

The Role of Sundanese Culture in Moderating the Effect of Digital Marketing Strategies on Campus Brand Identity: Evidence from Private Universities

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly competitive digital higher education environment, private universities often struggle with promotional homogenization and weak institutional differentiation. Integrating indigenous cultural values offers a strategic mechanism to enhance brand resonance, yet empirical evidence regarding its moderating role remains scarce. This study investigates the direct effect of digital marketing strategies on private universities' brand identity and evaluates the moderating role of Sundanese cultural orientation. Drawing on the Resource-Based View and Consumer Culture Theory, an associative quantitative research design was conducted using a structured five-point Likert survey administered to 300 prospective and first-year undergraduate students across ten private higher education institutions in eastern West Java, Indonesia (Majalengka, Sumedang, and Kuningan). Data were analyzed using classical linear regression diagnostics and hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The empirical results demonstrate that digital marketing strategies exert a significant positive direct effect on campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, Sundanese cultural orientation exhibits a significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$) and acts as a statistically significant quasi-moderator ($\beta = 0.176$, $p = 0.004$), amplifying the positive impact of digital marketing campaigns on brand identity formation. The regression model accounts for 52.1% of the total variance in campus brand identity ($R^2 = 0.521$). These findings highlight that indigenous culture is an inimitable strategic asset rather than a cosmetic feature, enabling universities to build authentic, human-centric narratives that drive sustainable competitive differentiation in digital higher education marketing.

Keywords: Sundanese Culture, Digital Marketing Strategy, Campus Brand Identity, Private Universities, Moderated Regression Analysis, Cultural Branding



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1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive higher education landscape, private universities face growing pressure to attract prospective students, increase enrollment, and develop strategies that ensure institutional survival and long-term sustainability (Baliyan & Mokoena, 2024; Ramaditya et al., 2023; Somantri et al., 2025). The rapid expansion of digital and social media technologies has transformed higher education marketing communication, increasingly positioning digital platforms as important channels for engaging prospective students and supporting student recruitment and acquisition (Cingillioglu et al., 2024; Isaacs & Mulder, 2025; Tran et al., 2026). In Indonesia, the increasing use of digital and social media has transformed higher education marketing practices, with universities increasingly employing platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to communicate institutional offerings, engage prospective students, and compete in the higher

education market. Empirical evidence further indicates that social media marketing contributes to higher education brand equity and prospective students' engagement and university choice (Juhaidi, 2024; Nofrizal et al., 2024).

However, the widespread and rapid adoption of digital marketing has introduced a critical strategic paradox regarding the homogenization of institutional communication (Pawar, 2024). Across regional clusters, private higher education institutions frequently deploy generic promotional narratives, standardized advertising formats, and transactional messaging focused predominantly on financial incentives or basic academic facilities (Karadağ et al., 2024). This strategic uniformity can weaken institutional distinctiveness and dilute the development of a distinctive and credible university brand in digitally mediated environments (Perera et al., 2023). Consequently, the core objective of digital marketing, namely, cultivating a distinctive and sustainable campus brand identity may remain compromised when institutions fail to establish authentic differentiation.

To break through this digital noise, contemporary branding frameworks increasingly emphasize the strategic value of local cultural embedding (Lemmetynen et al., 2021). Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Dhruvo et al., 2024; Gibson et al., 2021), indigenous cultural assets represent unique, historically embedded, socially complex, and difficult-to-imitate resources that competitors cannot easily replicate. In the regional context of West Java, Indonesia, Sundanese culture provides a rich reservoir of indigenous knowledge and cultural identity, including philosophical values such as *Silih Asah*, *Silih Asih*, and *Silih Asuh*, which emphasize mutual learning, affection, care, and communal responsibility (Dewi et al., 2025; Huzaema et al., 2024). Sundanese cultural heritage is also expressed through visual traditions such as *Batik*, where historical narratives and local wisdom can be transformed into culturally distinctive motifs that contribute to cultural preservation and identity formation (Pandanwangi et al., 2026). When embedded into institutional digital narratives, these cultural markers have the potential to transcend superficial functional messaging, fostering deep emotional bonding, cultural affinity, and perceived authenticity among prospective and enrolled students.

