

PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF IMAGE TOWARDS SCHOOL CHOICE DECISION MAKING: PLS-SEM ANALYSIS

Eka Mulyani^{*1}, Yetri², Aditia Fradito³, Riyuzen Praja Tuala⁴

¹²³⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: ekamulyani195@gmail.com
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Abstract:

Increasing competition among educational institutions requires schools to continuously improve the quality of their services and build a positive image of their institutions within the community. School image is an important factor influencing parents' perceptions in assessing the quality, reputation, and credibility of educational institutions, particularly in determining school choice for their children. This study aims to analyze the influence of parents' perceptions of school image in the decision-making process of choosing a school at SMP Islam Az Zahra Bandar Lampung. The method used is quantitative with an explanatory design through the distribution of questionnaires to parents as research respondents. Data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method with the help of the SmartPLS application. The results of the analysis show that parents' perceptions of school image have a significant influence on the decision-making process of choosing a school with a t-statistic value of 19.780 and a p-value of 0.000. In addition, the R-square value of 0.762 indicates that parents' perceptions of school image can explain 76.2% of the variation in parents' decisions in choosing a school. These findings confirm that a school's image, reflecting academic quality, institutional reputation, and the integration of Islamic values, plays a crucial role in shaping parental trust and preference for Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, schools are advised to continue strengthening their institutional image management by improving the quality of educational services and effective communication with parents.

Abstrak:

Persaingan lembaga pendidikan yang semakin meningkat menuntut sekolah untuk terus meningkatkan kualitas layanan serta membangun citra institusi yang positif di tengah masyarakat. Citra sekolah menjadi salah satu faktor penting yang memengaruhi persepsi orang tua dalam menilai kualitas, reputasi, dan kredibilitas lembaga pendidikan, khususnya dalam menentukan pilihan sekolah bagi anak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh persepsi orang tua terhadap citra sekolah dalam pengambilan keputusan memilih sekolah di SMP Islam Az Zahra Bandar Lampung. Metode yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif dengan desain eksplanatori melalui penyebaran angket kepada orang tua siswa sebagai responden penelitian. Data dianalisis menggunakan metode Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) dengan bantuan aplikasi SmartPLS. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa persepsi orang tua terhadap citra sekolah berpengaruh signifikan terhadap pengambilan keputusan memilih sekolah dengan nilai t-statistic sebesar 19,780 dan p-value 0,000. Selain itu, nilai R-square sebesar 0,762 menunjukkan bahwa persepsi orang tua terhadap citra sekolah mampu menjelaskan 76,2% variasi keputusan orang tua dalam memilih sekolah. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa citra sekolah yang mencerminkan kualitas akademik, reputasi lembaga, serta integrasi nilai-nilai keislaman memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk kepercayaan dan preferensi orang tua terhadap lembaga pendidikan Islam. Oleh karena itu, sekolah disarankan untuk terus memperkuat pengelolaan

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INTRODUCTION

Choosing a school is a strategic decision made by parents to determine the best educational environment for their children. This decision relates not only to academic aspects but also to social development, character, and moral values that shape a child's future (Hofflinger et al., 2020; Jonathan et al., 2023; Pratama & Sugiarto, 2023). Education is understood as a process of developing a complete human being, emphasizing both intellectual and character development (Birhan et al., 2021; Bourke et al., 2020; Sumiharsono et al., 2023). Therefore, the decision to choose a school is a complex process involving multidimensional considerations. From an Islamic educational perspective, decision-making is seen not only as a rational process but also as a form of moral and spiritual responsibility. The Qur'an emphasizes that humans are endowed with hearing, sight, and a heart as instruments for acquiring knowledge and considering choices (Q.S. An-Nahl: 78, Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). The principle of careful consideration before making a decision is also emphasized in Q.S. Ali 'Imran: 159, which teaches the importance of endeavor accompanied by trust in God after a decision is made (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). In the context of school selection, these values reflect that parental decisions are a conscious process that involves rational evaluation as well as consideration of values and trust in the educational institution (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

