

## STUDENTS AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE ON SERVICE QUALITY AND INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS ON INDONESIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Junaid Ali Saeed Rana<sup>1\*</sup>, Antonius Agus Susanto<sup>2</sup>, Wenny Chandra Mandagie<sup>3</sup>

Management Program, STIE Jakarta International College, Indonesia.

\*Corresponding Author: [junaid.rana@jic.ac.id](mailto:junaid.rana@jic.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

To formulate aggressive marketing strategies, the quality of service and marketing communication tools must provide a meaningful and consistent message. Service quality is gaining substantial respect in service marketing literature and higher education services. Aggressive marketing strategies among private universities have enabled these institutes to become marketing-oriented as students are considered consumers, therefore universities can expand their marketing efforts through improved service quality and consistent marketing communication in the form of Integrated Marketing Communication. This paper provides multiple-perspective (staff and student) descriptive analysis in evaluating service quality along with the importance of integrated marketing communication. The data from 34 universities (management perspective) and 5 large-sized universities (student perspective) was collected, analyzed, and compared using meaningful graphs providing significant conclusions. The paper concludes by providing suggestions, to private universities in Indonesia to efficiently and effectively incorporate service quality and integrated marketing communication in their action plans to improve their ranking and services that they promise to provide their current and prospective students.

### INTRODUCTION

With intense competition among different countries in the world, emerging economies are showing a higher level of performance over the last 2 decades. Certain countries have achieved global growth and this has been attributed to some changes in the external environment even in the presence of difficulties faced in accessing input prices at a lower rate to gain comparative advantage over other economies. This trend is also evident in the report by the World Economic Forum (2015) which provides a summary of the performance of different economies in different sectors.

To gain a comparative advantage, countries need to develop skills in all facets of their economy. To catch-up with Indonesia's skills set, this would require an improvement in service quality of education at all levels possible, along with improving and expanding skillsets delivered at training centers. According to the literature, service quality is one of the key measures to gain a competitive edge, thus universities' performance is signified by the services students receive (Hill, 1995). In Indonesia, the higher education service quality is monitored by their local governing body namely BAN-PT.

Over the past decades, service quality is considered as an important measure towards consumer interactive literature (Parasuraman et al., 1985), gaining substantial respect in service marketing

literature along with literature on higher education (Telford & Masson, 2005; Smith, O'Donnell, Easton, & Rudd, 2007). Service quality characteristics as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1985) are intangibility, inseparability, perishability, and heterogeneity. Therefore, graduates and workforces should also be provided with technical skills and behavioral skills to improve service quality in higher education so that they can be highly valued by their employers (World Bank, 2014).

Along with the service quality, the combination of the marketing communication strategy is equally important to influence consumer decisions in the service industry. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) helps organizations in many different ways, such as building product's identification and association of the customer with certain services (brand awareness), or showing a relationship between tangible/intangible brand association with its positive properties, or it can also motivate brand judgments or brand feelings in a positive manner, and/or facilitates a sturdy linkage between the brand and its customers (Keller, 2009).

Many researchers consider the IMC concept as an important means to expand marketing efforts and generate brand equity (Duncan, 2002; Kirchner, 2003; McGrath, 2005) through service quality. According to Chen (2008), aggressive marketing in universities along with other higher education institutes has enabled these institutes to become marketing-oriented and their students are considered as consumers. Higher education is considered one of the important pillars for any economy and to predicting its quality is quite difficult for consumers or students. Usually, students would distinguish the choice of higher education institutes as an uncertain decision due to the factors including future career and undoubtedly it is indeed a costly service they have to commit to before they can make a decision (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003).

This paper aims to provide empirical data presented in the form of descriptive findings from a larger spectrum of research conducted and contributes through the study of service quality and integrated marketing communication of the private universities in DKI Jakarta. The paper follows the IMRAD structure by organizing the literature review for service quality and IMC, followed by the methodology (research design) and multiple perspectives findings for staff and students of the private universities in Jakarta. The paper also provides meaningful theoretical and managerial implications for private universities.

## **LITRATURE REVIEW**

There has been an extensive discussion on the facets of service namely inseparability, intangibility, perishability, and heterogeneity in the marketing literature for the service industry along with the implications (Bateson, 1991; Zeithaml, 1991). A higher degree of risk is residual to the consumers when purchasing services compared to physical commodities, hence a proper evaluation of these services is not possible until they are experienced (Laroche, Bergeron, & Goutaland, 2003; Mitchell, 1999). These complications due to risk perceptions may be more for highly reliable services, which are once consumed become difficult to evaluate. There are internal and external risk reduction strategies for the service industry. External risk reduction strategies include strong advertising campaigns, enhancing reputation, and other public relations activities (Temple, 2006; Chen, 2008). Whereas, internal risk reduction strategies are centered on monitoring the experience of the consumers with the product to diminish uncertainty (Bateson, 1991).

