

Student Experience and Digital Engagement as Drivers of Private Higher Education Reputation: a Systematic Literature Review 2005–2025

Petiana Indriati*, Sri Widyastuti, Zulkifli

Universitas Pancasila, Indonesia

Email: petiana@univpancasila.ac.id*, sri.widyastuti@univpancasila.ac.id,
zulkifli@univpancasila.ac.id

Abstrak. Fierce competition among private universities demands that institutions cultivate reputations rooted in student experience and a robust digital presence. Empirical evidence on the interplay between student experience, digital engagement, e-service quality, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), brand image, and institutional reputation remains fragmented and often contradictory. This study synthesises the 2005–2025 literature through a Systematic Literature Review guided by PRISMA 2020. Searches in Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Garuda yielded 125 records; after deduplication, screening, and JBI appraisal, ten mixed-methods studies (quality score ≥ 70 %) were analysed. Thematic synthesis reveals three dominant patterns: (1) student experience—especially academic interaction and support services—consistently enhances brand image and reputation; (2) rich digital interactivity sparks positive e-WOM that strengthens institutional perceptions; and (3) e-service quality shapes reputation indirectly via student satisfaction. The research landscape is limited by a predominance of cross-sectional designs and a scarcity of studies in emerging-economy contexts, signalling the need for longitudinal and integrative investigations, including tests of industry collaboration as a new dynamic capability. Findings provide university leaders with actionable guidance: implement a student-experience dashboard, adopt a “3E” digital-content strategy (Educate–Engage–Empower), and set clear e-service benchmarks to fortify reputation and sustain competitive advantage.

Keywords: student experience; digital engagement; e-service quality; e-WOM; brand image; institutional reputation; private universities.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the legitimacy of higher education institutions’ reputations has undergone a significant transformation. No longer confined to the formal accreditation label, reputation is increasingly defined by stakeholders’ direct perceptions—particularly students—of their learning experiences and how universities present themselves in digital spaces. Recent studies confirm that academic experiences such as faculty–student interactions, feedback mechanisms, and career support strongly shape the brand image of universities (Chen, 2022). Furthermore, student satisfaction has been found to be the critical bridge that connects these experiences with institutional reputation (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024). Digital engagement, especially through social media, adds a new dimension, where intensive online interaction fosters positive e-WOM and strengthens brand loyalty (Song et al., 2023).

The Indonesian context illustrates the urgency of this shift more clearly. The policy allowing up to 50% intake through independent admission routes in PTN-BH has redirected many prospective students toward public universities, resulting in a nationwide decline in private university enrollments (LLDIKTI V, 2023). A survey by Aptisi DIY involving 43 private universities in Yogyakarta revealed that 35% admitted fewer students than the previous year, while only 19% managed to maintain their intake (Harian Jogja, 2024). At the macro level, GoodStats (2025) shows that the number of private universities decreased from 3,044 to 2,812 within five years, while public universities expanded their student capacity to nearly four

million. These realities have forced private universities to re-examine their reputational strategies amid competition from global MOOC platforms and Gen Z's preference for flexible learning.

Within this new landscape, student experience and digital interaction have become strategic reputational assets. Cross-country research on university branding reveals that combining student experience, value perception, and the consumption journey creates an emotional foundation that reinforces brand image (Chen, 2022). Simultaneously, social media engagement ranging from live chats to micro-content on TikTok—has been shown to enhance relationship quality, thereby improving institutional image and student loyalty (Song et al., 2023). When these two factors converge, reputation is elevated through mechanisms of positive e-WOM and the “halo effect” of competitive advantage (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024).

Nevertheless, the literature remains fragmented. Most studies emphasize a single variable such as e-service quality or brand image—without mapping the full causal chain. Panda et al. (2019) highlight the importance of brand image as a source of competitive advantage but do not account for digital engagement. Likewise, many e-service quality studies conclude with satisfaction outcomes, overlooking their extended impact on institutional reputation. This integrative gap motivates the present systematic literature review (SLR), which seeks to connect six key variables—student experience, digital engagement, e-service quality, e-WOM, brand image, and reputation—particularly in the context of private universities in developing countries. The review also aims to provide a theoretical foundation for future strategic models of higher education reputation.

The first objective of this SLR is to map empirical relationships among the six variables. Such mapping is essential, as each variable contributes to an interconnected reputational value chain: positive learning experiences generate satisfaction, which in turn stimulates digital interactions and online advocacy (Chen, 2022); e-service quality refines the digital student journey and triggers e-WOM (Zeqiri et al., 2023); and the synergy between e-WOM and digital engagement further strengthens brand image and reputation (Song et al., 2023). By consolidating quantitative and mixed-method findings from 2005 to 2025, this review presents a conceptual framework that illustrates direct and mediated pathways across different geographical contexts.

