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The Influence Of Word Of Mouth, Location, And Facilities On Toraja Students' Decisions To Choose Boarding Houses In Bahu, Manado

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of word of mouth, location, and facilities on the decisions of students from Toraja to choose boarding houses in Bahu, Manado. A quantitative explanatory approach was applied using questionnaire data from 100 Toraja students selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression in SPSS. The findings indicate that word of mouth, location, and facilities jointly have a positive and statistically significant association with boarding-house choice ($F = 23.086$, $p < .001$). Each predictor is also significant individually: word of mouth ($B = 0.225$, $p = .027$), location ($B = 0.259$, $p = .007$), and facilities ($B = 0.157$, $p = .039$). Location has the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = .309$), followed by word of mouth ($\beta = .244$) and facilities ($\beta = .202$). The model explains 41.9% of the variance in choice (adjusted $R^2 = .401$). These results suggest that reliable interpersonal recommendations, convenient access and a supportive surrounding environment, and adequate shared and private facilities should be managed together to strengthen the appeal of boarding houses to students living away from home.

Keywords Word of Mouth; Location; Facilities; Boarding-House Choice; Toraja Students

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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the factors associated with boarding-house choice among students from Toraja who live in Bahu, Manado. Choosing accommodation is a consequential decision for students who move away from their home region: the place they rent must support academic activities and everyday life while providing reasonable access, comfort, and security. Bahu is an important setting because Universitas Sam Ratulangi is located in this area and the presence of a large student population has supported a range of boarding-house options. The thesis records 183 Toraja students residing in Bahu, including 68 registered members of the Ikatan Mahasiswa Toraja di Manado (IKMA TORNADO) and 115 who were not registered members. The study therefore considers Toraja students living in the area regardless of organizational membership.

In services marketing, accommodation choice can be understood as a consumer decision process involving need recognition, information search,

evaluation of alternatives, selection, and post-choice evaluation (Kotler et al., 2022). Students often cannot fully assess a boarding house before visiting or living there. As a result, recommendations from friends, relatives, seniors, or current residents may reduce uncertainty. Word of mouth conveys first-hand experiences about cleanliness, management responsiveness, safety, facilities, and the actual conditions of a property. Such interpersonal information can be perceived as more credible than promotional claims because it comes from people with relevant experience (Fawzi et al., 2022).

Location is another important service attribute. For students, proximity and convenient access to campus and daily activities may reduce travel time and costs. Visibility, the availability of parking, and the condition of the surrounding environment may also shape perceptions of convenience and suitability. A boarding house with good rooms may nevertheless be less attractive if it is difficult to reach or located in an uncomfortable environment. Facilities likewise contribute to the accommodation experience. Shared facilities, room facilities, and additional amenities can support study, rest, personal routines, and interaction with other residents. Their value depends not only on availability but also on condition and usability.

Prior studies cited in the thesis have examined different combinations of accommodation-choice factors. Anjani et al. (2023) reported the relevance of price, location, facilities, and information quality in students' boarding-house choices. Rahayu and Hartiningtyas (2022) discussed location, facilities, and comfort, while Binsya and Siam (2025) examined location attractiveness, service quality, and brand trust. Research on word of mouth has also identified its relationship with consumer decisions (Ghufron et al., 2022; Wulandari & Irwansyah, 2025). However, the thesis identifies a contextual gap: the combined effects of word of mouth, location, and facilities have not been specifically tested among Toraja students choosing boarding houses in Bahu, Manado.

The preliminary survey of 15 Toraja students reported that many respondents learned about boarding houses through friends or senior students, while location and facilities were also considered during selection. Some respondents had rejected accommodation because its location or facilities did not meet their needs. These initial observations motivated an empirical test of the three factors. Accordingly, the study addresses four questions: (1) do word of mouth, location, and facilities jointly influence boarding-house choice; (2) does word of mouth have a partial effect; (3) does location have a partial effect; and (4) do facilities have a partial effect? The study

contributes context-specific evidence to consumer-behavior and services-marketing research and offers practical considerations for boarding-house owners in student-centered neighborhoods.

