

Consumer Decisions in Education between Institutional Quality and Social Image of Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how parents as education consumers consider reputation, accreditation, and social values when selecting schools for their children. The analysis reveals that school reputation serves as a cognitive shortcut for parents to assess quality, while accreditation provides a minimum quality standard that varies in its importance across different parent segments. Social and moral values taught by schools have become increasingly important considerations amid concerns about moral degradation among younger generations. Parents engage in active information search through various channels, including social media, word of mouth, and direct visits to schools. The decision-making process involves complex tradeoffs between multiple factors that may sometimes conflict with each other. Family financial capacity, geographic proximity, child characteristics, and school community culture all contribute to the final choice. Schools that maintain consistency between their promises and actual practices tend to build stronger and more sustainable reputations. Understanding these consumer behavior patterns is essential for schools to develop appropriate strategies and for policymakers to design regulations that protect consumer interests.

INTRODUCTION

Parents' decisions in selecting an educational institution for their children represent a form of consumer behavior laden with complex considerations. Education is no longer viewed merely as a basic need, but as a long-term investment that shapes the future of the next generation. Parents, as consumers of education, face a wide range of choices available in the market, from public to private schools, and from national to international curricula. Each choice carries different consequences for a child's academic and social development later in life (Lewis et al., 2024). This decision-making process involves evaluating various school attributes, some of which are objective while others are highly subjective. Cost and distance, once the dominant considerations, have gradually given way to parents' growing awareness of the importance of meaningful educational quality. This shift reflects how parents' orientation toward choosing a school adjusts as the broader landscape of educational consumption changes, much as adaptability shapes how individuals respond to shifting conditions in other settings (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). This shift in mindset marks a fundamental change in

the landscape of educational service consumption in contemporary society.

Educational quality, one of the main considerations for parents, has a very broad dimension that is not easily measured in simple terms. Institutional accreditation is often used as an initial indicator to assess whether a school meets the minimum standards set by the government (Tamlekha et al., 2025). However, parents increasingly realize that accreditation is only one of many factors that need to be considered when choosing a school. Teacher quality, the learning methods applied, student-to-class ratios, and supporting facilities are aspects that also shape parents' assessment of an institution. A school's capacity to provide this quality is closely tied to how well it manages its teaching staff, since a properly designed work environment strengthens teachers' wellbeing and, in turn, their performance in the classroom (Issalillah & Khayru, 2025). Parents are also beginning to pay closer attention to student learning outcomes in a more comprehensive way, not limited to exam scores alone, but also encompassing the development of critical thinking

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skills and creativity. Broader competencies such as global awareness are increasingly regarded as part of this outcome, reflecting how education is expected to prepare students to engage with issues beyond the classroom (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Information about school quality is no longer obtained solely from brochures or signboards, but through increasingly diverse and accessible channels.

A school's social image has emerged as an increasingly dominant factor in parents' decisions when choosing an educational institution for their children. Schools are no longer judged purely on academic grounds, but also on the social status attached to them in the eyes of society (Cieřla, 2022). Parents often choose schools considered prestigious because doing so reflects their family's social standing within the community hierarchy. The friendship networks and relationships a child can build at a particular school are also considerations that matter to many parents. Schools with a good reputation are seen as capable of opening more opportunities for children in the future, both in further education and in the workplace. This pursuit of reputation resembles how organizations cultivate their image to attract stakeholders, where flexibility in shaping that image becomes a deliberate strategy rather than an incidental outcome (Mardikaningsih, 2025). Concern about judgment from the surrounding social environment drives parents to maintain certain standards when choosing a school, even though doing so sometimes requires considerable financial sacrifice. A school's social image thus becomes a commodity traded in the education market, both explicitly and implicitly.