Theoretically, this process can be explained through a consumer decision-making model that includes need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, decision-making, and post-decision evaluation (Kotler et al., 2021; Saatcioglu & Snethen, 2023). However, in practice, parents often face limitations in information and evaluation capacity. The bounded rationality perspective explains that individuals are not always able to comprehensively evaluate all alternatives due to cognitive limitations (Mintrom, 2016; Simon, 1947). In such situations, perceptions of school image become an important indicator used by parents to assess the quality and credibility of the institution (Borger et al., 2024; Jheng et al., 2022). In this study, parental perceptions are understood as cognitive and affective processes in interpreting information and experiences about the school, which shape subjective assessments of the institution's quality (Lewis et al., 2024; Sutisna et al., 2023). According to Schiffman and Wisenblit, the concept of consumer perception explains that perceptions of an object are formed through several key aspects: quality, reliability, perceived benefits, price, and the image of a product or service. In the context of education, these aspects form the basis for parents' assessment of educational institutions as service providers. The perceptions formed from these various aspects subsequently influence how parents view and evaluate the quality and credibility of the school.

Perceptions formed from these various aspects will then shape the image of the educational institution in the minds of parents. This perception is manifested in the school's image, namely a mental representation of academic reputation, service quality, management credibility, and institutional values (Damanik et al., 2022; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). In the context of Islamic schools, image is also shaped by the integration of Islamic values into educational governance and culture (Agustin & Zalnur, 2024; Halima & Suprapti, 2023; Sulastri et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that institutional image significantly influences school selection decisions (Seow & Hussain, 2024; Tjay et al., 2025).

Table 1 Data on the Total Number of Students at Az Zahra Islamic Middle School, Bandar Lampung (2025/2026 Academic Year)

No	Kelas	Jumlah
1	VII	107
2	VIII	81
3	IX	84
Total		272

The study population was all parents of 272 students at Az Zahra Islamic Junior High School in Bandar Lampung for the 2025/2026 academic year. Each student was represented by one parent or guardian as a research respondent. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% error rate, resulting in a minimum of 73 respondents. To increase statistical power and stability of estimates in the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis, the number of respondents was increased to 100 (Hair et al., 2019; Kock & Hadaya, 2018). This number also met the minimum criteria based on the 10-times rule in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022).

The sampling technique in this study used probability sampling with a proportionate stratified random sampling approach. The study population, consisting of parents/guardians of students, was grouped into strata based on the guardians of students at each grade level (VII, VIII, and IX). The determination of the number of samples in each stratum was carried out proportionally according to the number of guardians of students at each grade level. Furthermore, respondents in each stratum were randomly selected based on the available list of guardians, so that each member of the population had an equal opportunity to be selected as a research sample. The research instrument was a closed questionnaire consisting of 38 statements, with 19 indicators for the variable of parents' perceptions of school image and 19 indicators for the variable of parental decision-making. The questionnaire statement items were adapted from the research instrument used by Muhamad Aulia Mahbub (2022). The adaptation process was carried out by adjusting the wording and context of the statements to suit the characteristics of the respondents and the context of the educational institution being studied. The adapted instrument was then tested for validity and reliability before being used in research data collection. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed after the semester report cards were distributed to ensure respondents had sufficient information regarding school conditions, allowing for more reflective perceptions. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS version 4.0 with a Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. Evaluation of the measurement model was conducted through convergent validity tests (outer loading and Average Variance Extracted/AVE) and internal reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha). Furthermore, the structural model was tested using path coefficients, R^2 values, and significance tests using bootstrapping techniques to test the research hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019, 2022).

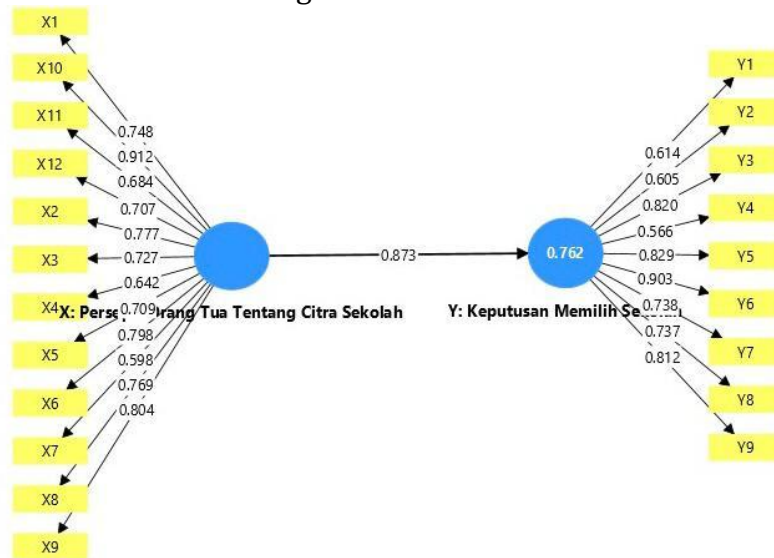
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Model And Loading Factor SEM-PLS

