

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USER GENERATED CONTENT THROUGH VALUE PERCEPTION IN INCREASING INTEREST IN CHOOSING PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN RIAU

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accepted: 5/3/2026; revised: 2/4/2026; published: 31/5/2026

ABSTRACT : The development of digital technology has changed the way prospective students obtain information about universities. One increasingly important form of digital communication is User Generated Content (UGC), which is content produced by students, alumni, and the general public through social media. Official university promotions are perceived as less authentic than this user generated content. This study uses perceived value as a mediating variable to assess how well user generated content increases intention to choose a private institution in Riau Province. A total of 150 prospective students were surveyed as part of this quantitative investigation. A purposive survey method was used. For data analysis, SmartPLS 3 software was used. With a route coefficient of 0.557, intention to choose with a coefficient of 0.287, and perceived value with a coefficient of 0.809, the findings indicate a positive impact of user-generated content. These results also indicate that perceived value plays a mediating role in the relationship between intention to choose and user-generated content. Consequently, prospective students' perceptions of the value of private universities increase along with the authenticity, credibility, relevance, usefulness, and interactivity of information provided by students and alumni, thus increasing their intention to choose that institution.

Keywords: *User generated content, value perception, Interest in Choosing*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has changed the way people obtain information, including how they choose a school. While previously prospective students sought official information about universities primarily through brochures, exhibitions, or the institution's official website, they now tend to seek it through social media (Putri, 2025). Social media users tend to seek out experiences, reviews, testimonials, and student activities shared by (Sasikumar and Hemalatha, 2026).

This is known as User Generated Content (UGC), which is content created independently by users and not by the university. UGC is considered more honest and objective than official promotional information and can provide a more

accurate picture of the academic world and campus environment.

UGC is considered a more realistic, reliable, and trustworthy type of digital marketing communication (Krishna, 2025). A true picture of a university's quality can be seen from the student experience, student organization activities, campus facilities, academic achievements, and alumni testimonials. Therefore, UGC plays a strategic role in shaping prospective students' perceptions before they make a decision about their chosen university.

In Riau Province, private universities (PTS) are increasingly competitive. According to the 2026 UniRank rankings, several private universities in Riau have quite varied positions compared to other universities nationwide. Lancang Kuning

University is ranked 124th nationwide, while Riau Islamic University is ranked 143rd, Muhammadiyah University of Riau is ranked 163rd, Hang Tuah University Pekanbaru is ranked 176th, Pasir Pengaraian University is ranked 238th, Abdurrahman University is ranked 289th, Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai University is ranked 371st, Kuantan Singingi Islamic University is ranked 419th, and Indragiri Islamic University is ranked 426th (Unirank Website, 2026).

These differences in position indicate that each private university faces different challenges in becoming more attractive to prospective students in the competition. It should be noted that UniRank rankings are based on web presence and web visibility rather than a direct assessment of academic quality. With the increasing number of private universities, with the number of high school/vocational school graduates in Riau and the emergence of more tertiary choices, competition for new students is becoming increasingly fierce. This condition encourages campuses to use more creative digital marketing strategies (Adryan et al., 2025). However, many other universities still focus on campus promotion through official accounts, while under-managing user-generated content from students and alumni (Mesra et al., 2025). However, research shows that user-generated content is more credible than corporate or university marketing communications.

User generated content does not necessarily directly increase students' intention to enroll at a particular university. How prospective students interpret the data into perceived value significantly determines the performance of UGC. According to marketing theory, perceived value is a consumer's consideration of the benefits gained compared to the costs or expenses incurred (Priansa, 2016). Academic quality, university reputation, learning facilities, campus environment,

administrative services, and student learning experiences are some of the benefits of higher education.

When user generated content provides a true picture of a university's quality, prospective students will perceive the university as highly valuable. Conversely, if the information obtained reveals negative student experiences, perceived value will also decrease, which in turn will reduce students interest in choosing that university. Therefore, perceived value is suspected to be a mediating variable that determines user behavior (Putri, 2023). Previous studies have shown that perceived value, trust, satisfaction, and intention to use goods and services are positively influenced by user-generated content (Adriani, 2019).

However, most research has been conducted on the e-commerce, tourism, hospitality, and food industries, with very little research on higher education. In contrast, research on digital marketing in higher education has focused more on the impact of brand image, e-word of mouth (e-WOM), or social media marketing (Marlena, 2022). However, very little research has specifically examined the effectiveness of user-generated content through perceived value on intention to choose a private university.

This study, entitled "The Effectiveness of User Generated Content through Perceived Value in Increasing Intention to Choose a Private University in Riau," is suitable for this purpose. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of research on educational service marketing, particularly regarding the effectiveness of user generated content as a digital marketing strategy. In addition, this research is expected to provide practical assistance for private universities in Riau Province in creating marketing communication strategies based on students' real experiences, thereby increasing prospective students interest in enrolling in certain universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

User generated content

User-generated content (UGC) is created by social media content creators and consists of documentation of user experiences with a product or service, which is then shared on social media so that other customers can consider it before purchasing (Firdaus, 2025). This is a type of marketing content that exists in today's globalized era (Marlena, 2022). These reviews can include personal responses, feedback, or reviews about the product's features, design, functionality, packaging, or delivery method.

