

FROM LOYALTY TO ADVOCACY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL IDENTIFICATION ON STUDENT CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR IN INDONESIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Iskandar Arifin^{1*}, Mirandha Ariesca Riana²

Kalla Institute of Technology and Business, Makassar, Indonesia^{1,2}.

E-mail: iskandar@kallainstitute.ac.id^{1*}, mirandhaariesca@kallainstitute.ac.id²

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Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of institutional identification between brand loyalty and Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB) in Indonesian higher education. Using a quantitative design with 350 student respondents and PLS-SEM analysis, findings reveal that brand loyalty significantly impacts institutional identification ($\beta=0.750$) and SCB ($\beta=0.247$). Crucially, institutional identification partially mediates this relationship (VAF=63.8%), effectively amplifying loyalty's impact on SCB. Validating Social Identity Theory, this study establishes institutional identification as the key "psychological bridge" transforming loyalty into voluntary extra-role behavior. Practically, higher education administrators are advised to shift focus from transactional service satisfaction to identity management strategies, fostering a narrative of "us" and symbolic pride to encourage active student advocacy.

Keywords: *Brand Loyalty, Higher Education, Institutional Identification, Student Citizenship Behavior, Mediation.*

INTRODUCTION

Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB) is increasingly recognized as a key element in the sustainability of higher education because it contributes to students' long-term relational orientation toward their institutions and strengthens a university's reputation in an increasingly competitive market (Abdelnaeim et al., 2023; Dang et al., 2023). SCB encompasses various voluntary behaviors such as providing constructive feedback, assisting peers, maintaining campus facilities, and acting as institutional advocates in online spaces (Gefen & Somech, 2019; Siregar, 2022). Empirical evidence shows that SCB is positively associated with academic performance and learning experiences, indicating that it should no longer be viewed as mere "extra-role behavior," but rather as an integral component of students' overall performance (Abdelnaeim et al., 2023; El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018; Siregar, 2022).

Nevertheless, the literature on SCB and customer citizenship behavior (CCB) in higher education remains relatively nascent and fragmented (Dang et al., 2023; El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018; Huyena et al., 2024). Early studies often conceptualize SCB as an outcome of students' satisfaction, commitment, and trust toward their universities, with a focus on how service quality encourages helping intentions, recommendations, and protective behaviors on behalf of the institution (Dang et al., 2023; El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018). However, most of these models still assume relatively linear relationships—such as from satisfaction or brand loyalty directly to citizenship behavior—thus overlooking deeper psychological mechanisms related to how students construe their membership identity within the institution (Abdelnaeim et al., 2023; El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018).

On the other hand, research on student organizational citizenship behavior demonstrates that citizenship behaviors among students possess unique dimensions not fully explained by employee OCB frameworks, including proactive behaviors toward academic communities, campus personnel, and surrounding society (Gefen & Somech, 2019). This suggests that SCB extends beyond responses to service quality; it is also related to how students view themselves as part of a social group and a learning community. This perspective aligns with findings indicating that psychosocial factors—such as institutional pride and perceptions of collective identity value—are correlated with students' willingness to engage in advocacy and voluntary support (Abdelnaeim et al., 2023; Dang et al., 2023; Naheen & Elsharnoubi, 2024). Within the institutional branding framework, research on university brand identification provides an important theoretical foundation for explaining these mechanisms. Balaji et al. found that students' identification with the university brand—shaped by brand personality, brand knowledge, and institutional

prestige—drives supportive behaviors such as positive word-of-mouth and active participation (Balaji et al., 2016). Other studies show that student university identification serves as a bridge linking brand attributes (e.g., brand personality) with participation and citizenship behavior, positioning identification not merely as a branding outcome but also as a mechanism translating brand perceptions into action (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2024). Similarly, cross-national evidence indicates that students who identify more strongly with their universities tend to exhibit stronger advocacy intentions, directly or indirectly via satisfaction and institutional trust (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021).