In the service quality literature, there are technical and functional perspectives, marketers prefer a functional perspective over a technical perspective as it truly measures the firm's service quality. The most frequently used measurement model for service quality is SERVQUAL as proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1991). SERVQUAL tool has been extensively used as a measure of organizational capabilities for quality service delivery in many cultures and environments (Chen & Chang, 2005).

To measure the service quality, a prevalent opinion commonly used is perception minus expectation. It is difficult to measure service quality objectively like the quality of a certain product, instead, it is the intangible characteristic that would satisfy the consumer. Service quality is recognized as the main force for commercial marketing and the financial performance of the companies (Buttle, 1996). The five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) are used to measure perceived quality as proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1991).

Higher education quality is quiet dynamic as all processes and their outcomes are improved. The reduced quality challenges posed in higher education are attributed to scarce models of the teaching evaluation process, and insufficient existing quality control applications. These challenges paramount to cumulative pressure on universities but provides areas of improvement for universities to transform into consumer-oriented organizations rather than faculty-centered organizations (Wright, 2000). Education quality can be measured as either meeting or surpassing customer's expectations, therefore this paper emphasizes that students as consumers of the universities and their expectations refer to the services their universities promised to offer.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a marketing tool to deliver consistent brand messages towards marketing channels employed by organizations, entailing personal selling, public relations, advertising, word-of-mouth marketing, and promotion among others. Companies need to deliver consistent messages across all platforms through a better indulgence of integrated communications. Integrated marketing communication assimilates all available marketing resources and tools available to an organization, which directly impacts the bottom-line at minimum cost. IMC includes internet-based marketing, direct marketing, sponsorship, public relations, and database marketing to deliver a unified message to its audience (Brunello, 2013).

In the past two decades, differences are still prevalent among researchers to conceptualize IMC. Despite these controversial theoretical theories, Gould (2004) recognized IMC as a powerful theoretical tool as it attracts and generates cognizant, rational discourse from previous researchers. Kitchen, Joanne, Tao, and Graham (2004) also identifies IMC as a process associated with management and brands, not just a communication process. Therefore, to achieve strategic objectives, IMC manages marketing communication completely and is considered as "the concept under which an organization carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent, and compelling message about the organization and its products" (Kotler & Armstrong, 1997, pp. 450). IMC measurement is equally important for practitioners and academics (Kliatchko, 2008). From the four IMC dimensions proposed by Lee and Park (2007), the first dimension (unified communications for consistent message and image) which primarily focuses on influencing product's recognition, image, consumer preferences, and attitudes, is easier for the consumer to evaluate.

McGrath (2005) researched students at two American universities, concluded that messages used for different media platforms having shared ideas and sophisticated stages of visual consistency could

motivate strong consumer attitudes towards brands compared to similar messages that were found to be less reliable. A survey conducted by Wang et al. (2009) of 197 tourists in a traditional township in Taiwan, studied the IMC role on visitors' destination choice of a heritage. Public relations, advertisement, direct sales, and promotion showed three IMC concepts as a result.

IMC is developed through a four-stage framework (Schultz & Schultz, 2004), "progressing from a highly practical, tactical orientation to one increasingly driven by an understanding of customers and their behaviors" (p. 21). According to the research of the American Productivity and Quality Center, in the early stages of IMC development, it was determined that most organizations addressed marketing communication activities with strategic "how-to" and "when-to" inquiries. The 4 Stages of the IMC framework was used to conduct the current study's survey form.

## **METHOD**

For this research, the authors have used an exploratory research design. A Likert scale questionnaire, with 5 anchor points (1 – 5) was used to gather information from a total of 52 universities, privately operating in Jakarta, Indonesia. To degree for each constructs' items were used from the literature. The questionnaires were interpreted by a sworn translator into the Indonesian language.

The data was gathered from a total of 34 universities (privately operating) in Jakarta from a total of 52 universities. Respondents were the marketing and/or public relation Manager or Directors and a total 67 responses were received. The response received was accounted for 65% of the total universities. From the students' perspective, the responses received were from the five largest privately operating universities in Jakarta. Students from these five universities amassed to 103,963, which represents 45% of total students (compared to 34 universities, the total student population account for 232,137). There are a total of 308,367 students undertaking their studies in 52 universities, hence these 5 large private universities represent 34% of the total student population in Jakarta. Valid and filled responses received were standing at 211.

