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THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND PROMOTION ON THE REPUTATION OF PRIVATE  
UNIVERSITIES WITH CO-CREATION AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE

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### **Abstract**

This study evaluates the influence of brand promotion, co-creation, and reputation of private universities on the purchase intention of prospective students in Palembang. The variables studied include brand promotion as the independent variable, private university reputation as the dependent variable, and co-creation as the mediator variable. This study used quantitative analysis with hypothesis testing and involved eleven randomly selected alumni of private universities in Palembang. The results showed that brand promotion has a positive and significant influence on private university reputation and co-creation. In addition, co-creation also has a positive and significant influence on private college reputation and acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between brand promotion and college reputation. These findings confirm that brand promotion and co-creation play an important role in enhancing the reputation of private colleges and attracting prospective students.

**Keywords:** Brand Promotion, Co-Creation, Reputation of Private Universities, Alumni.

### **1. Introduction**

Higher education is a place to improve knowledge, skills, and behavior. Private universities must continue to provide the best standards for their graduates as this quality affects their existence and the number of incoming students. (Nasib et al., 2022). The rapid development of education has made the government continue to improve the education system. Public awareness of the importance of education has also increased. However, the quality of education in Indonesia is still low due to lack of physical facilities, inadequate quality of teachers, unsatisfactory student achievement, and expensive education costs (Putri et al., 2021). (Putri et al., 2021).

A university's reputation is important for attracting prospective students and improving graduates' career opportunities. A strong reputation reflects the quality of the institution and helps graduates get positions in prestigious companies so universities need to build a solid brand image to compete in the competitive higher education market. (Fiaz et al., 2019) University image has a major effect on student decisions (Shehzadi et al., 2021). Brand image is a key element in marketing (Alkhaldeh et al., 2020). (Vo et al., 2024) stated that the quality and number of online brand posts influence students' cognitive and affective responses, which impact brand co-creation behavior. In higher education, co-creation involves collaboration between students and institutions, which increases engagement, satisfaction, and provides feedback for quality improvement. (Leino & Puumala, 2021).

Private universities are facing declining student numbers and need to formulate effective strategies, such as improving the quality of education, facilities, and marketing, as well as collaborating with industry to improve the relevance of the curriculum and student work experience. Private universities

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realize the importance of reputation to attract students and improve career opportunities for graduates. While the impact of brand promotion on reputation through co-creation has been discussed, a holistic marketing model is still needed. This research aims to develop an integrated framework to understand the contribution of brand promotion to the reputation of private universities in Palembang city through co-creation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Grand Theory**

The Grand Theory applied in this study means "Marketing Theory and Customer Relationship Management". This theory encompasses concepts relevant to the interaction between private colleges and prospective students, as well as how brand promotion and co-creation affect institutional reputation. Customer Relationship Marketing and Management Theory provides a strong foundation to explain how the interaction between private colleges and prospective students affects institutional reputation. In this theory, attention is given to the college's efforts in building positive relationships with prospective students through effective brand promotion and co-creation practices. Customer Relationship Marketing and Management Theory therefore provides a holistic framework for understanding how brand promotion and co-creation play a role in shaping the reputation of private colleges.

### **2.2 Promotion**

Sales promotion plays a role in creating value for both customers and organizations (Kaveh et al., 2021). While the purpose of promotion, namely to help achieve marketing goals and broader company goals. (Mulyana, 2019). (Vo et al., 2024) The main purpose of promotion in higher education through online brand posting is to increase brand awareness of prospective students, invite interaction, and encourage participation in brand identity formation. This strategy uses a variety of content such as video, audio, writing, images, contests, news, narratives, support for specific causes, brand reviews, online games, and virtual gifts and cards. The goal is to engage users and increase brand value. (Vo et al., 2024).

### **2.3 Reputation**

Reputation is a collection of perceptions and images owned by various related parties regarding the organization's ability to meet expectations over time. (Gardiana et al., 2024). The good reputation of private universities increases the interest of prospective students, the trust of stakeholders such as alumni and parents, and strengthens relationships with the community and industry. (Harahap et al., 2017). To improve reputation, private universities need to improve the quality of education and research, strengthen relationships with alumni and industry, increase brand visibility through effective promotion, and provide quality services for students and stakeholders (Harahap et al., 2017). (Harahap et al., 2017).

