023). The effect of subjective norm and electronic word of mouth on university choice. *Operations Management and Information System Studies* 3 (2), 87-96. <https://doi.org/10.24036/omiss.v3i2.120>



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## INTRODUCTION

In the process of transmitting values and knowledge between educators, namely lecturers and students as students, one of the most significant educational facilities is higher education. In 2021, according to reports from the Central Statistics Agency, there are 3,957 tertiary institutions in Indonesia. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is responsible for 3,115 tertiary institutions, while the Ministry of Religion is responsible for 842 campuses. In Indonesia, institutions of higher education may be polytechnics, high schools, academics, universities, or institutes.

The university is a type of institution for postsecondary education known as a college and has numerous faculties, departments, and study programs. Every prospective student who will enroll in a postsecondary institution will be required to choose a study program or department. Prospective students' selection of study programs and universities is a defining moment in every phase of their lives (Wang &

Lin, 2017). Padang State University and Andalas University are two state universities that are in high demand among students in West Sumatra.

Padang State University is one of the metropolis of Padang's state universities. Padang State University (also known as UNP) is the outcome of the Padang Teachers' Training College's transformation into a university. Padang State University was able to obtain an A accreditation from BAN-PT in 2016, as well as improve extant facilities and infrastructure, including the addition of lecture building facilities. Currently, there are +42,000 students and 1,242 professors with 402 doctoral degrees (37%) and 840 master's degrees (63%). 26 of the 1242 lecturers have additional professional training.

In addition, Andalas University (commonly abbreviated UNAND) is an Indonesian public university located in Padang. This institution is one of the oldest universities outside of Java Island; Vice President Mohammad Hatta inaugurated it on December 23, 1955. At the time, UNAND was the fourth university established by the Indonesian government. There are campuses in Padang, Payakumbuh, and Dharmasraya in addition to the main campus in Limau Manis, Padang. There are fifteen faculties at UNAND, with the primary campus located in Limau Manis, Padang. Based on the research performance-based evaluation and aggregation of higher education institutions launched in November 2019 by the Ministry of Research and Technology or the National Research and Innovation Agency, Andalas University is ranked fourth among Indonesia's higher education institutions. This campus has been included in cluster 1 of Kemenristekdikti's state universities since 2016. Government Regulation Number 95 of 2021 designated Unand as the thirteenth Legal Entity State University (PTN-BH) in Indonesia in 2021.

UNAND is included in the top 20 ranking of higher education clusters in Indonesia, while UNP is outside the top 20 in the ranking of higher education clusters in Indonesia. UNAND can be said to have strong brand equity based on the clustering of higher education institutions in Indonesia compared to UNP. In addition, the community also positions UNP as a class 2 tertiary institution after UNAND. This impression may be because UNP was once a faculty under the auspices of UNAND, namely FKIP UNAND Bukittinggi in Batusangkar and FKIP UNAND in Padang. This history partially makes some people associate UNP as a higher education institution under UNAND.

Strong brand equity is very significant for someone who is choosing a university. The existence of brand equity in a tertiary institution can strengthen a positive image so that it makes it easier for students to choose a tertiary institution. Universities that have a positive image tend to be more in demand and chosen than other higher education institutions whose image is not good in the eyes of consumers (Wanda et al., 2021). Higher education brand equity is a force that has an impact on SMA/MA graduates who are potential customers of education services.

Previous research by Wanda et al. (2021) found that brand equity has a positive and statistically significant influence on students' college selection decisions. Brand equity can be reflected in how students perceive, feel, and act in relation to the brand, as well as the brand's price, market share, and profitability for the university. In this instance, a campus with a high vision will seek a high level of equity. Brand equity is essential for introducing brands to the public and garnering student loyalty for large brands such as universities. Currently, Padang's universities are expanding so rapidly that several campuses are competing to increase their brand equity.

Each university has its own strategy for developing brand equity so that students have a high level of brand awareness and remain loyal. Brand equity is created when students have a high level of brand awareness and familiarity as well as strong, positive, and distinctive brand associations in their memories. Several factors, including subjective normative (Nguyen & Ho, 2022; Perera et al., 2021) and e-women (Pertiwi & Rusfian, 2021), impact brand equity.