The descriptive data were analyzed from 2 perspectives i.e. from students' perspective and staff perspective. The data were analyzed separately for the measures of service quality and integrated marketing communication, and finally, a multi-perspective analysis was performed to providing meaningful analysis for the audience and future researchers.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

From the Staff's Perspective, the data collected from the universities was categorized as a small-sized university ( $\leq 10,000$  students), medium-sized university ( $\geq 10,000$  students and  $\leq 20,000$  students), and large-sized university ( $>20,000$  students).

**Table 1:** Categories for Universities: Descriptive Statistics

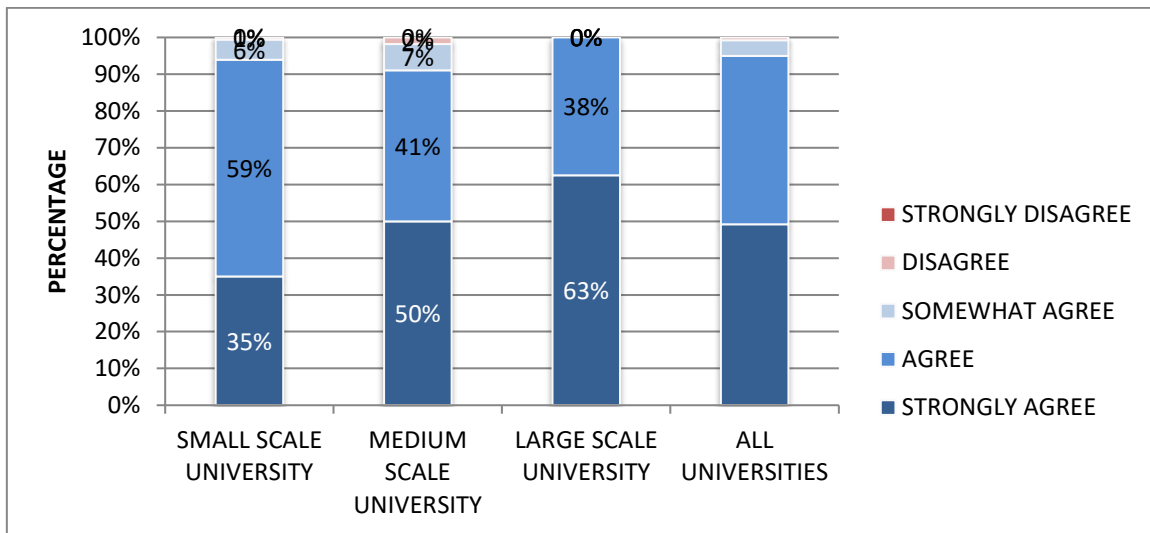
UNIVERSITIES CATEGORIES	UNIVERSITIES THAT RESPONDED			UNIVERSITIES THAT DID NOT RESPOND		
	Total Univ.	No. of Students (in '000)	Total Faculty (in '000)	Total Univ.	No. of Students (in '000)	Total Faculty (in '000)
Small-sized	25	74.68	3.5	16	35.1	1.3
Medium-sized	7	103.16	2.8	1	11.9	0.32
Large-sized	2	54.29	1.8	1	29.3	0.83
<b>AGGREGATE</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>232.14</b>	<b>8.13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>2.44</b>
<b>PROPORTION</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>23%</b>

*Source: Processed data (2017)*

Table 1 shows that the universities were identified as small-sized, medium-sized, and large-sized, and the data was categorized under the heads of universities that responded, and other universities that did not participate. The small-sized university response rate was 61%, whereas the medium-sized university response rate stood at 88%, and finally, the large-sized university response rate was 67%. The aggregate responses (received) presented a 65% valid and filled response rate. Compared to similar research conducted for universities, these responses were found to be higher compared to quantitative research that studied 42 prominent American public colleges and universities ranked by U.S. News & World Report for a total of 82 available and hence their response rate was 51% (Edmiston-Strasser, 2009).

From the students' perspective, 308,367 students and 10,564 faculty members were catered from 52 universities. The gathered data represented 232,137 students and 8,127 faculty members from 34 universities representing a response rate of 65%, which truly represents students' support rate of 75% and 77% for their faculty.