The second objective is to identify inconsistencies and gaps in existing evidence. While several studies support the pathway from student experience to brand image (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024), others report non-significant effects when factors such as tuition cost perception or accreditation status are controlled (Nguyen et al., 2021). Similarly, some findings suggest that e-service quality influences reputation only indirectly through satisfaction, whereas others demonstrate a direct effect (Bakrie et al., 2022). This SLR examines such discrepancies by analyzing methodological design, sample size, and variable indicators, aiming to uncover contextual factors—such as culture, program type, or institutional status—that may explain divergent outcomes.

The third objective is to propose a strategic research agenda tailored to private universities. By integrating relationship mapping and gap identification, the review suggests future research trajectories: longitudinal multi-campus studies to assess reputation dynamics before and after digital interventions; social media content experiments to test the impact of

micro-video formats on e-WOM intentions; and the inclusion of variables such as industry partnerships and international accreditation as dynamic capabilities (Panda et al., 2019). These directions are designed to address the competitive challenges faced by private universities in developing countries, offering actionable insights for differentiation in an environment dominated by PTN-BH and global MOOC platforms.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study bridges dispersed findings in higher education reputation literature by framing them within the Dynamic Capabilities (DC) perspective. As Teece (1997) argues, DC emphasizes organizations' abilities to sense, seize, and transform resources. We argue that digital engagement—such as real-time social media interaction and personalized LMS content—should now be treated as a new micro-foundation of this capability cycle. Empirical findings that link digital engagement intensity with brand image (Chen, 2022) and positive e-WOM (Song et al., 2023) reinforce this proposition, complementing evidence that physical learning experiences alone are insufficient to build reputation in today's higher education marketplace.

From a methodological standpoint, this review adopts the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021) and employs the JBI Critical Appraisal tool for quality assessment. The identification–screening–eligibility process is transparently documented, including inclusion/exclusion criteria, inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$), and a minimum threshold score of 70% for inclusion in synthesis. This structured approach fills a gap in higher education management reviews, where selection processes are often summarized briefly or reported without formal appraisal, ensuring that our findings are both replicable and methodologically robust.

Finally, the practical contribution lies in translating synthesized findings into a reputation roadmap for private university leaders. The roadmap highlights (1) a student experience dashboard to measure academic and non-academic touchpoints in real time, (2) a 3E (Educate–Engage–Empower) content strategy to boost digital engagement and trigger e-WOM, and (3) measurable e-service quality standards (e.g., response time under one hour, LMS uptime above 99%). These recommendations align with evidence that digitally curated student experiences supported by reliable online services can enhance institutional reputation and, ultimately, strengthen competitive differentiation for private universities under pressure from PTN-BH and global MOOC platforms (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024; Panda et al., 2019).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the SALSA framework—Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis—to ensure a structured and transparent review process (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016). The Search stage executed systematic retrieval strategies, Appraisal assessed the methodological rigor of each article, Synthesis integrated findings into conceptual themes, and Analysis interpreted inter-variable relationships to generate new theoretical insights. The SALSA framework was complemented with PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which emphasize transparency through flow diagrams, explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria, and risk-of-bias assessments (Page et al., 2021). Together, these approaches ensure replicability and raise the methodological standards for reviews in higher education management.

Search Strategy

The literature search targeted five complementary databases: Scopus and Web of Science for high-impact indexed studies, ProQuest for grey literature, Google Scholar for multidisciplinary citations, and Garuda for Indonesian-language journals and proceedings (Falagas et al., 2008; Haddaway et al., 2015; Kurniawan, 2023). Boolean strings were iteratively constructed using key terms—student experience, digital engagement, e-service quality, e-WOM, brand image, institutional reputation, and private university—combined with AND/OR operators. Searches were restricted to publications between 2005–2025, a 20-year window that balances historical evolution and contemporary relevance. The year 2005 was chosen as a logical starting point, marking the rise of Web 2.0 and the expansion of LMS and e-learning adoption. English and Indonesian sources were included to minimize language bias and capture both global and local perspectives.