Although the concept of identification has proven highly relevant, most higher-education models still place brand loyalty as a direct predictor of SCB or as the final outcome of branding, rather than as an antecedent operating through social-identity mechanisms (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021; Hsu et al., 2021; Huyena et al., 2024). In many studies, brand loyalty is measured through intentions to continue study, enroll in additional programs from the same institution, or willingness to recommend the university (Hsu et al., 2021), yet it has not been consistently linked to identity-based citizenship—citizenship behaviors rooted in a sense of “we-ness” toward the institution. Social Identity Theory posits that group identification is central to the emergence of prosocial, advocacy-based, and protective in-group behaviors (Tajfel et al., 2001). When students perceive themselves as part of the university’s “we,” they are more likely to go beyond formal roles and exhibit stronger SCB.

In the digital context, the relevance of identification mechanisms becomes even more pronounced. Recent studies show that university brand personality in digital environments enhances student identification, which in turn fosters citizenship behaviors such as content engagement, reputation support, and voluntary promotion on social media (Arifin & Rijal, 2025; Ghorbanzadeh & Sharbatian, 2024). At the same time, findings on the outcomes of SCB emphasize that such behaviors contribute to transformative service experiences for both students and other stakeholders, making digital SCB an essential dimension that should not be overlooked (Abdelnaeim et al., 2023). However, limited research has explicitly examined institutional identification as a mediator bridging the relationship between brand loyalty and SCB, particularly within developing-country higher-education contexts. Addressing this gap, the present study examines a model in which institutional brand loyalty drives Student Citizenship Behavior through institutional identification. This study seeks to offer deeper insights into the social-identity mechanisms that underpin students’ citizenship behaviors including those manifested in digital environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Loyalty in Higher Education

Brand loyalty in the context of higher education refers to students’ tendency to maintain a long-term relationship with the institution, continue choosing its academic services, and recommend it to others (Dang et al., 2023). Student loyalty is shaped by positive experiences, institutional image, and the perceived value obtained throughout their educational journey (Abdelnaeim et al., 2023). Recent studies show that brand loyalty has a strong association with supportive student behaviors, including advocacy intention and positive word-of-mouth (Siregar, 2022). However, much of the literature tends to position brand loyalty as a direct predictor of citizenship behavior, thereby failing to account for the psychological mechanisms that transform loyalty into voluntary student actions (Gefen & Somech, 2019). The need for new mediating models becomes evident when prior studies report that loyalty is attitudinal and does not always translate into actual behavior without the presence of internal factors such as social identification (El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018).

Institutional Identification Based on Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, and such identification fosters willingness to engage in behaviors that benefit the group (Tajfel et al., 2001). In higher education, institutional identification refers to the extent to which students view their institution as part of their personal identity (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2024). Studies in the university branding context have found that student identification mediates the effects of brand attributes on supportive behaviors (Balaji et al., 2016). Other research reinforces that the stronger students identify with their university, the more likely they are to promote the institution, provide constructive feedback, and protect its reputation (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021). In digital environments, university brand identification has been shown to enhance online engagement and advocacy on social media platforms (Hsu et al., 2021). Thus, institutional identification becomes a highly relevant construct for explaining how loyalty is transformed into citizenship behavior.

Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB)

Student Citizenship Behavior encompasses voluntary student actions that support institutional sustainability, such as helping peers, providing constructive input, promoting the university, and maintaining campus facilities (Huyena et al., 2024). These behaviors contribute to students' academic performance and a more positive learning experience (Ghorbanzadeh & Sharbatian, 2024). Research in Transformative Service (TSR) further shows that SCB generates value for other stakeholders—such as campus staff and incoming students—positioning SCB as an important indicator of relational well-being in educational institutions (Arifin & Rijal, 2025). Although the relationship between satisfaction, loyalty, and SCB has been documented, the role of social-identity mechanisms in shaping SCB remains underexplored, especially in Southeast Asian contexts. Yet SCB is strongly associated with sense of belonging and emotional identification with the institution (Tajfel et al., 2001).