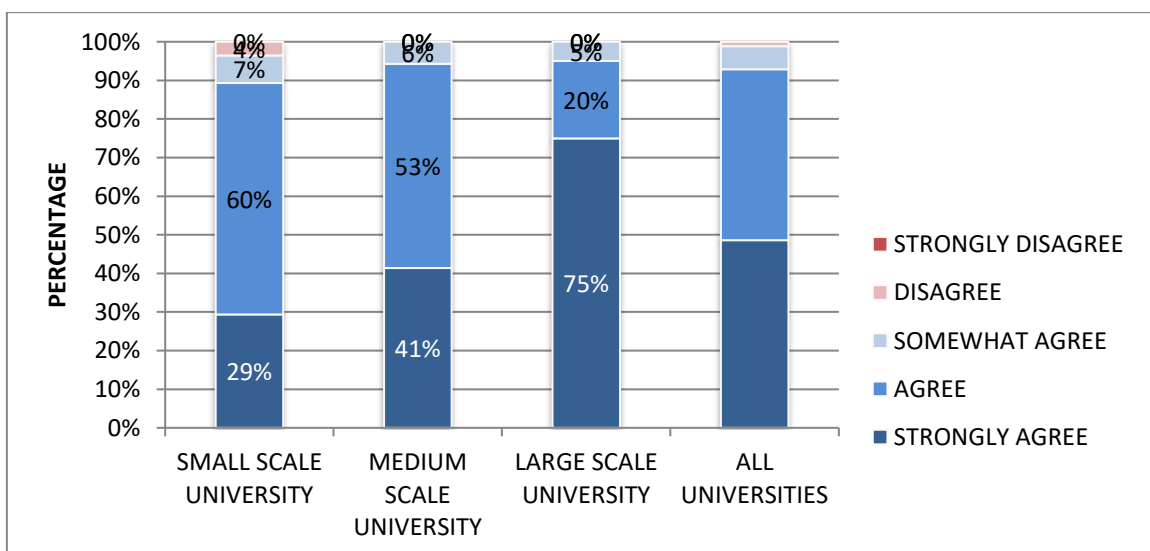
The quality of the service is considered an integral part of the service industry and the quality of the universities in DKI Jakarta can be inferred from the international rankings of the universities. Therefore, this latent variable is also one of the most important variables in this study. To gauge the service quality of the small, medium, and large scale universities, the data were analyzed as well.



**Figure 1:** Service Quality Response Percentage Based on Student Population

The service quality responses generated based on small, medium, and large scale universities student population showed the same trend as it was evident in the social media latent variable (Rana, 2020). The service quality is considered very important and management in general (greater than or equal to 50%) were more satisfied with the quality in large and medium scale university but this percentage was relatively lower in small scale university indicating some moderate service quality that is perceived by the management in those universities. The common agreement towards the service quality provided by the small-scale university was higher (59%) compared to medium (41%) and large (38%) respectively. There were some disagreements also noted in small scale university (1%) and medium-scale university (2%).

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is also an important and emerging research interest, especially for private universities. The data were summarized from the management respondents for further analysis based on the scales of the universities.



**Figure 2:** IMC Response Percentage Based on Student Population

The integrated marketing communication responses generated based on small, medium, and large scale universities student population showed some drastic results for large scale universities compared to small and medium scale universities. The management perspective of IMC for large scale universities,

in general, is that it is considered highly important and a lot of importance is given to IMC as indicated by 75% strong agreement. The medium and small scale universities also do pay attention with 29% and 41% respectively. The management staff in the small and medium scale universities does agree with the IMC strategies and policies but this percentage is lower in large scale universities, which is indicative of the fact that a lot of importance and attention is paid toward the role of IMC by the management staff in large scale universities. Only 4% disagreement was shown by the small scale university with the policies and strategies adopted by the management. No such disagreements were found in medium and large scale universities.

From the Students' Perspective, the data was collected from five large-sized universities operating in Jakarta, and to ensure privacy, the names of the universities are presented as university A, B, C, D, and E. The order of the represented universities exhibits the most populated one in terms of the number of students and their size. As can be seen from table 2 that university A and university B are categorized as large-sized universities ( $\geq 20,000$  students) and they are situated in west Jakarta. University C and university D, along with university E are categorized as medium-sized universities ( $< 20,000$  students) and these 3 universities are located in South Jakarta.