Despite the strategic promise of cultural branding, a critical theoretical and empirical gap persists in higher education marketing literature. Prior studies have largely focused on social media marketing, promotional mechanisms, brand equity, student engagement, and student acquisition (Barus, 2023; Juhaidi, 2024; Mandagie & Rana, 2023; Pawar, 2024; Tran et al., 2026), or have examined university branding primarily through established constructs such as brand identity, positioning, image, reputation, and communication, leaving comparatively limited attention to culturally embedded branding mechanisms (Kim & Bamberger, 2025; Yaping et al., 2023). However, limited empirical research has systematically examined whether and how local indigenous culture functions as a statistical catalyst (moderator) that amplifies the efficacy of digital marketing strategies in building institutional brand identity. Whether the positive effect of digital outreach on brand identity is contingent upon the depth of cultural integration remains insufficiently theorized and under-tested in the private higher education sector.

To address this gap, this study investigates the direct influence of digital marketing strategies on campus brand identity while explicitly examining the moderating role of Sundanese cultural integration among private universities in West Java. By evaluating the empirical perceptions of prospective and first-year students across regional university clusters in Majalengka, Sumedang, and Kuningan, this research offers two key contributions. Theoretically, it bridges the Resource-Based View and Consumer Culture Theory within higher education digital marketing by demonstrating how cultural resonance serves as an intangible strategic amplifier. Practically, it provides actionable insights for university administrators and marketing strategists to construct culturally embedded, differentiated digital campaigns that build authentic and resilient institutional brand equity.

2. METHOD

This study adopts an associative quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey approach (Maier et al., 2023) to examine the direct and interactive relationships between digital marketing strategies, Sundanese cultural values, and private university brand identity. Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) (Park & Yi, 2023) is utilized to determine whether Sundanese cultural orientation statistically moderates the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand identity formation. The target population comprises prospective students and first-year undergraduate students enrolled across private universities in three dynamic regional clusters of eastern West Java, namely Majalengka, Sumedang, and Kuningan. Through a proportional stratified sampling technique, a total sample of 300 respondents was selected, consisting of an equal distribution of 30 participants from each of the 10 selected private higher education institutions to guarantee balanced and representative institutional coverage.

The empirical data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire structured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The measurement instrument operationalizes three core constructs adapted from validated scholarly literature. Digital marketing strategy (the independent variable) evaluates the perceived effectiveness, interactivity, and multimedia content of

institutional campaigns across websites and social media platforms. Sundanese culture (the moderating variable) captures the integration of indigenous philosophical values (including *Silih Asih*, *Silih Asah*, and *Silih Asuh*), traditional aesthetic arts, and local linguistic expressions in campus communication. Campus brand identity (the dependent variable) measures institutional distinctiveness, perceived reputation, emotional connection, and brand differentiation in higher education competition. All measurement scales were verified through construct validity tests using item-total correlations and internal consistency reliability assessments using Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the 0.70 threshold.

The research framework specifies three foundational hypotheses: first, digital marketing strategies have a positive direct effect on private university brand identity; second, Sundanese cultural orientation has a positive direct effect on brand identity; and third, Sundanese cultural orientation significantly moderates the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand identity, thereby amplifying institutional differentiation. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption diagnostics were conducted to ensure that the survey data fulfilled the requirements of ordinary least squares estimation, encompassing Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests, tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) multicollinearity checks, and Glejser heteroskedasticity evaluations.