Hypothesis Development

Effect of Brand Loyalty on Institutional Identification

Students with high loyalty tend to perceive the institution as part of their social identity. Loyalty enhances perceptions of value congruence, institutional pride, and sense of belonging—key elements of identification (Balaji et al., 2016; Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2024). Research shows that brand-related constructs can strengthen student identification, particularly when the institution is perceived as prestigious, positively viewed, and supported by a strong brand personality (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021; Balaji et al., 2016).

H1: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on institutional identification.

Effect of Institutional Identification on Student Citizenship Behavior

SIT posits that group identification encourages prosocial behaviors such as helping group members, advocacy, and protecting group reputation (El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018). When students perceive themselves as part of the university's "we," their likelihood of exhibiting SCB increases substantially (Arifin & Rijal, 2025; Hsu et al., 2021; Huyena et al., 2024). Empirical findings show that university identification enhances advocacy intentions, voluntary participation, and digital engagement that supports the institution (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021; Hsu et al., 2021).

H2: Institutional identification has a positive effect on Student Citizenship Behavior.

Effect of Brand Loyalty on Student Citizenship Behavior

Although a direct relationship between loyalty and SCB has been reported, its effects are often weak because loyalty does not always translate into action without other internal factors (El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018; Gefen & Somech, 2019). Nonetheless, loyalty remains an important antecedent that provides the emotional foundation for supportive student behaviors (Dang et al., 2023; Siregar, 2022).

H3: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on Student Citizenship Behavior.

Mediating Role of Institutional Identification

Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, institutional identification serves as the cognitive–affective mechanism that bridges loyalty and voluntary behaviors. When students are loyal to the institution, their level of identification increases, which subsequently motivates them to engage in SCB, both in offline supportive actions and digital participation (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021; Balaji et al., 2016; Hsu et al., 2021).

H4: Institutional identification mediates the relationship between brand loyalty and Student Citizenship Behavior.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the mechanism of institutional identification as a mediator between brand loyalty and Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB). The population consists of active university students in Indonesia, and the sampling technique used is purposive sampling, targeting students with adequate interaction experience with their institution. The final sample consists of more than 300 respondents, meeting the minimum recommended sample size for structural equation modeling following Hair et al. (Hair et al., 2024). Data were collected cross-sectionally using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measurement of variables in this study adapts previously validated instruments from the literature. Brand Loyalty was measured using indicators adopted from Balaji et al. (Balaji et al., 2016), capturing intentions to continue studies and willingness to recommend the institution. Institutional Identification was measured based on the Social Identity Theory framework by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel et al., 2001), along with adaptations from Naheen and Elsharnouby (Naheen & Elsharnouby,

2024) and Balaji et al. (Balaji et al., 2016), emphasizing perceived oneness with the institution and identity-based pride. Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB) was assessed using indicators of voluntary actions such as helping peers, advocating for institutional reputation, and engaging in active participation, adapted from El Sayed and Marzouk (El Sayed & Marzouk, 2018) and Hsu et al. (Hsu et al., 2021). Data analysis was conducted using variance-based Structural Equation Modeling or Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. Model evaluation was carried out in two stages, beginning with the assessment of the outer model to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments. Convergent validity was evaluated using outer loadings (>0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50), while internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, both exceeding the 0.70 threshold as recommended by Hair et al. (Hair Jr et al., 2020). Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with a threshold value below 0.85 as proposed by Henseler et al. (Henseler et al., 2015).