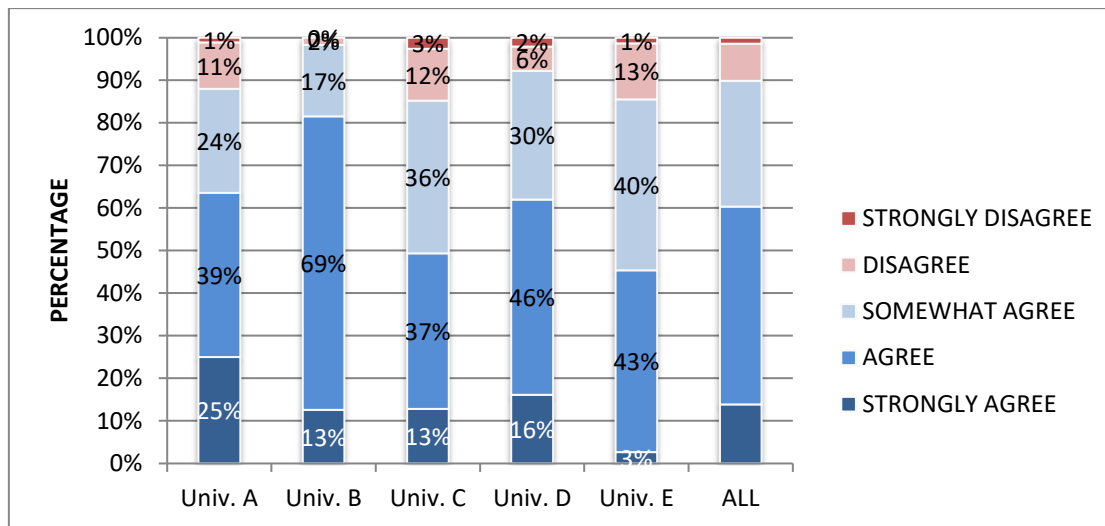
**Table 2:** Students' Perspective from the top 5 universities in Jakarta

Universities	Location	Category	Students	Faculty
Univ. A	West Jakarta	Large-sized	29,225	1,037
Univ. B	West Jakarta	Large-sized	25,068	750
Univ. C	South Jakarta	Medium-sized	18,027	448
Univ. D	South Jakarta	Medium-sized	17,508	415
Univ. E	South Jakarta	Medium-sized	14,135	351
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>103,963</b>	<b>3,001</b>

*Source: Processed data (2017)*

These five universities have a total of 103,963 students along with 3,001 teaching faculty members in the Jakarta region. From the previously discussed (staff' perspective – refer to table 1), the data collected from 34 universities accounted for 232,137 students and had a total teaching faculty of 8,127 staff members, therefore the 5 biggest universities in Jakarta embody 45% of students and 37% of the total faculty from table 2 above. At a macro level of 52 universities, the numbers aggregate to 308,367 students and 10,564 faculty staff. Thus, the 5 universities jointly represent 34% of the aggregated students and 28% of faculty staff in the Jakarta region.

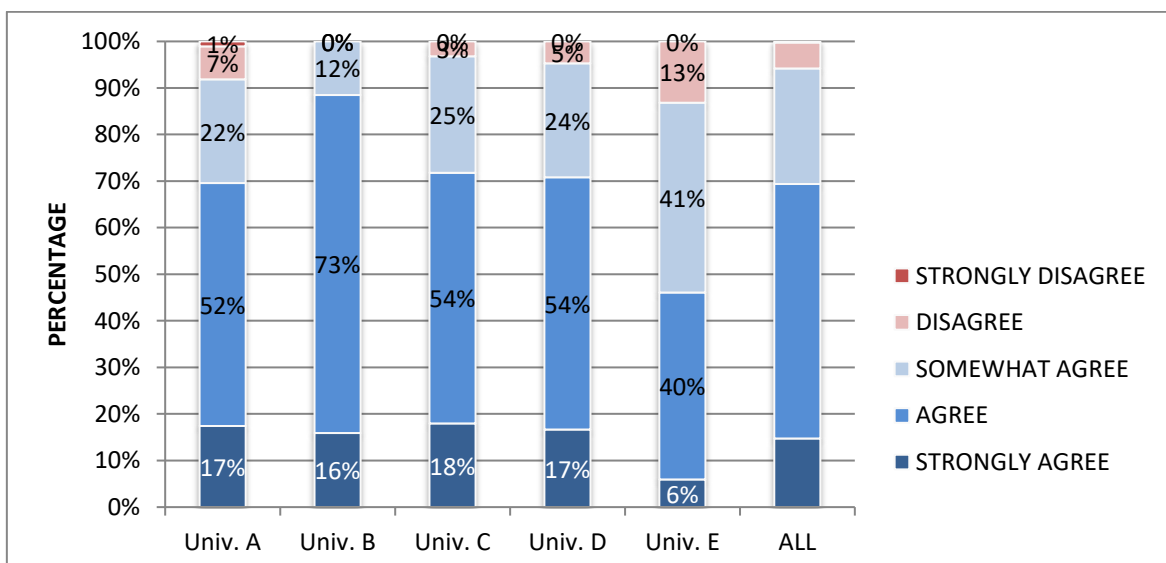
Service quality is considered the most important factor in the service industry and how satisfied the students are with the quality of service provided by their university is also evident from this variable. Thus, a comparison of those 5 universities was conducted in terms of service quality latent variables.