The social and moral values taught at school have become an increasingly prominent consideration among parents in recent years. Concern over moral decline among the younger generation drives parents to seek educational institutions that excel not only academically, but also in their commitment to character building (Kour et al., 2025). Schools that consistently instill honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and social concern become the primary choice for many families. Parents want to ensure that their children grow not only intellectually capable, but also possess the moral integrity that will serve them well in social life. This concern is closely linked to how children's social competence develops through their exposure to varied learning experiences at school, which shapes their ability to interact appropriately with others (Hariani et al., 2021). A curriculum that incorporates character education in a structured and integrated

manner holds particular appeal for parents concerned with their children's moral development. Schools that succeed in shaping students with strong character often gain a favorable reputation among parents. Empirical findings even show that school culture has a direct bearing on students' character formation, reinforcing the view that a school's everyday practices, not just its stated curriculum, shape who students become (Wanti & Darmawan, 2024). The values taught at school are expected to align with those instilled at home so that continuity is achieved in shaping a child's personality.

The complexity of parental considerations in choosing a school creates a distinct dynamic in consumer behavior within the education sector. Parents are no longer passive consumers who simply accept the information provided by schools, but active and critical information seekers (Prieto et al., 2019). This active pursuit of information reflects the kind of engagement seen when individuals invest effort and attention into a decision that matters to them, a pattern well documented in other settings where knowledge-seeking drives better outcomes (Darmawan, 2024). They compare various school options through multiple sources, including websites, social media, reviews from other parents, and direct school visits. This information-seeking process reflects the seriousness with which parents approach a decision considered crucial to their child's future. The final decision is often the result of compromise among various considerations that sometimes conflict with one another, such as quality versus affordability, or prestige versus a comfortable environment. Parents also pay attention to the fit between their child's characteristics and the culture and approach applied at a particular school. Ultimately, the decision to choose a school becomes a reflection of the values and aspirations held by the family.

The main problem that arises is the gap between what schools promise and what students and parents actually receive. Many schools promote themselves with a highly appealing image, yet in practice fail to consistently deliver on those promises. Parents who have invested considerable time, effort, and money often feel disappointed when reality does not match the expectations that were built up. This gap between image and reality creates a crisis of trust that can have long-term effects on the relationship between school and family (Sousa, 2023). Parents who feel misled by exaggerated school promotion tend to share their negative experiences with prospective parents through various communication channels. Information circulating in the community about the

mismatch between promises and reality can permanently damage a school's reputation. This phenomenon shows that building an image unsupported by genuine quality is a risky and unsustainable strategy.

Promotional materials prepared by schools naturally tend to highlight strengths while concealing weaknesses. Other sources of information, such as social media reviews, are often subjective and sometimes influenced by particular interests. Parents without access to a broad information network may struggle to obtain an accurate picture of a given school. This limited access to information makes the decision-making process less than optimal and potentially misleading (Greaves et al., 2023). Accreditation, as a formal assessment instrument, is often considered insufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of a school's quality. Minimum accreditation standards also fail to distinguish truly outstanding schools from those that merely meet administrative requirements. This condition creates an education market that lacks transparency and disadvantages consumers.

Unequal access to information and resources for choosing a school has the potential to widen the quality gap in the education received by children from different family backgrounds. Families with greater financial and social resources are better able to access information and choose high-quality schools. Families with limited resources often have to accept whatever options remain without many viable alternatives (Wadesango, 2025). This condition reinforces the reproduction of social inequality across generations, since access to quality education is not evenly distributed in society. Schools with good reputations tend to be located in areas inhabited by middle- and upper-income groups, so physical access is also limited for families from lower economic backgrounds. This pattern echoes broader concerns about how unequal access to resources and technology can widen disparities between groups rather than narrow them (Darmawan, 2024). High costs for prestigious schools also present a barrier for families that cannot afford them financially. This inequality poses a serious challenge to efforts aimed at achieving fair access to quality education for all levels of society.

Understanding consumer behavior in choosing educational services is essential for various stakeholders in this sector. Schools need to understand what genuinely matters to parents so they can adjust their offerings to market needs.