Upon confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the analysis proceeded to the inner model evaluation to test the proposed hypotheses. The significance of structural paths was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. In addition to testing direct effects, mediation analysis was conducted to examine the role of institutional identification by evaluating indirect effects. The classification of mediation type was determined using the Variance Accounted For (VAF) and the significance of the indirect path, referring to the mediation framework of Zhao et al. (Zhao et al., 2010), which states that mediation occurs when the indirect effect is statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data for this study were collected from a total of 350 respondents, all of whom were active university students. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents met the inclusion criteria: being currently enrolled and having experience interacting with their institution's academic services. The demographic characteristics—including gender, age, and level of education—are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 350)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	137	39.1%
	Female	213	60.9%
Age	< 18 years	2	0.6%
	18–23 years	320	91.4%
	24–29 years	28	8.0%
Educational Level	Diploma (D1/D2/D3)	10	2.9%
	Undergraduate (S1)	325	92.9%
	Postgraduate (S2)	15	4.3%

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents in this study are female (213 respondents or 60.9%), while male respondents account for 137 individuals (39.1%). In terms of age distribution, the sample is dominated by the conventional undergraduate age group, namely 18 to 23 years old, comprising 91.4% of the respondents. This aligns with the distribution of educational level, where most respondents (92.9%) are currently pursuing an undergraduate degree (S1). Although a smaller proportion of respondents come from Diploma programs (2.9%) and postgraduate studies (4.3%), the dominance of undergraduate students within a young age range suggests that the participants predominantly represent digitally native or Gen Z characteristics. This demographic profile is particularly relevant to the context of this study, which examines Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB), including advocacy and supportive actions that frequently occur through digital platforms and university social media channels. In addition, respondents come from diverse higher-education institutions, including both public universities (PTN) and private universities (PTS), representing a wide range of academic disciplines, thereby contributing to the heterogeneity of the sample.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed as an initial step to ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments used. A summary of the convergent validity and reliability results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Measurement Model Evaluation Results

Variable / Construct	Indicator Code	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Loyalty (LM)	LM1	0.848	0.845	0.907	0.764
	LM2	0.881			
	LM3	0.892			
Institutional Identification (IS)	IS1	0.877	0.906	0.934	0.781
	IS2	0.891			
	IS3	0.893			
	IS4	0.874			
Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB)	SCB1	0.803	0.935	0.945	0.632
	SCB2	0.762			
	SCB3	0.826			
	SCB4	0.789			
	SCB5	0.843			
	SCB6	0.703			
	SCB7	0.818			
	SCB8	0.766			
	SCB9	0.824			
	SCB10	0.810			

Source: Processed Data (2025)

All indicators for brand loyalty, institutional identification, and student citizenship behavior (SCB) show outer loading values above the threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity is also achieved, as indicated by AVE values exceeding 0.50 for all constructs. Additionally, internal consistency reliability meets the required standards, with Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs surpassing the recommended 0.70 threshold, in line with Hair et al. (Hair Jr et al., 2020).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Construct Relationship	HTMT Value	Status
IS <-> Brand Loyalty (LM)	0.857	Valid
SCB <-> Institutional Identification (IS)	0.833	Valid
SCB <-> Brand Loyalty (LM)	0.768	Valid

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to confirm adequate empirical distinction among constructs. The results indicate that all HTMT values fall below the recommended threshold of 0.90, with the highest value observed between Brand Loyalty and Institutional Identification (0.857), and others ranging from 0.768 to 0.833. As all ratios fall below the limit proposed by Henseler et al. (Henseler et al., 2015), the discriminant validity of the model is confirmed, indicating that each latent construct represents a unique phenomenon within the study.