User generated content, such as textual, informative, and interactive content, is distributed through social media platforms, helping customers choose products before making a purchase (Natasya et al, 2025). Customers can see the product in real life with visual content, which increases their engagement and satisfaction. Furthermore, UGC interacts with platform-level variables such as service quality, ease of navigation, and information relevance to determine overall satisfaction (Sasikumar and Hemalatha, 2026).

Consumers engage in UGC for the purpose of self promotion, satisfaction, or changing public perception, often using marketing communication styles (Muspita et al, 2026). Marketers benefit from this phenomenon because they can obtain valuable information from customers and leverage their informants at low cost by illustrating the emergence of "consumer actors" who, in open dialogue, serve as potential communication relays and pose a threat to an organization's online perception. Customer trust makes UGC more appealing than conventional advertising (Oubal and Khouiammi, 2026). According to (Khayani, and Adhi, 2025) UGC consists of three dimensions:

Content authenticity: content with a high level of authenticity can provide a clear and

objective picture of the user experience with a product or service.

Content appeal: content that attracts viewers to interact.

Content usefulness: content's usefulness depends on its strong appeal.

Content capability: content can generate positive emotions toward a brand or product. Positive emotions indicate satisfaction and increase consumer trust, and can encourage them to consider purchasing a product.

Value Perception

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information into a meaningful picture of the world. Consumer value is the benefit consumers receive by reducing purchasing costs (Priansa, 2016). Perceived value is the difference in potential customers' perceptions of all the benefits and costs of an offering compared to alternatives (Edwin and Mariati, 2026). Therefore, a product is considered to have high value if it meets customer needs, desires, and demands.

Value Perception Indicators according to (Putra et al., 2026) :

Functional Value: the practical benefits or perceived utility of a product or service.

Emotional Value: positive feelings arising from the consumption experience.

Social Value: the perception of increased status or social image through product use.

Economic Value: the perception of the balance between benefits and costs.

Experiential Value: the overall quality of the interaction experience with the product or service.

In marketing, perceived value is considered an important indicator in assessing the feasibility of an exchange, namely whether the product or service is worth the price and benefits offered. Values that are considered appropriate will encourage consumers to make purchases and have a positive impact on their purchasing decisions (Aisyah et al., 2025).

Interest In Choosing

Interest is a desire supported by desire after observation, vision, and consideration with the needs of (Srimastuti, et al, 2025). According to Kotler and Keller (2016), interest in choosing is also known as purchasing intention, namely a person's tendency to buy/choose by using a product or service after conducting a process of evaluating various alternatives. This concept is adapted to the world of higher education to become the interest of prospective students to choose a college and enroll. Interest in choosing a college is defined as the tendency of prospective students to choose and enroll in a college after conducting the process of searching for information, evaluating various options, and considering the advantages of the college.

In the perspective of consumer behavior, interest is a phase before decision-making that indicates a person's desire, preference, and readiness to take certain actions (Gifita et al., 2025). Therefore, interest in choosing is one of the important metrics that can be used to measure how effective a college's marketing strategy is.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey method. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to examine the causal relationship between the following variables: User Generated Content (UGC), Perceived Value, and Intention to Choose a Private University through hypothesis testing with numerical data.

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling because the population of prospective students was not precisely known, or the population was not limited (Lisdayanti et al., 2025). According to the formula of (Hair et al., 2012), the sample size should be at least 5–10 times the number of independent variable indicators. Generally, the sample size should be at

least five times larger than the number of variable indicators to be analyzed. Thus, the number of variable indicators is $15 \times 10 = 150$, and the total sample for this study was 150 respondents. Data analysis in this study used Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) provided by SmartPLS 3 (Lutfi and Sukmono, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Presentase (%)	Total(person)
Male	33	50
Female	67	100
Total	100%	150

Source : Researcher data processing results, (2026)

According to the table above, of the 150 respondents, 100 were female, representing 67%, and 50 were male, representing 33%, representing the majority of women. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents in this study were female. This indicates that, compared to men, more women completed the questionnaire.

Table 2. Respondents Age

Age	Presentase (%)	Total (Person)
17 years	64	96
18 years	36	54
Total	100%	150

Source : Researcher data processing results, (2026)

According to Table 2 From the age characteristics, the majority of respondents were 17 years old, 96 people with a percentage of 64%, and 54 people with a percentage of 36%. The number of respondents in this study was 150 people. This finding shows that most respondents are prospective students at the age of 17, and

this age composition shows that most respondents are in the age range of 17 to 18 years.

