

THE EFFECT OF INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE AND EDUCATIONAL COST ON STUDENTS' INTEREST IN STUDYING AT NAMIRA MADINA HEALTH COLLEGE WITH BRAND TRUST AS AN INTERVENING VARIABLE

Lidya Kesuma Sari^{1*}, Endang Sulistya Rini²,
Beby Karina Fawzee Sembiring³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan

Correspondence Author: lidyakesumasari0@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effect of institutional image and educational cost on student interest through brand trust. This is an associative study, and the data used are quantitative. The data were obtained from primary and secondary data. The analytical methods used were descriptive statistical analysis and structural equation modeling. The population and sample in this study consisted of 297 members of the Mandailing Natal Regency generation Z community. The sampling technique used was accidental sampling. The results of this study indicate that institutional image has a positive and significant effect on brand trust, institutional image has a positive and significant effect on student interest, educational cost has a negative but insignificant effect on student interest, educational cost has a negative and significant effect on brand trust, brand trust has a positive and significant effect on student interest, institutional image has a positive and significant effect on student interest through brand trust, and educational cost has a negative and significant effect on student interest through brand trust among the Gen Z community in Mandailing Natal Regency.

Keywords: *Institutional Image, Educational Cost, Student Interest, Brand Trust*

INTRODUCTION

Currently, private higher education is a new business sector with potential for development, as it is a supporting factor for competitiveness in the job market. The government's efforts to develop the education system in Indonesia have been quite significant over time, for example, through curriculum development, faculty development, student learning processes, and the development of educational institutions. Given the importance of education, many people compete to seek higher education to improve their economic standing.

Table 1.1 shows data on schools in Mandailing Natal in 2025, as shown below:

Table 1.1

School Table Data in Mandailing Natal in 2025

No.	SMA	Total Student
1.	SMAN 1 Batahan	261 Student
2.	SMAN 1 Batang Natal	397 Student
3.	SMAN 1 Hutabargot	275 Student
4.	SMAN 1 Kotanopan	324 Student
5.	SMAN 1 Linggabayu	208 Student
6.	SMAN 1 Muara Batang Gadis	199 Student
7.	SMAN 2 Muara Batang Gadis	294 Student
8.	SMAN 1 Muarasipongi	702 Student
9.	SMAN 1 Nagajuang	298 Student

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School Table Data in Mandailing Natal in 2025		
No.	SMA	Total Student
10.	SMAN 1 Natal	189 Student
11.	SMAN 1 Panyabungan	626 Student
12.	SMAN 2 Plus Panyabungan	608 Student
13.	SMAN 3 Panyabungan	667 Student
14.	SMAN 1 Panyabungan Barat	412 Student
15.	SMAN 1 Panyabungan Selatan	374 Student
16.	SMAN 1 Panyabungan Timur	298 Student
17.	SMAN 1 Panyabungan Utara	289 Student
18.	SMAN 1 Ranto Baek	320 Student
19.	SMAN 1 Siabu	691 Student
20.	SMAN 2 Siabu	214 Student
21.	SMAN 1 Sinunukan	222 Student
22.	SMAN 1 Tambangan	379 Student
23.	SMAS IT Al-Husnayain	93 Student
24.	SMAS Muhammadiyah 13 Panyabungan	94 Student
25.	SMAS Wira Bangsa	98 Student
Total		7.214
School Table Data in Mandailing Natal in 2025		
No.	SMK	Total Student
1	SMKN 1 Batahan	49 Student
2	SMKN 1 Batang Natal	450 Student
3	SMKN 1 Kotanopan	356 Student
4	SMKN 2 Kotanopan	387 Student
5	SMKN 1 Lembah Sorik Marapi	210 Student
6	SMKN 1 Muara Batang Gadis	207 Student
7	SMKN 1 Natal	248 Student
8	SMKN 1 Panyabungan	702 Student
9	SMKN 2 Panyabungan	1.003 Student
10	SMKN 3 Panyabungan	698 Student
11	SMKN 1 Siabu	287 Student
12	SMKN 1 Sinunukan	434 Student
13	SMKN 1 Ulu Pungkut	64 Student
14	SMKS Armina	82 Student
15	SMKS Hamid Hamka	354 Student
16	SMKS Merpati Nusantara	230 Student
17	SMKS Mitra Mandiri	197 Student
18	SMKS Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu	227 Student
19	SMKS Muhammadiyah 15 Sinunukan	156 Student
20	SMKS Namira Husada Madina	87 Student
21	Merpati Nusantara	289 Student
22	SMKS Wira Bangsa	156 Student
Total Keseluruhan		6.873