Aryadhe et al. (2018) found that subjective norms can affect the decision to choose. Subjective norms can also affect the brand equity of the university to be addressed. Students who have family, friends and parents who work in the field of education are more dominant in choosing to study at educational campuses such as UNP because UNP has the brand equity of universities which produce many teachers.

Meanwhile, students with family and friends with medical backgrounds are more dominant in choosing to continue their education at state universities such as UNAND which has a university brand equity that produces many qualified doctors.

E-WOM is in the form of opinions and comments shared by friends and family in an online community or social media. Consumers use social media as a place to share opinions about a product, brand, promotion and other information. Word of mouth communication through electronic media makes it easier for students to find information about majors or study programs and can influence students to choose the campus they want. Statements received by students by word of mouth are not necessarily positive statements but can be negative statements. The problem of e-wom at prospective student universities prioritizes entering UNAND as a favorite state university than other campuses including UNP.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **University choice**

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008), decision making is an individual activity that is directly engaged in acquiring and utilizing the offered products. Harahap et al. (2018) define the decision to choose a place to study (university choice) as the introduction, action, and attitude of prospective students in deciding which college to attend. University choice also the decision prospective students make when selecting a university. McDonough dalam Harahap et al. (2018) also explained that prospective pupils who will pursue higher education after high school make study choices. Participating school counselors in the selection of graduate school aid in the organization of information in colleges and assist parents in understanding their role in encouraging their children to continue their education.

### **Brand equity**

Brand equity is a collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, its name and symbol, which increase or decrease the value provided by a product or service to a business or business's customers (Aaker, 2014). Menurut According to Shimp (2012), brand equity is the brand value that results in strong, positive, and possibly unique brand associations that consumers remember for a particular brand. Brand equity can be reflected in how consumers perceive, feel, and act in relation to the brand, as well as in the price, market share, and profitability that the brand affords the company.

### **Subjective norm**

Ajzen (2005) defines subjective norm as a person's perception of whether people are essential to the person who believes the behavior should be carried out. Subjective norms derive from the interior element or human conscience (Perera et al., 2021). Shin & Hancer (2016) define subjective norms as an individual's perception of the influence of the social environment on his decision to engage in or refrain from engaging in specific behaviors. According to Canova et al. (2020), the formation of subjective norms in individuals is predicated on the belief that the majority of their significant others expect them to engage in particular behaviors, so individuals will be motivated to engage in these behaviors. In contrast, if the individual's significant others expect him not to perform or avoid a particular behavior, he will not perform or avoid that behavior.

### **Electronic word of mouth (E-wom)**

According to one indicator of the development of technology and information, the pervasive use of social media in the business world by the general public is evidence of this development. Through social media, one can share experiences, conduct product reviews, and interact with other consumers. This mode of communication is known as E-wom (Al-Debei et al., 2015). According to Kotler and Keller (2016), viral marketing, also known as electronic word of mouth, is marketing that uses the Internet to generate the

effect of word of mouth to support marketing efforts and goals. E-wom has become a significant factor in hotel reservations; many visitors find reviews to be nearly as influential as a hotel's brand or price.

## METHOD

From the time the proposal is drafted until the research is conducted, it is anticipated that April 2023 will pass. The investigation was conducted in Padang. This study employs quantitative research, a technique founded on positivist philosophy and also known as the positivistic method. This procedure meets the prerequisites of being concrete, quantifiable, systematic, and objective. This quantitative method can be created using cutting-edge science and technology, with the research conducted in numerical form and analyzed using statistics (Sugiyono, 2016).

This study's participants were freshmen at Padang State University. In this research, the nonprobability sampling technique was utilized. Purposive sampling is one of the methods for determining the sample size in non-probability sampling. This research sample was comprised of prospective pupils who would choose Padang State University. The statement (Hair et al., 2017) that the number of samples as respondents must be adjusted to the number of indicators  $n \times 5$  observed variables (indicators) up to  $n \times 10$  observed variables (indicators) applies to the determination of the minimal number of samples in this study. Based on these calculations, it can be concluded that the research sample consists of at least 220 participants. It is anticipated that the number of samples will be representative of the research sample. This formula is used because the population size is extremely large and the numbers fluctuate.