The analytical procedure was executed systematically through hierarchical moderated regression modeling. The linear baseline model was established to evaluate the direct effects of digital marketing strategies and Sundanese culture on campus brand identity. Subsequently, an interaction term constructed from the product of the mean-centered independent and moderator variables was introduced into the regression equation to assess the presence and magnitude of the quasi-moderating effect. Statistical significance was evaluated using individual t-tests for path coefficients, the overall F-test for model fit, and changes in the coefficient of determination (R^2) to verify whether integrating indigenous Sundanese culture significantly enhances the explanatory power of digital marketing in establishing a competitive campus brand identity.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Diagnostic Checks for Regression Assumptions

Prior to testing the research hypotheses, diagnostic evaluations were performed to verify that the empirical survey data satisfied ordinary least squares linear regression assumptions. As presented in Table 1, the normality evaluation conducted via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test produced an asymptotic significance value of 0.078, which exceeds the standard 0.05 threshold and confirms that the dataset residuals are normally distributed. Collinearity diagnostics demonstrated that tolerance metrics across the predictors and the interaction term were 0.732 for digital marketing strategy (X), 0.754 for Sundanese culture (M), and 0.698 for the interaction variable ($X*M$). Corresponding Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were 1.366, 1.325, and 1.433 respectively. Given that all tolerance values surpass 0.10 and all VIF values remain well beneath the cutoff threshold of 10.0, multicollinearity is absent from the model. Additionally, the Glejser test for heteroskedasticity yielded significance levels greater than 0.05 across all variables, verifying constant error variance and fulfilling all prerequisite regression criteria.

Table 1. Diagnostic Checks for Linear Regression Assumptions

Test Type	Indicator	Empirical Metric	Threshold / Criteria	Statistical Description
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	0.078	Sig. > 0.05	Data are normally distributed
Multicollinearity	Tolerance	(X) = 0.732, (M) = 0.754, ($X*M$) = 0.698	> 0.10	No multicollinearity detected
	VIF	(X) = 1.366, (M) = 1.325, ($X*M$) = 1.433	< 10	No multicollinearity detected
Heteroskedasticity	Glejser Test Sig.	Sig. for all variables > 0.05	Sig. > 0.05	No heteroskedasticity detected

3.2. Moderated Regression Analysis Output

Following prerequisite fulfillment, Moderated Regression Analysis was estimated by introducing the direct predictors (digital marketing strategy, X, and Sundanese culture, M) alongside the interaction term ($X*M$) into the model. The analytical findings compiled in Table 2 demonstrate that digital marketing strategy exerts a statistically significant positive direct effect on campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.421$, $t = 6.832$, $p = 0.000$). Sundanese cultural orientation similarly exhibits a significant positive direct contribution to campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.298$, $t = 4.567$, $p = 0.000$).

Furthermore, the interaction term ($X*M$) is statistically significant with a positive path coefficient ($\beta = 0.176$, $t = 2.951$, $p = 0.004$). Because both the direct predictor M and the interaction term $X*M$ are statistically significant, Sundanese culture operates as a quasi-moderator. This statistical behavior confirms that the positive impact of digital marketing strategies on university brand identity is significantly enhanced when institutions incorporate Sundanese cultural elements. The overall regression model demonstrated strong predictive capability ($F = 45.276$, $p = 0.000$), accounting for 52.1% of the total variation in campus brand identity ($R^2 = 0.521$), whereas the remaining 47.9% is governed by external factors beyond the current empirical model.

Table 2. Results of Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA)

Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	Sig. (p-value)	Empirical Conclusion
Digital Marketing Strategy (X)	0.421	6.832	0.000	Significant positive direct effect
Sundanese Culture (M)	0.298	4.567	0.000	Significant positive direct effect
Interaction ($X*M$)	0.176	2.951	0.004	Significant positive moderation
Constant	1.245	3.432	0.001	Statistically significant
R^2	0.521	-	-	Model explains 52.1% of Y variance
F-Test	45.276	-	0.000	Overall model is statistically significant