The variables in this study include indicators that influence parents' perceptions of the school image (X), which is the independent variable, on the decision to choose a school (Y), which is the dependent variable.

Figure 2 Data Model



Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity in this study was evaluated through the outer loading value of each indicator. Although the recommended ideal outer loading value is ≥ 0.70 , in the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, indicators with outer loading values ≥ 0.50 are still acceptable, especially in exploratory social and educational research that measures perceptual constructs. Therefore, indicators with outer loading values below 0.50 were eliminated, while indicators with outer loading values between 0.50–0.69 were retained as long as they had strong theoretical relevance and did not reduce the average variance extracted (AVE) value and construct reliability. In the initial stage of the measurement model evaluation, several indicators that did not meet these criteria were gradually eliminated while still considering the conceptual suitability of the construct being measured. After the elimination process, all indicators in the final model met the criteria for convergent validity and construct reliability. The results of the outer model test indicate that all indicators in the variables of parental perception of school image (X) and decision-making in choosing a school (Y) have outer loading values above the minimum limit of 0.50, which confirms that these indicators have made an adequate contribution in representing their respective latent constructs. Thus, the measurement model is declared feasible and ready to be used for further analysis at the structural model evaluation stage (Hair et al., 2022).

The next step in evaluating the measurement model is testing the construct quality using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. The AVE value is used to assess the extent to which an indicator is able to explain the variance of the latent construct it measures. A construct is considered to meet the criteria if it has an AVE value greater than 0.50. The AVE calculation results for each variable indicate that all constructs in this study have met the required threshold value. Thus, the indicators used in each variable are able to adequately represent the latent construct, a prerequisite for further discriminant validity evaluation (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 2 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Results

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Information
Parents' Perception of School Image (X)	0.553	Valid
Making a Decision to Choose a School (Y)	0.554	valid

Based on the test results presented in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for the variable of parents' perceptions of school image (X) is 0.553, while the variable of decision-making in choosing a school (Y) has an AVE value of 0.554. Both values have exceeded the minimum limit of 0.50, so it can be concluded that each construct has met the criteria for convergent validity. These findings indicate that the indicators used in each variable are able to adequately represent and explain the measured latent construct according to the evaluation criteria for the measurement model in the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach (Hair et al., 2022).

Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity testing was conducted to ensure that each indicator more strongly represents the construct it measures compared to other constructs, thus being able to clearly differentiate between constructs. In the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, discriminant validity can be evaluated through cross-loading analysis, where the loading value of an indicator on its original construct must be higher than the loading value of that indicator on other constructs (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015). The test results showed that all indicators met this criterion, indicating that each indicator was significantly more correlated with its own construct than with other constructs. Thus, the measurement model in this study has met the requirements for discriminant validity and is declared suitable for use in the analysis of relationships between constructs.

Table 3 Cross Loading Results

Code	Parents' Perception of School Image (X)	Making a Decision to Choose a School (Y)
X1	0.748	0.615
X2	0.777	0.653
X3	0.727	0.561
X4	0.642	0.473
X5	0.709	0.596
X6	0.798	0.799
X7	0.598	0.404
X8	0.769	0.710
X9	0.804	0.677
X10	0.912	0.833
X11	0.684	0.649
X12	0.707	0.658
Y1	0.463	0.614
Y2	0.398	0.605
Y3	0.641	0.820
Y4	0.456	0.566
Y5	0.716	0.829
Y6	0.814	0.903
Y7	0.647	0.738
Y8	0.728	0.737
Y9	0.799	0.812

Based on the cross-loading analysis results presented in Table 3, all indicators showed higher loading values on their original constructs compared to the other constructs. For example, indicator X1 had a loading value of 0.748 on the variable of parents' perceptions of school image (X), which was higher than its loading value on the

variable of school choice decision making (Y) of 0.615. This finding indicates that indicator X1 more accurately represents the construct it measures. A similar pattern was also seen in the other indicators, so all indicators can be said to be consistently more correlated with their own constructs than with other constructs. Thus, the measurement model in this study has met the criteria for discriminant validity based on cross-loading analysis in the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015).