### **2.4 Co-Creation**

Co-creation is the collaboration between organizations and consumers or stakeholders in developing products, services, or solutions that provide additional benefits to both parties. (Darlington et al., 2022). Some of the factors that influence the success of co-creation include efficient communication between all parties involved, trust and openness, respect for contributions, ability to adapt to change, and constructive management of conflict (Leino & Puumala, 2021). (Leino & Puumala, 2021).

### 2.5 Framework for Thinking

With reference to the formulation of the case and various studies that have been conducted, the paradigm for this research can be explained as follows:

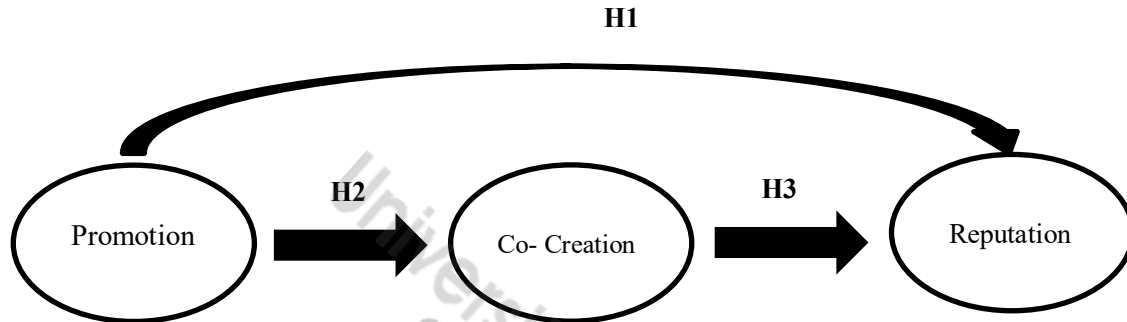


Figure 1. Thinking Framework

### 2.6 Hypothesis

In accordance with the literature review and framework that has been described, the research hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

1. Hypothesis 1 (H1): there is a positive effect between brand promotion and the reputation of private universities.
2. Hypothesis two (H2): there is a positive impact between brand promotion and co-creation.
3. Hypothesis 3 (H3): there is a positive impact between co-creation on the reputation of private universities.
4. Hypothesis 4 (H4): Co-creation mediates the relationship between brand promotion and reputation of private universities.

## 3. Research Methods

### 3.1 Subjects and Objects in Research

This research focuses on 11 private universities as its scope. The research subjects were undergraduate students from private universities in Palembang city.

### 3.2 Population and Research Sample

The population in this study included all students of private universities in Palembang City. There are about 11 private universities in Palembang City in the form of academies, colleges, polytechnics and universities. The sample unit in this study is the alumni of PTS. The number of respondents at each PTS was taken as many as 10 respondents. The sampling technique is done by random sampling method from various types of private universities, similar to what is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Population and Sample Size for Each PTS

Form of PTS	Number of PTS	Number of PTS Samples	Number of Respondents
University	11	10	110

The number of samples to be used in this study means 110 respondents, consisting of 11 randomly selected alumni of private universities.

### 3.3 Variable Definitions and Operations

This study includes one exogenous variable, namely Co-creation, and 2 endogenous variables, namely Brand promotion and Reputation of Private Universities, with operational details of the variables as listed in Table two.

**Table 2: Operational Definition of Variables**

No.	Concept	Variables	Indicator	Scale
1	Promotion	Brand Promotion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Advertising</li> <li>2) Personal Selling</li> <li>3) Sales Promotion</li> <li>4) Public Relations</li> </ol>	Interval
2	Reputation	College Reputation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Brand Recognition</li> <li>2) Reviews and Feedback</li> <li>3) Social Media san Online</li> <li>4) Awards and Recognition</li> <li>5) Customer Trust</li> <li>6) Financial Performanc e</li> <li>7) Company Leader</li> <li>8) Product innovation and excellence</li> </ol>	Interval
3	Co-creation	Co-creation Level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Student Participation in Decision Making</li> <li>2) Students in research projects</li> <li>3) Stakeholder Input-Based curriculum development</li> <li>4) Innovation and Development of Education Services</li> <li>5) Internship and Industry Cooperation Program</li> <li>6) Alumni involvement in institutional development</li> <li>7) Use of Technology for Collaboration</li> <li>8) Rewards and Recognition for Collaborative Contributions</li> </ol>	Interval

### 3.5 Data Collection Techniques

The data for this study was obtained through the use of general newsletters that used a 1-five Likert scale to assess the impact of brand promotion on university reputation using co-creation. Student respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement from strongly disagree to strongly agree for each question.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Method

This study used the *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) method analyzed using SmartPLS 3.0, including CB-SEM and PLS-SEM approaches. SEM examines complex relationships between variables, while PLS specifically handles non-normal data and small samples, enabling simultaneous testing of sample validity and reliability.