This research utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. This study's primary data were collected by disseminating questionnaires to the study population. In order to obtain direct responses, questionnaires were disseminated by distributing questions to sheets of paper and Google forms and then distributing them to respondents. This secondary data is typically obtained from Internet-based publications and other sources pertinent to the research topic. This research's secondary data consists of Internet-based publications, books, and scholarly articles or periodicals concerning subjective norms, electronic word of mouth, brand equity, and university choice.

Data collection techniques in this study using a questionnaire. This questionnaire employs a Likert scale with five possible alternatives. Respondents can respond to the questionnaire statements by inserting a checkmark (✓) next to one of the five provided options. The data were then analyzed using SEM-PLS analysis with the application Smart PLS version 3. This technique was used to compensate for the limitations of the regression method in data processing (Ghozali, 2016). The objective of SEM-PLS analysis is to maximize the variance of criterion latent variables that can be explained by predictor latent variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary data that researchers have collected through questionnaires distributed via Google form to UNP students totaled 220 questionnaires can be classified as follows.

**Table 1. Characteristic of Respondent**

No	Characteristics	Choice	Total	
			F	%
1	Gender	Man	100	45
		Woman	122	55
2	Age	<18 years	138	62.2
		18 years	56	25.2
		19 years	63	28.4

No	Characteristics	Choice	Total	
			F	%
		20 years	19	8.6
3	Last education	Senior High School	187	84.2
		Vocational School	35	15.8
4	Study program	Accountancy	1	0.5
		Guidance and counseling	15	6.8
		Recreational Health	1	0.5
		Management	36	16.2
		Indonesian language and literature education	33	14.9
		English language education	1	0.5
		Japanese Language Education	9	4.1
		Early Childhood Teacher Education	1	0.5
		Primary teacher education	25	11.3
		Natural Science Education	11	5
		Mathematics education	1	0.5
		Sports Education	30	13.5
		Fine Arts Education	1	0.5
		Electrical Engineering	13	5.9
		Mechanical Engineering	21	9.5
5	Faculty	Mining Engineering	4	1.8
		Education technology	1	0.5
		Faculty of Language and Art	44	19.8
		Faculty of Economics	37	16.7
		Faculty of Science Education	42	18.9
		Faculty of Sport Science	31	14
		Faculty of Social Science	18	8.1
		Faculty of Public Health	10	2.9
6	Education programs	Faculty of Engineering	38	17.1
		Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences	12	5.4
7	Entry Year	D3	23	10.4
		S1	199	89.6
8	Semester	2020	20	9
		2021	65	29.3
		2022	137	61.7
9	Cost of education	2	136	61.3
		4	66	29.7
		6	20	9
		< Rp. 2.000.000,-	23	10.4
10	Parents Income	Rp. 2.000.000,---Rp. 3.500.000,-	18	8.1
		Rp. 3.500.000,---Rp. 4.500.000,-	49	22.1
		Rp. 4.500.000,---Rp. 5.500.000,-	132	59.5
		>Rp. 6.500.000,-	4	1.8
		< Rp. 2.000.000,-	44	19.8
		Rp. 2.000.000,---Rp. 3.500.000,-	26	11.7
<b>Total</b>			<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

Sourcel: Priimary Data Proceisseid (2023)

### Validity test

Validity testing is carried out to prove that all variables are different from one another. opinion from Hair et al. (2018) a measurement can be declared valid if it meets the criteria, namely the AVE value is equal to or more than 0.5.

**Table 2. Average Variance Extract**

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
<i>Brand Equity</i>	0.596
<i>E-wom</i>	0.741
<i>Subjective Norm</i>	0.764
<i>University Choice</i>	0.601

Source: Primary Data Processed (2023)

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the AVE value for each variable has met the required rule of thumb, namely the AVE value > 0.50. So, this research can be declared valid.

### Reliability test

Reliability test is a sign of stability and consistency of measuring instruments against concepts and helps assess the certainty of a measurement Sekaran & Bougei (2016). Variables are said to be reliable if the Cronbach alpha value is > 0.6, the results of the reliability test can be seen in Table 3:

**Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability**

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
<i>Brand Equity</i>	0.932	0.942
<i>E-wom</i>	0.884	0.920
<i>Subjective Norm</i>	0.897	0.928
<i>University Choice</i>	0.956	0.960

Source: Primary Data Processed (2023)

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the output value of Cronbach alpha and composite reliability for each variable is > 0.6. This is in accordance with the rule of thumb where the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability values for each variable must be greater than 0.6, meaning that the data in Table 3 can be declared reliable.