In addition to cross-loading analysis, discriminant validity was also evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach. The HTMT approach is used to assess the extent to which different constructs truly represent distinct concepts, with lower HTMT values indicating a better degree of construct separation. This method is considered more sensitive than traditional approaches such as the Fornell–Larcker criterion in detecting potential overlap between constructs. The HTMT test results showed that all values were below the recommended threshold, thus providing additional evidence that each construct in this research model was discriminantly measured and suitable for use in inter-construct relationship analysis (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4 HTMT Results

Variabel	X	Y
Parents' Perception of School Image (X)		
Making a Decision to Choose a School (Y)	0.919	

The test results show that the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) value between constructs is 0.919. Although this value slightly exceeds the conservative threshold of 0.90, it is still below the maximum limit of 0.95 recommended in social and behavioral research. This condition indicates that the discriminant validity in this study is still acceptable, especially considering the conceptual closeness between the variables of parental perceptions of school image (X) and school choice decision making (Y). Thus, the constructs in this research model can still be adequately distinguished and are suitable for use in the analysis of relationships between latent variables (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015).

Reliability Test

Reliability testing in this study was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. Composite Reliability is used to assess the overall internal consistency of the construct and is considered more appropriate in the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, while Cronbach's Alpha reflects the lowest estimate of a construct's reliability limit. Both measures are used as a basis for assessing the level of reliability of the variables used in the study. The results of the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability calculations for each variable are presented in the following table and indicate that all constructs have met the reliability criteria required in PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 5 Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability Results

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	Information
Parents' Perception of School Image (X)	0.925	0.935	0.936	Reliable
Making a Decision to Choose a School (Y)	0.896	0.917	0.916	Reliable

Based on the reliability test results presented in Table 5, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for the parental perception of school image variable (X) were 0.925 and 0.936, respectively, while for the decision-making variable for choosing a school (Y) were 0.896 and 0.916, respectively. All of these values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that each construct in this study had a good level of internal consistency. Thus, the research instrument can be declared reliable, so that the measurement results obtained are stable and can be trusted in further analysis according to the reliability evaluation criteria in the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach (Hair et al., 2022).

Structure Test (Inner Model)

The R-square value is used to describe the ability of independent variables to explain the variation of the dependent variable in a research model. The greater the R-square value obtained, the higher the proportion of the variation of the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variable. In the context of Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), an R-square value above 0.75 is categorized as having strong explanatory power, an R-square value in the range of 0.50–0.75 indicates moderate explanatory power, while an R-square value below 0.50 indicates that the contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable is relatively low, so that there are still other factors outside the model that play a more dominant role (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Table 6 R-Square Results

Variables	R-Square	R-Square adjusted	Information
Making a Decision to Choose a School (Y)	0.762	0.753	Strong

Based on the results of the structural model analysis, an R-square value of 0.762 was obtained for the decision-making variable in choosing a school. This value indicates that the variable of parents' perceptions of school image is able to explain approximately 76.2% of the variation in the dependent variable, while the remaining 23.8% is influenced by other factors outside the research model. The Adjusted R-square value of 0.753 indicates that the model remains stable after being adjusted for the number of variables used. Based on the R-square evaluation criteria in the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, this value is included in the category of strong explanatory power. Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in PLS-SEM with the criteria of a t-statistic value ≥ 1.96 and a p-value ≤ 0.05 at a significance level of 5% as the basis for determining the significance and strength of the influence between variables in the research model (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Table 7 Results of T Statistic and P Value

Hypothesis	Construct Relationship	T Statistic	P Value	Information
H1	X → Y	19.780	0.000	Significant