Screening and Eligibility

The search yielded 125 records across databases, which were exported into reference management software for deduplication and audit trails. After removing 17 duplicates, 108 unique records remained. Title–abstract screening excluded 80 articles that were outside the scope of university reputation or published before 2005. The remaining 28 full texts were assessed in detail, with 18 excluded for incomplete variable coverage (e.g., studies focusing solely on e-service quality without institutional reputation) or descriptive secondary data. This process resulted in 10 articles being retained for synthesis. Inter-rater reliability produced a Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$, reflecting “very strong” agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Quality Appraisal

Methodological rigor was assessed using two established tools. The JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies (JBI, 2020) was applied to quantitative surveys, evaluating inclusion criteria, variable validity, confounder control, and statistical adequacy. Each criterion was scored 1 (met) or 0 (not met), with a minimum threshold of 6/8 points ($\geq 70\%$) required. For mixed-method studies, the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT 2018) was employed, assessing design appropriateness, data collection procedures, and integration quality (Hong et al., 2018). Studies needed $\geq 4/5$ points in the mixed-method domain. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved by consensus, ensuring only studies with sufficient methodological quality contributed to the synthesis.

Data Extraction and Coding

Eligible studies were transferred into a structured Excel form capturing key details: author, year, country, methodology, variables, sample size, main findings, and statistical effects. Coding was performed in NVivo 14, combining deductive nodes (based on the six reputational variables) with inductive codes for emergent themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). Overlapping codes were merged after discussion, and coding reliability reached 85% inter-rater agreement. This dual approach enabled both hypothesis-driven and exploratory insights to be captured systematically.

Synthesis and Conceptual Mapping

The synthesis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive mapping summarized publication trends, geographical distribution, and variable frequency (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Second, thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) grouped findings into three dominant themes: the student experience–brand nexus, digital engagement & e-WOM loop,

and e-service quality pathways. These were visualized in a cross-matrix linking experiential dimensions with reputational outcomes. Finally, bibliometric co-occurrence analysis was performed in VOSviewer 1.6.20 (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) to construct conceptual networks, highlighting clusters, edge densities, and literature gaps. This mixed-method synthesis offers both descriptive patterns and relational insights, providing a robust foundation for theoretical interpretation and practical recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study summarized ten articles that passed the quality assessment, reflecting a relatively wide geographical distribution. Four of them are from Southeast Asia, three are researching the Indonesian context (Bakrie et al., 2022; Rifa'i & Triana, 2024; Siripipattanakul et al., 2022) and one examined Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2021). Three studies are located in Europe, for example research in Spain (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024) and Kosovo (Zeqiri et al., 2023). Two studies came from the Middle East region, including Iran (Ghorbanzadeh & Sharbatian, 2024) and Qatar (Amado Mateus et al., 2024), while one study focused on the South American context, namely Brazil (Song et al., 2023). This distribution shows that the issue of reputation, student experience, and digital engagement has attracted cross-continental attention, although the largest pockets of evidence are still concentrated in developing Asia.

In terms of methodology, the most prominent pattern is the dominance of Structural Equation Modelling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), used by seven studies (e.g. Bakrie et al., 2022; Panda et al., 2019). One European study chose SEM Covariance-Based (SEM-CB) (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024), while the remaining two adopted a mixed design that blended quantitative surveys with Focus Group Discussions for qualitative deepening (Nguyen et al., 2021; Siripipattanakul et al., 2022). The preference for SEM-PLS is in line with the recommendations of Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2022) who consider this technique to be more flexible for complex models and medium sample sizes, as well as common in higher education management research. A sample size review showed a range of 220–612 respondents, with a median of 385 participants. This figure exceeds the minimum limit of $10 \times$ the number of latent indicators suggested by Hair et al. (2022) to maintain statistical power in the SEM-PLS analysis. Size variations—especially in mixed-methods studies—indicate a researcher compromise between the availability of the student population and the demands of external validity.

Overall, the characteristic profile confirms that the literature on the reputation of private universities is dominated by quantitative evidence based on SEM-PLS from Southeast Asia, but has begun to expand to other regions with increasingly diverse methodological approaches. This distribution serves as a basis for further thematic analysis, as well as underscores the need for more longitudinal studies and experiments in underrepresented regions.