#### 3.6.1 Partial Least Square Analysis

PLS is used to test the relationship between latent variables and predict indicators of structural constructs. The stages of PLS-SEM analysis include: PLS is used to test the relationship between latent variables and predict indicators from structural constructs. The PLS-SEM analysis process involves several terms, namely:

1. Conceptualization
2. Algorithm analysis method selection
3. Resampling Method Selection
4. Path Diagram Creation
5. Model evaluation

#### 3.6.2 Measurement or Outer Model

Outer sample analysis assesses the correlation between indicators and latent variables using three primary criteria:

- **Convergent Validity:** evaluated based on standardized factor loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). A factor loading of  $\geq 0.70$  is referred to as the ideal standard.
- **Discriminant Validity:** checked by evaluating cross loading and  $\sqrt{AVE}$  to ensure that indicators have a higher relationship using the construct being measured compared to other constructs.
- **Composite Reliability:** Measures the internal consistency and reliability of indicators measuring a construct, preferably over Cronbach's alpha.

### 3.7 Operational Definition and Variable Measurement

#### 3.7.1 Operational Definition

1. **Independent Variable:** Variables that affect other variables, generally denoted by the alphabet X. In this study, the variable was Brand promotion (X).
2. **Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable influenced by the independent variable is symbolized by the alphabet Y. In this study, the dependent variable used is Reputation (Y).
3. **Mediating Variable:** The variable that connects the independent variable with the dependent variable in this study is Co-Creation (Z).

## 4. Research Methods

### 3.1 Descriptive Analysis

#### 1. Respondent Characteristics Based on College

The characteristics of the respondents of this study came from 11 private universities in Palembang city, each contributing 10 respondents, so there were 110 respondents in total.

**Table 3.** Respondents based on PTS Origin

No.	Name of Private College	Sample Quantity
1	Bina Darma University Palembang	10 People
2	Muhamadiyah University of Palembang	10 People
3	Multi Data University Palembang	10 People
4	Indo Global Mandiri University Palembang	10 People

5	Tridinanti University Palembang	10 People
6	Tamansiswa University Palembang	10 People
7	PGRI University Palembang	10 People
8	Universitas Kader Bangsa Palembang	10 People
9	IBA University Palembang	10 People
10	Sjakhyakirti University	10 People
11	STISIPOL Candradimuka University	10 People

2. Respondent Characteristics Based on Gender

Based on the summary data, there were 57 male respondents (51.8%) and 53 female respondents (48.2%).

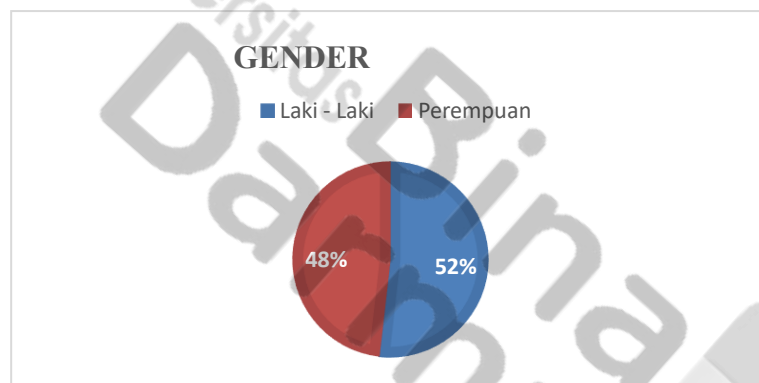


Figure 2 Frequency Chart by Gender

3. Respondent Characteristics Based on Age

Based on the questionnaire, the distribution of the number of respondents based on age is as follows, 19 years old (1 person, 0.9%), 20 years old (3 people, 2.7%), 21 years old (9 people, 8.2%), 22 years old (7 people, 6.4%), 23 years old (10 people, 9.1%), 24 years (15 people, 13.6%), 25 years (20 people, 18.2%), 26 years (16 people, 14.5%), 27 years (17 people, 15.5%), 28 years (10 people, 9.1%), 29 years (1 person, 0.9%), and 30 years (1 person, 0.9%).