Achieving this kind of responsiveness requires a structure flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances, much as adaptable organizational arrangements allow institutions to respond more effectively to shifting environmental demands (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2023). The government, as regulator, also needs a solid understanding of consumer behavior dynamics to formulate well-targeted policies. Society at large, concerned with the quality of education, needs to know what factors influence parents' decisions in choosing a school (Meier & Lemmer, 2019). Without adequate understanding, efforts to improve educational quality will be difficult to carry out effectively and sustainably. Sustained improvement of this kind also depends on the commitment of those working within the system, since positive psychological factors have been shown to strengthen engagement and dedication to the tasks at hand (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2022). The study of consumer behavior in choosing educational services also carries important implications for the development of marketing theory in the service sector. A better understanding of parents' decision-making process will help all parties move toward a better education system.

The purpose of this writing is to conceptually outline the process of parental deliberation in choosing educational services with a focus on aspects of school reputation, accreditation status, and social values as primary considerations. The explanation of the interaction between these various factors will be a central part of the discussion to be conducted. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in mapping the non-financial and non-physical factors that influence parents' decisions in choosing a school. Practically, the results of this thought are expected to provide guidance for school managers to understand consumer preferences and for parents to make more appropriate decisions. A better understanding of consumer behavior in the education sector can also assist policymakers in designing regulations that protect consumer interests. Thus, this study attempts to bridge the gap between school marketing practices and the real needs of parents as educational consumers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies a qualitative approach with a literature study form to explore the theoretical construction surrounding consumer behavior in choosing educational services. The selection of this design stems from the understanding that the

phenomenon of parental decision-making in choosing a school involves many layers of considerations that are subjective and closely tied to the values held by the family. The qualitative methodology provides an advantage in capturing the complexity of meaning inherent in human social actions (Hosseini, 2024). A literature study as a variant of qualitative research provides room for researchers to synthesize various theoretical views from written sources, as asserted by Makateng and Mokala (2025) in their study on qualitative approaches. The nature of the topic intersecting with consumer theory, sociology of education, and social psychology makes this approach relevant. The information sources used include scientific journal articles, textbooks, and policy documents related to educational service marketing. The search for materials was conducted systematically through academic databases using selected keywords to ensure adequate coverage. The literature study approach allows for the mapping of various perspectives without having to collect empirical data from respondents directly.

The data analysis in this research uses a conceptual analysis approach rooted in the qualitative research tradition. Paul and Kaurav (2025) explain that qualitative research demands procedures that are flexible yet systematic in processing data to generate meaningful findings. Reading materials gathered from various sources are critically examined to capture the essence of thought from each author before being grouped into core themes. Validity in library research relies heavily on meticulousness in interpreting and comparing various sources (Salzano et al., 2023). The themes raised include constructs of school reputation, parental perceptions of accreditation, social values in education, and the consumer decision-making process in the service sector. The analysis process is conducted inductively by building conceptual categories from the available reading materials. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing arguments from various authors and traditions of thought to obtain a more balanced overview. The final result of this process is a conceptual mapping of the factors influencing parental decisions in choosing a school, which will serve as the foundation for a more detailed discussion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A school's reputation, as one of the main considerations for parents, is formed through a long process involving multiple parties and information channels. Reputation is not something built in a

short time, but rather an accumulation of experiences and assessments made by various stakeholders toward an institution (Warta et al., 2024). Parents often use reputation as a heuristic, a cognitive shortcut for judging school quality without needing to conduct an in-depth investigation. A school with a good reputation in society will automatically enter parents' list of considerations once they begin searching for educational options for their child. A positive reputation can become a highly valuable asset for a school, drawing prospective students without requiring large promotional expenses. Sustaining that asset, however, depends on how consistently a school's staff bring creativity and fresh thinking into their work, since an institution that stops renewing itself risks losing the very edge that built its standing in the first place (Darmawan, 2023). Nevertheless, a reputation built on a fragile foundation can collapse quickly if a scandal or a significant decline in quality occurs. Parents who have entrusted their child's education to a particular school will be deeply disappointed if the reputation once promised turns out not to match the reality they experience.