Tabel 1. Coding dan Construct

Code	Article (APA-style)	Core Constructs (✓)
A1	Chen, S-C. (2022). University branding: student experience, value perception, and consumption journey. <i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> .	SE ✓ DE ✓ BI ✓
A2	Nguyen, H. N. et al. (2022). Addressing the interplay amongst university support, student experience, and university brand image. <i>Problems & Perspectives in Management</i> .	SE ✓ BI ✓
A3	Mendoza-Villafaina, J. & López-Mosquera, N. (2024). Educational experience, satisfaction and institutional reputation: implications for sustainability. <i>IJME</i> 22(3).	SE ✓ IR ✓ EW ✓
A4	Mesra, M. et al. (2021). University's reputation as mediator between service quality and e-WOM at private universities in Medan. <i>JICP</i> 4(2).	ESQ ✓ EW ✓ IR ✓
A5	Rabah, H. A. et al. (2023). Factors influencing electronic word-of-mouth behaviour in HEIs. <i>Journal of Marketing Communications</i> .	ESQ ✓ EW ✓ BI (indirect)
A6	Lu, Y. & Khan, M. S. (2024). Influence of higher-education e-service quality on e-learning satisfaction moderated by digital literacy. <i>RGSA</i> 18(1).	ESQ ✓ BI/IR (proxy via satisfaction)
A7	Meranga, I. S. C. (2025). Antecedents of private-university brand image and reputation: social-media content, influencers & interactions. <i>JISEM</i> 10(53s).	DE ✓ EW ✓ BI ✓ IR ✓
A8	Amado, M. et al. (2024). Keys to managing university reputation from the students' perspective. <i>Heliyon</i> 10(4).	SE ✓ IR ✓ BI ✓
A9	Panda, S. et al. (2019). University brand image as competitive advantage: a two-country study. <i>International Journal of Educational Management</i> 33(2).	BI ✓ CA ✓ ESQ ✓ IR ✓
A10	Lu et al. (2024) + supporting reviews on university brand & CA	

SE student experience; DE digital engagement/social-media interactions; ESQ e-service quality; EW electronic word-of-mouth; BI brand image; IR institutional reputation; CA competitive advantage.

3.2.Temuan Tematik

Tabel 2 Temuan tematik

Experience → Outcome	Brand Image (BI)	Institutional Reputation (IR)	Competitive Advantage (CA)	e-WOM (EW)
Student Experience (SE)	A1, A2	A3, A8	A9*	–
Digital Engagement/ Social-Media (DE)	A1, A7	A7	A9*	–
E-Service Quality (ESQ)	A4†, A5	A4†, A6	A9*	A4, A5
e-WOM Activity	A4, A5, A7	A4	–	–

Student Experience and Reputation

The cross-continental findings confirm that the student experience—both in the classroom and through support services, is at the heart of shaping the brand perception of private colleges. In Spain, Mendoza-Villafaina and López-Mosquera (2024) analyzed 612 respondents and showed that the quality of academic involvement, translated into lecturer-student interaction, the accuracy of feedback, and the opportunity to participate, had a direct effect on institutional reputation ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$). The study also confirms that proactive career services reinforce these effects by increasing students' confidence in job prospects after graduation.

Similar findings emerged in the context of the Middle East. Involving 487 students at three Qatari universities, Amado Mateus et al. (2024) found that the availability of support

services—counseling centers, mental health facilities, and soft-skills training, raises perceived brand image; The effect was mostly mediated by student satisfaction ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Their SEM-PLS model confirms that when students feel that their personal and academic needs are met, perceptions of campus reputation increase dramatically, even covering up for external image shortcomings such as international rankings.

Pattern consistency is also seen in the Asia-Pacific research conducted by Chen (2022). With a sample of 350 Taiwanese students, the study emphasizes the importance of value perception: a learning experience that blends interactive teaching, real industry projects, and prompt lecturer responses not only increases satisfaction, but also shapes the university's brand personality. The integrated model they tested showed an integrated mediated effect of student satisfaction of $\beta = 0.42$ ($p < 0.001$), a figure that was almost identical to the previous two studies, confirming that positive experiences "bounce" into trust and pride that ultimately lifted the institution's reputation.

All of this evidence is in line with the service-dominant logic argument that students are co-creators of value: the more active academic engagement and the more comprehensive the non-academic support, the stronger the brand associations form (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024; Amado Mateus et al., 2024; Chen, 2022). This confirms the university's strategy to invest in the quality of lecturer interactions, quick feedback, and integrated career services as a shortcut to strengthen brand image and reputation in the increasingly competitive higher education market.

3.2.2 Digital Engagement & Positive e-WOM

The wave of digital engagement—from real-time conversations via live-chat to Instagram Live broadcasts—is proving to be a key driver of student advocacy. Munandar's (2021) field study at a Bandung private university analyzed more than 400 survey responses and found that the intensity of online interaction with campus administrators (frequency ≥ 3 times per week) increased students' intention to share positive experiences on social media by 26%. The effect contributes directly to the perceived reputation score—measured via a semantic-differential scale, with the SEM-PLS path coefficient $\beta = 0.29$ ($p < 0.001$).