4. Characteristics of respondents based on the last level of education.

Based on the data, there were 4 respondents (3.6%) with the latest D3 education, while 106 respondents (96.4%) had the latest S1 education. The following graph shows the distribution of respondents according to the last education level:

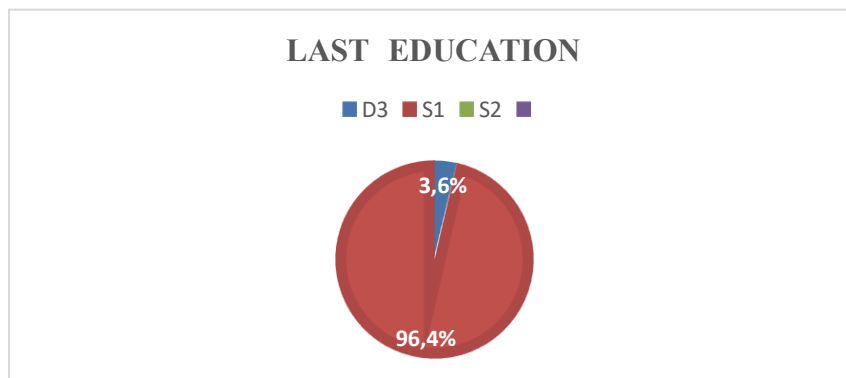


Figure 3 Graph of Respondents based on last education

### 4.2 Model Evaluation

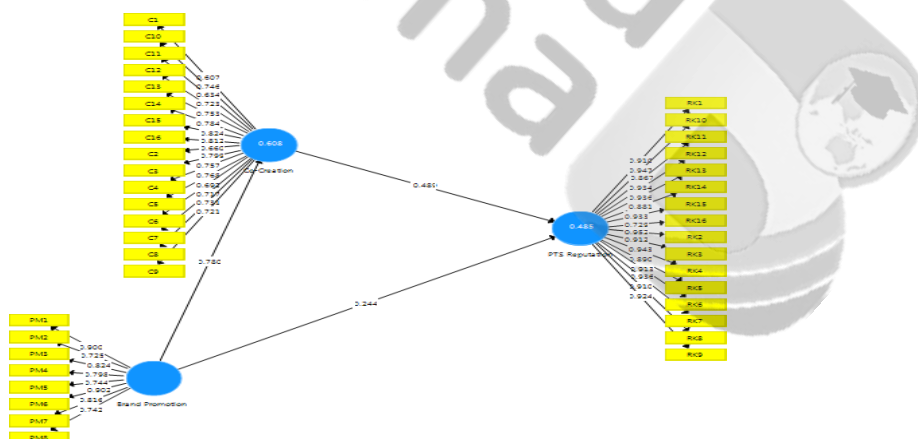
This research utilizes the SEM-PLS method with the donation of the SmartPLS threeapplication. Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis is a multivariate statistical method used to compare a large number of dependent and independent variables. PLS, being a variant-based SEM method, was created to overcome dilemmas similar to small sample size, missing data, and multicollinearity. PLS sample evaluation is carried out using assessing the validity of the outer sample and inner model.

### 4.3 Outer Model Measurement

The measurement of the outer sample in SEM PLS is based on the value of convergent validity and discriminant validity to assess the validity of the instrument. Convergent validity is evaluated according to the correlation between item scores and construct scores. Loading values above 0.70 are claimed to be high, while values between 0.5 and 0.6 are still claimed to be adequate in scale development (Ghozali, 2014). Discriminant validity is compared with the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), where an AVE value greater than 0.50 is considered adequate (Ghozali, 2014). Reliability tests are conducted using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha, where values greater than 0.60 indicate a good level of reliability (Ghozali, 2014).

### 4.4 Validity Test

Model assessment using Smart PLS includes validity and reliability testing, including convergent validity and discriminant validity. The validity analysis process was conducted through model test 1, as shown in figure three below:



**Figure 4** Outer Model 1

The results of the Model 1 outer loadings test show that indicators C1, C2, C6, and C11 in the Co-Creation variable have outer loadings values  $< 0.7$  (C1: 0.607; C2: 0.660; C6: 0.692; C11: 0.634). This value indicates that these indicators do not meet the expected convergent validity, where the ideal value is  $> 0.7$ .