METHODS

The study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to examine the relationships between three independent variables—word of mouth (X1), location (X2), and facilities (X3)—and the dependent variable, the decision to choose a boarding house (Y). The research setting was Bahu, Manado, and the target population comprised students from Toraja who lived in boarding houses in the area. The thesis identifies 183 Toraja students residing in Bahu. A purposive sampling technique was used, resulting in 100 respondents who met the study's criteria.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. Word of mouth was represented by indicators related to talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking. Location measures included access, visibility, parking availability, and the surrounding environment. Facilities covered shared facilities, facilities inside the room, and additional amenities. The decision variable captured need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, the choice decision, and post-choice evaluation. The questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability, and the data were processed using SPSS.

The analysis included descriptive statistics, validity and reliability testing, classical regression diagnostics, multiple linear regression, the simultaneous F-test, partial t-tests, and the coefficient of determination. The reported reliability coefficients were .682 for word of mouth, .789 for location, .760 for facilities, and .701 for the choice-decision measure. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for unstandardized residuals was not significant (statistic = .079, p = .128). The regression table reported tolerance values of .484–.647 and VIF values of 1.546–2.068, which did not indicate problematic multicollinearity. Glejser-test significance values for the three predictors were above .05. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level. The analysis is observational and based on self-reported questionnaire responses; results are therefore interpreted as statistical associations within the study context rather than proof of causation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent and descriptive profile. The sample comprised 100 Toraja

students. Women accounted for 78 respondents (78%) and men for 22 (22%). Most respondents attended Universitas Sam Ratulangi (98%). The descriptive mean for word of mouth was 4.15, for location 4.12, and for facilities 4.02; all were categorized as good in the thesis. The mean for the boarding-house choice variable was 4.30, categorized as very good. These descriptive results suggest that respondents generally viewed recommendations, location characteristics, and facilities positively, while also reporting a strong level of agreement with statements describing their accommodation-choice process.

Joint influence of word of mouth, location, and facilities. The first research question asked whether the three predictors jointly influence the decision to choose a boarding house. The ANOVA result was statistically significant, $F(3, 96) = 23.086$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .647$, and $R^2 = .419$; the adjusted R^2 was .401. Thus, the three predictors collectively accounted for 41.9% of the observed variance in boarding-house choice, or 40.1% after adjustment for the number of predictors and sample size. The remaining variation may be associated with factors outside the model, such as rental price, perceived safety, contract terms, privacy, service quality, or personal preferences, which were not tested as independent variables in this study.

This joint result indicates that students' decisions are not adequately understood through a single attribute alone. Interpersonal information can help students identify and assess alternatives, location affects the practical convenience of living in a property, and facilities determine whether daily and academic needs can be met. These factors complement one another: recommendations may attract attention, but students may still reject a property after considering its access or room conditions. The result is consistent with the broader framing of consumer decision-making as an evaluation of information and alternatives (Kotler et al., 2022) and with previous boarding-house studies that consider several marketing attributes together (Anjani et al., 2023; Rahayu & Hartiningtyas, 2022).

Partial influence of word of mouth. The second research question concerned word of mouth. The regression coefficient was positive ($B = .225$; standardized $\beta = .244$), with $t = 2.247$ and $p = .027$. Therefore, word of mouth had a positive and statistically significant partial association with the choice decision when location and facilities were held constant. In practical terms, recommendations and accounts from friends, seniors, relatives, and current or former residents may make it easier for students to identify suitable accommodation and reduce uncertainty about conditions that cannot be fully assessed from a brief visit or advertisement.

The thesis operationalized word of mouth through talkers, topics, tools, taking part, and tracking. Applied to boarding houses, talkers include people whose experiences students trust; topics include rent-related information, location, cleanliness, and facilities; and tools include direct conversations and personal communication channels. Taking part refers to the owner or manager responding to questions, while tracking involves attending to resident feedback and complaints. The finding aligns with the view that interpersonal communication can influence consumer judgments because it is personal and experience-based (Fawzi et al., 2022), and it is consistent with prior research linking word of mouth to consumer decisions (Ghufron et al., 2022; Wulandari & Irwansyah, 2025). For owners, the implication is not simply to encourage positive reviews, but to deliver a reliable living experience and respond to concerns so that residents can share accurate recommendations.