3.3. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

The comprehensive results of the hypothesis testing are outlined in Table 3. The first hypothesis (H1) is supported, confirming that digital marketing strategies exert a significant positive effect on the brand identity of private universities ($\beta = 0.421$, $p = 0.000$). The second hypothesis (H2) is supported, verifying that Sundanese cultural orientation directly contributes to a stronger perception of campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.298$, $p = 0.000$). The third hypothesis (H3) is supported, demonstrating that Sundanese culture significantly moderates and strengthens the relationship between digital marketing strategies and campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.176$, $p = 0.004$). The positive moderating coefficient substantiates that higher education institutions that strategically pair digital marketing execution with authentic local cultural values achieve superior brand distinctiveness and competitive differentiation across regional markets.

Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Proposition	Path Coefficient (β)	Sig. (p-value)	Empirical Outcome
H1	Digital marketing strategies have a positive effect on the brand identity of private universities	0.421	0.000	Accepted
H2	Sundanese cultural orientation has a positive direct effect on the brand identity of private universities	0.298	0.000	Accepted
H3	Sundanese culture positively moderates the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand identity	0.176	0.004	Supported (Quasi-Moderator)

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Direct Effect of Digital Marketing Strategies on Campus Brand Identity

The empirical findings confirm that digital marketing strategies exert a significant positive effect on the formation of private universities' brand identity ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$). This result demonstrates that consistent, structured, and interactive digital marketing communication substantially enhances prospective and first-year students' cognitive perceptions, institutional awareness, and recognition of the university's academic identity. In the contemporary higher education landscape, digital channels (such as institutional websites, search engine visibility, and social media ecosystems) serve as the primary touchpoints through which students interpret institutional values, campus culture, and pedagogical credibility.

This outcome aligns with modern higher education marketing paradigms, particularly the role of digital communication in university brand building and student engagement (Nguyen et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2026). In emerging higher education markets, interactive digital media enable institutions to move beyond static, transactional promotion toward more engaging, content-driven and narrative-oriented

communication (Losada Díaz & Almela-Baeza, 2026; Saikia & Barman, 2023). The finding is also consistent with recent empirical observations that social media interaction contributes to university brand value, while social media engagement can shape students' attitudes, behavioural intentions, and intentions to enrol during the university selection process (Konstantoulaki et al., 2022; Li et al., 2025; Tran et al., 2026). When private universities deploy informative and engaging online content, they lower communication barriers, foster perceived transparency, and cultivate a professional brand image that resonates with digitally native cohorts.

4.2. Direct Effect of Sundanese Cultural Orientation on Brand Identity

The empirical analysis indicates that Sundanese cultural orientation has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$). This finding illustrates that the active inclusion of indigenous cultural wisdom, visual aesthetic elements, and local performing arts directly enriches the perceived character and distinctiveness of private higher education institutions. Grounded in cross-cultural and organizational identity perspectives (Bachmann et al., 2024; Desai & Hogg, 2024; Freeman & Koçak, 2023), institutional identity is deeply intertwined with the social and cultural environment in which an organization operates.

In the context of West Java, Sundanese cultural values, specifically the communal philosophy of *Silih Asih*, *Silih Asah*, and *Silih Asuh*, alongside the ethos of *Someah Hade ka Semah*, provide a profound foundation for human-centered branding (Dewi et al., 2025; Huzaeema et al., 2024). By integrating these indigenous values alongside visual symbols such as traditional batik patterns and musical arts, universities can project an image of hospitality, mutual academic mentorship, and cultural stewardship (Maulana et al., 2025; Pandanwangi et al., 2026). These attributes establish an authentic social identity that can distinguish local private campuses from standardized and commercially oriented educational providers. Consequently, local culture serves as an intrinsic source of symbolic capital that elevates institutional standing in the minds of regional stakeholders.