### 4.5 Convergent Validity Analysis Results

The convergent validity test results from Outer Model 1 (Figure 4) show the outer loading value  $< 0.7$  for indicators C1, C2, C6, and C11 on the Co-Creation variable. These indicators were removed and re-analyzed in Outer Model 2. The Outer Model 2 results (Figure 5) show a model that is considered good.

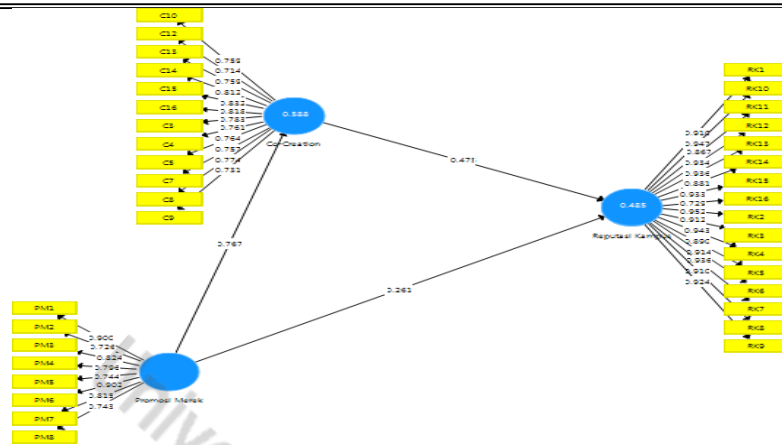


Figure 5 Outer Model 2

The validity of reflective indicators is tested by studying the relationship between the item score and the construct score. The results of the analysis provide that the brand Promotion, Private Universities Reputation, and Co-Creation variables are called valid because all indicators have a value above 0.5.

4.6 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Analysis

the results of the discriminant validity test on the outer model 1 resulted in an AVE brand Promotion value of 0.654, Private Universities Reputation 0.826, Co-Creation 0.541. In order to increase the AVE value of indicators that have an outer loadings value <0.5, the origin of the variable indicator is removed, the discriminant validity test on the outer model 2 obtained the results of the AVE analysis for each variable as illustrated in table 5.

Table 6 Average Variance Extracted Analysis Results

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Promotion	0,654
PTS Reputation	0,826
Co-Creation	0,597

Based on the results of the convergent and discriminant validity tests, the research instrument is declared valid and can be continued to The multicollinearity test stage is carried out by checking the variance inflation factor (VIF).

4.7 Reliability Test

Reliability testing in PLS is done by looking at the value of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, which must be  $\geq 0.7$ . based on what will happen in the analysis of the outer model 2, the value of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha are each more than 0.7, as shown in table 7.

Table 7 Reliability Test Analysis Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Promotion	0,923	0,938



PTS Reputation	0,986	0,987
Co-Creation	0,938	0,947

#### 4.8 Inner Model Test

The evaluation of the structural model using SmartPLS begins with evaluating the R-squared value, which indicates how well the latent variables are explained by the independent variables. The model is evaluated to check the predictive ability of the similar variables of non-physical performance and employee engagement.

##### a. R Square

R Squared in linearized regression of endogenous variables can be explained by exogenous variables. Criteria:

- If the value of  $R^2 = 0.67$  indicates substantial (medium / strong)
- When the value of  $R^2 = 0.33$ , it indicates an implicit mode (in line)
- When the value of  $R^2 = 0.19$  indicates lemah (kecil)

**Table 8 R Square**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Co-Creation	0.588	0.584
PTS Reputation	0.485	0.475

Based on the table above, you can see the explanation below:

- R Square on line I = 0.588 explains that the Co-Creation variable means 58.8% (classified as large).
- R Square on path II = 0.485. This means that the ability of the PTS Reputation variable is 48.5% (classified as large).

In the structural model assessment with SmartPLS, the R-squared value for "Co-Creation" is 0.588, explaining 58.8% of the variation in that variable, and for "PTS Reputation" is 0.485, explaining 48.5% of the variation in that variable. Both of these values are classified as "substantial," indicating that the model does a fairly good job of explaining the latent variables under study.

##### b. F Square

The effect size measure  $F^2$  (F-square) is a metric used to evaluate the relative impact of influencing (exogenous) variables on influenced (endogenous) variables. The criteria are:

- If the F value = 0.02, the effect is small/less significant.
- When the value of F = 0.15 indicates a moderate effect.
- If the value of F = 0.35 indicates a large/good effect.