X: Parents' Perceptions of School Image

Y: Making a Decision About Choosing a School

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, the t-statistic value for the relationship between variables X and Y is 19.780, which far exceeds the minimum limit of 1.96 at a 5% significance level. Furthermore, the p-value obtained is 0.000, less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between variables X and Y is statistically significant. Thus, the research hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that parents' perceptions of school image significantly influence the decision to choose a school, with a strong model explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.762$). This finding indicates that parents' perceptions can explain 76.2% of the variation in school choice decisions, thus confirming the strategic role of school image in the decision-making process. Within the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) framework, a high R-square value reflects the model's ability to substantially explain endogenous variables. However, the decision to choose a school remains a complex and multidimensional process, involving rational, emotional, and situational considerations (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022). This finding reinforces the literature stating that the image of an educational institution shapes the attitudes, beliefs, and trust of stakeholders, including parents, which in turn influence educational preferences and decisions (Alshareef et al., 2023; Seow & Hussain, 2024). School image serves as a collective representation of academic quality, institutional reputation, and perceived service experience. In this context, positive perceptions of the school's image increase parents' confidence that the institution is capable of meeting their children's educational needs and expectations.

In the context of Islamic schools, the dimensions of school image have more specific characteristics. Image is built not only on academic reputation but also on perceptions of the quality of religious guidance, internalization of Islamic values, Islamic school culture, and consistency in student moral formation. The literature shows that in Islamic education, the congruence of school and family values is a significant normative consideration in the decision-making process (Agustin & Zalnur, 2024; Halima & Suprapti, 2023; Sulastri et al., 2021). Thus, school image in this context serves as a comprehensive representation of both the academic quality and the institution's religious identity, strengthening parental trust in the institution (Juhaidi et al., 2025; Tessema et al., 2025). Despite the strong influence of school image, 23.8% of the variation in parental decisions remains unexplained by the model.

This suggests that the decision to choose a school is not solely determined by perceptions of the institution's image. Additional factors such as tuition fees, location and accessibility, school facilities, flagship programs, social influences from the surrounding environment, and child and family characteristics can play a role in shaping parental preferences (Bekele & Kenea, 2024; Rehman et al., 2025; Tjay et al., 2025). Specifically, in the context of Islamic schools, several other factors can also influence parental decisions, such as the quality of the religious education program, the intensity of Islamic character development, the teachers' reputation for instilling religious values, and the school's social environment, which is perceived as supportive of students' moral and spiritual development. Furthermore, the school's involvement in religious activities, the consistency of Islamic culture in daily activities, and communication between the school and parents in developing children's character can also be important considerations for Muslim families in choosing an educational institution. These factors suggest that the decision to choose an Islamic school is influenced not only by the institution's overall image but also by perceptions of the school's ability to shape religious character and an educational environment that aligns with family values.

These findings indicate that the decision to choose an Islamic school is the result of an interaction between rational, social, and religious considerations held by the family. Therefore, the influence of school image needs to be understood as contextual and conditional, dependent on the socioeconomic situation and the family's value orientation. Based on these findings, the development of a more comprehensive model incorporating additional variables such as the quality of educational services, parental trust, institutional religiosity, and value congruence is recommended for future research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the decision to choose an Islamic school.

Practically, these findings suggest that Islamic school administrators cannot rely solely on building a positive image but also need to strengthen the quality of academic and non-academic services, maintain consistent Islamic values, and establish transparent and ongoing communication with parents. This integrated strategy has the potential to strengthen trust and increase the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions in a sustainable manner (Faiq Yuniato, 2025; Nafisah et al., 2025; Rosmayani et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that parents' perceptions of school image play a significant role in shaping their decision to attend Az Zahra Islamic Junior High School in Bandar Lampung. School image is a key consideration as it is seen as an indicator of the institution's quality, educational reputation, and the level of public trust in the educational system. Therefore, a positive school image can strengthen parents' confidence in selecting an educational institution capable of supporting their children's academic and character development. The implications of these findings emphasize that Islamic educational institution administrators need to consistently build and maintain their school's reputation by improving the quality of educational services, developing flagship programs, and maintaining effective communication with parents and the community. However, parents' decision-making in choosing a school can also be influenced by various factors beyond school image. Therefore, further research is expected to develop a broader study by incorporating additional variables and using a more diverse research approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of school selection.

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