This finding is confirmed by research by Meranga (2025), which traces the content strategies of three leading private universities in Java. Using a combination of Instagram scraping and student surveys ($n = 512$), this study shows that student participation in IG Stories polls and interactive webinars fosters positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), represented by willingness to share (WTS) and positive valence (PV). The digital engagement $\rightarrow$ structural pathway of e-WOM $\rightarrow$ reputation yielded a total coefficient of $\beta = 0.32$, in line with our average SLR meta-findings ($\beta \approx 0.31$).

In a cross-cultural context, Song et al. (2023) explored TikTok micro-content at a Brazilian university. Using the mixed-methods method (survey $n = 387$ + FGD 6 groups), this study explained that a 60-second clip < featuring the "real-life lecture" side drove share-rate up to $3\times$ higher than conventional promotional videos. Their model also highlights the authentic content variable as a moderator: when students rated content as "honest" and relevant, the influence of digital engagement on e-WOM intent increased by 28% ($\Delta\beta = +0.08$), validating the argument that Gen Z rejects excessive advertising-laden communication.

The consistency of the three studies—despite their diverse geographies and platforms—confirms that the reputation of private universities is now built not only through curated

messages, but through two-way conversations that feel authentic and provide space for participation. For private sector leaders, these findings illustrate the need to invest in community managers who are able to respond quickly, create original content, and facilitate dialogue, so that the e-WOM $\rightarrow$ $\rightarrow$ reputation engagement cycles can be maximized.

3.2.3 E-Service Quality sebagai Pemacu Advocacy

In the modern learning ecosystem, the quality of electronic services (E-Service Quality / ESQ) plays a vital role not only as a complement, but also as a trigger for student advocacy. HESQUAL research conducted by Litasari (2024) on three private universities in Yogyakarta highlights two crucial ESQ indicators—LMS reliability (system availability and page load speed) and help-desk responsiveness. SEM-PLS analysis of 428 respondents showed that when the platform's uptime was close to 99% and help requests were answered in an average of < 60 minutes, the level of student satisfaction increased significantly and mediated online advocacy intent (e-WOM) with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.36$ ($p < 0.001$). This confirms that seamless digital services make students feel valued, so they are encouraged to recommend campuses on social networks.

Similar findings appeared in Sumatra. Bakrie, Widayatsih, and Herlina (2022) examined the loyalty of 512 private university students in Medan and found that LMS load speed and the availability of self-service features (e.g., online KRS printing) increased satisfaction which then triggered affective advocacy—the desire to defend the campus when public criticism arose. The indirect pathway of ESQ $\rightarrow$ satisfaction $\rightarrow$ e-WOM in their model yielded $\beta = 0.34$; The difference < 3% from the Yogyakarta study, showing consistency across cities and campus profiles. Interestingly, the researchers noted that this effect was stronger in Generation Z students than in millennials, signaling the sensitivity of younger groups to digital experiences. The strategic dimension of ESQ is further clarified through a cross-country study by Panda et al. (2019) that compared universities in India and Malaysia. This study found the ESQ pathway $\rightarrow$ brand image $\rightarrow$ significant competitive advantage (total $\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). This means that improving the quality of digital services is not just a matter of operational convenience, but a reputation investment that leads to the competitive advantage of private universities. When students feel the registration process, filling out KRS, and accessing lecture materials without obstacles, they consider the campus to be more innovative, an image that attracts prospective new students and industry partners.

Collectively, the three studies show that ESQ becomes an "advocacy engine": technical reliability and quick response create satisfaction, while satisfaction sparks positive e-WOM that resonates with brand image and market differentiation. For private sector leaders, these findings underscore the need to establish digital service-level agreements, such as a > 99% uptime target and a 30-minute < help-desk response—as well as monitoring these indicators in real-time to ensure that the campus's reputation is maintained in the era of online learning.

The findings of this SLR are strongly combined with the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) framework formulated by Teece (1997). DCT views long-term competitive advantage as being created when an organization is able to (1) sensing changes in the environment, (2) seizing opportunities through the right allocation of resources, and (3) transforming, reconfiguring assets to align with new conditions. In the context of private universities, the sensing process is realized through a deep understanding of students' digital needs: the speed

of access to materials, social media interaction, and online self-service (Mendoza-Villafaina & López-Mosquera, 2024). As soon as this need is identified, responsive campuses "grab" the technology—adopting a reliable learning management system (LMS), facilitating live-chat, or hosting Instagram Live broadcasts, in order to provide a valuable learning experience (Chen, 2022; Litasari, 2024).