Accreditation, as an official government assessment instrument, occupies an interesting position among parents' considerations when choosing a school. Some parents regard accreditation as a fairly reliable indicator for assessing the minimum quality offered by an educational institution (Badaruddin et al., 2023). A school with an A accreditation is seen as superior to one with a B or C rating, even though the gap between them may not always reflect a substantial difference in quality. Parents with limited time and access to information tend to rely on accreditation as one of the primary criteria for narrowing down school choices. This reliance can be misleading, since accreditation ratings say little about how a school actually runs its classrooms, for instance whether assignment methods and the quality of social interaction in learning genuinely support how actively students participate (Rahmawati & Darmawan, 2024). However, more and more parents realize that accreditation has limitations in capturing educational quality as a whole. Accreditation standards, being general and minimal in nature, are unable to capture the unique strengths specific to each school. A school with a high accreditation rating does not necessarily provide the best educational experience for every child, since each child has different needs and characteristics.

The social and moral values taught at school

have become an increasingly important consideration for parents amid concerns over the moral decline of the younger generation. Parents want to ensure that a school does not merely transfer academic knowledge, but also shapes a child's character into that of a person with integrity. Schools that emphasize character education programs, religious activities, and the development of humanistic values often become the primary choice for religious families or those with strong moral commitments. Delivering these values consistently is not simply a matter of curriculum design; it also depends on how engaged and self-assured teachers are in carrying out their professional roles, since their commitment shapes whether stated values are actually lived out in daily practice (Pramudya & Mardikaningsih, 2021). A mismatch between the values taught at school and those upheld within the family can create internal conflict for the child and confusion in identity formation (Khare, 2025). Parents will try to find a school whose values align with those of the family in order to avoid unnecessary confusion for the child. Parents increasingly extend this search into digital spaces as well, weighing how a school's online presence and religious content are managed responsibly before deciding whether its stated values can be trusted (Rifa'id et al., 2024). This process of searching for a value-aligned school often involves lengthy discussions with a spouse and careful consideration of the various alternatives available. Schools that can clearly communicate the values they uphold and demonstrate consistency in practice will find it easier to earn parents' trust.

The interaction between reputation, accreditation, and social values in shaping parents' decisions creates a complex dynamic that is not always linear. A good reputation is often supported by high accreditation and the consistent reinforcement of positive values. However, it is not uncommon to find schools with high accreditation but a poor reputation due to unethical practices in their management. Where a school also invests in structured support such as counseling to strengthen students' character, this substance tends to matter more to such parents than any formal rating (Rojak et al., 2024). Schools with strong values and a good reputation but moderate accreditation are also often chosen by parents who prioritize substance over formality (Lewis et al., 2024). Critical parents will compare various pieces of information from multiple sources before making a final decision on which school to choose. This comparison process involves

weighing various factors that sometimes conflict with one another and requires clear priorities. Different families will have different priorities depending on the values they hold and the specific circumstances they face.

Parents' decision-making process in choosing a school begins long before they actively search for information about the available options. Exposure to information about schools occurs continuously through conversations with neighbors, colleagues at work, and other family members. This exposure increasingly plays out through digital channels, and the ease with which such platforms now reach older and less tech-savvy parents as well means that concerns over how personal information is shared and trusted online deserve attention (Darmawan, 2023). Social media and parent chat groups on instant messaging applications are becoming an increasingly dominant source of information in shaping initial perceptions of various schools (Javořík, 2025). Yet the openness of these groups also raises questions about how safely personal opinions and family information circulate among relative strangers, since weak boundaries around privacy can quietly erode the trust parents place in what they read (Negara et al., 2022). Parents who repeatedly hear positive stories about a particular school will tend to develop a more favorable attitude toward it. Widely circulated negative stories can quickly damage a school's reputation and reduce prospective parents' interest in considering it. The active information-seeking stage begins when parents genuinely need to choose a school for a child approaching school age. At this stage, parents will gather information from various sources in a more systematic and intensive manner.