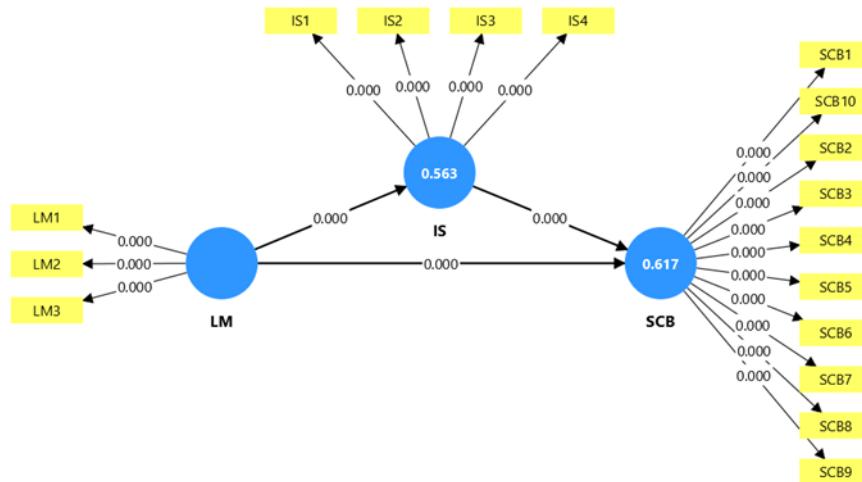


Figure 1 Structural Model Results (SmartPLS Output)

Structural Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to assess relationships among variables, as illustrated in Figure 1. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure, and the summary of results is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Testing (Direct & Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	Brand Loyalty \rightarrow Institutional Identification	0.750	24.081	0.000	Supported
H2	Institutional Identification \rightarrow SCB	0.583	8.606	0.000	Supported
H3	Brand Loyalty \rightarrow SCB	0.247	3.701	0.000	Supported
H4 (Mediation)	Brand Loyalty \rightarrow Institutional Identification \rightarrow SCB	0.437	7.724	0.000	Supported

*Note: Significant at the 5% level (t-statistic > 1.96).

Source: Processed Data (2025)

After establishing instrument validity and reliability, hypothesis testing was performed to verify the relationships among the variables. The results reveal that H1 is supported, indicating that Brand Loyalty significantly and positively influences Institutional Identification, with a strong path coefficient of $\beta = 0.750$ and a T-statistic of 24.081. This represents the strongest relationship in the model, suggesting that student loyalty forms the primary foundation for institutional identification. Next, H2 is supported, demonstrating that Institutional Identification significantly affects Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB), with $\beta = 0.583$ and $T = 8.606$. This confirms that stronger identification enhances students' willingness to engage in citizenship behaviors. The direct effect of Brand Loyalty on SCB (H3) is also significant ($\beta = 0.247$, $T = 3.701$), though its magnitude is notably smaller than the indirect effect. This leads to the examination of H4, which tests the mediating role of Institutional Identification. The specific indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.437$, $T = 7.724$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a strong mediation pathway. To further clarify the nature of mediation, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) was calculated by comparing the indirect effect (0.437) with the total effect (0.684). The resulting VAF value of 63.8% falls within the 20%–80% range, indicating partial mediation, as classified by Hair et al. This means that Institutional Identification serves as a dominant mediator that strengthens the impact of loyalty on citizenship behavior, even though loyalty retains a significant direct effect. This study aims to uncover the psychological mechanism that explains how students' loyalty toward a university brand can transform into voluntary prosocial actions, commonly referred to as Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB). The first prominent finding is the strong effect of brand loyalty on institutional identification ($\beta = 0.750$). This result indicates that student loyalty extends beyond transactional behaviors such as reenrolling or expressing intentions to remain at the institution; it evolves into a deeper emotional attachment. Loyal students are more likely to internalize the values and image of the university into their self-concept. This finding reinforces Social

Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel et al., 2001), which posits that individuals tend to classify themselves into social categories they perceive as prestigious or positively valued. In this context, brand loyalty acts as a crucial antecedent that facilitates the “oneness” process through which students integrate the institution into their identity, aligning with Balaji et al. (Balaji et al., 2016), who highlight positive brand experiences as a primary trigger for social identification in higher-education settings. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that institutional identification is a strong predictor of SCB ($\beta = 0.583$). When students define themselves as an integral part of the university (“I am a representative of this institution”), they develop an intrinsic motivation to engage in behaviors that benefit the group, such as defending the university’s reputation from criticism on social media or assisting fellow students altruistically. This supports the view that SCB is not merely a response to service satisfaction but rather a manifestation of social identity. The findings corroborate studies by Hsu et al. (Hsu et al., 2021) and Abdelmaaboud et al. (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021), which reveal that extra-role behaviors emerge when individuals perceive the fate of the group as intertwined with their own (Malik & Santoso, 2022). Through identification, students shift their mindset from “what I receive” to “what I can contribute” for the collective good.