4.3. The Catalytic Moderating Role of Sundanese Culture in Brand Differentiation

A central contribution of this study is the confirmation that Sundanese cultural orientation significantly moderates the relationship between digital marketing strategies and campus brand identity ($\beta = 0.176$, $p = 0.004$). This empirical outcome indicates that the positive relationship between digital marketing and campus brand identity becomes stronger when institutional communication is more culturally embedded. While generic digital marketing can contribute to baseline brand awareness, its contribution to distinctive institutional identity may be enhanced when digital communication incorporates meaningful local cultural references and narratives.

This synergistic relationship finds theoretical justification in the Resource-Based View (RBV), particularly the argument that resources embedded in unique organizational and community contexts can become valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and nonsubstitutable sources of competitive advantage (Dhrubo et al., 2024; Gibson et al., 2021). From this perspective, digital marketing technologies such as social media advertising, websites, and search-engine optimization are increasingly accessible to competing universities and therefore may provide limited differentiation when deployed in isolation. By contrast, culturally embedded resources arising from local history, community relationships, social values, and indigenous knowledge may possess greater contextual specificity and be more difficult for competitors to replicate.

The interpretation can also be situated within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which emphasizes how marketplace meanings are embedded within broader cultural and social contexts (Fitchett & Cronin, 2022; Waqas et al., 2022). From this perspective, the incorporation of Sundanese cultural narratives into digital institutional communication may allow prospective students to interpret university brands through locally meaningful cultural and symbolic references rather than through purely functional promotional information. Such cultural embedding can strengthen the perceived authenticity and distinctiveness of institutional communication, thereby providing a basis for differentiation that is more context-specific and less readily replicated by competing institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the strategic integration of indigenous cultural values within the digital marketing communication of private higher education institutions. The findings demonstrate that digital marketing strategies exert a significant positive direct effect on the formation of private universities' brand identity, confirming that structured and interactive online engagement enhances institutional visibility and reputation. Moreover, Sundanese cultural orientation directly strengthens campus brand perceptions and statistically functions as a significant quasi-moderator in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand identity. By confirming that the positive impact of digital marketing is substantially amplified when paired with authentic Sundanese cultural narratives, this study substantiates that indigenous culture is not merely a cosmetic or ornamental feature, but a vital strategic asset that drives authentic brand differentiation amidst the homogenizing tendencies of digital higher education recruitment.

The theoretical and practical contributions of this research are twofold. Theoretically, this study advances the higher education branding and Consumer Culture Theory literature by incorporating the Resource-Based View to explain how indigenous cultural orientation acts as an inimitable, intangible catalyst that enhances the structural efficiency of digital promotional investments. It expands the understanding of glocalized educational branding within emerging Asian economies by demonstrating the empirical viability of indigenous relational philosophies (*Silih Asih, Silih Asah, Silih Asuh*) as powerful socio-emotional branding appeals. Practically, these insights offer a actionable roadmap for university administrators, marketing directors, and communication teams in private institutions. Higher education leaders should transcend generic, transactional marketing by purposefully embedding local aesthetic symbols, regional performing arts, and indigenous communal values into digital campaigns, thereby establishing a distinctive institutional identity that builds deeper emotional affinity and sustainable student recruitment.

Despite its contributions, several limitations of this study warrant consideration for future research directions. First, the empirical scope was geographically confined to private university clusters across three regencies in eastern West Java, namely Majalengka, Sumedang, and Kuningan, which may constrain the immediate generalizability of the findings to different cultural and metropolitan contexts. Future scholars are encouraged to test this moderation framework across diverse ethnic landscapes, cross-cultural comparative settings, and public university systems. Second, the cross-sectional design evaluated respondent perceptions at a single time point; longitudinal or experimental methodologies are recommended to capture how culturally embedded digital marketing impacts actual enrollment decisions and long-term institutional loyalty over time. Finally, subsequent investigations should incorporate potential mediating constructs, such as perceived brand authenticity, brand trust, and prospective student engagement, to further refine the structural pathways through which cultural branding fosters competitive advantage in the digital higher education sector.

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