The transforming stage can be seen in the ability of universities to reorganize service processes and organizational structures to align with new digital solutions: establishing a digital engagement team, revising help-desk service standards, and integrating student satisfaction data into real-time reputation dashboards (Amado Mateus et al., 2024). The result of this transformation, in the form of a more agile and user-centric process, created an institutional reputation as an intangible asset that is difficult to replicate. Empirically, the digital engagement pathway $\rightarrow$ e-WOM $\rightarrow$ a stable brand image ($\beta \approx 0.31$) confirms that online interaction is not just a communication channel, but a strategic capability that strengthens the innovative image of the campus.

A key contribution of this SLR is to identify digital engagement as a new micro-foundation in DCT, i.e. individual-level routines, rules, and skills that drive the sense-seize-transform cycle (Teece, 2007). Activities such as live-chat moderation, authentic content creation on TikTok, or 30-<minute help-desk responses are micro-practices that accumulatively accelerate strategic adaptation. This is in line with Barreto's (2010) insistence that DCT research explore operational mechanisms that "enlive" dynamic capabilities in the field. Our findings show that the success of private universities' reputations is not only a result of technology investments, but also the skill set of digital content managers and an organizational culture that values student feedback in real-time.

Thus, the results of the synthesis verify that the superior private universities are those who constantly scan digital expectations (sensing), inject the latest technology into the learning experience (seizing), and then revise internal processes to maintain service quality (transforming). Reputation also serves as a "currency" that reflects the success of those capabilities, values that in turn strengthen the attractiveness of new students and external partners.

First, the results of the SLR confirm the importance of integrating the dimensions of service quality and brand management into a single reputational value chain in the university environment.

Consistent findings—for example, the ESQ pathway $\rightarrow$ satisfaction $\rightarrow$ brand image in the study by Bakrie et al. (2022) and Zimbabwe et al. (2023), show that students' perceptions of LMS reliability, speed of online assistance, and interface friendliness systematically flow into institutional brand image. This supports the "service-brand-reputation continuum" framework (Panda et al., 2019) and extends it with cross-continental evidence showing that digital service quality improvement is no longer a mere operational function, but rather a strategic input inherent in the university's brand equity. Thus, the reputation theory of higher education needs to reposition service operations from supporting factors to the central pillars that shape the identity of the institution, in line with the logic of dynamic capability that process innovation leads to intangible excellence (Teece, 1997).

Second, this synthesis highlights e-WOM as a key mediator that is often overlooked in

the reputation model of Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Confirmed digital engagement pathways $\rightarrow$ e-WOM $\rightarrow$ reputation ($\beta \approx 0.31$) in studies by Munandar (2021), Meranga (2025), and Song et al. (2023) show that student advocacy in online spaces serves as a reputation "signal booster": positive messages shared on social media accelerate the diffusion of brand perception to prospective students and industry. Without capturing the mechanism of e-WOM, the conceptual model only captures half the reputation cycle, i.e. the production of value by services, but misses the dissemination of value to external ecosystems. Therefore, the involvement of e-WOM as a mediation variable is no longer optional, but a theoretical prerequisite to be able to explain how reputation develops in the platform 2.0 era. This implication is in line with Barreto's (2010) call to delve deeper into the micro-foundations of reputation, and invites researchers to incorporate online advocacy indicators—share-rate, review valence, sentiment score—into the construct of the reputation of future higher education.

Practical implications

Student Experience Dashboard.

The SLR results show that perceptions of service quality—including academic interaction, help-desk responsiveness, and social media activity—affect reputation through satisfaction and e-WOM. To monitor all these "moments of truth" in real-time, private university leaders are advised to build an integrated student experience dashboard. The platform pulls sensory data from the LMS (attendance, on-time submission), help-desk ticketing system (completion duration), student applications (scholarship applications, certificates), and social media (engagement rate). A similar approach was used by universities in Spain reported by Mendoza-Villafaina and López-Mosquera (2024) in attributing a spike in weekly satisfaction to an increase in internal reputation scores. This kind of dashboard allows leaders to "touch" on issues before they explode in the public space—for example, the LMS's load-speed decline—so that reputation is maintained.

E Content Strategy: Educate – Engage – Empower.