Validity and Reliability Results

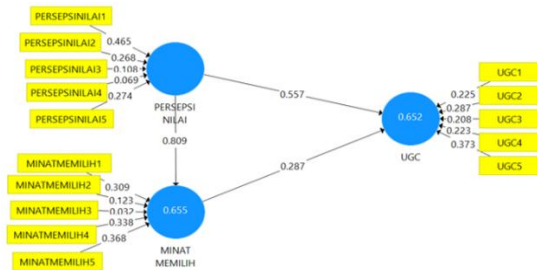


Figure 1. Outer Model

Source : Researcher data processing results, (2026)

Tabel 3. Outer Loading

Variab le	Indicato r	Outer Loading	Descriptio n
User Generated Content (UGC)	UGC1	0,754	Valid
	UGC2	0,755	Valid
	UGC3	0,744	Valid
	UGC4	0,763	Valid
	UGC5	0,775	Valid
Perceived Value	PN1	0,916	Valid
	PN2	0,818	Valid
	PN3	0,707	Valid
	PN4	0,796	Valid
	PN5	0,815	Valid
Interest In Choosing	MM1	0,855	Valid
	MM2	0,763	Valid
	MM3	0,806	Valid
	MM4	0,885	Valid
	MM5	0,860	Valid

Source : Researcher data processing results, (2026)

The outer loading analysis aims to evaluate the validity and reliability of the indicators used to measure each research

construct. The outer loading value is used to conduct the test. Most indicators meet the convergent validity requirements with an outer loading value above 0.70, as shown by the results of SmartPLS data processing by (Sakinah et al., 2026). Based on the table above, it can be concluded that all indicators have a loading factor value greater than 0.70 so that all indicators are declared valid and suitable for use in further analysis. The results show that each indicator can show the construct being measured well.

Discriminant Validity Test Results

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Test

Relationship Between Variables	Coefficient Value
Perceived Value -> Intention to Choose	0,809
UGC -> Intention to Choose	0,738
UGC -> Perceived Value	0,789

Source : Researcher data processing results, (2026)

As seen from the table above, with the highest correlation value of 0.809, the relationship between Perceived Value and Intention to Choose was obtained, followed by the relationship between UGC and Perceived Value of 0.789, and the relationship between UGC and Intention to Choose of 0.738. These two correlation values indicate a fairly strong correlation between the variables in the research model.

Path Coefficient Results

The path coefficient estimation results indicate the magnitude of the influence between variables in the research model.

Table 5. Path coefficient test results

Relationship of Variable	Coefficients
User Generated Content → Perceived Value	0,557
User Generated Content → Intention to Choose	0,287
Perceived Value → Intention to Choose	0,809

Source : Researcher data processing results, (2026)

The results of the table above show that:

- User Generated Content has a positive effect on Perceived Value with a coefficient of 0.557, indicating that the better the user-generated content received, the higher their perceived value of private universities.
- User Generated Content also has a positive effect on Intention to Study with a coefficient of 0.287, indicating that better-quality content can increase prospective students' interest in studying at private universities. The strongest relationship between these values in the research model indicates that greater perceived value by prospective students is associated with their intention to enroll at private universities.
- Perceived Value has a positive effect on Intention to Study with a coefficient of 0.809. The strongest relationship between these values in the research model indicates that greater perceived value by prospective students is associated with their intention to enroll at private universities.

CONCLUSION

The results of a study conducted on 150 respondents using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) showed that using User-Generated

Content on Perceived Value to Increase Intention to Choose Private Universities in Riau is as follows:

User Generated Content (UGC) has a positive impact on perceived value. With a path coefficient of 0.557, the study indicates that user-generated content, including student experiences, testimonials, on campus activities, and information shared on social media, has a higher perceived value for private universities in Riau Province. Therefore, UGC can shape positive perceptions regarding the quality, benefits, and attractiveness of higher education institutions.

The results indicate that user-generated content (UGC) has a positive impact on prospective students interest in choosing private universities. With a path coefficient of 0.287, UGC has the ability to directly increase prospective students' interest in choosing private universities. UGC remains one of the most effective digital marketing approaches for attracting prospective students, although its direct influence is smaller than its influence through perceived value.

The Influence of Perceived Value on Intention to Choose a Private University is positive. This relationship has a path coefficient of 0.809, which is the most significant influence in the research model. The results indicate that the more favorable prospective students perceive the quality of education, facilities, reputation, value for money, and learning experience at a university, the greater their intention to choose that university.

Perceived Value serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between user-generated content and intention to choose. This suggests that user-generated content not only directly influences intention to choose but also enhances it by creating a positive perception of value. In other words, UGC will be more effective in increasing intention to choose if it instills value in the eyes of prospective students.

Overall, this study indicates that user-generated content is an effective digital marketing approach to increase student interest in enrolling in private universities in Riau Province, primarily by enhancing perceived value. Therefore, private universities should encourage students, alumni, and employees to post original, informative, and engaging content on social media. This should be part of their marketing communications plans aimed at enhancing university competitiveness.

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