Source Data : Kantor BPS Mandailing Natal Tahun 2025

Table 1.1 shows that registered schools in Mandailing Natal in 2025 total 25 senior high schools with 7,214 students and 22 vocational high schools with 6,873 students. This means that 14,087 students will graduate and continue on to their chosen universities. The growth of both private and public universities continues to increase, especially among private universities. This increase in the number of private universities has a positive side, accelerating the improvement of human resource quality, which can help reduce the unemployment rate. However, on

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the other hand, the large number of private universities has triggered unhealthy competition among them, as students often consider their choices based on their preferences regarding majors or programs, academic facilities, and accreditation. According to Situmorang et al. (2025), universities are places to gain knowledge, skills, creative thinking, and conduct research. With the awareness of the importance of education, people compete to gain knowledge, both through formal and informal education. This investment must provide benefits to consumers after graduating from private universities. This is because, in addition to the significant costs involved, studying at a university also requires a considerable amount of time. Therefore, consumers will be very careful in choosing a university to ensure that the time and costs are commensurate with the benefits they receive from the private university's services. According to Fakhruddin (2023), this can usually be determined from the university's promotional campaigns in marketing the services it sells through its institutions.

Sartika et al. (2023) state that the complexity of the problems currently facing higher education institutions in Indonesia is the low quality of education in its implementation. This presents a challenge and responsibility that requires finding concrete solutions. Universities are required to respond by implementing cultural reform, namely changing old habits that no longer align with the demands of the times. The old culture inherent in the way they work must be changed. Therefore, both public and private higher education institutions will always prioritize values oriented toward higher education quality, productivity, high speed, and orientation toward student (stakeholder) interests. The private college that is the object of this research is STIKES Namira Mandailing Natal. STIKES Namira Madina was officially established on April 11, 2018 based on the Decree of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education No. SK 343 / KTP / I / 2018. In 2018, a change in form was made from the Midwifery Academy of Namira Madina Panyabungan to the Health Sciences College of Namira Mandailing Natal. Currently, STIKES Namira Madina has two study programs, namely the Diploma Three Midwifery Study Program and the Bachelor of Pharmacy Study Program. Since its opening, the STIKES Namira Madina Campus has now produced 556 graduates who have worked in various health institutions. STIKES Namira Madina is the only health science college in Panyabungan City, Mandailing Natal Regency which has grown rapidly and has a health study program and has a number of new students of 90 people during the 2025/2026 academic year. Namira Madina Health College faces stiff competition due to the large number of higher education institutions in South Tapanuli (Tabagsel). The following table 1.3 shows the number of student admissions at Namira Mandailing Natal Health College for each of its undergraduate pharmacy and midwifery programs over the past five years (2021–2025).

Table 1.2
Data Jumlah Penerimaan Mahasiswa STIKES Namira Mandailing Natal

	Jumlah Mahasiswa Baru STIKES Namira Mandailing Natal		Total Jumlah Mahasiswa
	S1 Farmasi	D3 Kebidanan	
2021	37	57	94
2022	44	68	112
2023	41	67	108
2024	36	64	100
2025	32	58	90