**Figure 3: Service Quality Response Percentage Based on University**

In the graph above it is also evident that university B has once again outperformed all the other universities with an agreed level of 82% and has the lowest disagreement level of 2%. University A on the other hand produced the highest level of strong agreement (25%) and had 12% disagreements as well. University D has performed slightly better than university C and E in terms of its' students agreement level and 8% disagreement level among C and E. University E produced the least 3% strong agreement for its university service quality statement and the most disagreement level (14%) among any other university. Therefore, universities need to pay close attention to the service quality of their university as these students are the main referents to the future students once they have experienced and used the services of their university.

Universities tend to compete with one another through effective marketing communication policies and procedures and the best way to see its effectiveness is through the eyes of the students who are currently studying in that university as these students can reflect how satisfied they are with the marketing communication policies and procedures to truly reflect on those marketing efforts. Therefore, this analysis will provide the students' perspective on IMC policies and procedures, and the level of satisfaction by the students of these 5 universities towards those policies.



**Figure 4: IMC Response Percentage Based on University**



In terms of the policies and procedures adopted by these universities, it can be seen that university B has 89% of general agreement towards its university policies in terms of integrated marketing communication and this university also produced 0% disagreement towards those policies, which shows that this university is effectively running its IMC policies and procedures among all the other universities. University A did produce 69% of general agreements but it also had 8% disagreements towards its IMC policies in the eyes of their students. 22% of the students from University A showed neutrality (somewhat agree), which means that this university should have more clarity towards its IMC policies. University C and D again have shown similar results with a high level of agreements (72%) and low level of disagreements (3-5%) but university D had more neutral students (18%) compared to university C (14%). University E had the highest number of neutral students (41%) and 13% of the highest disagreement level among all the other universities. Therefore, university B performed very well in IMC and there is a margin of improvement for university E in terms of its IMC policies and procedures.

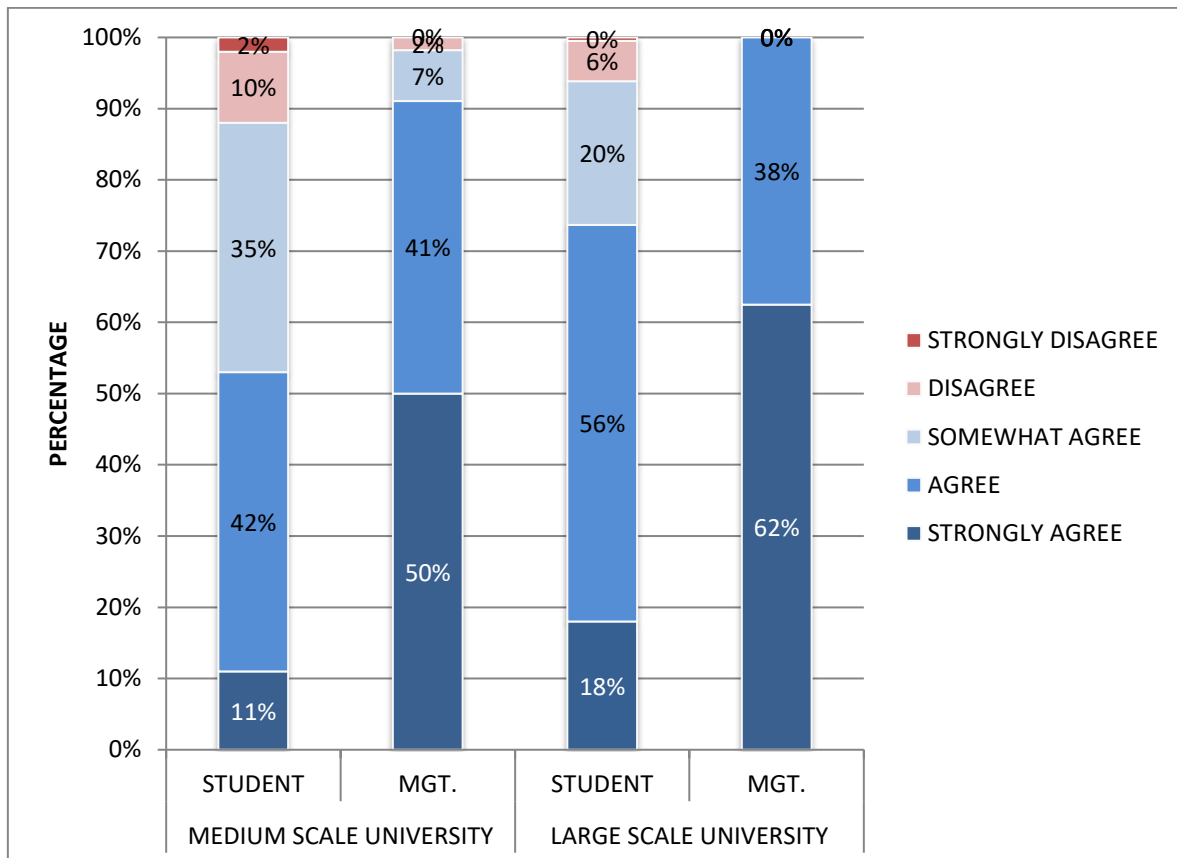
Continuing from the perspectives (staff and students) given above, the researchers recommend that it would be thought-provoking to investigate the perspectives presented above to provide more significant investigation. Thus a multi-perspective analysis is useful for medium-sized and large-sized universities based on the data collected and analyzed above.