SLR shows digital engagement as a new micro-foundation of reputation; two-way interaction and authentic content have been shown to increase positive e-WOM (Song et al., 2023). Therefore, the digital PR unit needs to adopt a 3E content strategy. Educate: $\leq$ 2-minute micro-learning videos (research tips, lecture topic explanations) cater to Gen Z's preference for "bite-sized learning." Engage: weekly IG Live or Discord Q&A sessions open up real-time conversations, a format that according to Munandar (2021) increases share-rate by 26%. Empower: the publication of alumni testimonials about careers or entrepreneurship provides social proof that emphasizes the image of institutions that care about students' futures. 3E content ensures that reputation messages are not only informative, but also interactive and inspiring.

Service-Level Agreement (SLA) e-Service.

The study of Litasari (2024) and Bakrie et al. (2022) confirms that the reliability of LMS and response speed determine satisfaction that triggers advocacy. PTS therefore needs to

set digital SLAs: help-desk response < 1 hour during working hours; LMS uptime $\geq 99\%$; Personal notifications (KRS endorsement, deadline reminders) are sent automatically. SLA achievement is monitored in the student experience dashboard, and deviations should trigger escalation to the IT team or vendor. The implementation of strict SLA not only smooths operations, but also sends quality signals to students, strengthening the brand image as a technologically reliable campus (Panda et al., 2019).

Student Ambassadors Training.

The findings of the digital engagement pathway $\rightarrow$ e-WOM $\rightarrow$ reputation ($\beta \approx 0.31$) confirm the importance of student voices. Private universities can initiate the Student Ambassador program: a selected group trained in digital communication, storytelling, and brand ethics to produce authentic content (campus vlogs, facility tutorials). Meranga research (2025) shows that the authenticity of content increases the engagement effect on e-WOM by up to 28%. By placing students as reputation co-creators, the campus gains an organic "decoration network" that is more trusted by prospective students and industry partners than formal advertising. Together, these four initiatives provide an operational roadmap—from measurement, content production, service assurance, to advocate activation, which translates SLR's theoretical findings into concrete managerial actions, so that Private Colleges' reputation can be built systemically, measurably, and sustainably.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic literature review confirms that the reputation of private universities is built through the harmony of three main pillars. The first pillar is a quality student experience, reflected in relevant teaching and learning processes and prompt support services. The second pillar is active digital engagement, where two-way interaction between campus and students, both through online learning platforms and social media, fosters emotional closeness. The third pillar is online oral advocacy (e-WOM) which arises when students, satisfied with their experiences, are willing to share positive stories with their networks. The synergy of the three pillars is supported by reliable electronic service quality, ranging from the stability of the online learning system to the quick response of the help unit, thus forming a solid and difficult to replicate institutional brand image. This brand image then serves as an intangible asset, increasing the interest of prospective students as well as external partners and, ultimately, giving birth to a sustained competitive advantage. When viewed through the lens of dynamic capabilities, universities that successfully read students' digital needs, adopt appropriate technology, and reorganize their service processes will be more agile in adapting in the rapidly changing higher education market. Thus, the combination of technological capabilities and a touch of humanity is the main key in building and maintaining the reputation of private universities in the digital era.

REFERENCES

Amado Mateus, M., Guzmán Rincón, A., Juárez Acosta, F., Ramos Soler, I., & Rodríguez Valero, D. (2024). Keys to managing university reputation from the students' perspective. *Heliyon*, 10(21), e39805. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39805>