Source : STIKES Namira Mandailing Natal Year 2025

Table 1.2 shows data on student enrollment at Namira Mandailing Natal Health College (STIKES) for the 2021-2025 period. Over the past three years, from 2023 to 2025, student enrollment has continued to decline. This decline indicates a decline in student interest in enrolling. Given this competitive environment, every university is expected to continuously improve, employing strategies to increase attractiveness and understanding the advantages of brand trust, institutional image, and educational cost, in line with their target market. They are also expected to actively engage in activities to communicate the university's strengths, thereby generating student interest in attending Namira Mandailing Natal Health College. Every prospective student pursuing higher education must carefully consider their chosen major, as this choice will impact their career path and personal development. Students are the service users of higher education institutions. Students will leave a positive impression on the university and its reputation in the eyes of the public. Those who decide to continue and complete their education at a private university will be faced with numerous choices, ranging from study programs and levels of education to the chosen university. According to Vera & Prastiwi (2022), a student is someone who is in the process of gaining knowledge or studying and is enrolled

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in one of the forms of higher education, including academies, polytechnics, colleges, institutes, and universities. Students and prospective students must make a number of difficult but crucial decisions when choosing a private higher education institution. Students' perspectives on choosing a campus at a private higher education institution play a crucial role in the decision-making process. The choice of a college major is often viewed as a strategic decision and has a significant impact on one's future and career. Increasing competition requires STIKES Namira Madina to continuously strive to provide quality educational services, embrace digital development, innovation, and creativity, compete in terms of improving facilities, developing the quality of the teaching workforce, and providing the advantages that private universities must possess to produce quality graduates. Interest is also influenced by variables such as brand trust, institutional image, and educational cost (Ahmad, 2024; Wu et al., 2023; Gutiérrez-Villar, 2022; Solodovnikov et al., 2024). Research studies by Putri & Maulidina (2025); Widyana et al. (2021) found that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on student interest. However, Wanda's (2018) study showed that brand trust had a negative and insignificant effect on student interest.

Research studies by Ali et al. (2025); Rohamnia & Kartiko (2025) found that institutional image has a positive and significant effect on student interest. However, this differs from the research by Nurcholis & Puteri (2024), which found that institutional image has a negative and insignificant effect on student interest. However, some parents still consider the educational cost high, as many parents request waivers or are in arrears in payments. According to Arfiyanto et al. (2023), competitive educational costs will attract prospective students to enroll at STIKES Namira Madina. This competitive price will help retain prospective students. STIKES Namira Madina strives to provide services commensurate with the educational costs incurred by parents. In terms of payment, the campus provides a convenient payment service by opening a personal account for each student to simplify payments via mobile banking. However, some parents and students feel the costs of studying at STIKES Namira Madina are too high due to a lack of information regarding the payments, such as the activities required to graduate from the courses. The Panyabungan community, seeing the exterior of the multi-story and spacious building, often perceives the average tuition fee at STIKES Namira Madina as high. Students tend to be more satisfied if the tuition fee is considered affordable and commensurate with the quality of service received, which meets their desires and expectations. This will increase student interest. Research studies from Mimba & Indrawati (2025); Puspita et al. (2021) found that educational cost has a positive and significant effect on student interest. However, research from Situngkir & Ruslan (2019) showed that educational image is different. Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in conducting further research on "The Influence of Institutional Image and Educational Cost on Student Interest in Studying at STIKES Namira Madina with Brand Trust as an Intervening Variable".

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Kotler and Keller (2021), consumer behavior is the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires. Kotler and Keller (2021) state that consumer behavior has several components that influence it. First, cultural factors, where culture, subculture, and social class have the greatest and most profound influence on consumer behavior. Second, social factors such as a consumer's social status, role, social group, and family will influence consumer behavior. Third, individual factors, namely individual characteristics such as the buyer's age and life cycle stage, occupation, economic condition, lifestyle, personality, and self-concept, will influence purchasing decisions. Fourth, psychological factors, including perception, learning, beliefs, motivation, and attitudes, are evaluations of emotional feelings that can influence consumer purchasing decisions. According to Ananda & Pratiwi (2024), consumer behavior is how a person makes decisions to buy, use, and utilize the goods and services they purchase.