The comparisons parents make between schools are not always rational and objective, since they involve emotional factors and subjective values. Parents often have an emotional attachment to a particular school because they themselves once studied there, or because other family members have had positive experiences with it. Loyalty toward a particular school can be a very strong factor in parents' decisions, at times outweighing other rational considerations (Burgess et al., 2015). This kind of loyalty and emotional pull can also shift as social patterns change, in much the same way that changing work arrangements have been shown to reshape people's relationships and sense of belonging over time (Darmawan, 2023). Parents can also be influenced by prevailing trends in society regarding which type of school is considered best for

children. This trend can change over time, for instance, shifting from public schools to private schools, or from a national curriculum to an international curriculum. Parents who want to be seen as keeping up with the times will tend to choose a school that is currently trending, even if it may not suit their child's actual needs. Ultimately, choosing a school is a highly personal decision influenced by various factors unique to each family.

Cost and school distance remain important considerations for parents, even though they are no longer the most dominant factors in decision-making. A family's financial capacity greatly influences the school options available, since schools with high reputations and quality typically charge substantial fees. This financial barrier reflects a wider pattern in which unequal access to resources shapes who can reach quality education in the first place, particularly in contexts where good schools remain concentrated and costly (Rojak & Khayru, 2022). Parents must carefully consider whether the costs incurred are proportionate to the benefits their child will gain from that school (Zahira & Habiby, 2025). The distance between home and school is also a practical factor that cannot be ignored, as it affects a child's comfort and safety during the commute. A school located far from home requires a longer travel time and can drain a child's energy before and after school. Parents with limited time to drop off and pick up their child will tend to choose a school closer to home or their workplace. These cost and distance considerations often become limiting factors that narrow the range of school options available to a family.

The influence of socialization from the surrounding environment plays a major role in shaping parents' preferences for a particular type of school. Parents tend to choose schools also chosen by other parents in their social circle, wanting their children to have peers at the same school. This preference for shared social circles is consistent with findings on how the quality of a student's interaction with peers and teachers carries weight for their engagement and outcomes, giving parents a further reason to value schools where such interaction is strong (Rafiuddin & Darmawan, 2023). Social pressure to choose a school considered prestigious can become a fairly heavy psychological burden for parents with limited financial means (Alejandra, 2019). Parents who cannot keep up with the trend of expensive schools may feel guilty or worry about facing negative judgment from those around them. This

concern can drive parents to take on debt or sacrifice other needs in order to enroll their child in a school deemed prestigious. This phenomenon shows that the decision to choose a school is influenced not only by rational considerations but also by powerful social dynamics. A school that succeeds in building a high so.

Marketing and branding carried out by schools have a significant influence on how parents perceive a school's quality and image. Schools that invest in creative promotional activities capable of touching parents' emotions will find it easier to capture attention and interest. Building an appeal of this kind works best when a school balances the pace of new promotional technology with genuine attention to how people actually experience learning, rather than chasing novelty for its own sake (Darmawan, 2023). Education fairs, open houses, and school visits become opportunities for schools to showcase their strengths directly to prospective parents (Ho & Lee, 2023). Testimonials from parents who already have children enrolled become a highly effective marketing tool, seen as more credible than formal advertising. The way these publications and testimonials circulate has also shifted, since social media now plays a growing role in spreading educational content and shaping how far a school's message actually reaches (Darmawan & Fajar, 2024). Schools also make use of social media to build their image and interact with prospective parents in a more personal and intensive way. However, excessive marketing that does not match reality can backfire on schools, causing deep disappointment among parents. Parents who feel misled by exaggerated promotion will spread their negative experiences and damage the school's reputation over the long term.