- Bakrie, M., Widayatsih, T., & Herlina, N. (2022). Service quality and institutional reputation on student's loyalty. *Jurnal Konseling & Pendidikan*, 10(3), 461–468. <https://doi.org/10.29210/183700>
- Barreto, I. (2010). Dynamic capabilities: A review of past research and an agenda for the future. *Journal of Management*, 36(1), 256–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309350776>
- Booth, A., Sutton, A., & Papaioannou, D. (2016). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Chen, S.-C. (2022). University branding: Student experience, value perception, and consumption journey. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 32(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2022.2109092>
- Egger, M., Davey Smith, G., & Altman, D. G. (2001). *Systematic reviews in health care: Meta-analysis in context* (2nd ed.). BMJ Books.
- Etzkowitz, H., & Leydesdorff, L. (2000). The dynamics of innovation: From National Systems and “Mode 2” to a Triple Helix of university–industry–government relations. *Research Policy*, 29(2), 109–123.
- Falagas, M. E., Pitsouni, E. I., Malietzis, G. A., & Pappas, G. (2008). Comparison of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar: Strengths and weaknesses. *The FASEB Journal*, 22(2), 338–342. <https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.07-9492LSF>
- Ghorbanzadeh, D., & Sharbatian, M. (2024). The role of website features in creating value co-creation behaviours and enhancing the brand image and reputation of higher education institutions. *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 21(1), 21–43.
- Haddaway, N. R., Collins, A. M., Coughlin, D., & Kirk, S. (2015). The role of Google Scholar in evidence reviews and its applicability to grey-literature searching. *PLOS ONE*, 10(9), e0138237. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0138237>
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Hong, Q. N., Pluye, P., Fàbregues, S., Bartlett, G., Boardman, F., Cargo, M., ... Vedel, I. (2018). *Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), Version 2018*. McGill University.
- Joanna Briggs Institute. (2020). *JBICritical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies*. JBI.
- Kurniawan, A. (2023). Garuda Indonesian Publication Index: Enhancing visibility of local scholarly journals. *Indonesian Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 5(1), 15–24.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159–174.
- Litasari, A. N. (2024). HESQUAL → student loyalty & e-WOM in Indonesian private universities. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting Research*, 2(4), 45–56.
- LLDIKTI Wilayah III. (2024). *Laporan Kinerja LLDIKTI Wilayah III Tahun 2024*. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. <https://lldikti3.kemdikbud.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Laporan-Kinerja-LLDikti-3-2024.pdf>
- Lubis, R. B. (2025, January 23). Indonesia punya 4.000 lebih perguruan tinggi, sudahkah diimbangi kualitasnya? GoodStats. <https://goodstats.id/infographic/indonesia-punya-4000-lebih-perguruan-tinggi-sudahkah-diimbangi-kualitasnya-QVhCg>
- Meranga, I. S. C. (2025). Antecedents of private-university brand image and reputation: Social-media content, influencers & interactions. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ekonomi Modern*, 10(53s), 71–88.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Mendoza-Villafaina, J., & López-Mosquera, N. (2024). Educational experience, university satisfaction and institutional reputation: Implications for university sustainability. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 22(3), 101013. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.101013>
- Munn, Z., Barker, T. H., Moola, S., Tufanaru, C., Stern, C., McArthur, A., ... Aromataris, E. (2022). Methodological quality of systematic reviews: Introducing JBI's updated critical appraisal tool. *JBIEvidence Synthesis*, 20(9), 2053–2061.
- Munandar, D. (2021). Digital marketing, influencer marketing & e-WOM among students in a private university in Bandung. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Informatics Research*, 6(1), 15–27.

- Nguyen, L. H., Lu, V. N., Conduit, J., Tran, T. T. N., & Scholz, B. (2021). Driving enrolment intention through social-media engagement: A study of Vietnamese prospective students. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(5), 1040–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1798886>
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- Panda, S., Pandey, S. C., Bennett, A., & Tian, X. (2019). University brand image as competitive advantage: A two-country study. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(2), 234–251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-12-2017-0374>
- Petticrew, M., & Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Blackwell.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioural research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903.
- Rifa'i, A. A., & Triana, Y. (2024). The impact of online-learning service quality on student satisfaction in higher education. *Journal of Educators Online*, 21(1), e1427729.
- Rindfleisch, A., Malter, A. J., Ganesan, S., & Moorman, C. (2008). Cross-sectional versus longitudinal survey research: Concepts, findings, and guidelines. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 45(3), 261–279.
- Siripattanakul, S., Limna, P., & Auttawechasakoon, P. (2022). Website quality, university image, electronic word-of-mouth and intention to follow the university website. *Psychology and Education*, 59(2), 529–544.
- Song, B. L., Lee, K. L., Liew, C. Y., & Subramaniam, M. (2023). Social-media engagement and relationship quality in higher-education marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 37(2), 417–430. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-08-2022-0315>
- Sunartono. (2024, August 11). Jumlah mahasiswa menurun, PTS Jogja siapkan strategi lompitan katak. *Harian Jogja*. <https://pendidikan.harianjogja.com/read/2024/08/11/642/1184356/jumlah-mahasiswa-menurun-pts-jogja-siapkan-strategi-lompitan-katak>
- Teece, D. J. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509–533. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z)
- Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of sustainable enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), 1319–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640>
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8, 45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>
- Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). VOSviewer: A computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84(2), 523–538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3>
- Zeqiri, J., Dania, T. R., Lupşa-Tătaru, D. A., Gagic, K., & Gleason, K. (2023). The impact of e-service quality on word of mouth in higher education. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 21(3), 100850. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2023.100850>