Partial influence of location. The third research question tested location. The estimated coefficient was positive (B = .259; standardized β = .309), and the effect was statistically significant (t = 2.762, p = .007). Among the three predictors, location had the largest standardized coefficient, indicating the strongest relative association with choice in this model. This is plausible in the Bahu context, where students need to travel between accommodation, campus, and everyday destinations. Convenient access, a location that can be found easily, parking availability, and a comfortable surrounding environment can reduce practical burdens and contribute to students' perceptions of suitability.

The result supports the conceptual importance of location as more than a geographic point: it includes accessibility and the conditions surrounding the service. It is also in line with Anjani et al. (2023), whose study considered location in students' boarding-house decisions, and with the thesis's discussion of location attractiveness in earlier research. Because location showed the largest standardized coefficient, owners may benefit from clearly communicating routes, transport options, and nearby facilities, while maintaining safe, clean, and accessible premises. However, the result should not be interpreted to mean that location alone determines the decision; its influence is estimated alongside word of mouth and facilities.

Partial influence of facilities. The fourth research question examined facilities. The coefficient was positive (B = .157; standardized β = .202), with t = 2.091 and p = .039. Facilities therefore had a positive and statistically significant partial association with students' boarding-house choices. The effect was smaller than the standardized effects of location and word of mouth, but it remained significant. This suggests that facilities are a meaningful component of the decision, although they may be weighed

together with access and information from other people.

Facilities were categorized as shared facilities, private room facilities, and additional amenities. Shared facilities affect the daily experience of all residents, while room facilities directly support privacy, rest, studying, and storage. Additional facilities may distinguish one property from another even when they are not essential. The finding is consistent with the service-marketing perspective that physical evidence shapes how customers evaluate an otherwise intangible service (Halim et al., 2021) and with research on students' accommodation choices that considers facilities (Anjani et al., 2023; Rahayu & Hartiningtyas, 2022). Owners should prioritize the condition, cleanliness, and reliable operation of essential facilities before investing in optional additions. Advertising amenities that are unavailable or poorly maintained may undermine trust and generate negative word of mouth.

Integrated interpretation. The regression equation based on the reported unstandardized coefficients is $Y = 8.372 + 0.225X1 + 0.259X2 + 0.157X3$. All three slopes are positive and statistically significant at the 5% level. Location has the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = .309$), followed by word of mouth ($\beta = .244$) and facilities ($\beta = .202$). These standardized coefficients permit a relative comparison within the fitted model, but they do not imply that the predictors are interchangeable or that their practical effects are identical in every setting. The model leaves approximately 58.1% of the unadjusted variance unexplained, highlighting the potential role of other determinants. Future studies could add price, perceived safety, service quality, contract flexibility, and personal budget, and could compare students from different regions or institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the simultaneous and partial relationships of word of mouth, location, and facilities with Toraja students' decisions to choose boarding houses in Bahu, Manado. The joint F-test was significant, $F(3, 96) = 23.086$, $p < .001$, and the model explained 41.9% of the variance in choice (adjusted $R^2 = .401$). Each predictor had a positive and significant partial coefficient: word of mouth ($B = .225$, $p = .027$), location ($B = .259$, $p = .007$), and facilities ($B = .157$, $p = .039$). Location showed the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = .309$), followed by word of mouth ($\beta = .244$) and facilities ($\beta = .202$).

The findings suggest that boarding-house providers should manage these dimensions in an integrated manner. They should maintain accessible and

comfortable locations, provide accurate information about access and the surrounding environment, keep shared and private facilities in good condition, and respond constructively to residents' questions and complaints. A positive resident experience may in turn support credible word of mouth. Since the model does not account for all variation in choice, future research should examine additional variables and test the findings in other locations and student populations. The study's cross-sectional, self-reported design also means that the results should be interpreted as associations rather than definitive causal effects.

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