### Hypothesis testing

The significance of the estimated parameters provides very useful information about the relationship between the research variables. The basis used in testing the hypothesis is the value contained in the path coefficient output. Used in testing the hypothesis is the value contained in the path coefficient output. Hypothesis testing can be done based on the level of significance and the value of the path coefficient between latent variables. For significance guidelines on p value with a value below 0.05 or t statistics > 1.96. The table of path coefficient between variables is as follows:

**Table 4. Path Coefficient**

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Hypothesis
<i>Subjective Norm -&gt; University</i>	0.141	0.143	0.064	2.213	0.027	Accepted
<i>E-wom -&gt; University Choice</i>	0.192	0.187	0.074	2.589	0.010	Accepted
<i>Brand Equity -&gt; University Choice</i>	0.556	0.555	0.096	5.785	0.000	Accepted
<i>Subjective Norm -&gt; Brand Equity</i>	0.247	0.249	0.073	3.403	0.001	Accepted

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Hypothesis
E-wom -> Brand Equity	0.399	0.396	0.057	6.949	0.000	Accepted
Subjective Norm -> Brand Equity -> University Choice	0.137	0.139	0.049	2.813	0.005	Accepted
E-wom -> Brand Equity -> University Choice	0.334	0.334	0.068	4.907	0.000	Accepted

Source: Primary Data Processed (2023)

Based on Table 4, it is known that all hypotheses can be accepted as seen in Table 4 that the p-value of each hypothesis is below the significance level <0.05.

**Model**

Structural model testing is carried out in stages until appropriate results are obtained. Then, the complete structural model will be estimated by including the indicators that have been tested in the measurement model analysis. Based on the results of data processing that has been done, the following model is obtained:

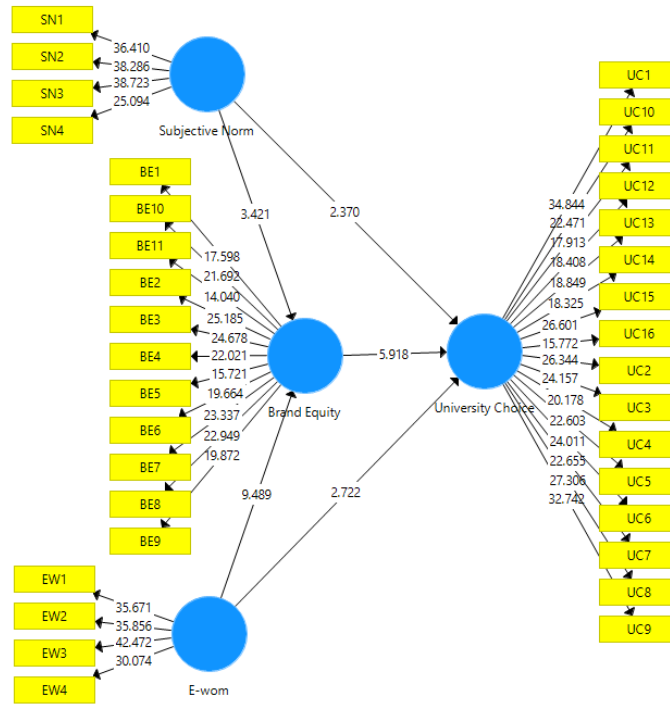


Figure 1. Structural Model

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing above, a discussion can be attached that discusses the results and objectives of the study, as follows:

**The effect of subjective norms on university choice**

In case studies of students at Padang State University, subjective norms were found to have a direct and statistically significant impact on their university choice. This finding indicates that students have a mind that is influenced by the opinions and approval of the people around them or their social milieu when deciding which university to attend. If students receive adequate subjective norms, they will be able to select the university of their choice. Consistent with the findings of Aryadhe et al. (2018), subjective norms can influence the decision to select.