**Table 3:** Medium-sized and large-sized Universities: Multi-Perspective Analysis

Category	Location	Staff Perspective			Students Perspective		
		Total Uni.	Students	Faculty	Total Uni.	Students	Faculty
Medium-Sized Univ.	South Jakarta	7	103,162	2,824	3	49,670	1,214
Large-Sized Univ.	West Jakarta	2	54,293	1,787	2	54,293	1,787
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>157,455</b>	<b>4,611</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>103,963</b>	<b>3,001</b>

From the students' perspective, a total of 5 biggest universities (in terms of the number of students) were included in the 34 universities from which the data was collected from the staff perspective. Interestingly 3 of the medium-sized universities were located in South Jakarta and 2 of the large-sized universities were situated in the West Jakarta region. Three of the universities (from the students' perspective) were part of the seven medium-sized universities (from a staff perspective), therefore, reasonable conclusions can be drawn from this study.

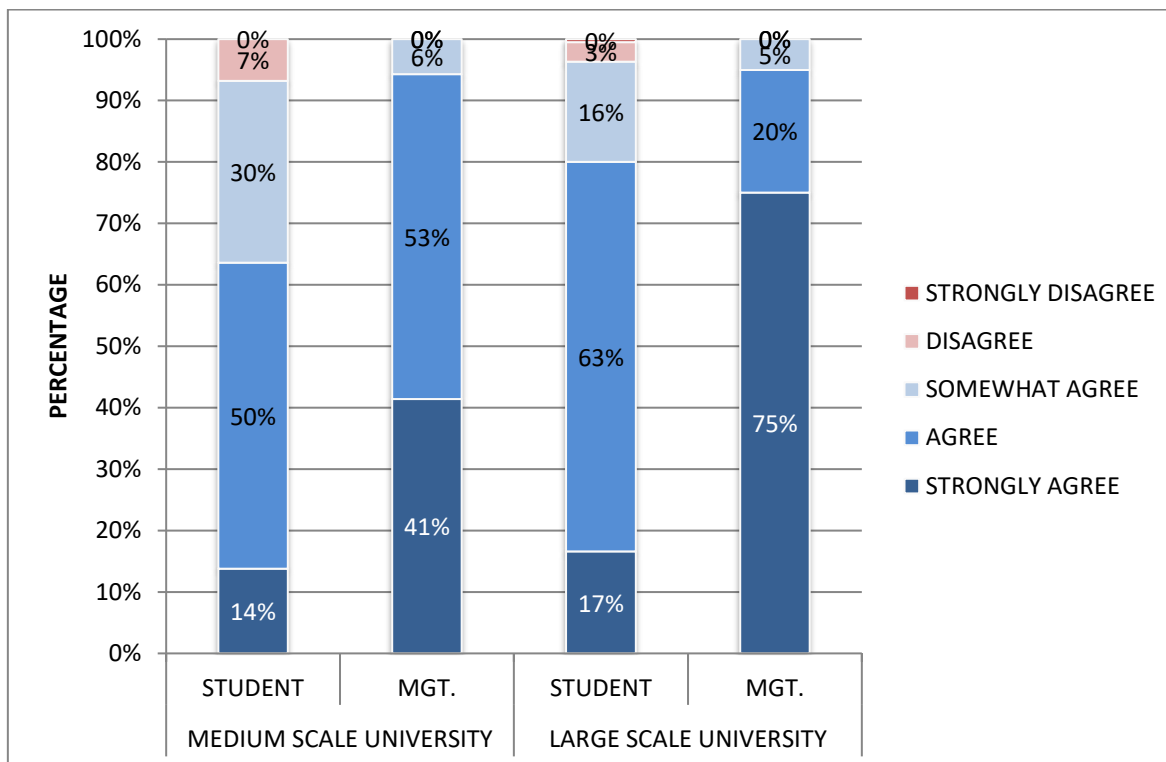
This study on multi-perspective analysis comprising both the medium-sized and large-sized universities can be utilized by the management of private universities to narrow down the expectations between what the students expects and how well the management responds. Weaknesses would provide an opportunity for enhancement and the strengths would demonstrate the management's commitment towards students' expectations.