**Table 9 F Square**

	Brand Promotion	Co-Creation	PTS Reputation
Brand Promotion	1.427		0.055
Co-Creation			0.181
PTS Reputation			

Based on the table above, it is concluded as follows:

- *Brand Promotion* = 1.427 (large)
- *Co-Creation - PTS Reputation* = 0.181 (medium)
- *Brand Promotion - PTS Reputation* = 0.055 (small)

F-Square ( $F^2$ ) shows the impact of independent variables on the dependent. The analysis results show that Brand Promotion has a small impact on Reputation ( $F^2 = 0.055$ ), a medium impact of Co-Creation on PTS Reputation ( $F^2 = 0.181$ ), and a large impact on Brand Promotion ( $F^2 = 1.427$ ).

#### 4.9 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is done through the structural model by examining the R-squared value and t-test. Bootstrapping in SmartPLS allows data evaluation without the assumption of normality and large sample size. The test results are displayed in the structural model output.

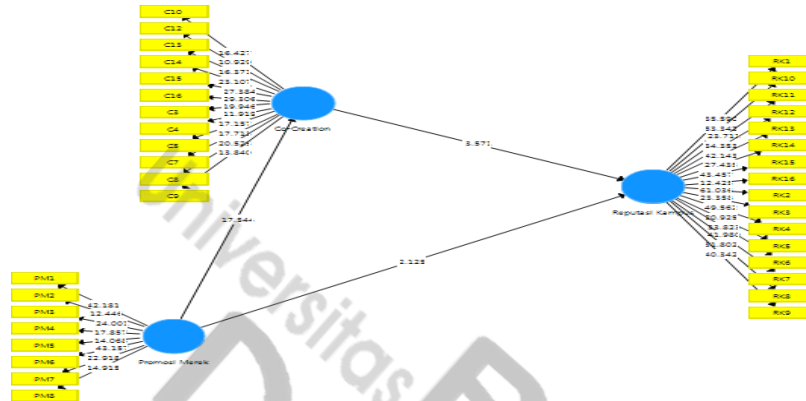


Figure 6 Inner Weight Analysis

##### a. Direct Effect (Path Coefficient)

Exclusive effect analysis is useful for testing hypotheses regarding the direct impact of hypothesized variables (exogenous) on specified variables (endogenous). Criteria:

- Path coefficient
- If the path coefficient value is positive, then the influence of the variable on other variables is unidirectional. that is, if the value of the exogenous variable increases, the value of the endogenous variable will also be higher.
- If the path coefficient value is negative, then the effect of the variable on the other variables is in the opposite direction. that is, if the value of the exogenous variable is higher, the value of the endogenous variable will decrease. Probability / Significant Value (P-Value)
  - If the P-value < 0.5, then the result is significant.
  - If the P-value > 0.5, then the result is not significant.

Table 10 Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Ket
Co-Creation -> PTS Reputation	0.475	0.477	0.133	3.571	0.000	Significant
Brand Promotion -> Co-Creation	0.767	0.769	0.044	17.544	0.000	Significant
Brand Promotion -> PTS Reputation	0.261	0.265	0.123	2.125	0.034	Significant

##### b. Indirect Effect

Impersonal impact analysis evaluates the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable by considering the work of intervening variables as mediators. The criteria:

- If the P-value < 0.05, then the effect is significant (there is an indirect effect), which indicates that the intervening variable plays a role in mediating the relationship between the independent variable and the endogenous variable.
- If the P-Value > 0.05, then the effect is not significant (there is a direct impact), which means that

the intervening variable does not play a role in mediating the relationship between exogenous variables and endogenous variables.

**Table 11 Indirect Effect**

	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistics ((O/STDEV))</b>	<b>P Values</b>	<b>Ket</b>
<i>Brand Promotion -&gt; PTS Reputation</i>	0.364	0.367	0.104	3.498	<b>0.001</b>	Significant

#### 4.10 Discussion

This study evaluates the effect of brand promotion on reputation of private universities with co-creation as a mediating variable. From 110 respondents from 11 private universities in Palembang, it was found that brand promotion, reputation, and institutional image have a positive effect on prospective students' purchase intention. Effective promotion increases visibility and positive perceptions, good reputation reflects the quality of education, and positive image helps campus differentiation. Prospective students are more interested in campuses with a good reputation and positive image, so campuses need to increase innovative promotions, maintain reputation, and build a strong institutional image.

1. Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a positive influence between brand promotion on the reputation of private universities. The results of the analysis with a p-value of 0.034 indicate a significant positive effect between brand promotion and the reputation of private universities, indicating that effective promotion improves the reputation of universities. This finding is in line with (Hemsley-Brown, 2020) which states that good promotion improves the image and reputation of universities. (Suwarsih et al., 2021) (Anggraini et al., 2020) stated that promotion has an effect on brand image.
2. Hypothesis 2 (H2): There is a positive influence between brand promotion and co-creation. The results of the analysis with a p-value of 0.000 indicate a significant positive influence between brand promotion and co-creation, which means that effective brand promotion increases student involvement in co-creation. This finding supports research (Hemsley- Brown and Oplatka, 2020) which states that good promotion strengthens student participation and relationships with universities, and increases student reputation and engagement . (Hoyer, WD, Kroschke, M., Schmitt, B., Kraume, K., & Shankar, 2020) how a well-designed brand promotion strategy can enhance co-creation by leveraging intensive digital interactions between consumers and brands. (Gyrd-Jones, RI, Helm, C. and Munk, 2019) how effective brand promotion can strengthen consumer engagement in the co- creation process, especially through social media and other digital platforms. (Pansari, A., & Kumar, 2018) brands that focus on value creation and meaningful interactions with consumers can significantly drive co-creation.
3. Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a positive influence between co-creation on the reputation of private universities. The results of the analysis with a p-value of 0.000 indicate that co-creation has a significant influence on the reputation of private universities, because active involvement in co-creation improves the reputation of the institution. This finding is supported by (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka., 2020), which states that co-creation strengthens reputation by involving various stakeholders in the development and innovation process. (Gunarto, 2018) The better the co-creation carried out by PTS, the better the image of the university perceived by students. (Management & Rusfa, 2023) related to explaining that building the image of a learning institution through Religious Value Co Creation can be implemented in various ways. (Iglesias, V., Ind, N., & Alfaro, 2019) This research shows customer participation in co-creation affects

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brand reputation, including in an educational context.

4. Hypothesis 4 (H4): Co-creation mediates the relationship between brand promotion and reputation of private universities. The results of the analysis with a p-value of 0.001 show that co-creation significantly mediates the relationship between brand promotion and reputation of private universities, meaning that effective brand promotion improves reputation both directly and through increased co-creation. This finding is in line with (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka., 2020), which emphasizes that co-creation strengthens college reputation by increasing institutional engagement and quality. (Hollebeek, L. D., & Macky, 2018) showed how co-creation and digital content act as mediators in the relationship between marketing strategies and brand perception, which can be applied to the context of private universities. (Kamboj, S., & Rahman, 2021) how co-creation mediates the relationship between brand promotion and brand reputation in the higher education sector, showing a positive influence on brand equity and customer loyalty. (Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., & Sharif, 2020) This research shows how co-creation through social media affects brand reputation and its role as a mediator between brand promotion and reputation, including in the context of educational institutions. (Cova, B., & Dalli, 2020) co-creation can mediate the relationship between brand promotion and brand reputation, with a focus on the digital context and its application in various sectors, including education.

## **5. Conclusions and Suggestions**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study shows a positive and significant effect of brand promotion on the reputation of private universities, with co-creation as a mediator variable. The following are the main conclusions of this study:

1. The Effect of Brand Promotion on the Reputation of Private Universities: Brand promotion that is carried out effectively has a significant role in improving the reputation of universities in the eyes of prospective students and the community.
2. The Effect of Brand Promotion on Co-Creation: Good brand promotion increases student involvement in the co-creation process, such as the development of academic programs and extracurricular activities.
3. The Effect of Co-Creation on Reputation of Private Universities: Active involvement in co-creation has a significant positive impact on the reputation of private universities.
4. The Mediating Role of Co-Creation: Co-creation mediates the relationship between brand promotion and private college reputation, where effective brand promotion enhances co-creation which further strengthens college reputation.

### **5.2 Suggestions**

1. Sample Expansion: Future research can expand the sample to include more private universities from various cities to get a more comprehensive picture.
2. Use of Other Methods: Use qualitative or mixed research methods to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms of brand promotion and co-creation.
3. Additional Variables: Research additional variables such as digital technology in brand promotion and its impact on reputation and student engagement.
4. Longitudinal Study: Conduct a longitudinal study to see the development of the relationship between brand promotion, co-creation, and college reputation over time

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