Parents' direct experience when visiting a school often becomes the deciding moment in the final decision-making process. A school visit gives parents the opportunity to feel firsthand the atmosphere and culture within the school environment. Interaction with teachers and staff during a visit can offer a picture of the quality of service and the approach applied in managing the school (Zahira & Habiby, 2025). What parents observe during a visit, such as how actively students take part in organized activities and how well discipline is maintained day to day, often says more about a school's true operating standard than any brochure can (Arifin & Kurniawan, 2022). Parents will pay attention to small details such as the cleanliness of the environment, the friendliness of staff, and the enthusiasm of students during the

visit. This attentiveness to everyday operational details mirrors a broader principle found in organizational management, where consistent operational performance, not one-off polish, is what actually signals a well-run institution (Barzani et al., 2022). The first impression gained during a visit is often highly influential on parents' final decision, even though they rationally know that first impressions are not always accurate. Schools able to deliver a positive visit experience and leave a lasting impression on parents will hold a significant competitive advantage. Parents who feel comfortable and valued during a visit will tend to develop a more positive perception of that school.

Differences in children's characteristics are a very important factor in parents' decisions when choosing a school, since every child has unique needs and temperaments. Parents who understand their child's characteristics will look for a school that matches the child's learning style and personality. An active and exploratory child may be better suited to a school that applies project-based learning approaches with sufficient physical activity (Tampubolon & Manik, 2025). This need for a tailored fit becomes even more pressing for children with special needs, where accessibility and a child-friendly design are what determine whether a school can genuinely accommodate them rather than merely admit them (Adriani et al., 2025). A quiet and introspective child may feel more at ease in a school with a calmer, well-structured environment. Parents also consider special needs their child may have, such as talent in art or sports that requires specific facilities and support from the school. How well a school nurtures such individual differences is closely tied to its approach to discipline, since character-building practices that respect a child's disposition tend to produce steadier learning outcomes than a uniform, one-size-fits-all approach (Masfufah & Darmawan, 2023). Schools able to accommodate children's needs individually will be more appealing to parents whose children have particular characteristics. The influence of parenting style at home further shapes how a child responds to a given school culture, meaning the same school environment can suit one child's discipline and character development while poorly matching another's (Djazilan & Darmawan, 2021). A mismatch between a child's characteristics and the school's approach can cause serious adjustment problems and hinder the child's optimal development.

Parental involvement in the educational process at school is becoming an increasingly important factor in school choice for some families. Parents who want to be actively involved in their child's education will look for a school that opens up broad space for parental participation. Schools with an active parent-teacher association and a structured collaboration program between school and family will be more appealing to this type of parent. This kind of collaboration tends to flourish when school leadership is genuinely authentic in its approach, since a leadership style that builds trust and a positive climate naturally encourages parents to engage rather than stay at arm's length (Mardikaningsih et al., 2022). Open and intensive communication between school and parents is also an important indicator that parents assess before deciding to enroll their child (Malta et al., 2023). Teacher competence carries similar weight here, since a teacher's ability combined with consistent parental attention has been shown to reinforce how well a child's character actually develops (Firmansyah & Darmawan, 2023). A school responsive to parents' questions and complaints demonstrates its commitment to quality service and consumer satisfaction. This responsiveness matters for another reason too, since a child's independence in learning tends to develop best when it is backed by steady family support rather than left to the school alone (Masfufah & Darmawan, 2024). Parents who feel heard and involved will develop greater loyalty toward the school and be more willing to participate in various school activities. A strong partnership between school and parents will ultimately bring great benefits to a child's development and wellbeing.

Changes in parental preferences over time show that consumer behavior in choosing educational services is dynamic and responsive to social developments. Different generations of parents may hold different priorities when choosing a school for their children (Yazdani & Yazdani, 2025). This generational shift is also visible in how schools now try to measure a child's progress, moving toward assessment methods that aim for greater objectivity in capturing spiritual and social dimensions of learning, not just academic scores (An Nafisah et al., 2025). Younger parents tend to pay closer attention to aspects of technology and innovation in learning compared to previous generations. Encouraging this kind of behavioral shift is itself an ongoing process, since sustained awareness-raising through education is what makes new habits and preferences stick rather than fade after a single