According to Widnyana et al. (2021) Interest in continuing education to higher education is a desire that arises among high school/vocational school students to continue their education to a higher level. According to Mimba et al. (2025), student interest is influenced by various considerations and beliefs that influence their attraction to a profession. According to Usman et al. (2022), there are two factors that can influence learning: internal factors and external factors. According to Hossain (2021), image is the identity of each organization that is conveyed to the public and makes people loyal to products or services, which helps in growing customers. According to Subiyantoro et al. (2022), institutional image has been identified as an important factor in the overall assessment of a service provider, because a mental image of this image arises when mentioning the company name. According to Handoko et al. (2022), image is a reflection or picture in a person's mind that arises due to emotions and reactions to their environment. According to Dwita & Rosta (2021), institutional image is characterized as an impression formed based on a person's knowledge

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and experience of a subject. According to Situmorang et al. (2025) stated that the components that form the image of an institution are academic reputation, campus appearance, costs, employee services, location, distance of the campus from residence, alumni, and personal school preparation, job placement, social activities, and study programs. According to Febrianti & Salam (2023) Institutional Image is a way for a company to carry out operating procedures and standards, mainly based on service. According to Subiyantoro et al. (2022) According to define Institutional Image as the sum of all individual beliefs in choosing a university. According to Rahmani et al. (2023) Institutional Image is a perception that develops in the public mind about the visible reality of the institution.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design with a descriptive and correlational approach. The population in this study is the people of Mandailing Natal Regency who are Gen Z and have an unknown minimum monthly parental income of Rp. 5,000,000. Based on these results, the number of respondents who will be used as a sample in this study is 297 respondents who are Gen Z residents of Mandailing Natal Regency and have a minimum monthly parental income of Rp. 5,000,000 who want to enroll at STIKES Namira Madina. Data collection was carried out through surveys, which were administered both online and in person. The survey included questions related to Institutional Image (X1) and Educational Cost (X2) on Student Interest (Y) with Student Loyalty (Y) as an intervening variable. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which allows for the testing of complex relationships among multiple variables simultaneously. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to provide a basic understanding of consumer behavior at Stikes Namira Madina.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1
Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Institutional Image -> Brand Trust	0.529	0.528	0.066	8.062	0.000
Institutional Image -> Minat Mahasiswa	0.483	0.480	0.053	9.204	0.000
Educational Cost -> Brand Trust	-0.236	-0.248	0.072	3.276	0.001
Educational Cost ->Minat Mahasiswa	-0.040	-0.039	0.048	0.818	0.413
Brand Trust -> Minat Mahasiswa	0.326	0.329	0.048	6.756	0.000

The following is an interpretation of Table 4.1 as follows The path coefficient value of Institutional Image is 0.529, which is positive, with a 5 percent significance level of 8.062 t-test > 1.96 and a p-value of 0.000 < α (0.05), indicating that Institutional Image has a positive and significant effect on Brand Trust. This means that a higher Institutional Image significantly increases Brand Trust. The path coefficient value of Institutional Image is 0.483, which is positive, with a 5 percent significance level of 9.204 t-test > 1.96 and a p-value of 0.000 < α (0.05), indicating that Institutional Image has a positive and significant effect on Student Interest. This means that a higher Institutional Image significantly increases Student Interest. The path coefficient value of Educational Cost is -0.236, which is negative, with a 5 percent significance level of 3.276 > 1.96, and a p-value of 0.001 < α (0.05). This means that Educational Cost has a negative and significant effect on Brand Trust. This means that higher Educational Cost significantly decreases Brand Trust. The path coefficient value of Educational Cost is -0.040, which is negative, with a 5 percent significance level of 0.818 < 1.96, and a p-value of 0.413 > α (0.05). This means that Educational Cost has a negative and insignificant effect on Student Interest. This means that better Educational Cost does not significantly decrease Student Interest. 5) It is known that the Brand Trust path coefficient value is 0.326, which is positive, with a significance of 5 percent, t count 6.756 > 1.96 and a p value of 0.000 < α (0.05), meaning that Brand Trust has a

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positive and significant effect on Student Interest. This means that the better the Brand Trust, the more it will significantly increase Student Interest.