Subjective norms can influence a student's desire to attend a particular university. According to Tan and Keni (2020), subjective norms are a significant variable that affects product purchase intentions. Reference groups influence the college selection process for prospective pupils. Prospective students as consumers anticipate their opinions on the reference group so that they do not make poor purchasing decisions, namely in selecting universities in which they are interested.

#### **The effect of e-wom on university choice**

Based on the results of the analysis, it has been determined that e-wom has a direct and significant impact on university choice. This finding indicates that students have a mind that is influenced by the opinions and approval of the people around them or their social milieu when deciding which university to attend. This means that as e-women increase, so will university choice.

E-wom is electronic communication in the form of likes, remarks, or invitations. E-wom is believed to be one of the marketing communication mixtures that can affect college selection interest. The distinctive characteristics of E-wom communication enable the effective use of E-wom to influence students' college selection (Hermansyah, 2018). The better the E-wom received by pupils, the more favorable the college selection decision will be.

#### **The effect of brand equity on university choice**

According to the results of the analysis, brand equity has a direct and significant impact on university choice. This finding indicates that universities with a strong brand equity encourage students to attend their institution. If the character of brand equity improves, so too will university choice. The findings are consistent with those of Wanda et al. (2021), who found that brand equity influences students' college selection decisions. Brand equity is one of the factors that can influence prospective students' selection of an institution of higher education. Prospective students will find it simpler to decide which tertiary institution to attend if the institution's brand equity is stronger.

Brand equity plays a significant role in enhancing the value of a brand and creating consumer appeal, including in the education sector, specifically among universities. This is due to the fact that universities with high brand equity will be able to endure and expand in the world of higher education (Setiawan et al., 2022). In addition, brand equity is one of the factors that influence consumers' purchasing decisions, in this case prospective students' selection of colleges at which to continue their education. Universities with a strong brand equity encourage students to select the institution as their destination of study. If the character of brand equity improves, so too will university choice.

#### **The direct of subjective norms on brand equity**

According to the results of the analysis, subjective norms have a direct and significant impact on brand equity. This finding indicates that students are influenced by the opinions and approval of the people around them or their social milieu when evaluating the brand equity of the university they will attend. Brand equity will increase if the subjective norm increases. Subjective norms can also affect the university's brand equity, which must be addressed.

In student case studies from Padang State University, subjective norms have a significant impact on brand equity. This study's findings are supported by Perera et al.'s (2021) finding that subjective norms have a positive influence on brand equity. Subjective norms influence a person's brand equity through the opinions or suggestions of others in their social environment. Creating strong brand equity for certain products frequently results in a strong market, and because universities are more competitive than private campuses in attracting students, it is crucial that they use market strategies to create brand equity (Pertiwi & Rusfian, 2021).



### **The effect of e-wom on brand equity**

Based on the analysis conducted, it has been determined that e-WOM has a direct and significant impact on brand equity. This finding indicates that e-women can affect the brand equity of a university. If university e-women increase, so will the character of brand equity. Consistent with the findings of Perera et al. and Pertiwi & Rusfian, e-wom communication has a positive impact on brand equity. The more positive e-WOM a student receives about a university, the greater the university's brand equity.

According to Pertiwi and Rusfian (2021), strong brand equity is achieved through effective social media communication. Not only universities, but also students create effective social media communication. Consumer-based brand equity occurs when consumers are familiar with the brand and have positive, strong, and/or unique memories of the college brand image (Seo et al., 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results found in this study, it can be concluded that describes the direct effect of the variables studied including subjective norms have a direct and substantial impact on university choice. This implies that if the subjective norm increases, so will university choice. E-wom has a direct and substantial impact on university choice. This means that as e-women increase, so will university choice. Brand equity has a direct and substantial impact on university choice. This implies that if brand equity increases, so will university choice. Subjective standards have a direct and substantial impact on brand equity. This means that if the subjective norm increases, so will brand equity. E-women has a direct and substantial impact on brand equity. This means that brand equity will increase if e-WOM increases. The second conclusion describes the indirect effect (mediation test) including is Brand equity mediates the influence of subjective norms on university choice. This indicates that brand equity can enhance the impact of subjective norms on university choice. Brand equity mediates the impact of e-women on university choice. This indicates that brand equity can enhance the impact of e-women on university choice.

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