campaign (Gautama & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Changes in the national curriculum and education policy also influence parents' preferences for certain types of schools. The stress that surrounds these frequent adjustments, whether felt by students or parents, has been shown to interact with reference groups in shaping a child's motivation to achieve, adding another layer to how preferences form (Issalillah & Khayru, 2021). Crises affecting the world of education, such as a pandemic or natural disaster, can also shift parents' priorities in choosing a school. Some families lean on religious practice to cope during such periods, and this has been linked to steadier psychological wellbeing when children face heightened academic pressure (Darmawan & Zahid, 2025). Parents who previously paid close attention to prestige may pay more attention to a school's safety and preparedness after experiencing a particular crisis. Schools able to adapt to changing parental preferences will be better positioned to survive and grow in the long term.

The influence of mass media and social media on parents' perception of schools cannot be ignored in any discussion of consumer behavior in education. News about student or teacher achievements at a school will enhance that school's image in the eyes of the wider public (Zul et al., 2025). Negative reporting about violence or misconduct at a school can quickly damage a reputation built over many years. Coverage of this kind can also reinforce broader social stereotypes about certain schools or student groups, and such labeling has a documented tendency to shape unequal opportunities well beyond the classroom (Sajjapong et al., 2022). Social media gives every parent a space to voice their experience with a school, whether positive or negative. Reviews and ratings of schools on various online platforms have become an easily accessible source of information for prospective parents during the school search process. Schools no longer have full control over the narrative circulating about them in the digital public sphere. Managing this narrative well has become part of a principal's broader workload, and the resulting time pressure on school leadership means that reputation management now competes directly with other organizational demands for attention (Saputra et al., 2023). Sustaining a positive online presence over time also depends on the kind of ethical leadership a school practices, since a culture seen as principled tends to earn more forgiving treatment from the public when problems do arise (Mardikaningsih et al., 2022). The ability of a school to manage its online reputation is becoming

an increasingly important skill in this digital era. Technology-literate parents will make use of various online information sources to get a more complete picture of the school they are considering.

Parents' final decision in choosing a school is essentially the result of a deliberative process involving various factors that interact in complex ways (Prieto et al., 2019). No single factor can stand alone in influencing parents' decisions, since each factor carries a different weight for each family. Reputation, accreditation, social values, cost, distance, a child's characteristics, and parental involvement are among the main factors that influence one another and shape parents' preferences. Weighing all of these factors at once resembles how organizations manage knowledge from many sources to arrive at a sound decision, where the ability to synthesize scattered information becomes a genuine advantage rather than a burden (Darmawan, 2023). Parents will consider all these factors simultaneously and seek the balance that best fits their conditions and priorities. This balancing act is not unlike managing a system where every component depends on the others, so that adjusting one consideration, such as cost, inevitably reshapes how the rest are weighed (Mardikaningsih & Nuraini, 2022). This decision-making process often takes a considerable amount of time and involves intensive discussion among family members. The end result of this process is a school choice expected to provide the best outcome for the child's development in the long run.

CONCLUSION

Consumer behavior in choosing educational services involves complex considerations among quality, reputation, accreditation, and social values factors. Parents do not merely choose schools based on cost and distance, but rather seriously consider aspects of reputation formed through a long process, accreditation as an indicator of minimum standards, and the alignment of social values taught by the school with the values held by the family. The parental decision-making process is dynamic and influenced by various sources of information, direct experience, social pressure, and the unique characteristics of each child. Schools that successfully build a positive reputation through consistency between promises and reality, possess credible accreditation, and are able to communicate clear values will more easily attract parents' trust. Understanding this complexity of consumer behavior is important for schools in designing appropriate strategies, for parents in making

appropriate decisions, and for governments in formulating policies that protect the interests of educational consumers.

Schools are advised to actively involve parents in the educational process and build strong partnerships with families to create a positive and sustainable experience. Parents need to be encouraged to conduct comprehensive and critical information searches before deciding on a school for their child, balancing various aspects carefully. The government as a regulator needs to ensure that the existing accreditation system truly reflects school quality and provides useful information for consumers.

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