Table

4.2

Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Institutional Image -> Brand Trust -> Minat Mahasiswa	0.172	0.174	0.035	4.937	0.000
Educational Cost -> Brand Trust -> Minat Mahasiswa	-0.077	-0.082	0.029	2.693	0.007

Based on Table 4.2 The coefficient of the indirect effect of Institutional Image on Student Interest through Brand Trust is 0.172, which is positive, with a 5 percent significance of t count $4.937 > 1.96$ and a p value of $0.000 < \alpha (0.05)$, this indicates that Brand Trust is able to significantly mediate the effect of Institutional Image on Student Interest.

The coefficient of the indirect effect of Educational Cost on Student Interest through Brand Trust is -0.077, which is negative, with a 5 percent significance of t count $2.693 > 1.96$ and a p value of $0.007 < \alpha (0.1)$, this indicates that Brand Trust is able to significantly mediate the relationship between Educational Cost and Student Interest.

According to Hossain (2021), image is the identity of any organization conveyed to the public and fosters loyalty to its products or services, which helps grow customers. Subiyantoro et al. (2022) states that institutional image has been identified as a crucial factor in the overall assessment of a service provider, as a mental image emerges when the company name is mentioned. Handoko et al. (2022) states that image is a reflection or picture in a person's mind that arises from emotions and reactions to their environment. Dwita & Rosta (2021) defines institutional image as an impression formed based on a person's knowledge and experience of a subject. Situmorang et al. (2025) states that the components that shape an institution's image are academic reputation, campus appearance, costs, employee services, location, distance from the campus, alumni, personal school preparation, job placement, social activities, and study programs.

Determining institutional image is not only related to the economic value of a product or service but also serves as a signal of quality and differentiates the brand from competitors. An institutional image perceived as fair, consistent, and commensurate with the benefits and quality received will shape a positive perception of the brand, thereby strengthening student interest. The results of this study indicate that institutional image has a positive effect on student interest. This means that an improved institutional image at STIKES Namira Madina, which aligns with the quality of services offered to students, increases student interest in enrolling at STIKES Namira Madina. Therefore, it is understandable that institutional image has a positive and significant effect on student interest. This study aligns with Lubis et al. (2023) who stated that institutional image has a positive and significant effect on student interest.

An institutional image perceived as fair, consistent, and commensurate with the benefits and quality received will shape a positive perception of the brand, thereby strengthening student interest. The results of this study indicate that institutional image has a positive effect on student interest. This means that an improved institutional image at STIKES Namira Madina, which aligns with the quality of services offered to students, increases student interest in enrolling at STIKES Namira Madina. Therefore, it is understandable that institutional image has a positive and significant effect on student interest. Research by Lubis et al. (2023) found that institutional image has a positive and significant effect on brand trust, meaning that the better the institutional image, the higher the brand trust.

According to Gita et al. (2024), cost is a collection of monetary and non-monetary factors exchanged to obtain ownership and use of a good or service. According to Rofiq et al. (2023), cost in marketing is the amount of money consumers must pay to obtain a product. Educational costs vary, including direct and indirect costs, social costs, and personal costs. According to Puspita et al. (2021), educational costs serve as an empirical basis for describing the financial characteristics of schools. According to Indrawati et al. (2021), educational costs influence the educational process. This is because educational costs are defined as the amount of money earned and spent on various educational needs. Research by Rohmania & Kartiko (2025) found that educational costs have a negative and significant effect on student interest, meaning that the higher the educational costs, the lower the student interest. According to Puspita et