The most significant contribution of this study lies in uncovering the dominant partial mediating role of institutional identification. Although brand loyalty has a significant direct effect on SCB ($\beta = 0.247$), the indirect pathway through identification is substantially stronger ($\beta = 0.437$), with a Variance Accounted For (VAF) of 63.8%. These statistics provide deep insight: loyalty based solely on satisfaction or habitual engagement (direct effect) has limited power in generating citizenship behaviors. In contrast, when loyalty is transformed into self-identity (indirect effect), its influence on voluntary behavior becomes far more powerful. This explains why some students may be satisfied and loyal yet remain passive, whereas others are loyal and highly active in advocating for the university—the difference lies in their level of identification. Overall, the findings fill an important gap in the literature by validating institutional identification as the “missing link” in the loyalty–behavior relationship. The theoretical implication is that loyalty models in higher education can no longer be viewed as linear; they must incorporate social psychological components. For higher-education managers, the results imply that student retention strategies should not focus solely on functional satisfaction (e.g., facilities and services) but must also address emotional aspects that cultivate pride and a sense of belonging. Building a strong brand narrative and engaging students in value co-creation are strategic approaches to transforming students from merely “loyal customers” into “institutional citizens” who actively and passionately support the university.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that brand loyalty alone is not sufficient to drive Student Citizenship Behavior (SCB). The central conclusion is that institutional identification serves as a crucial partial mediator in the mechanism linking loyalty to citizenship behaviors. Although loyalty exerts a direct positive effect on SCB, the path analysis reveals that its influence becomes substantially stronger when students first internalize the institution’s identity as part of their self-concept. This finding suggests that students who are merely “loyal” (e.g., willing to reenroll or recommend the institution) are not necessarily motivated to perform extra-role voluntary behaviors unless they experience emotional unity—or oneness—with their university. Empirically, this study validates Social Identity Theory within the Indonesian higher-education context by confirming that prosocial behaviors stem from a sense of belonging to a collective (“we”), rather than from a purely transactional student–institution relationship. The findings offer several important practical implications for university management, particularly regarding branding and student engagement strategies. First, universities should not rely solely on high student retention rates as a sign of success. Strategic priorities must shift from merely “creating satisfaction” toward “building identity.”

Institutions should design communication programs that strengthen symbolic pride, such as showcasing student-involved achievements, promoting shared identity attributes (e.g., branded merchandise), and engaging students in co-creation of institutional social media content. Second, given that institutional identification is a strong predictor of SCB, universities should cultivate rituals or traditions that foster a sense of belonging from the earliest stages of the student journey. Orientation programs, flagship events, and community-building initiatives should be designed to help students perceive themselves not as temporary visitors, but as members of an institutional community who share moral and reputational responsibility for their alma mater. Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw long-term causal inferences, as students’ identification levels may evolve over the course of their academic experience. Second, the model explains only part of the variance in SCB through loyalty and identification, indicating room for other relevant factors yet to be examined. Third, the online sampling technique limits the representativeness of respondents across diverse demographic groups and geographic regions.

Future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal approaches to capture the evolution of student identity formation from the first year to graduation. From a theoretical perspective, researchers may consider integrating moderators relevant to digital ecosystems—such as online brand community engagement or gamification—to assess whether digital interaction strengthens or weakens the identification–citizenship relationship. Moreover, comparative studies between public and private universities would offer valuable insights into how institutional culture shapes loyalty and identity formation differently across educational contexts.

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