**Figure 5: Multi-Perspective Analysis: Service Quality (SQ)**

The multi-perspective analysis on Service Quality for medium-sized universities shows some drastic differences as students only show 53% of general agreement compared to 91% of staff perspective. The level of neutrality is also high among students (35%) and quite low for staff (7%) with 12% disagreement shown by students compared to just 2% by management. The marketing staff tends to make more promises than they can deliver, hence this can be one of the possible causes of the differences.

The multi-perspective service quality analysis for the large-sized universities shows that management staff has a 100% general agreement level compared to just 74% from students. There is 20% neutrality shown by students and 6% showed disagreement. The possible cause here can be that the marketing staff might not be fully aware of the quality of service offered by the large-sized university and tend to rely more on their marketing campaigns to attract students, whereas ground realities could be quite different.



**Figure 6:** Multi-Perspective Analysis: Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

The multi-perspective IMC analysis on the medium-sized universities reveals that the general agreement from the students accounted for 64% compared to 94% from the management side on the integrated marketing communication policies and strategies. There is high neutrality (somewhat agree) from students (30%) compared to just 6% from the management side. There were 7% disagreements also found from students. These medium-sized universities are facing stiff competition from large-sized universities and some colleges, therefore, they might have promised something that they couldn't deliver, thus leading to a high rate of neutrality.

On the other hand, the multi-perspective IMC analysis for large-sized universities discloses 80% general agreement from students compared to 95% agreement from management staff. The level of neutrality is reasonable with 16% from students and 5% from staff. Students express a 3% disagreement. In general, this exhibit that large-sized universities are better able to deliver the promises they have kept with their students, and their policies and procedures are better aligned with the expectation of the students.

From the perspective of the management, favorable management responses were recorded as generally, the marketing staff is providing services to the new students, who might not have experienced the quality of service offered and promised by that university. The study affirmed from the students' perspective that students were in general agreement with the statements for the service quality. But in general, students were contented with the services provided by the university and their staff. Although, students were also critical towards their needs and the failure of the staff to understand what is required, therefore, universities need to pay close attention to the service quality of their university as these students are the main referents to the future students once they have experienced and used the services of their university.

From the management perspective, overall policies, practices, and procedures for the branding of all marketing efforts in these universities are not fully communicated verbally or in written format across the university, therefore, this issue needs to be addressed and some online media channels can be used to rectify this deficiency. The staff employed at the marketing office were satisfied with the integrated marketing communication mechanism adopted by their prospective universities. The study also confirmed from the students' perspective that students acknowledged the integrated marketing effort of their university. Students have shown confidence that their university has maintained and strengthened the relationship with existing students and this relationship has enabled the university to expand its market share through word-of-mouth marketing to recruit new students.

## CONCLUSION

Service Quality in universities shows customer's expectations either meeting or exceeding their educational experience. The findings showed that the students were very critical towards their requests and the staff failure to apprehend as to what is required, so universities should pay particular attention to the students' needs by improving their quality of service. Incorporating students' feedback for every strategic department can enable further improvements. Universities need to provide realistic commitments through their traditional marketing activities to which the students would experience. Educationists must understand the technical and functional qualities, and how students perceive them by creating interactive marketing rather than traditional marketing activities.

Students these days are well informed, more powerful, and are becoming increasingly demanding by processing the information and open communication with each other, to build strong opinions about their universities. Therefore, students' attitude is vital for IMC campaign and should not be ignored. Marketing executives and their staff must regularly evaluate students' opinions to gauge their IMC campaigns. Private universities should incorporate new communication practices by effectively using social media to enable their university's position and draw a clear line of differentiation with other universities to better deliver their services and IMC messages.

The paper's limitation are that if more respondents could be added to the management perspective or the research could have been enhanced by including academic managers so the service quality perspective could have been explored better. From the students' perspective, future researches can include more universities so more meaningful results can be incorporated and data can be collected from small scale universities.

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