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al. (2021) Educational Cost is an empirical basis for providing an overview of school financial characteristics. According to Indrawati et al. (2021), Educational Cost influences the educational process. This is because educational costs are defined as the amount of money earned and spent on various educational needs. The results of Hermawan's (2014) study stated that Educational Cost has a positive and significant effect on Brand Trust, meaning that the higher the Educational Cost, the higher the Brand Trust. According to Widnyana et al. (2021), brand trust is a consumer's willingness to rely on a brand despite facing risks, due to the expectation that the brand will produce positive outcomes. According to Absah et al. (2023), brand trust is a feeling of security experienced by consumers as a result of their interactions with a brand, based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the consumer's interests and safety. According to Absah et al. (2023), brand trust is defined as a feeling of security experienced by product users in their interactions with a brand based on the perception that the brand is trustworthy and cares about the consumer's interests and well-being. According to Putri et al. (2025), brand trust is the average consumer's willingness to rely on a brand's ability to perform all its functions and uses. According to Absah et al. (2023), brand trust is a sense of security experienced by customers as a consequence of their engagement with a brand and is based on the belief that a private university is reliable and responsible for the consumer's interests and safety.

Brand trust plays a significant role in influencing student consumer interest. A positive brand image will create the perception that the product or service offered possesses quality, excellence, and trustworthy credibility. When consumers perceive a brand as having a good reputation, they tend to be more confident and encouraged to choose that product over other brands. Conversely, negative brand trust can decrease consumer interest and confidence in making a purchase. Therefore, the better the brand trust established in consumers' minds, the more likely they are to purchase. According to Hossain (2021), image is the identity of each organization conveyed to the public and fosters loyalty to the product or service, which helps grow customers. Subiyantoro et al. (2022) stated that institutional image has been identified as an important factor in the overall assessment of a service provider, as a mental image emerges when mentioning the company name. According to Handoko et al. (2022), image is a reflection or picture in a person's mind that arises from emotions and reactions to their environment. According to Dwita & Rosta (2021), institutional image is characterized as an impression formed based on a person's knowledge and experience of a subject. According to Situmorang et al. (2025) state that the components that shape an institution's image are academic reputation, campus appearance, costs, employee service, location, distance from the campus, alumni, personal school preparation, job placement, social activities, and study programs.

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According to Gita et al. (2024), cost is a set of monetary and non-monetary factors exchanged to obtain the right to own and use a good or service. According to Rofiq et al. (2023), cost in marketing is the amount of money consumers must pay to obtain a product. There are various types of educational costs, including direct and indirect costs, social costs, and personal costs. According to Puspita et al. (2021), educational cost is an empirical basis for providing an overview of the characteristics of school finances. According to Indrawati et al. (2021), educational cost influences the educational process. This is because educational costs are defined as the amount of money earned and spent on various educational needs. According to Widnyana et al. (2021), brand trust is a consumer's desire to rely on a brand despite facing risks, due to the expectation that the brand will produce positive results. According to Absah et al. (2023), brand trust is a feeling of security experienced by consumers as a result of their interactions with a brand, based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the consumer's interests and safety. According to

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CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that institutional image, educational cost, and brand trust are important factors that influence student interest in choosing a higher education institution. A positive institutional image, reflected through academic reputation, campus appearance, service quality, alumni outcomes, and study programs, can strengthen students' perceptions and increase their intention to enroll. This study shows that a better institutional image at STIKES Namira Madina significantly increases student interest. In addition, educational cost also plays an important role in shaping student interest. Educational cost is not only related to the amount of money paid by students, but also reflects the financial characteristics and quality of the educational process. When tuition fees are perceived as reasonable and proportional to the benefits and quality received, students are more likely to show interest. However, excessively high educational costs may reduce student interest, although in some cases higher costs can also strengthen perceptions of quality and increase brand trust.

Furthermore, brand trust has a significant influence on student interest because it reflects students' confidence in the institution's reliability, credibility, and responsibility. When students perceive an institution as trustworthy and capable of meeting their expectations, they are more likely to choose it. Strong brand trust, supported by a positive institutional image and appropriate educational cost, will further increase student interest. Overall, the combination of a strong institutional image, affordable and appropriate educational cost, and high brand trust has a positive and significant effect on student interest. Therefore, higher education institutions, including STIKES Namira Madina, should continuously improve their image, maintain public trust, and ensure that educational costs remain aligned with the quality of services provided in order to attract more prospective students.

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